WASTE HERITAGE:
THE EFFECT OF CLASS ON LITERARY STRUCTURE

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Canadian literary criticism in English rarely bases examination of a novel on the structure of class in the work and the relation of class to the creation of image, of hero, of — finally — meaning in the novel. Possibly criticism rarely employs that basis because Canadian novels with a strong sense of class are rare — or at least are said to be rare. But every novel is set in class terms, assumes class orientation, sets value in class context. And so the rarity of criticism with strong class awareness is probably more attributable to the fact that middle class critics make up the bulk of Canadian literary critics, and they are unconscious of class, believe it irrelevant to the study of literature, or reject it as a dangerous or foolhardy concept to use in criticism.

Every reader will agree that class cannot be absent from a novel. Think about Grove's *Master of the Mill,* Mazo de la Roche's *Jalna,* Margaret Laurence's *Stone Angel,* Margaret Atwood's *Edible Woman,* for instance, to pick four titles at random. In each one the main characters are easily placed as to class, and the act of placing defines them and tells a good deal about the novel: its focus, its centre of value. We have more trouble, however, when we try to think about novels, in English Canadian literature, in which the clash of classes provides the main focus in such a way that the reader ought to be made dramatically aware of the concept of class both as a subject and as an invitation to the reader to consider a reorientation of his or her values in the social and political order. Such novels, indeed, are the kind most readers think of when they consider the idea of literature and class. Critics, moreover, are generally afraid of them. They prefer novels like Morley Callaghan's *They Shall Inherit the Earth* or John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* in which the plight of the dispossessed and disadvantaged may be revealed touchingly but without serious challenge to the social-political order. Novels that do challenge the social-political order also challenge conventional wisdom about literary structures and heroes

who make choices that — however indirectly — legitimize the status quo. The act of literary criticism involving analysis of class and class implications is by its nature, therefore, revolutionary in capitalist society. The novels that strongly invite such criticism because of their class consciousness are rare in English Canadian fiction.

One novel, however, belongs in the category. Irene Baird's 1939 novel, *Waste Heritage,* is set in a state of class war, shows — unequivocally — the wounds caused by capitalist domination, and leaves the message that only a significant change in the social order can provide a change in the position of the people fighting for the simplest kind of social justice (work and wages). The protagonist of the novel confronts the modern conflict between the claims of the individual and the claims of the larger community, but he does so in an embattled milieu. The capitalist system provides no security for the drifting population. In fact, the class in power actively harasses that population. The Communist Party provides organization for the men and strategies for amelioration, on the way, of course, to what it hopes will be the overthrow of the capitalist system. The hero of the novel — as distinct from the protagonist — is a lower level Communist organizer. The protagonist, Matt Striker, in his confrontation with the claims of individualism and communitarian values helps to reveal class structure and the role of class in Canadian society. The novel is instructive because it can provide a basis for rejecting the general sense that there is no class interest in Canadian literature, and it can show why Canadian critics are timid about using an analysis of class as a way of making Canadian literature more accessible and comprehensible to readers.

Perhaps the best known piece on the subject is the R.L. McDougall article published in 1963, "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk: Class in Canadian Literature." McDougall writes there that our literature "shows what can only be described as an abnormal absence of feeling for class and for what the class structure can do in a developing society to make or mar the life of the individual."[1] McDougall insists, moreover, that "class is not a central issue in any significant part of our fiction."[2] His claim may be less true than he suggests.

But there is no doubt that even middle class literature written by

[1]R.L. McDougall, "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk: Class in Canadian Literature," *Canadian Literature,* #18 (Autumn 1963), p. 7.
[2]McDougall, p. 13.

authors quite unconscious of any implications of class difference can be fruitfully analysed from a class perspective. McDougall praises but does not pursue one novel as "a genuinely proletarian novel." He calls *Waste Heritage* — mistakenly, I believe — a novel "whose setting is hobodom,"[3] but his major characterization of it is important. *Waste Heritage* stands out as deeply rooted in class consciousness, unswerving in its examination of class oppression, and detailed in its depiction of dispossessed workers — and others — in capitalist society.

