

**AN EXAMINATION OF VIOLENCE
IN HUGH GARNER'S SHORT STORIES**

by

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VIOLENCE IN HUGH GARNER'S SHORT STORIES: SEXUAL, SOCIAL, AND NATURAL

ABSTRACT

Although Hugh Garner's short stories have earned him a considerable measure of critical recognition, as well as a firm place in the tradition of social realism, an exploration of his frequent use of violence as a theme (a feature which consistently keeps his stories topical), has been curiously absent in the critical literature. In this study of Garner's three collections of short stories--*Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963), *Men and Women* (1966), and *Violation of the Virgins* (1971)--I propose to narrow that gap by demonstrating how Garner's central theme of violence manifests itself through depictions of sexual violence, social violence, and the violence inherent in natural disasters. In the conclusion, I shall argue that Garner's particular representation of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse reflects a 'working class' mind set and moral code--making us ever aware that "the personal is political."

I have taken the position in Chapter One that 'realist' texts, to which category the stories belong, are best understood in the context of the sociocritical tradition and biographical experiences (Garner's 'life and times') that helped shape them.

Drawing upon both primary and secondary sources, I have addressed the three themes of sexual violence, social violence, and the violence of nature in the central chapters: Chapter Two explores the theme of sexual conflict; Chapter Three, the theme of conflict related to race, ethnicity, and social class; and Chapter Four, the theme of conflict arising from natural disasters. Through these themes, we become aware of Garner's distinct vision, as well as his penetrating insights, both into the motives of the perpetrators and the 'wounds' of the survivors.

Distribution of Violence and Abuse in Hugh Garner's Short Stories

Themes of Violence in the Stories PHYSICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL ECONOMIC

A. Sexual Violence

1. A Couple of Quiet Young Guys	(UMCM vs. (WCM	(UMCM vs. (WCM	(UMCM vs. (WCM
2. The Yellow Sweater	(UMCM vs. (WCG	(UMCM vs. (WCG	(UMCM vs. (WCG
3. Lucy	(WCM vs. (WCG	(WCM vs. (WCG	(WCM vs. (WCG
4. Black and White and Red All Over	(UMCM vs. (UMCW and M		
5. Dwell in Heaven, Die on Earth	(MCM vs. (SCG)		
6. What a Way to Make a Living	(WCM s. (WCM	(WCM vs. (WCM	
7. Step 'n-a-Half	(WCM vs. (WCM and (UMCM	(WCM vs. (WCM and (UMCM	
8. Twelve Miles of Asphalt		(WCM vs. (WCM	

B. Violence Related to Race, Ethnicity Social Class

9. The Stretcher Bearers	(WCM s. (WCM	(WCM vs. (WCM	
10. No More Songs About the Suwanee	(SCM vs. (SCM	(SCM vs. (SCM	(SCM vs. (SCM
11. Hunty	(UMCM vs. (WCM	(UMCM vs. (WCM	(UMCM vs. (WCM
12. B Equals MC Squared	(UMCM vs. (WCM	(UMCM vs. (WCM	(UMCM vs. (WCM
13. The Conversion of Willie Heaps		(MCM vs. (WCM	
14. Stumblebum	(WCM vs. (WCM		
15. The Fall Guy	(SCM vs. (SCM	(SCM vs. (SCM	(SCM vs. (SCM
16. The Moose and the Sparrow	(WCM vs. (WCM	(WCM vs. (WCM	
17. Captain Rafferty		(WCM vs. (WCM and W	(WCM vs. (WCM and W
18. The Happiest Man in the World	(MCM vs. (WCM		

C. Violence Related to Natural Disasters

19. Red Racer	(WCM	(WCM	
20. One Mile of Ice	(WCM	(WCM	
21. Act of a Hero	(WCM	(WCM	

Class Codes
 (UMC) = upper middle class
 (MC) = middle class
 (WC) = working class
 (SC) = subculture

Gender Codes
 M = man
 W = woman
 G = girl
 B = boy

N.B. Throughout this table the letters "vs." will be used to distinguish "the oppressor" from "the oppressed." Thus "M vs. G" indicates that a man is oppressing a girl.

To the Memory of

Pauline Hunter

(1907 - 1998)

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THE THEME OF VIOLENCE: ITS CRITICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXTS

A. INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the central theme of violence that characterizes Hugh Garner's three collections of short stories--*Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963), *Men and Women* (1966), and *Violation of the Virgins* (1971). To this end, 21 of Garner's 39 published stories will be examined.

B. METHODOLOGY

Realist texts, to which category Garner's stories clearly belong (Arthur 92), are best understood in the context of the critical tradition and biographical experiences that have helped shape them. In this chapter, therefore, I shall attempt to shed light on Garner's stories from two different perspectives: on the one hand, literary criticism (in particular, sociocriticism), and (to a lesser extent), reports about Garner's life and times--both biographical and autobiographical. Next, I shall explore the theme of violence in a general sense as well as in relation to the particular kinds of violence and abuse that typify Garner's stories. The application of the 'dual lenses' of literary criticism and biographical data to Garner's stories takes place in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, and is followed by the Conclusion in Chapter Five.

C. THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

1. The Critical Frame of Reference

In general, Garner's work has not provoked much critical response, and "both the volume and the intrinsic quality of criticism are surprisingly low" (Fetherling 7). Garner's most important critics are probably Doug Fetherling and Paul Stuewe. In 1984, Stuewe noted that Fetherling's 1972 biography, *Hugh Garner* (which, according to Garner, "was written out of friendship" [ODT 173]), was the only major critical assessment of a literary career that spanned three decades. Fetherling maintains that Garner's skills as a writer had developed considerably over the course of his career. Commenting on Garner's final collection of stories (*Violation of the Virgins*), he notes that "the fourteen stories are more even in quality than those in his other books, being uniformly tooled and exact. To the last, the stories are surefooted and concise" (72). Fetherling also adds:

If his style seems at times old-fashioned, it is because he writes without tricks or sham in an age which alternates between the mad and the plastic. If his novels seem strained at times it is because he has always, except in *Cabbagetown*, had trouble sustaining the quality of his better stories in the bigger works, and if the stories seem good, it is because--line for line, story for story, year for year--Hugh Garner is the best storyteller we have. (10)

One of the major preoccupations of Garner's critics has been the relationship between the writer's life and his art. Stuewe, for example, maintains that literary texts are clarified through an application of what he calls "fictionalizing" theory, which invites the critical reader to explore the relationship

between an author's own experiences and his literary creations. In this regard, Stuewe makes the following observation: "Garner's writing of fiction is a process of fictionalizing, of disguising the real through *renaming*, rather than subjecting it to aesthetic processes intended to *transform* it into something else" (Stuewe 14) [emphases mine]. According to Stuewe in *Hugh Garner and His Works*, Garner has claimed that his stories are solidly grounded in personal experience, and "written with an almost complete disregard for esoteric issues" (12).

2. The Implications of Realism in Literature

Literature in the realist genre reflects "the economic, social, and psychological stresses of industrial society" (Bender 10). Garner's "naturalistic philosophy" (Arthur 93) clearly informs the realistic style with which he explores the relationships between and among the alienated characters and their hostile environments. Through his short stories, Garner documents the disastrous sequences of human encounters which polarize and stratify the protagonists, determine their fates and, ultimately, deny them their freedom and autonomy.

One is tempted at this point to compare literature that belongs to the genre of realism to films that purport to be 'objective' documentaries' (*'renamings'*) of real life. In both cases, however, the uniquely creative 'take' on reality, whether of the author or the film maker, is likely to be at risk of being overlooked.

According to J. W. Beach, an established expert in the field of American

realism, "realism requires that the facts shall be so rightly ordered that they will speak for themselves" (Beach 111). This, he notes, "presents a challenge to the serious artist, [for] the indiscriminating reader may miss this intention and confuse this work with pulp" (111). In this vein, it is interesting to note that Fetherling not only describes Garner as a "literary populist" but conjectures that Garner's readers are "a less intellectual although no less intelligent breed" (Fetherling 2). Garner, in turn, often complained of the snobbery and elitism of his academic critics (e.g., in *Author, Author!*, a 1964 collection of essays), many of whom either dismissed or disparaged his work. Indeed, the editor of the 1974 edition of *A Guide to Canadian Literature Since 1960* maintains that most of Garner's short stories "provide an enjoyable and provocative reading experience at the secondary school level" (Davey 113). Also, the 1983 edition of *World Literature in English Information Guide* dismisses Garner's novels as "fluff" and maintains that "[m]any of his novels, while displaying a close attention to detail, are basically lighter works of popular entertainment" (Hoy 172).

Garner was by no means oblivious to the barbs of his critics, and his open hostility toward what he called "socio-literary bullshit" relegated his stories to a critical limbo (ODT 249). While his relations with the academic world were mutually suspicious, dismissal by his critics did little to discourage him. Indeed, his antagonism towards 'the literati' fuels his autobiographical essays: "Shortly after I became what is known as a published author, a snobbish friend of mine said, 'I sure envy you. Now you'll be able to mix with the social set.' Up to then the thought had never occurred to me and the thought occurs to me even less

since meeting the literati on their own ground" (AA 1). Garner's self-willed exclusion from a literary milieu has paradoxically led to a favorable reception of his work on the part of 'sociocritics' (Arthur 15).

3. Sociocriticism

It has been noted that "[t]he findings and concepts of sociology may be abridged as a tool for criticism" (Routh 3) and certainly Garner's works have attracted the attention of proponents of the school of "sociocriticism."

Sociocriticism strives to address the "social whole which is characterized by class, sex, or race oppression and resistance" (Xu 159). In short, it focuses on social conditions, adversarial class relations, discrimination against minorities, and gender conflicts. All of these, in varying degrees, are either expressed or implied in the texts under observation.

The sociocritical approach also allows us to appreciate Garner's own sociological 'take' on the characters and situations he writes about, rather than dismiss them merely as isolated incidences of idiosyncratic human behaviour, disconnected from their social contexts. In the vast majority of his short stories, Garner shows the "forces of organized society in direct conflict with the happiness of the individuals who live in that society" (Arthur 87).

Although Garner considered himself a social radical, he credits "neither Marx, Engels nor Proudhon" for his political conversion (ODT 32). His art, then, seems to derive primarily from lived experience, and his themes of sexual, social, and natural violence not only underline the marginalization and alienation

of his characters, but also suggest his own. For example, the following passage illustrates this literary tendency:

Writing is the least homogenous trade of any I know, and to throw a group of writers together at a party or in an association is the best way I know to observe the innate jealousy, pettiness and sycophancy of members of the human race as true of me as of any other writer, so in order to protect both my dignity and my self-respect I have generally remained a literary loner, choosing my friends from among those outside the business and insisting that other writers remain acquaintances rather than personal friends. (247)

As one critic remarks "[w]riting may be secondary to the class struggle, yet nevertheless it is a social and political act of considerable importance" (Routin 170). An integral component of what Garner calls his "socialist philosophy" is the struggle against exploitation. In this regard, he cites prostitution as a prime example of sustained slavery (*ODT* 234). In bearing witness to the social interaction that typifies prostituted sex, he shows us the normalization of oppression, which ranges from individual coercion to class domination. Thus Garner's fiction has much in common with the works of other 'naturalist-realist' writers, such as John Steinbeck, Theodore Dreiser, Dorothy Livesay, and Morley Callaghan, all of whom share his acute class-consciousness and determination to challenge the objectification and reification of humanity.

The sociocritical approach is thus consistent with the themes of the stories. Rather than focussing solely on the violent actions of his protagonists, Garner locates the conflict in a broader context. His fiction portrays violent "subcultures" in which "a set of values, attitudes and beliefs [promotes] aggression as a major mode of personal interaction and a device for solving

problems" (Hays 109).

Garner also exposes the economic determinants that turn "individual conflicts into social, class conflicts" (Lukacs 15). Fetherling suggests that the content of his stories was inspired by his own economic struggles and their consequences, and remarks that while Garner "is aware that the earth is round, for him it is always uphill" (Fetherling 3). Garner's focus on the economic (and hence social and political) backgrounds of his characters highlights the objective forces which compel each character to behave in a certain way. These forces, in Garner's 'uphill world,' are typically expressed through the subordination of the needs of one class or gender to those of another.

Finally, the critic John Moss, a champion of Garner's work, maintains that "the current need for critical direction, evaluation and definition within the field of Canadian literature demands of the critic--or forces him to demand of himself--a social responsibility, even sometimes at the expense of his literary vision" (311). One suspects that Garner might well have concurred.

D. BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT: GARNER'S LIFE AND TIMES

Garner lends credence to certain biographical interpretations of his work by outlining a personal and historical context for critical interpretation. In his 1973 autobiography, Garner responds to criticism of his depictions of violence by citing his early encounters with "ineffective social agencies" as the source of his grimly

realistic style, and asks us to "please understand [that] I'm writing about the dark ages" (*ODT* 9). The author counted himself one of "the many boys and young men who became bums, hobos, migrant workers, or temporary tramps, call us what you will, who were part of the phenomenon of the Great Depression" (272). "The poverty, distress and disruption of that decade scarred a generation. People faced the future with mixed feelings: the hope that such a depression would never happen again and the fear that it might" (243). Growing up poor during the thirties in a "dangerous Toronto slum scarred" the young author, and accounts for the centrality of violence in his work (243). In numerous ways, his "lamentable and injurious Depression experiences" are reflected, if not in fact relocated, in his stories (3).

Garner recalls this historic phenomenon that defined his literary predilections: "I was, you could say, a wanderer. One of the unfortunates. A victim of the economic system? Perhaps. Certainly, most certainly a casualty in the battle between ignorant men who were running the country" (274).

Garner's sympathy for the working-class poor and his socialist philosophy also seem to have had their origins in his own 'personal depression' resulting from his father's desertion of his mother and his siblings. He recalls the last time they saw him,

.... in a Toronto court, where my mother had taken him on a charge of non-support of his two sons. She never did get any support from him, as far as I know, and she brought up my brother and me, and two younger half sisters who were born of a disastrous common-law union later, in the best way she could as a working woman a credit to the working class.
(19)

While the perceptual acuity evident in Garner's fiction helped build his literary reputation, it also helped him to become a prolific journalist. Subsisting in Toronto in what he called "squalor," Garner turned his hand to a great many "quasi-literary" activities (Toye 291). In 1975, he wrote 56 full-length magazine articles, and 36 between 1962 and 1972. These articles were written largely to secure the financial survival of his growing family (who, during these hard times, were living with Garner's in-laws in Quebec), and to supplement the modest royalties from his short stories and novels. Later, Garner attributed the inability of many academics to take him seriously to his reputation as a magazine journalist (*HG* 7). According to Fetherling: "[Garner] was a poor man who worked at odd jobs and the rest of it and who, when sensing he was ready to write, turned naturally to his surroundings and his generation" (Fetherling 10).

With respect to the traumas he underwent in relation to his war experiences, Garner recalls in his autobiography that during his first weeks in the Spanish Civil War, he confronted not only his own sense of powerlessness but also the death of whatever illusions he "had picked up about idealism" (*ODT* 217). This tragic war and its aftermath had also profoundly affected many other writers of Garner's generation--George Orwell, André Malraux, John Dos Passos, and Ernest Hemingway--all of whom, like Garner, abandoned their civilian status to fight for their convictions in Spain:

A million people lost their lives in the Spanish Civil War. It was a bitter, cruel and wasteful war that dragged on from 1936 to 1939. Some cynics in Spain today, and indeed all over the world, believe it would have been better not to have opposed Spanish fascism at all. I do not agree. Though my own part in it was a very insignificant one, going there to fight is one of

the few things I am proud of having done. It is always better to fight for what you believe in. (219)

This passage reveals Garner as a moralist, and scholars and critics alike have often characterized him in this way. He condones "fighting" in a moral context, which is evident in the stories that depict characters who undergo physical, psychological, sexual, or economic forms of oppression. By representing women, non-whites, refugees, and the poor as 'fair game,' Garner exposes the conflicts that both unite and separate the strong and the weak. He recreates in order to expose a Darwinian society, one in which only the 'fittest' (and not typically the morally fittest) survive, whether through their brawn or their cunning.

To sum up, Garner's self-imposed alienation, his experiences during the Depression, his desertion by his father, his subsequent life of poverty and hardship, his involvement in the Spanish Civil War, and the evolution of a strong moral sensibility, all conspired to forge the working-class 'mind set' which left such a powerful stamp on his fiction.

E. THE CENTRAL THEME OF VIOLENCE

In Chapters Two, Three, and Four, the theme of violence is systematically explored (respectively, sexual violence, social violence, and the violence of nature), as are the various types of abuse the characters undergo—physical, psychological, and economic.

Garner's studies in violence raise compelling issues concerning the links

between and among gender, class, ethnicity, and oppression. More than half of the selected stories end fatally, approximately one-third feature explicit violence, and the remainder feature themes addressing poverty, alcoholism, and divorce, in which the suppressed violence threatens, momentarily, to erupt.

While it is true that Garner's violent protagonists exalt power and domination, his stories also reveal the transience and banality of violence, as well as (in a few of the stories) the regenerative power of violence for the community at large. Finally, throughout all of the works, the narrator's apparent distance from and lack of involvement in the violent action adds elements of cynicism and irony.

As one critic maintains: "the roots of inequality among classes, ethnic groups, and races are modelled on the patriarchal characterization of man's superiority to woman" (Bart 80). Certainly one notices in Garner's stories that violence is most often perpetrated by males, often by working-class males who are themselves victims of the class structure as well as oppressors of others.

Garner, however, is by no means indifferent to the injustices dealt to his female characters. One way in which Garner approaches the issue of women's oppression is by portraying prostitute women not as an isolated and marginalised group (what some call 'a misogynist construct'), but rather as women whose sexual exploitation is "consonant with that of all women's experience of exploitation" (Barry 9). To this end, in researching his novel about a serial killer (*The Sin Sniper*), Garner interviewed numerous prostitutes about the violent experiences relating to their work. In general, all of the sexual relationships

depicted in Gamer's stories reveal social inequalities, and share a common thread of violence not inconsistent with patriarchal patterns of objectification of and possessiveness toward females.

In summary, Gamer's treatment of violence in relation to war, poverty, economic injustice, and the power relations between men and women is simultaneously an acknowledgement of oppression and a rallying cry for social change:

.... war and its threat where violence is supreme, slaughters millions and imperils all Poverty with its extremes of starvation, malnutrition, sickness, ignorance, and want is a form of violence as deadly as gunfire. Countless forms of economic exploitation, of discrimination, and hopelessness are constant violent experiences. (Hays 1)

CHAPTER TWO: SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The following stories were selected because they feature the theme of sexual violence, in particular, sexual violence directed toward females. Aspects of this theme that appear in the stories include harassment, rape, incest, prostitution, child abuse, and spousal abuse. Moreover, sexist violence is invariably registered in forms of a complex matrix of social, economic, and cultural factors, gender constituting only one of the key determinants. However, Garner forces the reader to examine this issue of gendered violence in terms of poverty, exploitation and class oppression. The texts will be analysed in the order in which they were published.

1. "A Couple of Quiet Young Guys" in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963)

The ironically misleading characterization of "A Couple of Quiet Young Guys" actually provides the occasion for an analysis of their typical victim. In this intimate study of characters at an all-night diner, the conflict entails the sexual assault of a young woman (a "pretty little thing," by a so-called "shy and clean" young man) (HG 32). Through veiled references, she reports this event to Slim, the cook and owner of the diner. After she departs, Slim himself becomes a victim, but in this case, a victim of a robbery at gunpoint at the hands of "a quiet young guy." The quiet diner thus becomes the venue for accumulated tension that eventually implodes.

