

Norman Maclean and the Problem of Identity: Storytelling,
Tragedy, and American Literature

Stephen Andrew Calatrello

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate Faculty of Middle Tennessee State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2009

UMI Number: 3381437

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3381437
Copyright 2009 by ProQuest LLC
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Norman Maclean and the Problem of Identity: Storytelling,
Tragedy, and American Literature

Stephen Andrew Calatrello

APPROVED: 08/05/2009

Dr. Carl Ostrowski

Dr. Carl Ostrowski, Major Professor

Will Brantley

Dr. Will Brantley, Reader

Tom Strawman

Dr. Tom Strawman, Chair, Department of English

Michael D. Allen

Dr. Michael D. Allen, Dean, College of Graduate Studies

Copyright © 2009

Stephen Andrew Calatrello

To my wife Jennifer
and my children
Thomas, Jack, Annie, and Henry

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The origin of this work goes back more than twenty years to a previous, quite different period in my life. During this time, I lived in a house that looked out over the Pacific Ocean and there I was lucky to live among a close circle of friends: poets, painters, and musicians, a few of whom were errant dock workers. Our doors and windows were always open, and the days and nights were full of music, books, laughter, interesting people, and good conversation. One day, I picked up a roommate's copy of Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* from the coffee table and read what I still believe is one of the most beautifully written stories I have ever read. Although I was not aware of it at the time, a dissertation had begun.

This project would not have been possible without the patience, assistance, and guidance of Dr. Carl Ostrowski. I am deeply indebted to him for his advice and counsel over the years and for his close reading of the manuscript. I am likewise grateful to Dr. Will Brantley, who reminded me amid my dark hours of St. John of the Cross's words: "All shall be well; and all shall be well, and all matter of

things shall be well." I am a better reader, writer, and teacher because of these and several other distinguished faculty members/mentors in the English Department: Dr. Michael Dunne, Dr. Angela Hague, and Dr. Robert Petersen. Dr. Kevin Donovan and Dr. Tom Strawman have likewise helped to make my path easier to navigate.

I would like to thank my colleagues at Calhoun Community College in Decatur, AL, for their support and encouragement over the years. Among these, I must thank the staff of Albert P. Brewer Library for assisting me with my numerous requests and accommodations. Furthermore, I must thank my good friend and colleague Dr. Ray Bell for the thousands of road miles and experiences we shared commuting to MTSU. Finally, I am grateful for my friend Dr. Randy K. Cross, a true gentleman and scholar, for listening to me, encouraging me, and reading my manuscript.

More immediately, my family has supported and encouraged me throughout this process. I'd like to thank my mother Anne B. King and my father Robert L. Calatrello for their love and support. My deepest debt, however, is

to my wife Jennifer for always being in my balcony; her
abiding love, encouragement, and faith are beyond measure.

ABSTRACT

Although Norman Maclean is best known for his novella *A River Runs through It*, in *Young Men and Fire*, he asserts a central premise that undergirds his work: "The problem of identity is always a problem, not just a problem of youth." At seventy, Maclean began his literary career, one that can be viewed as his attempt to explore this problem.

Throughout his life, Maclean championed narratives -- stories and storytelling. This book-length study presents an analysis of Maclean's intrigue with narratives, particularly the process by which narratives shape the individual's self-identity. For Maclean, the problem of identity can be resolved at any given time when a person finds a story that tells him something about himself. Applying insights from the criticism of Gerard Genette, Dan McAdams, Jerome Bruner, and Donald Polkinghorne, it becomes evident that Maclean does more than transform personal histories into art; his texts constitute what McAdams calls narrative identities, "stories people construct and tell about themselves to define who they are for themselves and for others."

Any study of Maclean, particularly one involving his quest for identity, must explore how he renders two events from his personal history: the murder of his brother Paul and the Mann Gulch Fire. Maclean's treatment of these personal tragedies reflects his belief that tragedy is the most demanding of literary forms; as such, this study focuses on Maclean's ideas regarding tragedy, tracing them to Aristotle and Shakespeare. Beyond the Aristotelian and Shakespearean influences, one senses that Maclean -- approaching the end of his life -- casts himself as his own tragic hero. As McAdams would put it, Maclean becomes an *individual*, "a storyteller who narrates life while living it."

Although Maclean's influences were numerous and diverse, many of them were writers associated with the American literary tradition; therefore, this study traces the influence of four canonical writers on Maclean. Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, and Hemingway provide a useful context against which readers may better understand Maclean's art, for many of these writers were themselves exploring matters of individual self-hood and identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II - MACLEAN AS STORYTELLER	32
CHAPTER III - MACLEAN'S TRAGIC VISION	80
CHAPTER IV - MACLEAN AND AMERICAN LITERATURE	147
CHAPTER V - CONCLUSION	211
WORKS CITED	219

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In a letter written by Sarah Orne Jewett to Willa Cather, Jewett offers her friend a thoughtful, apt definition of literature. "The thing that teases the mind," muses Jewett, "over and over for years, and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper -- whether little or great, it belongs to Literature" (Cather 6). At least two aspects of Jewett's characterization of what constitutes literature help inform the life and literary career of Norman Fitzroy Maclean (1902-1990). If Jewett's notion is accurate -- that literature is produced by writers teased by particular experiences, whether real or imagined -- then this applies to Maclean, a man who for decades internalized the grief of his brother's murder and the death of twelve United States Forest Service Smokejumpers.¹ In addition, Maclean's literary career, which he embarked upon late in life, exemplifies Jewett's idea that literature "at last gets itself put down on paper." With a distinguished teaching and administrative career at the University of

¹ In all, the Mann Gulch tragedy claimed the lives of thirteen United States Forest Service members. James O. Harrison, a recreation and fire prevention guard stationed at the mouth of Meriwether Canyon, perished in the fire.

Chicago behind him, Maclean spent his remaining years putting down on paper rightly that which had repeatedly teased -- if not haunted -- his mind.

Norman Maclean was the first-born son of John Norman Maclean and Clara (Davidson) Maclean. A brother, Paul, was born in 1905. In 1909, the Macleans moved from Clarinda, Iowa, to Missoula, Montana, where Maclean's father was a Presbyterian minister. Maclean's early education was conducted at home by his father, a "stern and harsh" man who introduced his sons early to the grace and beauty -- the art -- of religion, fly-fishing, and literature (Kittredge and Smith 172). According to Maclean, his home-schooled days were divided. The boy's morning hours were highly structured periods devoted to reading, writing, and recitation; however, in the afternoons, the Presbyterian minister turned his boys loose, free to explore the fields, roam the woods, and fish the rivers ("The Woods, Books, and Truant Officers" 82).²

² See also Maclean's "Interview" with National Public Radio. After one such afternoon excursion, the exuberant boy flaunted his freedom -- and perhaps his catch -- too openly to friends confined in the schoolyard, and a subsequent confrontation with a Missoula truant officer landed Maclean in the public schools.

When World War I broke out, many of the men who worked for the United States Forest Service left the woods to go to war. Because his age prohibited enlistment, the fifteen-year-old Maclean began working summers for the United States Forest Service clearing brush, cutting fire roads, and spotting forest fires; living and working in the logging camps profoundly shaped Maclean's character and literary expression in the years ahead.³ The Macleans were not wealthy. The Reverend Maclean's salary was a modest \$1,800 a year, yet the elder Maclean assured his son that when the time came for him to go to college, he would have enough money saved to send him to whatever college he could get into. "I cannot tell you," Maclean recalled, "what that assurance did to my character His saying what he and my mother were going to do for me was one of the most important things in my life" (Kittredge and Smith 117).

When the time came for Maclean to begin college, he went east, choosing Dartmouth College over Harvard

³ See Kittredge and Smith's "The Two Worlds of Norman Maclean: Interviews in Montana and Chicago" 118 and Maclean's "Interview with Norman Maclean" from *The Norman Maclean Reader* 171. Maclean worked summers for the United States Forest Service throughout his undergraduate and graduate years at Dartmouth.

University. There, he studied English and was a year ahead of Theodore S. Geisel.⁴ A more significant relationship for Maclean during his days at Dartmouth was with visiting professor Robert Frost, whom Maclean admired long before arriving at Dartmouth. Frost's creative writing class would meet in the basement of the chairman of the English Department's house, and as Maclean recalls it, Frost would walk in circles in front of the large fireplace: "He [Frost] talked straight to you, and often poetry was there, or something close to it" ("Interview with Norman Maclean" 179).⁵ After earning his A.B. degree in 1924, Maclean continued at Dartmouth another two years working as a teaching assistant.

In 1926, he met Jessie Burns at a friend's Christmas party on a trip home to Montana. Jessie, too, was descended from Scottish ancestry, but Methodist. Red-headed and freckled, she was "thin, strong, fast," as Maclean remembers (qtd. in Kittredge and Smith 126). "Her

⁴ Geisel would later be better known as Dr. Seuss. Maclean and Geisel served as editor-in-chief of the *Dartmouth Jack-O-Lantern*, the college's humor magazine.

⁵ As Maclean remembers it, Frost never read any student papers. "Frost would just walk back and forth in front of the fireplace and talk and talk and talk. Dramatic monologues" (qtd. in Dexter 147).

heels clicked when she walked. She had a kind of style about her, she had what I call 'swish'" (qtd. in Kittredge and Smith 127). Two years later, Maclean accepted a position as a graduate teaching assistant in the English Department at the University of Chicago. With the Depression underway, Maclean felt his income would not be adequate for the two to get married, so Jessie moved to Chicago and worked until the two had saved enough money to wed. In 1931, the Reverend Maclean married Norman and Jessie, and Maclean was promoted to instructor;⁶ however, the prosperity in his professional and personal lives was disrupted in the spring of 1938, when his brother Paul was murdered, beaten to death with the butt of a revolver.

In 1940, Maclean completed his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. In 1942, a daughter, Jean Burns Maclean, was born to Norman and Jessie; a son, John Norman Maclean, was born the following year. During World War II, Maclean enlisted in Naval Aviation, but the university requested he not be accepted. Instead, Maclean spent the

⁶ Maclean excelled at teaching; three times (1932, 1940, and 1973) he received the Quantrell Teaching Award, an award to recognize excellence in undergraduate teaching. Throughout his tenure, Maclean regularly taught Shakespeare and English Romantic Poetry at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

war years on campus performing numerous jobs in support of the war. In addition to teaching responsibilities, Maclean served as Dean of Students, directed Naval recruitment on campus, and served as the Director of the Institute of Military Studies, a program specializing in military training. During this time, Maclean co-authored with Everett C. Olson a *Manual of Instruction in Military Maps and Aerial Photographs*. Of these years, Maclean expressed sorrow and regret over not being available to his family -- particularly his children -- as he would have liked. "It's a real sorrow of mine," said Maclean. "I feel that I never picked up my children at the age when I should have. I was tired all the time" (Kittredge and Smith 129).

In 1952, two of Maclean's scholarly articles were published in *Critics and Criticism*, edited by Ronald S. Crane: "Episode, Scene, Speech, and Word: The Madness of Lear" and "From Action to Image: Theories of the Lyric in the Eighteenth Century." In the mid-1950s, Maclean began work on a history of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, a "psychological study of the golden-maned soldier, George

Armstrong Custer."⁷ Maclean would struggle to complete this study for more than a decade before aborting it altogether. The 1960s were turbulent years in America, and the decade presented enormous challenges for Maclean, too. His health was in decline and there were several extended hospitalizations. More difficult for Maclean, however, was the passing of his wife Jessie from cancer in 1968.⁸ "She died in December 1968, in Chicago, and I thought I died with her," said Maclean (qtd. in Dexter 144).

In 1973, after nearly fifty years of teaching literature, Maclean retired from the University of Chicago. Committed to an "anti-shuffleboard philosophy" of what to do when he was "old enough to be scripturally dead" (*Young Men and Fire* 242), Maclean -- at his children's behest -- turned to writing fiction. There were other motivations to write, too, ones that Maclean traced to his "being Scotch" and being "thick-headed" ("Interview with Norman Maclean"

⁷ This description is taken from a note that followed the article Maclean co-authored with Robert M. Utley, "Edward S. Luce: Commanding General (Retired), Department of the Little Bighorn."

⁸ See Dexter's "The Old Man and the River." "Eighteen years before she [Jessie] died, they told her it was hopeless. Emphysema. She wouldn't leave the cigarettes alone. The last years she lived with an oxygen tank, but she never whined, I never heard her cry" (144).

167). Specifically, Maclean was motivated by the challenge to undertake serious writing late in life: "I thought, 'As soon as I retire, I've got some serious things I'd like to write, and I think I know enough about writing to do them well. We'll see how they come out'" ("Interview with Norman Maclean" 167). A 1976 letter to Nick Lyons, though, suggests Maclean's motivations to write were not merely to test his intellectual/creative mettle:

After my father's death, there was no one -- not even my wife -- to whom I could talk about my brother and his death. After my retirement from teaching, I felt that it was imperative I come to some kind of terms with his death as part of trying to do the same with my own. This was the major impulse that started me to write at 70, and the first one naturally that I wrote was about him. It was both a moral and artistic failure. It was really not about my brother -- it was only about how I and my father and our duck dogs felt about his death. So I put it aside (and have carefully never tried to publish it).⁹ I wrote

⁹ Maclean is referring to "Retrievers Good and Bad," which was published in *Esquire* in 1977.

the other stories to get more confidence in myself as a story-teller and to talk out loud to myself about him. ("Letters to Nick Lyons" 234-235)

In 1976, the University of Chicago Press published Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*. In doing so, it published the first and only book of fiction in its history. The volume contains the title piece, a novella that recounts Maclean's memories of growing up in western Montana at the beginning of the century. A close-knit family united by religion and fly-fishing is devastated by the brutal murder of the narrator's brother Paul, a street-fighting, hard-drinking gambler whom the family loved, did not understand, and, in the end, could not help. "Logging and Pimping and 'Your Pal, Jim'" is a short story that recreates a summer spent in a logging camp. The narrator, a graduate student home from school for the summer, teams up with Jim, the best lumberjack in the camp, and together the unlikely duo work a two-man crosscut saw "gyppo" style (piece work) to beat the wages and the men who work for wages. In doing so, the two characters develop a friendship and mutual respect for

one another. "USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky" is likewise a backward glance, a coming-of-age memoir of life in a logging camp; the narrator celebrates the artistry displayed by men at work and their loyalty to one another amid crises.

The first publication run of *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* numbered approximately 3,000 copies. Its popularity, particularly among the fly-fishing community, grew primarily through word of mouth and fishing periodicals. For example, Nick Lyons, a university English professor and avid fly fisherman, was one of the first to review Maclean's stories in *Fly Fisherman* (Spring 1976). Later that year, Maclean acknowledged a debt of gratitude to Lyons for his review and his marketing assistance to the University of Chicago Press in a letter dated December 2, 1976:

I am glad that you gave our sales department a booster shot. And me, too. I sure can't kick about the number or kindness of reviews that the little blue book has received¹⁰ I'm sure that part of the fault lies in the inexperience

¹⁰ Maclean is referring to the color of the dust jacket, a pale blue.

of the press in dealing with the kind of thing I write, and I know both the Director, Mr. [Morris] Philipson and the Sales Manager, Mr. [Stanley] Plona, were grateful for the list you sent them of [illegible] points for fly fishermen. I'm grateful too I should like to thank you for the lift you have given me this year and to wish you health and happiness for the coming season and the coming year. May they always rise in the evening. (237)

Initial reviews of Maclean's "little blue book" were, like Lyons's, consistently positive, even those written by New York reviewers. "There were," recalls Maclean, "probably 600 reviews of it, and I think I only read one poor review . . . so I have no kick about reviewers" ("Interview with Norman Maclean" 179). In 1977, Maclean's effort earned a Pulitzer Prize nomination in the fiction category; however, citing "a lean year for fiction," the Pulitzer Prize Advisory Board issued no award (Dexter 146).

In his late seventies, Maclean showed no signs of slowing down or relaxing. Paramount Studios approached the University of Chicago Press to negotiate options to make a

film out of the longer fishing story.¹¹ Colleges and universities invited him to speak; two honorary doctoral degrees came, one in 1980 from Montana State University, one in 1981 from the University of Montana. Still, Maclean pressed on to the next challenge. Beginning in 1976, Maclean spent the next ten years devoting his time and energy researching, writing, and revising an account of the Mann Gulch Fire of August 5, 1949, one of the worst tragedies in the history of the United States Forest Service. Within an hour of parachuting into Mann Gulch in western Montana, twelve Smokejumpers and one ranger were dead. Maclean felt a kinship with these young men; they represented to him a life that he saw himself leading had he not entered the classroom. The book came from his desire to give them a voice -- to tell their story. By the end of 1981, Maclean's first draft was complete, and he "set the manuscript aside for several weeks to gather strength to start the impossible task of revision" ("Letters to Lois Jansson" 255).¹² By January of 1985, the

¹¹ For more on Maclean's attitudes toward the Hollywood film industry, see Dexter's "The Old Man and the River" 146-7.

¹² See also "Letters to Nick Lyons, 1976-1981." In a letter dated June 15, 1981, Maclean closes the letter telling Lyons that he can read his manuscript. "Of course, Nick,

"impossible task" seemed closer to Maclean. In a letter to Marie Borroff dated January 29, 1985, Maclean wrote that by the end of the summer he hoped "to float out on the blue water with a manuscript of a story on a forest fire ready to lay on the publisher" ("Letters to Marie Borroff" 232). No such float would take place.

By 1987, Maclean's health began deteriorating to the point he could no longer work. He died August 2, 1990, in Chicago. He was eighty-seven. Shortly afterward, Robert Redford's adaptation of *A River Runs through It* was released. Maclean's unfinished manuscript of the Mann Gulch Fire was left to the University of Chicago Press. With the assistance of Maclean's son John, his daughter Jean, and University of Chicago Press editor Alan Thomas, *Young Men and Fire* was published posthumously in 1992, and was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award (General Non-Fiction) the same year. Interest in the life and work of Norman Maclean continues. In the fall of 2008, the

you can see it. You are among the few I most want to see it. I haven't even yet thought much of what I'll do with it when I finish it -- probably turn it over to an agent, but if I do, after informing him of my great admiration for you and your literary judgment and your kindness to me and with the instruction that, no matter what, you are to see it at your leisure" (245).

University of Chicago Press published *The Norman Maclean Reader*, a collection of essays, letters, and other writings, edited by O. Alan Weltzien.¹³

Critical attention and reception of Maclean's work has been more than commensurate with what remains a decidedly small oeuvre. Since the publication of *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*, more than forty critical essays on Maclean and one collection of essays of appreciation and criticism (McFarland and Nichols) have been published. Looking at the critical work generally, one would note there has been some useful work done on Maclean; in fact, one is singularly struck by the range of resourceful literary and cultural criticism his two publications have generated: psychoanalytical,

¹³ Ten of the twelve selections that comprise "The Maclean Sampler" section of *The Norman Maclean Reader* have been previously published. Only "An Incident" and "Interview with Norman Maclean" appear for the first time. Readers seeking a more intimate glimpse into Maclean as a thinker, writer, and friend will enjoy the "Selected Letters" portion of the text, which includes correspondence between Maclean and Robert Utley, Marie Borroff, Nick Lyons, and Lois Jansson. Weltzien includes five chapters of "The Unfinished Custer Manuscript," which, while interesting, leave one wondering why these five were chosen. Maclean had planned his study to be twenty chapters and had written sixteen of them before abandoning the project.

deconstructive, feminist, Christian/myth readings, and genre analysis.

Daniel Dervin's perceptive psychoanalytical study "Casting Shadows: Filial Enactments in *A River Runs through It*" explores the tenuous relationships among the Maclean men, particularly the sibling rivalry and Oedipal impulses the text reveals. Dervin suggests that the Reverend Maclean's "phallic authority is redefined as powerful and trembling" (344). More convincingly, he argues that the narrator's connection to his father is through Logos, the Word (and literature); Paul earns his praise from his father through his mastery of fishing and the world of water. Dervin asserts that while the narrator's fishing constitutes a world of play -- "a world apart" -- for Paul, the river and fishing define his sphere of self-expression, despite his enigmatic, dark self that gambles, fights, and drinks too much.

Deconstructionist approaches include Mark Browning's "'Some of the Words Are Theirs': The Elusive Logos in *A River Runs through It*." Browning rightly notes the elusiveness inherent in language mirroring the elusiveness of relationships between and among Maclean's characters.

"Difficulty of communication in *A River Runs through It*," writes Browning, "is at once a theme, a symbol, and a technique" (679). Of particular interest is his deconstruction of Maclean's repetitive use of the words "help" and "beautiful," which gives rise to numerous elusive/ambiguous situations for both the characters and the reader. Browning asserts that "throughout *A River Runs through It* the difficulty of communicating parallels the difficulty of helping others" (681). Similarly, Douglas R. Butler's "Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*: Word, Water, and Text" demonstrates various ways to deconstruct *A River Runs through It*, a text whose meaning Butler argues is not determined, but rather created through various linguistic ambiguities and references.

Feminist readings of Maclean's work include studies by Mary Clearman Blew, J. Gerard Dollar, and Helen Lojek. Of these, Dollar's and Lojek's offer more explicit condemnation of Maclean for his treatment of women in his work. Dollar's "Misogyny in the American Eden: Abbey, Cather, and Maclean," for example, squarely places Maclean in the tradition of writers who see the American West as masculine territory, writers who render Edenic

presentations of landscape without women. "One finds," argues Dollar, "that the presentation, and indeed veneration, of the western wilderness as the site for men both to escape women and bond with other men . . . is disturbingly widespread" (98). Lojek's "Casting Flies and Recasting Myths with Norman Maclean" questions the value of the Western myth presented through Paul and postulates that Maclean's female characters threaten to emasculate the men in the narrative. Lojek concludes that *A River Runs through It* "perpetuates a worldview which has strict limitations" that its author is incapable of recognizing (156). Perhaps the essential objection to Lojek's appraisal of Maclean's misogyny is his rendering of Jessie in *A River Runs through It*, who defies Lojek's categorizations.

Readers surveying Maclean scholarship should detect a noteworthy pattern among certain critics who explore elements of Christian myth, ritual, and theology in Maclean's work, for his texts are fraught with Christian imagery and iconography. George F. Grattan's "Climbing Back into the Tree: Art, Nature, and Theology in *A River Runs through It*," along with Don Johnson's "The Words

beneath the Stones: Salvation in *A River Runs through It*," and Theodore Weinberger's "Religion and Fly Fishing: Taking Norman Maclean Seriously" are representative of such studies. More recently, Patrick Dooley's 2005 study "The Prodigal Son Parable and Norman Maclean's *A River Runs Through It*" suggests the merits of this approach have not been fully exhausted.

Of course much of the critical discussion places its focus on Maclean as a writer primarily interested in tragedy, and justifiably so. The major statements among this group of writers have been made by O. Alan Weltzien, author of five journal articles and, most recently, editor of *The Norman Maclean Reader* (2008). In his article "Norman Maclean and Tragedy," Weltzien traces Maclean's interest in tragedy chronologically from Maclean's 1952 essay on *King Lear*: "Episode, Scene, Speech, and Word: The Madness of Lear" through Maclean's aborted book on General George Armstrong Custer, *A River Runs through It*, and *Young Men and Fire*. Weltzien submits that for Maclean "tragedy emanates from experiences of acute defeat" (139). Equally valuable is the research Weltzien has done concerning Maclean's friendships with Robert Utley and Laird Robinson.

Maclean and Utley shared a mutual interest in General George Custer and the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and it was Laird Robinson with whom Maclean worked so closely as he investigated the Mann Gulch Fire. Weltzien's lasting contribution, however, will be the work he undertook with the University of Chicago Press and Maclean's estate to bring forward selected chapters from Maclean's unfinished Custer manuscript and his selected letters, which open and close *The Norman Maclean Reader*.

David Toole's "Wonder, Grief, and Tragedy: A Nietzschean Defense of *Young Men and Fire*" and James E. Ford's "When 'Life ... Becomes Literature:' The Neo-Aristotelian Poetics of Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*" each propose that Maclean owes a debt of gratitude to the literary genre of tragedy -- its early proponents and practitioners. As the title of his study suggests, David Toole's discussion of *Young Men and Fire* applies Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas regarding tragedy as a way to approach *Young Men and Fire*. Toole's most astute observation is the similarity he notes between Greek charioteers who race their chariots into the abyss and the smoke jumpers' footrace with fire up the side of a canyon.