McDougall's article must be read by anyone interested in class analyses and class awareness in Canadian literature, for he claims that the lack of class awareness in our literature is seriously debilitating: "The dead cold air, the uniformity of assumptions, the lack of commitment are oppressive."[4] But he also draws back and concludes on a note that belies his expressed concern, suggesting perhaps another unstated reason why consciousness of class seems so low — at least among critics. He wants class awareness, it would seem, to make the literal capitalist community more alive, exciting and interesting, but not in order that we may see our way to truths that will change our perceptions of nation, power, art, and the self. McDougall says specifically that we do *not* want "the reinforcing of the class struggle."[5] Having shown, for instance, that Morley Callaghan in *They Shall Inherit the Earth* is "a novelist preeminently concerned with personal values and 'inscape'," a position McDougall considers "a peculiarly static and negative position in the context of the thirties," he, then, concludes his essay with a philosophical position similar to Callaghan's, a call for class consciousness for personalist reasons. "I think," McDougall writes, "the heart of the matter is the question of individual liberty. . . ." So does Michael Aikenhead of *They Shall Inherit the Earth.* No one would deny that freedom of the person is important. In Callaghan's novel, freedom of the person means the freedom of Michael Aikenhead, and when that is secured, Michael does not consider he needs to involve himself with the freedom of the person in a larger context. Dorothy Livesay sums up the situation well:

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[3]McDougall, p. 16.
[4]McDougall, p. 19.
[5]McDougall, p. 19.

> Callaghan's hero, instead of accepting the full implications of his situation, dives down a blind alley, achieves a psychological peace with his broken-down father. His solution is an individual solution which does not solve the enigma at all for his class, for the millions like him, or even for himself — a year hence.[6]

McDougall, too, calls for class consciousness because it will help to create

> the kind of turbulence that encompasses the whole of the social mosaic and in the end makes possible within it that freedom of choice and of movement for the individual which, from a secular point of view, is the best means open to us of enabling him to realize the creative potential within him.[7]

Perhaps, as I have said, class conscious literature is more available than McDougall has allowed. But perhaps we shall not have serious class conscious criticism until it is written by those who believe the structure of Canadian society must be changed, who believe the class struggle must be reinforced, and who believe genuinely humane values will not dominate in Canadian society until capitalism ceases to be the ruling economic force and the controlling power over ideology in the country.

McDougall's gesture towards Irene Baird's novel is, itself, characteristic of Canadian criticism, as is, perhaps, his statement that it is set in hoboland. His comments permit an acknowledgement of the novel's existence even while extracting from it some of its importance as a statement of class conflict. The novel arose out of real events in the Depression in which the work of the Communist Party and the dissatisfied unemployed forced a measure of acknowledgement of conditions from the British Columbia government in Victoria. It is a closely documented work, the result of painful research, on the spot observation, interviews, and even a minute examination of the accommodation used by the men during their stay in Victoria. The novel may fairly be said to have been neglected. Some of the reasons must be obvious from its subject matter and treatment. But the date of its publication also must have affected its life among an appropriate reading public.

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[6]Dorothy Livesay, "*They Shall Inherit the Earth* by Morley Callaghan," *New Frontier*, 1936, reprinted in D. Livesay, *Right Hand Left Hand* (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic Ltd., 1977), p. 176.

[7]McDougall, p. 19.

Its publication was, of course, followed very soon by the Second World War. It was simultaneously published in 1939 in Canada by Macmillan and in the U.S. by Random House. In a later edition, it was published in France as *Heritage Gaspillé* by Maréchal in 1946. *Heritage Gaspillé* is almost impossible to find at the present time. Fortunately, *Waste Heritage* was re-issued in 1974 in the Laurentian Library series; but since that time no serious criticism of it has appeared.