Deadpan dialogue and a "naturalistic treatment of the passage of time [are] used to generate suspense from what would otherwise be an uncompromisingly commonplace setting" (Stuewe 29). The all-night establishment caters to the downtown streetcar crowd and is a hangout for "crying, drunken girls early in the morning" (*HG* 31). Slim recalls the tragic "girls" of the past, but is unable to answer the question posed by the present survivor: "Why do all men act like bastards, Slim?" (32). Judging from her "mussed hair, her trembling and dirt-stained hands" (32), "pretty little things" are at risk of assault by "quiet young guys" who subvert "the myth that criminals are Frankenstein or Quasimodo types" (Stuart 7).

The story's defenceless little "thing" faces an assault which violates her both physically and psychologically. A crew-cut, neat-looking young man wearing a grey worsted suit commits the crime in the hour that she is absent from the restaurant. The girl's testimony to Slim indicates that this assault was particularly vicious. The youth gets rough in their exchange for the simple reason that he enjoys her suffering. She cries over the victimization of "girls" in general and explains: "this time was different and the other guys were just dates if you watched yourself, nothing happened, and sometimes it was fun" (*HG* 31). Her date's true nature severely shocks her, and in confiding to Slim, she characterizes her unexpected attacker as follows: "You saw him tonight he wasn't good-looking, but kind of shy and clean" (31). The girl's tearful disclosure follows her dramatic revelation that even (or perhaps especially) "quiet young guys" are capable of exceptional cruelty. Through her 'ugly' expletive, "bastards,"

she slips momentarily out of her 'pretty' social role (31).

In this story, Garner refutes one of the most harmful myths about abused women, namely, that they enjoy their mistreatment and subconsciously are drawn to violent men because of their masochistic tendencies. Indeed, male bias has "so permeated the social contract" that victims of harassment or rape are often asked what they did to provoke the attack (Bart 149).

The author presents the girl's prettiness as her bane, and comments on her metamorphosis from a sobbing girl, bewildered by "bastards," into a resigned young woman whose docility serves to reinforce the status quo. Evoking the theme of the 'beauty myth' (HG 30) and shamed by her experience, she conceals the tell-tale lipstick stains and dirt with care. Her need to keep up appearances at all costs motivates her to conceal the stains on her napkin and on her person which bear witness to her assault. With bravado, she steps into the night with an affirmation: "Sure I'll be around. I'll be around a long time yet" (33).

The alienation typically reflected by many of Garner's female characters reveals his sensitivity to the issue of sexual violence. As one critic points out (Moss 12): "Within the spectrum of Canadian fiction as a whole, a broad section is dominated by the question of moral identity--that is, by the relationships between the origins and consequences of individual behaviour, and the conditions of the larger community." Moreover, according to Desmond Pacey, in his introduction to *A Book of Canadian Stories* (Pacey 1962), Garner's violent stories are "important for what they suggest of the national mood" (28).

In short, Garner tackles in "A Couple of Quiet Young Guys" (as he does in

many of his other stories) the 'personal as the political.' Through his depictions of sexual violence, which he presents as emblematic of violence on a broader scale, Garner implies that the characters are not merely puppets of physiological, psychological, and social forces beyond their control. He also portrays their struggles in making conscious decisions, which in other stories prove to be fatal.

2. "The Yellow Sweater" in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963)

The title of this story once more ironically signals Garner's examination of a young woman's sexual objectification. Here, a successful, middle-aged, and overweight businessman picks up a pregnant young runaway attempting to escape the sexual abuse she has suffered at the hands of her "aunt's husband" (HG 50). The businessman's attempts to exploit her sexually fail when she escapes from his car in an emotionally upset state and she falls into a muddy ditch. Through his rear-view mirror, he sees her gesticulating to a passerby while pointing to his escaping vehicle. He panics at the possibility of being identified and throws her suitcase, which opens on impact, into the mud, thereby soiling "the yellow sweater." In that one moment, he is reminded of the yellow sweater which his own daughter owns.

The pivotal act of violence in this story is an attempted rape in which the businessman tries to reduce the girl to a commodity, someone whom he hopes to possess through his offer to 'help' her. Although Garner stops short of depicting an actual rape in this story, he nonetheless examines the physical and psychological impacts of sexual abuse on the part of two adult males--the aunt's

boyfriend and the businessman. The would-be capitalist initially takes pleasure in humiliating the local "yokels," to which category the young runaway clearly belongs (48).

The narrator takes pains to describe, with a great deal of implied irony, a "typical middle-aged businessman"-- someone who represents "the physiognomy of success" (48). Conversely, his victim symbolizes the physiognomy of failure, for her vulnerability seems to whet the violent instincts of both of her male oppressors, at whose hands she suffers betrayal and stigmatization.

Walking along the highway without attempting to hitch a ride indicates the girl's resolution to 'go it alone,' and the independence which this behaviour implies provokes the businessman's anger to such an extent that he feels challenged to pursue her. The fact that this indifferent, clean, and "good-looking kid" is not a "common hitchhiker" also elicits the businessman's essential opportunism (49). To exploit an attractive teenager (especially one whom he learns has come to expect the unwanted advances of adult males), creates in him "an almost forgotten sense of adventure, an eagerness not experienced for years" and "a tingling along his spine" (49). To his surprise, the girl ultimately cancels out both his 'power trip' and his anticipation of a "triumphant homecoming," which would have capped the "success of his trip and the feeling of power it gave him" (47). The domination and submission encoded in gender and social differences connect the pair to their respective worlds.

Garner's physical characterization of the girl's body language in "The Yellow Sweater" implies her dread of continued sexual abuse: "She did as he

commanded, sitting very stiff and straight against the door. Despite the warmth of the morning her coat was buttoned, and she held it to her in a way that suggested modesty or fear" (49). Furthermore, the businessman shrewdly notes that she refers to the man who abused her as 'uncle,' and thus conjectures (although the narrator does not make this explicit), that the nature of the girl's "trouble"-- pregnancy--is the product of her aunt's new boyfriend and his unwanted attention (50). The protagonist's awareness of her victimized status causes him to assume that he is now on "intimate" terms with her (49). Finally, her tearful plea for secrecy conveys a powerful message about her sense of shame and guilt. His presumption leads to a proposition, to which she responds as follows:

She stifled a gasp. "I can't. I didn't--I had no idea when we--" He pressed his advantage. "Why can't you stay? Nobody'll know. I may be in a position to help you afterwards. You'll need help, you know." "No. No, I couldn't," she answered. Her eyes filled with tears. He had not expected her to cry. Perhaps he had been wrong in his estimation of her. He felt suddenly bored with the whole business, and ashamed of the feelings she had ignited in him. (55)

While she laughs uncontrollably in the face of his verbal and physical advances, she retains enough presence of mind to deny her would-be oppressor by screaming: "I know your tricks!" (55)

Discarding the girl's cheap suitcase assuages his guilt, that is, until he sees that the failed clasp on the suitcase has caused the girl's belongings to become soiled. The image of the muddied girl in the ditch crying out her aunt's name ("Bernice!") haunts the businessman. He tries to recapture the capitalistic vainglory of that fateful morning, but "when he looked at himself in the mirror all he saw was the staring face of a fat, frightened old man" (56).

Gamer's 'realistic' episodes of sexual violence not only reflect the social issues of his period, but also anticipate the trends of the future. To illustrate: in a 1995 study, an "estimated 25% of women were sexually abused at least once prior to the age of 16 years" (Dawson 17). Such abuses are often followed by "grief reactions and depression over the loss of a trusted figure" (5). In his stories, Gamer frequently portrays young girls whose "running away, drug and alcohol use, prostitution, [and] teen pregnancy" are attributed, either explicitly or implicitly, to abuse (Strauss 108). The nameless girl in the story "The Yellow Sweater" is thus symbolic of all such victims who

.... run away from home to the big cities, often just as they have begun to have a sexual relationship with a boyfriend [which incites the abuser to become] jealous or punitive. The combination of incest and rape in the histories of prostitutes is not chance; there seems to be a definite increased likelihood of the female incest victim being raped. It is probable that the helplessness, lack of confidence make the girl an easy victim for the rapist. It is as though she expects to be abused. (Ashurst 74)

3. "Lucy" in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963)

"Lucy" exemplifies Gamer's attempt to portray the sexual and social conditioning of a protagonist conventionally branded as a nymphomaniac. However, the sexual and economic determinants of her behavior work to offset any stereotypical rendition. Lucy, a young woman unhappily married to an "old" young man, finds herself ostracized and reviled by the members of her community (*HG* 38). They are critical of her flashy style and seductive behaviour, and they gossip about her many affairs, conjecturing that she is little better than a common prostitute. A young man who initially is smitten by her, and who is the

narrator of the story, encounters her periodically over many years. Seeing her for the last time, he now finds himself repulsed by her "childishness," her deteriorated and dishevelled state, and her failed attempt to attract him sexually as she once had (38). The objectification of Lucy is clear from the very outset of this story:

It was back in the mid nineteen-thirties that I first met Lucy Cullen, but it hardly seems that long ago. She must have been about twenty-seven then, a beautiful woman by any standards, not too tall but slim with a good bust and hips and a pouting face that surrounded a small spoiled mouth and the whitest teeth I've ever seen. She wore her dark brown hair long in those days and it gave her a girlish look that was not hindered by the short tight dresses she wore, or her French-heeled shoes. (35)

At sixteen, Lucy marries a man five years her senior, but soon came to regret it. Marginalised in her community, ogled by "every man who passed her on the street," and shunned by the "respectable" women in the neighbourhood, Lucy finds herself entangled in a vicious circle, which she tries to deny through her "brazen hussy" bravado (41). She is the archetypal unruly female who trades her sexual favours for various needed services from the grocer, the milkman, and others. She works her sexual charms to dominate men, and seeks to make them helpless in her presence. According to the narrator:

Two of the most overworked words in the English language are "personality" and "sex-appeal," but she had both of them to burn. Her "sex-appeal" did not rely on her appearance only, but was aimed at all the male senses, and she could make a man conscious of the feel of her, without quite allowing him to go that far. She could not afford expensive perfumes, but wore the ones she could afford in a way that could stop a millionaire's bride in her tracks. After talking with her for a minute or two a man would walk away feeling that somehow he had been singled out from the others, and that it was a only a question of time before their meetings would be much more intimate. He would hardly ever remember what she said, for she seldom said anything worth remembering, but he would carry with him

the melody of her laugh, the odour of her hair and clothes, and the sight of her figure while she had postured before him. (38)

The fact that Lucy's sexual power over men is so strong causes the young and frustrated narrator to deny the "worth" of "anything" she says. Paradoxically, the very potency of Lucy's sexuality as a young woman damns her to be perceived in her more mature years as a demonic and sinister creature (46). Thus, as an irresistible creature, Lucy's power over men in general is "located in a mystical realm that is closely linked with evil" (Dawes 106).

There is a fundamental dialectic in Garner's violent realism between victim and oppressor--one inflicting and the other submitting to violence. However, Garner seems to recognize that women often are incapable of exercising the power of choice, and attributes their inability to improve their situation to their limited power and helplessness.

The narrator also confirms that there are women like Lucy, who inspire so much "dislike for themselves among the members of their own sex that whether they want to or not, they are forced to seek companionship among the men they meet" (*HG* 36). Quite clearly, Lucy is prevented from establishing liberation through female relationships, although this does not deter her from doggedly "saying good morning to [the neighbourhood wives who ignored her] as she passed them on the street" (36).

Lucy, a character who has been banished to the margins of society and a virtual 'single mother' (her reclusive husband is nowhere to be seen throughout the story), struggles to raise her brood of children. Despite the fact that the

neighbours speculate about the paternity of her children, they nevertheless grudgingly admit that she is a "good mother" (36). Lucy ensures that her children are always clean, and even her "worst enemies" on the street admit that she manages her home well (36). Her powerful sensuality makes it difficult for the community to accept Lucy as a maternal figure, however.

Gamer portrays Lucy as a sensualist who has no choice but to "trade on" her beauty (41). The narrator tells us that Lucy is literally "forced" to interact exclusively with men (36). Just as Lucy's community attempts to enforce certain rules of conduct, so does her inability to conform to such rules reinforce their disapproval of her.

Lucy tells the narrator that, when alone, she invariably falls victim to unsolicited male attention, and she describes her assault in a darkened theatre by a stranger who bites her fingers. According to community standards, however, the "poor men" are her victims:

One morning Mrs. Brownlee, who lived in the next apartment to the Cullens, came upstairs and told my mother that the milkman from the Pinecrest Dairy had lost his job for allowing Lucy to run up a bill of forty-two dollars for her butter and milk. She said,

"There's an inspector from the dairy there now."

"Is there!" my mother exclaimed.

"The poor milk driver pleaded with her yesterday to pay something on the bill so he wouldn't lose his job."

"What did she say to that?" asked my mother.

"She just laughed. She just stood there in the doorway like a brazen hussy and laughed in the poor man's face."

My mother clucked her tongue.

Mrs. Brownlee cupped a hand over her mouth, and leaning close to my mother said,

"I think she takes everything out in trade!" (41)

A communal belief flourishes that she prostitutes herself in order to

purchase the "small extravagances" that her husband's wages deny her, such as faux snakeskin pumps (40). Clearly, the roots of Lucy's financial dependency were firmly planted by her marriage at age sixteen to a "poor provider," and the need to feed and clothe their many offspring. Paradoxically, Lucy's only bid for autonomy and power is to rebel by sexually enslaving men while she herself becomes a 'slave' to her terminally "adolescent" passions (40). Lucy's unplanned pregnancies and promiscuity (dismissed by Fetherling as attributable to her "nymphomania") are shown to be the result of early sex on Lucy's identity development in her adolescence (Fetherling 70).

Strategically placed at the beginning of the story, the sensual nature of Lucy's physical description provides a premonition for the reader, while phrases such as "short tight dresses," "pouting face," and "small spoiled mouth" (*HG* 35) indicate the "sensuality of Lucy's character" and foreshadow the narrator's discovery that her preoccupation with "dime-store pom" (39) rules her actions throughout the story (Arthur 38). Her "girlish look," a projection of her immature sexual identity, makes her a more attractive target for sexually aggressive men (*HG* 38). Currently, "51% of all sexual assaults happen to women between the ages of 16 and 21" (Williams 83).

The narrator's disgust for Lucy's "cheap" attempts at flattery and his condemnation of what he deems a "schoolgirlish use of a billet doux" ignite his passionate hatred (*HG* 36). The male ideal of a subservient, beautiful nymphomaniac has disintegrated. The narrator's frustration suddenly inspires his

hatred for the tawdriness of Lucy's character and what he considers an immature obsession with dirty magazines.

Garner himself endorses "pornography" (literature such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, for example) on the grounds that it offers creative stimulation. In his autobiography, he "can readily vouch for the fact that if anyone wishes they can get a good fortnight's pornographic reading from the Old Testament alone" (ODT 81). He can also "truthfully say that sex drove [him] to a love of literature, and vice versa" (2). During puberty, when sexual fantasy became his "obsession," Garner (like his protagonist Lucy) obtained books from an Owl Drugstore lending library at three cents a day (2). Lucy identifies with the heroines of *A Maid and A Million Men* and the other romances which fascinate her. "Forced" to seek companionship among the men she meets regardless of whether she wants to or not and so necessarily "used," Lucy the sex object metamorphoses from an ideal erotic companion into a "grotesque bulk" (HG 36).

The once beautiful, discreet (albeit "childish") lover, capable of enjoying an almost unquenchable appetite, finally faces patriarchal judgment and standards which induce guilt (36). Her "Fanny Hill" lifestyle climaxes in drunken violence outside a downtown tavern, as an undesirable version of the same character becomes pathetic. Lucy's social devaluation and her subsequent metamorphosis (from pubescent fantasy to repulsive creature) are characteristic of her existence, which remains an "uphill grind" (Fetherling 3).

A guiltless eagerness, so vital to the feminine passion of the ideal sensual

character, damns Lucy. The narrator lists five men she leaves behind after tiring of them, and states that what they most remember her for has become sinister. Lucy's "fabulous" female power fades with her beauty and she is reduced to drawing a violent, drunken crowd (*HG* 45). Her laughter's once-happy melody finally fills an almost deserted street: "It was sinister. It had the most sinister sound I had ever heard" (46). A lack of "sex-appeal" devalues the woman:

A couple of weeks ago I was driving home from a lodge meeting, and as I was passing a downtown tavern I noticed a small crowd gathered on the sidewalk. There were two men fighting, one middle aged and drunk, the other young and apparently sober. The young man knocked the drunken one down, and then a woman stepped from the crowd and took him by the arm. It was Lucy, but a different Lucy than the one I remembered from the last time I'd seen her. She was quite fat now, but her legs had remained thin and shapely, and they looked grotesque trying to hold up such a heavy bulk. (46)

Now a "successful" lodge member, the narrator's perspective reveals his bias as Lucy becomes a repulsive victim of male objectification (46). Lucy embodies in narrative form the naturalistic tenet that, ultimately, all things decay.

The narrator's smug attitude towards Lucy, based on his sense of social superiority, metaphorically 'strips' her during their final phone conversation. She has seen his newspaper photo--a tribute to his success in business--and whispers: "I'm lucky you can't see me through the telephone my kimono is undone all down the front" (45). Physical description, as used by the narrator in the revelation of characters (in combination with other methods of characterization, such as dialogue), is usually less detailed due to the short stories' structural limitations. Lucy's appearance defines her, however, for Garner describes her in purely physical terms. The collective preoccupation with her

sexuality results in her victimization, as when the lodge member imposes an ugly characterization shortly after the violent confrontation outside the tavern. His description constitutes a distinct expression of dominance and superiority.

Garner also decries the sad state of "sexuality education" when "most sexually explicit materials women see are pornographic, rather than educational" (Russel 184). His concern for the exploitation of specific social groups is apparent in the numerous studies of sexual violence common to all three collections. Women are often stratified and set at odds with each other in the stories.

4. "**Black and White and Red All Over**" in *Men and Women* (1966)

In this, the first story in the Governor General's Award-winning collection, a man simply known as "Bob" spends his final moments of freedom at a local bar, where he is apprehended for murdering his wife and her lover after finding them in bed together. While drinking with Bob and hinting to him about his wife's adultery, Anne and Dave Herridge--a married couple whom Bob has "had no social contact with for years"--arrive at the gory truth (*MW* 4). In a fit of jealous rage, Bob has killed his wife in their bed upon discovering her with Clyde Hackett, a travelling salesman. Clyde has tried to escape to the kitchen, where he also dies at Bob's hands.

Garner's fictional treatment of domestic conflict "cleverly sets up a truly shocking denouement" (Stuewe 32). The estrangement of husband and wife takes on a violent incarnation in which the narrative point of view of the oppressor

becomes ironic: he is incapable of doing anything except blaming circumstances outside himself for the death of his wife and her lover.

Garner's attention to detail heightens the drama of the death in the bedroom. The fact that the murder has no witnesses heightens the dramatic irony of the verbal games played with the Herridges at the bar. Garner does not describe the gore at the murder scene, thereby allowing readers to picture the blood-soaked rooms for themselves, with the help of Bob's riddle, "what's black and white and red all over?" (*MW* 11).

Anne reacts impulsively to Bob's intimated crime and cries out. Her intense hatred for Bob as oppressor and in recognition of his revulsion to her own "ugliness" (that of "a woman who has known defeat too many times") climaxes: "Dave's mouth was hanging open but Anne was repeating the conundrum to herself: '.... and red all over!' she almost screamed, pushing back her chair and jumping to her feet" (12). Anne's cry betrays her horror when faced with the 'lady killer'--she becomes the archetypal victim shocked by an act of violence that involves her completely in another woman's defeat.

