

Loneliness, Communication, and Survival in the Plays of Michael  
Cook

by

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Loneliness, Communication, and Survival  
in the Plays of Michael Cook

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## ABSTRACT

Newfoundland playwright Michael Cook portrays in his nine published stage plays, from *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust* (1971) to *Therese's Creed* (1977), a male-dominated society in which there is very little contact between the men who spend most of their time fishing and hunting, and the women who work at home. The very limited contact between these men and women results, quite regularly, in their inability to create a shared relationship with one another. Comparing the characteristics of the males and the females in these plays illuminates Cook's central theme--the subconscious yearning of the males for a shared relationship with the women and the men's inability to achieve it. This theme is intertwined with the women's ability to offer their men the basis for such a shared relationship.

While Michael Cook's male characters lack the ability to create relationships, they subconsciously yearn to establish mutual communication. The ways in which Cook's male characters perceive time allow us to understand why these men will never be able to achieve the kind of relationship they yearn for. In contrast to these males, the females in Cook's plays are able to create a shared relationship. And it is these women who provide a gleam of hope to the society which Cook depicts. But this hope could be realized only if the men are willing to accept what their women offer. Otherwise Cook's society, whose members suffer from the lack of communication, will eventually cease to exist.

DEDICATION

For Mimi and Ido

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## PREFACE

As I was reading Michael Cook's<sup>1</sup> *Jacob's Wake* for the first time, I was immediately intrigued by the playwright's ability to present both a local and a universal view of a broken family. Similarities with Pinter's *The Homecoming* were obvious at once, but what aroused my interest mostly was the way in which Cook portrays the various types of relationships within this family.

As I continued to explore Cook's work, it became clear that several of the major themes Cook deals with in *Jacob's Wake* appear in his other plays as well. Among these themes, the differentiation that Cook makes between his male and female characters is most significant. This differentiation reveals two worlds that are quite deliberately set apart one from the other. The possibility of bridging the gap between these two worlds is one of Cook's major interests.

The society which Cook depicts in his plays is male-dominated. It is a society in which both the men and the women have defined roles--the women usually work at home while the men are fishing and hunting. It is a society in which there is not much everyday contact between the men and the women. And the limited contact between them results, quite regularly, in their inability to create a shared relationship with one another.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the characters in Cook's major stage plays are males.<sup>3</sup> However, in most of these plays there is an important



female character as well. Comparing the values, activities, and feelings of the males and the females in these plays illuminates Cook's central theme--the subconscious yearning of the males for a shared relationship with the women and the males' inability to achieve it. This theme is intertwined with the women's ability to offer their men the basis for such a shared relationship, an offer which most of the men decline.

My thesis will trace the development of this major theme, a theme which centres around the characters' inability to achieve shared relationships within the society Cook has created. I will trace this theme through the nine published stage plays Cook has written between 1971 and 1977: *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust*, *Tiln*, *The Head*, *Guts and Sound Bone Dance*, *Jacob's Wake*, *Quiller*, *The Fisherman's Revenge*, *The Gayden Chronicles*, *On the Rim of the Curve*, and *Therese's Creed*. Using a thematic approach, the discussion in this thesis follows the central theme of communication through Cook's work, focusing, when needed, on a specific character or play, then moving on to the next one. Some characters are thus being studied in more than one part of this thesis, while others are only briefly mentioned. Once the development of Cook's major theme is traced within the plays--a process which is not necessarily chronological--the focus on communication will become clearer.

The scope of this thesis does not allow me to comment on Cook's place within Canadian drama in particular or drama in general. Although there are indeed many opportunities for

comparing Cook's output with the works of Brecht, Beckett, or Arden, to name just a few, I deliberately refrain from doing so. And although analyzing Cook's plays according to their specific genre might emphasize Cook's versatility as a playwright, I believe that in a thematic approach it becomes valid to treat all plays, whether they be historical sagas or children's entertainment, equally. All of Cook's plays, even though they differ in tone and style, are susceptible to a thorough, at times psychological analysis, because Cook's major themes can be detected in each of them. And it is indeed the central theme of communication, or rather the lack of communication, that joins these rather different plays into one unified cluster. And although I do refer to the critical work written about Cook's plays, I deliberately refrain from judging the quality of these plays. Such an evaluation belongs in another place, and would not have benefited this thesis.

After an introduction describing the critical response to the work of Michael Cook, I begin my discussion with an analysis of Cook's male characters--without any doubt the ones with whom Cook is most engaged. The first chapter of the thesis will outline the enclosed worlds they have created, and will focus on their inability to establish relationships. The second chapter will focus on the subconscious yearning of these males to establish mutual communication. By looking at the ways in which Cook's male characters perceive time, it will be shown, in the third chapter, why these men will never be able to achieve the kind of relationship they eventually yearn for. And although

these males present a very pessimistic view of life and society, it is Cook's females who are able to transform this pessimistic view of life. The final chapter of the thesis will focus on these women and on the basic differences between the women and the men Cook has created. This comparison will emphasize the hope that does indeed exist in all of Cook's plays. But it is a hope that will be realized only if the men are willing to accept the love, faith, and hope the women offer. Otherwise Cook's society, which suffers greatly from lack of communication, will eventually cease to exist, as Cook himself has indicated more than once, in both his dramatic and his non-dramatic works.

## INTRODUCTION: THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

When analyzing all the work written about Michael Cook, whether scholarly or popular, one immediately notes that there is a lack of agreement among the various writers regarding the significance of Cook as a playwright and the importance of his works. This lack of agreement is most evident in the theatre reviews.

There is no lack of reviews of the productions of Michael Cook's plays. However, not many of the sixty-six reviews which I was able to trace either analyze the play they review or describe the production itself. What does one expect to find in a theatre review? Patrick Treacher argues that "reviewing plays calls for a description of the action, rather than analysis of the author's meaning."<sup>4</sup> But it is possible to learn about the plot of Cook's plays from only a few of the reviews. Most reviewers apparently do not subscribe to the theory which maintains that a review "calls for a description of the action."<sup>5</sup> They also seem reluctant to provide information on what they actually saw in the theatre--the production itself. Rather, they seem to believe that the most important thing in a review is to express only an evaluation of the script, and to defend this opinion emphatically. Thus, we find most reviewers either praise or condemn each play. And no consensus exists among reviewers regarding the artistic quality of any of Cook's plays; each play has received both very negative and very positive reviews.

The contrasting attitudes towards each play can be illustrated by reviews of *The Gayden Chronicles*.<sup>6</sup> *Gayden* is described in one review as "thunderous boredom."<sup>7</sup> According to Gina Mallet it "is written in barnacular, barnacled prose of a meaningless pretension";<sup>8</sup> and Mark Czarnecki claims that the play has no plot at all.<sup>9</sup> However, one also reads that *Gayden*--in an earlier production this time--does not

sink to the level of sheer melodrama . . . As in all good material which is more tragic than comic, *The Gayden Chronicles* has enough laughs in it to keep it from degenerating into something maudlin.<sup>10</sup>

And A. Schroeder proclaims that *Gayden* "is an absolute stunner."<sup>11</sup> As the reviewers seem to comment on the script and not on the production, it is perhaps not significant that this critical divergence originated from different productions of *Gayden*.

The history of *Jacob's Wake's* critical reception provides the only clear example of how a production can influence the general tone of reviews. Most of the reviews of the Lennoxville premiere of *Jacob's Wake* are very negative. The script is described as "woefully inadequate . . . long and wordy."<sup>12</sup> And Audrey Ashley argues that Cook

has managed to create some relatively interesting characters, and then apparently doesn't know what to do with them dramatically . . . If . . . Michael Cook still insists on being a playwright, we can only hope for better things from his next foray into dramatic territory.<sup>13</sup>

These are only two examples of the general tone that could be found in most of the reviews of *Jacob's Wake's* premiere.

But nine years later a new production of the play at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa resulted in much better reviews. Ray Conlogue maintains that "the play itself is perhaps Cook's best-shaped. The violent power struggle among the three sons is completely convincing . . . And the ending . . . is one of Cook's most moving."<sup>14</sup> Conlogue, uncharacteristically, devotes a large space in his review to the production itself. Thus we are able to find out that the actors were "presented as living corpses."<sup>15</sup> This, maintains Conlogue,

is a breathtaking director's intervention, and it goes much further than the author's suggestion. Does it successfully take the play with it into the hell's mouth of director's and designer's imagination?<sup>16</sup>

The answer is positive, according to Conlogue and other reviewers of this same production. Most of the credit for the success of this production goes, according to the reviews, to the director, Neil Munro, who has staged the play as "a chilling dance of death,"<sup>17</sup> and has approached it "as a piece of expressionistic theatre, in which external reality is less important than inner psychological truths."<sup>18</sup>

Conlogue's review is almost unique. Usually reviewers are concerned only with the playwright and neglect the theatrical aspects of the production. In spite of the fact that the reviewers are the only eyewitnesses who report on the various productions, they tell us little if anything about them. When there is some information about the performance it is usually no more than an assessment of some of the actors.

Very few reviewers deal with the theatrical values of the production, as Conlogue does in his review of *Jacob's Wake*. One other such exception is Myron Galloway, who mentions that in a production of two of Cook's one-act plays--*Quiller* and *Therese's Creed*<sup>19</sup>--in the Centaur Theatre, the director introduced

Quiller lying asleep on his verandah as we enter the theatre, then putting him to one side while we spend the morning with Therese in her kitchen . . . [It] serves to weld both pieces together exquisitely.<sup>20</sup>

Such information, however, as much as it is relevant to our understanding of any particular production, is rarely given in any of the reviews.

Beside trying to assess the play, the script itself, and the playwright, at times we find several reviewers dealing with a major aspect of Cook's plays--their universality. Julia Maskoulis, for example, maintains that what "is especially interesting in the two one-acters [*Therese's Creed* and *Quiller*] is they really have little to do with Newfoundland. Except for accents, they could be taking place just about anywhere."<sup>21</sup> And Al Pittman, who reviews *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*,<sup>22</sup> argues that the

play is a Newfoundland play no doubt, but is also much more than that. It is a play committed to the exploration of the brutal truths that make universal man seek solace and satisfaction in his dreams.<sup>23</sup>

Pat Lees introduces another aspect to the argument about the universality of Cook's plays. Lees maintains that *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust* is definitely a Newfoundland play and that Cook "has captured the spirit of Newfoundland in prose, poetry and song."<sup>24</sup> However, Lees also argues that the play is

"timeless and just as applicable now as then."<sup>25</sup> Lees goes on and maintains that *Colour* is

an almost spiritual appreciation of the island itself--that primitive, primeval ship of a rock endlessly outfacing the Atlantic breakers and breeding tough, durable people, filled with humour and an almost angry affection for the place of their conception.<sup>26</sup>

The extent to which Cook was able to capture this spirit of Newfoundland is--as will be discussed later on<sup>27</sup>--debated in the scholarly literature.

While there seems to be no lack of performance reviews of the plays of Michael Cook, many articles (scholarly and popular) about Canadian drama in general fail to mention Cook at all. And while one could argue that the subject matter of Mallet<sup>28</sup>--Canadian playwrights on Broadway--allows for such an omission, others like Brian Parker,<sup>29</sup> John Ripley,<sup>30</sup> Richard Plant,<sup>31</sup> or Mira Friedlander,<sup>32</sup> to name just a few who have no such excuse, mention Cook very briefly, if at all.<sup>33</sup> It is even more difficult to understand Cook's omission from the works of Terry Goldie<sup>34</sup> and Sandra Rabinovitch,<sup>35</sup> who write about theatre in Newfoundland and radio drama respectively--two areas to which Cook's work is relevant.<sup>36</sup>

While several writers do not mention Cook at all, others, who write in one of several formats--a book review, a biographical checklist of one length or another, an interview with the playwright, or a more detailed article about his work--consider Cook to be a very accomplished playwright, to say the least. Jerry Wasserman, for example, argues that "*Jacob's*



*Wake* alone warrants his [Cook's] definitive status."<sup>37</sup> And Martin Fishman maintains that

we have living in Newfoundland a playwright of immense stature and ability, a playwright who understands the conventions of the theatre and who uses the theatrical medium with expertise to convey to his audience his vision of man. Michael Cook is the name of this master playwright.<sup>38</sup>

Among the existing scholarly material about Michael Cook there are very few substantial articles.<sup>39</sup> Book reviews and the various bibliographical-biographical entries in dictionaries and general books on Canadian literature are rather short.<sup>40</sup> The rest serve occasionally only as a good starting point for more thorough research.<sup>41</sup> Some of these works provide only basic biographical information, while others try to assess, very briefly, Cook's plays. Among the writers who provide brief information about Cook, Malcolm Page is one of the few who do try to focus on the thematic aspects of the plays and present them in a more general context:

Cook's work commonly has a tension between his admiration for the underdog . . . his fear that their particular strengths will be lost through the impact of outside civilization, and his inability to believe that any change can be beneficial. He sees the severity of traditional outports' life as breeding tough, larger-than-life figures.<sup>42</sup>

Although these quite short entries are not as conflicting as the theatre reviews, still there is no unity in the evaluation of the dramatic quality of Cook's plays. While many commentators accuse Cook of being too much influenced by other playwrights, W.J. Keith, for example, maintains that "Cook's great virtue is that, while not afraid of outside influences, he is strong

enough to absorb and transcend them."<sup>43</sup> Patrick O'Flaherty tries to summarize, in a way, this dialectic approach to Cook's works, arguing that "his plays achieve few subtle effects, yet they are daring, passionate, and full of movement."<sup>44</sup>

The reason for the relative shortness of these entries lies in the genre of reference books, in which brevity is required. Another form which limits its writers to very brief discussions is that of the book review. Play scripts are usually not reviewed at length in Canadian publications, and Cook's plays are no exception. The Canadian Book Review Annual as well as the special yearly issue of the University of Toronto Quarterly--the most comprehensive sources of book reviews--usually provide reviews that are not longer than two hundred words, and at times review two or three plays within such a short space.

