

Luke Baldwin's Vow and Morley Callaghan's Vision

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Morley Callaghan's novel *Luke Baldwin's Vow* has a curious critical history. It grew out of a short story Callaghan first published in 1947 in the *Saturday Evening Post*. The story was called "The Little Business Man" and it attracted enough attention to be reprinted in a collection of stories put out by Random House called *Post Stories--1947*. A publisher suggested that Callaghan expand the story into a novel for boys and so, in 1948, *Luke Baldwin's Vow* was published by the John C. Winston Company with illustrations by Stanley Turner. This ended the author's ten-year bout of gladflyism (although the symptoms recurred and not altogether unhappily), and once again Callaghan turned his attention to the writing of fiction. One would expect, then, that this novel would receive some special critical attention, but in fact it completely dropped out of sight until its recent publication by Macmillan of Canada with illustrations by Michael Poulton. Critics have all but ignored it. Professor Conron gives it only passing attention in his study of Callaghan, while Victor Hoar does not even mention it in his. Fraser Sutherland writes that the novel is "negligible" although he acknowledges that it is well done "for what it is".

What happened? Is the novel itself to blame? Callaghan stands by it. In an interview first published in *Saturday Night* Donald Cameron asked about the critics' neglect of the novel and Callaghan answered:

That's because it's supposed to be something that a boy might like. What's involved in the book, of course, is a lot about life, growing older and a little wiser about life and human things, living things. But if you write a book that has a boy in it and a dog in it, you cannot expect any critic to take it seriously...But it was just one of my stories, that's all. I think it's a fine piece of work. I'd print it again and again and again.¹

These contradictory judgments between critics and author pose two essential questions. The first has to do with whether or not the novel has any merit on its own. The second question is whether *Luke Baldwin's Vow* holds any significant place in the Callaghan canon. Dealing with the first question in some ways absorbs the second, but every effort will be made to treat them separately.

A perfunctory examination of *Luke Baldwin's Vow* may lead readers schooled in reading Callaghan's other fiction to dismiss the novel as outside the author's central vision. Ostensibly it was written for boys and so it can be left to them to enjoy. In some ways this reaction can be accounted for simply by the fact that Callaghan has had to adjust his writing style in order to accommodate younger and presumably less sophisticated readers. Callaghan's usual mode is that of irony. His strength as a writer stems from his ability to seem detached from the characters and the story--to let things develop on their own. This kind of quasi-documentary style allows for a quietness of tone, the narration of very ordinary events, and a kind of ambiguity that is just right for

Callaghan's purpose--the investigation of moral tensions set up by various human relationships. The characteristic mode of children's literature, however, is that of romance, i.e. the description of a world in which good and evil are clearly defined and in which the central hero obviously has the author's sympathy. In other words, in *Luke Baldwin's Vow* Callaghan is practically forced to be explicitly didactic and to work much closer to the surface of his story. The rhetorical design of the novel cannot be ambiguous. Yet, it is commonplace in Callaghan criticism that as soon as Callaghan-the-engaged-moralist shows his hand (or his craft) by using obvious symbolism or characters who are nothing more than mouthpieces for ideas, then his whole story collapses. So in his "novel for boys" the author has to perform a very delicate balancing act: he has to make his moral plain even though his writing style is more suited to the subtleties of irony. Readers who hear the author expounding the moral at the end of the novel tend to be irritated or even insulted by it. That, however, is to do an injustice to the author's performance. The story contains more than its tag-end moral. Like all of Callaghan's novels it is a close investigation of the moral tensions produced when people get together. As a matter of fact, both those readers who never can figure out what is going on in a Callaghan story and those readers who feel that the stories are made of straw can hardly do better than to start with *Luke Baldwin's Vow*. The author in this novel works close enough to the surface to reveal his craft, and at the same time the themes and patterns woven into the story are fairly typical of Callaghan's other works.