These two, submits Toole, "are the same race" (198). In this "glance into the abyss" (200), Toole argues that Maclean embodies Nietzsche's concept of tragedy as "the artistic taming of the horrible" (200). Whereas Toole's discussion is limited to *Young Men and Fire*, Ford's interest is the extent to which Maclean's sensibilities as a Neo-Aristotelian critic influence *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*. In particular, Ford recognizes the Aristotelian aesthetic operating in Maclean, citing "'objects of imitation' of *A River Runs through It*, as well as its two companion stories, as events from Maclean's life that happen to have -- were selected precisely because they have -- inherent and fundamental poetic qualities" (527). Ford concludes -- perhaps too hastily -- that Maclean's novella is "neither tragedy nor comedy, it is a third kind of story, the end of which is ultimately positive" (531).

With the exception of Ronald McFarland's pamphlet *Norman Maclean* (1993), there is no definitive Maclean biography or book-length study of his work, nor has Maclean been treated as the exclusive subject of a dissertation. McFarland's fifty-five page pamphlet on Maclean is part of the Western Writers Series published by Boise State

University Press. In it, McFarland offers readers a general analysis of plot, character, and theme of *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*. His treatment of *Young Men and Fire*, which he characterizes as an "amalgam of factual story and scientific fact" (46), seems somewhat overshadowed by his more thorough synopsis of Maclean's novella. Subsequently, the undertaking of this study has several objectives, the most significant of which is to contribute to the ongoing critical conversation among readers of Maclean, both general and academic.

What draws one reader to Maclean may not necessarily be that which attracts others to him. He is seldom taught in school and certainly not among the class of anthologized writers, so many readers come to him -- as I did -- by word of mouth. Undoubtedly, others are introduced to Maclean through Robert Redford's thoughtful film adaptation of *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* and then, perhaps later, come to read *Young Men and Fire*. Even his non-academic readers are left with a clear sense that his art transcends simply an ability to tell stories about fly-fishing and forest fires. Intuitive readers apprehend and appreciate Maclean's ability to explore some of humanity's

deepest and most problematic relationships and questions: Why are we incapable of understanding, knowing, or helping the people we live with and love? What is humanity's relationship with the natural world, especially as the individual confronts the universe's seemingly random and terrifying displays of destructive phenomena? For more than twenty years, my interest in Maclean has evolved from these two abiding questions.

Of course, Maclean's life and work reverberate with readers for other reasons. Academics, particularly teachers of writing and literature, may find Maclean intriguing because his life's trajectory followed a similar path to theirs. Seasoned teachers familiar with his essays and lectures might go as far as to argue that these writings should be required reading for beginning graduate teaching assistants; his anecdotes and insights offer a wellspring of sound, practical pedagogical advice. Likewise, students of composition and creative writing would do well to emulate Maclean's prose style. Direct and sparse in one passage, he can modulate in the next, crafting lyrical passages that approximate poetry. Still, even though his texts explore profound human defeat and

loss, Maclean's wit and humor are never wholly eclipsed by them. This versatility in style and timbre appeals to readers who know and appreciate Maclean. Finally, I would concede that part of my fascination with Maclean is the intellectual, creative, and physical courage that he displayed with his decision to begin a writing career at the age of seventy. To me, Maclean's personal narrative embodies the spirit of Tennyson's aged Ulysses, who decries, "Old age hath yet his honor and his toil. / Death closes all; but something ere the end, / Some work of noble note, may yet be done" (lines 50-52).

The scope of the present study is limited and defined, as most inevitably are, by prevailing and persistent questions regarding an author's life and work: that which lingers long after the reading experience has passed. While some of these questions are not necessarily new or wholly unique to Maclean, an additional purpose of this study is to extend this discourse further, to explore new, related questions. What readers know is ultimately cumulative. To that end, this study re-frames questions -- some that have been asked before -- about Maclean's

aesthetic and offers readers a fresh lens through which they may view Maclean's texts.

The core proposition of this discussion is to demonstrate the ways that Maclean's life and work signify the essential quest each human being undergoes, or should undergo: the quest for self-hood.¹⁴ If one approaches Maclean with this unique, over-arching objective, a new perspective is made available; no longer is Maclean merely viewed as a minor voice, western writer, or modern-day romantic. Instead, one begins to recognize Maclean as a writer whose intellect, imagination, and aesthetic wrestle with what is a significantly larger, universal question that can be traced back to the ancients; as Socrates asserted while on trial for heresy, "The unexamined life is not worth living." This Socratic edict provides the essential, critical underpinning for a logical study of Maclean, a man whose life seems guided by this single impulse. At every stage of his life, he paused to examine its direction and purpose; he possessed the

¹⁴ The work of Erik Erikson informs my use of this term. In the 1960s, Erikson argued that beginning in adolescence human beings begin formulating answers to two questions central to the formulation of identity: "Who am I" and "How do I fit in the adult world?"

intellectual/creative/spiritual courage to question, redirect, and, when necessary, reinvent himself. This process -- in essence -- bears resemblance to the ideas advanced by William James in *The Principles of Psychology*. For James, one's personal identity is continually being revised in response to the changing interests, needs, and events of the person. He believed that it is possible for the individual to conceive his or her life in terms of a coherent narrative structure that links events from the past to activities in the present and to plans for the future (371-372).¹⁵ Consequently, this study dramatically departs from any other; it recasts and reframes some of the critical observations of Maclean, subsuming them under the Socratic maxim that champions the individual's quest for self-hood. The advantage of this inquiry is that it provides a new vantage point from which readers may contemplate Maclean's life and work in toto.

¹⁵ Certainly research in the twentieth century -- in particular the last twenty years -- has contributed to our understanding of how narratives intersect and inform fundamental and foundational issues of consciousness and self. See, for example, Dan P. McAdams's *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative* and his *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*; Mark Freeman's *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* and Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush's *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative* are likewise instructive.

A further, related rationale for this analysis is the fact that critical inquiry thus far has yet to identify the Socratic quest for self-hood as the unifying thread which pulls together the disparate, individual approaches to Maclean's work. One could argue that this analysis -- an argument that presents Maclean's quest for self-identity as a sole, unifying core concept -- helps explain two questions regarding Maclean's texts. First, historically publishers and critics have had difficulty determining the genre that most appropriately classifies Maclean. The often-quoted, belabored criticism leveled against Maclean's manuscript by one publisher, "These stories have trees in them," and the Pulitzer Prize advisory board's confusion and dismissal of *A River Runs through It* as a work of fiction suggest that some confusion has plagued Maclean's readers. Secondly, this methodology clarifies what heretofore has been difficult to explain: why do readers, the majority of whom are not fly-fishermen or regularly amid field or stream, find themselves -- the truthfulness of their lives' experiences -- refracted and reflected in Maclean's texts?

Throughout his life, Maclean was deeply, and often self-consciously, aware of the importance of narrative -- of stories and story-telling. Therefore, Chapter Two presents an analysis of his life-long intrigue with narratives, particularly the process by which the narrative shapes the individual's self-identity, his or her quest for self-hood. At base, Maclean believed that the problem of identity is never simply a problem for the young; it endures throughout one's life. For Maclean, the question of identity can be resolved at any given time when a person finds a story that tells him something about himself. In this chapter, I submit that this concept remains the essential premise upon which Maclean's art rests. When Maclean embarked on his literary career, he did so from a vantage point that allowed him to survey the vicissitudes of life as a sequence of Wordsworthian "spots of time," moments that for him possessed intrinsic, eternal literary quality. My methodology in this chapter consists of close textual analysis complemented by some of the terminology established by narratologist Gerard Genette and cognitive psychologists Dan P. McAdams, Jerome Bruner, and Donald Polkinghorne. As readers explore how Maclean structures his stories (his narrative techniques) and the purposes to

which stories are put in *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* and *Young Men and Fire*, they find that Maclean's role as story-teller is one that does more than transform personal histories into art. Maclean's texts constitute what Dan P. McAdams and others call narrative identities, "stories people construct and tell about themselves to define who they are for themselves and for others" (*Identity and Story* 4).

The genesis for Chapter Three, "Maclean's Tragic Vision," stems from a remark Maclean made during an interview regarding his teaching career at the University of Chicago. He said that when teaching Shakespeare he always began with *Hamlet* and that he spent the first day of class lecturing on the first line of the play: "Who's there?" I submit that this simple, yet evocative, two-word question underpins Maclean's *A River Runs through It* and, perhaps to a greater extent, *Young Men and Fire*. In each of these works, Maclean's conflict, and thus his primary purpose, is reconciling the tragedies that have haunted him: the murder of his brother Paul in 1938, and the death of twelve smoke jumpers in 1949. Any study of Maclean, particularly one that recognizes his fundamental quest for

identity, must explore how he renders these events from his personal history. The methodology is to determine the extent to which Maclean's *A River Runs through It* embodies tenets advanced by Aristotle in *Poetics*; this seems a legitimate endeavor, for Maclean and his University of Chicago colleagues were known as neo-Aristotelian critics. What distinguishes my discussion from that of other critics, particularly James E. Ford's, is my exploration of Maclean's debt to Shakespeare, one that has not been sufficiently examined. For example, in *A River Runs through It*, Maclean clearly employs Shakespeare's technique of incorporating deliberate comic scenes into his tragedies. These light-hearted flights of fancy are necessary structurally to reduce the intensity of the tragedy, one readers certainly sense from the onset is approaching. In addition, Maclean demonstrates an uncanny sense of Shakespearean balance in his pairing of couples: Norman and Jessie, Paul and Monasetah, and Neal and Old Rawhide. To my knowledge no critic has yet explored these pairings, which I submit suggest three types: the ideal, the artistic, and the comic. In presenting Maclean's tragic vision in *Young Men and Fire*, I begin with his observation that tragedy is the most demanding of literary

forms. In the discussion of this text, I draw upon the work of psychologist D.P. McAdams, for whom the individual is "a storyteller who narrates life while living it" (*The Person: An Introduction to Personality Psychology* 746).

Finally, in Chapter Four I present Maclean as a writer whose quest for self-hood may be more completely appreciated if readers approach him as a writer whose work is profoundly influenced by the American literary tradition: the canon. Though current trends in American literary studies would have readers mistrust such an approach, I argue that the canon has not outlived its utility. The objective of this discussion is to demonstrate that readers who come to Maclean with a familiarity with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Ernest Hemingway will recognize the fingerprint of each of these writers upon Maclean. The American literary canon provides an on-going, useful context against which readers may better understand the tradition in which Maclean appears to be writing. More to the point, a case could be made that these canonical writers were themselves -- at varying levels -- exploring matters of individual self-hood and identity. While some

readers might question how Maclean could descend from a group of writers whose philosophies -- for lack of a better term -- contradict one another, what we discover in Maclean is ultimately an individual whose life, in so many respects, was marked by this type of dichotomy. The fact that Maclean's work possesses transcendental optimism counterbalanced by modernist pessimism should come as no alarm to one who understands his other major schisms.

CHAPTER II

MACLEAN AS STORYTELLER

In *Young Men and Fire*, Norman Maclean asserts what may well be his most significant, revealing aesthetic statement: "The nearest anyone can come to finding himself at any age is to find a story that somehow tells him about himself" (145). Perhaps above all other assertions, this statement informs his life and, subsequently, his work; it reverberates throughout his slim, yet powerful, body of work. Cumulatively, *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*, *Young Men and Fire* -- along with his essays, lectures, and interviews -- illustrate Maclean's life-long intrigue and belief in both the importance and power of storytelling.¹ Simply put, Maclean believed that stories (and related activities: reading/writing in the written tradition and listening/telling in the oral tradition) are integral to the construction and evolution of the individual's self-identity, a process that Maclean asserted was not simply a problem for the young. The general consensus among psychologists such as Rivka Tuval-Mashiach is that story and identity are opposite sides of the same

¹ See Maclean's acknowledgments in *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*. A purpose of his stories is "letting children know what kind of people their parents are or think they are or hope they are" (ix).

coin. For all intents and purposes, one's story is one's identity. "The relationship between story and identity is reciprocal," argues Tuval-Mashiach. "Identity infuses the life story with content and meaning even as it is changed and shaped by the story being told We know or discover ourselves through the stories that we tell" (250).

Maclean's formative years certainly were shaped by stories -- the simple activity of being read to aloud the Bible and literature.² When he got older, Maclean spent summer evenings on the steps of the First National Bank in Missoula exchanging Montana stories with his friends.³ As a parent, Maclean would tell bed-time stories to children John and Jean, and it was at their behest he began writing down these stories upon his retirement.⁴ Therefore,

² Maclean credits his writing process to being read to aloud by his father: "One seeming side effect of my early family training was that I learned a great deal about literature by hearing it read, with the result that I depended heavily upon sound to guide my writing" ("The Hidden Art of a Good Story" (25).

³ See Maclean's lecture "Montana Memory: Talk at the Institute of the Rockies." According to Maclean, "This was a great experience for developing our narrative art although it made us a little retarded in the art of making love" (70). See also Maclean's "Teaching and Storytelling" 89-93.

⁴ See Maclean's acknowledgments in *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*. Maclean concedes that the stories that follow in no way resemble those he told his children. The

exploring how Maclean structures his stories (his narrative techniques) and the purposes to which stories are put in *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* and *Young Men and Fire* makes appropriate sense for any study of his work.

While this pursuit may seem straightforward, it is not without its own unusual set of issues and challenges. Specifically, Maclean's work relies exclusively on stories crafted from his personal history. In fact, one cannot help but be singularly struck by the author's presence in his work. Further complicating this convoluted link is the fact that Maclean's storytelling enterprise cuts across generic boundaries. *A River Runs through It* is a fictional rendering of his personal familial history while *Young Men and Fire* is non-fiction. Without doubt, the relation of a literary work to its author has long been one of criticism's most provocative issues. This is certainly the case with Maclean, as the reader considers the ways in which Maclean manipulates his roles as author and character to create an art that both does and -- at times -- does not mirror life. This problem often leads to a consideration of how readers become involved in the tension between

act of writing changes them, makes them "bigger and longer" than is necessary to put children to sleep (ix).

Maclean as author and Maclean as an imagined presence in his work. One possible solution to these issues -- and the long shadows they cast -- is simply to acknowledge them as such, for they are distinguishing traits of Maclean's work that contribute to the texture of his art.

To date, only a few articles have attempted to treat Maclean's intrigue with stories and storytelling. In "'Haunted by Waters': Narrative Reconciliation in Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*," Kenneth Womack and Todd F. Davis rightly identify the novella as an example of narrative therapy, the attempt to search for the truth about familial relationships through storytelling. "The act of writing," according to Womack and Todd, "allows Maclean to acknowledge the spiritual and emotional pain that he carried for nearly forty years after his brother's death" (193). Womack and Todd argue that as a form of narrative therapy texts such as *A River Runs through It* allow readers to effect a positive change in their own lives "through the therapeutic interpretation of their textual experiences" (194).

Teresa Ferreira de Almeida-Alves's "Gazing at the River, Throwing the Line, Daring the Waters" places Maclean's novella within the Augustinian tradition of

spiritual conversion; she also submits that Maclean is working in the same American tradition as predecessors Irving, Thoreau, and Hemingway. As such, she asserts that *A River Runs through It* should be seen "as an autobiography that might be read as a scripture of the self" (26). Alves submits that *A River Runs through It* "goes beyond time and space" (14) and, like the writings of Thoreau, reveals the "discovery of the self in nature" (14).

Douglas A. Butler's "Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It: Word, Water, and Text*" presents various ways to deconstruct the novella. For Butler, meaning is not determined; rather, it is created through Maclean's use of various linguistic ambiguities and references: Logos, the Word, and various texts, for example, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, *The Compleat Angler*, and the Bible. Butler also asserts that the words spoken by the narrator Norman and his father are inextricably linked, blurred beyond distinction. "We are aware," writes Butler, "that some of the words may be the minister's but also that some are Norman's; we cannot tell the difference" (266). According to Butler, both Paul and the Big Blackfoot River are likewise treated as texts, equally as ambiguous and difficult to understand. His interest remains in the

linguistic ambiguities that he believes pervade Maclean's text.

Delivered first as a lecture in 1985, Gordan Brittan's "Common Texts" explores how reading and discussing common texts creates important communities for readers of stories. Brittan identifies the importance of patterns and forms in rivers, texts, and in human experience. According to Brittan, Maclean's text illustrates the efficacy of storytelling, for it is what gives a life pattern and form. "Lived experience is for the most part formless and without meaning," writes Brittan. "Only later do we begin to discover patterns, unities, but only as we begin, in this case as an old man, to recover that experience in memory and order it in words" (187).

Kathleen A. Boardman examines how American writers Mark Twain, Ann Zwinger, and Norman Maclean represent the river in their fiction. As counterparts to the men and women who navigate, canoe, or fish these waterways, these artists, according to Boardman, are more interested in "reading" the river than rendering a fixed, objective description of it. Boardman asserts that reading, whether a text or a river, is "an active process of creating meaning through an interaction of reader and text" (139).

Ultimately, the transactions between the individual and river create experiences that remain outside of culture and transcend human time, reflecting and refracting the self.

Finally, Wayne Booth discusses how and why his mind changed regarding the aesthetic value of Maclean's *Young Men and Fire*. A fellow faculty member of Maclean's at the University of Chicago, Booth and his wife read early manuscripts of *Young Men and Fire*; neither was impressed. Booth could not easily discern the genre, and he felt that Maclean's manuscript lacked unity. With some trepidation, Booth assisted in the editing of the text for publication after Maclean's death. While Booth supported the text's publication, he thought it was a "mess" (13). When he read the book in published form, Booth recognized that the text's weaknesses, conflicting genres, purposes, and authorial intrusions, essentially create a second story -- the struggle of Maclean to tell the story, the "telling-plot" that accompanies the "action-plot" of the text (14). According to Booth, "adding a struggle plot -- that is, turning what these days is called the 'discourse' into a prime subject in itself -- transforms the effect of any narrative, and it may often transform the genre" (14).

Although these critics offer perceptive insights into his work, there is nothing quite like hearing Maclean speak for himself. His voice is prominent in his work; his strength distinctive in capturing the American idiom and "the way it was" for the people in his stories. He possessed specific ideas regarding the art of storytelling and seldom missed an opportunity -- whether a lecture or an interview -- to share his views and methodologies, which he always traced to his career teaching literature and his upbringing in western Montana. For example, in "Teaching and Story Telling," a lecture delivered at the University of Chicago and Montana State University in Bozeman, he discussed the relationship between teaching and the craft of storytelling. "There is a good deal of overlap," said Maclean, "between teaching and story telling, and was, even in my early life; as for my stories, teaching is almost everywhere present in them" ("Teaching and Story Telling" 88). Nevertheless, Maclean maintained that the effective storyteller must retain control over his tale; one of the worst mistakes possible was for the story to lapse into didacticism. "Teaching and storytelling can easily destroy each other," warned Maclean, "a story is dead if it seems to preach and a teacher is also dead if he spins yarns and

hasn't anything to say" (90). In this speech, he presented the essential elements of storytelling as he learned them in his youth around the campfires and bunkhouses of the United States Forest Service and under the moonlight on the steps of the First Bank in Missoula, Montana. Maclean told his audience that his stories have their "humble origins" in this "bunkhouse variety of the narrative art" (90). The fundamentals to the art of the bunkhouse narrative deserve mention. First, the story -- whether oral or written -- needs to be short.⁵ Maclean quite rightly noted that not even a "close friend will listen to a story for ten minutes" (90). Second, a lot has to happen in the story. According to Maclean, "None of your friends in a bunkhouse is being psychoanalyzed and is willing to spend money year after year waiting for something to happen" (90). The final element of the bunkhouse narrative, though, is paramount to understanding Maclean's art. Maclean said that even Western stories had "something to do with truth" and that bunkhouse stories taught him that "the world was funny and full of pain, and that, too, is a good thing to know" (91). In "Montana Memory: A Talk at the Institute

⁵ See Maclean's "Teaching and Storytelling." Maclean said he could not conceive writing a novel. "I would be sure ahead of time that a novel would be mostly wind, as most novels are" (90).

of the Rockies," delivered two years before "Teaching and Story Telling," Maclean discussed his attraction to this mixture of humor and sorrow in the Western stories of writer and painter Charles Russell (1864-1926).⁶

Specifically, Maclean identified the manner in which Russell's narrative art left a particular, influential mark on his own memories of Montana:

But I suppose that essentially the conventional Western tall tale is comic, and the comic spirit is certainly deep in Charley's art as it was in his view of life and as I hope it is in ours. But mixed with comic and helping to separate his stories from the Western tall tale are sadness and pathos. Part of the sadness is tied up with a sense of history. He knew he had lived through one of America's great moments in history -- he had lived to see all but the end. (73)

Maclean believed his stories functioned similarly. As a storyteller, one of his objectives (in addition to telling a good story) was to leave a record -- an historical record -- of how life was lived in western Montana at the beginning of the twentieth century. His stories present a

⁶ See Charles Russell's *Trails Plowed Under* (1927), for example.

specific time before the modern age when work in the woods and canyons of America's West was still performed by hand and horse, a time long before modern conveniences.

Speaking of *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*, Maclean told his listeners: "The history in these stories, then, is a kind of history of hand craft, and the chief characters are experts with their hands - expert packers, expert sawyers, expert fishermen . . ." (73). To be sure, readers of Maclean may often sense that what they hold in their hands is a eulogy of sorts, a tribute to a time and a place that simply no longer exist. The aged storyteller simultaneously extols the virtues of his epoch and laments its loss.

Maclean reiterated much of what he felt to be true about the art of storytelling in what would be one of his last lectures: "The Hidden Art of a Good Story." In this address, though, Maclean revealed more than what he had previously shared about his humble bunkhouse narrative art form; he identified a central point about his writing, a characteristic that he believed derived from his observations of life: the beauty of design and rhythm in the natural world.

Long before I became a student of the beauty and art of what men and women can do with their hands, I was deeply aware of the beauty and designs of nature. I suppose that would be natural enough, turned loose in nature nearly every afternoon. I suppose it was only natural that nature became my one close friend I had outside of my family It had design and structure and beauty to it. I also thought if only I stayed still and looked hard and thought about what I had seen I could see how it was connected with the beauty of what women and men could do with their hands and heart and head.

(29)

The sentiments expressed here regarding design, structure, and beauty in the natural world manifest in Maclean's ideas regarding the art of storytelling. "A story," Maclean said, "if anything, is flow and movement and rhythm. Much of the story-art is in the hidden art of keeping the story flowing" (32). By his own admission, Maclean worked diligently to achieve the flow and rhythm that mark his stories. His composition process, as many aspects of his life, was divided. In the mornings, Maclean wrote; his

afternoons were spent soaking in a bath until the water turned cold ("Teaching and Storytelling" 96). The "bathtub part of writing," as he called it, helped lessen his anxiety about writing. The afternoons in tepid bath water were where Maclean solved the problems and answered the questions of what awaited him with the morning's writing.⁷ When writing, his ear was always attuned, listening for the music that would assure him he was writing well. The musical quality of his prose is, he said, a consequence of growing up hearing literature read aloud:

I write by paragraphs which I hear as units of sound that rise a few notes to their middle, then drop a note or two as the paragraph comes to an end - except right at the very end when they rise a note or two to start the next paragraph, slightly higher in scale than the preceding paragraph, and so help quietly to increase the scale of interest as the story proceeds. I need hardly tell you that families no longer read to each other. I am sure it leaves a sound gap in family life. (26)

⁷ Maclean's "bathtub part of writing" is "wordless, architectural," but necessary so that the story will not "crack" or "collapse" (96).

Readers of Maclean, it could be suggested, recognize this musical quality of his prose in any number of passages.

Read aloud, two short paragraphs from *A River Runs through It* illustrate Maclean's explanation of his composition process:

We sat on the bank and the river went by. As always it was making sounds to itself, and now it made sounds to us. It would be hard to find three men sitting side by side who knew better what a river was saying.