Surveying the existing short book reviews of Cook's works, one realizes that not all of his published plays have been reviewed. Moreover, as Cook's plays were almost never published as separate entities, but either in anthologies or in groups of two and three, almost none of those that were reviewed received independent reviews.<sup>45</sup> *Quiller* and *Tiln*, for example, were usually reviewed together, at times even with *Therese's Creed*.<sup>46</sup> It is also not clear why a relatively minor play--*The Fisherman's Revenge*--received three reviews,<sup>47</sup> while *Jacob's Wake*--one of Cook's major plays--appears to have been reviewed by itself only by Renate Usmiani<sup>48</sup> and Alexander Leggatt.<sup>49</sup>

But although most book reviews and biographical entries are short, some (by Robert Wallace<sup>50</sup> and Helen Porter<sup>51</sup>) are more substantial. In these writings the scholars are dealing with several major issues, above all with the fact that Cook is an outsider in Newfoundland and with the significance of the female characters in his plays. Cook himself maintains time and again that he is an outsider in Newfoundland. And while this fact does not prevent most writers from acknowledging his understanding of the place, Wick Collins<sup>52</sup> disagrees. Collins is one of the few writers who totally condemn the works of Cook. In a lengthy article he asserts that Cook

knows very little about Newfoundland and its people. Although he has been here for a few years, he fails to understand that people can struggle for centuries to survive and never feel a sense of defeat or suffer the agony of black despair.<sup>53</sup>

Although the "Newfoundland character is not easy to define,"<sup>54</sup> Collins's opinion--that Cook does not understand this character--is not shared by other scholars.<sup>55</sup> Addressing this issue, Parker argues that Cook's "main purpose as a playwright is . . . to reaffirm the validity of the traditional Newfoundland way of life."<sup>56</sup>

Collins bases most of his arguments on his belief that Cook, as far as one can judge from his plays, does not understand the nature of Newfoundland women. However, it seems that, at more than one point, it is Collins who misinterprets Cook's plays. There is no doubt that Cook does see the Newfoundland wife and mother as far from being "a kitchen slob, a characterless and humorless family slut at the beck and call of the men."<sup>57</sup>

Collins maintains that "there are very few mothers and wives in North America who have as much affection, respect and admiration as those of Newfoundland."<sup>58</sup> Most of Cook's wives, as I will argue in this thesis, indeed enjoy respect and admiration.<sup>59</sup> Perkyms, in contrast to both Porter and Collins, argues that the woman in *Dance*

has the courage to stand up to a tyrannical father where her husband will mostly falter. Although she remains unnamed throughout the play . . . she becomes the conscience of both father and husband, condemning both men for making fools of themselves.<sup>60</sup>

Most of the scholars who write about Michael Cook base their arguments not only on the plays themselves, but also on the playwright's own words. Cook himself has written quite substantially in several places.<sup>61</sup> Most of Cook's writing, however, has nothing to do with his plays directly. In his article for Stage Voices, Cook provides his credo about discussing his own works:

I also feel acutely embarrassed when called upon to discuss my own work in any context. The plays should say it all, and who really gives a damn for the peculiar circumstances which divert the most unlikely candidates into egomaniacs convinced that they have something to say . . . ?<sup>62</sup>

Thus, instead of discussing his own work Cook's non-dramatic writing centres on playwrights' lack of further opportunities for producing their plays. Even when he asks the question "Why did I write *Head Guts And Sound Bone Dance*?",<sup>63</sup> Cook never gives an answer. Rather, he talks about the "advanced schizophrenia"<sup>64</sup> of Canadian art, and about the fact that theatre directors are guided by the box office receipts and not by the artistic

quality of any particular play.<sup>65</sup>

Beside his frustration at not being produced as often as he would like, Cook also talks extensively about his relationship--his belonging or rather not belonging--to Newfoundland, and about the character of the place. In both articles and interviews, Cook talks about a "highly complex, ritualistic community" that preserves a "core of silence, an inner communion with the self which is rarely manifest."<sup>66</sup> But even when Cook talks about Newfoundland, he never neglects to remind us that "communal efforts . . . struggles for common identity . . . [and] isolation . . . seem to be relevant to my own position as a playwright in Canada."<sup>67</sup> The ritualistic community and the struggles for identity will be discussed later in more depth.

Although Cook is reluctant to talk about his work, in various interviews he does reveal a few insights about the plays and characters he has created. Thus in his interview with Wallace, Cook talks about a "sense of history slipping away" in *Colour*; about the significance of women in his plays; as well as about the relationship between human beings and their environment.<sup>68</sup>

The central point that comes through in all these interviews and articles is the fact that Cook sees himself as an outsider in Newfoundland, as he himself states at the very beginning of his interview with Wallace:

I'm very much an outsider in Newfoundland. I guess I always have been. It's not that I am not accepted as a person, but my work is still viewed with suspicion, because as an outsider I have not followed the current trend--the Irish trend, actually--of romanticizing and mythologizing the glories of the past. It was a very dark and soul-destroying past in many ways, a survival culture with incredibly tight-knit family and social structures . . . As I fell in love with all of those things that are immediately obvious to every outsider who goes there, I became aware that it was a culture that was not only threatened, but doomed. I became a chronicler of that--what I consider to be the destruction of a spirit, language, culture and people.<sup>69</sup>

But as much as Cook loves and appreciates Newfoundland, he loves the theatre even more. "All I know is that I have to keep writing plays. And more plays. All I know is that I love theatre with a passion. It is life and breath to me."<sup>70</sup>

Cook is not the only outsider in Newfoundland. Most of the characters, males and females, in his plays are outsiders as well because they do not fit in the society in which they live. While Cook tries to become an insider in the land and in the society he chose for his home, his characters try to overcome the apparent paradox of being outsiders in their own land. Cook is doing that by writing plays. His characters search for other modes of expression.

## CHAPTER I

### THE MEN--THE DIFFICULTIES OF ESTABLISHING A RELATIONSHIP

A major theme in the plays of Michael Cook is the theme of not belonging. Most of the characters in Cook's plays say that either they themselves or other characters do not belong in a specific place, time, or environment. One of the results of not belonging is the inability to communicate with other human beings and with one's surroundings.

One must distinguish very clearly between two rather different meanings of the term "communication." A minimal kind of communication allows human beings to receive information from one another. Or to use the words of Eugene L. Hartley, the general meaning of the term refers to "a process in which an initiator emits or sends a message via some vehicle to some recipient and produces an effect."<sup>71</sup>

However, one should clearly differentiate between this merely technical type of communication, in which only information is being passed between the initiator and the recipient, and a more qualitative level of communication, which aims to reach understanding between both the initiator and the recipient. The sociologist Jurgen Habermas explains that the general presuppositions of communicative action are important since he takes "the type of action aimed at reaching understanding to be fundamental."<sup>72</sup> Habermas goes on to argue that establishing communication is necessary in any society. And

Edward Sapir explains that for "the building up of society . . . and the understandings which prevail between its members some process of communication is needed."<sup>73</sup> In this thesis I will refer to the second type of "communication," the type which enables two people to have a shared and genuine relationship.

Most of the male characters in the plays of Michael Cook fail to establish relationships and to communicate. Most of these males have created, each for his own self, an enclosed private world, a world which is centred around a very specific goal. For some characters this goal is power, for others it is sex, while others seek adventure and revolution.

In these various enclosed worlds there is no place at all for relationships, because each of the different characters is interested only in himself. But even in their rigid worlds Cook's male characters are occasionally faced with encounters in which there exists an opportunity for mutual communication.

The males react to the challenge of these encounters by trying to establish a shared relationship. However, because they seem, at least on the surface, to deny the necessity of mutual communication, all these attempts fail. But in spite of their failures and their denial, these males do try, maybe only subconsciously, to communicate mutually. Cook's male characters try to communicate and to establish a shared relationship basically on three levels--with the woman or women in their lives; with other members of their family; and with their own selves. In the latter case the character becomes both the



initiator and the recipient, as he tries to comprehend his goals in life and understand his own self. The central theme in Cook's plays is this subconscious yearning of the males for a shared relationship and their inability to achieve it.

Tiln, in the one act play which bears his name,<sup>74</sup> is the most prominent example of a character who has difficulties in realizing what his own goals in life are. Tiln is a "man living on the exposed edge of his soul" (7), living in his lighthouse which is "on the edge of space and time" (7). He shares the lighthouse with Fern, a man he rescued at sea ten years ago. Fern, who is now dying, hears Tiln's gospel:

In the beginning was the water . . . Gospel according to Saint Tiln. Then storm. Then cloud. Then the splitting. Then the upheaving. The boiling rock cascading. Then God. And after . . . Tiln. ME. Tiln. (11)

Later on he maintains that "I am still God. Tiln . . . God of the wilderness" (15).

Tiln--"God of the wilderness"--has apparently always lived alone in the lighthouse. But since he rescued Fern, Tiln's life has changed drastically. As Tiln retells the story of their first meeting, one realizes that since Fern's arrival, Fern--who has come from the unknown, from "the direction I had not left, but one in which I refused to go" (34)--has been a threat to Tiln's own world, to a very lonely and isolated world in which Tiln was ruler of the universe. By introducing music and religion into Tiln's universe, Fern manages to disrupt the harmony Tiln has created for himself. Tiln, who can control his own world, or at least thinks that he can control it, cannot

control Fern.

Tiln seems to believe that his life is meaningful only if he is in complete control of any given situation. He even admits that he had no intention of saving Fern. Tiln approached Fern's boat only because he thought Fern was dead (35). However, Tiln did not leave Fern at sea. He did take him home with him, adopting him as a companion. And once Fern entered Tiln's lighthouse--Tiln's universe--Tiln's life changed.

It is, however, not easy to discern how Fern managed to change Tiln. Both Tiln himself and the reader realize the meaning of this change only at the very end of the play when Fern dies. As Tiln becomes aware that his sole companion is dead, he accuses Fern, sobbing, "You've cheated me . . ." (43). Fern's death ended the relationship which, only in retrospect, Tiln realizes was extremely important. Although earlier Tiln longed for Fern's death and cherished his own lonely life, believing that being in control is the only thing that matters, once Fern is dead the importance of a shared relationship becomes clearer to Tiln. Tiln now realizes that his former solitude was meaningless, and acknowledges the importance of having a companion, of sharing his life with someone else. Thus, although he loses his only real friend, his acknowledgment of his own need of a relationship--by actually shedding tears--indicates that in the future Tiln might search for and maybe even find a new friend. Fern's death gives Tiln a new life, a life which will probably be different from the past when

Tiln proclaimed himself God of the universe, a new life of giving and sharing, a new life of happiness.

Another character in Cook's plays who has eventually come to acknowledge the importance of a shared relationship is Quiller, the protagonist of another of Cook's one-acters--*Quiller*.<sup>75</sup> Quiller is a widower whom no one talks to. Therefore, he talks to himself, to his dead wife, and above all to God:

Mornin' Lord. Dis is your servant, Quiller. Dat's right too, Lord. I 'lows, ye knew it were me all the time. Ye mustn't mind me, Lord. I'm gittin' a bit foolish. (48)

When his wife died, Quiller started to regret that he was never able to communicate mutually with her. Now Quiller tries desperately to establish a relationship--even if just a sexual one--with his neighbors, especially Mrs. Ivany and other women. But Quiller's desperate attempts to establish what he thinks is a shared relationship fail. His neighbors--including their children who call him "Killer Quiller!" (56)--mock him, seeing him as just a crazy old man who talks to himself.

Although the old Quiller has his priorities very clear--"I wants to talk" (56)--at this point in his life he is not able to begin communicating mutually. Now, when he wants to talk, Quiller has no one to talk to. In the past, however, he never wanted to talk, or to establish a shared relationship. Apparently Quiller spent very little time with his wife. And they had no children, not only because they were "wore out wi' trying" (p. 71), but above all because, as Quiller admits, "I'd not ever 'ave bin around long enough to be a fader to 'n" (78).

In the past, establishing a relationship never seemed an important issue; now, in his old age, the lack of a relationship is shaping Quiller's life. Quiller does realize that a shared relationship is necessary to being sane and alive, especially in one's old age. However, since Quiller lives in a rather small community and since he lacks the experience which can show him how to establish a relationship, Quiller will not find it easy to comprehend his own current goal--to make the friend he yearns for.

Coming to terms with one's own self--as Quiller and Tilm apparently do, although with many difficulties--is, at times, easier than establishing a relationship with one's family. Within Cook's incomplete families, families in which the generation gap is almost always too wide to bridge, true relationships hardly ever exist. The effects of the generation gap on the ability to communicate with the members of one's family are most obvious in *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*.<sup>76</sup> This play centres around Skipper Pete, an old man who cannot accept the changing modern world, a world in which fishing--the only trade he is accustomed to--is no longer a necessity.

Pete, whose wife is dead, whose son is retarded, and whose grandson--whom he wanted so much--was never born, tries to sustain a sort of a shared relationship with his son-in-law, Uncle John: "I took ye fer me own. Treated ye just like me own sons" (65). However, this is far from a shared relationship.

