A Secular Liturgy: Hugh Hood's Aesthetics and *Around the Mountain*

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I

By means of a series of critical essays, letters, and interviews, Hugh Hood has sought to make his aesthetic intentions clearly understood by a wide readership. Two of the most instructive essays are "Sober Colouring: The Ontology of Super-Realism" and "Before the Flood," the former written near the beginning of the 1970s and the latter towards the end of the decade. "Sober Colouring: The Onotology of Super-Realism" comments on the development of Hood's ideas about art during the fourteen years since his turning to fiction writing in January 1957, immediately after Robert Weaver rejected an essay by Hood on "Rose Symbolism in the Novels of Morley Callaghan," the first criticle article that Hood had written following the completion of his Ph.D. at the University of Toronto.[1] The more recent essay, "Before the Flood," discusses the imaginative influence of Hood's childhood reading and typifies the refined conceptions informing his writing in the 1970s, notably the first trilogy of his epic cycle, *The New Age/Le Nouveau siècle,* and the impressive short stories written during the same period and collected in *Dark Glasses* and *None Genuine Without This Signature.*[2] Together, "Sober Colouring: The Onotology of Super-

[1] In September 1955, Hood began teaching full-time at Saint Joseph College in Hartford, Connecticut; and on October 31, 1955 he completed the oral examination on his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Toronto. The dissertation, which is 421 pages long, is entitled "Theories of Imagination in English Thinkers 1650-1790." From December 1955 to spring 1956, Hood wrote the opening chapter of "God Rest You Merry," the first of two early, complete, unpublished novels. Then in the summer of 1956, Hood "spent a lot of time talking to Morley Callaghan with the idea in mind of doing a critical article," which he wrote that fall and submitted to *The Tamarack Review*. Robert Weaver's dislike for the article convinced Hood "definitely to throw over academic criticism and go for fiction writing." Hood dates his beginnings as a fiction writer, therefore, from January 1957. In the first year of "writing seriously and all the time," Hood composed ten short stories and finished the first draft of "God Rest You Merry." (Hugh Hood, Notes for an Autobiography, 1 June 1963.)

[2] Hood began the first part of *The New Age/Le Nouveau Siècle* in October 1972 and completed the third part in May 1978. In the same period, he wrote the following short stories: "An Allegory of Man's Fate" (Dec. 1973-Jan. 1974), "Going out as a Ghost" (Jan. 1974), "Thanksgiving: Between Junetown and Caintown" (Nov. 1974), "God has Manifested Himself Unto Us as Canadian Tire" (Nov. 1975), "Ghosts at Jarry" (Sept. 1977), "None Genuine Without This Signature, or, Peaches in the Bathtub" (Oct.1977), "Crosby" (Nov. 1977), and "Doubles" (Nov. 1977). The first three of these stories are among those collected in *Dark Glasses*. The last five stories appear in *None Genuine*

Realism" and "Before the Flood" present a view of art that has shaped all of Hood's writing in varying degrees. Quite early in his career, however, between January and June 1966,[3] this theory was given a subtle, coherent and comprehensive form of expression through the composition of *Around the Mountain: Scenes from Montreal Life.*

In the two essays, Hood conveys his admiration for "an art that exhibits the transcendental element dwelling in living things,"[4] for an art that is neither penned in itself as an image is. . . nor. . . hissing away into the invisible inane as symbols do"[5] but *emblematic,* that is, "as colourful as an image, and as full of meta-meaning as a symbol, indeed fuller because the implications of the symbol are so chillingly, so frustratingly imprecise."[6] Hood's great exemplar in this instance and in many others is Wordsworth, whose use of the colour green is precisely emblematic: "the colour is rich, full, wholly given, contextually one of several neighbouring shades and no other, not blurred, intensely evocative of real grass and trees, but at the same time meaningful in a distinct allegorical sense."[7] Alluding to the example of Wordsworth, Hood states that, "If you pay close enough attention to things, stare at them, concentrate on them as hard as you can, not just with your intelligence, but with your feelings and instincts, you will begin to apprehend the forms in them.[8]

This is the method that Hood pursues in *Around the Mountain,* a cycle of twelve stories following the Christian calendar and containing specific descriptions of distinct seasons in Montreal, different areas of the city, unique groups of people, and notable individuals. All of these details are informed and illuminated by Hood's artistic revelation of their place in greater patterns and in a Divine Order. It is a method that John Mills says Hood used succesfully in the title story of his first book, *Flying a Red Kite,* and later "brought very close to perfection" in *A New*

Without This Signature (Hugh Hood, Notes for an Autobiography, 4 Oct. 1973, 7 Sept. 1974, 30 Aug. 1975, 11 Sept. 1976, 4 Sept. 1977; Letter received from Hugh Hood, 22 Feb. 1979; Letter received from Hugh Hood, 8 March 1979; and J.R. (Tim) Struthers, "A Bibliography of Works by and on Hugh Hood," in *Before the Flood: Our Exagmination round His Factification for Incamination of Hugh Hood's Work in Progress,* ed. J.R. (Tim) Struthers (Downsview, Ont.: Ecw, 1979), 232, 233, 234.)

[3] Hugh Hood, Notes for an Autobiography, 7 July 1966.

[4] Hugh Hood, "Sober Colouring: The Onotology of Super-Realism," *Canadian Literature* 49 (1971), 30; rpt., with pref., as "The Onotology of Super-Realism" in his *The Governor's Bridge is Closed* (Ottawa: Oberon, 1973) 130. All references to this essay use Hood's preferred title, "Sober Colouring: The Onotology of Super-Realism," but cite page numbers from *The Governor's Bridge is Closed.*

[5] Hood, "Before the Flood" in *Before the Flood,* 14.

[6] Hood, "Before the Flood," 14.

[7] Hood, "Before the Flood," 16.

[8] Hood, "Sober Colouring: The Onotology of Super-Realism," 132.

Athens, the second volume of *The New Age.*[9] Drawing on a commentary by Erwin Panofsky in *Meaning in the Visual Arts,* Mills identifies Hood's technique as "the anagogical method," a process involving "abandonment of the mind to the harmony and radiance of objects in the physical world in order that the mind be guided towards the transcendent source of this harmony and radiance, namely God."[10]

A Christian cosmology—specifically, a Roman Catholic one, with its attendant structure of beliefs and emblems—permeates and unites the whole sequence of ritualistic actions in *Around the Mountain.* As in William Cooper's hymn "Light Shining Out of Darkness," whose title Hood borrowed for the second story in *Around the Mountain,*[11] and as in other religious poetry that Hood studied in his M.A. thesis,[12] images of light in *Around the Mountain* frequently represent Hood's belief in the saving presence of God in this world. Both the searchlight, in the ninth story, that rescues Thierry Desautels from being lost when he descends for the first time into an infernal valley of the shadow of death at rue Valdombre and the amazingly bright and colourful fleet of model ships created by the gypsy Tom, in the second story, that gleams out of the hellishly dark," "deadly cold" (*AM* 29, 33) night are meant to signify the immanence of the Divine Being, by whose Light, Grace, and Love the fallen world of mankind is redeemed.

In "Light Shining Out of Darkness," the Fall from Grace and the ascent of Mount Purgatory are represented as well, through the emblematic description leading up to the vision of Tom's model ships:

> The approach to his third-floor quarters is embellished by a really beautiful spiral staircase with a delicate iron rail rising in a graceful curve. I don't deny the staircase is dangerous in winter, when you can't put your bare hand on the railing, and when you have to watch your footing very carefully.
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> As we ascended Lazarovich said, "A man fell down here one night straight to the bottom. He was a Hungarian, may have been drunk.