Luke Baldwin's Vow begins with the description of the death of young Luke's father. His mother is already dead, so Luke joins that large group of orphans in Canadian literature (a small sample includes Montgomery's Anne, MacLennan's Jerome, Wilson's Frankie, Gelinas' Tit-Coq, Seton's Yan), all of whom are searching for a surrogate family which hopefully will provide a home, an identity, and rock-solid values. Like most of these orphans Luke finds his new parents, but it becomes increasingly clear that he still has to seek out a satisfactory system of values on his own. He becomes a lonely, wandering, questioning hero, in search of a way to live within his society's mores without compromising his own instinctive feelings and sense of integrity. His quest takes him into a new geographical, psychological and spiritual territory. In this Luke is a youthful replica of all of Callaghan's central protagonists, whether Father Dowling prowling city slums in *Such is My Beloved*, or Jim McAlpine moving into high society in Montreal in *The Loved and the Lost*.

It is important to note *why* Luke's father dies, because the subsequent internal conflict which the boy feels evolves out of this episode. Dr. Baldwin is asked to go to the aid of old Mrs. Wilson, a seventy-nine year old hypochondriac. Although the doctor suspects there is nothing seriously wrong with his patient, he nevertheless ignores the warnings of his practical housekeeper and goes out into the rain to try to start his car. When the car refuses to start he tries to push it, has a heart attack, and later dies. It seems that Dr. Baldwin's death is related to his particular value system. He "was careless with his accounts and yet took an extraordinary interest in the petty ailments of his patients". Clearly people are of more concern to him than his

“business”; and he has taken some care to teach Luke “that the world was bright and mysterious and not too easily understood” (p. 9). Luke, who resembles his father in appearance, has always sensed a “quiet strength” and a “reality” in his father’s smiling view of the world (p. 9), and the boy feels that a close and unbreakable affinity exists between them. However, from Luke’s point of view, it is Dr. Baldwin’s concern and compassion for other people that has brought about his premature death. If his father had been more “practical” Luke would not now feel so lonely and lost. All the people grouped around Luke and his dying father comment on how foolish, irrational and impractical the doctor’s gesture was. Even the appearance of the young city doctor “who looked like a smart young businessman” (p. 8) stands as a silent reproach. Perhaps this is why Dr. Baldwin tells Luke to learn about the world from his very practical Uncle Henry. His dying words, however, are also addressed to something deeper in Luke: “I’ll never be far away from you, son. Here and there ... not far away” (p. 10). The father who liked to tell legends to his son, entrusts himself to his son’s imagination.

After his father’s death, Luke begins his quest for a way of determining what is *valuable* and what is *real*. His father has given him one way of responding to the world around him, but that way has been challenged not only by other people but also by the very fact of his father’s death. So he finds himself in new territory, Collingwood, Ontario--a perfect setting for Callaghan’s purposes because it holds many symbols that are useful in delineating Luke’s journey through new “spiritual territory”.

The settings in this novel are, in fact, intimately linked to themes and characters, so an examination of the relationships among these three elements furnishes a way into the heart of the novel. There are two “realities” in this novel and in his travels Luke confronts both of them. On one side is the “reality” described and represented by Uncle Henry. Henry insists upon ordering his world to conform with what he considers to be reasonable, practical, factual, utilitarian. In terms of the setting, Henry’s world is symbolized by the “steel network” of the shipyard (p. 14), and by the order and efficiency of his own sawmill’s “frenzied shriek” which can be heard in the background as it chews up trees from the woods across the river.

The other “reality” is represented by Luke himself when he reverts back to what his father taught him to respect: imagination, freedom, sympathy, and a sense of wonder at the mystery of things. Luke can express this side of himself when he is contemplating the blue mountains beyond the lake, or visiting his “sacred grove” in the woods across the river where he can feel the presence of his father’s spirit. One other important place that symbolizes this aspect of Luke’s nature is a legendary island inhabited by Indian spirits called “Christian Island”.