That may be the case for a number of reasons. The novel was well received when it first appeared, but the majority of reviews and notices accepted it as merely documentary and did not look deeper. Since then it has been treated in literary histories as a small, imitative work. Indeed the publishers themselves, as the reviewer in *University of Toronto Quarterly* observed, invited "its comparison with Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*."[8] At the same time, reviewers made what was a more damaging claim — that Irene Baird had copied the main character, Matt Striker, and his mentally unstable friend, Eddy, from Steinbeck's George and Lennie in the 1937 novel, *Of Mice and Men*. To add to that denigration of the novel's importance, later critics were aware that Irene Baird has recently (1937) published a gentle, middle class novel called *John* and followed *Waste Heritage* in 1941 with a novel quite removed from class consciousness, *He Rides the Sky*, an epistolary novel of a Canadian airman overseas. The dust jacket of that novel quotes five reviews of *Waste Heritage*, three of which compare it to *Grapes of Wrath*. By her own account, Irene Baird was never a Communist nor even a radical.[9] She was drawn to the subject by the staggering waste and injustice of the Depression. She was touched by the plight of the unemployed and angered by the impotence and insensitivity of Canadian governments. She literally followed the events leading from the occupation of the Vancouver Post Office and Art Gallery to the march on Victoria shortly after. She set out to record the human drama of the events. The documentary strength of the novel is so great, and the style so unlike her previous novel that critics floundered when they dealt with it. Some — when it first appeared — pointed out that such documentary work had not before appeared

[8]J.R. MacGillivray, "Letters in Canada 1939," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 9 (1940), 293.

[9]Irene Baird, "Sidown, Brothers, Sidown," *Laurentian University Review*, 9 (1976), 81-86.

in Canada. *Queen's Quarterly* declared it to be of the same genre but "not in any way" dependent upon *Grapes of Wrath* "for inspiration or interest."[10] J.R. MacGillivray's article (already referred to), dealing with 1939 fiction in *University of Toronto Quarterly,* treats the novel seriously, recommends it, but fails to see any serious class comment in it, and, ultimately, condescends to it. MacGillivray writes that the "urban descriptions are not the best imaginable, but by Canadian standards they are wonderful".[11] Eleanor Godfrey, in *Canadian Forum,* accepts the possibility that Irene Baird "borrowed her idea" for Matt and Eddy from Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men.* But she goes on: "it is just as possible that Miss Baird found quite independently the same social instincts in Canadian unemployed that Steinbeck found in his bindlestiffs." For her, *Waste Heritage* is "a social indictment in a literary form," but she does not go into the novel's class or political implications.[12] *The New York Times* critic "could only read George for Matt and Lennie for Eddy, recalling the astonishingly similar relationship of these two characters in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men.*"[13] That "astonishingly similar relationship" will be dealt with later.

In June 1939 Earle Birney reviewed *Grapes of Wrath* for *Canadian Forum.* (Birney appeared again in February 1940, and so could have reviewed *Waste Heritage* which *Saturday Night, The New York Times,* and *Saturday Review of Literature* reviewed in December 1939). Birney wrote ecstatically about Steinbeck's novel.

> This is no "proletarian novel." It is rather the only thing a class-conscious artist can write so long as the working people of the earth — of our Canadian prairies too — suffer and die under their economic overlords. . . .
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> That the end will be revolution is implicit from the title onwards. Self-interest dictates that the HAVES will not concede; self-preservation and the ultimately superior power of numbers mean the masses will win, so long as they retain the will to "turn their fear to wrath."[14]

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[10]E.H.W., "The Season's Books: Fiction," *Queen's Quarterly,* 47 (1940), 117.
[11]MacGillivray, p. 293.
[12]Eleanor Godfrey, "Waste Heritage," *Canadian Forum,* February 1940, 365.
[13]Harold Strauss, "*Waste Heritage* and Other New Works of Fiction," *New York Times,* December 10, 1939, p. 97.
[14]Earle Birney, "A Must Book," *Canadian Forum,* June 1939, 94-95.

Brave words. But *Grapes of Wrath* is not so specifically a novel of class conflict as *Waste Heritage* is. Even Birney says that Steinbeck employs "overtones of mysticism and sentimental individualism which occasionally confuse the dominant social philosophy." But the dominant social philosophy of *Grapes of Wrath* is one which suggests a kind of Emersonian U.S. identity that transcends the exploitation by powerful interests and permits the folk to prevail: hardly a call to class action.