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[9] John Mills, "Hugh Hood and the Anagogical Method," in *Before the Flood,* 95, 110.

[10] Mills, "Hugh Hood and the Anagogical Method," 100.

[11] Telephone conversation with Hugh Hood, 21 Aug. 1979.

[12] See Hood, "The Architecture of Experience (Studies in the Relation of Cosmology to Poetry in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries)," M.A. Thesis Toronto, 1952. 111pp.

> Killed instantly." It was hellishly dark climbing. . . . On the third-floor platform, right at the top, you're apt to feel slightly dizzy if you look down at the black rectangle below, whose center, an oblong grass plot, is ringed by upwards-pointing metal spikes. (*AM* 29)

In sharp contrast to the hope of heavenly immortality suggested by the *grace*fully curving spiral staircase, the Hungarian's sudden fall to the grave-like plot of ground below is an immediate reminder of mankind's present fallen state and human mortality.

Morality and immortality, fallenness and salvation, are religious themes that evoke the Christian system behind *Around the Mountain* but that also serve as a device of literary structure, connecting the different scenes and the different stories in which they occur. The first story in the volume, "The Sportive Centre of Saint Vincent de Paul," a study of secular analogies for religious community, of man's irresponsibility, and of his deficiency in Christian charity, takes place in part during the "darkest week of the year" (*AM* 6) and contains a memorable description of death and damnation:

> Sometimes working my way along beside the park towards the level-crossing in winter twilight or blackness, I used to have an infernal vision of the place as an immense and horrid ashpit. There are piles of ashes and discarded rubbers, old tires, dead cats, at the back of the park where the snow-removal men heap tumuli of gray slush to await the coming of spring. It seemed ashy, gray to black, infinite, that stretch of obscurity along the railroad right-of-way, where now and then a truck might be seen, its body tilted at a dangerous angle. Spectral muffled figures prodded at lumps of packed snow and ordure as one came by; it was always mysteriously saddening to observe their dauntless activity.(*AM* 2-3.)

The theme of death is introduced again in the opening story when Seymour's goalie mask is said to resemble closely the death-mask of Keats, and when the emblem fo the infernal ashpit is recalled in the reference to the "ashen" (*AM* 9) appearance of the banished hockey player, Fred Carpenter.

Hood's portrait of man's immortal nature is amplified by many linking references in subsequent stories in the volume. "Light Shining Out of Darkness" contains, in addition to the

Hungarian's fatal fall, a remark by Mister Petroff, followed by his "grave salute" (*AM* 28), that Tom will replace him as patriarch of the Montreal gypsies when he dies. In "Looking Down from Above," the narrator experiences "feelings of mortality and a sense of the passage of time" (*AM* 82), which are stimulated by the dry heat in June and embodied in the defiant old woman and the dwindled form of Monsieur Bourbonnais. The aged Victor Latourelle sits alone "through the oncoming dark" (*AM* 126) at the close of "The Village Inside." The valley of the shadow of death into which Thierry Desautels descends in "A Green Child" contains a ruined "car's corpse" (*AM* 136), along with "piles of ashes" (*AM* 132) that recall emblematic descriptions in the opening story.

These intimations of mortality are drawn together in "The River behind Things," in the final scene where a deathly figure riding in a punt beside a dock, a solitary Charon-like man with "agitated thin black limbs" (*AM* 175), jabs a long black pole repeatedly into the ice.[13] The narrator watches, then raises his eyes up "to the source of the river," gazing off towards "the high hills" and "the melting ice and snow" (*AM* 175). Like "The Dead," the final story in Joyce's *Dubliners,* whih closes with a description of the sound of "snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead,"[14] *Around the Mountain* ends, as it begins, with an evocation of death emphasized by Hood's placement of the word "snow" last, and first, in the volume.

The first descriptionof snow in "The Sportive Centre of Saint Vncent de Paul" is linked with references to snow in the infernal vision pictured later in the same story; but that vision also anticipates "the coming of spring" (*AM* 3). The hope of rebirth, a return to Eden, immortality, is suggested—again briefly, since the opening story is designed to reflect the ambiguity of winter—by the applegreen and yellow colours of t the light emanating, significantly, from the parish church and by the identical colous of one Pee-Wee team's hockey sweaters. The actual sequence of events in the story marks a hopeful advance as well. "The Sportive Centre of Saint Vincent de Paul" concetrates on

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[13] In an interview with Hugh Hood," by J.R. (Tim) Struthers, in *Before the Flood,* 47, Hood says of this dark figure, "Well he was there. I looked at the man. I was maybe a hundred years away from this guy who was doing exactly what's described in the story, and I though to myself that this looks like a little black figure in the painting of Bruegel or Hieronymus Bosch, it looks like a Dance of Death figure, and I thought it tied in very nicely with the poetic complex of, putatively, high hills, mystical experience, primordial breast, nurture, fog, snow, dark figure, death—and that's how it ends."

[14] James Joyce, *Dubliners: Text, Criticism, and Notes,* ed. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Lits, The Viking Critical Library (New York: Viking, 1969), 224.

the irresponsible actions by Fred Carpenter[15] and, in turn, by his uncharitable team-mates, which are made to appear more incongruous by their occurrence during the season of Christmas. However, the story moves to a night some weeks later, sometime after the ritualistic beginning of the new year, when, standing near a statue of the Blessed Virgin with the Child in her arms, an emblem of holiness, Grace, and unselfish sacrifice and love, Seymour glimpses the possible self-righteousness of their earlier moral judgment of Fred Carpenter, and the narrator agrees.

This forward-moving or forward-looking tendency, which is based on the archetypal movement from death to rebirth, is more pronounced in the second story in the volume. Here, Hood's calendrical sequence of stories moves one month closer to June and to the "heightened perception" (*AM* 81)—meaning improved sight and, especially, insight—that fair weather symbolizes for Hood. The vision of Tom's gleaming model ships, the light shining out of darkness of the story's title, momentarily excites "A renovating virtue"[16] in the narrator, who, like Wordsworth contemplating the "spots of time,"[17] concludes,

> Sometimes a calm scene like this, a rounded period in the life of the imagination, will rest in one's faculties, stay, rotate, restate itself over and over in changing colours and meanings, excited feelings, instincts, memory, imagination, seeming to have special powers to enlighten and give form to the rest of our lives. Standing there in the queer narrow living room, almost a scarcely enclosed balcony projecting over nothing, a bit drafty, a bit poor in its other furnishings, I was mysteriously overwhelmed by this various and splendid sight with feelings of a hidden and immense joy. I was smiling and transfixed and the remembrance of the sight long after retains the capacity to direct and strengthen all my ways of feeling, so that the life of de Chateaubriand mixes itself irrecoverably with my suspicions of the possibility of goodness, of the memorable life. (*AM* 30-1)

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[15] Hood's ironic choice of a surname for Fred Carpenter alludes to the occupation of Jesus. In "Hugh Hood and His Expanding Universe," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 3, No.1 (1974), 58, Kent Thompson suggests that "If Carpenter represents the failure of Christ for the 20th century, then Hood seems to be saying that in the 20th century's rejection of Christ there has also been the rejection of the doctrine of Mercy, with the resulting sin of self-righteousness. Pride."