It is worth noticing here that the sawmill and shipyard are separated from the woods by a river, and that Collingwood is separated from the island and mountains by the lake. Water in this novel symbolizes a kind of half-way spot where one reality meets the other. Mr. Kemp’s farm, on the edge of town, functions symbolically in the same way, but in order to understand how this works other issues have to be resolved first. For now, it is enough to emphasize that the sawmill

chews up the logs from the woods and turns them into money for Uncle Henry. In his description of the first time Luke sees the sawmill, Callaghan introduces his symbolical patterns:

First they stood at the edge of the mill pond gazing toward the bush where, according to Aunt Helen, Luke's father had often hunted with Uncle Henry, and the bush looked dark and cool and he began to rub his hand through his hair, frowning and trying to understand why he felt such compulsion to plunge into the bush at once...But gradually the whine of the saw hacking through logs began to distract him, for the sound, like an agonized shriek...rose and died and rose again...[Upon closer inspection he saw] sawdust spreading out like a gold cloth, and when he walked on this sawdust it was like walking noiselessly on a thick golden carpet (p. 19).

Later on, Luke is told that he will likely inherit the sawmill if he follows Uncle Henry's ethics. The danger inherent in accepting both "mechanisms" is summed up symbolically in a scene in which Luke watches the milling process:

A great log was being ripped to pieces by the saws, and as he watched, the saws seemed to hypnotize him; it was the horror of imagining what would happen to him if he were ever caught on one of the logs and drawn toward the spinning saw. (p. 316).

His imagination is what saves him from a spiritual death that would certainly occur if he were to accept completely Uncle Henry's view of the world.

Virtually every episode in the novel reinforces the thematic design suggested by the contrasting settings. Luke's experiences in his imaginative inner world are just as charged with feeling as his experiences in the outer world, so both are equally "real" to him. Consequently he finds it difficult to accept Uncle Henry's precepts. To Luke the mountains are blue. Uncle Henry insists that the colour is a result of an optical illusion and that anyone who believes they are blue is an idiot. Factual knowledge is useful knowledge. Luke, however, insists that if they *look* blue, then they are blue:

"If a man painted those hills, he'd have to paint what he saw, wouldn't he?" "And if he didn't paint them blue it would be a lie" (p. 42).

Uncle Henry goes so far as to suggest that legends, fairy stories, myths, Luke's books about pirates on the Spanish Main, even belief in Santa Claus or the man in the moon, are responsible for twisting people's minds and making them "afraid of the world" (p. 27). Applying his gentle ironical touch, Callaghan has Uncle Henry tell Luke to "get into the hard bright world" of "facts" (p. 28) by reading biographies of Ford and Edison. Obviously Uncle Henry has his own set of mythical heroes but he refuses to acknowledge them as such. *His* myths are, after all, "real". At the end of this section Callaghan tells us that Luke intuitively distrusts his uncle primarily because Luke "needed ... the splendor and insight of the imagination" (p. 29), and he needs it in order to remain in contact with the spirit of his father.

In two different descriptions of Luke's imagination at work Callaghan explores his themes further. In chapter five Luke enters, into

the woods in search of his father's spirit. The whole journey is described in mythical terms. This section is a good example of Callaghan the craftsman working very close to the surface of his art. Luke's journey is first of all a journey to the underworld through a "primeval, tangled, ancient region" (p. 46).

It was like going into the shadowed vaulted world of ghosts; in his imagination each stone and tree had its spirit; some of them good, some of them evil and determined to thwart him.... as if he suddenly believed that powerful demons could take the form of curling vines and twine around him and force him back. (p. 47).

After passing dead logs, a grey and dead pool, and "a burned-out place", Luke meets a huge snake, "the guardian of these dark regions" (p. 48). He chases the snake away and the whole earth begins to shake (a passing train) before he begins to "haul himself up" to the top of a huge rock where he feels "the mysterious presence" of his father (p. 50). This private little odyssey through the underworld to the other side symbolically represents Luke's moral and spiritual journey in the whole novel. This is a technique that Callaghan uses in most of his other novels and especially in *Such Is My Beloved*, *More Joy in Heaven*, *They Shall Inherit the Earth* and *The Loved and the Lost*.

It should be noted, too, that in this episode Luke's imagination works overtime and he terrifies himself needlessly. He is also using his imagination to withdraw into his own "secret world of strange wonders" and, judging by the tone of this chapter, Callaghan has ambiguous feelings about this kind of escape. The imagination is capable of penetrating through to another dimension of reality, and that is necessary and good; but Callaghan is no mystic. Luke will have to make his way back to Uncle Henry's world and somehow learn to deal with the people in it. Every escape route is a trap.