Even so, no one does for Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage* what Birney does for *Grapes of Wrath.* Perhaps the greatest example of blindness about Baird's novel is presented by the critic who insists that she made an "astonishingly similar relationship" to the one between Lennie and George of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men.* To begin, Lennie is retarded — apparently congenitally — and the relation between the two men is individualistic: George knew Lennie's aunt in the home town and so assumes responsibility for him. Eddy, however, is made partly amnesiac and intermittently childlike by the experience of being beaten viciously by a plain clothes policeman. The relation with Matt is formed when Matt intervenes to assist Eddy against what must be seen as class exploitation. At the end of *Waste Heritage,* Matt and Eddy are confronted with the hopelessness of their condition. Unable to continue the long class resistance to injustice and harassment, the two men — both scarred by class warfare — fall back into unorganized violence: Matt is in the unsympathetic hands of the police; Eddy runs into an oncoming train. At the end of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men,* Lennie is believed guilty of the murder of a woman who was being flauntingly, sexually provocative. The revenge posse is after Lennie — a revenge posse only exiguously connected to class conflict. George decides, completely individualistically, to take the power of judgement upon himself. He raises a pistol to Lennie's head and calmly blows his brains out. In both novels two men are in relation, one reasonably intelligent, the other mentally unstable. But the more their situations and relations are examined, the more the pairs are seen to be incomparable.

The novel takes its origin, as has been said, from events that rocked Vancouver in May and June of 1938. The situation was very clearly one in which class tensions were stretched tight. The Depression, which had seemed to be waning a little, had grown very bad again. Unemployment was high, and the unemployed were

treated, often, as if they were outcasts and suspects. Neither governments nor captains of industry seemed able to do anything effective to ameliorate the lot of the suffering. To press for positive action, sit-downs were organized in the Art Gallery and the Post Office. As Steve Brodie, leader of the action, has recorded of the Post Office occupation, "one hundred men maintained perfect discipline for thirty days in spite of constant harassment by police and invitations to do battle."[15] Indeed, when confronted by police, the men offered to submit to arrest on condition that all of them would be tried equally. But, as Steve Brodie records, governments "agreed that the building should not be cleared by lawful arrest and trial. A riot was necessary to provide the pretext for a few leaders to be railroaded for inciting rioting and destruction of property."[16]

The plan was simple and it was simply executed. The very strong bond of solidarity forged between the people of Vancouver and the sit-downers had to be broken for the sake of government and capitalist power. What is more, it had to be broken in such a way as to place the stamp of criminal on the sit-downers and make them appear irresponsible and dangerous. To that end, the police tear-gassed the building (as they did the Post Office), attacked the men, beat many of them severely, and carried off a number of them to jail. The general population and the sit-downers were incensed; street damage and looting followed, and, after, some huge rallies were held.

The rallies of 15,000 people at the Powel Street grounds and 30,000 at the CPR pier for the send-off of 100 jobless men going to Victoria appear in *Waste Heritage*. Irene Baird takes up the story of class conflict soon after the sit-downers have been violently evicted from the public buildings.

Matt Striker arrives in Vancouver at the beginning of the novel, crowning six years of life spent travelling back and forth across Canada in search of work. No Province or municipality will recognize his claim to residence. Baird not only makes Matt a man who is unable to claim residence; she also strips him of family so that he may be examined in relation to his desire to forge an alliance within his class. A reader cannot wonder why Matt does not just go home. He has no home to go to. Matt has known from a very early age, moreover, that capitalism protects itself against any threat. "One of

[15]"Bloody Sunday" in Livesay, p. 272.
[16]Livesay, p. 274.

the first things I can remember," he tells Charlie, the restauranteur, "is bein' waked by a cop shinin' a flashlight on my face an' shovin' his hand under my mattress to feel for seditious literature. I think that's the first moment I ever hated cops."[17]
He joins the protesting unemployed, but the action is not set in hoboland and they are not hobos. Hep describes the men.