Female characters (Lillian and the protagonist of "Lucy", for example) are only too aware of the dissatisfactions which originate in the regulation of married, female sexuality. Minutes after the bloody killing of his wife in their bed and of her lover Clyde who "made it as far as the kitchen," the murderous Bob ironically wonders: "where had he read that man was the sentimental sex, while woman was the pragmatist who let nothing deter her in her search for hedonistic sexual fulfilment?" (3). The rebellious Lillian, who by her husband's estimation drinks too

much, must die for her indiscretions. The author's concern with habitual drunkenness--and its direct bearing on the social construction of gender roles--manifests itself in the story's violence.

While the patriarchal cult of "True Womanhood" celebrates female abstemiousness, the drunk woman remains the stereotypical "slut" (Crowley 188). Insofar as it perpetuated the idea of a "male preserve," the "drinking culture as modern literary movement provided no place for woman, except as she conformed to an updated version of the drunken harlot: the alcoholic nymphomaniac" (Crowley 188). Lil's adulterous behaviour defines her as an "alcoholic female" (an oversexed victim), thereby warranting an objectified sexual nature. Conversely, Anne Herridge as the "female alcoholic" of the piece, does not. As an aggressively sexual woman, Anne faces rejection. Bob rejects her propositions as a matter "of course" when she "corners" him (*MW* 8). She is apparently thrown over for Lil by Clyde, as well. Anne's "harsh" and "coarse" laugh, and her projected image of a "tawdry biddy" with "blue-grey" hair, complete the "showy and cheap" characterization (8). The chronic "female alcoholic" becomes "unsexable" (Crowley 118). To Lil's credit, her husband grants that ("so far")

Nobody could say that Lil had become cheap and vulgar like the woman at the table. Lately, though, since she'd been ill so often, she delayed her housework sometimes. When he had returned home the time before [the murder] the beds were not made and there'd been hardly anything to eat in the fridge. He had fetched Brenda home from the Danchuks and they had eaten peanut butter sandwiches in the kitchen. Lil had not arrived until after eight o'clock, a bit loud and unsure of her balance but not what you'd call drunk. Not, for instance, like the woman sitting behind him [Anne Herridge]. (*MW* 7)

Young "Lillian" becomes the rebellious "Lil," at a time when alcohol emerged as "a prominent element in the feminist revolt" of middle-class [American] women, especially those, in increasing numbers, who went to college" (Crowley 117). Liquor, a historical flag of woman's new freedom, affects Bob's relationship with his wife (which occasions his morbid excitement).

Garner explores the conjunction of aberrant intimacy and drunkenness in the context of a murderer's shame and despair. Bob feels that he is victimized in the face of the lack of understanding which he receives in his suburban world. The "social hipsterism" from which the narrator voluntarily resigns himself receives ironic treatment (*MW* 9). After the murder, Bob finds no solace in the mundane, "barfly" existence of Anne and Dave Herridge.

Garner purports to "defend" the plight of women by quoting H. L. Mencken in *Star Weekly* magazine: "In a book titled *In Defence of Women*, he wrote, 'The first-rate woman is a realist. She sees clearly that in a world dominated by second-rate men, their special capabilities (as breadwinners) are esteemed and given the highest rewards' Sentimentality, largely a male trait, may be man's attempt to escape the pressure of realism" (Garner 20). Bob's "sentimentality" (the violent jealousy which motivates him to murder his wife and her lover) stems from a perception of reality which continues to be reinforced by social stereotypes.

Women, according to Garner, "do not place themselves vicariously in the position of the women portrayed on the screen, but are content to view Hollywood's version of the dance of life objectively men, on the other hand,

become sentimentally attached to the unreal caricatures of women that are shown and, for an hour or two, become the equally unreal heroes that pursue them" (20). As feminist Jane Caputi points out in *The Prostitution of Sexuality* (1995), "sexual murder is not some inexplicable explosion/epidemic of an extrinsic evil or the domain of the mysterious psychopath. On the contrary such murder is an eminently logical step in the procession of patriarchal roles, values, needs, and rule of force" (Barry 14). Here, the murderer justifies the death of Lillian and her lover, owing to Lillian's domestic irresponsibility.

Garner "can naturally write a man's thoughts and feelings and make them believable, and this is doubtless why the stories are densely populated by men" (Arthur 55). However, he frequently explores the powerlessness of women in the short stories and the subsequent contravention of their will.

Bob executes Clyde in the kitchen, perhaps on a newly-scrubbed floor in light of Lillian's insistence on "scrubbing her kitchen and bathroom floors rather than mopping them, afterwards covering them with laid out newspapers what is black and white and red all over? [The bloody newsprint]" (MW 6). She neglects her duties as a wife and mother to drink and have sex with men because her husband no longer satisfies her, and thus, by his jealous standards, she must die. We need look no further than Betty Friedan's research in *The Feminine Mystique* to examine the suffering of women such as Lillian from a historical perspective: "If a woman had a problem in the 1950s and 1960s, she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage, or with herself. Other women were satisfied with their lives, she thought. What kind of woman was she if she did not feel this mysterious

fulfilment waxing the kitchen floor?" (Friedan 14).

Bob would rather blame his wife because "when the victim is blamed in some way for having 'provoked' him--victim precipitation theory--the man who beat her does not hold himself responsible for his behaviour" (Stuart 109). The pattern of the drunken killer's blame after the murder is consistently portrayed in many stories, in that a disproportionate number of male characters stereotype the females as 'villains.'

Lillian, the trysting wife in "Black and White and Red All Over", purportedly does not exemplify what a married woman "should" be, although her murderer grudgingly admits she proves a capable wife (*MW* 6). At the root of such crises, according to *Women Murdered By The Men They Loved* (1992), is the promotion of harmful myths. "A man can take just so much," a popular "apologist's attempt to explain an apparently senseless murder," also proves to be Bob's own reaction to his bloody deeds (Bean 7). Of potentially great importance in shaping violence toward women in Garner's stories are men's deeper emotional responses to "control over emotional distance" in relationships (Peters 205).

Here, the function of Garner's art contributes somewhat to the "de-alienation" of the killer by portraying a certain sense of shame as he remembers his dead wife. Through an analysis of the marriage's deterioration, the narrator reconstructs the murder. Garner clearly demonstrates that cuckold Bob appears to have strong motives to regain a "sense of control in intimate relationships, and poor verbal skills to do so" (Peters 205):

Bob lifted his glass and drained it, while the others stared incredulously.

Dave's use of the word "morbid" was the giveaway, he thought. It was one of *their* words, like "complex" and substituting "john" for bathroom, and using phrases such as "she's a grand person." There was a whole lexicon of "in" words and phrases that *they* used to assert their social hipsterism. He raised his head and stared first at one and then the other. Dave looked away, but Anne stared coldly at Bob. Then casually--too casually--she asked, "What happened?" (MW 10)

Anne Herridge "almost screams 'and red all over!'" when she grasps the personal ramifications of the riddle (12). Lil, her drinking companion, is slaughtered for neglecting her wifely duties. Garner's purportedly "sentimental," jealous man simply cannot help himself:

He pushed those thoughts away from him and tried to think of only good things about her, but could not. Instead he remembered the times she had asserted herself at parties, when the drinks had broken down her inhibitions and she had ignored his unspoken pleas, and she had talked and sung a little too loudly and had flirted outrageously with some of the men. This open denial of him as a husband he remembered now with shame and self-recrimination. (5)

Women such as Anne Herridge, who once enjoyed a reputation for being "fast" but who are made undesirable due to their fallen, "alcoholic" image, are considered "realists" and as such, they are quick to recognize the likelihood of violence (8). Lillian also stands guilty of having "asserted her rebelliousness" in public and in private (5). In the ironic testimony of the love triangle's sole survivor, the female villain has driven him to murder.

5. "Dwell In Heaven, Die On Earth" in *Men and Women* (1966)

Garner's principal theme in *Men and Women*, the estrangement of husband and wife, is regarded from another dimension which critically unmasks

the brittle veneer of social and religious conventions in this story of a holier-than-thou young Reverend who destroys his marriage due to his relationship with a prostitute and her pimp. The violent withdrawal symptoms suffered by the young prostitute Cecile in "Dwell In Heaven, Die On Earth" are only temporarily assuaged by the drugs which the clergyman provides. The sanctimonious, inexperienced "Rev" character gets a vicarious thrill from 'playing God' and buying drugs, purportedly to ease the prostitute's withdrawal: "Christ would have done it, he reminded himself, putting aside the thoughts of Margaret and the coming baby, his reputation in the church, the fact that the act would make him a criminal" (*MW* 84).

Eventually, the Rev's acts of so-called "charity" towards Cecile lead "Joe" (her pimp/pusher) to assault his wife, Margaret, as well. Garner introduces Rev. Ben Morgan as a clergyman who wants to escape his suburban flock at St. Matthew's-On-The-Hill in Fairview, with its "pushy women's groups, christening parties, rented white-tie weddings and the rest" (76). The character, however earnestly, nonetheless "fritters" away the funding of his outreach ministry and is ashamed of this failure (76).

The Rev, a "square" Christian, must pay to spend time with the young prostitute just as any other "john" would (78). An astute pimp shows the inexperienced Rev the error of his new, drug-dealing ways by assaulting Ben's pregnant wife, Margaret. Cecile, a desperate addict, also senses the Rev's spiritual weakness. As a prostitute she is painfully aware of the Rev's submissive attraction; he is presented as another trick who expects a semblance of emotional

involvement. Here, the immature clergyman needs the prostitute to treat a semblance of religious transcendence as if it is real, because nearly "all the patients had taken advantage of him, most of the appropriation being frittered away in the handouts" (*MW* 76). The prostitute is inclined to share the hopelessness of her addiction with the Rev because she views him with the same contempt as she does her customers, even as she is forced to make overtures to him according to her "charity" case status (76):

As the young prostitute and heroin addict, Cecile had told him, on the evening she had given up and had left to meet the pusher in the subway station: "Rev, for five years now I've been a user on the street. You Protestants believe in the same heaven as us Catholics do, but do you know where it is? It's right down here on earth, being cooked in a spoon, and mainlined with a hypo. When I'm on the stuff I go to heaven every day. (77)

The statement succinctly reflects Cecile's despondency, and the addiction to which she has abjectly "given up." Garner's contemporary critics found his stories characterized by a "tension" that "pits his sympathy for the innate decency of human beings against his anger toward social conditions" (Stuewe 11).

Joe Johnson, Cecile's pimp, takes advantage of the Rev's relationship with the girl in that he maintains the Rev's interference entitles him to visit with--and to ultimately assault--Ben's pregnant wife Margaret. He demands money from the suburban housewife and sexually assaults her while the Rev blames the prostitutes and junkies, as much as he does the pimps, for the failure of his ministry. After his wife calls Cecile a "drug addict little trollop" Ben claims to finally 'see the light': "Margaret had been right all along" (89). Here, his sense of failure alienates him from his troubled "charges": "Within the framework of their own

selfish warped mentality there was no place for gratitude towards those they thought of as square-john reformers" (*MW* 89). Cecile is also considered an expendable "throwaway" by Johnson (79).

Garner characterizes the oppressor as "a tall good-looking young man snappily dressed and carrying a rolled-up newspaper under his arm", and the oppressed as a girl who "began to retch dryly and spread her body into fantastic shapes as she writhed across the bed" (85). The textual juxtaposition of the descriptions addresses the issue of sex as power over women. The "Man" who collects the profits from his slave "girl" is stereotypically attractive. He sets the "snappily dressed" standard at the expense of the naked, helpless girl on the bed (85). The brutal pimp/pusher in "Dwell In Heaven, Die On Earth" exploits his economic advantage over the Rev's wife as well, by misappropriating ten dollars from her (four more than we see him take from Cecile to cover her drug habit). In this case, Garner demonstrates the violence of sexual exploitation, its stratification of women along socioeconomic lines, and their reduction to sexual objects.

As prostitution sex becomes "increasingly recognized as 'normal' sexual practice, the only way non-prostitute women know that they are 'normal,' is by ensuring that some women are sustained in a separate category" (Barry 73), whether they call these women prostitutes, "trollops" (*HG* 89), or "brazen hussies" (41). In "Lucy," the privatized woman and the public woman--the wife and the whore--are also the principal forms that sexual slavery takes, and they are mutually reinforcing (Burstow 6). Interestingly, Lucy's acknowledged autonomy,

as a wife *and* a whore, is perceived as "the most sinister" (HG 25). The infighting inherent amongst the female characters is symptomatic of their subordination.

Cecile describes her daily routine as a heroin-addicted prostitute: "I'm gonna go on the nod for an hour or so, then turn a coupla tricks up the street so I can make a meet in the morning" (MW 86). Cecile has "given up" and resigned herself to the fact that she is 'hooked,' confiding in the Reverend about her five-year struggle with addiction and abuse. Ironically, Margaret blames Cecile for the pimp's presence at her home, demonstrating the manner in which "prostitution reinforces a pattern of female animosity" (Barry 83).

Nonetheless, Margaret is capable of recognizing the "snappy dresser" for what he is and she warns her husband, "'When you associate with pigs, the other pigs learn to treat you as a pig,' [Margaret] went on, her voice flat and lifeless. 'The man tonight propositioned me.' She began sobbing again. 'He kissed me on the mouth. And he--he felt me!'" (MW 88). The Rev finally confesses his own guilt and asks himself, "His so called charges had played him for a fool, but wasn't that what he'd deserved?" (89).

6. "What A Way To Make A Living" in *Violation of the Virgins* (1971)

In "What a Way to Make a Living," two stag party performers made to feel by their 'patrons' "about as low as any woman could get", have coffee in the Budapest Cafe and speak with the owner, a Hungarian refugee who waits on

them (V 12). "Marya Nagy" is clearly frustrated by the poverty she endures, and this troubles Denise, the younger performer. Denise begins to associate her partner Lena with her own exploitation and accuses the older woman of being a lesbian. Denise is reduced to tears and decides to quit the stag circuit and to "go back on the streets, where at least she'd been a woman" (19). The character's sudden awareness that "being a woman" is prohibited, spurs her to gain a measure of autonomous control over her body as merchandise (8).

It is also significant that the character who represents the hopelessness of women in prostitution is Lena (the older prostitute), who makes an effort to convince Denise that any attempts at escaping the sex trade are futile. Lena serves as a pessimistic symbol of sexual slavery: there exists a pragmatic quality to her 'logic,' and she refuses to participate in the liberation of her oppressed companion due to her own powerlessness. Lena's fear of "Sammy" dictates her curt response to Denise's statement that "working for [him] is going down instead of up" (11). "What A Way To Make A Living" reveals the stratifying effects of sexual slavery, which alienate a young prostitute from her current business partner and would-be "friend" (13).

Gamer chooses to portray objectified sexuality in order to expose the subsequent "depersonalization" of individuals (Barry 42). The only overt act of violence is immediate and "offhand" in the story, when Sammy slaps the older stripper (V 8). Nonetheless, memories of prior performances--in which "slobbering creeps" taunt the young prostitute--are relived in dramatic detail (8). Ironically, the personal nature of the sexual violence further alienates the characters, through

acts which are usually unseen and often implied. As the two women leave the Atlas Boxing and Sporting Club, the city's cold air "stings their faces," while the "soft noises of the night rubbed out the drunken obscenities of the sweating male crowd they had left behind in the athletic club" (8).

After Denise confides in Lena about her horrifying "first job table dancing," Lena patronizes Denise in order to continue exploiting her: "Sure, sweet, I know. After a while you get so used to it that it don't matter" (9). Denise fears Sammy and the men she performs for, calling them a sea of "just dirty grinning skulls," and admitting that she is most terrified of "Eddie," who comes to her apartment uninvited and "hurts" people (11). Lena's first question in response to this revelation is revealing: "How come you'd invite Eddie an' not me, honey?" (11).

Lena does not appreciate Denise going 'over her head' with Eddie, and in response, Denise makes no secret of her desire to quit dancing at stag parties: "When they were settled on their flimsy chairs Denise said, 'You know, Lena, if I wasn't facing a third offence next time up I think I'd tell Sammy to get a new girl.' 'Why?' The older woman sounded not only surprised but frightened" (11). Denise's record of offenses merely serves to criminalize her, and to further entrench her victimization.

Denise "hates" Lena; she concludes that the older woman "enjoys" humiliating herself and pretending to be a lesbian (15). For Denise, pornography (here the sexual subordination of women to the gaze of the male voyeurs) is worse than streetwalking or prostitution. The failure of the marginalised female characters in finding a sense of unity reflects a larger pattern of such 'infighting'

throughout the texts.

The migration from a rural to an urban area also alienates the young Francophone, who finds herself a victim of the hierarchies that structure the world of prostitution. Given that Sammy gives the money to Lena, Lena purportedly "splits" it with Denise (10). "The system of minimum prices is an exact parallel to the internal solidarity employees exhibit when it comes to the question of pay that sets women more intensely against each other" (Barry 42). This undoubtedly contributes to Denise's angry outburst and to her subsequent estrangement from Lena:

They said nothing more until they reached the lighted windows of a dress shop, then Lena pulled her young companion into the tiled entry way of the store. She drew a clutched bare hand from her coat pocket and opened it, splitting their performance fee, handing the girl five of the ten-dollar bills she held in her palm.

"What did Sammy say about the next booking?" Denise asked, stuffing her share of the money deep inside her purse.

"He's gonna give me a call in a couple days." The younger woman stared at the colorful display of ski clothes in one of the windows. (V 9)

By juxtaposing the extremes of leisure and prostitution, Garner sets himself the "correct and important goal" (according to Lukacs in his essay "On Realism") of "depicting the life of the underclass in concrete interaction with that of the other classes" (Lukacs 24). Denise's ruminations in the Budapest Cafe further ensure that this goal becomes an important development in "What A Way To Make A Living." Her relationship with the older prostitute also causes the "girl" anguish:

"Come on Denise," Lena said. "I'm getting chilled. Let's find a place that's open an' have a hot coffee." She took the girl by the elbow, but Denise twisted away and made a great show of pulling on her gloves.

As they hurried up the street Lena asked, "You ever ski?"

"Only once."

"Where was that, down in Quebec?"

"Yeah." Lena didn't push her young friend for details. There were some things neither of them talked about. (V 9)

The nature of the relationship (performing sex acts with each other for large groups of men) alienates the women. Research has shown that prostitutes' "disengagement from former friends, family, and 'straight' society makes them anonymous, then invisible within the prostitution world, no one cares" (Barry 45).

The fact that the older prostitute promotes their act as a dancing duo (to the Hungarian refugee who owns the cafe in which they sit) humiliates Denise:

Denise remembered the searching look she'd received from Lena's former partner, for it often came back to her when she felt depressed. It hadn't taken her long to realize what it had meant. Though their performance was--well, pretending you might say, there were times when she felt that Lena was enjoying the act itself. She couldn't really accuse Lena of being a dyke, but the older woman often went further than necessary to give the slobbering creeps their cheap thrill. And any woman Lena's age who had never married was suspect to begin with. Not that her partner had ever propositioned her, but Denise felt that Lena sometimes wanted to carry things on after their act was finished, trying to invite herself to her apartment, things like that. To pretend to enjoy her participation with Lena in parts of their act was one thing, that was just for money, but you had to draw the line at *enjoying* it.

"Magda, that's my youngest one," the woman was saying, "is engaged to a boy she met at Commercial," She shifted her painful weight from one foot to the other.

"An English speaking boy. His father has worked for bus company twenty year."

"That's nice dear," Lena said, swishing her coffee.