On the Big Blackfoot River above the mouth of Belmont Creek, the banks are fringed by large Ponderosa pines. In the slanting sun of late afternoon the shadows of great branches reached across the river, and took the river in their arms. The shadows continued up the bank, until they included us. (102)

Read aloud, one detects a rise that comes at the end of the first paragraph; the next paragraph appears "slightly higher in scale," quietly and evocatively moving the reader onward. By the end of the next paragraph, Paul is dead. It's difficult for one to imagine what Maclean wrestled with the afternoon before he wrote these paragraphs,

soaking in a bathtub of cold water, alone. Maclean's attitudes -- his ethos -- throughout these lectures and workshops on his writing are shrewd and sincere.

In one respect, *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* can be considered a collection of stories about the art of storytelling. Consequently, the ideas of narratologist Gerard Genette may provide a useful critical vocabulary to approach a discussion of Maclean's narrative strategies.⁸ To begin, Maclean's narrative mode, as with most any writer of fiction, can best be described as an effective blend of mimesis and diegesis.⁹ The parts of a narrative that are presented in a mimetic manner are dramatized, which is to say that they are rendered in a scenic way, with a specific setting, and make use of dialogue which contains direct speech. The mimetic portions of a narrative create the illusion that readers are seeing and hearing things for themselves. By contrast,

⁸ As one of the most prominent narratologists since Roland Barthes, Genette's work has as its focus, not the tale itself, so to speak, but how it is told, which is to say the process of telling itself. Genette identifies five particular narrative categories -- order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice -- in his book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*.

⁹ Ibid. Genette points out that the mimetic and diegetic were originally identified by Plato in Book III of *The Republic* 162.

diegetic passages of a narrative are crafted in a more rapid and sweeping fashion. The aim of the diegetic is often to provide readers with essential linking information as efficiently as possible, without trying to create the illusion that the events are taking place before readers' eyes. In practice, of course, writers use the two modes in tandem, moving from mimetic to diegetic, and back again, for strategic reasons. This is partly because an entirely mimetic novel would tend to be infinitely long, and an entirely diegetic one could hardly be more than a couple of pages. The glide between the narrative modes, however, is often handled more artfully and seamlessly by some writers than others. To illustrate, consider the following brief passage as one of the first major modal glides from *A River Runs through It*:

I ran into him [Paul] in front of the Montana Club, which was built by rich gold miners supposedly on the spot where gold was discovered in Last Chance Gulch. Although it was only ten o'clock in the morning, I had a hunch he was about to buy a drink. I had news to give him before I could ask the question.

After I gave him the news, my brother said,
"He'll [Neal] be just as welcome as a dose of
clap." (9)

The modal shift between the diegetic and the mimetic occurs subtly and smoothly here. In a short span, the reader has been transported from the present tense of the main narrative to a particular setting, a day in the summer of 1937, replete with setting, characters, and reconstructed speech. The shift from the diegetic to the mimetic is crafted in such a way that the reader believes he is witnessing the action taking place before his eyes. Maclean's novella ends with a similarly effective modal glide from the mimetic conversation between Norman and his father to the diegetic ruminations of an aged Norman:

"It is those we live with and love and
should know elude us."

Now nearly all those I loved and did not
understand when I was young are dead, but I still
reach out to them. (104)

In this modal shift not only does Maclean transition from the mimetic to the diegetic, he transports his readers to an evocative, imaginative present tense, wherein his

narrator Norman, no longer young and virile, is advanced in age, an old man.

Another key narrative strategy according to Genette is focalization, which means viewpoint or perspective: the point of view from which the story is told (189-194). At any time in a narrative a reader may ask whether or not the focalization is external or internal. In external focalization, the manner in which Maclean structures his narratives, the viewpoint is outside the character depicted, so that readers are told only things which are external or observable to Norman, the narrator. In other words, Maclean never shifts focalization or viewpoint to another character, for example, Neal, Old Rawhide, or Paul, for that matter. The narrative's focalization is consistently filtered through Norman's line of vision. Thus, for example, when Neal steps off the train, the action is focalized externally: "He [Neal] was the last off the train, and he came down the platform trying to remember what he thought an international-cup tennis player looked like" (29). A different, perhaps more experimental, novelist could have reconstructed the same scene through the mind and emotions of more than one of the characters present in the scene: Jessie, Neal, Florence, for example.

External focalization, one could argue, is a limitation of a first-person narrator.

The notion of who is telling the story is also of considerable interest to narratologists such as Genette. At some level, of course, the author is always telling us the story, but not necessarily in his own voice or persona. One kind of narrator is not identified at all as a distinct character with a name and a personal history and remains just as a voice or tone, which readers may simply register as a transparent recording consciousness, a telling medium of sort. This type of narrator is often referred to as a non-intrusive, or covert narrator. Still, it is worth remembering that even in these cases, the non-intrusive narrator is not the author's true voice, but rather an authorial persona. In the case of Maclean's texts, readers interact with what Genette calls a homodiegetic narrator, a narrator who "is present as a character in the story he tells" (245). First-person narrators, Genette posits, can either be homodiegetic or heterodiegetic, the latter not being present in the story he tells.¹⁰

¹⁰ This distinction becomes blurred in *Young Men and Fire*, for Maclean is not literally a character in the story he tells of the Mann Gulch fire, although through his rendering of it, his presence is added.

Narratives often contain references back and references forward so that the order of telling does not correspond to the order of happening, and Maclean's stories are no exception. Such parts of a narrative, according to Genette, can be called "analeptic" (from analepsis, which literally means a back-tale). Likewise, the narrative may "flash forward" to narrate, refer to, or anticipate an event which happens later. Such moments in a narrative can be called proleptic (from prolepsis, which literally means a fore-take). Maclean's technique in *A River Runs through It* is chiefly proleptic. In several areas in the narrative, Maclean's proleptic shifts foretell the fact that the story will end tragically. The first instance comes early in the text as Norman resists his brother's boyhood interest in wagering to make things interesting:

The third time he [Paul] asked me must have made me angry because he never again spoke to me about money, not even about borrowing a few dollars when he was having real money problems. . . . He did not want any big brother advice or money or help and, in the end, I could not help him. (6)

This passage is significant, for it prepares readers for the events which follow it. Although the prolepsis is

subtle, it is enough to register with the careful reader. Similarly, Maclean cues readers with proleptic statements about the fish Norman catches with his brother:

They weren't the biggest or the most spectacular fish I ever caught, but they were three fish I caught because my brother waded across the river to give me the fly that would catch them and because they were the last fish I ever caught fishing with him. (94)

Again, while the scene itself is not proleptic in that it is set in the future, the scene is wrought with pathos because it foretells an untimely and tragic future event.

Another major area of interest within Genette's narrative schema involves the notion of meta-narratives. The main narrative, or primary narrative, really is just the narrative which comes first. A secondary narrative comes after; often it is embedded within the primary narrative.¹¹ Genette defines these secondary narratives, or meta-narratives, as "a narrative within a narrative" (228). These secondary narratives may often function to reinforce the thematics of the primary narrative. In the case of Maclean's *A River Runs through It*, readers experience two

¹¹ Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* represent this concept.

short meta-narratives. The first of these involves Paul, whom Norman reminds readers would often assume the role of storyteller as they would cross the Continental Divide for a day fishing the Big Blackfoot River:

Paul nearly always had a story to tell in which he was the leading character but not the hero.

He told his Continental Divide stories in a seemingly light-hearted, slightly poetical mood such as reporters often use in writing "human interest stories," but, if the mood were removed, his stories would appear as something about him that would not meet the approval of his family and that I would probably find out in time anyway. (13)

The story Paul tells recounts a night he was driving home to Helena after fishing. Along Nevada Creek, a jackrabbit runs out alongside his car. Tired and sleepy, Paul sticks his head out his window, befriending the jackrabbit. "I didn't push him too hard because I didn't want to lose a friend" (14). The jackrabbit runs in his headlights and then as Paul states, "I don't know how to explain what happened next, but there was a right angle turn in this section-line road, and the rabbit saw it, and I didn't"

(14). It is clear that Maclean uses this meta-narrative strategically to advance and enrich his primary narrative. Paul crashing the front end of his car prefigures his murder; moreover, the meta-narrative illuminates the dysfunctional relationship between the two brothers. Paul crafts and tells his stories to Norman to mask the truth: his excessive drinking led to his crash. Norman, initially bewildered by the tall tale, assumes the enabler's posture and "decided to forget it," which he doesn't (15). In this case, the purpose of the story is -- in a broad sense -- the medium to explain what has happened; however, while it offers a "slightly poetic" rendering of events, it obfuscates the truth.

A second instance of a meta-narrative occurs while Norman and Neal are in Black Jack's Bar. After a couple of drinks of 3-7-77 whiskey, Neal is "outshooting, outhunting, and outtrapping" Long Bow, the expert trapper and marksman (32). According to Norman, "There was something deep in Neal that compelled him [Neal] to lie to experts, even though they knew best that he was lying. He was one of those who need to be caught telling a lie while he is telling it" (32). The narrative shift, as Genette would call it, occurs soon after Norman relates that Neal, with

an eye on his distorted image of himself in the mirror behind the bar, is "doing all of the talking and none of the listening" (33). In the story Neal tells, he has tracked an otter and her pups to Rogers Pass. The temperature was 69.7 degrees below zero: "I had a hard time following it because it had turned white in winter, so it must have been part ermine They [the otter's pups] snuggled up right in my shirt" (33). This embedded narrative functions similarly to Paul's, for here, too, Maclean's narrative strategy is to use a meta-narrative to complement his primary narrative. Specifically, the story that Neal tells reveals one of his predominant character traits; he is a liar and knows nothing whatsoever about the outdoors and the wildlife it contains. As Norman states, "mostly she [the otter] was 3-7-77, because she was the only animal in western Montana besides man that had pups in the winter" (33). Qualitatively, however, to what extent do these meta-narratives contrast one another? One could argue that both Paul and Neal are liars, fabricating stories in an attempt to mask their respective character flaws, yet Norman withholds censuring Paul in the way he does Neal. The reason for this may be that Paul's story, albeit fictionalized, has its foundation in an actual

event. By contrast, Neal's story, it would seem, is purely fictional, possessing no element of truth.

Genette's interest in temporal shifts in narrative also includes the idea of metalepsis, a narrative device defined by Genette as the "taking hold of (telling) by changing levels" (235). While Maclean's plots, for the most part, are presented in a first-person, chronological fashion, one intriguing feature of *A River Runs through It* and *USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky* are the metaleptical shifts that occur at various points in the narrative, the shifts that occur between two levels of the narrative. In these instances, Maclean deliberately breaks the spell of his narrative, the effect of which is to remind readers -- if only momentarily -- that they are merely reading a story. For example, one subtle instance of this takes place in *A River Runs through It*, when Norman and Jessie are in the middle of a conversation regarding Neal:

"Tell me," I asked her, "if your brother comes back next summer, will we both try to help him?"

"If he comes back," she nodded. I thought I saw tears in her eyes but I was mistaken. In all

my life I was never to see her cry. And also he was never to come back.

Without interrupting each other, we both said at the same time, "Let's never get out of touch with each other." And we never have, although her death has come between us. (77)

The changing of narrative levels in this passage is subtle, occurring almost entirely undetected; however, in the last sentence of this passage, an intriguing change of narrative levels transpires. In the process, readers are transported completely outside of the primary narrative level. With one simple concluding dependent clause "although her death has come between us," decades have passed, Jessie and Norman have grown old, and Jessie has died. The narrative spell has been broken, and readers are reminded of another narrative level. This disruption reminds readers that the narrator is no longer in his thirties -- he is aged; this shift in narrative level, in fact, takes hold of the reader, drawing his attention outside the text itself to the life and times of Norman Maclean, the author of the text in hand. A more overt example of a shift in narrative level takes place when Norman, who has just laid bare the anatomy of a river, awaits his brother:

As the heat mirages on the river in front of me danced with and through each other, I could feel patterns from my own life joining with them. It was here, while waiting for my brother, that I started this story, although, of course, at the time I did not know that stories of life are often more like rivers than books. But I knew a story had begun, perhaps long ago near the sound of water. And I sensed that ahead I would meet something that would never erode so there would be a sharp turn, deep circles, a deposit, and quietness. (63)

In this passage, Norman disrupts his primary narrative, locating the beginning of the story *here*, not, as readers had perhaps surmised, sixty-two pages prior. The effect of this particular narrative shift on the reader goes beyond being temporarily dislocated out of the primary narrative. Evocatively rendered, the "something that would never erode" must be none other than Norman's future grief. The pattern of the river -- with its turn, circles, deposit, and quietness -- suggests to Norman the pattern of his life; moreover, this deliberate narrative shift evidences Maclean's belief that life contains moments that

potentially belong to literature. Stated another way, Maclean often interrupts his stories to tell readers about the art of storytelling.

Maclean makes use of this intrusive narrative technique in other stories, too. Consider, for example, *USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky*, a narrative recounting a summer Maclean spent in the United States Forest Service working alongside Bill Bell, expert packer, ranger, and cribbage player.¹² In this story, Maclean evolves the narrative technique he began in *A River Runs through It*. In short, he becomes increasingly self-conscious, and apparently quite comfortable, inserting his theories concerning what he sees as parallels between life and art, specifically, the purpose of storytelling.¹³ The first such narrative shift occurs within the opening pages of the tale:

¹² In a 1985 interview presented by The American Audio Prose Library, Maclean concedes that *USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky* conflates three summers, not one.

¹³ There are numerous additional instances of these narrative shifts/intrusions in *USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky*: Norman's description of the cook (132), his "life turns into a story" (144), and "I was becoming part of a plot" (144), and "they too began to get the feeling that they were all to have parts in a sort of pulp magazine plot" (157).

By the middle of that summer when I was seventeen I had yet to see myself become part of a story. I had as yet no notion that life every now and then becomes literature -- not for long, of course, but long enough to be what we best remember, and often enough so that what we eventually come to mean by life are those moments when life, instead of going sideways, backwards, forward, or nowhere at all lines out straight, tense and inevitable, with a complication, climax, and, given some luck, a purgation, as if life had been made and not happened. Right then, though, I wasn't thinking of Bill as being the hero of any story -- I was just getting tired of waiting for him to make the next deal. (127)

Looking back, Maclean views himself -- and others -- as characters playing parts in a scripted, fated play. Of course, at seventeen, he could not see the design, but as an old storyteller, this is his art -- to shape a narrative, people it with characters, conflicts, and climaxes. For this writer, the function of the story is to explain the events of his life. Of course, considering the tragic events of Maclean's life, one can understand the

depths of his attraction to the notion that life "had been made and not happened" (127) and that crafting stories may, in part, alleviate the ambiguities that characterize human experience. In the final pages of *A River Runs through It*, though, a conversation between Norman and his father suggests the limitations of stories, which, like those told by Norman, are based on experience, or "true stories:"

Once, for instance, my father asked me a series of questions that suddenly made me wonder whether I understood even my father whom I felt closer to than any man I have ever known. "You like to tell true stories, don't you?" he asked, and I answered, "Yes, I like to tell stories that are true."

Then he asked, "After you have finished your true stories sometime, why don't you make up a story and the people to go with it?"

"Only then will you understand what happened and why."

"It is those we live with and love and should know who elude us." (104)

This is one of the most important passages in the text for what it reveals about Maclean and his art of storytelling.

It comes as father and son desperately seek answers to the inexplicable -- the mystery surrounding the events leading up to Paul's brutal murder. In the Reverend Maclean's questioning of Norman's preference for "real" over "made up" stories, the elder Maclean recognizes that which Norman does not: stories that are "true" have the potential to be cloaked in ambiguity. Knowledge and understanding of human events is partial, at best. When pressed hard enough, all that Norman can say for certain of his brother is "that he was a fine fisherman" (103). The Reverend Maclean can offer little more, adding, "You know more than that . . . he was beautiful" (103). By contrast, the storyteller who produces a work of fiction (creating the story and the people in them) is not left grappling with the uncertainties of what happened and why.

Maclean's chief interest, aside from his story on logging and the United States Forest Service, appears to have always been in tragedy, writing about the significant, "true" events of his lifetime. His doing so can be viewed as an attempt to understand himself in light of these events: his brother's murder and the death of twelve Smokejumpers in Mann Gulch. While these events haunted Maclean throughout his life, still another historic event

occupied Maclean's mind off and on for nearly twenty years. Between 1955 and 1973, Maclean attempted to write a book on General George Armstrong Custer and the Battle of Little Bighorn.¹⁴ Illness in the early 1960s and academic affairs interrupted his work, but the most plausible explanation for why he was unable to complete the manuscript is that he was unable to find himself in the story. In a July 10, 1966, correspondence with historian and friend Robert Utley, Maclean explained it:

I don't think, though, that I'll ever take up Custer again -- at least seriously. He was one more life than I could live, and he didn't tie up with any of the others. But, who knows? I might change my mind as I start giving up some of these other lives and looking around for other identities. (qtd. in Utley 77)

Five years later, according to Robert Utley, Maclean had given up the Custer project and turned his energy toward what would eventually become *A River Runs through it and Other Stories*. Maclean's aborted project on Custer is central to understanding his development as a storyteller, for the simple reason that he could never meaningfully

¹⁴ See Robert Utley's "Professor Maclean and General Custer."

connect the historic event to his self-identity. In other words, the Little Bighorn effort failed for the same reason that *Young Men and Fire* succeeded.

Almost immediately after the publication of *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*, Maclean began work on what would become *Young Men and Fire*. With glowing reviews and a Pulitzer Prize nomination for fiction, it would not be long before the publishing houses that had rejected Maclean's first collection of stories for having trees in them would begin courting him for his next. When Alfred A. Knopf, which had rejected Maclean's manuscript for *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*, solicited Maclean expressing interest in his current work in progress, Maclean would show no mercy. In a 1981 letter to Charles Elliott, an editor at Alfred A. Knopf, Maclean aligns himself with rejected authors and asserts his dominance over the publishing Goliath.¹⁵ Needless to say, Maclean did not enter into any serious negotiation with Knopf, and

¹⁵ See Maclean's "A Grudge Runs through It." Maclean concludes his letter to Elliott with one well-crafted, caustic quip: "I can now only weakly say this: if the situation ever arose when Alfred A. Knopf was the only publishing house remaining in the world and I was the sole surviving author, that would mark the end of the world of books" (35).

Young Men and Fire would bear the imprint of the University of Chicago Press.

One way to approach *Young Men and Fire* is to consider it as a text wherein three stories conflate. In the first of these, *Black Ghost*, Maclean reconstructs a personal experience fighting, at age fifteen, a big fire on Fish Creek in 1919. His account depicts the bewilderment and terror he experienced during his own footrace with wildfire burning up a steep slope. The ten-page narrative functions effectively as an evocative prelude to the book proper, for it establishes Maclean's credibility as one well acquainted with fire and the history of the United States Forest Service. Furthermore, Maclean's memory of this experience on the Fish Creek fire helps readers understand his abiding intrigue with the Mann Gulch fire. "In my story of the Mann Gulch fire," writes Maclean, "how I first came to Mann Gulch is part of the story" (13). The larger narrative, of course, is the Mann Gulch fire of 1949, killing thirteen men. Maclean, visiting his cabin at Seely Lake, witnessed the destruction of the fire about a week after fatalities and "started to become, even then in part consciously, a small part of its story" (3). The third story -- one that at times overshadows the larger narrative itself -- takes

place thirty years later: Maclean's quest to find the truth about the fire and his struggle to tell the story.¹⁶

Similar to *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*, *Young Men and Fire* brings to the fore the importance of stories and those individuals who tell them.¹⁷ For Maclean, the need to reconstruct in narrative form the chief tragedies of his life is more than an artistic impulse; it is a moral responsibility. In fact, Maclean articulates the genesis of this moral imperative when he speaks of his Presbyterian upbringing, specifically the influence of his Presbyterian minister father. In Chapter 11 of *Young Men and Fire*, for example, Maclean recalls a sentence spoken by the Reverend Maclean. It echoes the Westminster Catechism and provides readers with a significant insight into Maclean's storytelling: "One of the chief privileges of man is to speak up for the universe" (216). Simply put, this appears to be Maclean's objective; his job of work throughout *Young Men and Fire*, and perhaps to a lesser

¹⁶ See Wayne Booth's "The Struggle to Tell the Story of the Struggle to Get the Story Told: The Genre of Norman Maclean's *Young Men and Fire*." Booth's attitude toward the text changed dramatically and his article provides insight into the debate over genre classification.

¹⁷ Derivatives of the word "story:" "stories," "storyteller," "story-telling," etc. appear in *Young Men and Fire* 101 times.

extent in *A River Runs through It*, is to speak for those who have perished and attempt to explain why and how it happened.

Maclean's notion of "speaking up for the universe" casts him as a participant observer, an interpreter of sorts. As such, he describes what he observes as being inherently "cockeyed" (126). Although Maclean identifies the universe and its vicissitudes as being cockeyed, he also recognizes that its puzzles and mysteries can often be solved and that there are times when "it all fits" (134). To be sure, throughout Maclean's stories, readers repeatedly witness individuals/characters repeating, recognizing, reading, and respecting patterns in the natural world. This is most evident in the art of fly casting as taught by the Reverend Maclean: performed on a four-count rhythm between ten and two' o clock. Again, recognizing patterns is evident in Paul's selection of George Croonenberghs's No. 2 Yellow Hackles with a feather wing fly. As Paul explains, "All there is to thinking . . . is seeing something noticeable which makes you see something you weren't noticing which makes you see something that isn't even visible" (92). Similarly, Maclean uses an identical thought process as he reads the

flow of the Missouri River at the mouth of Mann Gulch (130-131). Later, standing at the bottom of the canyon, Maclean recognizes a puzzling pattern in the dead trees: "They [the trees] were lying parallel to each other, but, unlike the trees on the southern ridge, they lay parallel to the ridge. However puzzling the patterns, the patterns had to stand as the remains of winds" (129). Cumulatively, these representative episodes suggest Maclean's belief that although the universe may appear to be "cockeyed" and chaotic, it may be understood and explained; it is, subsequently, an essential function of the storyteller to be the voice that constructs and relates the pattern of experience. In short, the storyteller, when he has done his job well, recognizes "there are shapes and designs" (37) amid the cockeyed universe and makes them fit together.

It might be fruitful to consider, however briefly, another particular "storyteller" with a "story" to tell that appears within Maclean's main narrative of *Young Men and Fire*: the United States government. Because the Mann Gulch fire claimed the lives of more Smokejumpers than any previous fire, it was immediately clouded in controversy, and by the time it was finally extinguished many important

facts had already been lost by the U.S. government, which, Maclean suggests, sometimes hides things consciously and unconsciously (153, 158-163). As Maclean notes, the *Report of Board of Review* was published September 29, 1949, three days after the United States Fire Service Board of Review landed in Missoula. "In four days," asserts Maclean, "they assembled all the relevant facts, reviewed them, passed judgment on them, and wrote what they hoped was a *closed book* on the biggest tragedy the Smokejumpers ever had" (emphasis added 148). Maclean offers an astute observation here. The Board of Review consisted of high-ranking United States Forest Service bureaucrats who quickly assembled "to get *its story* of the fire to the public" (emphasis added 148). Just as the universe has not run out of "blowups," the government's report -- its story -- was "retouched and given the right shading" (153). Despite eight lawsuits filed on behalf of four of the deceased, the government's story prevailed. The United States paid the paltry sum of four hundred dollars, enough to cover burial expenses, per victim. For the most part, the families of the fallen did not have the means to pursue further litigation or inquiry. Consequently, in one sense, *Young Men and Fire* functions as Maclean's "fire report" (300), his attempt to

speak up for the dead; in doing so, he retorts the government's official report, offering a far more evocative, perhaps more accurate, rendition of what happened in Mann Gulch August 5, 1949.