> We started out with five hundred an' we got close to fifteen hundred, everything from school teachers an' truck drivers an' last years' high school kids down to plain, ordinary, stinkin' bums. We got a cross-section of pretty near every trade an' profession in the country. (p. 75)

As part of the protesting group Matt develops concepts of group responsibility and class awareness. Professor McDougall's claim that the novel is "set in hobodom" is misleading, since hobodom is a very real state created (at any time in economic history) by a small part of the population that rejects normal social responsibility and contact and chooses, instead, to live apart from any recognized social order. The group Matt Striker joins is essentially an action group with distinct political aims, working to gain social power, to shift social policy, and to participate in the larger social order.

Matt's most significant introduction to Vancouver occurs at the point when he rescues Eddy from the violence of a police agent: "a big man in plain clothes . . . cracking down on something that looked like a bundle of waste with a head on it" (p. 11). Eddie is crippled mentally by the attack. Before he was hit, he was, as Hep says, "one of the steadiest boys in this whole outfit . . . simple but . . . steady". (p. 40). Matt, too, is a victim of the system, for he, too, has been scarred by it, and the scar he got by being hit "on the head by a riot stick" in 1935 is the sign that he now has occasions when he gets "blind-mad," as he describes the condition himself (p. 31).

Matt goes from a condition in which he does not care about politics (p. 29) to a state in which he believes he wants very much to work in the organization to do something worthwhile. He is refused by the movement because he is unpredictable, because he does not seem to be able to take a steady line and keep cool, and because he does not seem to be able to get a strong overview of the political situation. But the basis of his rejection is connected to his scar. One

[17]Irene Baird, *Waste Heritage*. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 115. Further references to *Waste Heritage* will be indicated by page numbers included in the text.

might want to say that Matt has been scarred by "society." But he has not been. He has been scarred, as Eddy has — to put the situation in the language that describes it best — by agents of the bourgeois power. And when the action of the novel comes round again to where Matt began, he faces a policeman beating Eddy, and the "old rage-blindness [arises], choking him" (p. 327). Matt moves in, as he had done at the beginning, but this time the action unfolds differently. Matt vents all his pent-up rage and frustration on the person who represents the injustice of the system. Matt is surrounded. The people drawn to the scene believe the jobless are staging a riot, and, in a sense, they are. Inasmuch as Matt Striker represents the sit-down strikers, he acts against the forces that have repressed and deluded the men who have acted with discipline and good faith. But his action is individualistic and irrational. Only bad things can come of it. He has not learned the lesson Hep has been trying to teach him: the need for organized discipline and strategic action.

His difference from Hep points to the differing forces Baird presents in the novel. Organizing the men and working with them are the Communists. They are represented by Hep, Laban, and 'the movement.' In the real world the leader of the occupation of the Art Gallery and Post Office was Steve Brodie, a tough, militant Communist activist. A force which seemed half to cooperate with the Communists and half to betray them was the CCF, the social democratic organization. Brodie had no doubt about their role in real life. In the novel they seem to be skilful and effective. Brodie did not like them and thought they were making political capital on the hard, militant work of his people.

> Somehow, in a way which I have never understood, leadership seemed to pass from Harris to Harold Winch, then an MLA, and later MP. He appeared at 5 a.m. June 19, not at the invitation of the men, but as assistant to the chief of police. He claims credit for the fact that no clubs were used on the men, but fails to explain the use of tear gas on men who had surrendered to lawful arrest.
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> From both ends of the lobby the RCMP attacked, equipped with gas masks and plying their whips in joyful abandon like the notorious Cossacks.[18]

[18]Steve Brodie in Livesay, pp. 272 and 276.

The CCF figure enters the novel at two important places, both times to prevent 'rioting,' to prevent violent demonstrations of discontent by the men and their supporters from the general population against the policies that allowed the men to be savagely attacked.

Members of the general public — sympathetic and unsympathetic — are represented individually, through news reports, and through rallies and demonstrations. The general public is presented as fickle, emotional, unpredictable.

The two organized forces in more or less constant confrontation are the unemployed action group and bourgeois power, the latter represented ubiquitously by the police. The novel, of course, focuses on the unemployed action group. It is seen constantly in relation to the police who are quite clearly described as the instrument of bourgeois power. Matt thinks about them, concluding that "Uniforms were another bit of class oppression the same way that wars were cooked up by a bunch of pot-bellied financiers" (p. 136). Matt also identifies "the top" of the large department store Hazel works in as "invested capital." "That's what's got to be swept away," he adds (p. 215).