In the second treatment of Luke's secret world in chapter ten, Callaghan is much more straightforward. In this fantasy, based on his reading of pirate stories, Luke imagines Uncle Henry as a Spanish Don whose town is unassailable because of his "vast common sense". He runs around shouting "Order, order, we must have some order around here! Make yourself useful" (p. 100), until Luke attacks and disarms him and makes him confess that the sea is blue and not colourless, and that the red feathers on a robin's breast are valuable even though they have no price or usefulness to men. Luke knows what he feels, but his attacks on his Uncle's "sealed town" are, so far, confined to dreams. Perhaps Luke himself senses the error in this kind of withdrawal because he interprets the raspberry juice on his hands as blood "for some great wrong I've done" and he heads for the sacred rock in his temple in the woods. There he confronts the main issues:

"It's a funny thing ... but I'm getting to like Uncle Henry a little more all the time. What I mean is that he's a man you can count on, and he's a kind man, too, and he's never done anything cheap or mean, or a thing that didn't make sense.... But you'd wonder ... that my father and Uncle Henry could be so far apart on what was useful in the world? [My father] was a man who was always fixing up

people who were pretty useless ... invalids ... to have them around, and he must have known they were worth something to somebody...." It was all pretty complicated; the things that made his life entertaining and often magical were the useless things to Uncle Henry. Luke sighed and wondered how long it would take him to be wise enough to judge truly of what was really important in the world (pp. 109-110).

All of these issues are concentrated, of course, in the argument between Luke and his Uncle over Henry's old dog, Dan. Dan is a lazy old collie with worn teeth, a bad leg and only one eye--the Canadian version of Lassie. If Margaret Atwood and other critics of Canadian animal stories are right, then it is not unexpected that Callaghan should choose this kind of animal victim for the story, or that Luke should befriend him. Remember too that Luke's father has taught him by example the worth of "useless" things. To Uncle Henry, of course, the *fact* is that the dog is not worth the *price* of his keep, and therefore he has no *value*. The important difference between Henry and Luke is the currency in which they trade. Henry has a way of calculating the value of something or somebody by estimating usefulness in dollars and cents. He is the typical hard-nosed pioneer businessman--the Ontario bourgeoisie. He is the leading representative of the "society" contained in the novel. (We have already seen how Mrs. Jackson and both attending doctors in chapter one share Henry's point of view. Most of the other characters in the novel, including Aunt Helen, Mr. Highbottom and the workers at the mill, belong to the same group. They represent the status-quo, the "normal".) And this group is by far the most *powerful* one. The currency that Luke uses, however, is mined out of his own feelings and intuitions. Dan comes to stand for such things as love, loyalty, companionship, "spiritual instinct", mystery, spontaneity, joy, wonder--"that good part of [Luke's] life, the part that he had shared with his own father" (pp. 73, 132). So, obviously, much more than an old dog is about to be destroyed by Henry's utilitarian philosophy. The dog is a symbol of everything that Luke feels is valuable in himself and in the world.

Luke is also aware of what Henry's philosophy can *do* to people. The workers at the sawmill are living examples of what happens when men resign themselves to work for work's sake. The most pathetic victim of the system is of course Sam Carter, the man Henry praises as the best worker in the mill. What Luke sees, however, is a man who does everything "in a mechanical way. His eyes never glowed, he never moved quickly or joyfully.... he was the slave who no longer wanted to be free" (pp. 85-86). The other workers are resisting this mechanizing process--Alex Malone is not consistent and Joe Carson is unreliable--but the implication is that if they stay around Henry long enough they will be real slaves eventually. The worker who has been resisting too long, Willie Stanowski, is turning into an alcoholic. Evidently he has a large family to support and he cannot afford to quit his job, so he is trapped and self-destructive.