A related, additional dimension of *Young Men and Fire* and *A River Runs through It* that readers may note are the efforts Maclean makes drawing attention to the distinction between history and art. Events such as the Mann Gulch fire and the murder of his brother belong to the realm of history, that is to say, lived experience. The texts that derive from these events, however, are not: they belong to the realm of art. It is the job of the storyteller, in this case Maclean, to transform history to art. As Maclean observes early in Chapter 1 of *Young Men and Fire*: "This [the Mann Gulch fire event] is a catastrophe that we hope will not end where it began; it might go on to become a story" (37). The same sentiment may be applied to the murder of Paul Maclean, for without *A River Runs through It*, the event would have remained a catastrophic event in Maclean's life. Understanding the value of this process -- the transformation from catastrophe (history) to story (art) -- remains essential to understanding Maclean's intellect and imagination.

At the beginning of Part Two of *Young Men and Fire*, Maclean announces that the chief role of a storyteller is to resurrect the mysteries of the past, explaining the human events and natural forces that -- in this case -- led to twelve young men dying within fifty-six minutes of entering Mann Gulch. With "measured grains of consolation," the storyteller has the ability to "transform catastrophe into tragedy" (143). Without him, there would be "not many explanations" (143). Here Maclean seems to have in mind the families and loved ones of those who perished by fire for whom time stopped forever August 5, 1949. For Maclean, the telling of the story alters it, elevates it to the point that it takes on eternal properties. In the simplest of terms, the act of constructing and telling the story of the dead allows them to live on in Keatsian fashion -- in the realm of art.

In a way, Maclean's construction and telling of stories demonstrates the intriguing argument of cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner, whose principle of narrative epistemology argues that the individual's initial means of making knowledge about the world is narrative, not paradigmatic. In "The Narrative Construction of Reality," for example, Bruner posits that narrative knowledge

organizes experience and memory of human happenings in narrative form (924). With this narrative knowledge, human beings are able to identify themselves and function as social beings. The unpardonable sin, it seems, is for Maclean to allow the dead to remain in the catastrophic, which happens when they are forgotten:

Most important of all probably is the secrecy of the grief and moral bewilderment suffered at the death of one of ourselves who was young, had a special flair, a special daring, a special disregard for death, who seemed, both to himself and us, to be apart from death, especially from death leaving behind no explanation of itself either as a sequence of events or as a moral occurrence in what-kind-of-universe-is-this-anyway. It is the frightened and recessive grief suffered for one whom you hoped neither death nor anything evil would dare touch. Afterwards you live in fear that something might alter your memory of him and of all other things. I should know. (154)

The significance of this passage for what it illuminates about Maclean's art of storytelling cannot be overstated.

One manifestation of grief, Maclean intimates, is a dangerous condition marked by its solitary nature -- its secrecy and silence. This reaction to grief is akin to the sentiment the speaker in William Carlos Williams's "Tract," questions, asking "Or do you think you can shut grief in? / What from us? / We who have nothing to lose? Share with us / Share with us--it will be money / in your pockets" (lines 64-68). When the catastrophic event has been transformed to story, however, Maclean seems to be suggesting that there no longer is the need for the griever to live in fear and despair of the dead being forgotten. Each time the story is told/read, the dead are resurrected in the minds of the listeners/readers. Furthermore, in this description of the Smokejumpers, one detects precisely that which Maclean's friend Laird Robinson once noted about Maclean -- that in every conversation with him, Robinson detected the presence of Paul Maclean (qtd. in Weltzien 51). Maclean's effective use of the final sentence evocatively punctuates this observation.

While these observations affirm the special emphasis Maclean places on stories and those who tell them, a further distinguishing quality of *Young Men and Fire* concerns the narrative technique of authorial intrusion.

As noted, Maclean periodically steps out of the narrative proper in *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*, breaking the spell of the story. In *Young Men and Fire*, however, Maclean inhabits the story he tells as he investigates the abrupt termination of youth. Although he begins the narrative of Part One as one might expect a work of non-fiction to begin, in third-person objective point of view, within a few pages, he begins to intersperse the history of the Smokejumpers and fire science with first-person anecdotes from his personal experience: (23), (40), (46), (59), and (87).¹⁸ One notable effect of this narrative strategy is that one senses the extent to which the lives and deaths of these firefighters constitute Maclean's road not taken.¹⁹ In fact, one begins to sense that this is as much Maclean's story -- an expression of his quest for self-hood -- as it is the story of the fallen Smokejumpers. In this process, Maclean demonstrates an intriguing theory made by Donald Polkinghorne. In

¹⁸ John N. Maclean's *Fire on the Mountain* (1999), by contrast, is written in the third person. Maclean's son investigates the 1994 South Canyon fire in Colorado, where fourteen firefighters were killed by a blow-up similar to the Mann Gulch fire.

¹⁹ See Peter Dexter's "The Old Man and the River." Maclean took courses at Dartmouth taught by Robert Frost. Maclean notes, "I am directly indebted to him. As a writer of prose, my debts are nearly all to poets" (147).

Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences, Polkinghorne succinctly outlines his argument:

We achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing or a substance, but a configuring of personal events into an historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be. (150)

By Part Two, Maclean occupies center stage in this "single and unfolding story" as he enters "a different time zone," "a different world of time" (145). In relating his personal quest to find the survivors of Mann Gulch and return alongside them there to learn the truth of what happened and why, Maclean comes face to face with men whose lives appear reflections and refractions of Maclean's youth. As Maclean explains it, "It is as if old age

fortuitously had enriched your life by letting you live two lives, the life you finally chose to live and a working copy of the one you started out to live" (162). With repeated shifts into the second-person point of view, Maclean invites readers into Mann Gulch as he, Laird Robinson, and the reader traverse extreme topography and intense heat. This technique is one that Maclean uses to distinguish the storyteller from the historian:

If a storyteller thinks enough of storytelling to regard it as a calling, unlike a historian he cannot turn from the suffering of his characters. A storyteller, unlike a historian, must follow compassion wherever it leads him. He must be able to accompany his characters, even into smoke and fire, and bear witness to what they thought and felt even when they themselves no longer knew. This story of Mann Gulch will not end until it feels able to walk the final distance to the crosses with those who for the time being are blotted out by smoke. They were young and did not leave much behind them and need someone to remember them. (102)

Once one takes a narrative view, one can ask why one chooses to tell one story and not another. Such questioning, particularly in the case of Maclean, undoubtedly leads one back to compassion for those whose lives ended abruptly and for those who loved them and are left to make sense of what has befallen them. At base, Maclean maintained there were only two types of composition; in the first, a writer knows what he is going to write before he begins. The second, though, is the type of composition that characterizes Maclean's work: "The other [type of composition] is when something is bothering you," said Maclean, "and you start writing to find out why" (qtd. in Utley 77).

Part Three of *Young Men and Fire* is more than Maclean's denouement for his inquiry into the Mann Gulch fire, for it does more than bring a close to the main narrative; it functions as an elegiac coda for all the reader has experienced.²⁰ After rendering for the reader a graphic verbal image of wild fire as an incestuous monster, gorging on and regurgitating itself, Maclean stirs the

²⁰ See Marie Borroff's "The Achievement of Norman Maclean." Borroff, a student and life-long friend of Maclean, concludes that the end of *Young Men and Fire* "does not work," that had Maclean's powers of concentration endured, he would have crafted "an ending equal in power to the memorable paragraph of 'A River Runs through It'" (7).

embers, drawing an evocative comparison between the mushroom cloud that belled forth from Mann Gulch in 1949 and the "inner fear" of humanity living in the shadow of atomic annihilation. Physical death and regeneration clearly occupy Maclean's imagination as he grafts the story of the Smokejumpers -- who came from the sky and died on a hill -- to the meta-narrative of the Christ. At the final moment, both cried out, "Eli, Eli, Lama sabachthani? ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?")" (299). In a sense, the final pages of the text exemplify Maclean's assertion that eventually all things *do* merge into one: the violent deaths of Paul Maclean and the Smokejumpers and Jessie Maclean's struggle for oxygen as she fought her battle against cancer of the esophagus. Likewise, one senses Maclean's recognition of his mortality, and, if the reader were honest, he would sense his own, too.

In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Wayne Booth, Maclean's colleague at the University of Chicago, asserts a deceptively simple, yet relevant observation regarding the power of storytelling: "No human being literate or not, escapes the effect of stories, because everyone tells them and listens to them" (38-39). Maclean knew all too well the danger of grief that does not speak,

so he is, principally, a writer whose work is one that gives sorrow words. With force and compassion, he transforms the catastrophes that marked his life. Above all, in the short fiction of *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* and the non-fiction account *Young Men and Fire*, one salient thought remains: that Maclean lived among these people whose stories he tells, and in telling them, he continues constructing his own self. He knew them and saw the essential qualities -- the courage, the humor, the basic tragedy -- and dignity of their lives and of his own.

CHAPTER III

MACLEAN'S TRAGIC VISION

In 1928, when Norman Maclean moved to Chicago to begin graduate studies at the University of Chicago, the two tragedies of his life lay in the distance. In 1938, his brother Paul was murdered, beaten to death by the butt of a revolver, in Chicago.¹ Then, in 1949, twelve Smokejumpers perished by fire in a "blowup" within a few hours of parachuting into Mann Gulch in western Montana. The profound grief for the loss of a brother is readily comprehensible, but it is matched by the pity and compassion Maclean had for the Smokejumpers, for as a life-long woodsman and an early product of the United States Forest Service, Maclean possessed a deep fraternal bond with men who went to the woods and worked with their hands. Understandably, these events haunted Maclean throughout his adult life. Upon retiring from the University of Chicago in 1973, Maclean harnessed his creative and intellectual energy to record these tragedies. His doing so represents his longing to understand the sense, the depth and force of these events on his life. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles

¹ It should be noted that Paul Maclean was murdered in Chicago, not in Montana as it is depicted in the film adaptation. See George McElroy's "Norman Maclean: Teacher and Chicago Aristotelian" 13.

Taylor reasons that each human being's quest to find a framework to understand his or her self must involve a quest for sense: "We find the sense of life through articulating it . . . by framing meaningful expressions which are adequate" (18). For these and other reasons, readers may consider Maclean's *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* and *Young Men and Fire* as meaningful expressions/articulations created by an individual deeply intrigued by the genre of tragedy.

With his special interest in Shakespeare (and the Romantic poets), Maclean's gift for teaching tragedy was evident from the beginning of his career. In 1931, he was promoted to instructor and recognized for his work in the classroom by being honored with his first Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. According to Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, a former student of Maclean's at the University of Chicago, the best way to prepare for the law was to take Shakespeare from Maclean (qtd. in Dexter 140). In fact, Maclean once asserted why he made a point of teaching Shakespeare each term: "Every year I said to myself, 'You better teach this bastard so you don't forget what great writing is like'" (qtd. in Dexter 148). Whenever Maclean taught *Hamlet*, he spent the

first two weeks on the first scene of the play: "I'd spend the first day on just the first line, 'Who's there?'" (qtd. in Dexter 148). The question "Who's there?" is essential to reading and understanding Maclean. While this seemingly innocuous question frames the metaphysical questions explored in *Hamlet*, it likewise provides the underpinning of *A River Runs through It* and *Young Men and Fire*. Just as the ghost of Hamlet's father is a presence in Hamlet's mind, Maclean's murdered brother Paul and the thirteen concrete crosses in Mann Gulch haunt Maclean's mind.

Much of the scholarship on Maclean focuses on his interest in the genre of tragedy. One of the earliest treatments, Wendell Berry's 1983 essay "Style and Grace," provides a useful discussion of Maclean's *A River Runs through It* and Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." Berry observes that in Maclean, unlike Hemingway's *Big Two-Hearted River*, the Big Blackfoot River does not empty into a swamp, yet he believes "the whole story takes place in a dark swamp of sorts: the unresolved bewilderment of human conflict and affection and loss" (216). He rightly notes an important distinction between Hemingway and Maclean. For Maclean, fishing is not a "rite of solitary purification" as it is for Nick Adams; it is "a rite of

companionship" (215). While noting that *A River Runs through It* is "profoundly and elatedly religious," Berry recognizes that Maclean's story is, at base, a tragedy in the Greek tradition, one of deep "calamity and loss" (216-217).

Shortly after the publication of *Young Men and Fire* in 1992, critical interest in Maclean grew; more than twenty articles were published in the 1990s; by contrast, the 1980s yielded only nine. One of the earliest of these critics, Harold Simonson, published "Tragedy and Beyond: Norman Maclean's *Young Men and Fire*," in the spring of 1993, as a feature for non-academic readers.² Published in *Montana: The Magazine of the West*, Simonson provides the backstory of the Mann Gulch fire of 1949, explaining the origins of Maclean's interest in the catastrophe of the young Smokejumpers who perished by fire within sight of the Missouri River. Simonson recognizes what most readers do, that Maclean, "possessed by the destructive, apocalyptic fire," surfaces as the book's tragic hero (70). In the same year appeared James E. Ford's "When 'Life . . . Becomes Literature': The Neo-Aristotelian Poetics of Norman

² Simonson is the first critic to publish a critical article on Norman Maclean. See his "Norman Maclean's Two-Hearted River."

Maclean's *A River Runs through It*," which some might argue is the first academic article on Maclean as a writer of tragedy. Ford's primary interest is the extent to which Maclean's training as a neo-Aristotelian critic influences his writing. While Ford discusses the tragic flaws of Paul, he argues that *A River Runs through It* is not tragedy. It is "neither tragedy nor comedy, it is a third kind of story, the end of which is ultimately positive, but the effect of which on the protagonist-narrator, and through him, the reader, is muted by negative elements that, though subordinated, are not forgotten" (531). Ford concludes that *A River Runs through It* is not tragedy because the story derives its power through plot, rather than theme or character.

Of the studies on Maclean and tragedy, O. Alan Weltzien's "Norman Maclean and Tragedy" is most useful, particularly for his analysis on Maclean's life-long intrigue with personal defeat. Weltzien remains one of the most prolific and incisive critics who has written on Maclean's texts, and his 1995 study is no exception.³ Weltzien argues that tragedy is "this writer's [Maclean's]

³ O. Alan Weltzien has published four critical studies on Norman Maclean. In 2008, he edited *The Norman Maclean Reader*.

lifelong challenge" (139). He traces Maclean's interest in tragedy chronologically from his 1952 essay on *King Lear*, "Episode, Scene, Speech, and Word: The Madness of Lear," through an aborted book on General George Armstrong Custer, *A River Runs through It*, and *Young Men and Fire*. Weltzien submits that for Maclean "tragedy emanates from experiences of acute defeat" (139).

More recently, David Toole's 1998 study, "Wonder, Grief, and Tragedy: A Nietzschean Defense of *Young Men and Fire*," applies the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, specifically his ideas regarding tragedy, as a way to approach Maclean's *Young Men and Fire*. Because Maclean did not begin work on the manuscript for *Young Men and Fire* until age seventy-three, Toole argues that the book represents Maclean's personal race with death. According to Toole, *Young Men and Fire* is merely "the story of death by fire, but also about the very art of storytelling" (197). Toole argues that Maclean's *Young Men and Fire* attempts to impart to us "the secret of the universe. . . . To the extent Maclean divulges that secret with any success, it appears to be the same secret that Nietzsche found in Greek tragedy" (198). What Toole identifies is the similarity between Greek charioteers who race their

chariots into the abyss and the Smokejumpers' footrace with fire up the side of a canyon. These two, submits Toole, "are the same race" (198). Toole argues that Maclean, in his courageous glance into the abyss, embodies Nietzsche's concept of tragedy as "the artistic taming of the horrible" (200). For Maclean, the act of storytelling is his attempt to tame that which haunts him. Through an artistic rendering of the catastrophic, redemption is possible, and *catharsis*, the end goal of all tragedy (according to Aristotle), is achieved. Toole states that Maclean's story adds a further dimension to Nietzsche's concept of tragedy: "He [Maclean] suggests that the transformation of a catastrophe into a tragedy occurs when art alters grief by exposing us to wonder" (203), a notion Toole defines as "wonder-altered grief" (203). Toole positions his argument against that of Richard Manning, who argues that Maclean presents fire as an embodiment of evil and that *Young Men and Fire's* presentation of nature is "myopic and negligently incomplete" (qtd. in Toole 203).⁴ Indeed, Toole finds Maclean's prose rendering of the death and destruction in Mann Gulch "beautiful" (208).

⁴ See Richard Manning's "The Failure of Literature" 25-26.

Strictly speaking, neither *A River Runs through It* nor *Young Men and Fire* belongs to the genre of tragedy, for tragedy is first and foremost a dramatic genre; *A River Runs through It* is fiction, and *Young Men and Fire* is non-fiction. Limiting tragedy to literary works created to be performed by live actors on stages in front of live audiences, though, hardly seems sufficient.⁵ Richard B. Sewell traces the history of theater and tragedy in his 1959 study *The Vision of Tragedy*, explaining how the advent of a new literary form in the middle of the nineteenth century effectively changed the complexion of tragedy as a genre. According to Sewell, a new literary form held new opportunities for artists to treat ancient tragic themes:

What also was in fashion, however, was the novel, a vehicle flexible enough to accommodate the new vision (which was as old as Aeschylus and Sophocles); but it remained for artists outside the Victorian domain -- in America and Russia -- to turn to the novel to the uses of tragedy. As often in the history of genres, a vehicle once thought trivial, a device for mere story telling,

⁵ See Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Frye asserts that tragedy "is not confined to drama, nor to actions that end in disaster" (207).

became, and remained until the theater of Ibsen and O'Neill came to share the function -- the closest modern approximation of the Greek and Elizabethan tragic theaters. Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Melville's *Moby Dick* were the first novels in English to express the old vision by means of the new vehicle. (85)

Sewall's explanation seems appropriate when applied to Maclean's artistic expression. In other words, while Maclean is not writing tragedy in its strictest sense, he certainly imports key features of tragedy into his texts, essentially stretching the boundaries of the genre. More recently, the work of Gerard Genette may offer still another approach to considering Maclean's texts and their tragic temperament. In *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Genette posits that a text's literariness is derived chiefly from the relationships between and among it and other earlier texts. A text may be considered hypertextual when it imitates or transforms an earlier text, which he calls the hypotext. According to Genette, this phenomenon is "to some degree a universal feature of literarity: there is no literary work that does not evoke (to some extent and according to how it is read) some other

literary work, and in this sense all works are hypertextual" (9). While Maclean's texts may or may not evoke other specific texts, they do evoke the tradition that has historically been referred to as tragedy.

Genette's observations regarding textual transcendence and Sewall's notion of the novel as a new, literary form for exploring tragic themes help move one beyond the narrow, perhaps outdated, definition of tragedy as an exclusively dramatic genre. It may be best to leave genre classification open for discussion. As Genette asserts, "the text itself is not supposed to know, and consequently not meant to declare, its generic quality

Determining the generic status of the text is not the business of the text but that of the reader, the critic, or the public" (4). Maclean himself was comfortable with such generic ambiguity.⁶ His cue for readers may be embedded in the novella's penultimate paragraph: "Eventually all things merge into one, and a river runs through it" (104). In Maclean's work, one senses the merging of many literary traditions, genres, and forms. While the Shakespearean dimensions of Maclean's texts seem to merit immediate

⁶ See Maclean's "The Hidden Art of a Good Story: Wallace Stegner Lecture." Although *A River Runs through It* is a novella, Maclean referred to it throughout his life as a "love poem to my family" (28).

examination, it might be prudent to begin by examining *A River Runs through It* as a text written in the tradition of ancient Greek tragedy. After all, during his tenure at the University of Chicago, Maclean, along with Ronald S. Crane and a group of other "Chicago school" academicians, considered themselves neo-Aristotelian thinkers.

Ronald S. Crane's compilation of scholarly essays, *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern* (1952), contains two studies written by Maclean while he was at the University of Chicago. Both men spent their professional lives in the English department there, advancing a critical school of thought known as the "Chicago school" of criticism. Often referred to as neo-Aristotelian critics, Maclean and his contemporaries shared an interest in the critical principles described by Aristotle in *The Poetics*. For example, in "Episode, Scene, Speech, and Word: The Madness of Lear," Maclean submits that William Shakespeare's *King Lear* succeeds, in part, because it is an aesthetically organic work of art; Maclean traces Lear's madness through various levels -- what Maclean refers to as the "declension of particulars of the play" -- a word, speech, scene, and an episode (599). As one can sense, the "Chicago school" critic Maclean valued organic unity in a

work of art: each part being essential in itself and contributing to the whole.⁷ When Maclean retired from teaching in 1973, he began writing the title story for what would become *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*. The title story is that of Maclean's close-knit family and the brutal murder of his younger brother Paul, a first-rate fly-fisherman, an "artist" with self-destructive habits. Knowing Maclean's critical interest in Aristotle's writings regarding tragedy, the extent to which Aristotle's ideas inform his text may prove illuminating.

In Chapter XIII of *The Poetics*, Aristotle submits that the "perfect tragedy" should not be about the undoing of a wholly virtuous nor villainous man (29). On the contrary, Aristotle suggests the tragic hero should be "between these two extremes . . . whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty," and he must be "highly renowned" (29). Early in *A River Runs through It*, Maclean's presentation of his brother indicates that Paul functions as Maclean's tragic hero; to be sure, Maclean incorporates Aristotle's observation that the

⁷ For more on this, see James E. Ford's "When 'Life ... Becomes Literature:' The Neo-Aristotelian Poetics of Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*." Ford's primary interest is how Norman Maclean's sensibilities as a Neo-Aristotelian critic influence his fiction.

tragic hero should be renowned. Even as a boy Paul differs from Norman and others. Norman describes Paul as a "master of an art," a figure possessing "luck," "genius," and "self-confidence" (5-6). His skill and dexterity with rod and reel distinguish him among his peers. Even Norman's mother-in-law, a woman who concedes that she knows "nothing about fishing," asserts, "I know Paul is the best fisherman anywhere" (11). Despite Paul's prowess on the river, his excessive drinking and compulsive gambling lead to his destruction, suggesting that Maclean departs from Aristotle's assertion regarding the tragic hero and vice and depravity. Still, perhaps the most compelling observation to be made about Paul as a tragic hero is his self-reliance, his boorish refusal to accept help from those who love him yet do not understand his ways. Thus, despite his "drinking too much" and "getting behind at big stud poker games at Lolo Hot Springs" (24), perhaps the greater "error" or "frailty" remains his unwillingness to ask or accept help. Maclean's narrator ruminates on this very idea: "I found myself thinking about character . . . I was thinking of how, when things got tough, my brother looked to himself to get himself out of trouble I pursued this line of thought back to the Greeks who

believed that not wanting any help might even get you killed" (90). Paul's *hamartia*, his tragic flaw, stems not from his excessive drinking or gambling; rather, his "error," or "frailty," remains his unwillingness to accept an offer of help when it is extended.

Aristotle begins Chapter VII of *The Poetics* asserting the dominance of plot over character in tragedy. According to Aristotle, plot remains the "first and most important thing in Tragedy" and defines tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is complete and whole . . . a whole having a beginning, a middle, and an end" (25). Character, Aristotle asserts, "holds the second place" (24). Subsequently, in a story such as Maclean's -- one that involves a charismatic character like Paul -- what place do plot and narrative structure occupy in Maclean's text? A little more than midway through the text, Norman is fishing the Big Blackfoot River. At first glance, he appears to be meditating on the geologic forces that forged the river, but closer scrutiny suggests that he is describing more than the river; he is reading the patterns and plots, the design, of the story he is in the process of telling:

But internally it [the river/text] was made of sharp angles. It ran seemingly straight for a

while, turned abruptly, then ran smoothly again, then met another obstacle, again was turned sharply and again ran smoothly. Straight lines that couldn't have been exactly right angles became the artist's most beautiful curve and swept from here across the valley to where it could no longer be seen. (62)

This passage illustrates the writer of tragedy's job: to arrange skillfully and gracefully the numerous and necessary sequential incidents of a completed action. A few lines later, Maclean's narrator again appears to be analyzing the plot of tragedy more so than a simple fishing hole. When fishermen study the river, they are said to be "reading the water" and conceptualize the river as having "three parts as a unity and call it 'a hole'" (63). The tripartite structure assigned to a river's fishing "hole" bears striking resemblance to Aristotle's concept of the "whole" of tragedy as "that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end" (25). If any doubt remains regarding Maclean's pre-occupation with plot and his work as a story teller, this vignette ends with a decidedly metaleptic shift in his narrative: "But I knew a story had begun, perhaps long ago near the sound of water. And I sensed

ahead I would meet something that would never erode so there would be a sharp turn, deep circles, a deposit, and quietness" (63). Here Aristotle's "beginning, middle, and an end" (25) parallels Maclean's "sharp turn, deep circles, and a deposit" (63). The "quietness" that Maclean suggests follows the completed action of tragedy is akin to Aristotle's notion of *catharsis*, the purgation of emotion and pity that is the end goal of tragedy.