Denise realized with a small shock that the woman standing beside her, dead tired, shapeless and with aching feet, was the picture she had retained of her own mother as she stood over the old black woodburning stove a couple of years before her death. She said, "Maybe we should go, Lena. I'm sure this lady wants to take the weight off her feet." (V 15)

Garner deftly characterizes Denise's detached personal reflections, and her own

'heterosexist' bias and experience. When Denise finally refuses to be exploited any further by Lena, she tells her, "For Christ's sake don't keep pawing me, you butch! There's plenty of kids that think fifty bucks a night for putting on a half-hour filthy show is just great. Maybe you'll find one who likes it like you do!" (18)

Lena immediately blames the "fat hunky woman in the restaurant" for making Denise "change so sudden" (18). The "filthy show" (18) enacts a type of lesbian sexuality which maintains the stereotypical myths prevalent in pornographic, 'stag party' sexuality (Russell 108). The characters have so "internalized the structure of patriarchal domination that they replicate it" in their relationship with each other (Dawes 394).

Marya implies that her husband, when faced with the different standards of equality in Canada, also tries to exert power to maintain her traditionally subservient role. Denise's memories of her late mother and her suffering symbolize a domestic reality which parallels the present exploited condition of the three women in the cafe. 1993 statistics show that "about 70 percent of refugee women are slotted into low-paying job ghettos" (Williams 87):

Fear, lack of knowledge and intolerance shape Canadian attitudes toward immigrants, refugees and foreign domestic workers. Some Canadians blame them for causing increased unemployment and the recession. And while the Canadian government encourages immigration, not all immigrants are given the tools they need to integrate successfully into all aspects of Canadian life. They are often viewed as not quite Canadian and frequently treated as second-class citizens. Cumulatively, these factors make integration and adjustment difficult and intensify the risks for women already in violent situations who must face a double layer of dominance--that of their own situation and that of the society to which they have come. (Williams 86)

Marya clearly despises the discrimination she faces due to her displaced, refugee

status: "She clapped her hands together and shrugged, dismissing the failure of her dream. Her voice rose. 'We 'ave four t'ousand, two 'undred dollar, eh? Hokay, for all dat we got (spreading her arms and letting them fall to her ample hips) dis place. No customer, no monies, noddin but debts, eh? The Budapest Cafe!' She spat on the floor" (V 16).

'Pomocrats' such as Eddie make sex into a disturbing ritual, "like those stag parties for the groom: they stick you with prostitutes, or with a view of women that makes them all prostitutes, in order to show you how it must be done" (Russell 108). Social forces often work to fuel the "masculine sense of entitlement to intrude upon a woman, whether acquaintance or stranger, and they sustain the myths that allow such abuse to be tolerated rather than give rise to societal outrage" (Sampselle 12):

Thinking about the law reminded her of the night a month or so before when the suburban stag party had been raided, and she and Lena had been taken to the police station in a squad car. That had been the worst night of her life, she thought. The found-ins had just had to identify themselves and Sammy and Eddie had put up their own bail, but she and Lena had been thrown into adjoining cells where they'd spent the night. Even the guy who had leased the hall and had run the party wasn't kept in jail. After being scooped twice for street-walking it wasn't being pinched that had bothered her. It had been the way all the men had stared at her, the cops, the J.P. that had fixed bail for Sammy and Eddie, all the rest. This had only confirmed the fact that being a stag party performer was just about as low as any woman could get, and it had been bothering her constantly since. The guy running the party had political pull; the charges had been dropped and the two women freed in the morning.

"We got a visitor," Lena said, tipping her head in the direction of the window.

Denise glanced into the staring eyes of a young cop, and smiled at him flirtatiously. His jaw relaxed for a second before he turned away and disappeared along the sidewalk.

"He's proly from a squad car parked down at the corner." "Yeah."

Denise knew his kind all right. TV hockey games and a church bowling

team. Married a year, with a new first baby or one on the way. Living in an over mortgaged bungalow in a working class suburb that he liked to think other people thought of as middle class. His wife would be a sharp-nosed English girl with a high school typing course, who couldn't afford to have her hair set. She'd be the kind who would give herself a bath just before her husband came off shift. She'd go twice a day to the local shopping center, not as she claimed to give the baby some fresh air, but to enjoy the turning of male heads as she passed their owners showing off her still-lovely legs. (V 13)

Denise's labor, like that of her late mother's, is "devalued in the public economy" and thus she is exploited (Barry 52):

She was thinking of the poor woman in the little restaurant, and beyond her through the years stretching back to St-Felice, seeing once again her own mother, misshapen after ten childbirths and the drudgery and poverty of her life, standing uncomplaining and unashamed before the big black kitchen stove. And of her father getting up quietly so as not to wake the children at five o'clock six mornings a week, and riding the back of an open truck, winter and summer, to his job at the sawmill in Roberval. She wondered, frightened, whether they, both dead now, could see her as she had become. She made the sign of the cross, surreptitiously, turning her back on Lena. (V 17)

Denise, sick of her own "filthiness," finally decides to "go back on the streets where at least she'd be a woman" (19). Denise's independent, financial resourcefulness remains important to her--which is demonstrated by the fact that she plans to return to the "streets"--but Garner does not promote sex work as an alternative for women. Denise is made to feel less than a woman by the suburban men she services, so she decides to quit working with Lena to return to the street. The pair of prostitutes belong to a group who experience exploitation as consonant with that of an underclass.

7. "Step-'n-a-Half" in *Violation of the Virgins* (1971)

The sense of outrage, usually suppressed, experienced by women caught in socioeconomic traps, is given expression in "Step-'n-a-Half," the story of Rosetta, a handicapped and pregnant Hispanic girl. She is picked up on the highway, along with Clipper, her drug-addicted male companion, by a middle-aged man in a rented car. The driver is on a business trip across Texas, while the hitchhikers' destination during the two days they spend in the car is conspicuously vague. Before long, however, Clipper's intention to murder the driver and steal his car becomes obvious to Rosetta. In order to prevent the impending murder at the hands of her long-time tormentor, she somehow summons up the courage to kill him. When the businessman picks up the hitchhiking pair at the Arizona-New Mexico border, he soon begins to "worry about the little crippled girl" being "abused" by Clipper (44). Ironically, she saves his life by repeatedly clubbing Clipper on the head with a wrench. The knife falls from Clipper's hand and he dies with a "a bony crunch," in the passenger seat of the rented Buick (53).

The isolated setting of the American Southwest is used to emphasize the desert landscape which provides the eerie backdrop for the violence that will soon result. The nightfall further deepens the sinister ambience.

He knew it was dangerous to pick up hitchhikers after dark, but out there on the desert near the Arizona-New Mexico state line, fifteen miles beyond the last sign of habitation, he felt he was only following a historic code that went back to pioneer days. He pulled to a stop about fifty yards beyond the couple who had flagged him down. They were standing by the side at a seemingly stalled old car pulled off the shoulder of the road into the sagebrush and mesquite. In his back-up lights as he reversed the car along the divided U.S. Interstate 10 Ed Rogers could see the man hurrying towards him, carrying a tote bag over his shoulder. The woman, who seemed to be crippled, or was at least limping, stumbled along behind the man, carrying a paper parcel in her arms. (40)

The couple seem at first to evoke an image of the "pioneer days." Noting that the girl is pregnant, Ed Rogers assumes that the young man is the father, and becomes increasingly aware of his abusive behavior toward Rosetta.

He also discovers other things about Rosetta: first, that she allied with someone as unlikely as Clipper because of having experienced severe poverty and abuse during her miserable childhood; second, that Clipper was not the father of her baby; and finally, that it is only her strong desire to wreak revenge on Clipper for having robbed her of her money that prevents her from leaving him. Ironically, it is precisely because Rosetta detests Clipper's violent abuse that she makes a point of enduring it until an opportune moment arises. As a drug abuser, Clipper is apt to be violent more frequently, and to inflict more serious injury on his "partner than one who does not have a previous history of drug abuse" (Hansen 65).

Violence is linked to Rosetta's quest for self-determination, and this quest requires bloodshed: "'He was real mean crazy,' she said. 'Specially when he was out of stuff [hash]. He would of killed me too I guess, but I'd already made up my mind to get him first. The *hijo de puta!* That's why--that's why I just had to stay with him'" (V 54). Initially, however, Ed misunderstands the nature of their relationship: "Ed asked over his shoulder, 'Do you want to take the bus home from here, miss?' 'No,' she said in a scared but determined little voice. 'I'm going to stick with Clipper.' Clipper grinned. Ed vowed to himself to get rid of them both before long. A girl as stupid as she was didn't deserve help from anybody" (49).

Ed's earlier estimation of the girl--"A girl as stupid as she was [for staying

with Clipper] didn't deserve help from anybody"--becomes ironic in light of her coming to his rescue before Clipper kills him (47). Rosetta raises the heavy wrench, and brings it down with all her strength on Clipper's head to prevent him from killing Ed. Ed can only stare at the girl after she explains why she felt bound to Clipper, "amazed at her courage and the depth of her need for revenge" (54). Garner's effective use of ironic juxtaposition allows him to tell this story of deprivation and abuse with a minimum of authorial intrusion (for example, when the pregnant girl is starved and beaten while the businessman is offered a room with color TV). Garner uses irony in order to reverse traditional roles of prostitution, for example when the businessman delivers the pregnant, naked girl breakfast in bed. Here the mother figure represents a chaste paragon of virtue; in such a context, Clipper's abuse and pandering become all the more perverse.

The narrator then goes on to detail Ed's shocked reaction to the evidence of physical violence endured by Rosetta during her pregnancy. If violence against women is an expression of male power, Clipper's abuse of Rosetta can be interpreted as an attempt to exercise additional control "in the face of the overt expression of female power that pregnancy provides" (Williams 34). Clipper's resentment and hatred for the pregnant Rosetta is morally justified according to the abusive character's warped perception of his own power. Clipper's violent attacks on the pregnant girl may be disturbing, but according to *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence--Achieving Equality* (the Final Report by The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women in 1993):

As disturbing as such cases are, our consultants and existing research

suggest that they are fairly frequent. In one Canadian study involving 200 battered women, 30 percent of the women were pregnant when assaulted and 40 percent of the women revealed an increase in the severity of violence. In another study by the London Family Court Clinic, approximately half of 90 women were pregnant when assaulted. (34)

Studies of prostitution and of pimping strategies such as Clipper's are significant in the short stories, because prostitutes represent that institution of male domination (the prostitution contract) which grants a measure, however negligible, of economic power to the female. "Step-'n-a-Half" is a unique examination of oppression because the prostitute generally stands opposed to the mother figure in that she is identified as a purely sexual creature.

Ed's constant concern for Rosetta (and the bruises and cuts which multiply, "especially on her face") evinces the potentially fatal, destructive aspect of her relationship with Clipper (V 54). Clipper is also branded "one of them that passes for white" by the "establishment" (a motel owner) and faces discrimination himself: "'I don't take in none of them kind,' the man said to Ed, handing him his door key. 'Last winter a pair of 'em stole a fifteen dollar bedspread. The police picked 'em up in Tucson. The girl had cut it in half, cut a neck-hole in it, an' was wearing it for a poncho'" (44).

The young businessman gives Rosetta a ride and feeds her in order to shield her from Clipper's violent attacks but it is Ed himself who is saved from Clipper by the girl at the story's climax. Irony in Garner's short stories is a complex device which exploits the disparity between the reader's comprehension of a situation, or the incomplete understanding of a character (here, Rosetta). For its

effectiveness, irony relies on incongruity; Ed's pat view of Rosetta's relationship with Clipper is later shown to be erroneous. The fatal consequences of female rage and revenge prove shocking to Ed, more so than images of Rosetta's enslavement and suffering.

Clipper uses Rosetta's disability as a way to procure food and transportation, while the luxuries that the businessman is constantly offered (color TV in his room for a dollar extra, scotch on the rocks, even breakfast) serve as a commentary on the economic distance between him and the young couple. The agreement of the authorities who separate and categorize the characters (the motel owner, the crew-cut cop) contributes to the social injustices heaped upon the pair. Still, the themes of sexual violence and economic deprivation are finally concluded in affirmative terms; a victim achieves liberation by executing her oppressor and, in so doing, saves the life of the businessman.

Despite her "physiognomy of failure," Rosetta succeeds in surviving the hitchhike across the desert with him. Clipper is less interested in survival than he is in getting high on "that good grass an' hash" from Mexico (49). In these stories, law enforcement 'criminalizes' young women who fall victim to further abuse: "It's a immigration point,' the hippie said. 'They're lookin' for greasers.' He turned and ordered Step-'n-a-Half to crouch on the floor close to the left hand side of the car" (51). He presents Rosetta's prostitution as a convenient business arrangement, and perceives her "crippled" body from a mercantilistic point of view:

"You takin' a lunch, mister?"
 "No. I'm buying that little girl her breakfast."
 "That's real nice of yew."

"Where does she come from?"
 "Up nawth of here somewheres," the hippie answered, as if to conciliate him.
 "Where'd you meet her?"
 "Lately we bin stayin' at a *commune* [emphasis Gamer's] near Big Sur."
 "Where are you taking her now?"
 Clipper shrugged. "She's good fer gettin' us rides."
 "Is that your baby she's carrying?" The other shrugged but didn't answer.
 (45)

Clipper's perceived humiliation, his attempt to rob and kill Ed, and his own murder are suggested throughout the story by the symbolic use of the setting, and recurrent imagery. After the trio passes through El Paso on a raised freeway and observes the contrasting poverty of Juarez across the Rio Grande in Mexico, Ed spies the body of an animal, an occurrence which foreshadows Clipper's death by the roadside. The jaguar's death is something that makes Ed "ashamed he's a human being" (50). Ironically, Clipper laughs as they pass the carcass: "It's on'y vermin," Clipper insisted. "It deserved what it got" (50). One page later, "this piece of human vermin, to use his own words, was as dead as the beautiful jaguar back along the road" (51).

Clipper may laugh, but in "such situations there can be little humor as the author bases his stories upon what is unhappy and problematic" (Arthur 81). Gamer avoids literary symbols which are intrusive. Here, the recognition of the symbolic significance of Ciudad Juarez, the jaguar, and Ed's "nice heap [car]" contributes to a deeper thematic appreciation of the stories, but these can also be accepted on a literal level (V 42). The jaguar and the pimp are contrasting symbols which represent man's destructive nature; both make Ed ashamed to be "a human being" with a capacity for violence (52).

The story ends with the cleansing of the blood and dirt which betray the struggle in the car: "Rosetta wiped the sand and sweat from her face. She had done a good job on the bloodstain which now looked like an inoffensive Coke spill" (57). Rosetta limps away in a clean dress after washing, applying lipstick, and pinning up her long black hair:

"You're beautiful, Rosetta!" Ed exclaimed.
 "Thank you," she said, obviously pleased. She was carrying her sweatshirt and Levis in a shopping bag.
 "How much money did Clipper bequeath--leave to you?"
 "Over sixty dollars, but some of it was stole from me anyways."
 "Have you enough to get home on the bus?" She smiled and nodded.
 "Your name isn't really Rosetta, is it?"
 "No it ain't, but maybe it's better if I'm Rosetta an' you're just plain mister." (59)

This complicity represents an attempt to displace any residual guilt after the killing. The realistic form in which Garner works accounts for the author's awareness of the way dialogue expresses a membership in a particular social class. In this case, the privileged Canadian's diction is impeccable--almost formal. He also speaks with the assurance of a businessman who possesses the authority of what Garner calls "the physiognomy of success" in "The Yellow Sweater" (*Hugh Garner's Best Stories*).

Garner contrasts the lower-class dialect and the accent of Clipper with the "cultured" reactions of the Canadian: 'Come on, yew ol' Step-'n-a-Half! This here guy ain't got all night to wait for yew!' Step-'n-a-Half! What a cruel and mindless thing to call a crippled woman, Ed thought. He also resented this crummy hippie not even thanking him for stopping, and calling him 'this here guy'" (40). The introductory dialogue establishes the theme of discrimination, which exacerbates

the conflict between Clipper and Rosetta: "Underlying the systematic issues [of disability] is capitalist/patriarchal psychology. Through capitalist/patriarchal eyes, people with disabilities are not quite people. They are in-valids. In a world built on certain types of appearance, the visibly disabled are branded as freaks. They are blemished merchandise. People avoid them or stare at them. Some actively insult" (Burstow 93).

The story's conclusion affirms Rosetta's optimism and trust in human nature, and thus the sense of defeat and pessimism that defines the majority of the texts is pre-empted when the victim kills her abuser: "She smiled, closed her hand into a fist and shook it, then turned and limped into the diner. Ed swung the car into a U-turn and headed east along Route 66 towards Oklahoma City and home" (V 59).

Rosetta saves the life of the businessman (thereby freeing herself from sexual slavery), and sets off on a journey "home" with a smile and a new sense of hope (59). For Rosetta, her escape stems not only from a drive on her part to be liberated, but also from the imperative to save the businessman. Garner sanctions the murder as heroism, for the act of violence executed by Rosetta is based firmly on a rational premise of cause and effect. Such an approach focuses on ideological statements about the social context of Garner's work: the author's sympathies are with the prostitutes who are the exploited members of an "indentured" class (118).

Rosetta finds the courage within herself to end the abuse and, ultimately, to save the life of the businessman. This story is decidedly less pessimistic than

"Lucy," "Dwell In Heaven, Die On Earth," and "What A Way To Make A Living," in which the female characters are shown to be constantly in competition with (or fighting) each other, while the males consolidate an inalienable dominance.

8. **"Twelve Miles of Asphalt" in *Violation of the Virgins* (1971)**

In "Twelve Miles of Asphalt," the scenes of prostitution and violence occur at an isolated company camp. Jim Lawrence, the narrator, relates his dangerous experiences while clearing the Northern Ontario bush, building "twelve miles of blacktop road into a new base metals line" (V 111). The camp houses and employs men who construct and pave access roads, sewers, parking lots, etc. "north of Highway 101 between Timmins and Foyelet" (111). The isolated setting contributes to a sinister, otherworldly atmosphere in which women as prostitutes are seen as 'normal,' but accidents are attributed by Lawrence to a "cursed" female's presence (specifically that of Angie, an independent woman who is the "freakiest looking young chick [Lawrence] had seen in months") (116). The sexist foreman superstitiously predicts that Angie's presence will cause sawyer Jerry Cooper--and in fact the entire camp--bad luck (113). Unfortunately, his pessimistic vision foreshadow's Jerry's gory dismemberment at the culvert construction site. His death represents the curse's climax.

The physical risks of the construction work (three men are crippled, another three are killed) and the isolation justify the relatively high wages the men earn. The high wages of the isolated camp create an economic situation which furnishes an enterprising "madam" with a means of procuring income. Within

days of the camp's establishment, a trailer appears "nearby," out of which Anne-Marie Lauzier runs a prostitution business (117). Mr. Lawrence's discriminatory attitudes towards women are obvious; prostitution is acceptable to him. Angie expresses her anger concerning Lawrence's "outmoded" views (118). In fact, he speaks out in an attempt to prevent a young prostitute, "Jeannette," from 'marrying above her social status' in order to quit the "racket" (118). In this story the women are portrayed as participating in their own exploitation in order to survive. Arguably, Madame Lauzier's sense of ownership and control over her prostitutes appears to represent a discourse based on women's "choice" and "ownership of their own sexuality" (Dawes 363).

By contrast, Angie's father is "loaded" and this wealth enables her to be independent. She "hitches a ride out of east Cheyenne" with Jerry Cooper, a member of Mr. Lawrence's Riverton Road Builder's "gang" (V 114). When she arrives with Jerry and needs a place to live at the camp, her father wires her a "five grand bank draft before the banks closed" to buy a truck camper (114). The only autonomous, non-prostitute "chick" claims that the others function in a "lousy racket" which significantly privileges men (118). Angie therefore becomes an icon of the struggle against oppression (both economic and sexual in context of the camp's social microcosm). It is clear from the outset of the story that the "freaky-looking" woman's status is different (117).