At the meeting in the Cutlake ball park the question of the organization of the unemployed is raised. In answer the speaker is firm. "Sure these boys are organized!" The speaker goes on: "what about the doctors and lawyers and politicians?" After having set off the two organized groups quite clearly, the speaker refers to the unemployed.

> Just as long as they stayed scattered over the country like dogs, they couldn't stir up trouble, but let them get together into a disciplined organized body of men that know where they're headed for what happens? They become public enemy number one and the whole country is headed for red revolution. (p. 129)

In Andersonville Old Man Morgan rejects the red-baiting that one of his friends embarks upon, saying the "Reds didn't start nothin', they just come in an' took advantage of the set-up. The whole damn system is at the bottom of the trouble" (p. 165).

The policeman as servant to capitalist order makes up one of Matt's first memories. The police, too, stamp Matt with his real, visible wound which prevents him from being able to function in a disciplined community. In Clever, in 1935, during a protest against

unemployment, Matt is struck and scarred by a billy stick, and the scar he bears from that day is the symbol of his kind: harassed, unprovided for, disowned.

Even more than Matt, Eddy is a scarred and symbolic victim, wanting only work and a measure of self-respect. He wants a comfortable pair of shoes, the simple desire of someone always on the move. But Baird may intend more in his failure to get them and in her repeated images of feet and shoes. She may be calling upon the equality suggested in the negro spiritual and violently denied in the world of *Waste Heritage*.

> You got shoes.
> I got shoes.
> All of God's chillun got shoes.
> I'm gonna put on my golden shoes
> And walk all over God's heaven.

Eddy is not only denied basic comfort and self-respect. He is also violated by the police. He insists upon telling Matt what really happened in the alley when Matt found him being beaten by the policeman.

> "There was this big sonovabitching cop dressed in a grey fedora that comes at me an' says, 'Now you get outa here, move on,' and I ses, 'Where to?' an' he ses, 'How the hell should I know?' an' I ses, 'Just tell me some place to go an' I'll go.' 'Okay,' he ses, 'I'll tell you some place,' 'an' he runs me aroun' into the alley an' then . . .an' then . . ." Eddy said, breaking off uncertainly, "you come along. There was somethin' else happened between but I forget what it was." (p. 143)

The policeman did violence to Eddy as a mere demonstration of power. Eddy is violated without apparent reason; and Baird has Matt insist on Eddy's centrality in the novel: "Eddy was tied in with everything that happened since that first Sunday. Eddy was the one thread running clear through" (p. 273).

The much misread larger conflict in the novel has very real connection to the crippling of the two young men by agents of the capitalist state. In terms of the protagonist of the novel, Matt Striker, the internal conflict is between his individualism and his recognition of the need to learn discipline, responsibility to the group, and a long view of the struggle in which he is involved. He has come to town

"with a definite reason" (p. 22), to join the larger organization — his statement of his desire to end his 'loner' existence. In the first third of the book he feels "as though his identity were being sucked away" (p. 28) as if he has to give up some of his humanity in order to belong to a disciplined and purposeful organization. His repeated failures of calm are probably most dramatically exemplified by his attempt to strike Hep after an argument between them about the sordid accommodation in Victoria (p. 200). There, too, he admits his difficulty in seeing "the whole picture," as well as his still-remaining self-regarding motivation (p. 201). Parallel with the conflict in Matt is the repeated reference to the people who "can take it" and those who can't. The young boys who have stolen liquor from the half-breed at Andersonville "just couldn't take it" Hep says (p. 186). One of the boys says the same thing earlier (p. 176). Charlie admits he can't take it when he is asked to go tin-canning (p. 265). Three times Matt admits he can't take it: first, after he and Hep have had a painful interview with the war-scarred father of one of the sit-downers (p. 251). Secondly, he says it after the march on Victoria has proved to gain very little for the men (p. 315). "I guess I just couldn't take it," Matt admits to Help.