It is when Luke visits the Stanowski family "on the outskirts of town" (he is a marginal character like Kemp, neither insider nor outside the society) that he learns something else about Henry's notion of

Success. The family is poor but happy, united, and loving. As Luke joins the singing and chasing children he becomes part of a kind of exhilarating anarchy that is the antithesis of everything Henry stands for. Afterwards, at home, he is warned by his Aunt Helen that Willie is a troublemaker, that Maria is a probable prostitute, and, of course, that Tillie the younger sister will grow up to be just like Maria. So the Stanowski house becomes a "forbidden house" full of "wild happiness". All Luke can do is watch the house from the outside late at night and yearn to dance in the moonlight to the music coming from inside. He will not disobey Aunt Helen at this stage, even though emotionally he distrusts her ideas of class, status, and genetic determinism. The thing that perplexes him is that "what was most frightening about Uncle Henry and Aunt Helen [was] their kindness; whatever they did they had the advantage of doing it out of kindness" (p. 93). Evil is not always immediately recognizable.

As mentioned earlier, Luke has a tendency to withdraw into his secret world of imagination and dreams in order to avoid having to translate his feelings into action. Because of Dan, he is forced out into the open. First Callaghan has him re-enter the world in a symbolical episode in which Luke is perched high on the roof of a building afraid to jump into the sawdust twenty feet below. The descent from the world of dreams is easy, but "ashamed, he sat there staring at the sawdust pile, wondering why he couldn't force himself off the roof" (p. 120). Dan's barking coaxes Luke to jump. Immediately Luke decides to fight the bully Elmer Highbottom to show him that he will not be pushed around anymore. The loyal dog joins the fight and the ill-tempered Elmer is sent home in ignominy. This is Luke's first initiation rite.

The second test occurs when Elmer returns with his mad dog Thor. This dog represents another face of evil. He is crazed, savage brute strength and once again he threatens to kill Dan. Thor is supposed to be a "thoroughbred" but Luke knows that he is not. (Since this novel was written in 1947-48 one is tempted to discover World War II analogies all through it, and Thor is a fairly obvious case.) The point is that Luke is forced to take direct action to protect Dan and everything he stands for. This confrontation is pretty straightforward. Terrified but brave, Luke rushes the dog and bashes him senseless with a club. The description of this battle is one of the finest passages of sustained suspense anywhere in Callaghan's fiction.

However the best piece of writing is reserved for Luke's third test--the scene in which he decides to save Dan from drowning. When Uncle Henry pays Sam Carter one cigar to drown Dan, Luke sees not only the emptiness of his Uncle's philosophy, but also that he *has* to disobey him and *fight* him, in order to protect what he feels to be good and valuable. Many of the symbols and images from earlier parts of the novel come together in this section. When Carter drops the stone tied to the dog's neck into the water, Luke's scream is drowned out by the shriek of the sawmill. For what seems to be an interminable time the boy has to hide and watch Carter's cigar ash grow longer while the dog drowns. Finally he plunges into the water after the dog. He dives three times, a kind of baptism of his new self, before he saves the dog's life--and of course the life of everything the dog means to him. He sets out for the big white stone in the "sacred protected grove" to hide Dan,

but rocks cut him and branches scratch him and he abandons his plan (p. 175). The old escape route is not good enough. He swims back across the river to the house. What Luke needs is some practical plan to win over Uncle Henry on his own terms.

Since Luke is not very good at that kind of cunning, he visits his friend Mr. Kemp. Uncle Henry does not approve of Mr. Kemp because "Kemp doesn't try to do anything with the world" (p. 63). However, the old farmer is really Luke's surrogate father and spiritual advisor much more than Uncle Henry is. Kemp is Callaghan's mouthpiece in this novel; it is he who tells Luke to "think (his) own thoughts and rely on (his) own experience" (p. 75). He tolerates and even encourages Luke's imagination, and he seems to share Dr. Baldwin's point of view:

Some people never look to the right or left and only see what's under their noses. Life has no mysteries for them. They're sure of everything. Maybe it's wise not to be too sure about a dog or a man and the spirit that gets into them...It's hard to say what goes on in this world. You'll have to use your own eyes and your own imagination. (p. 76).