As an icon, she wears a Sioux headband throughout the story, and in the kitchen she wears only her bra and bellbottoms. She is wearing this garb when she learns of her lover's death, and also when she delivers the following

admonishment to the foreman after he expresses his dismay concerning a prostitute's relationship with a laborer: "You're like all the rest of your generation, basing your conduct on an outmoded morality. Times have changed, Mr. Lawrence!" (118). Unfortunately, the foreman's sexist statement remains valid: "Not that much. Do you think Robbins is the first young man to fall in love with a hooker? It was happening long before you--or I for that matter--were even born" (118). Times have not changed that much; women such as Angie, who "refuse to listen or who demand some semblance of equality are dismissed as 'cold bitches' by the average man, as well as by male-identified women, and are often seen as problematic even by those who pride themselves on being politically aware" (Burstow 9).

Like Denise in "What a Way to Make a Living" (*Violation of the Virgins*), the French-Canadian madam articulates the hopelessness of women trapped in prostitution. She makes every effort to convince the young Jeannette to continue her life of bondage. Instead of portraying the prostitutes sympathetically (or at all), Gamer portrays their madam in "Twelve Miles of Asphalt," suggesting that, in this story, commodified sexuality is the primary concern. Anne-Marie herself is marginalised, as a Francophone living outside her linguistic and cultural boundaries. Interestingly, her situation is further aggravated by her "isolation from the mainstream" as a madam (Williams 75). Here she discusses the disturbing prospect of a prostitute's departure:

"I knew about it, Jim," she said. "That guy is not the first one to be *attirer*--attract?--to one of my girls. If he was a--lumberjack or a farmer it would not be so bad, eh? But a doctor?" She shrugged.

"I've tol' Jeannette what will 'appen. What you tell 'im las' night is the same thing I tell 'er."

Her agitation had pushed her speech back into patois, despite her usual attempts to hide it.

"When will dis road be finish, Jim?" she asked me.

"In a few days."

"Where will you go then?" she asked, regaining her English with her composure. (V 120)

Throughout the story, Lawrence attributes the deadly accidents to "Jerry Cooper's chick's bad luck" (113). Although the foreman disagrees with her views, Angie speaks out against the social injustice which enslaves Jeannette:

"I think Mrs. Lauzier is making it *her* business."

"Anne-Marie is a pretty smart woman."

"She has no right to stop Jeannette from breaking away from that lousy racket."

"The girls aren't indentured slaves; they work for Anne-Marie because they want to."

"I guess you know I use one of their showers every night after supper?" I nodded.

"Mrs. Lauzier is trying to coax young Jeannette to break up with Billy. She keeps telling her that Billy is taking a pre-med course and that she'd never make it as a doctor's wife, even if Billy married her."

"I think the same thing." (118)

Neither character considers the possibility that Billy might not become a doctor.

The author raises the issue of choice; clearly the women are economically

"indentured" to the madam, more so than the men are to the foreman (Robbins

quits when his prostitute love leaves with the madam) (118). In the rationalization

of the prostitution of sexuality, it is not surprising to find that "prostitution is

increasingly considered to be merely another form of labor [this] raises the

question, what kind of labor? Slave labor or exploited labor of feudalism or class

exploitation of capitalism?" (Barry 65). The madam and the foreman make the

young couple's choice for them. Overnight, Lauzier's trailer disappears along with

Jeannette's opportunity to escape the slavery of Anne-Marie's so-called "racket" (V 118). In "Twelve Miles of Asphalt," individuals are controlled not only by fate, but also by the social and economic determinants of their society.

Garner, then, makes explicit and overt the various forms of invisible (and thereby condoned) violence perpetrated against women. If he predominantly concentrates on prostitution, this is because the sexually and economically reductive nature of the exchange (sex for money) makes it easier for the author to trace the ramifications of this exchange (and their generally hidden operation) in the supposedly more 'normative' relationships between men and women in the domestic sphere. Violence, both in forms of the oppressor and the oppressed, is the inevitable outcome of a society which seeks to conceal its mechanisms of power, either through strategies of marginalisation (prostitution) or through expressions of violence through condoned (predominantly male) brutalization in the domestic sphere.

CHAPTER THREE: SOCIAL VIOLENCE

The following stories were selected because they feature the theme of social violence. The various aspects of this theme include scapegoating, bullying, discrimination, and humiliation. Garner's examination of violence in forms of social class demonstrates the correlation between relative social importance and manifestations of physical violence. Physical violence is also seen--in its socially acceptable forms of aggressive sporting activity--as a means of escaping existing social class constraints. Garner traces this social scapegoating to the hegemonic sources of legitimization which endorse forms of class oppression in order to preserve the economic and social privileges of a minority ruling elite. As long as violence is either contained domestically in a patriarchal context or it is safely marginalised in extra-legal activities such as prostitution and drug abuse, it is not capable of being used politically, therein constituting a threat to the ruling class that condones such forms of non-threatening violence. Moreover, patriarchal forms of oppression work to contain violence through strife within the individual classes. Thus, Garner invariably depicts working class violence in a narrowly defined class context, wherein is never seen to effect those in a class context other than that from which the violence issues in the first place. Such is the futile and vicious cycle of violence which Garner unmask in terms of its hegemonic power determinants.

9. **"No More Songs About The Suwanee"** in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963)

While riding the freights with two young hobos, a "shabby" Canadian narrates the trio's violent experiences in the South during "the depression years" (*HG* 114). "Canada," "Michigan," and "Brownie" fear for their lives, and rightly so. They witness a brutal attack in the "hobo jungle" of Jackson, Mississippi, which "sours the narrator forever on the Blue Ridge Mountains" (115). The name of the river is delivered in a phonetic drawl, almost like a slur. "No More Songs About The Suwanee" is among the shortest in Hugh Garner's *Best Stories*. The brevity results in a stark, minimalist vignette of discrimination.

According to the hobo narrator, violence (and even death) is shown as a mere incident and even as a daily ritual during the Depression. Garner defines the characters in relation to his own experience: "A hobo, by definition, is a regular bum, a professional bum, and there probably were hobos in the time of the Crusades and there are hobos now. There always have been that kind of people, whether they are on the highways or in the slums, on the Skid Rows Hoboism is a state of mind" (*ODT* 274). The story of the vagrant Canadian among hobos in November, 1933, reflects Garner's biographical experience as an "unfortunate" Depression hobo: "The South was bad for hobos in the Depression years, all right" (*HG* 114). As demonstrated by the story's violent "mob", the era of Jim Crowism made life especially hard for Blacks (116).

In "No More Songs about The Suwanee," Garner exhibits a stylistic integrity no less obviously than "Steinbeck, through the much-played-upon social

conscience" shared by both authors (Fetherling 69). Set in the early 'thirties, specifically in the third year of the Great Depression, the story shows how the legacy of slavery ensures that, of the homeless underclass, the "nigger" remains the whipping "boy" (so draws "One-Hand", the "'whitest' hobo [Canada] had ever seen") (*HG* 118). According to One-Hand's supporters, a firmly entrenched social concept--that "a Negro" is somehow beneath "a white war veteran"--spurs the "mob" into action (118). The narrator details the racism inherent in the "game of chance," and also in the subsequent beating.

The Black hobo is hustled by the good ol' boy and his "shill," to the affirmations of the collective (with the exception of the infidel trio from the North) (117). The hustlers, conspiring as if to cheat each other, thus fool their victim with sleight of hand: "He [the shill] picked up two cards from the deck and flashed the second one to the crowd. Then, when he turned his head his partner hid the top card under his knee and made a sign to One-Hand that the second card, which was now on top, was the Jack of Clubs" (117). When he realizes that he has been cheated, the victim makes an unsuccessful attempt to reclaim his possessions. The black hobo appears to "empty his gun" at the advancing mob while he retreats, but the narrator reveals that he "must have fired his six shots into the air for nobody was hit" (117). When he retaliates, the mob is roused to violent action; one of them shouts that "the nigger had a hell of a lot of frigging crud to fire on a white war veteran" (118). The frightening display following the card trick further alienates Michigan, Brownie, and Canada.

The narrator makes an introductory statement about privation: "... the

scent of magnolias had evaded me amid the stink and poverty of most Southern small towns" (*HG* 115), and the story climaxes with a disturbing scene in which the mob seizes the Black man and he "disappears beneath a flail of stamping, kicking feet" (118). The deck is stacked against him in Mississippi's state capital, Jackson:

Often white mobs brutally attacked Blacks, particularly when they were purported to have committed a crime against a white person, even if they had not. Sometimes the "crime" was insulting someone white or looking at the person too long. Lynchings of Blacks frequently occurred beginning with the Reconstruction era and lasting into the 40s as white supremacists and racists decided to dispense their own brand of justice against Blacks--whether for crimes or at random because of hatred. (Flowers 9)

Canada awakens to find himself alone in Shreveport, Louisiana, and continues on to California. Michigan jumps freight the night before he passes through Louisiana because he "had done sixty days the year before in a Louisiana parish prison camp, and had the shackle marks to prove it. He was afraid of Louisiana, but he just said he hated it" (114). The "hoboing narrative genre" explores the primary concerns of the Depression, such as "racial conflict, poverty, and collective violence" (Ashley 117). In its aversion to the "townies" (*HG* 113) and to judicial authority, the 'hobo' tradition encourages the "value of opposition" (Ashley 117), and features vigilante rituals similar to those in "No More Songs About the Suwanee." Garner demonstrates the social problems which accompany the Depression. These motifs recur as Garner demystifies the economic determinants of social violence as it conditions the behavior of his protagonists.

10. **"The Stretcher Bearers"** in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963)

In "The Stretcher Bearers," a wounded Canadian soldier dies after his bearers abandon him, while "the International Brigades were attacking south from the hills towards the town of Brunette" in Spain (HG 196). His bearers are finally reduced in number from four to two, and although the remaining two men make a valiant attempt to carry the injured man to the advance dressing station, he dies. The character's status quickly deteriorates; at first, he receives special care from his attendants, being a personable character from the narrator's "hometown of Toronto sent as a replacement to the Lincoln Battalion when the offensive began," but he quickly becomes the expendable "wounded man" (196).

"Harper," the most powerful, aggressive character, bullies and intimidates the other soldiers, and actively initiates the desertion which hastens the death of the wounded man. Harper's cowardice leads him away from the front, and he is shown to be an opportunist "glad to have a legitimate excuse for not being up there with the battalion" (197). It becomes apparent that the Torontonians' wounds are internal and severe. The exhausted narrator finally resorts to "shaming the good-looking kid" into helping him bring in the corpse (197). The narrator and the "kid" suffer from physical exhaustion and shell-shock due to the mental "anguish" incurred while struggling to save the victim with "the bullet down in his lung" (194).

The author's own experiences in Spain prevent him from idealizing any state of war. Garner reflects upon this wartime background, and he characterizes war as a powerful literary inspiration in his autobiography:

Besides George Orwell, fighting with a POUM division in Catalonia and Arthur Koestler, being transferred as a prisoner from Malaga to Seville, André Malraux, the distinguished author of *Man's Hope* and other books, was leading a Loyalist Air Force fighter squadron on the Madrid Front. Elliot Paul was in Balearics, probably thinking and writing *Life and Death In A Spanish Town*, John Dos Passos and Josephine Herbst were in Madrid, and Ernest Hemingway was making plans to come to Spain, where he would arrive a month later. It was a great war for the literati, and the Loyalist forces probably contained more distinguished novelists and poets in relation to their size than any fighting force since Caesar's. (194)

As Hemingway said of his own experiences in Spain, there is "always the chance that works of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact" (Hemingway 1). Rarely do critical suppositions about 'the why and the wherefore' of Garner's violence lead to an examination of its imaginative substance and the formal properties responsible for it. However, Garner writes of his inspirational "billets" in the Lincoln Battalion in *One Damn Thing After Another*: "During the past weeks I'd lost whatever illusions I'd had about ... idealism, self-discipline and self-sacrifice" (ODT 217). "The Stretcher Bearers" is set in July, 1937, when (according to literary critics) "idealism was no longer in the air, promises were not honored," and the "Lost Generation had not created this hell; they were victims [who] found it impossible to highly revere their lives" (Chandel 2). Garner connects personal expressions of social violence to such mass phenomena as military struggle and warfare in "The Stretcher Bearers."

The author sought out violent situations in the same manner as many of the protagonists in his stories and novels. The horror of war is also a central theme in many of Garner's works, a trend that began with his first novel *Storm Below* (1949), and which also drew upon his 1943 naval experience on a

Canadian corvette.

The narrator blames "warlords" for enforcing the perverse psychological conditions of civil war (*HG* 197). Garner legitimizes his primary theme, the fighting and the dying itself, without any attempt to give positive meanings to the concept of war. Such 'institutionalized' violence is symbolized by the kinds of relationships that flourish under wartime duress. Here, the soldiers fail in their attempt to save a wounded man.

The soldiers are painfully aware of their own expendable status, with violence constantly thrust upon them: "I was envious of the wounded man seems to come a time after you've been in the line a few months when the wounded men are the lucky ones. They know what kind of wound they are going to get, but you don't. You never know, and you have to keep going back into it until it happens to you, and all you hope is that it won't be in the head or the groin" (196).

The above quotation is significant in more than one way, for Garner is unable to propose high-sounding ideals while his characters struggle to survive--literary sophistication and idealistic pretense would be inappropriate. The author's aim lies in the reproduction of what he has experienced, without allowing wordy abstractions to interfere. Garner's realism reflects the pessimism of the Lost Generation in general, "holding tight to themselves and to concrete writing simplicities when the world around them seems to be breaking to pieces" (Chandel 68). War is portrayed as a humiliating experience, as personified by the repulsive, domineering Harper. Harper's complaints about his

varicose veins preface an expression of the soldiers' collective dislike: "None of us liked Harper. He had come up to us as a replacement too, and had got drunk the last night before we moved out of billets for this attack. He was a very big man, and he had challenged everybody in the battalion to a fight" (*HG* 199).

Although the physically dominant man has an advantage over the others in the combat situation, he is nonetheless the first to abandon his station and to thus increase the suffering of the collective:

Harper said, "Comrades, I can't carry him any farther. My legs have given out."

"You're a son-of-a-bitch!" I said to him.

"I'd kill you if my legs weren't so sore."

"You're only brave in billets. In the line you're a cowardly son-of-a-bitch."

"So are you."

"We're all cowards," said the Jew, "or we'd have stayed near the village. We all wanted to get away, that's why we carried this man up here."

(*HG* 200)

Garner employs contrasting motifs in "The Stretcher Bearers," and the novel *Cabbagetown* (1968). A special sort of purity clings to the warrior leaving his homeland at the novel's conclusion, while in "The Stretcher Bearers" all are guilty and tainted by the slaughter of war. In his autobiography, he recalls his own physical response to the hostile environment: "The fear left my tongue and centered in my stomach like a cold ball of plasticine. Nothing was important now but my safety. I no longer really cared who won the war, but only hoped it would end in the next ten minutes. I was just one big ego trying to press myself down into the wheat stubble out of sight" (*ODT* 170). The obliteration of selfhood or ego identity posited here is a precondition of successful engagement in warfare, while the qualities of empathy and imagination upon which literary activity is

predicated are shown to be casualties of military struggle when all that matters is survival itself.

11. **"Hunky"** in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963)

A southern Ontario tobacco farm provides the backdrop against which this tragedy of murder and revenge plays out. The grief-stricken narrator acts in memory of "Hunky," the heroic refugee who dies in a calculated hit-and-run attempt because he opposes the tobacco farm "boss" (HG 160). The narrator burns the farm and equipment to atone for his friend's murder (160). From the outset, Hunky defends his fellow "primers" (tobacco hands) against Vandervelde's unreasonable pressure to "work harder" (163). Kurt, the "straw boss," enforces Vandervelde's demands through physical intimidation (163). The men are veritable "slaves" on the Belgian's tobacco farm, until Hunky resists this form of exploitation. Vandervelde kills the Pole on a lonely stretch of highway, late one "stormy" evening in Haldimand-Norfolk county. The recovering alcoholic who relates the tale discovers Vandervelde's guilt, and sets fire to the farm.

What does it mean when Hunky's corrupt "boss" (160) ordains Hunky as his 'victim'? Readiness to use violence underscores the villain's will to enforce the master/slave relationship. Employer misconduct (notably, in the manufacturing and marketing of dangerous products) results in the discrimination against the martyred tobacco hand. To avenge Hunky's murder, the narrator destroys the evil Flemish "slavedriver's" kilns (159).

Hatred for the murderer of his young friend motivates the alcoholic

narrator to destroy the killer's livelihood, by destroying Vandervelde's property. Vandervelde decides to kill Hunky, for he stands in the way of Vandervelde's exploitative mismanagement of the tobacco farm. In this story, it is not merely a question of codifying good and evil through an abstract concept of judicial justice. Rather, the narrator satisfies his "impulse for revenge" (Girard 21) by setting the farm ablaze in atonement for Hunky's murder.

Hunky maintains that having "a strong back" will eventually free him from the stigma of his displaced status, in keeping with the "modest ambitions of most immigrants: to buy a place of his own, marry and have children" (*HG* 164). In Vandervelde's quest for economic gain--the motivation behind his white collar criminality--he ultimately disregards the Pole. Hunky's proletarian spirit, born out of a childhood scarred by World War II, lives on in a resounding "epitaph" (as the narrator calls the arson) (172). This finally silences the perverse laughter of the hit-and-run killer.

Garner's own experience while "priming" tobacco accounts for the detailed descriptions of the setting used as a backdrop for the murder. The white sun makes sweat run down cold on the alcoholic's spine and the ampit-high tobacco "turns as dull green as bile" (158):

Hunky was soon several yards ahead of me, his gilded shoulders bobbing and weaving two rows away, his crewcut nodding up and down between the plants. When he crossed my aisle on his way to the stoneboat he would give me an encouraging wink. The pride he felt in his speed and skill was apparent in his stride and in the way he flaunted his wide armful of green and yellowing leaves before the straw boss, Kurt. At the opposite side of the tractor, McKinnon, Frenchy Cote and Old Man Crumlin were farther back than Hunky and me. Kurt fidgeted on the tractor seat, trying to hurry them with angry glances when he caught their eye.

(159)

Hunky testifies to the narrator about his childhood, which the latter reports does not qualify as a "real" childhood at all, since it had been spent in Germany during the war: "I know from the hints he dropped that his parents had been put to death in the gas chambers of a German concentration camp. From the things he told me I came to realize that physical fitness and strength were not youthful fads with him, but were the legacy of a time when to be weak or ill meant death"

(169).

Hunky and his fellow tobacco "slaves" are exploited, and he dies for protesting their exploitation (159). Like Lucy in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories*, Hunky is defined by his physiognomy. This aspect of characterization becomes significant in terms of the story's dramatic impact, for this vital man is callously slaughtered:

Hunky, to give him the name he called himself, was the [tobacco] gang's pace-setter and also my room-mate in the unused tool shed where we bunked. He lay in the grass, effortlessly touching the toes of his sneakers with the palms of his hands, a redundant exercise considering the limbering up we were getting from our work in the fields. Hunky was proud of his physique, and had a bug about physical fitness, and he practised every evening with a set of weights he had put together from an old Ford front axle with the wheels attached. He believed in health and strength as some believe in education. He had said to me on my first evening at the farm, "Me, I'm a poor D.P. No brains, only strong back. Keep strong, always find job." There was enough truth in his philosophy to make me feel a little ashamed of my own softness, but even more ashamed of the education and training I'd thrown away over the years. (158)

Hunky's heroic eminence merely serves to sour both the narrator and the other "slaves" by inspiring a sense of self-pity among those in the tobacco gang: "My admiration for Hunky was slightly soured with envy and regret. I wished I'd had a

son like him, I couldn't even remember ever being as young and healthy myself" (161).