Another Aristotelian principle appears near the end of the novella as the narrator describes the last fishing trip he and Paul took with their father. As the narrator describes Paul's fight to land the enormous trout, he stops referring to Paul by name. Instead, he refers to him repeatedly -- at least seven times -- simply as "the man" (98-99). This gradual de-emphasis of Paul as a living, breathing character squares nicely with Aristotle's belief that character should be secondary to plot. In "The Hidden Art of a Good Story," a speech delivered at Lewis and Clark College in 1987, Maclean reveals his "secret of the trade" (33). Although Maclean admits he was tempted to bring the reader up close to Paul, he made a conscious choice to do precisely the opposite. "I decided," Maclean states, "he should be seen so far away he could not be seen as an

individual" (33). Maclean continues clarifying his decision, explaining that his desire was for Paul to "fade away" as an "individual existence" just prior to becoming "an abstraction" (33). Here, Maclean advances what appears to be the Aristotelian premise of character occupying a secondary position to plot, an essential element for tragedy to succeed. In other words, tragedy works best when readers (or viewers) experience pity and fear as if they were the ones suffering, and this can only be achieved and sustained when characters are generic enough to allow this type of substitution. Maclean knew as much. In 1977, Maclean ended his speech "Montana Memory," delivered at the Institute of the Rockies, stating that *A River Runs through It* "is a tragedy, the tragedy of my brother who was one of the finest fishermen in the northwest . . . a tragedy about someone you love and did not understand and could not help. You don't have to come from Montana to understand that tragedy" (74).

When encountering the combination of critic/writer, the reader is tempted to scrutinize the writer's imaginative texts, analyzing how faithfully the writer has applied his favorite critical apparatus to his work. It would be a mistake, or at the least short-sighted, to let

such a pedestrian exercise be the barometer for an artist's success or failure. In Maclean's case, one can identify several of Aristotle's ideas underpinning *A River Runs through It* for Maclean's rendering of Paul as a tragic hero and his emphasis on plot suggest as much. At the same time, however, other instances in *A River Runs through It* depart from Aristotle's ideas and borrow from Shakespeare. Maclean's interest in Aristotle informs, but by no means restricts, his tragic vision.

The Shakespearean dimensions of *A River Runs through It* are equally compelling and have, up until this point, largely been overlooked. Certainly, much in the same way Hamlet feels the palpable presence of his murdered father, Maclean's narrator feels the presence of his murdered brother Paul throughout the text. He is "indirectly . . . present" in the conversations between Norman and his father (103) just as he was in conversations Maclean had with others. For example, Laird Robinson, Maclean's friend and research partner for more than ten years during the writing of *Young Men and Fire*, recalls that Paul's presence was always foremost in Maclean's thoughts and that Maclean "always circled back, sooner or later to his brother. . . . In conversation, he always wove in his brother in one form

or another" (qtd. in Weltzien's "Norman Maclean and Lair Robinson" 51). Norman is "haunted" not only by waters, but by his instinctual need to help those whom he loves but does not understand. As a "brother's keeper," Norman is "possessed" by one of the most "haunting" instincts. . . . It will not let us go" (29). Beyond merely feeling the presence of the dead, however, Maclean's novella exhibits additional techniques that seem indebted to the Shakespearean tradition.

To begin, one of Shakespeare's greatest contributions to the genre of tragedy was his decision to weave short comic vignettes into his tragedies. When they are introduced, these scenes, speeches, and incidents provide emotional intensity, and, by contrast, help heighten the seriousness of the story. As Milton Crane notes, the "comedy of tragedy" is a term that does not predate Shakespeare's achievement (68). Notable examples include the gatekeepers, or drunken porters in *Macbeth*.⁸ We find no comic relief in the tragedies produced by the Greek playwrights, and no instances of this technique in Shakespeare's English predecessors. Shakespeare's contribution seems a genuine insight into human psychology,

⁸ See, for example, Thomas De Quincey's "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*."

at least to the extent that he was able to recognize that life -- and art as its representation -- is neither wholly tragic nor comic. Rather, Shakespeare and Maclean recognize that the human condition and experience ultimately yield both. Considering Maclean's interest in *Hamlet*, one might do well to consider the play within the play in Act II.ii, as Polonius and Hamlet banter prior to the players' entrance:

Hamlet: "Then came each actor on his ass -

Polonius: The best actors in the world,
 either for tragedy, comedy, history,
 pastoral, pastoral comical, historical
 pastoral, [tragical-historical,
 tragical-comical-historical-
 pastoral,] scene individable, or poem
 unlimited; Seneca cannot be too heavy,
 nor Plautus too light, for the law of
 writ and the liberty: these are the
 only men. (395-402)

In this decidedly comic scene, Shakespeare plays with the blurring of generic lines, and the scene itself is constructed for comic relief, for laughter. Similarly, Maclean's *A River Runs through It* includes scenes that

function in the same manner: to reduce the reader's emotional intensity.

Maclean's comic interludes usually involve Norman's brother-in-law Neal and the whore Old Rawhide. An early example of a comic scene occurs after Norman bails Paul out of jail, and the two Maclean brothers, at the insistence of Jessie's mother, acquiesce and agree to take Neal fishing. On the hike across the meadow to the river, Norman wrestles with his conscience, wondering if he should talk candidly with his brother about "what happened the other night" (37). Readers sense Norman's deep concern with the "old problems in new forms" (38) and his conflict as he wrestles with whether or not he should confront Paul and extend an offer to help him with money. Norman remains contemplative and deep in worry until he turns around on the trail and encounters the hopeless bait fisherman Neal with his red Hills Bros. coffee can of worms "fishing" a stagnant pool:

"What are you doing? I asked.

It took some time for him to arrange an answer.

"I have been fishing," he said, finally. Then he tried over again for greater accuracy. "I have been fishing and not feeling well," he said.

"This dead water isn't much of a place to fish, is it?" I asked.

"Why, he said, "Look at all those fish at the bottom of the hole."

"Those are squaw fish and suckers," I told him, without looking.

"What's a sucker?" he asked, and so became the first native of Montana ever to sit on a rock and ask what a sucker was.

In the deep water below him was a little botch of pink that was sure to be angleworms with one hook running through all their guts. On the leader, just above the worms, were two red beads, strung there no doubt for cosmetic purposes. The botch of angleworms and the two beads hung within six inches of the nearest sucker. Not a fish stirred, and neither did the fisherman, although both were in plain view of each other. (38)

This passage is fundamental to understanding Maclean's use of comic relief, for this episode is fraught with the comic at every level. Norman's literal turn in direction on the meadow trail marks the generic shift -- the turn -- from the tragic to the comic. What Neal considers fishing in no

way approximates the high art of fishing as it is performed by Norman and Paul. Maclean counterbalances Neal's passivity with the motionless sucker fish dwelling at the bottom of a stagnant pool. Indeed, the comedy here is achieved by the vision of two suckers -- one a lousy bait fisherman and one a fish -- staring at one another through clear, calm water. Consequently, the insertion of this comic scene at this point in the narrative helps to relieve the emotional intensity that has been building.

Another instance where Maclean uses comic relief to release emotional intensity occurs when Neal and Old Rawhide show up uninvited, intoxicated, and woefully unprepared to fish at the Maclean family cabin at Seely Lake. Norman and Paul graciously greet the intruders and share their beer with them, submerging and securing their own bottles in the cold river bed to drink after a day of fishing trout. Leaving the two uninvited guests behind, Norman and Paul take to the river, and their conversation veers dangerously close to revealing Paul's reckless lifestyle, his confession that he "should leave Montana" (57) for only "trouble" (57) awaits him. Here, Norman comes his closest to articulating his desire to help his brother, extending an offer: "I think I could be of some

help if you want to work for a big paper. Then maybe you could do your own stuff -- special features, even some day your own column" (57). The blistering heat, however, ruins the fishing and the conversation, which melts into "Delphic utterances" (57), and the brothers turn their thoughts to the cold beer that awaits them. Not surprisingly, while the brothers are on the river, Neal and Old Rawhide consume the beer that Norman and Paul gave them and steal their submerged bottles, drinking those and a bottle of 3-7-77 whiskey as well. As Norman and Paul make the discovery of the stolen beer, the brothers spy something peculiar, large, bestial, and red on the sandbar. Norman's first suggestion is that they have stumbled upon a bear: "Bear hell," Paul said, "It's a bare ass." "Two bare asses," I said. "That's what I meant" he said. "It's two bare asses. Both are red" (66). Certainly, the bawdy verbal punning in this exchange is reminiscent of Shakespeare's use of the same technique in many of his most memorable and comic scenes.

In addition, though, this scene illustrates the deep fraternal bond between Norman and Paul, for as they chase Old Rawhide down the street of Wolf Creek, Paul kicks the whore in the ass and the moment, for Norman, becomes "a

frozen moment of memory" (73). The tension that has been building between Norman and Paul -- and within the reader -- has been released. Norman's reflection suggests as much: "I think I know how he [Paul] felt. Much as he hated her [Old Rawhide], he really had no strong feeling about her. It was the bastard in the back seat without any underwear that he hated" (72). Norman and Paul's hostility toward Neal is understandable, for Neal has ruined the fishing and stolen their beer; more significantly, however, Neal, the "untouchable," "bait-fishing bastard" (72), has dishonored everything that Norman and Paul's father had taught them about fishing, desecrating the family river by bringing with him a whore, a can of worms, but not a rod.

Here, as in the earlier comic scene with Neal and the sucker fish, Maclean utilizes what is essentially the Shakespearean device known as comic relief. These scenes containing verbal puns and physical comedy function identically to those contained in Shakespeare's greatest tragedies; they release the deep emotional intensity that has been building throughout the work. Furthermore, they illustrate Maclean's tragic vision as one that sees life -- even when it is the most tragic -- as being capable of producing the comic. This view was articulated by Maclean

in "Teaching and Story Telling," delivered at the University of Chicago in February of 1978 and again two months later at Montana State University. "It seems," Maclean said, "as if what you learn about story telling generally is only a more intense form of what you already knew because I learned again that a story should be funny as well as full of pain. I enlarged this knowledge later when I learned that hilarity and agony are both necessary to salvation" (91-92).

The more one considers Maclean as a writer whose sensibilities and impulses seem, at base, largely Shakespearean, the more he or she recognizes the extent of Maclean's debt to his reading and teaching of Shakespeare. E.M.W. Tillyard's landmark study *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1944) emphasizes the Elizabethan generation's obsession and need for stability, balance, and order. In many of Shakespeare's comedies, the desire for balance and order manifests itself in Shakespeare's pairing of lovers and his presentation of love and marriage. For centuries, critics have belabored Shakespeare's pairing of lovers, exploring the extent to which the lovers are (or are not) a good match, for certainly lovers complementing or confounding one another provide the comic entertainment.

It seems equally useful and intriguing to make the same inquiry regarding the characters in *A River Runs through It*. Maclean's pairing of lovers suggests a similar Shakespearean desire/design for balance and order.

Maclean pairs three sets of lovers in *A River Runs through It*. In doing so, he presents an interesting continuum spanning what may be identified as the comic, Neal and Old Rawhide; the ideal, Norman and Jessie; and the artistic, Paul and Monasetah. By considering the chief characteristics of each pair of lovers, Maclean's design for each to complement the other becomes evident. Norman's brother-in-law Neal and the "whore of Wolf Creek" Old Rawhide deserve one another. Their relationship is one rooted in little more than a mutual desire for physical pleasure and delight, whether these are located at the bottom of a bottle drunk or on a sand bar in the middle of a river naked. With this relationship, one recognizes Maclean's deliberate, effective pairing of two characters whose drunken antics provide the bulk of the novella's comic scenes. Consider their first encounter at Black Jack's Bar, where Norman and Neal go for a drink upon Neal's return home from California. Norman and Neal enter the modified freight car set on gravel to find one of the

reconstructed grocery crate stools occupied by Neal's soon-to-be paramour. Sitting on a crate at the other end of the bar is a "female character known as Old Rawhide to the goats up and down the Great Northern Line elected beauty queen of Wolf Creek" by riding "bareback standing up through the 111 inhabitants, mostly male, who had lined one of Wolf Creek's two streets. Her skirts flew high, and she won the contest" (31). We immediately learn Old Rawhide's history, her pattern of shacking up with steer wrestlers and ropers during the winter months, and during the summers she is "reduced to stray fishermen, most of them bait and hardware fishermen from Great Falls" (32). "Occasionally," we are told, Old Rawhide would marry one of them, but marriage "wasn't Old Rawhide's natural state of bliss" (32). She has slept with so many men that, for her failing memory, she is reduced to calling all men "buster." It comes as no surprise then to witness Old Rawhide set her sights on a new "Buster," the citified, egomaniac Neal, who, after a few shots of 3-7-77 whiskey, begins lying to expert outdoorsmen of his own hunting and fishing prowess. Norman is careful to record Neal's method of approaching Old Rawhide as well, noting his peculiar strategy: "As for Old Rawhide, Neal hadn't looked at her yet. I was already

wise to the fact that Neal's opening ploy with women was to ignore them, and indeed was beginning to realize what a good opening it was" (33). And even when Neal does acknowledge Old Rawhide's presence, it is indirectly through the mirror behind the bar: "Then for the first time he formally recognized that a woman was present by looking not at the image, but at the reality of Black Jack behind the bar" (34). And with Norman's subsequent departure, the drunken lovers gravitate toward one another: "The moment I rose from my crate," recalls Norman, "Old Rawhide moved in to be closer to Neal. She peered into his profile, and romance stirred under her epidermis" (34).

Of course the scene that best illuminates Maclean's effective pairing of Neal and Old Rawhide occurs at the Maclean family cabin at Seely Lake, where Norman and Paul have gone in the aftermath of the botched family picnic. Although the discovery of the "two bare asses" (66) on the sandbar is, in fact, comic, the humor is tempered by Norman's disgust at the violation of the sacred family spot. We are told he "never again threw a line" (68) in the fishing hole sullied by Neal and Old Rawhide. Likewise, Paul declares, "May he [Neal] get three doses of the clap, and may he recover from all but the first" (68). Paul's

disdain for Old Rawhide culminates when he chases after her and kicks her in the ass. Mary Clearman Blew argues vehemently that in this scene Paul, not Neal, functions as Old Rawhide's nemesis. According to Blew, "Old Rawhide pits her toughness against Paul's toughness, her banality against his artistry, the perversion she represents against his special ability to worship at the utmost shrine of the trout rivers" (196). Although the scenes including Neal and Old Rawhide are meant to be comic, their relationship explores one of Maclean's most prominent themes in the novella: the impulse for one human being to help another human being, whether this is possible or not. Old Rawhide, despite her limitations and failures as a character, attempts to help Neal. This is why she takes him fishing and why when she and Neal have been awakened from their drunken slumber by Norman and Paul, she instinctively reacts by stating, "He's my man. I can take care of him" (69). Old Rawhide helps the badly blistered Neal wade across the river to the shore and wades back to the sandbar to retrieve his worthless Hills Bros. can of worms because "Buster always like to have it with him" (70).⁹ The same

⁹ Mary Clearman Blew refers to the Hills Bros. can as a "scarlet letter for bait fishermen and Neal's special badge of inadequacy" (196).

impulse to extend an offer to help is there in Jessie's desire to help Neal and, of course, in Norman's desire to help Paul. In reality, however, neither Neal nor Paul is capable of accepting help, and the recognition of this truth remains central to Maclean's reconciling the tragedy of his brother's murder. Neal and Old Rawhide's relationship, in a sense, serves as a foil for Norman and Jessie's relationship.

In the pairing of characters Norman and Jessie, Maclean presents an ideal relationship. In short, they too are well matched. While their relationship is founded on mutual love and respect, their desire to help a loved one draws them closer to one another. In this sense, Norman and Jessie face the same conflict. Brothers Paul and Neal (although opposites in almost every regard) need help, and though both Norman and Jessie desperately try to help those they love, they fail. Still, it reassures a troubled Norman that he does not face this conflict alone. In the aftermath of Paul's drunken brawl and subsequent jailing, Norman reflects on the oldest and most futile of impulses, "the most haunting of instincts" (29). He recognizes that others have brothers "they did not understand but wanted to help" (28). Here, Norman's insight prepares us for the

conflict that Jessie faces with her brother Neal, the comic/pathetic bait-fishing prodigal son of sorts. Jessie reminds Norman that he had promised to meet Neal at the train station. "The truth was I had forgotten," Norman confesses, "but when I thought about him I felt relieved. It was good to remember that there was someone in my wife's family they worried about" (29). Norman makes it known that he does not like Neal, yet he agrees to try to help Neal out of the love he has for his wife (29). Later, when the family embarks on their picnic outing, Jessie again asks Norman not to leave or abandon Neal while they are fishing, and Norman does his best to help Neal, who is suffering from a hangover, content to baitfish a stagnant pond.

An interesting exchange takes place between Paul and Norman that deserves analysis. As the brothers have been fishing and *not* discussing Paul's most recent skirmish with the law, Paul admonishes a frustrated Norman:

"Come on, let's go find Neal." Then he added,

"You shouldn't have left him behind."

"What?" I asked.

"You should try to help him," he replied.

I could find words but not sentences they could fit. "I didn't leave him. He doesn't like me. He doesn't like Montana. He left me to go bait-fishing. He can't even bait-fish. Me, I don't like anything about him." . . . "Maybe so," my brother replied. "But maybe what he likes is somebody trying to help him." (46-47)

This passage deserves to be quoted at length because it provides insight into the novella's central conflict, certainly the one that binds Norman and Jessie together as they try to help their brothers. Even though Paul appears to be commenting on Neal, he really is talking about himself. Paul does not like -- and certainly does not want -- somebody trying to help him, while Neal does. This truth magnifies Norman and Jessie's conflict. Norman will not succeed in helping Paul because Paul will not accept it. Jessie will not succeed in helping Neal because he will dwell in a perpetual state of neediness. While it takes time for Norman and Jessie to recognize this truth, each one does in his or her own way. Though they each fail to help the ones they love, their love for one another -- though tested and strained -- solidifies.

The climax of the tension between and among Norman, Jessie and Neal occurs when Norman and Paul bring a sun-blistered Neal back home to face "the three Scotch women," Jessie, Florence, and Dorothy (72). Jessie's visceral reaction is to blame Norman for leaving Neal alone, calling Norman a "bastard" for doing so (74). As the three Scottish women attend to Neal, a "red carcass on a white sheet" (74), Florence, Dorothy, and finally Jessie recognize the truth about the events of the day and Neal's character. One by one, Florence, Dorothy, and Jessie reassure Norman they love him. The exchange between Jessie and Norman, though, is by far the most intimate and moving. Norman consoles Jessie, who desperately tries to process the events of the day, of a lifetime, for that matter. "Tell me," states Jessie, "why is it that people who want help do better without it -- at least no worse. Actually, that's what it is, no worse. They take all the help they can get, and are just the same as they have always been" (77). Without interrupting one another, Norman and Jessie simultaneously pledge "Let's never get out of touch with each other" (77). And in the next sentence Maclean confirms their solidarity: "And we never have, although her death has come between us" (77). As these exchanges

suggest, Maclean's pairing of Norman and Jessie represents the ideal. This pairing of characters is successful, for as a foil it permits us to recognize in their relationship that which is absent between Neal and Old Rawhide, whose relationship, though comic, is pathetic.

In the pairing of Paul and Monasetah, Maclean presents an equally balanced match, for embodied in the master fly-fisherman and the beautiful dancer are the creative and destructive forces of genuine artistry. Early in the novella, Paul is described by Norman as "a master of an art" (6) and later as Paul performs his innovative shadow casting technique, Norman states, "the whole world turned to water" (20). Indeed, the canvas upon which the artist Paul works is the Big Blackfoot River and his brush is his fly-rod. Rhythm and color superimpose upon one another until "the canyon was glorified by rhythms and colors" (22). It is noteworthy that Paul's artistry is the result of breaking free from the rigid four-count casting method taught by his Presbyterian minister father. "Long ago," Norman states, "he had gone far beyond my father's wrist casting, although his right wrist was always so important that it had become larger than his left" (21). Paul's artistry is only achieved by breaking away from the

metronome wrist casting of his father and brother.

Furthermore, one could argue that Paul's physical body takes on an artistic dimension as well. When Norman describes Paul in his wet clothes, he emphasizes Paul's physical prowess, suggesting that his brother's physique is God-like, carved from marble:

My brother was only five feet ten, but he had fished so many years his body had become partly shaped by his casting. He was thirty-two now, at the height of his power, and he could put all his body and soul into a four and a half ounce magic totem pole. . . . His right arm, which our father had kept tied to his side to emphasize the wrist, shot out of his shirt as if it were engineered, and it, too, was larger than his left arm. His wet shirt bulged and came unbuttoned with his pivoting shoulders and hips. It was also not hard to see why he was a street fighter. (21)

This passage -- quoted at length -- goes beyond merely depicting Paul as a work of art, a specimen of statuesque power. It foreshadows Paul's demise. Paradoxically, the over-developed, enlarged casting hand, the hand that creates glory amid the canyon and river, is itself crushed

during Paul's murder. As Norman tells their father what little he knows of the incident, he must reaffirm Paul's right hand: "Nearly all the bones in his hand were broken" (102). In the depiction of Paul, then, Maclean seems to be suggesting the duality of the artist and his or her art -- the creative and destructive.

Just as Old Rawhide and Jessie appear to be perfectly matched to their male counterparts Neal and Norman, the Northern Cheyenne girl Norman calls Monasetah is ideally suited for Paul, for she shares many of the same character traits as he. She is an artist, a work of art, and, ultimately, an agent of violence and destruction. As Norman states, "she was as beautiful a dancer as he was a fly caster" (26). Mary Clearman Blew's "Mo-Nah-Se-Tah, the Whore, and the Three Scottish Women" explores Maclean's treatment of women in *A River Runs through It and Other Short Stories*. She argues that Maclean's Monasetah is like many of the dangerous women presented in Cooper, Hawthorne, Poe, and Twain, "Sensual and destructive" (195); however, while Monasetah's artisty, beauty, and danger link her to many of the dark women in American literature, they also link her to Paul. In the same way that Norman's eye recognizes artistry in his brother, he recognizes it in

Monasetah, whom he describes as "one of the most beautiful dancers" he had ever seen (26). It is the performance aspect of her art Norman values, and although Monasetah does not paint the canyons and rivers with a four-and-a-half ounce fly-rod, she achieves the same extraordinary, "molecular" effects through her dancing. "She [Monasetah] made her partner feel as if he were about to be left behind," Norman says, awestruck (26). Norman describes Monasetah's artistry as clearly the same caliber as Paul's, the highest: "It is a strange and wonderful feeling to hold someone in your arms who is trying to detach you from the earth and you aren't good enough to follow her" (26). In addition to her artistry, Norman presents her the same way he does Paul -- as a work of art. When Monasetah first appears, Norman asserts that "When her black hair glistened, she was one of my favorite women" and that when it glistened, she was "handsome," "Romanlike," yet "warlike" in profile after she had consumed a few drinks (25). Nevertheless, despite the artistry and physical beauty she possesses, like Paul, Monasetah remains an agent of violence and destruction. Norman recounts her extraordinary lineage, the Northern Cheyenne squaws who "happily" castrated the wounded and dead of the Seventh

Cavalry as they lay on the hill of the Little Bighorn (25). Furthermore, Norman recalls that Monasetah enjoyed getting him into trouble as they walked down the street together. She walks between the Maclean brothers shoving one or the other into people as they promenade down Last Chance Gulch. As Norman asserts, "She [Monasetah] always felt that she had a disappointing evening and had not been appreciated if the guy who took her out didn't get into a big fight over her" (26).