He is the kind of character who rarely shows up in Callaghan's fiction--the advisor who is *right* and not simply the voice of another point of view. He belongs in romances, of course, so his presence is appropriate here, whereas he would be unacceptable in the other novels in which irony is so important. He is also needed because Luke is incapable of devising a plan to out-wit Uncle Henry. He advises Luke to go to work for him in order to make enough money to pay for the dog's food. Uncle Henry can do nothing but accept the proposition even though he dislikes the sentiment that prompted it. However, the whole episode makes Aunt Helen feel "ashamed and guilty" and "strangely lonely" (p. 186). So Luke vows that he will always have enough money "to be able to protect all that was truly valuable from the practical people in the world" (p. 187).

This ending resolves one of the basic conflicts in the book, but obviously it is not meant to stand for the whole novel. No single sentence can. There is much more to what Luke has learned about how to meet life and how to form a basis for one's morality than the contents of that sentence. The novel is least of all "the story of a boy and his dog". In the interview mentioned previously Callaghan expands upon his theme, and what he says is worth quoting because it indicates the more "universal" theme that he has in mind.

Callaghan: Well, what has always impressed me, particularly in my encounters with people, say, sixty, is that as they went through life the things they really believed in, the things that gave them this inner glow that made their lives worthwhile--bit by bit as the years passed, that stuff gradually got put down, and finally they gave up. As time passes you find really that you live more and more in a world of disappointed men....They settle down and do the next best thing. I've always felt that the real enemies of this stuff in you, this stuff that gives your heart a glow, are the guys you encounter in everyday life--not necessarily the barbarians, swooping down to kill you off with one punch. You gradually give in to other people's view of things....I always believed that people get hold of you by the

short hair first of all when they get hold of you economically. [This economic hold means that] you are going to be docile, and it's this necessity of docility that is the ruinous thing to your own spirit...[To avoid this docility] you've got to start with economics....It's like regarding the rest of the human race as your enemy, I know. They're not really your enemy; you can love them if you want to; but don't let them love too much. The way they really love you is when they simply change your mind, change your eyes, change your thinking, change your heart. and you become dear old lovable so-and-so.³

One can see how *Luke Baldwin's Vow* contains the "disappointed men" in Sam Carter and Willie Stanowski, the kind enemies in Uncle Henry, Aunt Helen, Mrs. Jackson and others, and especially the danger of a utilitarian philosophy based on economics. The idea that Luke's "inner glow" is somehow linked to his imagination is mentioned later in the same interview in connection with Father Dowling:

Callaghan: I imagine that a priest having this real true sense of Christianity would have a terrible time defending it as he grew older, with his enemies all around him. That's why the priest is just an exemplification of any of us trying to defend an inner light against many of his own instincts, many of his own friends. I believe in this possibility in people; it's what makes man interesting. How it got him I don't know, where it came from I don't know, where it's going I don't know. This business of disinterested goodness, *the imaginative awareness of the wholeness of things*, you see, is a most extraordinary thing. This is all mixed up in man's art, and often in his religion and it leads to wild...excesses in him. This is interesting in man, and it's a hopeful thing.⁴

Luke has this "disinterested goodness" and the "imaginative awareness" to go with it. He also has found the courage and the means to protect his "inner light" from various faces of evil around him. In this he is more fortunate than most of the protagonists in Callaghan's longer fiction.

It is fair to say, then, that *Luke Baldwin's Vow* is a carefully written, tightly constructed novel, organized around issues that Callaghan considers to be important ones. Details of setting, character relationships, episodes and images are woven into a complex design. Yet the curious thing about the novel is that Callaghan rarely compromises his quiet, understated prose. At first glance, one is barely aware of the undercurrents in this novel. Any discussion of symbolic patterns such as this one makes the novel seem more architectonic than the actual reading experience suggests. In some ways Professor Conron is right when he says that the novel recalls a "pastoral age apparently untouched by war or real vice ... peopled by kind and generous characters", because Callaghan's "realistic" descriptions of a Canadian boy's experience are faithful to time and place. There are no horribly evil people in Luke's world, but that does *not* mean there are no fears, frustrations, battles and hidden threats lurking everywhere. It is simply that the dangers represented by Uncle Henry, Aunt Helen, the sawmill, Sam Carter, even the sacred white rock, are difficult ones for a boy to define. Only Thor can be confronted directly. So it is to Callaghan's

credit that he restrains himself the way he does in this novel. The explicitly didactic passages and the character of Mr. Kemp are uncharacteristic of Callaghan's fiction, but they are necessary because of the kind of book *Luke Baldwin's Vow* is. And both of these latter elements are useful starting points in any exploration of Callaghan's other novels, for as stated earlier, they reveal the author peering out through the work.