Once John marries Pete's daughter, Pete's only concern is to have a grandson--a concern that in a way destroys the couple's love, as John tells very bluntly to Pete:

There you goes again. Give you a grandson. Not me. Not fer her and me. No. D'ye know what ye did? Ye came between us even there, that's what's ye did. It was like . . . I'd be lying atop her and I'd hear your voice. Roaring. "Give it to her, son. Give it to her. Don't stop now. Don't give up." And she felt the same. We had to stop. (65-66)

But Pete is not thinking of the continuity of his family when he is concerned with having a grandson. Rather, he looks for people whose life he will be able to rule, people who will be under his power. Pete has always managed other people's lives, a practice which more than once resulted in destroying these lives. Both John and Pete continually lament the unborn grandson which Pete wanted very much, and yet a young boy drowns at sea while Pete and John are chatting idly, reluctant to save him. Pete--the very perceptive John realizes--never cared for his family, or for other human beings. Yes, he wanted and needed sons and grandsons, but not in order to establish a shared relationship. Rather, he needed them in order to have his very own subjects, in order to rule and destroy:

Ye made me crawl [. . .] I remember my father saying--saying "We escaped the rule of others. And exchanged it for the rule of our own kind. No escape boy," he said. (60-61)<sup>77</sup>

In Pete's world, family has no meaning, and life and death are not sacred issues. John, by the play's end, challenges Pete's morals. Thus, John, who was another one of Pete's obedient followers, manages to break away from Pete's rule.

Under Pete's influence, John dismissed his wife. Now he returns to his family--to mutually communicate with his wife. It takes the death of a little boy--a boy John could have saved--to change him. John has come to terms with what he, and not Pete, wants in life. He says very clearly to Pete: "But I don't think I'll be shareman wid ye any longer. (*He is nearly crying*) I'm going home, ye see. Home" (80). He is going to his wife, to try and establish a shared relationship with her. As in *Tiln*, only death manages to change a person's point of view on life.

Although there are no deaths in *The Fisherman's Revenge*<sup>78</sup>--Cook's only foray into children's theatre--the two incomplete families in this play convey, yet again, the subconscious need to mutually communicate as well as the inability to establish a shared relationship. Like Quiller, the fisherman feels very lonely without his wife: "since my woman died I have been lonely even though my daughter is a comfort" (5). And the daughter, Colleen, is more than kind to her father. "I love to tend for him" (6), she says, maintaining that she will not marry as long as she looks after her father. The fisherman, however, cannot allow that. At this point in his life, when he feels the sorrow and loss of his wife's death, when he realizes how important mutual communication is, he wants his daughter to get married and establish a shared relationship.

Colleen, however, seems to fear marriage. And even when, at the end of the play, she is about to marry, it is not easy to discern if she and her husband will be able to maintain a shared

relationship. Because the proud Colleen might realize the necessity of mutual communication only when she is no longer able to achieve it, she might ultimately suffer like Quiller, who realizes in his old age that the inability to establish a shared relationship results in misery.

While Colleen does not seem willing to leave her father in order to create her own family, the three Blackburn boys in *Jacob's Wake*<sup>79</sup> are trying as much as they can to avoid establishing a shared relationship among themselves or with their parents. All the members of this family--the most complete family within Cook's canon--are trying continually to avoid mutual communication with one another. However, they all come to realize, at one point or another, that without establishing some kind of a shared relationship they will never be able to achieve their respective dreams.

*Jacob's Wake* centres around the multi-layered relationships between Winston, his wife Rosie, his sister Mary, and his three sons, Alonzo, Brad, and Wayne. Although they all try to avoid each other, the continual power struggles among them suggest a need to be together, a need to be responsible one for the other. In their perpetual power struggles--which concern the fate of their grandfather, Skipper Elijah Blackburn--the three brothers use as their major tool Mary, Winston's sister.

*Jacob's Wake* takes place during the first two days of the Easter holiday, a fact that prompted Jerry Wasserman to argue that "Maundy Thursday and Good Friday provide an ironic setting

for the failed communion and multiple betrayals that mark the gathering of the Blackburn clan."<sup>80</sup> Easter is a time for family gatherings, a time for happiness and forgiveness. But in *Jacob's Wake* we never reach Easter Sunday. The play ends at 3 p.m. on Good Friday, the time of Christ's death.

And there is definitely no resurrection in the relationships in the Blackburn household; quite the contrary. Brad, the "emotional cripple" (218) who has left home to become a minister only because he made a local girl pregnant, has now returned home announcing that he has left the church, although he was apparently expelled from it. And both his father and Alonzo fear that Brad's return will change the existing family order. And although Alonzo mockingly says that "it might do us all good to have the family conscience restored to the fold" (219), his father is quick to answer: "Family pain in the arse. That's what he [Brad] is. Always wor, now I comes to think of it" (219). Obviously there is no love lost between Brad and the other members of the family. And although Brad says that he has returned because "this is my home. This is where I began. Where we all began" (230), the real reason for his return is that Brad has nowhere else to go. Thus, at this point, Brad, maybe only subconsciously, yearns to establish a shared relationship with at least some members of his family. His hopes to communicate mutually, however, are shattered at once--he is totally rejected by the males of the household. And even Brad's mother enjoys, at least for a while, the violent struggle during which Winston and Alonzo try to make Brad drink beer.



If Brad indeed wants to get back into the family, he must participate in the family's regular drinking ceremonies. Family rituals are very important in Cook's plays. The rituals in *Jacob's Wake* (drinking) and *The Head Guts and Sound Bone Dance* (preparing the fish), for example, are long and non-verbal. But it is through these rituals that a kind of a shared relationship is established between the various family members. It is ironic that whenever the Blackburns try to communicate through words they fail. Without words they seem to get along much better.

The temperamental Brad, however, who suffers from hallucinations, is unable to fit into any kind of framework in which other people create the rules. Thus, Brad, the misfit, cannot find a place either in the strict world of religion or within the tight family bonds, which are strengthened by the drinking ceremony. The importance of this family ritual is emphasized when Wayne, the third brother, comes home. Wayne, at least according to Mary, is the most successful of the brothers, a politician who is about to become a minister in Newfoundland's government, and who, like most politicians, "can't bear to lose" (222). In spite of some political responsibilities, Wayne does manage to come home for the annual family meeting. When their drinking ritual is over, Winston says: "Now boys. Let's celebrate the annual family re-union" (220). Wayne immediately answers, "What family? What union?" (220), an answer which serves as the first of many hints as to Wayne's real motive for coming home, a motive which has more to do with his politics than with his family.

Hidden motives control the way each of the three brothers acts. As these motives are revealed throughout the course of the play, one confronts a family in which power struggles are continual, a family which is as lacking in harmony as one can imagine, a family in which even the existing and not shared relationships prove more often than not to be false ones. However, it is not really surprising that Winston's three sons find it difficult to communicate with their father or with one another--they inherited this inability from their father. Winston himself still has difficulties in communicating with his own father, because "talking to me father is always hard work, like reading hist'ry backwards. Yer own. I wish sometimes that I could have been the son he wanted" (229). Winston's sons never really become the boys he wished for, either.

While all the male characters in *Jacob's Wake* find it quite difficult to communicate mutually with each other, they find it easier, at times, to do so with their mother and their aunt. It is especially to Rosie, and at times to Mary, that these males turn for comfort, for understanding, and in a way even for an escape from the cold world that they have created for themselves. But even the more tender and at times seemingly shared relationships that are established between the males and the females of the Blackburn clan are shattered forever. The men are simply not able--maybe because of the lies that shape their relationship--to maintain such tenderness and understanding for long.

While the Blackburn men yearn and seem to be able, at least for a short while, to communicate mutually with the women in the family--or at least with Rosie, the wife and mother--most of the other male characters in Cook's plays have more difficulties in establishing a shared relationship with women. The only relationship the males seem capable of is a sexual one, whether for pleasure or for having children, or both. And such a relationship, Cook suggests, is not of high quality. Quiller, in the play which bears his name, provides some kind of an explanation as to why it seems almost impossible for the men of Newfoundland to have a shared relationship with their wives. Quiller--who talks continually to his dead wife--realizes how important she was to him, and how much he misses her, only after her death. However, when his wife was alive, Quiller never had the time for her--he was never at home.

John, in *The Head Guts and Sound Bone Dance*, is also never at home with his wife. Rather, he spends his days with his father-in-law. The latter explains to him very clearly that his daughter, whom John has married, is useless: "That woman of yours, I s'pose. Useless as the day ever was. God damnedest child I ever did raise. Glad to be rid of'er" (56). Only by the end of the play does John have the courage to break his false relationship with Pete. And he goes back home in order to start what could very well become a shared relationship with his wife.

While Quiller acknowledges his wife only when she is dead, and John in *Dance* avoids his wife for quite a while, the

merchant in *The Fisherman's Revenge* fears his wife. When she is away--and she does spend most of her time in sunny Florida or in Ontario--he has no problems in talking behind her back: ". . . my wife, may she rot in Hell" (8). But once she is in the house, she is the one who runs the show. In a way, however, the perpetual battle of the sexes in this particular family is a kind of mutual communication, and it does give both participants the vitality for their everyday life, as they both acknowledge (73).

Quiller, John, and even the merchant each has a relationship with one specific woman--his wife. Gayden in *The Gayden Chronicles*<sup>81</sup>--a historical saga that depicts life on a man-of-war--tries to establish a shared relationship not with one woman, but with three.<sup>82</sup> However, all these three attempts, as is usual in Cook's plays, fail. Why is Gayden unable to mutually communicate with the three women he is involved with throughout his life? Gayden is one of the more extraordinary characters one encounters in Cook's plays. He is a philosophical revolutionary who just cannot settle down in any given place for a long time. He is a man who is always on the move, a man who cherishes danger and adventure, and above all a man who fights any order of things just in order to create a new order. Gayden's need to move from and change any situation he finds himself in is one of the major reasons for his failure in communicating mutually. The women he associates with understand this inability very well.

Who are these women? The first is the daughter of young Gayden's employer. She hopes to marry Gayden, who made her pregnant. Gayden, however, is running away to London. And as he leaves, both Gayden and the daughter know that

every three or four years there'll be another pasty-faced little bugger stuffed into this rat hole waiting for ye to come down night after night wi' a plate o' greasy scraps and a warm, wet body to do with what he wants and ye wants. There's a maid would think herself lucky to be in your position. (10)

Gayden leaves his first woman, who initially cries, but whose tears turn into despair as she realizes that Gayden will never come back. In their parting, suddenly this nameless daughter is able to understand the nature of Gayden. After all he is not the type to "spend the rest of his life making barrels" (10).

Gayden's second female companion--Rowena--is quite different. She is a very sophisticated woman who says she married in order to be safe from the law while she whores around (29). When Gayden meets her in an inn, they are immediately attracted to each other and embark on a brief romance which is different from the "old drink or two, bang bang I'm through routine" (30). However, by its nature this romance cannot turn into a lasting shared relationship. A married woman who, in spite of having her dreams, always thinks of business, whether it comes with or without pleasure, and a sailor on leave, can have nothing more than a good time together. Both know it, and enjoy their affair as long as it lasts. This brief moment of tenderness, however, which is probably unique for both of them, is ended rather abruptly by the appearance of one of Rowena's

former companions. Rowena begs Gayden: "don't let him near me" (38). Gayden obliges by killing the intruder who was armed with a knife. Therefore, Gayden is forced to flee.

After a life of adventure and sexual encounters, Gayden is seen in blissful matrimony in Act III. He is now living in France with his nameless French wife. But Gayden is restless. His wife, who understands him very well, realizes that their marriage is not going to last forever. She knows that Gayden "can never belong" (63). And as she does belong to the land while his mistress is the sea, their relationship is about to end. Once again Gayden is leaving a woman before a shared relationship can be established.

All three women with whom Gayden is involved love him dearly. But all establish the relationship with him for very practical reasons--sexual ones. And Cook implies that, as with Quiller, sex alone cannot be the grounds for a shared relationship. Thus, in spite of the fact that these three women, and especially Rowena, comprehend Gayden's character very well, they always part, each probably looking for the next sexual encounter.

Gayden, however, communicates with another female character. It is the figure of death that haunts him throughout, reminding him that his end is near.<sup>83</sup> This messenger appears initially at the beginning of the play (7). And Gayden, who recognizes the figure from the very beginning, delivers his first monologue, knowing that he has a very specific audience. Later on the

figure returns to bear witness to further monologues. By the end of the play, when Gayden comes to terms with his own death, his relationship with death is the most meaningful relationship he was ever able to establish. And as he aptly comments, it is the only certainty (65). When death reveals itself as Rowena (75), one realizes where Gayden's heart was all along, where he did attain his most shared relationship, even if it was a very brief one.

Gayden, like all the male characters which Michael Cook has created, has tried, maybe only subconsciously, to establish a shared relationship. And like all the other males he fails. However, this subconscious yearning to communicate mutually seems to be so strong that all these males do try to communicate. In their search for other means of communication, most of these males end up trying to establish a relationship which, because it is one-sided, ends up being fraudulent.

## CHAPTER II

### LONELINESS AND FAILED RELATIONSHIPS

Because the male characters in Cook's plays are not able to establish a shared relationship, these males are lonely. And they all acknowledge and realize their loneliness. Some admit it openly, like Quiller, the merchant in *The Fisherman's Revenge*, or even Tiln (at the very end of *Tiln*). Others, like the Blackburn boys in *Jacob's Wake* or Gayden, avoid their loneliness on the surface, even though they cannot escape it. The failure to establish a shared relationship and the inevitable loneliness that follows are a direct result of the unwillingness of these males to make a sacrifice--to change their nature and abandon their lust for power--in order to achieve a two-sided, shared relationship. Therefore, Cook's males--people who can never settle down; people who are never satisfied; people who always complain--are not able to establish a shared relationship. And without the will to sacrifice and change the life they lead, mutual communication is unattainable.

But although on the surface most of these men deny the importance of establishing a shared relationship, subconsciously, most of them seem to believe in the importance of a shared relationship, in the necessity of mutual communication. And as they are not willing to change and openly strive for this shared relationship, Cook's lonely male characters eventually find a less demanding way of relationship, a relationship that does not call for either a sacrifice or a



change. As Cook's male characters fail to communicate mutually with other human beings they have a predilection to attempt communicating where mutual communication cannot exist at all: with figures of authority, with God, or with nature. However, the basis for this kind of a relationship is not shared understanding. Rather, the basis for this relationship is dominance and submission anchored within the hierarchy of law and order.