The few pages that present the artistry, beauty, and violence of Paul and Monasetah have significance beyond the two simply being a well-matched couple. The scene reveals what in many ways is an important conflict for Norman, who only wants to see his brother in a positive light. When the police desk-sergeant's phone call awakens Norman, though, the sergeant says, "I want you to see him. . . . I am the desk sergeant who wants you to see your brother" (emphasis added 23). Repeated references to vision, words such as "see," "look," and "seen" occur in the exchange between the desk sergeant and a befuddled Norman: The sergeant tells Norman, "All you have to do is look at him and take him home" (23). Norman's reaction, at first, is to deny that which he is being forced to observe, not

"wanting to see" Paul without being prepared to process the truth. Consider how Norman steels himself to see Paul:

Wanting to see him in a perspective when I saw him, I stood still until I could again see the woman in bib overalls marveling at his shadow casting. Then I opened the door to the room where they toss the drunks until they can walk a crack in the floor. (25)

What we witness here is Norman trying to visualize Paul as we have known him to be: the artist, beautiful and graceful, not the immediate, grim reality of his excessive drinking, gambling, and brawling. Paul's enlarged casting hand, associated with both his creativity and his destruction, is swollen from the brawl: "He [Paul] could not have seen me because his enlarged casting hand was over his face. Were it not for the lasting compassion I felt for his hand, I might have doubted afterwards that I had seen him" (25). Similarly, Norman describes Monasetah's condition, noting that "her hair did not glisten" and that her legs "were just things lying on the floor" (26). Functioning as their caretaker, Norman fulfills the desk sergeant's initial tasking; he "looks" at them and takes them home. Perhaps for the first time, though, Norman

recognizes the duality of their selves, and while he has the utmost admiration for their respective arts, he has nothing but disdain for their self-destructive behavior: "The two of them smelled worse than the jail. They smelled just like what they were -- a couple of drunks" (26).

The Aristotelian and Shakespearean dimensions of *A River Runs through It* provide a general framework for approaching the text as the tragedy it most assuredly is. Taking into consideration Maclean's training at the University of Chicago and his love of Shakespeare, it is not surprising to detect these two impulses and influences in his work. Paul is Maclean's tragic hero, complete with his tragic flaw; further, Maclean works within the Aristotelian tradition by emphasizing plot over character, and skillfully arranging the narrative to suggest Aristotle's concept of the "whole" of tragedy as "that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end" (25). Certainly, the text provides opportunity for each reader to experience a catharsis of his or her own. Fortunately, Paul Maclean's murder did not destroy Norman's life; rather, it seems to have fortified it. In his literary rendering of this personal tragedy, Maclean recognized what Shakespeare knew -- that human experience is marked by

comedy, even amid the most tragic of circumstances. Finally, in his pairing of lovers -- Neal and old Rawhide, Norman and Jessie, and Paul and Monasetah -- the same impulse for balance and order emerges that characterized the Elizabethan world view.

In 1976, the same year that *A River Runs through It* was published, Maclean began working on what he had called "The Great Blowup," the manuscript for what would become *Young Men and Fire*. He was seventy-three; he continued researching and working on the manuscript for nearly a decade before his body and mind began to betray him. By 1987, he no longer had the strength to work, and at the time of his death in 1990, the manuscript lay incomplete.¹⁰ For two years, Maclean's estate (son John Maclean and daughter Jean Maclean Snyder) and research partner Laird Robinson cooperated with editors at the University of Chicago Press to assemble, edit, and publish the manuscript. In August of 1992, *Young Men and Fire* was published. It spent numerous weeks on the *New York Times*

¹⁰ Maclean's health had noticeably deteriorated by 1987. After delivering the Wallace Stegner Lecture at Lewis-Clark College in Lewiston, Idaho, he accidentally walked into a wall after leaving the stage. See O. Alan Weltzien's "Norman Maclean and Laird Robinson: A Tale of Two Research Partners" 49.

best-seller list and won the 1992 National Book Critics Circle Award for best non-fiction.

Readers quickly sense that *Young Men and Fire* is more than "a race with fire to death" (182) or the story of "courage struggling for oxygen" (301). *Young Men and Fire* is deeply indebted to the genre of tragedy, a literary form that provided the conceptual framework for Maclean to comprehend -- to the extent he could -- the catastrophes of his life: his brother's murder and the Mann Gulch Fire of 1949, and -- seemingly -- his own race with death. Early in Part Two of the text, Maclean states: "Tragedy is the most demanding of all literary forms" (161). Perhaps it is best to begin with this assertion.

In Part Two of *Young Men and Fire*, Maclean foregrounds the demanding physical toll numerous visits to Mann Gulch took on his body and spirit. Admittedly, writing a tragedy does not necessarily involve exposing the author to such challenges; however, in *Young Men and Fire*, evaluating and understanding Maclean's personal hardships is essential for two reasons. In the first place, Maclean's assertion that tragedy is the most demanding of forms extends such an invitation; thus considering any and all demands seems appropriate if one is genuinely in pursuit of appreciating

the breadth and scope of Maclean's tragic vision and his quest for self-hood. More importantly, the cumulative effect of reading Maclean's descriptions of the endured physical demands he endured is that readers begin to view Maclean as a character performing on what becomes a stage of sorts, the same stage the original drama was enacted upon some forty years prior. Such a reading is further supported by the scholarship of Richard Sewell, whose seminal study *The Vision of Tragedy* advances a similar notion. While Sewell concedes that involving an artist in "boundary-situations" may not withstand scrutiny in every instance, he argues that in modern tragedy it may be justified:

In the modern age, when the symbol of the hero as the dominating center of the play seems to have lost its power with artist and audience, the artist becomes his own tragic hero. The "action," the suffering, and the perception are not objectified in the hero's ordeal, but seem to be the artist's own. (178)

Still a more compelling justification can be established by considering the contributions of psychologist D.P. McAdams, whose ideas regarding the

individual's quest toward self-hood explain why the physical demands Maclean endured bear noting. McAdams's primary interest in "Unity and Purpose in Human Lives: The Emergence of Identity as a Life Story," is the process by which the individual uses narrative to construct a "personal myth" early in life, developing and possibly altering it later in life.¹¹ A central tenet of McAdams is his belief that the individual is narrating his life while living it; consequently, as Maclean narrates the physical demands of his expeditions into Mann Gulch, readers detect that Maclean's personal myth is "developing and altering," as McAdams would suggest.

With its topography, a staggering seventy-six percent slope, and extreme summer temperatures sweltering well above 100 degrees, Mann Gulch -- as Lewis and Clark would attest -- is no place for the weak.¹² In fact, Harry Gisborne, the United States Forestry Service's leading fire scientist, died of a heart attack on a game trail high upon

¹¹According to McAdams the myth is constructed by the individual selecting remembered events from the past, arranging them in such a manner as to define and valorize the self identity that is constructed. "We choose in the present to remember the past in a certain way. In the making of history, there is no objective bedrock of the past from which to fashion the myth" (169).

¹² This statistic means that for every ten feet the men traversed horizontally, they climbed seven and a half feet.

the northern slope of Mann Gulch on November 4, 1949, the day he entered Mann Gulch with his former student and ranger Robert Jansson to test his theory of the Mann Gulch blowup. Jansson piled rocks around Gisborne's lifeless body to keep him from rolling down the slope, closed Gisborne's eyes, and then put his [Gisborne's] glasses back on him so, just in case he woke up, he could see where he was. Maclean refers to this as the "death of a scientist" (139), but it contains more admiration for the father of modern fire science; Maclean, twenty years Gisborne's senior, addresses his own mortality: "For a scientist, this is a good way to live and die, maybe the ideal way for any of us -- excitedly finding we were wrong and excitedly waiting for tomorrow to come so we can start over" (139). Nearly thirty years later, when Maclean entered Mann Gulch on July 1, 1978, with Laird Robinson and Mann Gulch survivors Robert Sallee and Walter Rumsey, the physical demands of the field research were considerable, to say the least. According to Maclean, the three younger men accompanying him were told in Missoula to keep him out of the gulch:

Finally, I had to get personal and tell them,
"Look, there is a mountain down-river no farther

than twelve miles from here by air that also looks over the Missouri. It was named by my wife when she was still a girl, and she named it Mount Jessie after herself, although she lived an otherwise modest life. At her request her ashes are there now. Nobody should feel bad if I should remain behind on one of these hills that looks her way." Sallee reached over and took my pack off my shoulders, and we started climbing.

(170)

This passage demonstrates the length to which Maclean would go to tell the story of the Mann Gulch fire; he would follow Gisborne in death. More to the point, though, it suggests a trope of sorts in *Young Men and Fire*: the numerous surrogate selves for Maclean. Gisborne, for example, appears to function as such. As Maclean asserts, "Later, in thinking I was following him [Gisborne], I came to find out much of what I had found missing in Mann Gulch" (139). Similarly, Laird Robinson, a former smokejumper turned public affairs specialist for the United States Forestry Service, clearly represents what Maclean might have become. Maclean ranks his friendship and research partnership with Robinson as one of the chief pleasures of

writing the tragedy of Mann Gulch: "It is a great privilege," writes Maclean, "to possess the friendship of a young man who is as good or better than you at what you intended to be when you were his age just before you changed direction" (162).

The physical demands of accessing Mann Gulch were great the following summer as well. On what would be Maclean's last research trip to Mann Gulch, Maclean, Robinson, and Paul Lloyd-Davis entered Mann Gulch on July 24, 1979, to run one-hundred-yard steel tape, trying to locate the origin of Wag Dodge's escape fire and to determine how accurately the concrete crosses marking the fallen Smokejumpers had been placed. The men worked to map the stage upon which the tragedy was enacted and conceptualize those final, hellish moments. Although the temperature at Helena was ninety-four degrees, three degrees cooler than the day of the Mann Gulch fire, the estimated temperature in the bottom of the gulch was between 120 and 130 degrees; 140 degrees is lethal (196). Maclean turns from worrying about suffering a heart attack to the more imminent fear of dehydration, instead. He also relates a frightening episode involving his horse, which slips from underneath him as they sidehill through a steep,

rocky stretch: "I fell under her legs. . . . Her front legs were curling as if her bones were soft and were curling to bring her hoofs down on the hill just above my head" (196). Scrambling for safety and stability, Maclean grasps fistfuls of slick dry grass. Enduring the physical demands of researching the Mann Gulch fire tragedy appears essential to Maclean, for doing so enabled him to understand what the young Smokejumpers experienced that day in August of 1949. Of this visit to Mann Gulch, Maclean reports that it was all he could have hoped for "partly because the heat gave us some sense of what men suffered in Mann Gulch on August 5, 1949" (196) and that he "learned how it might feel to die in the heat of the Inferno" (205). Maclean's sense of urgency is, in part, personal, for he "is frightened" that this is most likely his last trip to Mann Gulch, his "last chance to find out the truth of its tragedy" (201). In addition to the numerous physical demands of researching and writing the tragedy, Maclean's intellectual and imaginative faculties were tested.

Maclean faced a number of rigorous intellectual demands as he sought to understand and explain the Mann Gulch fire. Not surprisingly, some of these demands were worked out in the field with woodsmen; others were worked

out around a conference table with mathematicians. In Chapter 7, for example, Maclean and Robinson are in Mann Gulch, and Maclean's mind works brilliantly to construct a working hypothesis regarding the various natural forces that led to the blowup thirty years prior; interestingly, his experience as an outdoorsman and angler enables him to conclude that the Mann Gulch blowup is essentially a story of three winds (134). Standing alone in the heat at the bottom of Mann Gulch, he thinks to himself that maybe he is "trying to see something big and important too soon. Maybe it would be surer to come if you tried to work up to it" (128-129). As he relaxes his powers of concentration, the missing pieces of the puzzle begin to appear. Consoling himself, he muses that all there is left for him to see is the way dead trees fell: "I just then saw something -- or at least something that might be something" (129). As a practical woodsman, Maclean uses his powers of observation to identify an unusual pattern amid the fallen black trees on the northern slope of Mann Gulch. The trees had fallen parallel to the ridge, not perpendicular to the ridge, as those on the southern slope:

But it was fairly sure that once and for some years a big wind had blown over the top of the

southern ridge and then down it (at right angles to the top of the ridge) and that on the northern side a big wind with some regularity had blown parallel to the northern ridge near its top.

(130)

Shortly after recognizing the pattern of dead black trees, Maclean, idly musing how he might fish this stretch of the Missouri River, observes a medium-size wave pattern moving over the water's surface, noting that it looks "funny" (131) because it was moving the wrong way. The wind moving it "was going the wrong way for a prevailing wind on a big mountain river at this time of day" (131). These two discoveries in the field help Maclean understand what happened on August 5, 1949. Three winds converged near the mouth of Mann Gulch, adding oxygen to a fire already consuming fuel at an enormous rate up a seventy-six percent slope.

At the end of Part Two, Maclean's quest for the truth of the Mann Gulch fire leads him to validate his field observations with hard science. The intellectual demand of his personal odyssey led him deep into the study of fire science, tracing its evolution and numerous advancements: acceleration rates, fuel properties, fire behavior

prediction technology, fire danger rating systems, fire training policies, and mathematical models. Nevertheless, in Chapter 13, Maclean concedes his limitations: "When Laird and I were in the woods, I suppose we thought of ourselves as educated men . . . but I at least knew that my education, starting with what I got from my father, had never included much math" (254). Subsequently, Maclean's research leads him to amass a "small pile of articles" written by leading fire science mathematicians Richard C. Rothermel and Frank Albini (256-257). When Maclean and Robinson meet with these two mathematicians, it is to test their field analysis of "the fatal race between men and fire with their mathematical study of the same race" (259). Using a mathematical coefficient defined by Rothermel, Maclean offers a human and scientific understanding of the tragedy: "'The percentage increase in the spread rate [one factor of a fire] varies in proportion to the square of the percent slope [an environmental factor influencing the fire].' This is a tragic statement; it was very steep where they died" (263). In writing the tragedy *Young Men and Fire*, Maclean desired to explain what had never been sufficiently explained. In his relentless pursuit of the

truth, he summoned extraordinary intellectual energy -- both practical and scientific.

In addition to the demands in the field (with Robinson et al.) and around the conference table (with Rothermel and Albin), there were numerous other intellectual demands. Navigating the labyrinth of governmental bureaucracy often ends in frustration. The field research stretched well east of a remote gulch in western Montana. Maclean notes that his inquiry into the tragedy required "three visits to the Forest Service's Office of Information in Washington, D. C." (159). Furthermore, Maclean's search to find the two lost living survivors of the Mann Gulch fire was difficult. "Fortunately," Maclean says, "the basic tools of scholarship are much the same the world over" (166); scholars of the woods, however, know that to find a person, they need only contact the local post-mistress of a logging town, a "sort of yellow-pages directory of the loggers of the Northwest" (166). Maclean found the French-Canadian Sallee precisely this way, by finding another French-Canadian -- a sawmill nurse -- in the woods (167). Through Sallee, Maclean locates Rumsey, the second lost survivor, in Lincoln, Nebraska.

An argument could be made that the honing and nurturing of Maclean's intellect amid old age kept him alive and productive. Certainly, the presence of two surrogate selves in the text have suggested as much thus far. In the life and death of Harry Gisborne, Maclean acknowledges that he is following a brilliant fire scientist into Mann Gulch to seek the truth, and the basis of Maclean's partnership with Laird Robinson is the extent to which they match wits, each man keeping the other sharp as they investigate the tragedy of Mann Gulch. One consequence of Maclean's "homespun anti-shuffleboard philosophy" of what to do when one reaches the age to be "scripturally dead" is a "possible extension of life" (274). To exemplify this philosophy, Maclean introduces an additional character in *Young Men and Fire* who functions as a slightly different type of surrogate self for Maclean: A.J. Cramer, the forest service investigator who interviewed -- and perhaps coerced -- Robert Sallee and Walter Rumsey into changing their testimony in the aftermath of the tragedy.

When Maclean and Robinson interview Cramer at his cabin on Flat Lake, Maclean notes the feeble former fire service investigator appears to be "the remnants of a

powerful man" (237). His mental faculties have deteriorated as well, leaving him evasive and a poor source of information: "I don't know much of anything about the Mann Gulch fire, I was on another fire at the time, on a fire way up near Canada" (237). Maclean reckons that Cramer is "suspicious" of them and purposely distances himself from the fire. Cramer tries "to sound a long way off, but" as Maclean wryly suggests, "Canada is not a long way off from Northern Montana" (237). Cramer's evasiveness turns to fear when he learns that Maclean and Robinson want to discuss the events that occurred after the fire, not the day of the fire itself. He does not recognize the names of the two survivors -- Sallee and Rumsey -- nor does he remember travelling to Kansas to interview Rumsey during the investigation and the lawsuits. Maclean cross-examines Cramer relentlessly. The interview ceases rather abruptly when Cramer's wife returns home to find that she has left her husband "unprotected" and wonders if he said "anything to harm himself" (238). Her explanation is that her husband "has brain trouble" and "doesn't remember very well anymore" (239). As Maclean and Robinson arise to depart, Maclean observes a flock of Canada geese circle and light on the lake in front of Cramer's cabin. In Maclean's

description of the geese, he essentially is describing the fallen Cramer. The geese are "stately," but they "break into an anvil chorus of nonsense sounds" (239). Cramer wanders toward the shore and Maclean observes that "with them and him together, the near hysteria drained out of the scene. Soon they were talking peacefully to each other in gobbledygook" (239). Even though Maclean and Robinson do not glean any information about the fire's investigation, the scene is important, for Cramer functions as a character foil of sorts; one can't help but recognize the sharp contrast between Cramer and Maclean. Maclean's intellect is sharpened by its use during retirement. His intellectual quest into the science of fire is, in fact, precisely that which "might save" him "from feeding the geese" (243).

If tragedy is as Maclean asserts, "the most demanding of literary forms" (161), and the writing of *Young Men and Fire* required Maclean to summon his physical and intellectual powers, then the imaginative demands of writing the tragedy were equally formidable. It's not enough for one to simply assert that what he is writing is

a tragedy.¹³ Maclean's greatest challenge, and subsequently his greatest achievement, is his artistic transformation of the historical event -- the catastrophe of the Mann Gulch fire -- into a literary genre, a tragedy. As an imaginative thinker, a teller of stories, Maclean's writings consistently suggest that "life sometimes takes on the shape of art" (144). In our old age, Maclean would assert, our lives consist of our memories, the "short semi-humorous comedies," "long certain tragedies," "springtime lyrics," and "limericks" (144). Maclean views the memories of these experiences as essential and inevitable. Of the various literary forms Maclean identifies, however, he asserts that tragedy, in addition to being the most demanding of literary forms, is "generally regarded as the most *composed* art form" (emphasis added 145). Subsequently, Maclean's primary imaginative demand was to impose/compose an order/design on the history of the catastrophe. He sought to find some shape, form, and design in a world that, at times, appears "cockeyed" (126). If he failed, the effort would yield a text amounting to little more than another inconsequential fire report;

¹³ If it were enough to do this, Maclean would ignore Aristotle's precepts regarding tragedy. Maclean uses the word "tragedy" and "tragic" 139 times in *Young Men and Fire*.

however, if he succeeded, his work would transform the historical catastrophe to a tragedy.¹⁴ Through this transformation, Maclean would rescue from the ashes an historical event long forgotten by all but a few and elevate it to a much higher, transcendent plane, the realm of art, which at its best is nearly always redemptive and eternal.

Maclean knew the purpose of tragedy is to arouse pity and fear and to produce in the audience a *catharsis* of these emotions. Steeped in the Aristotelian tradition, Maclean's composition and design reflect these early, central tenets of tragedy as first defined by Aristotle. The text, divided into three parts, reflects Aristotle's definition of a tragedy as being complete or whole by having a beginning, middle, and an end. Furthermore, Maclean arouses fear and pity in his readers through *hubris*, spectacle, and structure (incidents) in his telling of the Mann Gulch fire of 1949.

Although tragedy takes many forms, it almost always must depict *hubris*, an overwhelming sense of pride or

¹⁴ See Robert M. Utley's "Professor Maclean and General Custer." Maclean had failed once already. His effort to produce a text on General Custer and Little Bighorn never came to fruition. For more than a decade, Maclean tried "to do something on Custer" (75).

insolence that results in the misfortune of the protagonist of a tragedy. In Part One of *Young Men and Fire*, Maclean introduces this essential element of tragedy in the collective character and personality of the Smokejumpers as an organization. As a fraternal unit, Maclean associates them with "Shriners" and "Knight Templars" (28); they are a highly select group of adventurers: young, fit, tough, and "thought to be a little crazy" (28). Maclean views the crew itself as this tragedy's tragic hero, for within two hours of stepping into the sky above Mann Gulch, twelve of the fifteen were dead or mortally burned: "It should be clear," asserts Maclean, "that this tragedy is not a classical tragedy of a monumental individual crossing the sword of his will with the sword of destiny. It is a tragedy of a crew, its flaws and grandeurs largely those of the Smokejumpers" (28-29). Maclean depicts the crew's character and personality as being marked by excessive pride. They would often boast of digging a trench around every fire they jumped on and containing it by ten o'clock the next morning. This excessive pride results, in part, in the crew's demise, for as Maclean so deftly puts it: "They were still so young they hadn't learned to count the odds and to sense they might owe the universe a tragedy"

(19). *Hubris* is not the sole cause of the Mann Gulch fire tragedy, or of any other modern tragedy, according to Maclean. He carefully reminds readers that in modern tragedy "you have to watch out for little details rather than big flaws" (56). No shortage of other little details compound the *hubris* of the Smokejumpers: the crew's radio is destroyed upon impact, high winds lead to the crew and supplies being scattered over a greater area than anticipated, not to mention the record heat and topography and fuel content of Mann Gulch. When all of this converges, it results in the blowup of Mann Gulch and one of the deadliest days in the history of the U.S. Forest Service.

In the composition of tragedy, Maclean also relied on another of Aristotle's ideas: the notion of spectacle. Simply put, spectacle is a large scene or event that is lavish in detail, unusual, or striking. It is usually used by the writer of tragedy to create a spectacular effect; in drama and cinematography, this effect relies heavily upon the visual. As a writer, Maclean recognized that the Mann Gulch fire possessed the potential for spectacle and leveraged several scenes for precisely that reason. Hollywood recognized this potential for spectacle as well,

producing *Red Skies of Montana* in February of 1952.

Starring Richard Widmark, Constance Smith, Jeffrey Hunter, and Richard Boone, the 20th-Century production was filmed on location in Missoula at the Smokejumpers' training facility. Hollywood takes predictable liberties and changes the ending; the crew, heeding its foreman, lies down in the ashes of the escape fire and all survive.¹⁵

One example of Maclean crafting a spectacular scene comes in Chapter 5 in the rendering of Wag Dodge setting his escape fire. The notion of the crew foreman deliberately setting his own fire in front of an oncoming one is unusually striking, but Maclean's crafting of the scene is powerful, for he recounts it twenty-nine years later on site through the eyes and words of Rumsey and Sallee, the only two living survivors. Although Rumsey was fixated on reaching the ridge and the safety he hoped it would represent, he says, "I remember thinking that that was a very good idea, but I don't remember what I thought it was good for. . . . I kept thinking the ridge -- if I can make it. On the ridge I will be safe" (74).

¹⁵ See O. Alan Weltzien's "Norman Maclean and Laird Robinson: A Tale of Two Research Partners." Apparently, Hollywood was interested in producing a film based on *Young Men and Fire*. This time, Warner Brothers, not 20th Century, had pursued "an intended movie adaptation" (51).