After Matt has been refused a place in the organization, the novel ends with Matt and Eddy as the supposed creators of a riot, an event Hep has been working consistently to avoid. Both Eddy and Matt take a lead in the violence. As Matt batters the body of the policeman he has found fighting with Eddy, "his breath [comes] in thick, angry sobs. His feet [work], he [pants] hoarsely, I couldn't take it! I couldn't take it!" (p. 327).

Hep can take it. He is usually calm. He is always capable. He has a clear overview of the struggle he is in. Though he is sometimes seen by others as cold and designing, he is both humane and understanding. He helps Matt and counsels him; he permits Matt to save Eddy from a mental institution, though he knows that the risk Eddy causes the men is great. Hep's act of humanitarianism helps to trigger the public violence at the end of the novel. Even after the incident with the prostitute, when Eddy has endangered the whole group, Hep acts with kindness. He says to Matt: "You know what I ought to do in a case like this?" But he does not run Eddy out of the group.

Baird remarks on Hep's sense of "dignity" (p. 84), refers to his "tough, sensitive fingers" (p. 161), has him look "at Matt with a

gleam of affection in his lonely eyes" (p. 170). When Matt is sore and offended after Mr. Chandler's insults, Hep makes a plea for himself: "How do you think I liked it, standin' up there in front of the old man an' havin to take it? D'you think I liked that whole job of work any better than you did?" (p. 250). And when Matt asks why Hep has treated Mrs. Bannerman's "faded lechery" (p. 252) with courteousness, Hep thinks about what was his natural, unpremeditated response:

> "I don't know," he admitted, "except that she was a human being an' maybe she got some kind of kick out of thinking she made an impression. It don't cost a nickel to be human." (p. 255)

Clearly, Baird wants Hep to be seen as a humanitarian. When Matt asks him why he does not get a better job with the organization, Hep tells him he likes "working among the boys from the ground up. . . . I like to watch how they shape up, then if they're any damn good at all maybe I can recommend them for special work" (p. 160). Baird balances Hep's character carefully. He must be able to reject Matt at the end; he must not allow himself to permit personal involvements to affect his judgement. When the two boys are rejected at Andersonville, Matt is uneasy, especially since he is sure one of them will end in jail. Hep asks Matt to see the larger picture: " '. . . you can't afford to let it get to you. You've got to keep looking at this as a whole, not as a lot of little individual units' " (p. 185).

Kenny Hughes, the unsuccessful novelist of the events, is impressed by the way Hep keeps order in the old hotel. But he is uneasy with Hep's self-control. "Did it ever occur to you, Matt," Hughes asks, "that there was something cold-blooded about Hep?" Matt replies that Hep is "bigger than the rest of us, that's all," but Hughes insists the right phrase is "cold-blooded" (p. 286). Hazel, also, who opts finally for personal comfort with Art the pimp rather than a threatened existence with Matt, criticizes Hep with a very ambiguous comment. Speaking of Hep, she tells Matt: " 'Sometimes I used to think that he didn't care what happened to Hep just so long as the organization was going along okay' " (p. 215). Matt smiles and says to her, "not quite human, huh?" Her response is to confuse Hep with the people at "the top" of her department store. But neither she nor Kenny Hughes can seem to find the centre of the protesting group and Hazel ends up — for survival's sake — going

with Art the pimp in Vancouver. Hep goes on, without being flustered, even when the agreement with government presents, in fact, a defeat for the men. Matt admits he cannot take the loss. Hep is critical of Matt for the last time.

> "That's because you don't get what it's all about. You don't see what bringing this little stink here out in the open can do for big main cause. All you're lookin' at is just one little corner" (p. 315).

Irene Baird was concerned that the Canadian public should look at a good deal more than "just one little corner." Indeed, in setting out to document the troubles in British Columbia in 1938, she presented an analysis of class which reveals the capitalists and their agents as ruthless oppressors, fundamentally responsible for the tragedy of Matt and Eddy. She shows working class organization as possessing the potential to ennoble some and to support many with a measure of self-respect. She shows her hero of the group, Hep the Communist organizer, as a man of solid, selfless, disciplined humanity.