And whether it be the law of man, nature, or God, one ceases to talk about a shared relationship in which both participants have an equal place. Man-made authority can never replace a shared relationship. It might only serve as a basis for a relationship which is one-sided in which submission replaces the will to share and give to one another. And communicating with the unknown or the non-human--with nature or with God--cannot be mutual. Nature, especially the sea, is indifferent and thus can never be trusted, and communicating with God, when it is obvious that God does not communicate back, is in effect only admitting that no other level of communication can be attained.<sup>84</sup>

In *The Gayden Chronicles* William Blake tells Gayden that there are three possible aspects to one's relationship with God--to know, use, or ignore God (42). And those male characters in Cook's plays who try to establish a kind of a relationship with God, indeed use one of these three ways. There is no blind faith from these males. For them God is an entity to relate to when establishing a shared relationship with human beings fails.

Quiller, for example, seems to know God and talks with God regularly: "I don't mind tellin' ye, Lord, they is times when I gits disturbed" (50). Thus he creates a failed, one-sided relationship in which he himself provides both sides of the dialogue. However, as much as Quiller's life is centred around his continual conversation with God, as well as with his dead wife, he keeps searching for a human companion, because the very lonesome Quiller does finally realize (81) that a one-sided relationship is fraudulent.

While Quiller "knows" God, Brad in *Jacob's Wake* uses him. Brad is a minister. However, he never chose religion out of vocation. Rather it was a retreat for him. Brad made a local girl pregnant when he was young (241), and turned to religion in order to avoid responsibility for his deed. But this "emotional cripple" (218) was "thrown out" (217) of the church because, as he explains, he "challenged corruption" (217), and because, as we find out later on, he was accused of arson (230). His aunt sees through him and denounces him. "What made you think you could use God as a crutch for your fantasies?" (218), she accuses Brad who returns home after a failed attempt to use God as a route of escape from his own personal problems. Brad never had a religious faith with appropriate foundations. His relationship with God was always fraudulent.

While knowing and using God cannot become the basis for a shared relationship, ignoring God, as Tilm finds out, is no good either. Tilm believes that he does not need God. He himself is

the God of his own universe, and he strongly believes that he is able to restore law and order to the kingdom in which he himself, the birds, and the sea are the only subjects:

Yes. Fly. Fly. Trapped in the light. The great unseeing eye that blinds. Fly on . . . Yes, that's it, out of the blackness, flying blind. I am Lord of the universe still. (16)

However, once this universe changes, Tilm's status as God changes as well. Fern, whom Tilm rescued at sea and brought to live with him in his lighthouse, does believe in God. He has his prayer book and begs Tilm to make a service for him once he is dead. Tilm cannot see the point in it. Once Fern is dead, Fern wouldn't know anything. But Fern insists and Tilm gives up. As Fern dies, Tilm's ignorance of God dies as well. Through Fern's belief, Tilm has learned that ignoring God is meaningless--it achieves nothing.

Beside the attempt to communicate with God, Cook's male characters also try to communicate with the land and the sea they live on, whether it be an unidentified land or Newfoundland in particular. Tilm, for example, believes that he will be able to establish a relationship with nature as long as he is able to sustain the order in nature. It is his universe, he believes, and as God he should be able to be at one with nature, to control nature--the sea, the birds, and everything else that exists:

I, Tilm, looked out across my world. It was all in order. The confusion of the waves. I felt a promise of thunder. Saw the gulls [. . .] The wave. Rock. No one. Everything absolute. The stock polished and smooth in my hands. (19)

Tiln himself even becomes part of nature: "The stock in my hand . . . The rock . . . Myself growing from the rock. Like some desolate anemone" (19). But it does not take a long time for Tiln, who confuses a shared relationship with enforced law and order, to realize that he is not able to control nature. Yes, he can shoot the birds, but he can neither control nor create a shared relationship with the universe--his universe. Nature does run its own course.

Gayden also comes to understand that nature--the sea--has its own rules. Gayden, however, in an attempt to achieve a shared relationship with the sea, abides by these rules. Thus he seems to be content at sea, by moving continually from one point to another, changing positions perpetually. He is acting just as the sea does--serene on the outside, but in effect a companion who cannot be trusted, a companion who is indifferent to his friends, especially when they need him most. But eventually Gayden realizes that it is impossible to mutually communicate with the sea, as the sea always takes and never gives back. Thus, Gayden also realizes that it is impossible to establish a shared relationship with the sea. And it is indeed the sea that accepts Gayden's dead body. The mistress has claimed her ultimate victim.

Although the sea is usually indifferent, some of Cook's male characters believe strongly that if they respect the sea and obey it, the sea will reward them with seals or with fish. And fishing is the one and only trade Newfoundland men are happy

with. But there is no consistency in the sea's pattern. It can never be trusted--and thus obviously can never be a part of a shared relationship--as Pete in *Dance* finds out, when he is suddenly, after a long life of fishing, confronted by a sea that provides no fish. This change in the routine, in a way, destroys Pete's life, but not only his. The death of the little child, whom Pete declined to save from drowning, might be interpreted as a kind of a sacrifice. Maybe Pete indeed believes--when he explains that the "sea wanted him" (77)--that one must not anger the sea. In order to be able to get fish in the future--a future only Pete believes in--one must befriend the sea, and not reject its demands.

As the sea itself cannot be trusted, the land--Newfoundland--cannot be trusted either. Foreigners who come to Newfoundland cannot get accustomed to the physical conditions of the island. The soldiers in *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust*<sup>85</sup>--a historical saga about Newfoundland in the second half of the eighteenth century--or in *On the Rim of the Curve*<sup>86</sup>--a macabre retelling of the extermination of the Beothucks--comment repeatedly on the cruelty of the place. But these foreigners never make an effort to accept the nature of Newfoundland. They simply despise the island and wait for the moment when they will be able to leave it.

However, even the native Blackburn family finds it almost impossible to cope with the island's weather. The outside storm that takes place during their family reunion not only

illuminates the storm within the house, it also deprives them of their own freedom to move. And while the Beothuck Indians, as they are portrayed in *Rim*, seem to have a kind of a shared relationship with the land (after all they do have "the knowledge of water and birds, the conversation of trees" [16]),<sup>87</sup> the white man never had the chance to learn from this unique relationship; he simply exterminated all the Beothucks.

Compared to their regular attempts to mutually communicate with God and with nature--attempts that are doomed to fail--the male characters in Cook's plays find it easier, at times, to try to mutually communicate with figures of authority. But the kind of a relationship that can be achieved with a figure of authority, by its very nature, is one-sided and thus fraudulent, as that figure always stands for law and order, for dominance and submission. And law and order by their nature cannot replace the sacrifice which is the basis of a shared relationship. Although in contrast to God and to nature figures of authority do communicate back at times, they themselves are not really interested in creating a true, two-sided relationship. Such a relationship might interfere with their major aim and interest--the power to rule. When these figures of authority, like the admiral in *Gayden* or the captain in *Colour*, do try to establish a shared relationship, their power as figures of authority in effect diminishes.<sup>88</sup>

One of the very few male characters in the Cook canon who is able to establish a shared relationship, even though it is a

very brief one, with a figure of authority is Gayden. He is able to do so, however, only just before his death, a death that his own sense of order brought about. Seeking law and order, Gayden keeps a diary of all his rebellious acts, because he believes that things must be kept in order. And he is caught only because his inner sense of order makes him stop running away. It is the admiral--a figure of authority--who understands this act of Gayden: "you put into St. Helena [where Gayden was caught] in pursuit of the law. Justice" (73). Gayden himself might not have realized his need for order in his rather short but quite adventurous life. It is the admiral who sentences him to death who realizes it. And it takes one man of order to recognize another one. The trust that is being built between Gayden and the admiral, in the last minutes before Gayden is hanged, suggests that Gayden finally found his peace of mind.

Gayden, however, cannot accept the freedom the admiral offers him. Gayden realizes that the admiral's suggestion--to become an officer and thus remain alive--is "very generous." But Gayden also realizes that he is

to be elevated in the hierarchy of slaves so that you [the admiral] can ward off your attackers, can show them that your way is the right way, that the revolution has been contained. (74)

And this will destroy Gayden's own sense of order. Thus, as Gayden's life reaches its final moments, he is content with his deeds as well as with the diary in which he recounted them. Yes, it is the diary that finally condemns him, but Gayden knows that he is nothing without words (74). The words that kept Gayden's

life in order have become his hangman. But at this point Gayden is happy because death is there, and death is in a way the ultimate order, something that even Gayden will never be able to change. For a long time he fought death and resisted it, but no longer. Now the end has come. And although Gayden will never be able to achieve a lasting shared relationship in his life, the memory of his long discussion with the admiral and his encounter with Rowena--both as a real woman and as the character of death--suggest that Gayden has reached the peace he always longed for. Gayden, who all his life fought against tyranny and rebelled against almost any kind of existing order, is hanged only because he himself cannot survive without law and order.

Gayden's death is the ultimate proof that one-sided relationships cannot exist. Gayden, like many of the other males in Cook's plays, in order to escape his loneliness, opted for relationships, with the sea and with a figure of authority, that were far from shared. But one-sided relationships, according to Cook's plays, have almost no quality. Only shared relationships and mutual communication can save these males from their loneliness. But mutual communication is almost never achieved by the male characters in the plays of Michael Cook.



## CHAPTER III

### LIVING IN THE PAST AND DENYING THE PRESENT

Another crucial dimension of Cook's work may explain or at least give us a deeper comprehension of Cook's male characters. Why is communication so difficult for these lonely males? Why do they simultaneously deny the necessity of a shared relationship and yearn desperately for it? And most important, why do most of these men refuse to change their nature and make the initial sacrifice that is the prerequisite for establishing a shared relationship? By examining the way in which some of Cook's male characters perceive time, it will be possible to gain a more complete understanding of these lonely characters.

The use and function of time is a major theme in the work of Michael Cook. And although this is not the place for a detailed analysis of the subject, a brief discussion of this theme will eventually enable us to understand more easily the theme of communication, or rather the lack of it.

Most of the male characters in Cook's plays live in the past and are not willing to accept the present. They remain enclosed within their own solitary worlds, worlds which were created long ago, worlds which some despise, but most still cherish. And they are not able to realize that living in the past negates the changes that have taken place within the society over the years.

To what extent does living in the past influence the daily behavior of Cook's male characters? Pete, in *The Head*, *Guts*, and

*Sound Bone Dance*, for example, believes very strongly in the importance of the past. Moreover, he totally neglects the present: "The new ways is for new people" (66), he says, not for people like himself who understand the "old way. The only way" (66). Pete's life has no meaning without his memories of the past, a time when "fish was t'ousands" (66). But times have changed, and in Cook's view of Newfoundland's future, fishing--once the major occupation of the natives--is no longer a profitable trade. Pete, however, cannot accept that his past, the time when he was apparently a successful fisherman, will not return.

And so Pete spends his time by the sea and waits for his good old days to come back. He knows that they will return: "And one day, they'll [the fish] come back, in their t'ousands, when all the boats has gone away, and nobody thinks they's anymore. They's waiting for the old days like we is" (73). Only the belief that the past will indeed come back provides Pete some hope in his own secluded world. And he knows that the only way he can survive in the present is by waiting for the past to return. "Memories ain't no good," he says to John, "unless you can see someone else working out the same ones" (73).

Pete's strong belief in the return of the past creates his own tragedy. It is during one of his long dreams about the good old days that he fails to save a drowning boy (67). The child who comes to Pete and his son-in-law, John, asking them to save the drowning Jimmy Fogarty, is ignored. As little Jimmy

eventually dies, one realizes that Pete's life, in which the present has no place, is, in a way, doomed as well.

As long as Pete, secluded within his own past, had no direct influence on those who surround him, one could only pity the skipper who is unable to realize that the past is dead and will never come back. But once Pete's strange way of living results in the death of a young child, John at least comes to realize the harm in neglecting the present. Earlier, John was Pete's companion, helping the old skipper reminisce. Now John will no longer return to Pete (80). Rather, he will return home to his wife, whom he neglected. From now on, John is going to live in the present.

Pete, however, will not change. Enclosed in his past Pete will be unable to mutually communicate with other human beings who can make the clear distinction between past and present. Pete will never make the effort to change his ideals and beliefs, to make that sacrifice which might become the basis of a shared relationship. He lives by himself and by his own rules, rules which are anchored in the past.

Another skipper who lives in the past is old Elijah Blackburn in *Jacob's Wake*. However, while Pete's past in a way destroys his present, Elijah's past enables him to function within the horrible present which his family provides for him. Elijah imagines that he is at the helm of his ship, still hunting seals--an occupation which, for him, was always more exciting than fishing:

. . . but the hunt, that's different. Every man, once in a lifetime, has to know what it's like. To hunt. To kill. To risk yerself, yer ship. Yer sons. Aye, and to lose sometimes. (227)

And indeed in one of these hunting expeditions, Elijah lost one of his sons.

The loss of his son, the Jacob of the play's title, haunts Elijah. But he manages, in a very personal manner, to preserve his own sanity because of his belief that he is still at sea, that he is running a ship hunting seals. True, most members of his family believe him to be insane. His own daughter has lost all her patience with him and would like to send him into a mental institution, and his grandsons would like to do the same. But alone in his room, secluded from the rest of the family, Elijah seems to be as sane as the rest of them.