Readers familiar with Callaghan's fiction will recognize by now that basic design of *Luke Baldwin's Vow* is essentially the same as that of most of the other novels from *It's Never Over* (1930) to *The Many Coloured Coat* (1960). (The first work, *Strange Fugitive*, and the most recent *A Passion in Rome*, contain slightly altered structural patterns for different reasons.) Callaghan usually presents a central character who, because of some crisis in his life (often death, and sometimes a change in status), feels a sudden inner compulsion to make moral sense out of his experience. So he begins his search for truth and self-justification--his own odyssey--much like Luke's. He usually recognizes certain *feelings* in himself which he uses as his basis for judging what is valuable or important to him. These feelings are either projected onto, or embodies in, some other person the protagonist meets on his travels. (Callaghan does not worry very much about whether or not the process involves "projection" or "recognition". It is probably both.) This other person is most often a girl with a dubious reputation, but the important thing is that she is always weak and vulnerable in the face of the stronger social forces around her. In *Luke Baldwin's Vow* the "other person" is replaced by a crippled old dog upon whom Luke projects his feelings, but the pattern is the same. In the manner of the *animae* in the other novels, Dan is frowned upon and threatened by the more powerful elements in society. Usually the representatives of the core is this society retain power by virtue of their money. In *Such Is My Beloved* we are given the Robinsons; in *More Joy in Heaven* we meet Senator Maclean; in *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, Jay Hillquist; and in *The Loved and the Lost*, the Carvers of Westmount seem to be in control. Uncle Henry has friends in high places. Allied to these socially powerful people are institutions--most notably the law and the institutionalized Church. The novels are peopled by judges, lawyers, bishops, priests and politicians--all of whom have a vested interest in social order. Since *Luke Baldwin's Vow* is a much simpler novel, the various arguments in favour of some sort of collective moral code are not presented. They are simply summed up in Uncle Henry's cries for order.

In all of the novels the central character is surrounded by people who represent various "moralities"--Marxism, Social Darwinism, orthodox Christianity, Capitalism, Genetic Determinism, Freudianism, and so on through popular modern "-isms". Each representative presents his ethical system, but each one in turn is rejected because it is felt to be too narrow and limiting. Each character, it seems, presents a *rational* system of order that somehow leaves the individual's feelings out. In *Luke Baldwin's Vow* Callaghan has largely substituted symbols for these spokesmen-characters and naturally he has pared the dialectics down. There is a hint of this kind of thing in Aunt Helen's attitude toward the Stanowskis, but the arguments are mostly represented in the symbolical use of settings, in Luke's dreams, and in the contrasting

kinds of advice the boy gets from his worldly and his spiritual "fathers".

How each novel ends depends upon whether or not the central protagonist ever resolves the tension between his individual feelings (embodied in the "object" of his love) and the power structure that enforces social mores. Most of the protagonists fail either because society's pressures are too strong, or because of a failing in themselves, or both. Father Dowling goes insane and his "beloved" prostitutes are driven out of town. Kip Caley in *More Joy In Heaven* is gunned down and his *anima* Julie Evans dies with him. Peggy Sanderson is raped and murdered because Jim McAlpine refuses to respond to his "best self", and he is left wandering in Montreal in *The Loved and the Lost*. Harry Lane in *The Many Coloured Coat* gains some insight into his moral dilemma (with the assistance of the prostitute Annie Laurie) but his neck is broken in the process and he dies in the hospital. Only Michael Aikenhead in *They Shall Inherit The Earth* and Luke Baldwin seem to find a way to reconcile the internal world of the individual spirit and the outside objective world. When Michael marries Anna (grace), he has come to the realization that no outside system of moral order can answer the need of the individual soul for wholeness and love. This realization carries with it the heartfelt conviction that the ways of the world are of secondary importance, and accepting this discovery is not an easy thing to do. Most of the protagonists are unwilling or unable to make the break. At any rate Luke Baldwin is given some sound advice on how to protect his awareness of his "reality", and of course Callaghan implicitly sides with Luke's way of responding to the world. What is important about Luke's youthfulness and innocence is that he is still very much in contact with his feelings. Adults have a tendency, somehow, to be distracted by their *intellects* which too often project systems of order and then they insist that they have control over what is real. Callaghan himself, when talking about Jim McAlpine, put it this way:

He made a mistake, I think he should have stayed with the girl. There should have been something in his heart that would override any attitude. When you're really good, you don't have to think. The trouble is, he *thought*.⁶

Luke "thinks" with his *heart* and that seems to make all the difference.

It seems that for Callaghan, one's moral decisions must first of all come from inside the self, and one must be fiercely independent, "never yielding to another man's sense of rectitude".⁷ Further, there has to exist some sort of congruency among emotions, thought and imagination--what Callaghan often calls "feelings". Individual conscience and institutional or collective moral codes will almost necessarily clash. Consequently the human spirit is always trying to maintain a precarious balance--that is the human condition. The interesting thing about *Luke Baldwin's Vow* is that it is the only novel in which Callaghan explicitly affirms the place of the human imagination in his explorations of why and how the spirit of man sometimes succeeds in fulfilling itself. All by itself the imagination can become a retreat, just as the intellect can. Callaghan distrusts these escape routes and finds them dangerous for reasons he often states:

At the end of your life, the whole question should be, how did you manage to get along with people? If you say, well, I lived my life in the desert, loving God, to my temperament that doesn't mean anything. Okay kid, you dropped out, you're a saint in the desert, a hermit. Great, you like that kind of thing, but you know nothing...about the human race. From my view you know nothing about love. And if you know nothing about human love, to me, in my stupidity, you can't know anything about divine love. I hate the person who loves the idea, you know? I don't believe in that kind of love.

Yet Luke's active imagination is what allows him to become keenly aware of the spirit and mystery in everything. It seems that this is a prerequisite for the growth of any kind of love. The failure of a number of the other protagonists can be traced, in part at least, to their neglect of this side of themselves.

It is fair to say, then, that *Luke Baldwin's Vow* holds a more important place in Callaghan's canon than critics have previously allowed. It is, first of all, a carefully crafted novel that can stand on its own merits. Every detail of the work fits into a larger pattern--even the names Luke ("light") and Dan ("judge") are significant to the book's theme. It comes as close to Romance as Callaghan ever does, and this allows us some insight into how Callaghan works and thinks in his fiction. With some qualifications the novel can also be seen to conform with the basic design of the other full-length works. In style and form it is similar to what critics have liked to call Callaghan's "parables" in that it deals with very ordinary events in stripped-down language for the purpose of presenting some moral. Both settings and episodes have symbolical value, and characters tend to represent sides in an argument. (In some ways the novel indicates a slightly new direction in Callaghan's style in that the *Canadian* setting is much more explicit and functional, and the Biblical and Christian symbols more muted.) Thematically, too, *Luke Baldwin's Vow* is important for our understanding of Callaghan's way of looking at things. All of these aspects make the novel interesting for sympathetic readers of Callaghan's fiction. Incidentally, most young boys also enjoy the book.

NOTES

- ¹ Donald Cameron, "Defending the Inner Light: An Interview with Morley Callaghan", *Saturday Night*, LXXXVIII, 7 (July, 1972), 21.
- ² Morley Callaghan, *Luke Baldwin's Vow* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 2. All further references are taken from this edition and page numbers are placed in parentheses at the end of the quotation.
- ³ Cameron, pp. 17-18.
- ⁴ Cameron, pp. 19-20.
- ⁵ Brandon Conron, *Morley Callaghan* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), p. 124.
- ⁶ Cameron, p. 20.
- ⁷ Cameron, p. 22.
- ⁸ Cameron, p. 20.

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