[16] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude of Growth of a Poet's Mind*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Helen Darbishire, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), Text of 1850, XII.210, 445.

[17] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude of Growth of a Poet's Mind*, Text of 1850, XII, 208, 445.

The glints of a Divine Order are now stronger and more sustaining than in the preceding story set in December and January; but these intimations of immortality remain only "suspicions" of a remote "possibility" (*AM* 31). The epiphanic light manifests itself briefly. The story then concludes with a descent into the darkness and cold of the February night, and with a sense of sorrow when the narrator returns much later in the year and discovers that the gypsy family, in whose presence he had been uplifted, has moved on.

The ascent and descent of the spiral staircase in "Light Shining Out of Darkness" is repeated and enlarged in the volume as a whole. Hood states in an interview that

> The stories begin on the flat land up in the north-east of the Montreal region and they gradually make their way up to the top . . . . Then [the book] winds around the mountain and back down to the flat land north of Montreal but this time in the west. A complete rotation around the mountain from east to west takes place, and the stories are calculated according to how high up the mountain they are.[18]

The summit of human achievement, the climax in man's temporal search for transcendental perfection, for the Divine Vision, for the goodness of God, occurs at the close of the June story. Mounting to a favourite picnic spot, a kind of Dantean Earthly Paradise at the top of a Mount Purgatory,[19] the narrator partakes eucharistically—like the little girl with the raspberries in the mountain-top scene at the end of Hood's earlier story "Flying a Red Kite"[20] —of some wine at what appears to be a kind of Last Supper for the now emaciated Monsieur Bourbonnais.

Following this secular analogue of a sacred ritual, the narrator climbs higher still until he is "right at the top," where he thinks he could step with a single stride "into the next world" (*AM* 93,94). But, "although the vision was good" (*AM* 93-94)—another comment with a double meaning—the weather "had a qualified fineness that day, not the perfect blue sky" (*AM*

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18 Hugh Hood, "An Interview with Hugh Hood," by J.R. (Tim) Struthers, 45.

19 Dorothy L. Sayers' description of Dante's Earthly Paradise, in the introduction to her translation of *Purgatory [Il Purgatorio]*, Vol. II of *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1955) 68, illuminates Hood's choice of setting and themes in "Looking Down from Above": "At the summit of Mount Purgatory is the *Earthly Paradise*, the place of Man's Innocence, 'empty now, because of her fault who gave ear to the Serpent.' It is from here that, if Man had not fallen, he would have entered upon the life of Perfection, in this world and the next."

20 For analysis of this scene from "Flying a Red Kite;" see John Mills, "Hugh Hood and the Anagogical Method," 96-98.

92). Even though the narrator thinks that he could step into heaven, his attention is rightfully redirected, in the final paragraph of the story, from a vision of heavenly goodness and salvation to a heightened, but still limited, perspective on the temporal world below—just as the mountain-climbers in Hood's later story "Thanksgiving: Between Junetown and Caintown," from *Dark Glasses,* are depicted as searching for a way to get back down to man's proper earthly station.[21]

"Looking Down from Above" exemplifies the epistemological and ontological theories that are central to Hood's writing. In a discussion of the influence of Roman Catholic Philosopher Jacques Maritain's concept of intuitive reason on Hood's thought, John Orange argues that

> Intuitive reason implies a spiritual preconscious—a knowing from inclination such as poetic knowledge, any pre-philosophical knowledge of moral values, and mystical experience. It is a kind of knowing from above, as it were, and this *way* of knowing is, of course, also related to *what* is known—the Divine Spirit. . . . One senses too that many of the short stories and novels are meant to demonstrate that this "knowing from above" (cf. "Looking Down from Above" *AM*), whose source is in a life of the spirit, in fact exists in our daily lives and that it *informs* many of our choices (aided by Grace) and also our perceptions of beauty and truth.[22]

When applied to aesthetic theory, Hood's religious principles give birth to the concept of "super-realism," which is discussed in the essay "Sober Colouring: The Ontology of Super-Realism" and in the interview in *Before the Flood.* "I love most in painting an art that exhibits the transcendental element dwelling in living things. I think of this as true super-realism,"[23] Hood states in the essay. As he confirms in the interview, his use of the term "super-realism" derives from the Latin word "super," meaning "above":

> I'm glad to have the chance to clear that up because I think some people have thought I meant it like Superman, as an intensifier, more real than

[21] For an analysis of "Thanksgiving: Between Junetown and Caintown," see Lawrence Mathews, "The Secular and the Sacral: Notes on *A New Athens* and Three Stories by Hugh Hood," in *Before the Flood,* 220-22.

[22] John Orange, "Lines of Ascent: Hugh Hood's Place in Canadian Fiction," in *Before the Flood,* 117-18.

[23] Hugh Hood, "Sober Colouring: The Ontology of Super-Realism," 130.

> the real. That isn't what I meant at all. I was thinking of a long Neo-platonic tradition and particularly of Emerson's essay on "The Over-Soul" as a counterweight to Freudian and psychoanalytic notions of the unconscious. . . . If we're going to use metaphors of space, I don't think the bulk of extra-conscious motivation is sub- or pre- or unconscious at all. I think it's superconscious in the Latin sense of coming from above, coming, in Emerson's terms, from the "Over-Soul," but, in my terms, from the Holy Ghost—down from above and enlightening and illuminating, not a dark pall cast up from below.[24]

Hood's apprehension of the transcendental element incarnate in earthly things distinguishes his writing from that of contemporaries like Alice Munro, for whom "This ordinary place is sufficient, everything here touchable and mysterious."[25] Hood's fiction, like Munro's, is thickly textured with minutely realistic observations of daily life; but, as Hood states in a letter to John Mills, his fiction is allegorical as well as realistic:

> I want to be more "real" than the realists, yet more transcendent than the most vaporous allegorist. In short, I am following what I conceive [as] the method of Dante. . . . Now let me put it to you that since I am *both* a realist and a *transcendentalist allegorist* that I cannot be bound by the forms of ordinary realism.[26]

Although *Around the Mountain*— like James Reaney's *A Suit of Nettles*— is indebted to the general form of Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender*,[27] Hood feels that he was more deply influenced by the allegory of Dante. "It was with that book," he states, "that I began to feel. . . stronger and stronger affinities with Dante, and it has been increasing ever since."[28] In Dante, rather than Spenser, Hood finds a model for his own artistic representation of the incarnation of the Divine Being in the flesh of this world:

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24 Hugh Hood, "An Interview with Hugh Hood," by J.R. (Tim) Struthers, 76.

25 Alice Munro, "Everything Here is Touchable and Mysterious," *Weekend Magazine*.

26 Hugh Hood, "Hugh Hood and John Mills in Epistolary Conversation," the *Fiddlehead*, No. 116 (1978) 145.

27 For discussion of correspondences between *The Shepheardes Calender* and see Victoria G. Hale, "Elements of Literary Tradition and Myth in the Novels and Sketches of Hugh Hood: An Examination," M.A. Thesis Sir George Williams 1971, 102-04.