We are confronted here with a logical dilemma. On the one hand it could be that, just because he is negated and despised by almost all the members of his family, Elijah must create for himself a world to cling to. On the other hand, Elijah's family might be neglecting him just because they believe he is insane. Whatever the case may be, Elijah knows very well that he lives in a house and not in a ship. But he explains to Winston, his son, that "a house is like a ship. Lights agin the night . . . some adrift . . . some foundered, some rotting old hulks full of the memories of men . . . They's no difference" (242). And so Elijah remains in his room alone with his log book, dreaming of the days when he was indeed at sea. Without the mutual communication with other members of his family, communication

which at this point Elijah longs for very much, he reluctantly has to be content with his memories.

And although no one else wants to acknowledge that these memories belong just to the past, as the play ends, Elijah, or rather the ghost of the dead Elijah, suddenly appears in full uniform trying to put an end to the fights between the other members of his family:

Forty years, it's been. Forty years, waiting to see if any o'ye could steer this ship. I give ye fair warning. Have ye anything to say? Good. Comes a time when things has to be brought together as best they kin. When ye has to steer into the starm and face up to what ye are. (246)

And the Blackburn clan will have to "face up to what" they are if the family is still to be one unit. The family is almost destroyed, but maybe Elijah's dreams about the return of the past, a past which the younger generation negates, could help his grandchildren realize how much mutual communication and understanding are meaningful. Without them, obviously there is no hope remaining for the Blackburn clan.

One other male character who lives in the past is Quiller. Like Elijah, Quiller does so because the members of the society he lives in will not accept him. He is denied the shared relationship that Pete in *Dance* is offered by his daughter but is too proud to accept. But in contrast to Pete and for that matter to Elijah as well, Quiller does try to create a new present which will be totally disconnected from his past. However, Quiller is unable to establish a shared relationship maybe because his prime interest is only sex:

I got something fer ye, maid. Better 'n firmer dan dat ol' turnip. Come up here, maid. Come here . . . I'd tickle ye. Make ye laugh. (59)

But the women just ignore Quiller, calling him "dirty ould divil" (59).

Thus, although Quiller, at times, wants to create a new present for himself, he is not able to do so. And so he goes on talking with his dead wife, trying, at least in his mind, to make up for a life in which there was no time at all for a shared relationship. In the past Quiller never realized the importance of mutual communication, of having a shared relationship with his wife. He was too busy at sea to think about what seemed, at the time, trivial matters. Only in his old age does Quiller realize what he missed and what he is still missing in life--a true companion. But Quiller does not know how to approach a woman and thus will never be able to establish himself in the present. Not that he does not want to; he just does not know how to do it.

Quiller's past has a very direct influence on the way his present is shaped. And the blurred perception of time that Quiller, Pete, and Elijah, as well as some other characters, have, becomes more significant when one realizes that the society in which they live is also greatly determined by its past. In several of his plays Cook suggests that the past is indeed shaping the present and the future, whether it be the future of a specific character or the future of Newfoundland. And as the past Cook is drawing is a destructive one--there

never was any hope for the people of Newfoundland--the future is doomed as well.

In *Colour the Flesh, the Colour of Dust* one sees how historical patterns repeat themselves. At the beginning of the play Newfoundland is ruled by the British. Later on the British are defeated by the French who become the new rulers, only to be defeated in their turn by the British who hold power once more. This pattern of changing rulers had become the normal way of life for the people of Newfoundland at the time. They knew that what had happened once would happen again sooner or later. The magistrate and the merchant always make sure to gain financially from each of the power changes, while the people themselves, the "scum" as they are called, never really matter. After all, does it really matter who your oppressor is?

In *Colour* Cook suggests that history repeats itself in Newfoundland, that the people will always be ruled, whether it be by a foreign nation, or, as becomes clearer in other plays, by the island itself. In *On the Rim of the Curve*--a very dark and macabre play that tells the story of the last Beothuck Indians in Newfoundland--the pattern of destiny seems to leave no choice to the Beothucks. But *Rim* does not deal only with the past. It mixes past, present, and future throughout, suggesting once again that historical events can shape the present and the future. It is a very grim view which Cook is consistent in developing throughout his entire canon.

*Rim* is Cook's only stage play in which the playwright actually deals with the native Indians of Newfoundland as real people. In other plays the settlers are treated as the people of the Island. In *Rim*, which is presented in cabaret form, the Ringmaster asks at the very beginning: "Is everything that happens to us determined in a dark past, making mockery of will?" (10) The answer at the very end of the play seems to be that indeed one cannot change destiny. And as it was the Indians' destiny to vanish and they seemed to accept it (49), so it will be the destiny of the people of Newfoundland to vanish as well. The pattern in Newfoundland, Cook argues in many places, will never change. As past cultures have been destroyed, so will the current one be.

If indeed the past does control the present and the future, then it seems that both the society in which Cook's characters live and the characters themselves are doomed. A society whose members cling to the past, without being able to accept the changes that take place year after year, is bound to be self-destroyed. But not only the society is about to be destroyed. The characters themselves, these lonely males who are unable to establish a shared relationship, are also on the verge of death.

And indeed death is hovering above in almost all of Cook's plays. *Rim* is a very cruel "dance of death" (20) not only for the Indians, but above all for their conquerors. *Dance* is a "death game" (72) for Pete and the society within which he



lives, as John tries to explain to his father-in-law. And although in *Jacob's Wake* Winston says that "life is one long celebration" (225), all the behavior and the noise in the house are "enough to raise the dead" (222). Like Pete in *Dance*, the Blackburns are playing a game which is closer to death than to life; it is a game of destruction, of self-destruction. There seems to be no future, no hope for Newfoundland and its male characters, a fact Cook himself emphasizes in many of his non-dramatic writings. However, in spite of Cook's prophesy of death for Newfoundland, the women in his plays convey a different outlook. In almost all of the plays the women are portrayed as the potential saviors of Newfoundland.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WOMEN--THE ABILITY TO ESTABLISH A SHARED RELATIONSHIP

The male world which is depicted in the plays of Michael Cook is a gloomy world because these men are neither willing to communicate mutually nor create a shared relationship with the women in their lives. However, the entire world which Cook draws in his various plays is not necessarily that gloomy. There is yet hope, faith, and love in that world, all of which could be attained through the women. If anyone can change the society that Cook's vision portrays, it is the women.

What makes these women so different from the men in Cook's plays? While the men are never satisfied, are never able to settle down, and continually mistake the present for the past, the women are willing to communicate mutually, to sacrifice, and to give of themselves, all in order to create a shared relationship with their men. It is this wish to communicate mutually which enables each of the various women in these plays to create, or at least to offer the opportunity for, a shared relationship with the man or men in her life. And since the women accept the present and, in contrast to their men, are able to forget the past, establishing a shared relationship is much easier for them than for the men.

The women in Cook's plays--there is at least one major female character in all of Cook's major plays except *Tiln* and *Quiller*--have much in common. These usually nameless wives,

mothers, or daughters are able to survive in a male-dominated society--whether it be society in general, or the family cluster in particular--a society which does not always favour the women, or acknowledge their needs. However, although these women have much in common one with the other, the way in which each woman manages to survive differs greatly. Through an analysis of the various techniques these women use to survive, it will be possible to realize how the women could save the gloomy men they live with, and in effect save the society which is usually far from favorable to them.

Newfoundland in the 1760s, as Cook portrays it in *Colour the Flesh, the Colour of Dust*, is a male-dominated society which through experience has learned how to adapt to the foreign rule and thus to survive. The members of this society always live under foreign conquerors, whether they be the English, the French who take over, or the English when they return once more to take over from the French. In all these historical experiences the ability to survive is shared by all members of the society, but is especially apparent in the women.

However, in this strife-ridden society, one character in particular displays a unique capability to adapt and survive. This is the woman, or girl, who at times is called Marie. Marie's actions centre around the necessity to adapt in order to go on living in spite of the horrors of everyday life. And the only way to adapt is by creating a shared relationship that would give some meaning to her life. Even though Sean, the man

with whom Marie probably established this kind of a relationship, is hanged by the English soldiers, Marie is not willing to end the relationship. Claiming his body from the soldiers who guard the hanging corpse and address her as Sean's whore, Marie reveals her sense of dignity. And addressing the corpse, or rather the audience, Marie in a Brecht-like "Song of the Woman" explains her philosophy of life, the philosophy that keeps her alive:

I sold my body  
as woman must  
sure what's a body  
it's only dust  
but I gave it you  
and what's the gain  
the weight of a corpse  
an ounce of pain

I sold my body  
rich and warm  
to poor fishy creatures  
fleeing the storm  
But to you I gave,  
As give I must  
to colour the flesh  
the colour of dust. (p. D7)

However, Marie's dead lover cannot become an obstacle in her day-to-day survival scheme. She has to communicate mutually, and she is willing to give and to love. Marie just looks for someone who will be willing to accept.

By actually demanding Sean's corpse from the British soldiers, Marie makes it clear that she is not giving up her rights as a human being. Marie wants to go on living, and she is facing the future with hope, never looking back to the past. And so after she initially saves Sean's body from the soldiers,

Marie then saves the lieutenant who hanged Sean from the local men who are about to lynch him.

Initially it is not easy to grasp Marie's motives for saving the lieutenant. And her argument that she wants him because he owes her (D18)--after all he hanged her lover--seems nothing more than an excuse. However, in the cold and cruel world of Newfoundland, this woman cannot find humanity and dignity. These are attributes which neither the place nor the society have. And when she recognizes dignity in the lieutenant, she wants him at once. In return for the love and comfort that Marie will give him, the lieutenant will give Marie the one element she does not find in the society in which she lives--dignity.

However, in this society which never changes, and in which history always repeats itself, it is almost inevitable that as the woman lost Sean, she will lose her current lover as well. And indeed the lieutenant dies, ironically by "one of his own too--from behind" (D43). Thus, the girl, who suffered from a loss as the play began, closes the cycle with yet another loss. But she was also able to give love and hope to two men; she was able to create shared relationships. And so, even as her second lover dies, Marie still has hope for the future. After all, she has given love to both Sean and the lieutenant, and she has definitely restored the lieutenant's faith in his own self. And with the child that she carries in her womb--whether it be Sean's or even more probably the lieutenant's--Marie does not fear the future. Her ability to communicate mutually and to

establish shared relationships will enable this woman to adapt to any given situation, and to survive. This is exactly what makes this woman strong, as she herself says: "the bravest people I know are the ones who endure" (D42). She has endured, and thus was able to survive. She was able to communicate mutually with men, in a society in which mutual communication between males and females is usually non-existent.

Like Marie, the wife in *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance* manages to adapt to the society she lives in. She tries to establish a shared relationship with both her husband and father. However, although this nameless wife will eventually manage to communicate mutually with her husband, her father still refuses to acknowledge the realization offered to him by his daughter--since life must go on, there is no point in clinging to a past that will never return. The only way to adapt, John's wife acknowledges, is to comprehend the nature of the society you live in, and to acknowledge it for what it is, not for what it is not, or rather for what it used to be. The wife's father, Skipper Pete, is not able to realize that the days in which fishing was a profitable trade are gone. His daughter, however, acknowledges this reality and tries, in vain, to bring him to accept the present:

Coiling and uncoiling the same rope day after day.  
Knitting nets you'll never use. Making killicks. And  
they's only fit now to make ornaments in the homes of  
the stuck-up in St. John's and the upalong. Talking  
about things that once were and will never be again. (64)

The wife does not address this accusation only to her father, she is also confronting her husband, John.

John spends all his time with his father-in-law, dreaming about the past, hoping that some day it will return. But John is unable to see that Pete is using him. And it remains for the wife to explain Pete's tactics to her husband:

Can't ye see? That's the way he holds onto ye, now. Just like it used to be. Smash yer face in if he caught ye with a drink on the voyage, and then encourage you to riot yer last cent away at the end of it, so ye had to go back. He's still doing it, John. (64)

Because John, like Pete, denies the necessity of women in life, he initially does not return home to the wife who begs him to come back and establish the shared relationship they never had. John, at this time, remains by the sea, in a world that no longer exists, in a world that only Pete believes in, in a world in which women have no place at all. However, in contrast to Pete, John does enjoy at home, without Pete knowing it, some of the advantages of technology; he watches television--an instrument of communication--and he uses an electric blanket (64). This first step to accept the new world and its advantages might hint at the possibility that, with the aid of his wife, John will be able to disconnect himself completely from Pete, who uses him and almost destroys his life.

John is almost destroyed by his father-in-law until, ironically enough, a death saves him. Pete and John let a young boy drown. They were asked to save him, but simply ignored the call for help. John, at the time, was under Pete's spell. But now, with the help of his wife who actually explains to him what has happened and thus brings him back to reality, John realizes

the grave truth of his deed. John realizes that he was indeed able to save the young boy but did not do it. And John's wife accuses her father very directly, blaming him for ignoring the present in favor of a dead past:

But ye'd filled that fool of mine with your dirty ravings of a dead past. Dead . . . dead . . . that past. And now ye've added another little body to yer tally. (78)

Eventually, after the boy's body is found in the sea, John realizes his guilt. He decides to return home to his wife, who really loves him and who has waited for him all that time in order to try to start a new beginning for a shared relationship--a relationship that in the past has always been fraudulent. John goes home, the only place where there is any hope and love waiting for him, the only place where he can create a shared relationship.

John's wife is one of many strong-minded female characters Cook has portrayed. Alone at home, neglected by both her father who wants to forget her and her husband who simply avoids her, she manages to survive. She accepts the present for what it is, and has the ability, in contrast to both her father and her husband, to accept the fact that the past is dead and that there is no point clinging to it. As daughter, she wants her father to change, to return home where she will look after him. However, she does realize that this will never happen. And so she concentrates on saving her husband from becoming another Pete. Eventually her strong determination, with the aid of some unfortunate outside circumstances, makes her mission successful. Her husband does return home, and she will have, at long last, a



family. Once John is willing to communicate mutually with his wife, he is able to receive the love and the hope that she can give him and to survive in spite of her father.