Hunky protests the physical exploitation throughout the story. The "D.P." ("Displaced Person," the term for refugee status in Canada at the time) decides to reclaim the ethnic slur he faced so often. Out of the underclass of "immigrants" Hunky remains the so-called "lowest of the low," a "D.P." (166). "Hunky"--a derogatory reference to the "Huns" of Eastern Europe--becomes his new Canadian name. His immigration clearance from a displaced person's camp near Mortfield, Lower Saxony ("Hunky's only proof that his life had a beginning as well as a present") symbolically lights the blaze that destroys Vandervelde's livelihood (165).

In "Hunky," the accidents in the kiln that cripple workers are directly attributable to Vandervelde's exploitation of his workers. The narrator attributes the disorder and violence to some "hidden evil" among them (165). He discovers the truth about Hunky's death when he finds the murder weapon (Maurice's car), eventually stumbling upon the damaged vehicle hidden in a barn after the hit-and-run accident. Hunky's tireless efforts to curb the exploitation of his co-workers, and a stubborn "pride" in his own work doom the twenty-three-year-old Pole, for the "Fat Belgian burgermeister" kills Hunky for refusing to be exploited any further (163). However, the tobacco gang's solidarity remains a threat to the "slavedriver" (159). In mourning his friend's death, the narrator invokes the adopted name of the honored man:

Hunky dead? It didn't seem possible, unless God had played a

senseless joke upon the world. Why would it have to be Hunky, riding along on his bike during the storm of the night before, who had to die? Hunky, the Polack kid with the overwhelming desire to become a Canadian. Hunky, who had enough pain and sorrow already to do the rest of us a lifetime. Hunky, who crossed himself at meals and went to mass. Boy, that was some heavenly joke all right! (169)

The recovering narrator-wino, driven by "spirits" and possessed of the "brave, drunken idea" to burn Vandervelde's farm, must implicate an unidentified man from St. Thomas, Ontario, in his alibi when the police question him (171). He claims that he could not have set fire to the tobacco, kilns, and equipment, because he was hitchhiking with a young man from St. Thomas on the fateful evening.

Vandervelde's criminality, like the majority of white collar violations, remains "hidden from the general public's view"; when the narrator finally detects it and exacts his revenge, the violence escalates into a "dramatic incident termed a disaster" (Szockyj 5). Prompted by the dramatic realization that Hunky's death is no accident, the alcoholic narrator selects Vandervelde's property for destruction, thereby paying tribute to the "burgermeister's" greed.

It is significant that the vengeful rite fitfully burns materials which Vandervelde values most, and which initially motivate him to destroy Hunky, who presents an irresistible target for the "boss' car" as he peddles back from Delhi's "Polish people's credit union" on a "typically" stormy and "unpredictable" Haldimand-Norfolk evening (*HG* 171). At the climax of poetic justice, the narrator states, "even that didn't seem enough. Not by a goddamn long shot!" (172). Garner's concern to validate certain forms of militant struggle and protest against

economic and racial oppression is amply articulated in "Hunky."

12. **"E Equals MC Squared"** in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963)

In "E Equals MC Squared," a factory worker--against whom one of the bosses is biased--dies as the result of a foreman's negligence. The safety council rules that the death is an accident, which reflects badly on the victim's competence. Eric Colby, an employee and the father of the dead worker, now has so little feeling for life that his entire nature is directed toward vengeance and the assertion of his deadly will. To the story's narrator, the phrase "E Equals MC Squared" will "always represent" the mysterious circumstances of Matt Colby's death and the "awful retribution to the foreman" (*HG* 223). Colby Sr. fashions a plan to avenge his son's death, and thus foreman McKillup's responsibility for the death of Matt Colby begets more violence.

This story continues the theme of violence against social injustice and exploitation; "'Hunky" is similar", writes Fetherling, "to another of the book's stories which is set in the punch press department of a farm implement factory--a place where Garner himself once toiled" (Fetherling 70). "E Equals MC Squared" also portrays a state of 'reciprocal' violence in which frustrated workers repudiate the hierarchy of the steel plant and kill out of vengeance.

Responsibility for the crisis at the Malloy-Harrison plant settles on a single person who becomes a surrogate representative of guilt for the entire community (the foreman). The second "accident" serves to reflect the community of workers' sense of violation, to "even the score" (*HG* 223). It prompts the community to

"choose a victim outside of itself" (Girard 8). The fact that the designation of this individual for elimination will somehow bring about a renewal in the community at large demonstrates an "analogy between sacrificial and political violence" at the plant (Dahl 8). "E Equals MC Squared" examines the employees' need for secretive action in response to McKillup's irresponsibility. The narrator's hatred for the dominant machines presents them as horrific:

Except for a dim sound of hammering the room was unnaturally quiet. The big hydraulic presses stood silent, their terrible punch-toothed maws waiting for a foot on their treadles to make them close with a room-shaking bite. The mere sight of their size and power made me hate to enter the place, and I was always happy to leave the room again when my job was finished. (*HG* 219)

Here, the author intends to portray the graphic violence which produced such an emotional reaction at the factory:

The body was hanging out from the clenched lips of the press, its feet suspended in the air. It looked like a messy doll hanging over the edge of a shelf. The machine was clamped across it near the shoulders, leaving one limp and lifeless arm hanging down beside the body. Through the seeping blood that dripped inexorably to the floor I saw a tattooed ship on the hanging arm. Three or four men stood in a white-faced group apart from the machine, keeping their eyes on me so they wouldn't have to look at each other. I turned away sickened, and got out of the place fast. (220)

Although replete with gory details, the narrative provided a succinct description of the victim's body. The impact of the workers' single statements (subject, predicate, object) simplifies the sequence. This paragraph refers the reader back to the fatal scene in which McKillup's concern for production surpasses that of safety at the plant. These accidents at the plant occasion a confrontation, and the dialogue is usually curt and economical (as if in such a setting there is little time to waste in conversation). In this story of economic exploitation, Garner

relies on reportage for its swift power of exposition.

Since such "irresponsible pressure to improve the 'bottom line' at many factories is institutionalized, one does not need to invoke a plot" to account for the mistreatment of workers (Bart 79). Garner charts the social consequences of the morality of exacting an 'eye for an eye' when the hand fresh with blood-guilt is found out. Only in the end does the narrator expose the "vengeance" which motivates the retributive event (*HG* 222).

The narrator's sarcastic quip--"He was a real nice guy"--targets the character for the ritualistic "attack" of the rigged machine; the crippling accident "could not have happened to a nicer guy" (218). The foreman's accident does not appear in the graphic detail provided in the case of young Matt Colby because between this victim (McKillup) and the community, a crucial social link is missing; for those seeking revenge, Matt Colby's death (not McKillup's dismemberment) is the issue. McKillup can therefore be "exposed to violence" without fear of further reprisal (Girard 13). The fact that such a bloody scene is never presented for readers a second time emphasizes the ritualistic nature of violence at the factory. McKillup's mutilation does not automatically entail another act of vengeance as Colby Sr.'s reaction is complete in itself: "A short time ago I was driving past the main gate of the Malloy-Harrison plant, and I noticed McKillup tending the gates. One uniform sleeve was empty, and the other ended above one of those steel mechanical hands. The sight of him brought it all back to me, but I'd just as soon forget it if I could" (*HG* 223).

This story features Garner's "point of view" technique, and imagery

expressing the foundations of belief which account for the story's "realism": in addition to "developing a social commitment, Garner strives to generate moral commitment" (Fetherling 73). "Hunky" also characterizes murderers and revengers in a style marked by tragic, declarative intensity.

13. **"The Conversion of Willie Heaps"** in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963)

Willie's "conversion" by the new Pentecostal minister from the city has dangerous repercussions. He mutilates a barnyard of animals in order to preserve them from corruption and "sin," and also attacks a boy, for in his deluded state he believes that castration will "save" his young friend (HG 15). Alone and threatened, the narrator barely escapes the raving, knife-wielding Willie. The negative impact of his "conversion" is obvious: he becomes an unholy fanatic, fierce and virulent in his exercise of what he considers to be supernatural power. The Reverend Blounsbury knowingly targets Willie for conversion by preaching sensational sermons to "turn on" the young man to "Jesus" (7). He exploits his congregation in order to generate the revenue necessary to justify his "shiny black suit" (7). What was once a maternal, 'natural' figure metamorphoses into a mentally ill aggressor with a Messiah complex, out to eliminate sin by slaughtering lambs, and finally emasculating himself in the Lord's name. "We're all sinners! I have the power to stop all sin! Oh, hallelujah!" cries Willie, before he commits suicide (14). Willie's paranoia reaches biblical proportions, and climaxes in suicide by "self-mutilation" (castration) in this, Garner's first story (written at his mother's kitchen table in Toronto).

Willie's terrifying actions are evidence of Blounsbury's inspirational "sermonizing": "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 7:13). In the eyes of the twelve-year-old narrator, sympathetic words at the funeral come too late: "I hated them all: Willie, Mr. and Mrs. Heaps; my mother and father and especially the Reverend Blounsbury" (*HG* 17). Those who contributed to the injustices against Willie now offer their condolences. The final question of the story is as much Garner's (in light of his own alienation) as it is the twelve-year-old boy's--"Why couldn't everybody in the whole wide world leave everybody else alone?" (17). Initial reactions upon completion of the bloody "Conversion of Willie Heaps" are that the character is violently disturbed, and unresponsive to morality due to his disturbing "conversion" (17). Martial law--Pentecostal-style--is made responsible for the unnatural sacrifices in the story. The slack-jawed, panting "dog" of a man wrongfully authorizes a distinction between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' castration.

As a "natural" character--a raw embodiment of the natural energy of humanity and of the natural world--Willie manifests both negative (masculine) and positive (feminine) energy. Prior to his being "saved by the blood of Jesus Christ" and the arrival of the sinister Reverend Blounsbury, Willie was the young narrator's only "real" friend, one who not only played with him but who also operated on young horses with hands "as gentle as a mother's" (9). Garner's decision to portray Willie as initially gentle was a conscious one. Willie's

instinctive, natural humanity, compassion, and "crafty friendliness" are changed by the interference of the infidel, a "tall skinny man in a black shiny suit and turned-on smile" (17). Garner explains why he rewrote the intimate introduction in *One Damn Thing After Another!*:

I had made the mistake of not starting the story at the real beginning, "I could see Willie coming along the road from his place, walking fast like he always did. His long legs were jerking back and forth above his broken shoes and his tangled hair hung in a bang just above his wide-staring eyes, where it had been cut by his mother, Mrs. Heaps. His mouth was hanging loose like it usually was, and even from a distance you could see his long brown teeth that were always wet like a panting dog's."
(ODT 345)

The theme of guilt versus innocence explodes into violence in the name of "Glory!" A deluded loathing of sin, which the purportedly righteous Reverend Blounsbury instills in Willie through his sermons, drives the character to irrational acts of violence in his misdirected attempt to purge the world of evil. The question of ideological brainwashing and its connection with violence is broached in "The Conversion of Willie Heaps."

14. **"Captain Rafferty"** in *Men and Women* (1966)

"Captain" Joe Rafferty risks life and limb every night on the 'midway' for the entertainment of the crowd at the Canadian National Exhibition. However, this particular evening the possibility of fatality increases with the weather, as the high winds make the diver's ascent to the elevated platform extremely dangerous. Garner heightens the tension by including a description of the death of an American diver only days before, who was blown off-course by a gust of

wind:

During the evening the wind had risen, and now the high ladder was waving a good two feet at the top, and there were ripples on the surface of the water. We had been talking in the commissary tent about a diver in St. Petersburg, Florida, who had been blown onto the edge of a galvanized tank the day before. Somebody had shown Joe Rafferty a piece in the paper, but he only shrugged. I'd watched his face though, and I knew that a thing like that wasn't so easy to forget. And with a high wind anything can happen. (*MW* 146)

The young Captain does not lose face; he disregards the danger and dives anyway. His survival against the odds bestows heroic status upon him, one that the aged narrator vicariously adopts in order to efface his own feelings of inefficacy. The crowd, unlike the narrator, is unaware that Rafferty's wife Irene has just informed him of her decision to stay on at the carnival as a chorus "mermaid," although he has decided to quit (147). During the Captain's moment of indecision on the platform, Shorty's interior monologue underscores the urgency of the situation. Although Shorty failed the same 'honor contest' so many years ago, the dive suddenly represents an opportunity for the narrator to find redemption, as much as it is a rite of passage for the young man. It proves to be Rafferty's final dive as the employee of the evil, cigar-smoking "carny boss" Tom Martin (147).

True to Garner's "naturalistic-realistic" form, the characters are placed in specific social and historical contexts, as the "realist" concept of "truth" is inextricably linked with the individual author's experience. In his autobiography, Garner explains his inspiration for the story:

I suppose it must have been the year before this that I went down to the Exhibition grounds early and found myself a job on the Midway, in a show

called Bill Rice's Water Circus, where I became a diving show 'property boy.' Among such duties as pumping air with a bicycle pump to Father Neptune who kept his head in a small air bucket under the water of the tank until it was time to make his appearance on the surface with the ballyhoo chorus mermaids, I also used to cover the surface of the small tank with gasoline and set it afire just before one of our high-divers made his dive. Many years later I wrote a short story about this, called "Captain Rafferty", which first appeared in *The Yellow Sweater And Other Stories*. (ODT 38)

Gamer has lived what he has written, and this allows him to draw the reader into his world more effectively. However, critics are often "down on him because Gamer is a realist in his style as well as his philosophy, and this--at a time when the new people whose turn it is to capture our awe are struggling with frontiers of surrealistic storytelling--tends to make critics view him with an air of patronage" (Fetherling 9). "Captain Rafferty" further demonstrates how sociological factors combine in Garner's fiction to determine individual destinies. Garner establishes the danger inherent in this line of work, by introducing the concept of "professional" respect in the opening paragraph:

He wasn't really a captain, none of them were. We called all the high-divers "Captain" whether their names were Anderson, Tulliver or Zyscovitch, who happened to be the three we had that summer before we picked up Joe Rafferty. Joe might not have been a captain on the ground, or on the deck of a ship, but when he stood up there on the high ladder above the midway he was the captain of Thompson's Shows, all right. (MW 144)

In Shorty's eyes, the success of the Captain's dive becomes more imperative because he is aware that Joe's marriage to Irene is over. The twenty-five-year-old Captain and his wife fall victim to the all-powerful carnival "contract" (146). The readiness to exploit his position demonstrates Martin's will to enforce his aims no matter what the cost. Martin's humiliating taunts in front of

the crowd also encourage Rafferty to make the fateful dive. In a moment of self-reflexivity, the narrator characterizes the boss as "one of those fat bullying men that you read about in stories. The kind who has the money to begin with, and gets the girl too, but the young fellow beats him in the end. Only that isn't the way it usually happens, because it takes youth and money to beat the Tom Martins I've met" (146). The following exchange (an example of Garner's "reportage" technique) exemplifies the conflicting personalities of the two men on that windy evening:

I got busy then, spreading the gas, and when I moved over close to them I heard Martin,

"...it's in the contract, wind or no wind."

"Irene [Rafferty's wife] wasn't in no contract" Joe answered.

"She's old enough to know what she's doing," Martin said.

"Of course if you're yellow I can get Benny to take it." Benny was the best of our clown divers.

"You know I'm not yellow," Joe whispered, low so the people in the front seats wouldn't hear him.

"If you're quitting tonight," said the boss, talking around his cigar, "you may as well make the last one good." (146)

The exchange also reveals Garner's sociocritical bent in that he treats his experience of "carry" labor by revealing inequalities and dual labor markets (in this case, the boss has a separate category for the Captain's pretty wife) (145). The Captain is free to chart his own course, and he therefore leaves the circuit. However, the crestfallen Irene does not have the same freedom.

Rafferty objects to the reduction of his wife to a mere contract clause, while the "boss" advocates a woman's right to "choose" whose property she becomes: "She's old enough to know what she's doing" (146). The high-diver asserts that his wife is not a commodity to be bought and sold, while his boss

points to Irene's complicity, although it is clear from the outset that she is unhappy. Irene watches her husband dive for the last time, and Shorty appends a noteworthy description of the beautiful Irene: "It's hard to explain how it was to a person who has never seen a woman smile with the corners of her mouth turned down" (149). Irene is trapped by her 'dehumanized' status; "Captain Rafferty," like the majority of Garner's short stories, does not claim a high degree of character satisfaction.

Rafferty leaves after his heroic dive, but Irene remains with the repulsive Tom Martin. Garner explores the factors which turn individual conflicts (the interpersonal relationships imposed upon Joe and Irene) into social conflicts. The usurpation or exploitation of a private code of honor and its inevitably violent outcome forms the basis of "Captain Rafferty."

15. "**Stumblebum**" in *Men and Women* (1966)

"Stumblebum" gradually becomes Punchy Griffon's nickname, providing evidence of his increasing inability to defend himself in the boxing ring. The narrator, a sports reporter, scorns Punchy's puzzling decision to continue boxing, and wonders why he appears oblivious to the fact that the crowds he performs for clearly hate him. At the boxer's wedding, he is guided by his new bride, and the narrator becomes aware for the first time that Stumblebum is practically blind. He also discovers the groom's vow to his new bride that he will soon retire. The reporter notes that she adores him, shielding him from ridicule when he boasts to the guests that he is "still good!" (63). Standing at the sidelines as

always, the reporter "feels a new dislike" for this "pathetic" creature (66).

This description of an aging boxer with a sports-induced head injury is the subject of Garner's disturbing study, in which he recreates a sports setting "socially constructed in such ways that violence is likely to be a central feature of the script" (Polk 207). Here, Garner portrays a champion, Young Ebony, who does not deign to strike below the belt, exemplifying how heroism and duplicity become partners in the ring. "Stumblebum" is a hapless victim, both of society's constructs and his own compulsions, and his slow disintegration over a period of years marks out the gradual diminishment of his essential being. The narrator contrasts the pain experienced during the stumbler's career with the boxer's current matrimonial bliss.

According to Garner, the "given" of prizefighting is that sooner or later, everybody gets "screwed" (*ODT* 171). On the other hand: "The best ways for a poor uneducated person to escape his poverty and class," (he notes in the preface to his autobiography) "are to become a professional athlete, a theatrical personality or an artist" (5).