28 Hugh Hood, "An Interview with Hugh Hood," by J.R. (Tim) Struthers, 82.

> I think that Dantean allegory is very much more able to save this world, and to preserve this world, than Spenserian. I don't feel the same commitment to this world in Spenserian allegory that I do in Dantean. I tend to find Spenser dualistic and Platonist and to have not as substantial an awareness of the fleshly solidity of things.[29]

If Roman Catholicism provides the emblemitic *super*-structure that contains the stories in *Around the Mountain*, Hugh Hood's concentration on particualr subjects from everyday life gives individuality to each story. Settings change from one neighborhood in Montreal to another, seasons pass, different characters appear, separate actions unfold, the tone shifts, themes are introduced for the first time or presented anew, and the narrative mode and the narrative techniques are modofied or somewhat altered. The stories as *stories* convey the variety within the design, the flexibility of the book's form.

II

In the first two stories in *Around the Mountain*, Hood concentrates initially on the rituals of hockey, the sport that draws together much of Montreal's populace, and then on gypsy life, a unique culture within that larger social fabric. "The Sportive Centre of Saint Vincent de Paul" begins with a drive heading north off Montreal island then farther east along the north shore of the Saint Lawrence River to the arena at Saint Vincent de Paul. "Light Shining Out of Darkness" centres on "the country of the *ruelles*" (*AM* 21), east of the Main and south of the railway track that the narrator and Seymour cross going north to their weekly game. The pace of the stories is unhurried, as each narrative develops almost imperceptibly from exact descriptions of residential or commercial developments in the east end of the city. "I want to show that the physical and visible are what art lives on,"[30] Hood says in the interview in *Before the Flood*, as he explains the meaning of the term "documentary fantasy,"[31] which he invented in an earlier interview with Robert Fulford to describe his style of writing in *The New Age*,

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[29] Hugh Hood, "An Interview with Hugh Hood," by J.R, (Tim) Struthers, 49.

[30] Hugh Hood, "An Interview with Hugh Hood," by J.R. (Tim) Struthers, 80.

[31] Hugh Hood, "An Interview with Hugh Hood," by Robert Fulford, *The Tamarack Review* No. 66 (1975): 77.

a style originating in *Around the Mountain* and some of the descriptive essays in *The Governor's Bridge is Closed.*[32] But, Hood adds, "Mental life is not exactly the same as living in the physical world. Documentary fantasy begins to look like, first of all, the world as a given, as the facts and then the facts transformed by the image-making power."[33]

Hood uses checkable facts, like the records for the hockey player Gary Paxton which the narrator finds in the first story; but the facts are exalted to their place in a religious allegory and sometimes they are adjusted to serve this greater fictional truth. "Strictly speaking," the narrator confides in "The Sportive Centre of Saint Vincent de Paul," "this is the Laval Community Arena, but since Laval is so expansive and sprawling a collection of suburbs, I prefer to associate it with the small township where it lies, named for a Saint of very charitable reputation" (*AM* 6). Knowing the allegorical significance of the fictional name of the arena strengthens one's recognition of the relative absence of sportsmanship or charity in the players' behaviour. In the same way, the use in "Light Shining Out of Darkness" of the name Avenue de Chateaubriand may refer, appropiately enough in the context of Hood's Roman Catholic and Roman aesthetics, to Francois Réne de Chateaubriand, who published *Le Génie du christianisme,* a work of Christian apologetics, just when Roman Catholicism was about to reassume its place as the official religion of France, and whose exotic and nostalgic works made him one of the great precursors of French Romanticism as well.[34] But the name also suggests *château brillant,* meaning "shining mansion," and therefore helps to concentrate attention on the gleaming manifestation of the model ships and their allegorical meaning. For Hood, documentary gives way to fantasy and images develop into emblems as he reaches for the source of meaning or the river behind things.

The opening Christmas story culminates in a hopeful scene that is set after New Year's and that is presided over, appropriately, by a highly emblematic statue of the Blessed Virgin with the Child. The figure of Mary, whose supernatural holiness,

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[32] A more detailed view of this development in Hood's style is given by Patrick Blanford in "Hood *a la mode:* Bicultural Tensionin the works of Hugh Hood," in *Before the Flood,* 150-51: *"The Governor's Bridge is Closed* (1973) is a collection of intimate first-person-singular recollections in which Hood, free of the restraints of plot and characterization, uses his considerably descriptive powers to great advantage. Stylistically, one is reminded of *Around the Mountain* (1967) which also exhibits a rather 'free-form' approach to the narrative acount. His next book, *The Swing in the Garden* (1975), demonstrates a further refinement of this technique wherin the opportunities for description and recollection are maintained, while Hood distances himself from the action through the character of Matt Goderich."

[33] Hugh Hood, "An Interview with Hugh Hood," by J.R. (Tim) Struthers, 82.

[34] "Chateaubriand, Vicomte Francois-René de (1768-1848)," *The Oxford Companion to French Literature* (1959).

fullness of grace, and unselfish sacrifices have made her the perfect exemplar of the theological virtues—faith, hope and charity—incorporates the preceding figure of Saint Vincent de Paul and signifies for Seymour and the narrator and the rest of mankind a model of both the contemplative and the active life.[35] In the second story a different model of moral behaviour is provided by the gypsy Tom, who, "had done much, worked very hard for a long time, to redress some of his people's legal and political disabilities connected with citizenship, conscription and taxation" (*AM* 32). Unlike the narrator's somewhat unhappy friend Shvetz, who claims tha he has given up joking because he has become a family man and has responsibilities, Tom succeeds in upholding both his freedom and his social and family responsibilities. The fairy-tale-like appearance of Tom's three little girls near the end of the story intensifies the narrator's, and the reader's, earlier wonderment at the "fantastic dream of vanished fleets" (*AM* 30).

This envisioned quality of "The Sportive Centre of Saint Vincent de Paul" and "Light Shining Out of Darkness" recedes in the third story, "Bicultural Angela," as emblematic description is temporarily superseded by dialogue and straightforward narration, the more literal techniques of conventional realism. Hood's Christian allegory, however, is still evident in the name of the main character, Angela-Marie or Marie-Ange, ahich suggests that she is an angel or messenger from God,[36] and which links her with the figure of Mary in the opening story and in *Le Grand Déménagement.* Angela Mary Robinson comes from Stoverville, Ontario to Montreal with the aspiration of redressing the problems created by the dangerous prejudice of people like her mother, of bridging the gap between anglophone and francophone culture, by becoming bicultural, changing her appearance to resemble that of the French girls, and improving communications through working for CBC-Montréal. But her efforts are confused and troubled—like the extremely ambiguous March light and the vexatious equinoctial gales—and finally disappointing, as represented by the failure of her affair with the would-be *chansonnier* Stéphane Dérôme.

Marie-Ange fails because she emulates, and eventually becomes, "the mode" (*AM* 39). Her attempts are inauthentic, cosmetic, and commercial—somewhat in the manner of Jacques Brel,

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[35] J.F. Murphy, "Holiness of Mary," in "Mary, Blessed Virgin, II (in theology)," *New Catholic Encyclopedia.*

[36] Telephone conversation with Hugh Hood, 21 Aug. 1979. Hood noted that the name "Angel" derived from the Greek word "aggelos," meaning "messenger," which is what angels and Marie-Ange are.

the popular entertainer. Brel impersonates rather than leading like a true *chansonnier.* This distinction is recalled in the fitting dialogue at the story's end, when Marie-Ange repeats Brel's impersonation of an anguished lover with the line "'*Ne me Quitte pas!*'" and her indifferent lover Dérôme absently replies "'*Brel*'" (*AM* 48). Dérôme is implicated in the failure as well, for his infidelity to Marie-Ange and for his limitations as an artist, his lack of social commitment. A Québec *chansonnier,* the narrator states "must be a leader and encourager of his people"; he has "the responsibility to protect and encourage the national tradition of a resentful minority" (*AM* 42). But Staphane Dérôme, despite his pretentions, has only the talent of a minor film composer or a commercial songwriter" (*AM* 43).