Like John's wife, the two women in *The Fisherman's Revenge* also try to adapt to a society in which women are looked on unfavorably by the men, as well as to communicate mutually with the men they love. And although these women succeed in adapting to the norms of the society in which they live, this ability results, at times, in the inability to create a shared relationship with their spouses.

The merchant's wife, for example, spends most of her time away from her husband, who explains that

my wife, may she rot in hell; spends her winters in Florida, her summers in Ontario, with her fat sisters . . . she's there now . . . I hope . . . and then she comes home for two weeks in the fall to raid my bank account. (8)

When the wife does come back home, for a while, the relationship between husband and wife develops in quite a peculiar manner. The wife, another one of Cook's nameless females, initially enters her house as her husband, the merchant, complains about her "money mania" (16). The stage directions at this specific moment present the reader with an angry wife who "suddenly roars like a wounded bull and charges" (16) in order to stalk her husband. And so in spite of the fact that in her first appearance in the play the wife does not say much, her presence leaves no doubt about the hierarchy in the family. She does not need words to demonstrate her superiority--violence is even more

convincing.

This violence, however, is the life force behind the relationship between the merchant and his wife; it is the only means of mutual communication they both understand. They are not able to communicate mutually in any other way, and both, on the whole, seem to enjoy it. In the inevitable happy end of this play--after all this is a children's play with a moral at its end--the tension between husband and wife seems to ease down for a while. They are reunited in a happy and shared relationship which is based, however, on violence:

(Merchant struggles to pick Wife up and swing her onto his shoulders. After some difficulty, he succeeds and, staggering, moves towards Friend and Colleen, turning back once to speak). (80)

His wife answers by beating his sides with her heels, calling "Come on now, giddyup" (80). The relationship that began with physical violence has continued in the same manner.

But it is exactly this violence that makes the relationship a shared one for both the merchant and his wife. And the merchant--although he does grumble when his wife is away--is having the best time of his life when she is around, when they can actually quarrel and fight with each other. They are communicating mutually on quite a different level from what we are used to, but their shared relationship is far from being fraudulent. And it succeeds simply because the wife is able to adapt to the society she lives in, and to react to the men as if she were one of them.

While the relationship between the merchant and his wife is, at times, portrayed in a light-hearted manner, the anticipated marriage between Colleen and the friend--the Fisherman's friend who comes for a holiday visit from Toronto--is on quite a different level. At this time one is not confronted with the middle-aged merchant or his wife, but rather with two young people who are about to become man and wife. But this younger and less experienced couple might very well end up like the merchant and his wife, in a shared relationship that will be based only on violence. And this is the exact way in which their relationship has began: "Colleen gave me my first kiss . . . she smacked me face afterwards mind . . ." (9). This first kiss was probably long ago; however, it could well have been symptomatic.

Colleen, the fisherman's daughter who loves her father dearly, argues that caring for her father is more important than finding a husband for herself: "There will be a time for the younger men, and the holding in arms, and the long nights of love" (7). And she remains devoted to her father, because, as she says, "we must all be true to what we are" (7). Because Colleen's values seem to differ from the values of the society she lives in, she is not so much interested in marriage. Rather, she defies the conventions of the society. Colleen is indeed willing to give and care, but she wants to give to and take care of her father. She wants to help her father to live comfortably in his old age. But the norms of society, as represented by her father, demand that she marry, and shift her love towards her husband.

Colleen's father, the lonely fisherman who indeed yearns for a shared relationship, wants his daughter to get married, and he knows exactly to whom--to his good friend. The fisherman believes that a shared relationship is not the one achieved between father and daughter, but rather the one between man and wife. And so Colleen cannot escape the male-dominated society whose members try to dictate how she should behave. And like her father, the friend also tries to shape Colleen's life without even finding if his ideas are shared by the woman he wants to marry. Nobody ever asks for Colleen's opinions.

Although Colleen might eventually marry the friend in order to survive in the male-oriented society in which she lives, she will no doubt be on her guard throughout. Colleen might indeed end up as a wife. However, one wonders what kind of a wife she will actually be. Obviously, with the friend, she found her match--someone who is ready to stand up to her. But will she give him happiness? Will they be able to embark on a shared relationship? These are questions that Cook avoids answering--after all this is a children's play and not one of Cook's epics. And although there is not much point in predicting the future, one might speculate about Colleen's marriage. On the one hand, Colleen--whose courage and outspoken character suggest that she could adapt very well--might find it rather difficult to create a shared relationship with her husband. On the other hand, the love and care Colleen shows towards her father suggest that she is indeed capable of a shared relationship, and that in the future she might yet give love and hope to the man she will

marry.

While Colleen has no reservations about caring for her father, even to the extent of neglecting her own life in the process, Mary, in *Jacob's Wake*, cannot stand her old father, and would like to see him committed to a mental institution. Mary is quite different from the other women one encounters in Cook's plays. She is not married, and although within the society Cook portrays women do not usually work outside the home, Mary must do so. She is a teacher, and although good by her own standards, she knows others see her as old-fashioned: "I survive here because I'm something of an institution, I suppose. And no one has the nerve to fire me" (235). But she definitely does value her experience in teaching far above any university degree which she, obviously, does not have: "Degrees don't necessarily make good teachers, Rose. Experience is the only teacher. Experience, common sense and a few good old-fashioned virtues" (216).

It is indeed experience and common sense that have enabled Mary to survive in a society which despises her. No one respects Mary. Her brother Winston enjoys seeing her embarrassed whenever he tells a dirty joke; not one of her nephews seems to care about her at all; her father knows that she despises him; and even Rosie, her sister-in-law, cannot respect a daughter who will not care for her father. Among all these people Mary has to survive, to live with them and to be harassed by their verbal and non-verbal actions which she simply despises.

In order to survive, Mary, at one point in the past, tried to establish a kind of a shared relationship with Wayne, whom she thought the wisest among her three nephews. She hoped that eventually Wayne would be able to leave the house for a better future and maybe even take her with him. And indeed when Wayne, who is about to become a minister in Newfoundland's government, comes home for the Easter gathering, one at once senses the fondness his aunt has for him (222). She still tries to protect her Wayne from the rest of the family, protecting herself as well in the process.

Although Mary is very happy that Wayne managed to come to the family gathering, she at once senses the reason for his presence. Wayne did not come just for a quiet family evening. Rather, he is scheming with his brother Alonzo, and Mary realizes that as Alonzo, and not "her" Wayne, is the brightest of the children, Wayne is about to be tricked. And indeed Alonzo agrees to forge his father's signature so that Elijah Blackburn, his grandfather, will be committed, but only when Wayne promises him a contract that will obviously benefit Alonzo's business.

Without knowing the particulars of the deed, Mary senses the disaster which inevitably arrives. Alonzo is not willing to trust his brother's word, and in the fierce argument which develops, their father gets hold of the document with his forged signature (244). The plan has failed. But at this exact moment much more has failed as well. Mary's hopes have been shattered--her wish for a better future diminishes into thin

air. Suddenly Mary realizes the false nature of her relationship with Wayne. He feels nothing for her, and simply dismisses her, forever: "Will you stop nagging me" (245). Her only hope of communicating mutually with somebody and eventually fleeing her house and family will not materialize. Mary has no one to go to, or even to talk to.

Although one pities Mary for the way the Blackburn men treat her, Mary herself encourages some of this attitude. She confronts these men continually; she makes it clear that she despises them; and above all she avoids their way of life. This is her mechanism of survival. Otherwise, Mary would have perished. And so even though Mary now realizes that Wayne is no different from his father and brothers, she will go on living her own life, suffering, but preserving her dignity. She is not capable of either giving or receiving love. Mary, like most of the male characters in Cook's plays, is unable to establish a shared relationship with anyone. But unlike the men, she very consciously tries.

Rosie, Mary's sister-in-law, also survives in this male household. However, she uses a completely contrasting mechanism to the one Mary has used. While Mary is fighting with the men, Rosie tends them; while Mary is always miserable, Rosie tries to remain happy. These major differences between the two women stem from the fact that one is a wife and a mother and believes in the importance of shared relationships within the family unit, while the other is, above all, thinking about her own interests.

While Mary is unable to care for her father and wishes him out of the house, Rosie is the one who does all the caring. And she has five men to look after: her father-in-law, her husband, and her three children, whenever they come home. Each of these men needs her care and love, which she is happy to deliver. Thus, Rosie is able to keep at least part of her family as a close and warm unit. Mary cannot understand Rosie's submissiveness to the men:

Don't worry about me, Rose. I can look after myself. It's you I feel sorry for, dear. Plodding along after all these years with a man who's an expert at two things. Making moonshine and cheating the Welfare. (225)

Rosie, however, sees things in quite a different light:

'Tis not as bad as dat, Mary. I wishes sometimes ye wouldn't fight so much . . . An' I'm luckier dan me mother and dey whose men nivar spent a minute at home, traipsin' off to the Labrador or Toronto or such. I allus reckoned it wor his life to do what he would wit', providing dey was a bit of food in the house and wood fer the stove . . . (225)

Rosie is happy with what she has. She has no higher aspirations than to lead a happy life and to try and give happiness to the other members of her family. And in contrast with the wife in *Dance*, Rosie will not criticize her husband. On the contrary, Rosie will continue to be there for Winston whenever he needs her. Winston obviously appreciates Rosie for exactly these qualities: "That's my Rosie. Fat and comfortable and mindin' her own business. Aye, and warm on a cold night too" (225).

However, should one not condemn Rosie for becoming subservient to the men in her household, to men who are always demanding something? Although on the surface it might seem that



Rosie is nothing more than the obedient wife, in effect there is much more to her character than meets the eye. In many of Cook's plays no shared relationship is ever achieved between husband and wife. The men simply do not have the time or the will to communicate mutually. Most of them are at sea for long periods of time, away from their wives. And those who are not fishing or hunting, like Winston, still do not spend their free time with their families. Rosie, however, cannot be bothered by the fact that her husband is away from home. She takes it for granted and manages to arrange her life accordingly. And her life is centred around her family. This is why she makes sure that twice a year the boys come home, and this is why she never really fights with them. This is how she manages to survive. Fighting will achieve nothing for Rosie, it will only result in a split in the family, as the boys and Mary clearly suggest.

However, as this saga reaches its climactic end, when the family is about to fall apart, Rosie once more consoles Winston with most tender feelings:

WINSTON. Rosie, me duck. Rosie. Come here. Come here, maid. Has turned out to be a good day after all, one way or another. An' I suppose we shouldn't complain too much, eh? Life's bin as good as it could've bin to the likes o'we, I suppose.

ROSIE. I nivr complained, Winston.

WINSTON. I knows, maid. And they was times I suppose you should've done. Does ye mind the time we wor desperate? I wor visiting your folks and we hadn't had it for a week or more.

ROSIE. Ye ould Divil. (245)

Not many couples are able to share such a moment in the Cook canon. And it is Rosie whom we must admire for being able to achieve this unique and tender moment. Truly one can argue that

Rosie belittled herself and became a mere servant to the men in her household. However, Rosie managed to keep her husband with her, and they are happy together. No other woman in Cook's plays can claim such a success.

By giving both love and hope to her husband and children, Rosie became the one character whom the Blackburn men could always approach in times of trouble. Other males in Cook's plays also try to approach their women for some help and consolation, but with much less success. Maybe the reason for Rosie's success is that she wanted to keep the family together above everything else. Other women, for whom the family cluster was less important, failed where Rosie succeeded.

Like Rosie, Therese, in the short monologue *Therese's Creed*,<sup>89</sup> acknowledges the significance of the family cluster for her ability to survive. However, Therese's job is much more difficult than Rosie's. Since the death of her husband, Therese has to look after her eight children all by herself, with very little money. And although some of the children have already left home, the four young ones keep Therese very busy.

Therese is a product of the male-dominated society Cook portrays--a society in which male and female roles are very clearly defined. The men go to fish at sea; the women stay home and work around the house. And these roles are known to every girl, as Therese explains:

We all knew what we had to be the time we was nine or ten. Aye. I was gitting ready to leave school dat year . . . No. We 'ad no choice, none at all. (p. 86)

Nor was there any time to think: "work afore school, work after in the house, then helping wi' the fish or about the gardens" (p. 86). It is a cruel world to grow in, a world which was and still is full with traps for the women (p. 89).

One of these traps is the lack of mutual communication. In a society in which the men are spending most of their time away from their families, enclosed in their own private world, the chances for a shared relationship are already quite dim. And Therese acknowledges the fact:

'Tis funny. Ye lives wi' a person all yer life, and ye nivir knows'n. An' if dats true, whats the point of it at all. Is we all to be strangers. 'Tis too cruel to be borned jest fer dat. (p. 99)

But in spite of the fact that Therese realizes that she, like many other women in Cook's plays, is suffering from a lack of a shared relationship with her husband, this realization comes only in retrospect. It comes when her husband is no longer there. Because when Pat was alive "we nivir talked o'things like dat. We was both too shy I 'llows" (p. 99).

The wish to create a shared relationship with her husband led Therese, in contrast to other females in the Cook canon, to go at times to sea with her husband "helping him haul the traps" (p. 92). But even this attempt to get closer to her husband and maybe try to understand why "he wor never happier den when he wor on the water" (p. 92) never generated the shared relationship Therese obviously hoped for. Pat never cared "as long as I [Therese] kept me place and did as I wor told" (p. 92).

Therese's place was and still is the kitchen, which has become the centre of her life--the most meaningful place for her to stay. And it is indeed from her kitchen that she delivers her entire monologue, a monologue that illustrates how the very realistic Therese was always able to survive. Her secret is revealed with one look at her kitchen. It includes some electrical equipment that makes the daily chores easier. By accepting the benefits of the changing times and by adapting to the present--instead of dreaming about a past that will never return--Therese is able to survive. She does so not so much through mutual communication, but rather because she realizes that "deys no pint in grieving . . . none at all" (p. 101), and because she has her family to look after. And her family, she tells us time and again, is the most important possession she has.