The novel builds an imagery that coordinates the theme of class conflict and class oppression. The image of the treadmill relates to the image of feet and shoes. Referring to the men without domicile in any Province, Charlie uses the treadmill image:

> "Kind of like a squirrel cage, ain't it?" Charlie said perplexedly, "round an' round an' never gettin' any place." (p. 225)

The men go shuffling on, but their movement is like movement on a treadmill. It has, in the short term, no significant direction because of economic and political forces. All of God's children do not have shoes, and those who try to get them are scarred and, ultimately, in *Waste Heritage,* tragically handled.

The women, too, get little that is beautiful from the system in which they live. Unlike Anna Prychoda in Callaghan's *They Shall Inherit the Earth,* Hazel in *Waste Heritage* is not saved by a gentle, sensitive man with an engineering degree. She is sexually harassed in her job, is fired, and is having another job lined up for her in a dance hall through the influence of a pimp. There is no doubt in the reader's mind that Hazel will get the job. She is a strong, realistic girl who loves Matt. But to survive, she has, almost literally, to sell herself

because the system in which she lives values her at nothing. Baird's depiction of Hazel is convincing, and it permits no sentimentality to creep into the novel. The men seeking work, self-respect, a decent wage are harassed and hounded. The women they would normally be with are pawns, for sale in a jungle of competition to survive.

In those conditions Hep takes on large stature. He is not middle class, nor does he come from the middle class. He is like Hazel, except that he has seen a way to get out of the jungle and to lead other needy people out, too. He has a proletarian toughness — so much so that some readers believe he is brutal and inhumane. He is quite the opposite. But for readers who want a Michael Aikenhead, someone to legitimize the status quo, Hep is a poor substitute. He sees the final march into the park as a tactic at a point in the struggle. It has public relations value. It contributes to "the big main cause," which is the final overthrow of the system that so viciously dehumanizes men and women. He is a hero produced by the demands of a book which rejects middle class aesthetics and heroism and focuses on the reality of class conflict. Matt tries to do what Michael Aikenhead would do — get a job and care for his own situation without regard for the others. When he is confronted by Hep, he feels that explanations are not good enough,

> that Hep was out to sell him something and that the thing he was selling was more important in Hep's mind than whether the customer wanted it or not. Once again he felt in the presence of that force inflexible, impersonal, untainted by pity, larger than any single man. Or maybe, he thought, it's because I'm so damn soreheaded tonight that I'd be suspicious of anything anyone said to me. (p. 221)

Matt tells Hep of his dissatisfaction: " 'I don't know what's got into me tonight,' he said at last. 'I know all the stuff you said was true but it still don't make any difference to the way I feel' " (p. 222).

Hep understands that Matt wants work, wages, and a chance to live with the woman he loves: "For a moment the two men stood side by side. Suddenly Hep spoke, sounding irritable and tired. 'I know damn well what's got into you, Matt, an' don't think you're the only one' " (p. 222).

Hep understands. But Baird permits him only one large, significant act on behalf of humane behaviour that will threaten the organization. He permits Eddy to stay with the group when Eddy is a

distinct danger to it. Eddy reveals the humanity of both Matt Striker and Hep; but he also provides the lesson of Hep's discipline. In the class conflict in which the group is engaged no weak links can be permitted. That may seem undesirable, cruel, and overly organized to the middle class mind. But the novel is not a middle class novel, and what it says about class structure, class interest, class exploitation, and class values makes it *mean* very differently from what a middle class novel means. Hep is not seeking to find himself or to liberate his own soul. He wants to liberate his class so it can gain some possibility of self-determination and freedom of person. His task does not end. The class struggle goes on and Hep goes on, too, dedicated to the organization, obviously, but as an instrument of liberation that does not come quickly in capitalist society to the proletariat and its members cast onto the garbage heap of capitalist waste.

Recognizing the class nature of *Waste Heritage,* recognizing the participants to the class conflict in it, and analysing the novel's action in those terms reveal a structure that is significantly different from what a conventional reading gives. That analysis and that structure tell us much about the meaning of Waste Heritage. They make it more accessible than it has been. Also they invite the reader to employ similar methods in the examination of other works of Canadian fiction.

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