The narrator's own largely unsympathetic response when Marie-Ange addresses him suddenly as her confidant adds further complexity to Hood's development of the theme of moral responsibility.[37] This response connects with the narrator's and Seymour's uncharitable reaction in "The Sportive Centre of Saint Vincent de Paul" and with the narrator's lack of feeling for Julie's anxiety when Gus Delahaye leaves her near the end of "Around Theatres," the next story in the volume.

The title of the fourth story is borrowed from Max Beerbohm's book of theatre criticism, *Around Theatres.*[38] In this story, the difference between anglophone and francophone culture that frustrates the efforts of Angela Mary Robinson "to get all the way across" (*AM* 38) reappears on two occasions, in a discussion of different movie audiences, and in the contrast between the unfruitfulness of English theatre in Montreal—represented by Gus Delahaye's failure to make a living as an actor—and the fecundity of French theatre in the city. Such subjects are appropriate to an April story, for, the narrator states, "By Easter the rinks have melted, the hockey season is almost over, so you naturally switch to going to the movies" (*AM* 49).

With this reference to Easter in the opening sentence of "Around Theatres," and the subsequent comparison of actors to "early Christian martyrs" (*AM* 49), Christian allegory again becomes a more explicit factor in the narration, as these allusions anticipate the enactment of a parody of the sacred events of

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[37] For a related discussion of the subtlety of Hood's rendering of falleness in his portrayal of the protagonist in "Going Out as a Ghost" and the narrator in "Dark Glasses," see Lawrence Mathews, "The Secular and the Sacral: Notes on *A New Athens* and Three Stories by Hugh Hood," 216-17, 219-20.

[38] Personal conversation with Hugh Hood, 14 Aug. 1981.

Easter in Gus's death, disappearance and resurrection. Gus is described by the narrator as being "'nothing but a Jesuitical self-torturing actor'" (*AM* 56) or martyr and as being "At a sad complete dead end in his own work" (*AM* 60). Then, following "the final disillusionment" (*AM* 60) of their hopes of freeing Montreal's English theatre and Gus's sudden disappearance, Gus undergoes a rebirth into cautious cab-driver that brings him financial security but that debilitates him spiritually. "'At this I can always make a good living,'" he tells the narrator at the end of the story. "Well, at least a living'" (*AM* 64). The ambiguity of this final turn of events offers very limited support for the narrator's belief in the meaning of Easter. Instead, the story's ending seems to confirm, for the moment, Gus's earlier outburst at the narrator:

> "So you're one of those saps that lets the weather affect you? Christ, man, the weather isn't good or bad, that's simply the pathetic fallacy, don't you even know that? It's all in your emotions, the universe doesn't give a damn about you . . . Besides, God is dead." (*AM* 63)

"Around Theatres" begins by referring to the end of the hockey season that was the subject of the first story and by commenting on the "driving vitality about early spring in Montréal" (*AM* 49). Then it passes through the "autumnal tone" (*AM* 61) of Gus's last play to a qualified spring-like revival. Such flexibility in the handling of time and the mixing of different seasons is one of Hood's techniques of casually integrating the whole volume. In the first story, the narrator looks ahead from December and January to the annual dinner at the end of the hockey season and "the coming of spring" (*AM* 3), and he refers to playing touch football in the summer. In the second story, the narrator describes summertime scenes of "a bare-bottomed infant creeping along the *ruelle* curb" (*AM* 21) and "a small, balding, grass plot with ten adults roosting on it and God knows how many kids hollering" (*AM* 23), and he concludes with his return to Avenue Chateaubriand "Much later in the year" (*AM* 33). Then, in the third story, the narrator begins by recalling a scene from a different time and place—Stoverville, Ontario, before Angela Mary Robinson went to university—and briefly relates her activities in Toronto and in the early period of her life in Montreal before concentrating on the month of March and the main events of the story.

The death and resurrection pattern in the April or Easter story recurs in the following story, *Le Grand Déménagement,*

which centres on April 30 and May 1. April 30 marks the customary moving day in Montreal, and the narrator's (as well as Hood's) birthdate. May 1 is the occasion for pagan May Day festivities, deriving from ancient fertility rites, but also for religious practices devoted to Mary, the Mother of God. This co-existence or analogy of pagan and religious rituals also appears in the quasi-religious meaning that the narrator finds in secular celebrations like his own birthday party: "Everybody gets the same intense pleasure from repeating the same sequence of actions at the same time each year. Just like a secular liturgy" (*AM* 70). What man gains from the calendrical arrangement informing his changing existence, from the ritual of celebrating a birthday, or from the ritual of moving into a home *into* a home, is a feeling of permanence, a sense of the Divine Order, an intimation of his ultimate abode when he returns "home to his father's house."[39]

Without this feeling of permanence, when man has "the impression of the evanescence of life" (*AM* 73)—as when one moves *out* of home—there is sadness at seeing "so many patterns being broken all at once" (*Am,* 70) and a sense that the former residence is "haunted by actions irrevocably lost" (*AM* 73). To be the last man to vacate his home and then to find himself wandering through Montreal after all the empty places have been occupied—a possibility that haunts the narrators imagination—or to be, as he also imagines, one of many souls "eternally condemned to wander" (*AM* 68) is to be lost in the Christian sense of being alienated from God.[40] But what the story emphasizes is man's hope of salvation. It is suggested that the beginning of leases on May 1 may represent "an assimilation of the new, unexplored and therefore slightly alarming domicile to the protection of Mary" (*AM* 66). The nine months pregnant young woman who falls three storeys when her balcony collapses is "miraculously unhurt" (*AM* 73) and gives birth to a healthy baby at, appropriately, the Hôtel Dieu.

The theme of Divine Grace or protection is given a humorous and altogether human twist in the reluctant charity of the narrator and the machinations of the rabbi presented in the final scenes of *Le Grand Déménagment.* "I'm no good Samaritan" (*AM* 74), the narrator remarks. This admission recalls his wary neutrality in the three of the four preceding stories. It also points to the difference in moral behaviour between ordinary people

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[39] I Samuel xviii.2. Hood's first published novel, *White Figure, White Ground,* was originally entitled "To His Father's House." (Hugh Hood, Notes for an Autobiography, 1 June 1963.)

[40] Lawrence Mathews, "The Secular and the Sacral: Notes on *A New Athens* and Three Other Stories by Hugh Hood," 221, demonstrates the Christian significance of being lost in his analysis of Hood's "Thanksgiving: Between Junetown and Caintown."

and saints like Saint Louise de Marillac, whose feast the narrator's family declines to celebrate in this story, and Saint Vincent de Paul, who figured in the first story, and who may be recalled quite appropriately at this moment because he in fact collaborated with Saint Louise de Marillac[41] in many charitable works.