Similarly, Sallee's account is fraught with lavish confusion: "I saw him [Dodge] bend over and light a fire with a match. . . . With the fire almost at our back, what the hell is the boss doing lighting another fire in front of us?" (74). The spectacle of watching the crew foreman playing with a box of gopher matches in dry tinder amid an oncoming six-hundred-foot wall of fire is an extraordinary scene. Maclean records that Sallee thought Dodge "must have gone nuts" (75), yet the end of this scene, marking the end of the chapter, reaches a final, poignant crescendo: "A few minutes later, his fire became more spectacular still, when Sallee, having reached the top of the ridge, looked back and saw the foreman enter his own fire and lie down in its hot ashes to let the main fire pass over him" (75). As Maclean notes, the escape fire has its literary precedent in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Prairie* (1827), wherein Natty Bumppo, nearing the end of his life, lights a similar advance escape fire and successfully ushers his party to safety as the raging prairie burns around the ashes of his controlled blaze.¹⁶ Addressing the party, Natty wisely counsels them that "It is time to be

¹⁶ Maclean errs, however, in his recollection of Cooper's novel. The scene occurs not in Chapter XIII, but much later in chapter XXIII.

doing. . . . it is time to leave off books and moanings and to be doing" (Cooper 247). Maclean's presentation of Dodge's character is similar to that of Cooper's Natty. Dodge was a skilled, practical man of the woods who worked with his hands; however, his fire differed from Natty's. Dodge had no time to let his fire burn out; after his crew ignored his orders, he soaked his handkerchief in water, covered his mouth, and lay down.

Although Dodge's setting of the escape fire -- his lying down and rising from his own ashes -- truly belongs to the realm of spectacle, Rumsey and Sallee passing through the hole in the reef/ridge seems an equally extraordinary feat fraught with the spectacle deserving of tragedy. Maclean's rendering of it is intended to suggest a rebirth has taken place as both men leave the world of the dead for a new life among the living. Similarly, Sallee's subsequent return into Mann Gulch later that night with Ranger Jansson to look for survivors is presented as a nightmarish word picture of a burned-out world:

It would not be exact to say that they were descending into the valley of death, because there was practically nothing left standing to cast a shadow. Since dead trees occasionally

exploded and then subsided weakly into dying flames, perhaps it would be more exact to say they were descending into the valley of the candles of death. Rumsey speaks of the night as a "pincushion of fire." (118)

Ultimately, *hubris* and spectacle do not account for the cumulative effect *Young Men and Fire* has on its readers. It is the powerful purgation of emotion, the *catharsis*, that one experiences walking alongside the Smokejumpers, witnessing the stations of the cross and experiencing the death of the elite: the young, strong, and proud. In whatever form the tragic impulse takes its expression, Maclean successfully celebrates courage and dignity in the face of defeat and attempts to portray the grandeur of the human spirit, extending the reach of tragedy to his life and the reader's. Specifically, in Part Three of the text readers witness this conflation and *catharsis*. Citing the *Book of Common Prayer*, Maclean projects his pathos onto those and all unfulfilled lives begging to be delivered from sudden death: "Good Lord, deliver us. . . . Good Lord, deliver us" (298). Then, further drawing on Christian mythology, Maclean draws a parallel between the young men and the Christ:

The most eloquent expression of this cry was made by a young man who came from the sky and returned to it and who, while on earth, knew he was alone and beyond all other men, and who, when he died, died on a hill: "About the ninth hour he cried with a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" ("My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?") (299)

Maclean's artistry begins to resonate when this and other passages appear elsewhere in Part Three. In his telling of the story, Maclean becomes a part of it; he has "carried part of the purgation of its tragedy" (87), and the reader has likewise become involved, experiencing the fear and the pity. In short, Maclean wrestles the catastrophe (the history), and transforms it into tragedy (art). In doing so, he has immortalized the lives lost in the Mann Gulch fire tragedy. Unlike before, the Smokejumpers no longer "need someone to remember them" (102). With the final passage of the text, Maclean's work, like Tennyson's "Ulysses," is complete:

Among other things, it was important to me, as an exercise for old age, to enlarge my knowledge and spirit so I could accompany young men whose lives

I might have led on their way to death. I have climbed where they climbed, and in my time I have lived to get a better understanding of myself and those close to me, many of them now dead.

Perhaps it is not odd, at the end of this tragedy where nothing much was left of the elite who came from the sky but courage struggling for oxygen, that I have often found myself thinking of my wife on her brave and lonely way to death. (300-301)

As a writer of tragedy, Maclean worked to achieve some understanding of the tragedies of his life -- his brother's murder and the death of twelve Smokejumpers. In the former, Maclean's understanding is limited, but he gracefully accepts that the human condition often must accept this diminished state. The human heart can "love completely without complete understanding" (103). In the case of the latter, Maclean expresses his understanding, reducing it to a simple poem reverberating for the world, for all the victims of Mann Gulch to hear: "Now we know, now we know" (207). As representatives of his tragic vision, *A River Runs through It* and *Young Men and Fire* exemplify an idea Maclean asserted as an essential truth,

that "at times life takes on the shape of art and that the remembered remnants of these moments are largely what we come to mean by life" (144). Despite the fact that Maclean's tragedies differ in substantive ways, for Paul's destruction is predictable, and the Mann Gulch fire is not, they lead to *catharsis*, which, in the end, is nearly always as redemptive and purifying as Maclean's principal elements: water and fire. Finally, Maclean's tragic vision -- as it is portrayed in *A River Runs through It* and *Young Men and Fire* -- suggests that the effect of tragedy upon the emotions is not merely something that took place in a former age, or among the Greeks alone; it may be observed at all times, and in virtually all persons. His theme is universal.

CHAPTER IV

MACLEAN AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

Dan McAdams begins his study *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myth and the Making of the Self* with an assertion Maclean would most likely find instructive: "If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, then I must come to know my own story" (11). Although McAdams's research primarily focuses on how human beings construct and revise narrative identities throughout their lives, it likewise provides insight into other forms of narrative -- the stories we read. In a sense, they too become part of our evolving personal identities.

Considering the era in which Maclean taught, it is not at all surprising that he was heavily influenced by those writers who then anchored the American literary canon. These major writers -- Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, and later, Hemingway -- were considered some of the major voices of American literature. Maclean knew their works intimately and his own writing may be regarded as a response to the issues these writers foregrounded.

For nearly thirty years, the most recognizable trend in American literary studies has arguably been the de-

centering/de-stabalization of the literary canon. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, a heightened interest in multi-culturalism, women's studies, and gay and lesbian studies has done much to transform the canon from that which it once was -- a body of work produced by writers who were predominantly privileged, white, heterosexual, and male. The result of this trend, by and large, has been positive, for by expanding the boundaries of the literary canon the experiences of previously marginalized factions of American culture have been brought to the fore. In fact, the names and texts of many previously devalued voices are now found in the table of contents of most American literature anthologies alongside those who have long been inscribed there. For some critics, however, merely redefining the canonical boundaries has not proved sufficient. Gregory S. Jay, for example, argues for a complete dismantling of the American literary canon, suggesting that college and university instructors abandon the long-established approach to teaching American literature using a schema based on historical/literary periods or themes.¹ As an alternative, Jay presents an

¹ See Gregory S. Jay's "The End of American Literature: Toward a Multicultural Practice" 264-81.

organizational model based on "a series of problematics" (277).² With the critical pendulum in sway, one may wonder if the literary canon has not gone the way of the Kentucky Cavefish, whose eyes, readers of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* may recall, have outlived their usefulness and all but disappeared.³ Has the American literary canon similarly outlived its usefulness, or does it not provide a useful context against which one may read certain American writers?

In the case of Norman Maclean, what has been referred to as the American tradition in literature (the body of work Jay would suggest needs "ending") remains a useful approach to reading and teaching his work, especially as one considers his "problem of identity." More than thirty years after Maclean published *A River Runs through It and*

² For more on periodization issues, see Charlene Avallone's "What American Renaissance? The Gendered Genealogy of a Critical Discourse." Of equal use and interest is the chapter "Theoretical Premises" in Lawrence Buell's *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution through Renaissance*. Buell asserts, "Periodization is a necessary evil of all historical study . . . yet boundaries and degree of internal coherence are notoriously hard to specify" (11).

³ See Chapter X of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. Although Wharton's metaphor of the Kentucky Cavefish appears constructed to illuminate the perilous social conventions Newland Archer navigates, it works well as a metaphor for the literary canon, which is itself a convention.

Other Stories (1976), his fiction still seems peculiarly out of tune with the literary climate of its time. The publication history of the text, an often told story, certainly suggests as much. Leading publishing houses rejected Maclean's manuscript time and again. "These stories," one publisher wrote with dismay, "have trees in them" (Maclean ix). Maclean's novella and the two shorter stories that follow it were by no means what the age demanded: the fiction of Barth, Pynchon, and DeLillo would help shape the post-modern perspective in contemporary American fiction. As such, aspects of Maclean's fiction suggest he might be better understood by reading him juxtaposed alongside writers associated with previous literary periods; specifically, one can readily identify Emersonian and Thoreauvian principles at work in his fiction, and the darkness that shades Melville's *Moby-Dick* seems at times to extend itself, covering *Young Men and Fire*, for both works examine the destructive forces of the universe and the limitations of the human condition. An additional analysis -- an approach that positions Maclean's *A River Runs through It* against some of the short fiction of Ernest Hemingway -- merits consideration as well.⁴

⁴ My approach departs from those of Wendell Berry and Harold

The critical discussion exploring the American literary canon and Maclean's work is, as one might predict, substantial, although certainly not complete. Those that identify the similarities between Maclean and the nineteenth-century writers traditionally associated with the American romanticism/realism periods include Mary Clearman Blew's "Mo-Nah-Se-Tah, the Whore, and the Three Scottish Women." This analysis explores Maclean's treatment of women in *A River Runs through It and Other Short Stories*. Blew argues that Monasetah typifies many of the dangerous women presented in Cooper, Hawthorne, Poe, and Twain, "sensual and destructive" (191). Kathleen Boardman's "Reading the River: Mark Twain, Ann Zwinger, and Norman Maclean" offers an insightful discussion of Maclean as a writer whose depiction of the river resembles other American writers: Mark Twain and Ann Zwinger. Boardman notes how characters from these authors' texts interact with, or "read," the river. In doing so, the individual's experience on the river creates a meaningful, imaginative space, one that exists outside of culture and transcends human time. Equally insightful is George F. Grattan's "Climbing Back into the Tree: Art, Nature, and Theology in

Simonson, both of whom offer readings of Maclean and Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River."

A River Runs through It." Grattan suggests that nature remains the sacred place where theology and artistry converge in transcendental moments of beauty and, perhaps, salvation. He positions his discussion of *A River Runs through It* against Emerson, Thoreau, and Edward Abbey, noting the similarities and differences among this tradition of writers whose interactions with nature transfigure them. Grattan's central premise is that man's fall from grace can be reversed by returning to nature through respecting it and observing it; however, he correctly notes that Maclean's text also dramatizes how nature may deny us these transcendental moments. In addition, Walter Hesford's "Fishing for the Words of Life: Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*" deals with Maclean as a writer faithful to the traditions of family and fishing. Hesford places Maclean within the piscatory literary tradition of Izaak Walton and Thoreau.

Emerson and Maclean

In the simplest yet most instructive manner, readers may do well to recall that Emerson and Maclean were men descended from clerical stock: Emerson's father was a Unitarian minister and Maclean's father was a Presbyterian

minister. Similarly, as both men matured, each eventually denounced the strict orthodoxy of their respective sectarian creeds, adopting instead a more progressive faith, one deeply rooted in intuition and individualism.⁵ Still another important connection between Emerson and Maclean remains the inspiration each found within the natural world -- amid field and stream. With this in mind, Emerson's "Self-Reliance" (1841) and *Nature* (1836) provide readers a most apt, useful context against which they may better approach Maclean's novella *A River Runs through It*.

Emerson's "Self-Reliance" (1841) marks the high tide of his prose; in it, he articulates ideas long considered central to his system of thought: the doctrines of self-reliance and intellectual independence, to name two. When readers have as a touchstone Emerson's ideas concerning non-conformity, they may have a greater appreciation for Maclean's novella. This is not to say the novella cannot

⁵ See Maclean, Norman. Interview. *The Best of NPR: Writers on Writing*. In this interview with Alex Chadwick from 1985, Maclean discusses religion: "I don't have any conventional religion left," said Maclean. Instead, Maclean identifies for Chadwick what he refers to as "spots of time," moments in life that are "exquisite, beautiful, true and moving," that "seem planned or plotted by an author." It would be a mistake, though, to suggest that Maclean believed God is the author ordering such moments. He remains tentative regarding the "design" of his life, unsure if it is "something I make up or in the thing itself, or something in between."

be read without an understanding of Emerson's work, for non-conformity in writings associated with North America certainly predate Emerson. Still, if Emerson is "the cow from which the rest drew their milk," as F.O. Matthiessen asserts in *American Renaissance*, then one may do well to consider the nourishment Maclean derived from Emerson (xii).⁶

As Walter Fuller Taylor suggests, Emerson's philosophical outlook was anything but systematic (136). Taylor notes that Emerson's essays were closer to the "lay sermon," essentially derived from his Lyceum lectures and further augmented by notes derived from his journal. Subsequently, Emerson's essays achieve their power, not cumulatively, but rather, at the sentence level.⁷ With this in mind, two seminal sentences from Emerson's essay bear directly on the character of Paul in *A River Runs through It*. The first of these comes early in the essay: "Whoso

⁶ While it is not fashionable to esteem Matthiessen, his contribution and words are still instructive for academic and common readers. In *American Renaissance*, he asserts "It is well to remember that although literature reflects an age, it also illuminates it He does not live by trends alone; he reads books, whether of the present or the past, because they have an immediate life of their own" (x).

⁷ According to Taylor, Emerson's "unit of composition is not the whole lecture, nor even the paragraphs, but the individual sentence" (140).

would be a man, must be a nonconformist" (149). In practically every aspect of his character, Paul exudes this central edict of Emerson's. Paul's non-conformity is evident in nearly everything he undertakes; he defiantly shuns traditions of his family and society. The most obvious example, of course, is identifiable in Paul's highly unorthodox "shadow casting." The narrator acknowledges, however, that Paul from his youth possesses "genius" and "plenty of self-confidence" (5), attributes that Emerson likewise repeatedly champions. Only upon breaking from the metronome-regularity of the four-count "Presbyterian style" (4), casting technique does Paul become "a master of an art" (6), "a major artist" (28) capable of glorifying the canyons with "beauty, rhythm, and color" (22).

Paul's nonconformity goes beyond his casting technique, however. It is discernible in his excessive gambling and chronic drinking, yet, more significantly, it is confirmed in his relationship with Monasetah, the "half-breed Indian he goes with" (24). In the aftermath of the bar-room brawl that erupts after a racial slur is hurled toward Paul and Monasetah, the bigot who yells "Wahoo," tells the police desk sergeant: "Jesus, all I meant is that

it is funny to go out with an Indian. It was just a joke" (24). Paul's unique brand of self-reliance equips him with the moral courage and fortitude to see beyond the dominant culture's prevailing, pervasive racism toward the Native American.⁸ Unfortunately, Paul experiences the fate of most nonconformists, for nonconformity does not come without its price, and the price is almost certainly high. Emerson, however, cautions his reader, reminding him of this consequence: "For nonconformity, the world whips you with its displeasure" (152). Paul's brutal murder reminds readers of this truth. It is important to note, though, that Emerson does not suggest his reader shrink from the consequences of intellectual, creative, or moral self-reliance. If anything, he inspires his reader, in part, by the profound statement: "To be great is to be misunderstood" (153). Maclean's readers should ponder this precept in particular, for the narrator repeatedly castigates himself for his inability to understand his brother.⁹

⁸ Monasetah, a half-breed who does not live on the reservation, "had to live out by the city limits" (27). There, they "pitched camp near either the slaughterhouse or the dump" (27).

⁹ See pages 28, 47, 90, 93, 95, 102, 103, 104, et al. Maclean's novella can quite easily be viewed as an

For Emerson, a transcendentalist, nature was a part of the divine. As with many of his contemporaries, Emerson maintained that the individual's soul was part and parcel of the bird, the flower, the blade of grass, the stars, and the ocean. All material forms were merely manifestations of the spiritual realm. Thus, when one is in nature, one is dwelling with the divine. Consider, for example, Emerson's assertion in *Nature* (1836): "The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them" (24). Likewise, when Maclean's narrator treads afoot in the woods or wades waist-deep across the Big Blackfoot River, he is administered the soothing balm of the natural world, which is divine. He inhabits "a world perfect and apart" (37), where "eternity is compressed into a moment" (44), and, ultimately, "all things merge into one" (104). Maclean's collapsing of all entities and eternities into one, it seems, evokes Emerson's notion of

exploration into the limitations of human understanding, particularly as it applies to inter-relationships. Part of Paul's "genius" and/or "beauty" is undeniably rooted in the narrator's inability to understand him. While Emerson suggests to be great is to be misunderstood, one detects that alienation may accompany any accolades. This is the point Emerson makes, and it seems applicable in the case of Maclean's novella, too.

the Oversoul. In addition, an often quoted passage from *Nature* illustrates the Emersonian texture of Maclean's novella:

In the woods we return to reason and faith.
There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,
-- no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes),
which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare
ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air and
uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism
vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am
nothing; I see all, the currents of the Universal
Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel
of God. (24)

This passage is quoted at length for it is -- at base -- central to Emersonian and transcendentalist thought; however, its further importance can be recognized by readers approaching *A River Runs through It* as a text that possesses distinct Emersonian qualities. Two scenes from the novella serve to illustrate. The first of these scenes comes early in the text as Maclean's narrator Norman watches and describes Paul's "shadow casting" on the Big Blackfoot River:

Then he steadied himself and began to cast
and the whole world turned to water.

Below him was the multitudinous river, and,
where the rock had parted it around him, big-
grained vapor rose. The mini-molecules of water
left in the wake of his line made momentary loops
of gossamer, disappearing so rapidly in the
rising big-grained vapor that they had to be
retained in memory to be visualized as loops.
The spray emanating from him was finer-grained
still and enclosed him in a halo of himself. The
halo of himself was always there and always
disappearing, as if he were candlelight
flickering about three inches from himself. The
images of himself and his line kept disappearing
into the rising vapors of the river, which
continually circled to the tops of the cliffs
where, after becoming a wreath in the wind, they
became rays of the sun. (20)

This exceptionally well wrought passage resonates a
transcendental moment of "transparent eyeball" proportion.
Paul appears simultaneously terrestrial (standing on the
rock) and celestial (ascending through concentric rings of

vapor). His "mean egotism" vanishes as he flickers like a candle -- appearing and disappearing into ascending vaporous mist. In fact, one might argue that this passage is nothing short of an apotheosis of sorts; consider the concentric circles of water vapor that form a halo for Paul as he ascends to the heavens. This reading may be further enforced by what happens immediately following this description. A husband and wife, Maclean's narrator goes on to report, unwittingly appear while Paul undergoes this apotheosis: "She [the wife] kept watching while groping behind her to smooth out some pine needles to sit on. 'My, my!' she said. Her husband stopped and stood and said, 'Jesus.' Every now and then he said, 'Jesus.' Each time his wife nodded" (22). While Paul is by no means a wholly Christ-like figure -- his numerous transgressions argue against such a reading -- he shares similar qualities and a similar fate; he is a non-conformist, a radical who is beaten and destroyed at the height of his strength.

A second passage from Maclean's novella that echoes the "transparent eyeball" passage from Emerson's *Nature* comes at the end of the text. As one recalls, Emerson believes that when he is amid the woods he feels that nothing can harm him: "I feel," Emerson argues, "that

nothing can befall me in life -- no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes) which nature cannot repair" (24).

This is a truly remarkable assertion, one to which less idealistic readers would have difficulty subscribing.

Unequivocally, the greatest calamity in Maclean's life was the murder of his brother whom he could neither understand nor, in the end, help. Nothing can erode the grief.

Intellectual and academic achievements will not assuage Maclean's profound loss; neither can the religion of his youth.

Now nearly all those I loved and did not understand when I was young are dead, but I still reach out to them.

Of course, now I am too old to be much of a fisherman, and now of course I usually fish the big waters alone, although some friends think I shouldn't. Like many fly-fishermen in western Montana where the summer days are Arctic in length, I often do not start fishing until the cool of the evening. Then in the Arctic half-light of the canyon, all existence fades to a being with my soul and memories and the sounds of

the Big Blackfoot River and a four-count rhythm
and the hope that a fish will rise. (104)

In these closing lines, the narrator affirms Emerson's postulation that there is no human calamity that nature cannot heal. Wading alone in the restorative waters of the Big Blackfoot River, Maclean's soul receives the healing balm of nature -- of the divine.¹⁰ Earlier in the text, the narrator refers to the Big Blackfoot river as his "family's river, a part of us" (13), so as he immerses himself in the water, he does, in fact, commune both with those he loved and did not understand and with the divine.

Another concept of Emerson's that appears in *Nature* and *A River Runs through It* is that of Beauty. Readers of Maclean's novella would do well to notice Maclean placing a similar emphasis on Beauty.¹¹ In his essay, Emerson presents three aspects of Beauty to the reader: (1) Beauty is the delight beheld in "simple perception of natural forms" (27); (2) Beauty is "the presence of a higher, namely divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy" (28); and (3) Beauty "becomes an object of the intellect"

¹⁰ See William Cullen Bryant's "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood" (1817) for a similar expression of Nature's healing powers.

¹¹ Maclean uses the terms "beauty or "beautiful" twenty-two times in the novella.

(30). Of these three, Maclean's concept of Beauty predominantly suggests Emerson's first aspect -- the delight held in the perception of natural forms. Early in the text, Maclean confesses that his Scottish father, "unlike many Presbyterians . . . often used the word 'beautiful'" (2). The Maclean boys are taught by their father that they can draw nearer to God -- achieving power and beauty -- by learning to detect His designs and rhythms manifest in nature (2).

An illustration of Emerson's ideas concerning Beauty in Maclean's text can be found in the instruction the Reverend Maclean gives his sons on the four-count rhythm of fly casting. If it is an "art," as the Reverend refers to it repeatedly (4), then it is, as Norman states, "functional" (4), but it is not Beautiful. As Paul matures, his artistry blossoms, evidenced here as Norman relates the beauty of Paul's "shadow casting" technique:

Rhythm was just as important as color and just as complicated. It was one rhythm superimposed upon another, our father's four-count rhythm of the line and wrist being still the base rhythm. But superimposed upon it was the piston two count of

his arm and the long over-riding four count of the completed figure eight of his reversed loop.

(22)

Paul's mastery of his art comes only as a result of his departing from the strict conventions of his father's casting technique. "Long ago," the narrator tells readers, "he [Paul] had gone far beyond my father's wrist casting" (21). The consequence of this is that he achieves mastery of his art, achieving Beauty. When the narrator and others behold Paul's "shadow casting," they delight in the perception of natural forms; surely, the artful display of rhythm, colors, and geometric shapes suggests as much. In what would be the last fish Norman and his father witness Paul catch, readers again detect the Emersonian aspect of Beauty in the culmination of his performance: "He is beautiful," the Reverend Maclean states (100); furthermore, as a consequence of Paul mastering his art, he, in effect, merges with it, becoming a work of art himself. The narrator remembers this last day fishing with his brother, rendering him as such:

However, one closeup picture of him at the end of this day remains in my mind, as if fixed by some chemical bath. Usually just after he

finished fishing he had little to say unless he saw he could have fished better. Otherwise he merely smiled. Now flies danced around his hatband. Large drops of water ran from under his hat on his face and then into his lips when he smiled.

At the end of the day, then, I remember him both as a distant abstraction in artistry and as a closeup in water and laughter. (101)

The artist becomes his art; the mean ego has vanished, and what little remains known about Paul befuddles both father and brother. After the narrator relates what little he knows about the murder beyond the facts that Paul was beaten to death by the butt of a revolver and his body dumped in an alley, the Reverend Maclean relies on the concept of Beauty to express the ineffable. Queried by his father, Norman can offer not much by way of reconciliation:

"I've said I told you all I know. If you push me far enough, all I really know is that he was a fine fisherman."

"You know more than that," my father said. "He was beautiful."

"Yes, I said, "He was beautiful. He should have been -- you taught him. (103)

This last articulation of "beautiful" is qualitatively different than Emerson's first aspect of Beauty. This exchange between the Reverend Maclean and Norman evokes Emerson's second aspect of Beauty, for readers may detect that the beauty expressed here transcends the natural world. Instead, one may view this as an expression of Emerson's second aspect of Beauty, for one here detects that Paul's memory occupies "the presence of a higher, namely divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy." Here, in the closing lines of Maclean's novella, the memory of Paul transcends natural form; in short, the Reverend Maclean and Norman's memory of Paul becomes eternal and thus, Beautiful.