As if to prove that the purpose of a boxing match is, in effect, not to see a close contest, the opening paragraph establishes the story's naturalistic tone:

Punchy Griffon was a has-been before he even began to fight. I remember him fifteen years ago down at Smallwood's Gym when he used to spar with the visiting lightweights for two bucks a time and coffee. He was such an eager and good-natured kid that the boxers all took advantage of him, and old man Smallwood threw him into the ring with some awfully tough bimbos. They used to knock him around the ring as if they were his personal enemies or he was a member of the Boxing Commission or something. He was the only fighter I ever knew who had a cauliflower ear before his first fight. (*MW* 59)

Gamer deals with boxing more as a cultural experience than a sport and thus the narrator embraces the atmosphere of that way of life. Individuals engaged in this violent pastime become more than athletes; they are victims of an exacting and improbable vocation. Punchy subjects himself to abuse because his environment conditions him to do so. The individual in contact with (at most) a handful of others, is at the center of Gamer's art, and to highlight the individual and provide an appropriate context, such a "small arena is indispensable" (Gurko 230). The story's brief moment of sporting glory proceeds as follows:

The crowd sat up and took notice as soon as they 'mixed it,' and they were standing up on their seats before the fight was finished. There would be no point in describing it here--it was one of the best, roughest, gamest fights anybody ever saw. Young Ebony hit Punchy ten times to each time he was tapped by the outfought white boy. It shouldn't have gone past the first round, but they allowed it to go to the fourth before the referee, shocked and blood-spattered, dragged Punchy to his corner and held up Young Ebony's hand. (MW 61)

In "Stumblebum," as in boxing in general, "the only structuring principle is temporal duration, the time it takes to throw or receive one shattering blow after another" (Kowalewski 14). Punchy's abuse is all the more poignant to the narrator as he leaves the wedding. The narrator's friend, another boxing enthusiast, also bears witness to Punchy's ignorant tenacity:

I knew what he meant, even if neither of us could put it into words. Punchy's efforts, which I had once admired for their gamecock perseverance were now revealed for what they really were: pretense without talent. The crowds had sensed it all along. As we left the reception and headed for the parking lot my friend said, "He always was a stumblebum." I nodded, trying to get used to the new dislike I felt for the Punchy Griffons of the world. (MW 64)

The monstrous boxer 'takes the punishment': "And he was something to hate. He

could have posed for all the caricatures of round-heeled ex-fighters there ever were. His face was pushed and twisted under his pieced-together eyebrows, giving him a perpetual leer" (62). Those who know Griffon as a boxer "hate" him for subjecting himself to further abuse when he is "washed up" (*MW* 62), which appears to 'come with the territory' in his profession:

To watch boxing closely, and seriously, is to risk moments of what might be called animal panic--a sense not only that something very ugly is happening but that, by watching it, one is an accomplice. This awareness, or revelation, or weakness can come at any instant, unanticipated and unbidden; though of course it tends to sweep over the viewer when he is watching a really violent match. I feel it as vertigo--breathlessness--a repugnance beyond language: a sheer physical loathing. (Kowalewski 13)

The brutality of organized prizefighting and its exploitation for profit is graphically portrayed in "Stumblebum."

16. **"The Fall Guy"** in *Men and Women* (1966)

The violence meted out to innocent scapegoats is the theme of "The Fall Guy." Throughout his life, Benny Harper, "The Fall Guy" of the title, has fallen victim to the vicious harassment of and intimidation of his so-called "best friend." The story is narrated by his long-time oppressor, now a criminal, who tells a story of having grown up in the slums with the Benny. Benny now faces a death sentence, having been convicted of the narrator's crimes. While incarcerated, he decides to "take the rap" for another inmate's crime as well (*MW* 95). The brutality of organized prizefighting and its exploitation for profit is graphically portrayed in "Stumblebum."

Benny's history, recounted uncharitably by his "best friend," relates the victim's misfortune. The prosaic narrative style of the murderer in "The Fall Guy" does not require poetic curves and flourishes, as the vigorous quality of the prose suits the content of the story. The setting reflects the author's authenticated point of view of slum life. The narrator's confrontational introduction to the "newspaper guy" sets the violent tone of the tragedy (92).

"You ast me if I knew Benny Harper?" the narrator demands in the opening line of "The Fall Guy." Here, the deviant narrator enforces violent interaction, which is then imitated, and reinforced. The delinquent Harper cannot escape his destiny as the "Fall Guy"--a man who hangs, although he is innocent. He is set up to take falls for the narrator, his purported "best friend" (90). Harper represents another example of the archetypal "loser". The narrator makes it painfully clear that, disadvantaged as the pair are in all the traditionally known ways, "the use of violence is either tolerated and permitted or specifically encouraged from infancy through childhood in their lower socioeconomic class" (Hays 109). An example of such anti-social reinforcement is found in the following description of their acquisition of material goods through stealing. In "The Fall Guy," deviance is learned when peers reward deviant action:

Me an' Benny knew each other since we was young kids. We lived in Cabbagetown, and if you don't know where that is, it don't much matter anyways Later on when we was punks wearing our first long pants we used to crack crates outta parkin' lots and deliver 'em to a guy we know that re-built hot crates. We never made much outta it, but I always give Benny half, even if all he did was knock 'em off an bring em to me, an I'd have to drive 'em from our place out to this other guy's, maybe three blocks. (MW 92)

The 'fence' money provided by the narrator is contingent on the criminal behavior, hence it encourages deviance. The narrator later abuses and abandons his pregnant girlfriend Margaret, and Benny takes the "fall" for him by marrying her. In this portrait of a "Fall Guy", the narrator seems to look forward to Benny's execution with perverse glee. Benny is bullied, victimized, and repeatedly exposed to negative actions on the part of his "best friend," which leads to his 'fatalistic' perception of his destiny in prison (93).

Countering the story's dramatic excesses of plot are Garner's mechanistic, "naturalistic descriptions" of a Darwinian struggle--of "the city, of the Depression, of the tone and temper of the times" (Moss 135). The narrator sets the stage upon which the action will take place and briefly characterizes the principals, before he initiates the unfolding of the narrative. In the story's introductory paragraphs, he situates the reader both politically and geographically:

You ast me if I knew Benny Harper? Like I know my own chin. It's a funny thing but you're the first newspaper guy that's come around here and ast me that. All the time during the trial, and while he was waitin' up at the jail to be hung this mornin', nobody ast me if I knew anythin' about him, and me his best friend you might say. Me an' Benny knew each other since we was punk kids. We lived in Cabbagetown, and if you don't know where that is, it doesn't matter anyways. (MW 90)

Young Benny's exploitation continues in a "Workin' Boys' Home," reminiscent of the reformatory in John Herbert's 1964 play, *Fortune And Men's Eyes*. The narrator, an opportunist, abuses and manipulates younger boys through constant physical intimidation. He rationalizes his relationship with Benny in the "Workin' Boys' Home":

We did one stretch together in the reformatory, an I took care a him alla

time, an' all he ever gave me was his tobacco ration. He used to even beef about this, an it made me sore, cause he didn't even smoke. It was me got him moved from the laundry out to the stables, 'cause I figured I was doin' us both a favor, me not likin' cows an him gettin' soft from workin' so long inside. I told the laundry screw that Benny was switchin' shirts to guys for their tobacco, so he put me in there. After that it was me got the tobacco, so it saved Benny a lotta trouble, cause I always got it anyway. (MW 92)

After the narrator reveals that he has allowed his so-called "best friend" to be hanged in his place, his notable farewell to the reader is a doctrinal double negative: "An' don't call me that neither, or I'll give ya a mouthful a fist!" (95).

Garner depends entirely upon the narrator's monologue for efficiency of exposition, and to "reproduce exactly the speech of real people in the social classes with which he is dealing" (Arthur 63). Garner employs faulty and unconventional syntax throughout "The Fall Guy" in order to accurately reflect the slum dialect of the predatory narrator to whom violence appears to represent an enhancement of prestige.

This introduces the reader directly to the central protagonist, who eagerly makes an ironic case for the oppressor's innocence and for the "Fall Guy's" guilt. Garner's skillful use of irony allows the character to narrate his story with minimal authorial intrusion. The narrator demonstrates that their criminal 'subculture' encourages violence as a mode of interaction, even among "best friends." The criminal's declaration defames a dead man by using what Noam Chomsky calls "political discourse," which "typically has two meanings the dictionary meaning, and the other is a meaning that is useful for serving power--the doctrinal meaning" (Chomsky 86). The opportunistic narrator of "The Fall Guy"

represents a genuine initiate, or reformatory "insider."

Benny remains the narrator's victim; he dies in prison for the narrator's crime. He becomes a martyr by taking responsibility for yet another crime that he did not commit, because he is to be hanged as punishment for the narrator's violent transgression. The date of his execution has already been determined: "Anyways, about a week before they was to fit this [other inmate] guy for a collar, Benny pulls this boy scout act about how the other guy couldn't a done it, on account a he was the guy that pulled both jobs" (*MW* 95).

Saintly Benny is sacrificed and his eulogy is all the more poignant in the colloquial words of his "best friend." A lack of complete explanation adds to the air of mystery surrounding the hanged man. The narrator's aggressive style aims to influence, and to anticipate the "newspaperman's" response: "Sure, you know the rest of what happened to Benny, but stick around a minute. Don't get excited, I'll hurry it up--you ast me, didn't ya?" (95).

Garner does not scorn those instincts and skills which he had developed as a reporter--such as brevity, clarity, austerity, and directness--from his creative writing. His naturalistic style is a more extreme form of realism, which tends towards a sociological emphasis on material not conventionally considered suitable for art. "The Fall Guy" embodies the complex concepts of love, fear, and courage, and they are deliberately presented in opposition to refinement of emotion or thought. The process of writing about the criminal underclass of the Depression in the language of the initiated lends the story a ring of authenticity which makes it a compelling portrait of the ultimate "bully."

17. **"The Moose and the Sparrow"** in *Men and Women* (1966)

Cut off from civilization in an "almost inaccessible" stand of Douglas fir about fifty miles out of Nanaimo, two characters must play out their fateful face-off until one kills the other (*MW* 42). "Moose" Maddon, the story's villain, tortures a student named Cecil, the "sparrow" of the piece. The other men at the logging camp eventually tire of the initiation pranks, and accept Cecil. Aside from Maddon's antics, the lumberjack code appears to rest on solid principles: "Nearly all of us joined in the jokes on Cecil It wasn't long though until the other men noticed that Moose Maddon's jokes seemed to have a grim purpose. You could almost say he was carrying out a personal vendetta against the kid for refusing to knuckle under or cry 'Uncle.' From then on everybody but Moose let the kid alone" (43). Cecil finally kills Moose when the narrator (the "walking boss" of the camp) decides to fly Cecil out of the interior for his own protection. The "sparrow" cannot afford to jeopardize his job as the camp's "whistle punk," for "without the wage" he would be unable to attend the University of British Columbia in the fall (42).

"The Moose and the Sparrow," the fourth story in *Men and Women* (1966), was reprinted in 1981 as part of the anthology *Best Canadian Short Stories* in a section entitled "Violent Encounters." The editor, John Stevens, classifies it as a story "whose perspective is among the closest to nihilism" (Stevens 7). The "sparrow" acts instinctively out of self-defense when he kills his tormentor, Moose Maddon. As their relationship at the lumber camp consists of

increasingly violent confrontations, the killing becomes a mission of vengeance. Gamer's grand concept--that the brilliant aesthete conceals his murder weapon in a unique fashion--serves to redeem the "pathetic sparrow" (*MW* 42). Moose Maddon, the instigator of sadistic violence against Cecil the "sparrow," intimidates the younger man until he "breaks down," and tells the narrator his pathetic tale:

He was one of those kids who are kicked around from birth. His mother and father had split up while he was still a baby, and he'd been brought up in a series of foster homes. He'd been smart enough, though, to graduate from high school at seventeen. By a miracle of hard work and self-denial he'd managed to put himself through the first year of university, and his ambition was to continue on to law school. The money he earned from his summer work here at the camp was to go towards his next year's tuition. (45)

Moose Maddon's unwarranted violent attacks jeopardize Cecil's future plans at UBC, and therefore the student kills Maddon the night before he is to be flown out. He refuses to risk the financial penalty of the loss of two weeks' pay. Maddon's murder is also in retribution for the escalating physical torment visited on Cecil, who doggedly "ignores" the abuse as best he can (47). Maddon attempts to break Cecil's will and to make him "cry 'Uncle'", but the tenacious student refuses (43).

The narrator develops a rapport with the effeminate "kid," and speaks on behalf of the entire camp when he expresses his concern for the student's well-being: "Moose had been lucky that the Chief, a giant Indian called Danny Corbett, hadn't caught him [torturing Cecil]. I made up my mind to have Cecil flown out in the morning without fail, no matter how much he protested" (48). The

narrator attempts to prevent further bloodshed at the camp. However, his attempts to convince the workers that violence is detestable are inadequate--for it is precisely because they "detest violence that men make a duty of vengeance" (Girard 15).

The narrator implies that Maddon feels compelled to dominate the student physically, in order to assuage his own sense of inferiority: " 'University! You!' Moose, who was probably a Grade Four dropout himself, was flabbergasted. I'm sure that up until that minute he'd been living in awe of anybody with a college education" (43). His torture unfolds to mark the struggle for life against death, as it appears that Moose "was carrying out a personal vendetta" (43). While death symbolizes the ultimate stasis, here the climactic struggle of the "Moose" versus the "sparrow" defines the action until the murder. It is an exploration of such life-and-death struggles, "so wrongly seen as a negative impulse by some critics, in which the Canadian writer defines the moral dimensions of the universe" (Moss 28).

"Most of the stories in the book [*Men and Women*]," explains Garner in his autobiography, "dealt with the confrontation of a man and a woman the sole exception being 'The Moose and the Sparrow'" (ODT 278). This story features confrontation nonetheless, for without its goal of dominance and submission there would be no social dynamic for the characters within the isolation of the lumber camp. The narrator notes the seasonal nature of the men's relationships, and the general manner through which their simplistic cruelty wanes once the "sparrow" is initiated by the loggers currently in residence.

Gamer emphasizes the process of torment, while the death itself reveals the "sparrow's" ingenuity and the extraordinary combination of creativity and destructiveness. Throughout his career, Gamer has demonstrated a writerly interest in violent male protagonists who exhibit a certain aesthetic sensitivity (as in *Cabbagetown*, for example). Cecil metamorphoses from powerless victim into talented executioner; the only evidence of the masterful murder is the copper wire that trips Moose, which the student deftly transforms into a watchband for the narrator. He resorts to violence that is paradoxically creative and destructive at the same time.

Moose's assaults are clumsy and obvious, while Cecil's clever act goes virtually undetected. He rigs a length of thin wire across the makeshift footbridge just high enough to catch Moose on the shin. The bully tumbles into the ravine: "There was a free fall of more than forty feet down to a rocky stream bed" (*MW* 48). The author closes the violent tale with the following conjecture, thereby transforming the murder into a footnote: "Still, it gives me a queer feeling sometimes, even yet, to look down at my wrist. For all I know I may be the only man in the world wearing the evidence of a murder as a wrist watch strap" (50). Ironically, a murder weapon (Cecil's copper wire handiwork) serves to illustrate the bond between the narrator and the murderer. In light of his antagonistic personality, the other loggers were "not exactly broken-hearted about Moose kicking off that way" (48):

There are some men like Moose Maddon who are so twisted up inside that they want to take it out on the world. They feel that most other men have had better breaks than they've had, and it rankles inside them. They

try to get rid of this feeling by working it out on somebody who's even weaker than they are. Once they pick on you there's no way of stopping them short of getting out of their way or beating it out of their hide. (46)

Gamer does not solve the murder mystery until the final page, although the killing takes place much earlier. However, the "unmanly" (42) Cecil appears to have plotted the physical removal of the threat to his future from the outset: "It'll [the copper wire] be enough for what I have in mind. Don't worry, Mr. Anderson, I'll make you the watch strap before I leave" (47). Cecil neither invites the loggers' friendship, nor asks for their protection. The narrator does not lionize the act or romanticize the protagonist (his watchband gift makes the narrator feel "queer") (49). Rather, he presents a disturbing vision of the creative intellect. The feebleness of Cecil's outward appearance and his relentless "hard work and self-denial" are unimportant in themselves, and are devoid of interest until the moment of his retaliation (45).

The pathetic Cecil, portrayed as a dog "kicked around" and abandoned by his parents, redeems himself by murdering Maddon (45). Maddon's ruthless cruelty seems to justify the violence. The weapon itself, twenty-five feet of copper wire once rigged in the bark of the trunks of two small trees that faced each other diagonally across the ravine, becomes a functional piece of art. Violence in reaction to sadism constitutes the plot line of the aptly named "The Moose and the Sparrow."

18. **"The Happiest Man in the World"** in *Violation of the Virgins* (1971)

"The Happiest Man in the World" examines the ironic unhappiness of

successful 'family man', Ed Crogan. He appears to have it all: a lucrative position as part of the management team at Cambrian Trust, a beautiful--albeit unhappy--wife, a comfortable suburban home, and a talented son. However, Ed has moments of personal crisis throughout the story, as he is convinced that "he had lost something in his life" (V 101). The privileged white male should be the happiest man in the world, yet he feels a sense of "emptiness" (101). Not even his coveted membership at the Greenbriar Golf Club can fill the void. His introverted son, Colin, from whom Ed feels "distant," suddenly offers his father the adulation he craves after Ed "k.o.'s" a retired hockey player in the parking lot of their local mall (102). The scene becomes a source of entertainment for teens "hanging out" there (102):

Ed noticed now that the man was drunk, weaving on his feet as he shoved his face forward belligerently. A small group of shoppers, arms loaded with paper bags, began to gather in a wide semi-circle around them. Some teenagers drifted over from where they'd been lounging in front of a hamburger bar. "Give 'im a rap in the mouth!" a thin, string-haired girl screamed shrilly. Her companions began to goad the drunk. (102)

In *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence--Achieving Equality* (the Final Report of The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women in 1993), the national action plan suggests that communities actively "discourage violence in sports" for reasons that are apparent in "The Happiest Man in the World" (Williams 105). Be that as it may, Colin's former "unhappy" diffidence is replaced by a shy admiration for his father's machismo: "You weren't scared. You must have been tough before you--when you were young, eh?" (V 104). The episode provides the crowd's sport, and Colin exhibits a new appreciation for his father,

whose violent behavior is encouraged as a sign of his masculinity. The brief exchange also exposes the encouragement of aggression in professional sport. The drunk's belligerence is portrayed as a product of hockey's conditioning. He has been struck in the face with such force and frequency, that he now wears false teeth. Ed explains the man's behavior to his son in the following manner: "Oh, hockey players are pretty tough; they have to be. It's a rough sport. Maybe he wasn't much of a hockey player" (104). Attitudes of machismo, primarily articulated through an examination of sports activities, are displayed in "The Happiest Man in the World."

In this chapter, class violence in the context of an authoritarian division of labor is seen to operate in the workplace through the coercion of non-unionized workers in a market where a privileged few own the means of production and are thereby exempted from the struggle for scarce economic resources. Once more, outbreaks of violence within the working class are seen to fall back on that class so that the deadlocked-grid of class exploitation and ideological stratification cannot be surpassed or circumvented, and violence boomerangs back on the hapless victim of economic oppression.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE VIOLENCE OF NATURE

The following stories were selected because they feature the theme of violence as it relates to natural disasters caused by the elements, such as fires, and ice. In these stories, unlike those of discrimination based on sex and class, Garner does not examine the political motivation behind the violence, for it is to "appease an angry god that the killing goes on" (Girard 7). Compared with sexist, racist, and "classist violence, the power of anonymous international corporations, and inexplicable economics, the natural disaster event is a clear-cut, easily grasped concept comprehensible to all" (Cornell 3). More 'real' than the threat of disaster is that of "rape, mugging, or auto accident" (3), and by the same token, Garner devotes the bulk of his texts to the examination of violence as a political event.

19. "Red Racer" in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories* (1963)

The Maritime farmer Marcel Boudreau works with his community to prevent the spread of the fire which threatens his homestead. Marcel witnesses the death of a fellow fire-fighter, and later risks his own life in order to save his family. He respects the limits of his own human power, as his successful choice in effecting renewal indicates: he sets the "god" (75) against itself to 'fight fire with fire'. An otherwise violent deed--torching the countryside near his farm--has, in this case, constituted a source of regenerative power for the community at large. The superior judgment of the man beset by seemingly "wrathful" (75)

natural forces prevails.