III

A more profound view of the dimensions of human purpose and potential is presented through the narrator's perceptions about an old woman and Monsieur Bourbonnais in the sixth story, "Looking Down from Above." Walking down University on a hot dry day in early June, the narrator finds himself disturbed by ugly and dismal images, "threatening a dubious future" (*AM* 81), and by "feelings of mortality and a sense of the passage of time" (*AM* 82). Then he encounters a very old woman, apparently deformed but proceeding steadily up the hill. The scene is remniscent of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," where the narrator, sunk in "Dim sadness—and blind thoughts," discovers—"whether it were by peculiar grace, / A leading from above, a something given"—the old Leech-gatherer. This man of "extreme old age," with "yet-vivid eyes," speaks "above the reach / Of ordinary men"[42] and renovates the faith and hope of Wordsworth's narrator through his own example of perseverence.

The old Leech-gatherer, Hood states in his essay "Sober Colouring: The Ontology of Super-Realism," "is perhaps the most striking example of this capacity of very ordinary persons and scenes to yield, on close inspection, an almost intolerable significance.[43] Like Wordsworth's Leech-gatherer, who seems "Like one whom I had met with in a dream,"[44] the old woman in Hood's story appears like "a snapshot in a dream" and is full of "unstated meaning" (*AM* 82). Examining her carefully, Hood's narrator has "a drastic percept perception of the human soul in her, impenetrable and indissoluble" (*AM* 83). He explains,

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41 M.A. Roche, "Vincent de Paul, St.," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

42 William Wordsworth, "Resolution and Independence," 11. 28, 50-51, 65, 91, 95-96, in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, II, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 236-38.

43 Hugh Hood, "Sober Colouring: The Ontology of Super-Realism," 134.

44 William Wordsworth, "Resolution and Independence," 1. 110, in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, II. 239.

> Here, I thought, is somebody who has had to renounce all human pretensions to health, beauty, sexuality, earnings and apparently even companionship. I wondered how she lived and what she ate, whether she took pleasure in her food and her life, what kept her going. We passed and our eyes met; there was fury in her eyes and extraordinary purpose. I could hear her words and felt afraid. She was full of life.
>
> That woman am I. To her state must I come in time. (*AM* 83)

This double vision of mankind's natural limitations and supernatural potential re-emerges later in "Looking Down from Above" as the narrator describes the life of Monsieur Bourbonnais, another example of perseverance and a model of magnanimity. An industrious, obliging, joyous, and free man, Monsieur Bourbonnais "knew how to live" (*AM* 91), the narrator states, and he "taught me much" (*AM* 84). "'I want it perfect'" (*AM* 91), Monsieur Bourbonnais insists, while repairing a dent in his car. But his striving for transcendental perfection is stopped short, necessarily, by his own fallen or mortal stature. His health declines.

Suitably, the last time the narrator sees Monsieur Bourbonnais is on a day that is "full of presagings of the end of the perfect part of summer," "a day which is autumnal in tone" (*AM* 92). It is also Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day—a holiday celebrated by Québec nationalists, as well as a religious festival devoted to John the Baptist, whom God sent to announce the forthcoming arrival of His kingdom in Christ.[45] It is on this day, again appropriately, that the narrator approaches the Divine Vision and momentarily sees the manifestation of God's Kingdom in the soul of earthly endeavour. Looking down from the top of the mountain at "a strangely mixed perspective" of old age and youth below, he realizes,

> That old woman on University had climbed and stood waiting for her green light; the tennis players chased their ball; and Monsieur Bourbonnais wanted it perfect. They were all within their rights. Human purpose is inscrutable, but undeniable. (*AM* 94)

[45] M.E. McIver, "John the Baptist, St.," *New Catholic Encyclopedia.*

The Edenic peacefulness of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day celebrations high on the mountain in "Looking Down from Above" gives way in the seventh story, at least temporarily, to the turbulence of anti-English demonstrations by the suppressed society of Québécois living in *le centre-sud.* At an earlier time, this area was admired for the cohesiveness and "qualified contentment" (*AM* 103) of its population; but now the district is moribund and explosive. The pattern of streets emphasized in the story's title, "One Way North and South," serves Hood as an emblem for the antithetical characters of francophone and anglophone cultures, which Angela Mary Robinson had failed to bridge in the third story, and which in this story appear to lead inevitably to confrontation.[46]

In "One Way North and South," Gilles O'Neill, an intelligent but uneducated young man from *le centre sud* is drawn into a violent demonstration, which happens on Victoria Day, the holiday on which English Canadians celebrate the Queen's birthday. But as the story proceeds, he is redeemed through the agency o of Grace in the form of a young, pretty university student named Denise Gariépy, who onced lived in the district. Immediatley after the riot, Denise "seems to materialize in front of him like a ghost" (*AM.* 100)—like the Holy Ghost, if the image is understood allegorically in the way that Barry Cameron and Lawrence Mathews have interpreted it in Hood's later story "Going Out as a Ghost," from *Dark Glasses.*[47] Consequently,Gilles refuses to participate in the next destructive demonstration, which occurs, again appropriately, on Canada Day. It is a scene of violence that Hood chooses, significantly, not to present, because he is still intent, in the summertime phase of the book, on revealing more hopeful auguries of social revolution through constitutional means, education, and love. Finally, Gilles decides to "suffer obscurity and indignity just a little bit longer" (*AM* 110), while he awaits educational reforms that are expected in a year's time, and that should allow him to gain the education needed to better himself for a fulfilling profession and a promised marriage to Denise.

In the interval that passes before Gilles arrives at this decision, he finds himself standing on summer evenings outside a deserted baseball stadium that seems, like his own life, to have reached a dead end. However, as he departs to walk north out

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[46] For an extended discussion of bicultural tension in *Around the Mountain,* see Patrick Blandford, "Treatment of English-French Cultural Tensions in the Works of Hugh Hood," M.A. Thesis Concordia 1979, 70-86.

[47] See Barry Cameron, rev. of *Dark Glasses,* by Hugh Hood, *Fiddlehead,* No. 115 (1977): 146, and Lawrence Mathews, "The Secular and the Sacral: Notes on *A New Athens* and Three Stories by Hugh Hood," 214-15.

of his district up the steep hill to where Denise's father had succeeded, years earlier, in moving with his family, Gilles feels that the change is "like climbing out of a pit" (*AM* 106), like Thierry Desautels' resurrection at one stage in "A Green Child." Because Gilles carries the strain of "a people's whole history" (*AM* 111), he also feels as if he is leaving "ghostly thousands cheering b behind him" (*AM* 106). Gilles' liberating decision is applauded by the ghosts of all his ancestors——whose hopes he may be able to fulfill with the continued inspiration and protection of Denise, who is far less elusive (or illusory) than Thierry's girl in green, and who has already shown herself to be "an example of *l'épanouissement des nôtres*" (*AM* 105).