Like many of the other female characters that Cook portrays, Therese is able to survive in a society which is, generally speaking, hostile to women. The various female characters one encounters in Cook's plays use different methods to enable them to survive in the male-dominated society. But they almost all share the ability to give love, hope, and faith to the men they love. And if the men are willing to accept the love, hope, and faith the women offer them, there is probably yet a chance that the gloomy world which Cook portrays in his plays might be saved. However, if the men refuse to accept the love that is offered to them as a basis for creating a shared relationship, then there is no doubt that by themselves the women will not be

able to save the society.

## CONCLUSION

In the male-dominated society which Michael Cook depicts in his plays, mutual communication scarcely exists. Almost every male character in Cook's plays goes through a similar process on his usually unsuccessful road to mutual communication. This process always begins with a denial of the importance of shared relationships intertwined with the subconscious yearning for these relationships. The attempts which then follow to achieve any kind of a shared relationship usually fail. The way in which these characters cope with the tension between the yearning for the relationships, on the one hand, and the inability to achieve them, on the other, is the centre of Cook's plays. Some of these males succeed in coping with this tension, while others fail. By exploring the various dimensions of the process these characters go through, it is possible to realize how the playwright sees the future of the society in which he lives.

All of the male characters in Cook's plays initially deny the importance of shared relationships. But there are various models of yearning for relationships which these males employ. Some, like Quiller, yearn for a woman to talk to and to make love to. Others, like Tilm or Pete in *Dance*, who replace mutual communication with attempted control over other human beings and over nature, yearn to be sole rulers of the universe each has created for himself, while Gayden secretly yearns for law and order, this time confusing submission with shared relationships.

Neither the subconscious yearnings for power or law and order nor the yearnings for achieving shared relationships are fulfilled. And the ways in which the various male characters fail to achieve what they long for are a direct offspring of what they yearn for. Quiller, for example, wants to make love to almost any woman who might be willing. Thus, he substitutes his sexual desires for the real essence of a shared relationship--for the will to sacrifice and give of one's self to another human being. The Blackburn boys in *Jacob's Wake* fail because deceit lies at the centre of everything they do, while Gayden fails to achieve any lasting relationship because his restless nature prevents him from remaining in one place. And Tiln is also unable to create a shared relationship because he is not willing to give anything to Fern, the man he saved from death at sea.

But while Tiln, in spite of himself, did save a man from drowning, Pete is unwilling to save a drowning boy. In his attempts to placate the sea, Pete is ready to sacrifice a human life for what he perceives to be a shared relationship. But as the sea, symbolically, does not accept Pete's sacrifice, the playwright might be suggesting here that it is impossible to create a shared relationship with the sea.

The yearning for shared relationships and the inability to achieve them creates great tensions for all these male characters. The way in which these males cope with this tension is usually dependent on external interference. And the result of

the communication attempts in Cook's plays relies deeply on how the males are able to interact with these interferences, especially with the women who penetrate into their own enclosed worlds, offering the opportunity for a shared relationship. Some of the men manage, eventually, to succeed, while others fail. And the way to success lies usually with acknowledging what it is they want to achieve, or rather what is missing when shared relationships are not created. John in *Dance*, for example, will probably succeed in achieving a shared relationship with his wife. But he is able to realize that he is ruled by Pete, his father-in-law, only as a result of the death of a boy he could have saved. Tilm also realizes the importance of shared relationships when his only companion dies. And Quiller is still searching for a way which might enable him to approach a woman. Other characters, like Brad in *Jacob's Wake*, who walked into a blizzard in what is probably an attempt to commit suicide, let nature decide their fate, thus acknowledging their own inability to achieve a shared relationship. And Gayden is crushed by his own subconscious pursuit of law and order.

But only a few of these male characters actually realize that the only way to achieve a shared relationship is by accepting the love, hope, and faith their women offer them. Rosie in *Jacob's Wake*, Marie in *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust*, and the wife in *Dance*, all long for a shared relationship with their men. And with their ability to survive within a male-dominated society, these women are indeed capable of saving the society in which they live from complete destruction. But



they are not able to do it by themselves. They need the men to help them.

Although Cook has said time and again that he sees himself as a chronicler of a doomed society, the women he has created suggest otherwise. And if the Merchant in *The Fisherman's Revenge*, Uncle John, or even Tiln--the latter without the help of a woman--can overcome the Petes and the Quillers of their world, Cook's society might yet be saved. Otherwise, its doom seems to be sealed.

## APPENDIX I: MICHAEL COOK--BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Michael Cook was born on February 14, 1933, in London, England, of Anglo-Irish Catholic parents. He spent twelve years in the army, serving in Korea, Japan, Malaya, Singapore, and Europe. Although his official army job was chief clerk, Michael Cook devoted most of his military service to troop entertainment. He acted, wrote, and performed in many plays. Cook also started writing radio plays at this time.

When Cook left the army in 1961 he worked as a farmer in England. After graduating from a teacher training course at Nottingham University's College of Education, he began teaching, but after three months he decided to quit the job, leave his wife and eight children, and leave England. He came to Newfoundland in 1966, and since that time regards Canada as his home.

Since arriving in Canada Cook has worked as an actor, a director--he founded the St. John's Summer Festival of the Arts--and a university teacher. He also began writing theatre reviews, columns for various newspapers and magazines, and continued writing radio plays. Michael Cook's first major stage play, *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust*, received major productions in Ottawa and Toronto in 1972 and 1974 respectively. That was followed by *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*, in 1973. Cook wrote his third major play, *Jacob's Wake*, in 1975, a commission from Festival Lennoxville, where it was premiered.

With these three plays--*Colour*, *Dance*, and *Jacob's Wake*--Cook's reputation as a playwright has been established. However, from 1975, Cook went very rapidly from being a promising new writer to a nearly forgotten one. Only one more major work followed, *The Gayden Chronicles*, and since 1976 one is still waiting for Cook's new major play. Meanwhile, he has written several very engaging one-act plays, as well as an impressive number of radio plays. The latter, by their very nature, have received little if any critical attention.

## APPENDIX II: THE STAGE PLAYS OF MICHAEL COOK

### A. The Plays in Chronological Order

1. *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust*--1971.
2. *Tiln*--1972.
3. *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*--1973.
4. *Jacob's Wake*--1974.
5. *Quiller*--1975.
6. *The Fisherman's Revenge*--1976.
7. *The Gayden Chronicles*--1976.
8. *Not as a Dream*--1976.
9. *On the Rim of the Curve*--1977.
10. *Therese's Creed*--1977.
11. *The Apocalypse Sonata*--1980.
12. *The End of the Road*--1981.
13. *Of the Heart's Cold*--1982.
14. *The Painful Education of Patrick Brown*--1983.

## B. Performance Checklist

### *The Apocalypse Sonata*

1. Globe Theatre, Regina. 1980.

Not published.

### *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust*

1. The Open Group, St. John's. 1971 and/or 1972. Also performed by the Open Group at the Dominion Drama Festival. 1971.
2. Neptune Theatre, Halifax. 1972. This production opened in October 1972 at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa.
3. St. Lawrence Centre, Toronto. February 12-March 9, 1974.

### *The End of the Road*

1. Was planned to be produced in 1981.

Not published.

### *The Fisherman's Revenge*

1. Newfoundland Travelling Theatre Company, Trinity Bay. October 1-December 15, 1976.

### *The Gayden Chronicles*

1. Commissioned for Festival Lennoxville. 1976. Workshopped 1975, but never produced.
2. Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights' Conference, Waterford, Connecticut, USA. 1978.
3. The Cast Theatre, Hollywood, California, USA. 1980.
4. Globe Theatre, Regina. January 29-February 15, 1981.

*The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*

1. The Open Group at the Arts and Culture Centre, St. John's. March 14, 1973.
2. Saidye Bronfman Centre, Montreal. April 27-May 19, 1974.
3. Theatre New Brunswick, Fredericton. October 21-November 9, 1974.
4. Theatre Three, Edmonton. March 12-23, 1975.
5. Globe Theatre, Regina. November 14-December 4, 1977.

*Jacob's Wake*

1. The Open Group, St. John's Arts and Culture Centre. July 22, 1974.
2. Festival Lennoxville. July 11-August 29, 1975.
3. Performance Circle, Fox Island. 1980
4. National Arts Centre, Ottawa. November 27-December 13, 1986.

*Not as a Dream*

1. Dalhousie University, Halifax. 1976.  
Not published.

*On the Rim of the Curve*

1. Avion Players, Gander. 1977. Subsequently performed by the Avion Players at the Newfoundland Drama Festival. 1977.

*Of the Heart's Cold*

1. Workshop production in Globe Theatre, Regina. 1982.  
Not published.

*The Painful Education of Patrick Brown*

1. A production was planned in 1983 by Rising Tide, but it did not take place.  
Not published.

*Quiller*

1. Breakwater Theatre Company, St. John's. 1975
2. Memorial University, St. John's. April 1975.
3. Giant's Head Theatre, Summerland, B.C. June-July 1976;  
March-April 1977.
4. Centaur Theatre, Montreal. March 24-April 17, 1977. [With  
*Therese's Creed*].
5. City Stage, Vancouver. October 5-22, 1977.

*Therese's Creed*

1. Centaur Theatre, Montreal. March 24-April 17, 1977. [With  
*Quiller*].
2. Open Circle Theatre, Winnipeg. 1979.
3. Rising Tide Theatre, Newfoundland. March-May 1979; 1981;  
1982.
4. There have been productions in Victoria and Ottawa, but I  
have no further details.

*Til n*

1. CBC Radio. August 29, 1971.
2. York University, Toronto. 1972.
3. St. John's Memorial University. 1975.
4. The Mummies' Troupe of Newfoundland. April 13 - 17 and/or  
May 1981.

## NOTES

### Preface

1. For a brief biography of Michael Cook, see Appendix I. For more detailed information see, for example, Don Rubin, "Biographical Checklist: Michael Cook," Canadian Theatre Review, No. 16 (Fall 1977), pp. 26-31.
2. Judith Lynne Hanna defines a shared relationship as "the process of an individual or group intentionally sending a message to someone who infers a shared meaning and responds" (Hanna, Dance, Sex and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988], p. 5).
3. For a complete list of Cook's stage plays see Appendix II. In this thesis I will focus on those stage plays that are available in print. Cook's many radio plays will not be discussed.

### Introduction

4. Patrick Treacher, "Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance. A review," St. John's Evening Telegram, April 5, 1973, p. 4.
5. Ibid.
6. The scope of this thesis does not allow for a very detailed analysis of the scholarly and popular works that relate to Cook's plays. Thus, I will only point out several general



trends that can be traced while analyzing this substantial amount of work. It might be worthwhile to conduct a thorough study of the production reviews, a study that will no doubt reveal a lot about the state of theatre reviewing in the Canadian press.

7. Ray Conlogue, "A nostalgic wallow in days of sailing ships," The Globe and Mail, May 21, 1982, no page number. A copy of this review exists in the "Michael Cook Papers," University of Calgary Library, Special Collection/Archives. Data from the University of Calgary Archives (UCA) is, at times, incomplete.
8. Gina Mallet, "The Gayden Chronicles defies unravelling," Toronto Star, May 21, 1982, p. D3.
9. Mark Czarnecki, "Ravaged by high winds," Maclean's, 95, No. 22 (May 31, 1982), 61.
10. Richard Allen, "Play one cheer short," Swift Current Sun, February 15, 1981 (UCA).
11. A. Schroeder, "Review of Michael Cook's THE GAYDEN CHRONICLES," probably CBC Radio, February 5, 1981 (UCA).
12. Jack Kapica, "A woeful Jacob's Wake runs Lennoxville aground," The Montreal Gazette (UCA).
13. Audrey M. Ashley, "New play a ludicrous cop-out," The Citizen (Ottawa), July 28, 1975, p. 50.

14. Ray Conlogue, "*Jacob's Wake* set in a wild funeral wilderness. A chilling dance of death," The Globe and Mail, December 11, 1986, p. A19.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Barbara Crook, "Ambitious production of saga leaves confusion in its wake," The Ottawa Citizen, November 28, 1986, p. F14. Although there might have been other factors that affected this change of opinion about *Jacob's Wake*, the major reason for this change seems to be the unique production.
19. I will use Therese spelled with an E. Although Theresa spelled with an A can be found in the title of the 1977 edition of the play (Three Plays, Portugal Cove, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books), in the text itself Therese is used throughout.
20. Myron Galloway, "Cook's double may be top stage winner to date," The Montreal Gazette, p. D8 (UCA). This seems to be another case in which the director has gone "much further than the author's suggestion" (Treacher, p. 4). Once more we find commentary on the production itself when it seems to add a further dimension to the script.
21. Julia Maskoulis, "Centaur's two new plays explore universal

problems," The Montreal Gazette, March 25, 1977, p. 29.

22. There seems to be an inconsistency about how this title is spelled. *Sound Bone* appears both as two separate words and as one word--*Soundbone*. When the text was published for the first time, in Canadian Theatre Review (No. 1, Winter 1974), *Sound Bone* was used. And Cook himself, in an introduction in this same issue, uses the two words. Later on, when the play was published in a book (Michael Cook, Three Plays [Portugal Cove: Newfoundland: Breakwater Books, 1977]), the title was changed to *Soundbone*. In this thesis I will stick to the original *Sound Bone*, unless in a direct quotation.
23. Al Pittman, "Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance. A review," St. John's Evening Telegram, April, 1973 (UCA).
24. Pat Lees, "Color the Flesh. Review," CBC Afternoon Metro, (probably Halifax), November 17, 1972 (UCA).
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. See pp. 8-9.
28. Gina Mallet, "Movers & Shakers. Canadian Playwrights: In Demand & Broadway Bound," Chatelaine, October 1980, pp. 42-44; 110-113.
29. Brian Parker, "Is There a Canadian Drama?" in The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture, ed. David

Staines (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 152-187.