Marcel Boudreau's dread foreshadows the disaster: "He was glad [his family] did not share the concern he felt for the *something* that lay above the valley like the brooding anger of a god" (*HG* 75). Much of what he thinks and feels about the impending blaze relates to supernatural preconceptions. Garner explores how the protagonists cope, both internally and in practice, with the threat. In anticipation of the impending violence, Marcel devises religious standards by which to evaluate the conflict. This allows him to "block out all past and present unpleasantness, and to control his responses and even his emotions", as well as the natural beast he faces (Chandel 144). The classical model sets heroic Marcel against the snake-like god, a killer "slithering over the hills" (*HG* 75).

Here, the omniscient narrator presents not the social man but the isolated one, who holds a fatalistic view: "He stood for a moment in fearful hesitation before making up his mind, gambling his safety and the safety of his family against the possible saving of his house and land. Then, his life and future depending on the cast of a die he ran several yards down the bank" (84). Denied rescue, these protagonists can do little more than hope, sometimes fatalistically, that the gods will be kinder next time. Marcel's response to the 'act of god' is a 'natural,' if not a somewhat "irrational," one:

The irrational reaction of modern man to the threat of disaster, as well as his sometimes equally illogical response to its actual impact, harks back to the behaviour of preliterate societies If earlier peoples interpreted disasters as primarily supernatural events, so, too, do they respond in ways more spiritual than practical. The common reaction was

simply resignation. If the gods caused catastrophe, then mortals could do little to change the course of events. (Cornell 46)

The violence of the elements pits man against nature in the struggle to survive. Thus, in order to survive, Marcel Boudreau's main activity presently consists of combatting the monstrous fire that lurks beyond the horizon, its feelers climbing thirty-foot trees like reversed lightning" (*HG* 80).

20. **"One Mile of Ice"** in *Hugh Gamer's Best Stories* (1963)

Pete (identified only in relation to his brother-in-law, Ralph Marsden) is clearly branded while visiting New Brunswick, for according to the omniscient narrator, "our ways aren't the ways of those of the city" (*HG* 119). The narrator spins a grisly yarn in which Pete loses "both his legs at the knees" (121), while Ralph's pride brings about his own death, in hubristic haste to be the first to cross a partially frozen river that year. Unfortunately, Pete goes along for the sleigh ride, while giving serious thought to "what Ralph had said earlier in the day about two men being able to help one another out if the sleigh went into a hole. 'I'll come, I guess, but I don't like it'" (123). In the end, Pete comes to regret his decision, praying that the sleigh would quickly sink while it "dipped and twisted before it filled with water and tilted into the cold black depths, bearing away Ralph's frozen grinning face" (124). Pete's initial sense of horror gives way to a powerful feeling of gratitude for having survived, mixed with guilt for having been spared. In the following passage, the narrator introduces his weird tale:

Down here in our part of New Brunswick we have a great respect for winter, but not much liking for it. Snow has its uses: it makes easily

traversed winter roads through the woods and covers the earth to keep the frost from penetrating too deep, but, to us, it is not formed of gossamer flakes that fall upon a poet's window. Sometimes it is blinding and cruel and impenetrable, and its dainty little patterns when multiplied a billion times can kill a man, and often do. And there are those of us who are afraid of the winter as some people are of lightning or fire or high places. (119)

Ralph is presented as a victim of his compulsions in the "naturalistic" tradition. He freezes to death, while Pete's more sober activity allows him to momentarily dominate himself enough to escape the sinking "*portage*" sleigh. Nonetheless, he sacrifices "both his legs at the knees" (121). Ralph's mortal appetites are too strong and his self-control too lax for him to survive. The doomed protagonist of "One Mile of Ice" lacks good judgment and self-control, and displays instead an inebriated bravado:

Pete pulled him into the bottom of the sleigh and placed Ralph's head between his own knees, covering him completely with the robe. When he tried to re-cap the brandy bottle he found that his hands had become too stiff from their slight exposure to the air. The cap rolled away, and he let it go, no longer caring whether the bottle was covered or not. He took a long gulp of the liquor before standing the uncapped bottle in a corner and bracing it with some parcels which were lying at his feet. (126)

As a work belonging to the both "drunk narrative" and horror genres, "One Mile of Ice" expresses the "conjunction of horror and alcoholism in a pervasive ideology of despair" (Crowley 5). Although the values demonstrated in the story differ from those of the American's, Garner's fiction refines Hemingway's metaphor of the hunt: Garner's version depicts humanity as prey. Garner uses the requisite 'horrific' imagery, in particular when his shocked protagonists find themselves unable to trust their senses.

Pete, a legitimately "paranoid" urban character out of his element, cannot share Ralph's "face splitting" grin until the sleigh crosses the thin ice to the other side of the river (*MW* 122). Ralph temporarily shares Pete's relief, laughing, "We're the first and I'm satisfied with that" (122). At the bar on the other side, the metamorphosis into a repulsive Ralph Marsden ("cocky, argumentative and ready to take a chance on anything") nears completion (123). The human error of "One Mile Of Ice" is enhanced by the example set by Marcel in "Red Racer." Pete, however, maintains a measure of sobriety in unknown territory.

The brief tragedy presents "winter" as an adversary of mythic proportions, and reflects the impact of F.P. Grove's fiction. Garner shows respect for Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (one of the first works of prairie realism, according to *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*) and adds that Grove's fiction was good, but unfortunately it "didn't reflect the lives of city-dwellers" (*ODT* 54). He explains: "I was one of the generation of the new authors who were attempting to change the Canadian literary scene by writing realistic urban-setting fiction. We weren't the first; Morley Callaghan had done it during the thirties, and Frederick Philip Grove had written realistically during the 1920s of prairie life. 'Snow' is the only good short story he ever wrote" (54).

In Grove's odyssey, man and steed cheat violent gods and arrive at the longed-for "domestic island" intact (Toye 325). Grove's classic 'hero' is a half-human, half-divine protagonist, only possessing human properties so that the ordinary reader may identify with his struggle. Conversely, the drunken 'antihero'

of Gamer's horror story dies, crippling his brother-in-law in the process. A typical antihero, Ralph "does not desire heroic virtues but dramatizes the simplest cravings for water or death" (Bender 788). The blizzard accounts for Ralph's reduction to a frost-bitten parody of his former self. His frozen 'death-mask' grins while the sleigh slowly--"Oh God, how slowly!"--sinks into a swirling black vortex, leaving Pete "horror-stricken" (HG 128).

The drunk's recklessness, which manifests itself in a deadly instinct to cross the partially frozen river during an icy gale, inspires a "curious respect for the awe-inspiring spectacle of one who has lost all inhibitions, who will do anything" (Crowley 77). Ralph's neighbours are surprised by his "risky" decision to cross the apparently frozen river "so early in the year *Bonne Chance!*" (HG 120). The sober city-dweller is aware of their elemental enemy. His warning comes too late: "Don't be a fool, Ralph! Let's go back tomorrow in the daylight. Maybe the blizzard will have died down by then" (125).

He plans to save the deluded pulp-cutter should the sleigh go through the ice, and he pays for this presumption: he takes a calculated risk and narrowly escapes the blizzard with his own life. As in many cinematic 'horror' narratives, Pete's guilt is enhanced by the fact that he witnesses the excruciating demise of the other man. Pete finds himself powerless, and "he hoped--yes, and prayed--that the sleigh would quickly sink" (129). The storm defies his description and he can only call it "fantastic": "They were no more than half a mile or so from a town of six thousand people who were eating supper, going to the early show at the Capitol, drinking beer at the Legion Hall, and yet they might have been a

thousand miles to the north in the midst of the frozen tundra" (125). He fears the maelstrom characterized by the narrator (an anonymous Maritimer) as a maddening "creature," capable of consuming its victims (126). The "million tiny whiplashes" of "cruel" snow carve intricate patterns into flesh with small, sharp spears (126). Ralph's alcoholic suicide on the frozen river practically engenders fratricide as well, but Pete survives.

Racked with guilt, Pete "still wonders if Ralph went to his death bearing a hatred for him because he had thought only of himself. It frightens him, so that he is afraid of the winter as some people are of lightning or fire or high places" (129). The tale finally comes full circle, through a repetition of the introduction's phobic references to natural forces. The mythic dimensions of winter, and its capacity to threaten the very lives of its victims, are present in "One Mile of Ice."

21. "Act of a Hero" in *Violation of the Virgins* in (1971)

Garner once more returns to the question of the human resources needed to counter the incidence of natural disasters in "An Act of a Hero." While on his way home from his delivery job at the flour mill for an "early lunch," George Ellsworth drives by his "youngsters" school, only to see it engulfed in flames (V 36). He rushes inside to save young Barry and Sandra, searching for them in the inferno until he recalls that they are absent due to an appointment with their dentist. Ellsworth notes that a boy is trapped by "fire and heat that engulfed him in a nauseating wave," but feels unable to save him: "*I'm a coward!* he suddenly

realized through the panic that now closed in on him. *Now, the one time in my life when I need courage, I have none!*" (37). Instead of "running the gauntlet of flames" to save the boy, he carries two girls outside who are clearly not in danger because he "had to accomplish something to justify his frightened run outside" (37).

Garner subjects his would-be heroes not only to the pressure of action, but to the pressure of *reaction* as well. In other words, it is a "coward's clarity" which replaces the vital heroic response, making Ellsworth change his mind about risking his life to save the boy (who is eventually overcome by smoke and dies) (37). The protagonist of Garner's conventionally antiheroic vignette is lauded as a hero by his community in "Act of A Hero."

Ironically, George's town believes he is a hero; this alone sets him on a pedestal by himself, but his private moment of cowardice alienates him further from those that would glorify him. The truth about his actions while under duress--which we later learn will haunt the character for the rest of his life--remains his secret.

When Ellsworth faces the power of the raging flames which trap the boy, his inner strength and moral resources fail to sustain him. Garner does not insist on the abstract value of self-control, in that his characters do not necessarily exhibit it; George is recognized and inadvertently rewarded for his cowardly deed.

Garner renders an artful *progression d'effet* by revealing "how pitiless and

inexorable natural forces" influence George's response to the crisis and cause a fatal weakening of his moral fibre (Meyers 3). The heavy heat is unbearable, and the 'under worldly' stalactites suggest the world outside the burning school no longer exists for the man in crisis. The terrible inferno ensures that the standard "heroic bearings--sun, sky, and horizon"--are lost (Meyers 3). Such imagery suggests intense suffering, culminating in the choking unconsciousness following the smoke inhalation which causes the boy's death. The narrator details a hellish setting in which the physical crisis takes place:

He turned from the classroom door and saw that the flames had now sealed the wall and were licking their way across the ceiling. On their trailing edge, large sheets of wall-board were hanging like fiery stalactites curling and undulating in the intense heat. When he drew closer to the fire the heat engulfed him in a nauseating wave, and turning his head away he groped for the parka on his sheepskin jacket and pulled it over his head. In order to reach the rear of the corridor, where he felt certain his own children were trapped, he would have to run the gauntlet of the flames. It flashed through his mind that he had often thought of rescuing his family from a burning house, especially if it was his own. It had seemed such a simple fundamental act of manhood when he had thought of it. Now, facing the painful stabbing flames that barred his path, and choking on the heavy smoke, he hesitated. From behind the fire came the sobbing cries of the trapped children, their screams muted now by the crackling roar of the nearby flames. (V 37)

The author subverts conventional heroism in the short stories' moments of crisis. Sandra's question--"Why are you mad [about the newspaper], Daddy?"--remains unanswered. The narrator concludes in "Act of A Hero" that it "was a question he [Ellsworth] would be unable to answer for the rest of his life" (V 39). The "gauntlet of flames," the screams of the trapped children, and the deadly smoke preclude the protagonist's heroic response (36). Excruciating heat melts Ellsworth's courage, saps his will, and forces him to submit to his terror and

panic. Given that the short story genre's "brief incidents, single moods, and isolated conversations are particularly suited to defining human limitations" (Gurko 175), Garner effectively characterizes the role of Ellsworth, who does not fit the image of a brave-hearted "hero."

In the short stories "Red Racer," "One Mile of Ice," and "Act of a Hero," natural forces challenge the alienated heroes' resources for survival. The sudden emergency (its apparently chaotic and unpredictable nature notwithstanding) commands a certain reaction from the surviving protagonists, one directed entirely toward endurance and an assertion of will. Thus the usual grid of class, economic, and social determinants which Garner variously examines to account for other forms of violence are curiously absent in his scrutiny of natural forces. However, the very ferocity and arbitrariness of irrational nature presents a macrocosm of the crude and equally ferocious economic forces which impinge on man's scarcely more ordered social context of existence. Nevertheless, while it is senseless to challenge the operation of arbitrary natural forces, it is both necessary and desirable to shake off one's fatalistic pessimism in the context of class oppression, which is predictable, and is capable of being resisted.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of this thesis, I have examined Garner's depictions both of the various manifestations and effects of violence. I have also attempted to demonstrate that this violence was "fictionalized" according to Garner's social and, more particularly, socialist sensibilities. His scenarios exemplify violence in three distinct spheres: sexual violence, social violence, and the violence of nature. They also represent the subordination of oppressed groups in general: women, the lower classes, and racial minorities. Although Garner may at times depict a "perversely titillating" image of society (Bok 121), the author deftly avoids stooping to the level of a mere propagandist, one whose flat stereotypes become allegorical representations of Marx's original class-based model.

In my view, he remains a compelling author who conveys his social messages in sexual and violent metaphors and images. Furthermore, Garner on occasion succeeds in sublimating a "deeper message in his stories so that they may [also] be read superficially for their entertainment value, without too much awareness on the reader's part of the two-edged sword which lies beneath them" (Arthur 108). His aversion to literary 'abstraction' causes him to expose the social injustices, the violence, and the outcome of that violence, and more precisely the long-term consequences of the violence which many authors systematically occlude from their work.

In these stories, "the crisis situation, the breaking point, is the chief, almost sole concern" (Gurko 228). Through the observations and asides of his narrators,

who themselves often resemble 'sociocritics,' Garner reveals that he belongs to the school of 'writer-as-sociologist', of which other revered 'members' include Morley Callaghan, Farley Mowat, and Dorothy Livesay.

Deadly violence is the context in which other violence occurs, and which "gives meaning to other forms, with which it inevitably interacts" (Burstow 15). The protagonists react in turn to the perversity of the violent patriarchal system of which, willingly or otherwise, they are a part. Yet a kind of compassion for the exploited and oppressed clearly emerges in Garner's realism, in which, however, he avoids fully replacing his inner world of 'feeling' for an external one of purported objectivity.

The narrative voice, which shifts from character to character with surprising arbitrariness, exudes irony. In Garner's concentration on sensational and violent subject matter, one also suspects that the author is not entirely unaware of how such material ensured his popularity with the masses if not with the critics. While his works may provide macabre entertainment for some, the violence, in my view, is not merely gratuitous embellishment, but "serves an integral political purpose" (Bok 121). In this examination of violence, one inevitably returns to the political in the personal, as expressed through the various characters. Forging a realistic authorial tone while seeking to articulate the experiences of a diverse community is a fundamental concern in Garner's violent stories.

Garner explores the relationship between humanity and violent external forces, whether these forces are 'natural' (as in his disaster stories) or political. In many ways, this thesis is itself like the short stories--a mixture of literary criticism, sociological insight, and biographically-inspired interpretation. In summary, then,

Gamer's stories deal with significant facets of oppression that are still very much with us. The strong sociocritical slant of these short stories, and Gamer's class and gender consciousness, call for a re-evaluation of Gamer's work and its place in Canadian literary history.

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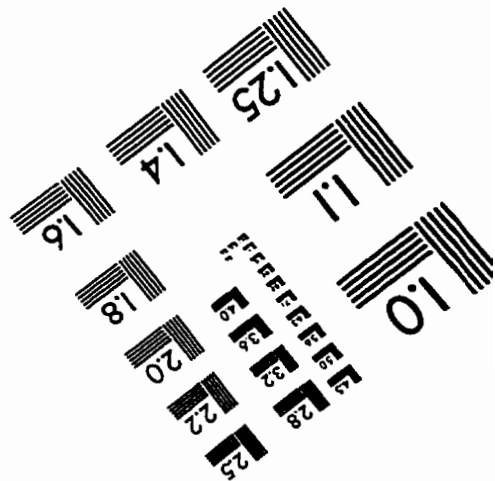
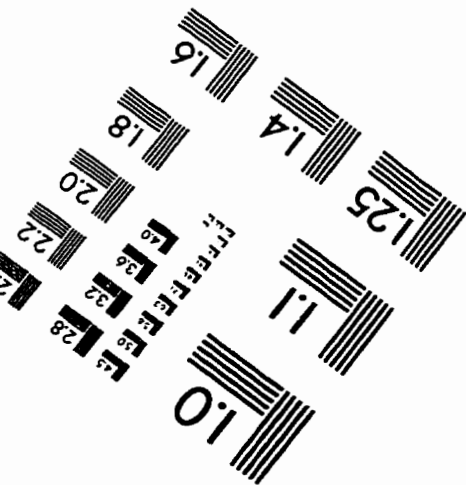
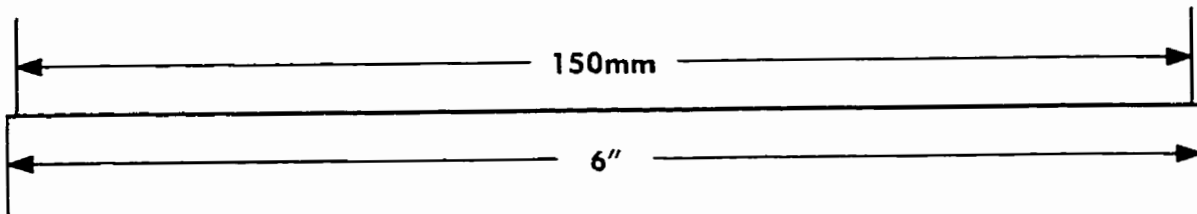
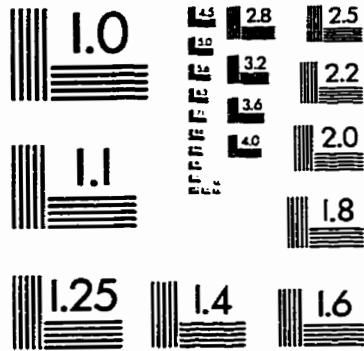
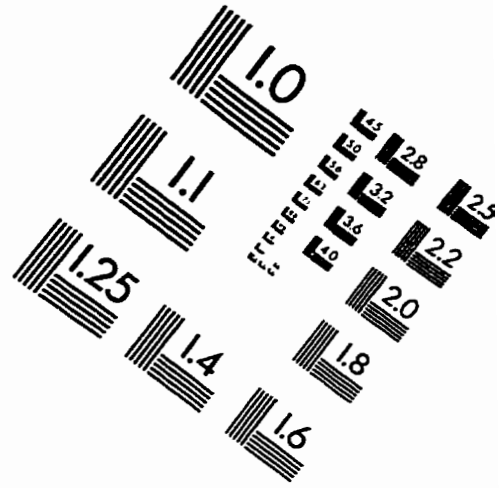
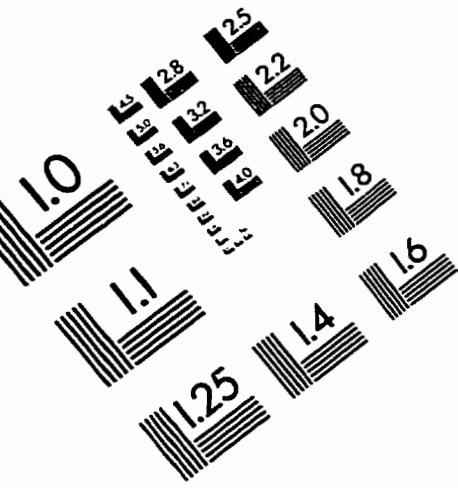
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