While Hood celebrates current changes that genuinely improve the quality of human life, and while he looks to the future for greater reform, he finds in the past more signs of the values that he permanently prizes—a sense of universal brotherhood, community, home, family, and tradition. This attitude is evident in the description of *le centre-sud* in "One Way North and South," and in reflections on
Ville Saint-Laurent and the life of Victor Latourelle in the succeeding story, "The Village Inside."[48] Meditating on the vanishing way of life in *le centre-sud,* the narrator argues,

> In those old parishes, there was much stagnation, no doubt, and sometimes acute poverty and hunger, which is painful and undeniable. But there was something valuable too, which made the place awfully good to contemplate, not merely picturesque or quaint, but self-assured, cohesive, admirable, a social unit that really worked, before the march of progress supplanted it with an enormous vacant lot . . . . What you saw, behind the trivially picturesque, was a populous society which provided almost all its members with qualified contentment, and a sense of being at home in the world. 'Nobody lives like that now.' Right. Nobody does. (*AM* 102-03)

In "The Village Inside," the narrator travels out to explore the municipalities situated in the countryside at the outer reaches of the island and discovers within the modern suburban development on *rue Sainte-Croix* in Ville Saint-Laurent much older buildings, "the ghostly presence of

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[48] For an extended analysis of "The Village Inside," see Kent Thompson, "Formal Coherence in the Art of Hugh Hood," in *Minus Canadian: Penultimate Essays on Literature*, ed. and introd. Barry Cameron and Michael Dixon, *Studies in Canadian Literature* 2 (1977): 205-12.

the old town" (*AM* 116), which like the "ghostly thousands cheering" (*AM* 106) Gilles O'Neill in the previous story, creates a memorable feeling of the continuity of past and present. A little later, the narrator witnesses a further example of this phenomenon:

> It's an eerie sight, standing on *rue Sainte-Croix* in front of the evident ghost of a nineteenth-century Québec village, to see overhead jet after jet slanting down and in towards the Dorval runways, almost without intervals between arrivals. You have the impression of one time superimposed on another, with both visibly present, something quite rare. (*AM* 117-8)

This intersection of different times and different ways of life—which occurs here, fittingly, on a street named Sainte-Croix—is repeated in the view of the home of Victor Latourelle, the somewhat ambiguous "winner in the little tower,"[49] whose history concludes "The Village Inside."

For his entire life, which exceeds seventy years, Victor Latourelle has lived in a now hundred-and-forty-year-old wooden farmhouse that once was situated on a seventy-acre farm lying outside the old village. At the insistence primarily of his daughter Victorine, and against his own will, Victor has gradually sold all of his land to developers except for the tiny fifty-by-fifty lot on which the ancient farmhouse now stands, near a recently constructed shopping center, at the extreme corner of a gigantic blacktopped parking lot. Attracted by the display of light on the walls of the farmhouse just after sunset during early August, and amazed by the odd juxtaposition of moments from extraordinarily disparate times, the narrator inquires into, then traces, the history of the farmhouse's tenacious and ultimately victorious owner.

Like the figure of Gilles O'Neill in the previous story, who contains the whole history of his people in himself—though even more closely resembling the lives of the Goderich family in *The New Age* which represent the growth of Canadian society in the twentieth century—Victor Latourelle's life shows the effects of the transformation of Quebec society from the traditional, agricultural existence of the nineteenth century to the industrialized, urbanized ways of twentieth-century life. Near the end of "The Village Inside," as Victor sits "through the oncoming dark" awaiting his death, he is said to be watching "the asphalt seas

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[49] Telephone conversation with Hugh Hood, 21 Aug. 1979.

surrounding him" (*AM* 126)—a very rich image, which suggests the "ash" of Hell and man's "Fall" (associated here with the fortunes of the land developers), and which Hood uses again in the description of the macadamized road at the beginning of *A New Athens.*[50] Victor's story culminates, however, in fantasy; for as he stares out at the infernal-looking asphalt, he sees "cattle grazing, his father working in their thick green truck garden, his uncle Antoine bent in a distant cornfield" (*AM* 126). It is a vision of a pastoral world now irretrievably past, unless, as the narrator states in the preceding story, you "use your imagination" (*AM* 102). But, like Jim McGregor's death-bed vision of Jesus walking through fields in Bruce County, Ontario, at the conclusion of Rob Robert Laidlaw's novel, *The McGregors,* Victor's vision may also represent a personal glimpse of future heavenly bliss, an intimation of immortality.

IV

Victor Latourelle's hallucination or vision, along with the suggestions of ghostliness in both "The Village Inside" and the preceding story, "One Way North and South," exemplifies the fantasy element of Hood's mode of "documentary fantasy" and prefigures the extraordinary atmosphere of the next story, "A Green Child." The dreadful image of urban society that emerges through the contrast between Victor's pastoral vision and the actual environment surrounding his home is also intensified in "A Green Child." Here all hope of life, love, and a Divine Order dissolves in the face the oppressiveness, impersonality, and monstrosity of the urban present. The story centres on Thierry Desautels, "*un vrai jusqu'auboutist*" (*AM* 127),that is, one who pursues his hopes to the very end. Appropriately, Thierry lives next to the loop at the very end of the busline, where the suburban landscape gives way to an alarming setting of dark fields dwith monstrous, lifeless, half-finished buildings and a hellish "deep pit of shadow" (*AM* 135).

Riding home half-asleep on a misty September night, the hard-working and lonely Thierry is entranced by the sight of a pretty, young girl wearing a vinyl raincoat and a green scarf, who disappears suddenly but whom he sees, and pursues unsuccesfully, on a second and a third occasion. The second instance happens about two weeks after he first glimpses her, an a night in early October while he is experiencing similar feelings of "langour, depression and sleepy fatigue" (*AM* 134). Thi-

[50] Telephone conversation with Hugh Hood, 21 Aug. 1979.

erry follows the possibly imaginary girl, who has already begun to haunt his dreams. He passes the ironic sign "BRIGHT FUTURE CONSTRUCTION" (*AM* 135), descends into the bottom of the pit, and gets lost—an inauspicious condition in Hood's Christian universe, as the later story "Thanksgiving: Between Junetown and Caintown," from *Dark Glasses,* confirms. However, Thierry is saved for the moment by a searchlight, which, from the viewpoint of Hood's work as a whole, can be seen as symbolizing the immanence of God. The searchlight reveals what Thierry thinks is the image of the girl, and he then uses the searchlight as a marker in order to ascend out of this infernal valley of the shadow of death.

On the third and last occasion, once again at night, and, significantly, "well into the fall" (*AM* 137), Thierry pursues the girl (or at least the image) as she disappears on her motorcycle towards the *Montée de Saint-Leonard* interchange "at fantastic speed" (*AM* 138). He has made a fatal choice, "putting his head an inch too close to the noose" (*AM* 138)—a metaphor that recalls the earlier emblem of the loop at the end of the busline. This time, Thierry is not saved. Having cast himself into this darkness, he is left crawling up and down different ramps on the monstrous and demonic interchange, afraid that he might fall off where the guardrails are not constructed, and totally exhausted. He is lost without any sense of direction, just as his life—like Gus Delahaye's in "Around Theatres"—has become increasingly directionless.

Thierry's final vision is of "a figure on a massive concrete slab rising before him, "which he thinks resembles a test-pattern, but which is really "a peculiarly distorted concrete woman" (*AM* 139). His Beatrice, the girl of his dreams, the girl in green—a colour that for Hood means "life in this world,"[51] —has been hideously transformed, disfigured by "the monstrous power and impersonality of this place" (*AM* 133) into a ghastly emblem of the lifelessness and the lunacy in modern society.[52] Ironically, Thierry Desautels does not share this perception with the narrator and the reader. Instead Thierry, whose surname means "of the altars," is presented finally as a sacrifice, lying almost without life on a gigantic, altar-like edifice.[53]

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[51] Hugh Hood, "An Interview with Hugh Hood" by J.R. (Tim) Struthers, 35.

[52] For a similiar interpretation, which argues that "The green girl could be lost Nature, instrumentalized by technological man into a reinforced-concrete fossil," and that "Thierry . . . is trapped, exhausted, in the mazy ruins of modernism where he wanders as in a nightmare," see Dennis Duffy, "Space/Time and the Matter of Form," in *Before the Flood,* 133-35.