30. John Ripley, "Drama and Theatre," Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, 2nd ed., ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), III, 212-232.
31. Richard Plant, "A Stage of Our Own: Canadians now recognize that indigenous drama reflects a deeply rooted human need. The result: more and better plays," Books in Canada, 9, No. 4 (April 1980), 5-7.
32. Mira Friedlander, "The new generation of Canadian playwrights," Performing Arts in Canada, XX, No. 3 (November 1983), 51-53.
33. It seems that for a long time there was absolutely no agreement among those who write on Canadian drama regarding who the leading playwrights in the country are. Thus, many playwrights who are mentioned in the works of some scholars are not mentioned by others. However, there seems to be some kind of a consensus among Richard Plant (The Penguin Book of Modern Canadian Drama [Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1984]), Richard Perkyns (Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre [Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984]), and Jerry Wasserman (Modern Canadian Plays [Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1986]), each of whom edited, in the last five years, an anthology of Canadian drama. According to these anthologies it seems

that, because they appear in two or three anthologies, George Ryga, James Reaney, Sharon Pollock, George F. Walker, David French, and Michael Cook are considered to be the more significant English-Canadian playwrights of our age.

34. Terry Goldie, "Troupes of St. John's stand divided," The Globe and Mail, November 28, 1983, p. SC 19.
35. Sandra Rabinovitch, "Writing the Airwaves," Radio Guide, 7, No.8 (August 1987), 2-4.
36. In spite of the fact that all these six scholars write after 1976, when Cook's fame was already established, they still do not mention him.
37. Jerry Wasserman, "Towards the Definitive Anthology," Canadian Theatre Review, No. 34 (Spring 1982), p. 178.
38. Martin Fishman, "Michael Cook: A Playwright In His Own Right," Canadian Drama, 2, No.2 (Fall 1976), 181-187.
39. The most substantial article is Brian Parker's "On the Edge: *Michael Cook's Newfoundland Trilogy*," (Canadian Literature, No. 85 [1980], pp. 22-41). No books have been written on Cook. Malcolm Page is writing now (1989) a book that will be published in the future by Simon & Pierre.
40. Only three of the bibliographical entries about Cook are long and contain quite a thorough analysis of some of his works. These are the entries written by Constance Brissenden in Contemporary Dramatists (Byfleet, Surrey: Macmillan,

1982), Chris Johnson in Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 53, Canadian Writers Since 1960, First Series, (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1986), and Robert Wallace in Profiles in Canadian Literature (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1982)--all reference books that provide larger space to each playwright.

41. Examples for such entries, in which only basic biographical information and a list of plays could be found, are the entries of Jane Cunningham in the Directory of Canadian Plays and Playwrights (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1981), and Patrick O'Flaherty in The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature. The latter summarizes his entry in the following manner:

Cook's plays celebrate the elemental and instinctive; they are harangues--assaults upon the audience's sense of decorum, and even upon intellect.

(O'Flaherty, "Cook, Michael," The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, ed. William Toye [Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983], p. 143.)

42. Malcolm Page, "MICHAEL COOK," The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre and Drama, forthcoming from Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989.
43. W. J. Keith, Canadian Literature in English (London: Longman, 1985), p. 193.
44. O'Flaherty, p. 143.

45. The longest book review that exists is by Helen Porter ("Books," St. John's Evening Telegram, October 22, 1977 [UCA]), who deals within this review with three of Cook's plays as well as with a book by another Newfoundland poet. Her review, however, for the first and only time among book reviews, provides more than a mere description of the plot and a general reference to outside influences. Porter uses this review to analyze Cook's work in general, focusing on the progress of his artistic output since his arrival in Newfoundland.
46. Two of these reviews--by David Carnegie ("Plays East, Plays West," Matrix, [Summer 1977], pp. 16-17) and by Ann P. Messenger ("The Long and the Short of It," Canadian Literature, No. 76 [1978], pp. 101-104)--review several other plays as well.
47. As *The Fisherman's Revenge* is a children's play, it was reviewed by Louise Griffith in a publication dedicated to this genre--"Cook, Michael. *The Fisherman's Revenge*," CM: Canadian Materials for Schools and Libraries, 14, No. 4 (July 1986), 192-193.
48. Renate Usmiani, "Cook, Michael. *Jacob's Wake*," Canadian Book Review Annual: 1976 (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Ltd., 1977), p. 207. Wasserman maintains that, at least until 1981, *Jacob's Wake* was "virtually unread as a playtext" (Wasserman, "Towards the Definitive Anthology," p. 178).

49. Alexander Leggatt, "Drama," University of Toronto Quarterly, No. 46 (Summer 1977), p. 388. Ronald Bryden, who reviews the three anthologies of Canadian plays, maintains that

Wasserman and Perkyns both choose plays, *Jacob's Wake* and *The Head Guts and Soundbone Dance*, by Michael Cook, an Irishman seized by the vanishing life of Newfoundland's fishermen as Synge was by that of the Aran islanders. (Essays in Theatre, 5, No. 1 [November 1986], 83)

Later on he argues that Cook is "the playwright with the greatest gift of singing language, even when it sings flat" (Bryden, p. 83).

50. See note 40.

51. See note 45.

52. Wick Collins, "A false view of Newfoundland," St. John's Evening Telegram, May 11, 1974, p. 7.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Perkyns might be hinting at an explanation for this negative look at Cook's work when he argues that one of the reasons for the unpopularity of *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance* in Newfoundland is that "it did not match the romantic concept of the fishing life of Newfoundland" (Perkyns, "*The Head, Guts and Soundbone Dance*. An Introduction," Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre 1934-1984 [Toronto: Irwin, 1984], p. 448). However, he maintains that, as is the case with most of Cook's plays, *Dance*



should not be interpreted in the narrower sense of its location or historical background, but as a parable that illustrates profound truths about society and civilization at any stage of our existence. (p. 448)

This argument is similar to that of several theatre reviewers--namely Maskoulis (see note 21) and Pittman (see note 23).

56. Brian Parker, "On the Edge: *Michael Cook's Newfoundland Trilogy*," Canadian Literature, No. 85 (1980), pp. 23-24.

57. Collins, p. 7. For example, Porter maintains that Therese, in *Therese's Creed*, is

first, last and always a human being, warm-blooded, warm-hearted, troubled and worried (for very good reasons) but somehow undaunted and positive through it all . . . Therese . . . is one of the best female characters I've come across in a play (Newfoundland or otherwise) for several years.

Therese, Porter argues, is quite different from the other females in Cook's plays, and especially from "the lone female character [in *Dance* who], as is often the case in Michael Cook's plays, comes off very badly."

58. Collins, p. 7.

59. Collins is also bothered by the character of Brad, the priest, in *Jacob's Wake*. Collins argues that "the clergyman in the family . . . is respected by his father, his mother, his brothers and sisters" (p. 7). But Brad is not a regular clergyman. He fled to religion as an escape from his family, and later on, tries to come back to his family, after failing in the religious life as well. This is why he is not

respected by his brothers and parents.

60. Perkyms, p. 447. The female characters in Cook's plays provide an example of how one can survive in Newfoundland. And survival is yet another important theme in these plays. Parker, in his analysis of Cook's Newfoundland trilogy, focuses on what Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood

have argued is the central Canadian literary theme: confrontation with a relentlessly hostile environment which undermines all confidence in human institutions and even in identity itself. (p. 23)

61. Although there is a substantial amount of writing by Michael Cook, most scholars base their argument only on the piece he wrote for Stage Voices (Toronto: Doubleday, 1978) and the interview in The Work (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1982).

62. Michael Cook, in Stage Voices: Twelve Canadian Playwrights Talk about Their Lives and Work, ed. Geraldine Anthony (Toronto: Doubleday, 1978), p. 213.

63. Michael Cook, Introduction to "*Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*," Canadian Theatre Review, No. 1 (Winter 1974), p. 74.

64. Ibid., p. 75.

65. However, when Cook does talk about his plays, there is no reason to doubt his sincerity. In all his writing Cook seems to be honest both about his life and his art. Thus it is not strange that many scholars indeed begin their analysis of Cook's plays with the playwright's own words.

66. Cook, Introduction to "*Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*," p. 75.
67. Ibid., p. 76.
68. Robert Wallace, "Michael Cook," in The Work: Conversations with English-Canadian Playwrights, ed. Robert Wallace and Cynthia Zimmerman (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1982), pp. 158-160. In other interviews Cook is less specific regarding his artistry. Only Albert-Reiner Glaap is able, at times, to draw out some further responses about the plays, especially about the Biblical motifs in *Jacob's Wake* ("Interview with Michael Cook in Stratford, Ontario," for publication in Dusseldorf, West Germany in a book on Canadian drama edited by Glaap, 1989, p. 8).
69. Wallace, p. 157.
70. Cook, Stage Voices, p. 228.

#### Chapter I

71. Eugene L. Hartley, "Communication," A Dictionary of the Social Sciences, ed. Julius Gould and William L. Kolb (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 111.
72. Jurgen Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), p. 1.
73. Edward Sapir, "Communication," Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, ed. Edwin R. A. Seligman (New York: Macmillan,

1930), p. 78.

74. Michael Cook, "Tiln," Tiln & Other Plays (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1976), pp. 7-43. All subsequent references to this play will be cited in the text.
75. Michael Cook, "Quiller," Tiln & Other Plays (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1976), pp. 45-81. All subsequent references to this play will be cited in the text.
76. Michael Cook, "The Head Guts and Soundbone Dance," Three Plays (Portugal Cove, Newfoundland: Breakwater, 1977), pp. 51-82. All subsequent references to this play will be cited in the text.
77. This kind of power is also exercised by Pete over his retarded son, Absalom. And although the reason for Absalom's mental state is unknown, it might have to do with the fact that in his teens Absalom was sent back by his father to collect more wood when it was "fifteen below and blowing and coming on dark" (57). Now it is obvious that Absalom suffers from his father's dominance to the extent that the son will never be able to look directly at his father's eyes (76). Absalom is one more victim of Pete. The father has virtually destroyed his son's independence.
78. Michael Cook, The Fisherman's Revenge (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1984). All subsequent references to this play will be cited in the text. Although set in Newfoundland, this is by far Cook's most universal play, which according to the

playwright ("Author's Notes," prefacing *The Fisherman's Revenge*), should be changed--in some of its details--when it is performed outside Newfoundland.

79. Michael Cook, "Jacob's Wake," Modern Canadian Plays, revised edition, ed. Jerry Wasserman (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1986), pp. 215-247. All subsequent references to this play will be cited in the text.
80. Wasserman, Modern Canadian Plays, p. 214.
81. Michael Cook, The Gayden Chronicles (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1979). All subsequent references to this play will be cited in the text. There are two published versions of this play. The first one appeared in Canadian Theatre Review, No. 13 (Winter 1977), pp. 40-104. I will be referring to the more recent version, which had several major changes from the earlier script. The most important changes concern the role of the Admiral, which is much more prominent in the second version, and the addition of the figure of death. This figure makes Gayden's final acceptance of death understandable, as well as helping the reader comprehend Gayden's complex character and his continual pursuit of law and order of one kind or another. A detailed analysis of the differences between these two versions, and of the alterations made for other productions, can be found in Denyse Lynde's Versions of the Gayden Chronicles, an unpublished paper read at the conference of the Association for Canadian Theatre History, May 1986.

82. Throughout the play there also exists a relationship between Gayden and his shipmates, as well as between Gayden and the bosun Douell, who seems to be Gayden's best friend. But these relationships are not shared. Douell needs and seeks the friendship of Gayden much more than Gayden seeks Douell's. Gayden leaves him behind whenever he feels like it, and asks for friendship, or rather help, only when he is about to be hanged (p. 17). And the only relationship that exists between Gayden and his shipmates is that of a leader and his followers. As a leader Gayden is not an easy man to follow, as Thomas, one of his shipmates finds out (p. 54).
83. *The Gayden Chronicles* is comprised of a series of flashbacks of Gayden's life. Gayden sees them in his last hours as he is about to be hanged for his many crimes including mutiny and murder.

## Chapter II

84. It is necessary to distinguish here between a strong religious faith in God which is part of one's set of beliefs--in which the believer accepts the will of God unquestionably and enjoys what for any believer is a shared relationship--and an attempt to talk with and question God when it is obvious that God is not communicating back. This is not a shared religious relationship but rather a last resort, when no other forms of communication are available.
85. Michael Cook, Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust (Toronto:

Simone & Pierre, 1974). All subsequent references to this play will be cited in the text.

86. Michael Cook, "On the Rim of the Curve," Three Plays (Portugal Cove, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books, 1977), pp. 7-50. All subsequent references to this play will be cited in the text.

87. As Cook never throughly develops the unique and shared relationship the Indians have with their land, I will avoid analyzing this issue as well. However, a complete understanding of this relationship might have provided us with a new form of genuine communication.

88. The Indians of Newfoundland in *Rim* and the settlers in *Colour* discover that there is no possibility to mutually communicate with their conquerors, who in effect seek only their submission. Conquerors come to rule, and when they do try to establish a relationship it can never become a shared one. Although the British in *Rim* do bring "wine to ease communication with the savages" (38), their only aim is to obtain the Indians' furs.

#### Chapter IV

89. Michael Cook, "Theresa's Creed," Three Plays (Portugal Cove, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books, 1977), pp. 83-101. All subsequent references to this play will be cited in the text.

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