[53] Victoria G. Hale, "Elements of Literary Tradition and Myth in the Novels and Sketches of Hugh Hood: An Examination," M.A. Thesis Sir George Williams 1971, 118, cites Hood's authority for this interpretation.

The living death of Thierry Desautels at the end of the ninth story is followed by the metaphorical death and rebirth of Christopher Holt in "Starting Again on Sherbrooke Street." In comparison with "A Green Child," this story is relatively light in tone, beginning with the cheerful bantering between the narrator and his friend Seymour as they load paintings for Seymour's fall show, and realistic rather than fantastic. The one Seymour Segal painting that is described—"an enormous, blue, three-headed, nightmarish, screaming figure" (*AM* 145)—may be a reminder of the monstrosity and frenzy of "A Green Child," or ti may anticipate Christopher Holt's milder turmoil recollected later on in "Starting Again on Sherbrooke Street"; but Seymour's visions do not prescribe the overall tone of the story. Instead, the narrator concentrates on the momentary triumph of the ascending cycle of human activity over the imminent fall in the cycle of nature:

> Sherbrooke Street looked wonderful in the October sunlight. It always does at that time of year, when you can feel the cycle of the year starting up again, the big fall shows in the galleries, girls in hig highly novel clothes, the hockey season starting on the Forum a few block blocks west. Boutiques full of whatever it is they sell, and antique shops likewise—Sherbrooke is where you find them. It was an afternoon full of the future. (*AM* 143)

The apparently happy ending of Christopher Holt's "sadly funny history" (*AM* 146) confirms, at least in his own mind, that it is "The right time of the year" for "Taking a fresh grip on things," for a "fresh start" (*AM* 153). After a long period of emotional indecision, Christopher (a modern-day version of the explorer) returns to his wife, Ruth (a constant woman, like her biblical namesake), and emerges "tall, well-dressed, confident, untouched, a Sherbrooke Street man" (*AM* 154). The character of the hero fits the tone of ostensible wealth in the place. But the fact that Christopher remains "untouched" by his past history suggests a lack of real involvement, which may be compared to Angela Mary Robinson's impersonations and Stéphane Dérôme's lack of personal and social commitment in "Bicultural Angela."

The narrator's self-admitted failure to commit himself emotionally to Christopher, to take any responsibility for him, or to act magnanimously towards him recalls the narrator's unsympathetic or uncharitable reactions in "Bicultural Angela" and other stories. One is reminded, especially, of the narrator's defensive warning in "Looking Down from Above" that "You can't get too

close, learn their names, start talking to them, or you become irrecoverably committed" (*AM* 83), an attitude that the m,agnanimity demonstrated by Monsieur Bourbonnais in the same story completely opposes.

The wonder and optimism at the promises of October in "Starting Again on Sherbrooke Street" carries over into the paean for the greatness of Montreal, for the godliness of the Saint Lawrence and the Ottawa River and for the humanity and magnificance of the port installations, in the opening pages of the eleventh story. However, the natural cycle of the year soon re-exerts its power tolimit human aspirations. At the close of November, the promise of the future intimated by a sunlit and bustling October afternoon is supplanted by predicdtions of ice, forebodings of the end of the consequential and controversial shipping season. As the tone changes, the mode of narration shifts from documentary into fantasy, from enraptured description of the topography of Montreal into the darkly mysterious and violent scenario of "a real life-movie" (*AM* 163), which recalls the Antonioni-like atmosphere of "A Green Child."

In "Predictions of Ice," the narrator encounters the vicious beating of a Russian sailor. The incident represents the kind of violence or sabotage that emerges as political, union, or commercial interests, with grievances to express, apply pressure at crucial moments, such as when the last of the year's shipping has to be completed quickly before ice blocks the route. In the seventh story, "One Way North and South," description of the destructive Canada Day demonstration was deliberately eschewed so that the narrator could concentrate on the augury of hope represented by the pair of lovers. By contrast, "Predictions of Ice" depicts violence and its awful effects vividly—a much darker vision, which would have been inappropriate in the summery story, but which fits the chilling advent of December in this second last story of the volume.

"The pleasure of the prospect depends upon the viewer and his sense of the appropriateness of the setting to certain forms of human action" (*AM* 168), the narrator remarks in the final story as he meditates on the inevitable transformation of the pastoral scenery in the northwest part of the island by suburban, commercial, and industrial development. "Landscape has no special grace in itself" (*AM* 168). Grace comes from God, and, as an intimation of this view, the narrator turns his attention from the two rivers of the preceding story to Rivière des Prairies, the river behind things, an emblem of the Divine Order that is revealed within the mutable world of man.

"The River behind Things" describes a joyous summertime excursion by the narrator and his son Dwight, then concludes with a return visit, by the narrator alone, on Christmas Day. The concluding scene expresses the sad sense of loss, which has already emerged at other points in the volume, as the narrator fails to recapture the mood of his earlier visit with his son. This feeling is followed by a vision of Death, of the Charon-like black figure that sums up all of the earlier hints of man's mortality including the near murder of the Russian sailor in "Predictions of Ice." However, Christmas Day is the festival of the incarnation, when, as Hood states on his essay "The Absolute Infant," "God came in upon the world, spread Himself through it, ran His being into the least spaces, showed himself to be in the smallest corner of existence."[54] The concluding scene of "The River behind Things" ends, therefore, in the manner of the psalm that intones "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."[55] Hood's narrator raises his eyes above and beyond the figure of death towards "the high hills" and "the source of the river" (*AM* 175), that is, towards God. But the narrator's vision is limited by the prescence of mist, which, like the "qualified fineness" (*AM* 92) of the weather in "Looking Down from Above," reminds us of Hood's epigraph for *Dark Glasses:* "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face."[56]

At this instant, the scenery is entirely "enveloped and changed" and the city becomes "inexistent" (*AM* 175). It is a moment of transcendence, like the narrator's vision of Tom's gleaming model ships in "Light Shining Out of Darkness" or the narrator's rapturous upward glance near the end of "Looking Down from Above" or Victor Latourelle's pastoral vision of heavenly bliss at the conclusion of "The Village Inside." The final scene of the book composes itself instantaneously into meaning, and the narrator experiences a feeling like the philosopher's transcendental sense of his own afterlife at the close of Hood's later story "The Hole":

> He began to imagine that he'd arrived at an unconditioned state of pre-existence where he was in his cause, that is, in or annexed to or issuing from or conceived by or held in the Divine Mind, in a state of unmixed creaturehood before locality caught him. Not before birth. More like in the idea of himself in the Creator's eternal contemplation of His Essence. . . . It was not an annihi-

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[54] Hugh Hood, "The Absolute Infant," in his *The Governor's Bridge is Closed*, 142.

[55] Psalms cxxi.1.

[56] I Corinthians xiii.12

> lation of himself. It was like finally grasping the definition of himself, seeing everything he meant, unconditionally and in an instant.[57]

On an artistic rather than a personal level, the transcendence of space and time at the end of *Around the Mountain* represents the imaginative process by which Hood, here and elsewhere, has transformed reality into a visionary work of art, "a secular liturgy" (*AM* 70) praising God by illuminating His creation.

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[57] Hugh Hood, "The Hole," in his *Dark Glasses* (Ottawa: Oberon, 1976), 118.