Finally, *A River Runs through It* is rife with examples of Emerson's third aspect of Beauty, wherein Beauty becomes an object of the intellect. In this final viewpoint, Emerson writes that ultimately Beauty has relation to the operation of the individual's working mind:

Beside the relation of things to virtue, they [natural forms] have a relation to thought. The intellect searches out the absolute order of

things as they stand in the mind of God, and without the colors of affection The beauty of nature re-forms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation. (30)

This passage illuminates Maclean's method of rendering the natural world: his interactions and observations of it.¹² Two scenes illustrate this notion and, more importantly, define an essential contrast between Norman and Paul. The first of these scenes comes as Norman analyzes the anatomy of the river laid bare. In this scene, Norman is enraptured, or "delighted," by the beauty of the river and its natural form; he, "the watcher," and the "heat mirages" dance together with the river until they become one (61). However, Maclean's eye for Beauty modulates as he lays bare "the anatomy of a river" (61). The Beauty of the dry channel where the river had once run provokes him to rational thought, Emerson's third aspect of Beauty:

In death it [the dry channel] had its pattern,
and we can hope for as much. Its overall pattern

¹² This passage informs Maclean's writings far beyond his novella; readers repeatedly witness Maclean reasoning inductively and deductively throughout his essays, other stories, and *Young Men and Fire*.

was the favorite serpentine curve of the artist sketched on the valley from the hill to the last hill I could see on the other side. But internally it was made of sharp angles. It ran seemingly straight for a while, turned abruptly, then ran smooth again, then met another obstacle, again was turned sharply and again ran smoothly. Straight lines that couldn't be exact straight lines and angles that couldn't have been exact right angles became the artist's most beautiful curve and swept from here across the valley to where it could no longer be seen. (62)

The anatomy of the river, which lies beneath its fluid surface, is that which stimulates the narrator's intellect. He analyzes the harsh geometry of its geologic formation that creates the beauty of the serpentine river. In addition, this passage functions as an effective metaphor for the life and death of Maclean's brother, for as he states just prior to this, "part of the way to come to know a thing is through its death" (61). Another scene, one involving Paul, deserves consideration, for it likewise illustrates Emerson's notion that Beauty should bear relation to human thought. In an exchange between Norman

and Paul, Paul explains the thought process that leads him to fishing successfully a hole that Norman does not:

"Then I knew," he said, "if there were flies in this hole they had to come from the hole above that's in the sunlight where there's enough heat to make them hatch."

"After that, I should have seen them dead in the water. Since I couldn't see them dead in the water, I knew they had to be at least six or seven inches under the water where I couldn't see them. So that's where I fished." (93)

Paul's exchange with Norman represents a sophisticated line of thought, one that embodies Emerson's third aspect of Beauty. One assuredly detects Paul's intellect searching out "the absolute order of things as they stand in the mind of God, and without the colors of affection" and nature reformulating itself in his mind. This intellectual thought process is certainly not "barren contemplation." To reiterate, Paul is repeatedly referred to as "beautiful" by Maclean's narrator and the Reverend Maclean, and Emerson's ideas regarding Beauty as articulated in *Nature*, present a unique lens through which readers may view Beauty in Maclean's text.

Thoreau and Maclean

Certainly there must be more to connect Maclean to the life and work of Henry David Thoreau than what presents itself as obvious: a shared, deep affinity for nature.¹³ In particular, one significant tie between both writers is the profound, personal loss each writer experienced through the premature death of their brothers. In 1839, Thoreau and his brother John made a two-week excursion in a rowboat beginning in the waters of the Concord River. After his brother's death in 1842, Thoreau dedicated himself to writing a memorial tribute to John, and the voyage they undertook provided apt fodder.¹⁴ It was not until 1845, however, the year that he went to live at Walden, that Thoreau began writing his memoir in earnest. The resulting work, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), stands as Thoreau's elegy written to commemorate his

¹³ The critical consensus suggests that both Maclean's *A River Runs through It* and Thoreau's *Walden* extol the beauty of the natural world and present Nature as a benevolent force capable of spiritually regenerating the individual.

¹⁴ On New Year's Day in 1842, Thoreau's brother John cut his finger while stropping a razor; he lingered eleven days during which he suffered severe delirium and spasms. John would die in the arms of his brother. In 1938, of course, Paul Maclean was murdered in Chicago. I see these events as formative artistic wounds that altered the course of both men's lives and writings.

brother's life.¹⁵ Similarly, *A River Runs through It* possesses a decidedly elegiac quality to it although Maclean's grief, unlike Thoreau's, would take decades, not years, to germinate and take shape in prose. Consider how fitting Thoreau's epigram for *A Week* would be for Maclean's novella: "Where'er thou sail'st who sailed with me / Though now thou climbest loftier mounts, / And fairer rivers dost ascend. / Be thou my Muse, my Brother." The filial affection uttered here might easily be mistaken for Maclean's own expression.

While readers may note similarities between Thoreau and Maclean beyond the elegiac quality of their texts, or their effective use of the river as a metaphor for the spiritual self, it is a related notion, a shared belief that the act of fishing signifies a solemn, sacred act that suggests Maclean is working within the same tradition as Thoreau. Early on in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Thoreau witnesses a man late in the afternoon wading the waters of the Concord, "abiding his luck" (21). As Thoreau and his brother silently slip out of sight from their townsmen, the image of this solitary angler brings to

¹⁵ Although the excursion took two full weeks, Thoreau condensed the trip into one week, crafting a chapter for each day of the week. Maclean likewise collapses time for artistic purposes in his novella.

the surface a memory in Thoreau's mind, another angler, an "old brown-coated man who was the Walton of this stream"

(22).¹⁶ Thoreau describes him thus:

A straight old man he was who took his way in silence through the meadows, having passed the period of communication with his fellows; his old experienced coat hanging long and straight and brown as the yellow pine bark, glittering with so much smothered sunlight, if you stood near enough, no work of art but naturalized at length.

(23)

Here, Thoreau's rendering of a weathered angler, who moves "amid pads and the gray willows" (23), approximates Maclean's aged narrator at the close of the novella. He, too, is "too old to be much of a fisherman" and "fishes alone" in the "half-light of the canyon" (104). Those he loved and did not understand are dead though he still seeks communion with them. Thoreau's angler "haunts" the river, appearing to Thoreau "full of incommunicable thoughts" and "weighed down with aged thoughts" (23). Maclean's narrator, readers will note, is similarly weighed down,

¹⁶ The reference here is to Izaak Walton (1593-1683). Maclean likewise mentions *The Compleate Angler* (1653). See Walter Hesford's "Fishing for the Words of Life: Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*" for a discussion.

"haunted by waters," the "memories and sounds" of the Big Blackfoot River (104).

Thoreau, musing on this long-deceased, brown-coated angler, offers this final observation regarding the fisherman: "His fishing was not a sport, not solely a means of subsistence, but a sort of solemn sacrament and withdrawal from the world, just as the aged read their bibles" (24).¹⁷ This passage, unequivocally, seems analogous to several scenes the reader finds in Maclean. The narrator in *A River Runs through It* concedes early on that fishing in the Maclean family is likewise not a sport, but an art. Fun and recreation are not necessarily associated with the act of fishing, nor should they be in Maclean's schema. It is a solemn, sacred act. There is "no clear line between religion and fly-fishing" (1). The narrator recalls how if his father had his way that "nobody who did not know how to catch a fish would be allowed to disgrace a fish by catching him" (3). The narrator's family reveres fly-fishing and the fish caught, just as Thoreau does in his tribute to his brother. Maclean's narrator reminds readers time and again the privileged

¹⁷ See the chapter "Sunday" in *A Week on the Concord and the Merrimack Rivers*. Most readers would concur that Thoreau's viewpoint of religion is overtly more pantheistic than Maclean's.

position fly-fishing occupies in his family tradition; it is repeatedly portrayed as Thoreau renders it in *A Week*. According to the Reverend Maclean, "all good things -- trout as well as eternal salvation -- come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy" (94).

Finally, Thoreau's words regarding fishing resonate in one additional manner with those of Maclean's. Thoreau observes that fishing -- in addition to being solemn and sacred -- is "a withdrawal from the world" (24).

Throughout *A River Runs through It*, readers witness Maclean defining fishing similarly. To illustrate, with each step the narrator takes toward the river, he attempts to "leave the world behind" and "tries to make fishing a world perfect and apart" (37). He repeatedly concedes that which Thoreau would aver to be true: "Fishing is a world created apart from all others" (40). Thoreau and Maclean seem to suggest that inhabitants of this mythical realm may sound the depth of their souls. The angler may "stand somewhat apart" from himself, examine himself, and hope he may find answers to questions (42-43). Maclean sees this world as the poets do, possessing transitory moments, or "spots of time" (44). Within this world, the angler may "experience eternity compressed into a moment" (44). This realm,

however, as enchanting as it appears, remains fleeting, illusory. Either simply "the fish is gone" (44), breaking the constructed world apart, or the pastoral moment is spoiled by some other external force.

In *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Leo Marx offers an extended analysis of a pattern he identifies in the canon of American literature. These pastoral moments, as Marx refers to them, coalesce and, subsequently, are disrupted and vanquished by external forces:

The setting may be an island, or a hut beside a pond, or a raft floating down a river, or a secluded valley in the mountains, or a clearing between impenetrable walls of forest, or the beached skeleton of a whale - but whatever the specific details, certain general features of the pattern recur too often to be fortuitous. Most important is the sense of a sudden, shocking intruder upon a fantasy of idyllic satisfaction. It invariably is associated with crude, masculine aggressiveness (29)

One could argue that this recurring pattern is identifiable in Maclean as well, for it happens time and again to the

narrator. For example, when Neal and Old Rawhide show up to fish, it ruins the trip Norman and Paul take to the family cabin at Seeley Lake, which was supposed to be a retreat for the two brothers. The uninvited intruders arrive drunk, without rod or tackle, announcing that "Buster [Neal] wants to go fishing" (54-55). The result, of course, culminates in the defiling of the Maclean family sandbar (66-70). In fairness, it should be noted that the "world" that fishing creates may crumble as a result of less disturbing, profane intrusions, too. Consider "the rock treatment," Paul's good-natured way of keeping Norman from catching more fish than he is by throwing rocks in the pool, disrupting and scattering any fish (88-89). Norman is "feeling more perfect with every Rainbow [Trout]" he hooks (88).

Without looking, I knew it was my brother. It didn't happen often in this life, only when his fishing partner was catching fish and he couldn't. It was a sight, however rare, that he could not bear to watch. So he would spoil his partner's hole, even if it was his brother's.

(89)

While these "spots of time," or pastoral moments of perfection, coalesce and dissipate for Norman as he fishes, one may think of Thoreau's *Walden*, wherein Thoreau writes "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in" (66). In the sandy, shallow bottoms, Thoreau detects eternity (66). Maclean likewise accesses eternity fishing waters "cut by the world's great flood" that "run over the basement of time:" rocks speckled with "timeless raindrops" (104). Connections such as these, ones made between writers such as Thoreau and Maclean, result in a deeper appreciation and understanding of the writers and their texts.

Melville and Maclean

While Emerson and Thoreau have long occupied a place in the canon of American literature, contemporary Herman Melville's place among the literary pantheon came relatively late, certainly long after the author's death in 1891. In fact, the first doctoral dissertation on Melville was not completed until 1933, more than eighty years after the publication of *Moby-Dick* (1851), the work for which he is best known.¹⁸ This, in itself, is not unusual

¹⁸ Hugh Hetterington's doctoral dissertation submitted for publication at The University of Michigan in 1933 is considered the first.

considering that American literature as a discipline was not deemed worthy of study in American colleges and universities until late in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Still, it is peculiar to note that even the early histories of American literature overlooked Melville. In 1896, Brander Matthews's *An Introduction to the Study of American Literature* mentions Melville's *Typee*, but is quick to note that it is "not to be classed as fiction" (qtd. in Hubbell 60). Ruben Post Halleck's *History of American Literature* (1911), for example, makes no mention of Melville in the text proper. Halleck does, however, annex Melville in a "supplementary list of Eastern writers" near the end of his history devoted to "describe the greatest achievements in American literature from the earliest times to the present" (Halleck 5). In addition, Percy H. Boynton's history of American literature published in 1919 omits Melville.²⁰ This should illustrate that the canon has long been a fluid, dynamic entity capable of expanding its boundaries, and the vast amount of critical attention that Melville's corpus

¹⁹ See Joel Myerson's *The Transcendentalists: A Review of Research and Criticism*. Myerson traces the study of American literature at the college/university level to 1886 and Dartmouth professor Charles Richardson (13).

²⁰ See pages 57-62 of Jay B. Hubbell's *Who Are the Major American Writers* for a concise history of Melville's reputation as a writer.

has generated suggests his work continues to create interest and inquiry at all levels, even if not deemed "great" by previous generations. All of this is to say that readers who possess a familiarity with the American literary canon, specifically Melville's *Moby-Dick* and the criticism his text has generated, will benefit when approaching and considering Maclean's *Young Men and Fire*.

Some similarities between the early personal experiences of Melville and Maclean bear comparison. Long before Melville embarked on writing his sea fiction, he first went to sea himself, serving as a hand on numerous maritime expeditions. Unlike his contemporaries in the literary world, many of whom were of New England's pedigreed Brahmin caste, Melville maintained that the whale ship was his Harvard, his Yale. Without his gritty, first-hand experience and observation of life at sea and in remote, exotic ports of call, his writings would not possess the authenticity that characterizes them. Similarly, Maclean, who was homeschooled under his father's tutelage, began working summers in the logging camps at fifteen, entering a United States Forest Service depleted of its men during World War I ("Teaching and Storytelling" 90). Life in the logging camps and saw mills of western

Montana, it could be argued, were Maclean's Harvard and Yale, despite his subsequent academic achievements at Dartmouth College and the University of Chicago. His texts bear the mark of his youth and young adulthood in the same way that Melville's work does. Maclean received a significant, practical education -- not aboard a schooner in the South Pacific -- but by working in the Bitterroot Valley alongside Bill Bell, a notoriously tough Forest Service Ranger. "It was from Bill," Maclean told an audience in 1979, "that I learned about fire-fighting and perhaps even more about life" ("A Man I Met" 102). Once, for example, Maclean recalled Bell explaining to him the duties of a lookout. Bell told Maclean that when he spotted a fire, his job description and duties changed; he became a smoke chaser and was required to grab his pack and head for the fire. When Maclean asked what to do next, Bell told him to put it out and to run for help if he could not do so:

I asked, "Mr. Bell, how long do you stay on a fire before you run for help?" He then made an answer I have used many times since and in many situations in life. He said, "Before you run for help, stay on a fire twice as long as you think

you can't handle it alone." It's odd how many crises will cool off in life if you can only stand a double-dose of heat. ("A Man I Met" 102)

In a sense, Melville and Maclean were men whose lives were bifurcated, and their literary lives, their lives of arts and letters, drew upon these other lives they had lived, whether it was at sea or in the woods.

One approach to understanding the relevancy of the American literary canon to Maclean, especially Melville's *Moby-Dick*, is to consider several points of intersection between Melville's masterpiece and Maclean's *Young Men and Fire*. These must extend beyond that which is perhaps most evident: both are stories of natural phenomena (a whale, fire) that destroy the men who confront them. While many intersections exist, three seem particularly useful: attitudes toward the universe, fire, and fate. First, one perceives in both texts a prevailing skepticism regarding the benevolence of the universe. Melville did not possess the optimism of his transcendentalist contemporaries. Melville's story, as Charles Child Walcutt notes, "questions the orthodox Christian and Transcendental belief in the essential goodness of the universe and in the idea

of progress" (305).²¹ Thornton Y. Bush, similarly, argues that in his story of the whale, Melville is probing "God's universe in his day," a universe that was "fluid, shifting, largely unchartered, vast, full of dangers and terrors" (38). That Maclean is operating similarly -- probing and sounding the depths of his universe -- is evident throughout the apocalyptic *Young Men and Fire*. Maclean's universe is the universe of literary naturalists Stephen Crane and Jack London; it cares not in the least for its occupants. Subsequently, as Maclean reconstructs the Mann Gulch fire tragedy, his invocations of the universe are consistently rendered to depict it as fluid, capable of expanding and contracting, yet, ultimately, fated. Maclean describes the universe as being "unfossilized" (46), "wide" (112), "compressed" (98), "truculent" (145), and "a bitch" (258). Maclean's teleology, like that of Melville's, often appears to question the ideology of progress. Readers can sense this in Part Three of *Young Men and Fire*, as Maclean heaps image upon image to evoke the fear of living in a nuclear age:

²¹ Charles Child Walcutt's 1944 study "The Fire Symbolism in *Moby-Dick*" is an article to which I am greatly indebted. His analysis of fire symbolism has informed my reading of Maclean.

When the blowup rose out of Mann Gulch and its smoke merged with the jet stream, it looked much like an atomic explosion in Nevada on its cancerous way to Utah. When last seen, the tri-visual figure had reached out and was on its way, far, far, far, away, looking like death and looking back at its dead and looking forward to its dead yet to come. Perhaps it could see all of us. (295)

Death and destruction, whether occurring in a blow-up in a dry box canyon above the Missouri River or on a global scale, appear to pre-occupy Maclean's thoughts. Here, he seems skeptical regarding the possibility of human progress.

At times, readers of Melville and Maclean must tire of the endless descriptions and catalogues each writer includes. Whether it is the numerous chapters Melville devotes to whales, whaling, and whalecraft, or Maclean's inquest into fire, firefighting and fire science, the honest reader might concede he has been tempted to thumb forward a few pages in either text to locate the narrative thread again, to get on with the chase or on with the fire.

Contained herein, within each man's obsession, though, resides another significant intersection between the two texts: the use of fire as a symbol.

To suggest that Melville's use of fire imagery in *Moby-Dick* is complex, and often contradictory, is to concur with what critics such as Walcutt and Matthiessen have analyzed at length. Walcutt, for example, argues that Melville's use of fire as a symbol is purposely ambiguous, that Melville equates fire with both good and evil at various places in the text to underscore humanity's dual nature. Walcutt submits that Ahab initially equates fire with a property that is good, worthy of worship. Yet under the Zoroastrian practice of fire-worship -- presumably with the exotic Fedallah -- Ahab is struck by lightning, burned, and scarred. Ahab "hates the fire as he hates Moby Dick because he considers it an essential evil, alien to man and maliciously destructive" (Walcutt 307). Subsequently, fire is perceived as evil by Ahab until Chapter CXIX, "The Candles," when Ahab reconciles himself to the duality of human nature and the element of fire.²² Matthiessen

²² In Chapter CXIX, "The Candles," Ahab defiantly addresses the tri-pointed trinity of flames: "Oh! Thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on the seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou

likewise recognizes ambiguity in Melville's use of fire, stating that "it is not always easy to understand" (441).

By contrast, Maclean's attitude toward fire in *Young Men and Fire* is consistent from beginning to end; for Maclean, fire represents destruction and death and the fear associated with them. Maclean establishes his attitude toward fire early in the text in "Black Ghost," the brief personal narrative that prefaces the text proper.²³

In this account of his first experience working on a big fire, Maclean personifies the fire as an agent of evil, imbuing the element with terror and malevolence, as it dances and jumps through patches of bunch and cheat grass in the dry summer canyon. As Maclean recounts his foot race against fire, the reader senses the fury and wrath of the inferno racing after Maclean:

The spot fires turned me in my course by leaping
into each other and forming an avalanche that
went both down and up the mountain. I kept

clear spirit, and I now know thy right worship is defiance" (416). Walcutt argues that in this passage readers may see "a great development from his [Ahab's] earlier insane hatred of Moby Dick and the fire, both of which leave him maimed (308).

²³"Black Ghost" may be considered a significant autobiographical memory for Maclean, one that Ulric Neisser would argue may form part of Maclean's "life narrative," an essential "way of defining the self" (1).

looking for escape openings marked by holes in smoke that at times burned upside down. Behind, where I dared not look, the main fire was sound and heat, a ground noise like a freight train. Where there were weak spots in grass, it sounded as if the freight train had slowed down to cross a bridge or to enter a tunnel. It could have been doing either, because in a moment it roared again and started to catch up. It came so close it sounded as if it were cracking bones, and mine were the only bones around. Then it would enter a tunnel, and I would have hope again. Whether it rumbled or crackled, I was always terrified. Always thirsty. Always exhausted. (6)

This passage is significant for it foreshadows the race against fire that Wagg Dodge and his crew ran in Mann Gulch, a race only two would win.

Maclean's research and investigation into the fire included locating and interviewing survivors ("ghosts" he later calls them) Robert Sallee and Walter Rumsford; he accompanied them to Mann Gulch in July 1978, retracing the men's steps and recording their memory of the day (168). Maclean's attitude toward fire as an evil agent in the

universe is apparent again in his description of the blowup. Here, Fire is personified as an evil character hunting its prey:

It is really not possible to see the center of a blowup because the smoke only occasionally lifts, and when it does all that can be seen are pieces, pieces of death flying around looking for you -- burning cones, branches circling on wings, a log in flight without a propeller. Below in the bottom of the gulch was a great roar without visible flames but blown with winds on fire. (73)

Melville's use of fire as a symbol, ambiguous as it may be, remains more satisfying than Maclean's. The explanation for this may be because Maclean's story is structured to pit good versus evil, or so it seems. The young men who perish are romanticized throughout the text, despite the author's pledge "never to sentimentalize them" (223). The fact of the matter is that fire is not evil; it is necessary, especially in matters concerning the ecosystem of the American West. Without it, particularly controlled burning, forests become overgrown, diseased, and eventually die; then, when they do burn, they burn hotter and with

more intensity.²⁴ The fact that Maclean does not sufficiently reconcile science with literature is not at all surprising, however, considering his personal experience fighting fires and his affection for literature, of both he seems incapable of divesting himself.

An additional thematic intersection between Melville's story of the whale and Maclean's story of the fire merits discussion: the authors' mutual intrigue with fate. In the cosmos Ahab occupies, individuals may become entangled in a web of pre-destined forces that bring about their eventual demise. Ahab is maimed by natural forces, presumably a turn of events sanctioned by an approving God, and vows to destroy Moby Dick, whom he perceives as the embodiment of evil. All the while, Ishmael reports the drama of Ahab's ensuing monomania. In Chapter XLVII, "The Mat-Maker," though, Melville presents readers with an intriguing portrait of a universe seemingly ordered by fate, yet one wherein the individual still possesses a limited free will. As Ishmael assists Queequeg in the weaving of the sword

²⁴ The work of Stephen J. Pyne, an environmental historian in the Biology and Society Program at Arizona State University, is particularly useful for anyone interested in the behavioral patterns of fire in the American West. See, for example, *How the Canyon Became Grand* (1999), *Year of the Fires* (2001), and *Fire: A Brief History* (2001).

mat, Ishmael muses that it "seemed as if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically weaving and weaving away at the Fates" (185). Although Ishmael notes that the threads appear "fixed" and "ever-returning" to yield an "ultimate course," he simultaneously notes he is in control: "I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads" (185). Maclean seems likewise intrigued with the notion of fate, particularly how a sequence of apparently innocuous events and natural phenomena can coalesce, culminating in a tragedy that would claim thirteen lives. In one sense, Maclean's model of the universe appears comparable to that of Melville's insofar as Maclean seems willing, if not eager, to consign events both human and natural to Providence, or as he puts it, the "encompassing sense of inevitability" (278). While this notion is evident at various times throughout *Young Men and Fire*, it is perhaps best illustrated in the closing pages of Part Two. Here, "from the elevation of retrospect," Maclean likens the events of August 5, 1949, the "convergence of sky, young men, and fire" to Thomas Hardy's "Convergence of the Twain" (278-79). For Maclean, the story of the *Titanic* tells the story of the Smokejumpers, for both exemplify what happens

when excessive pride meets an underestimated, phenomenal force of nature.

The further one reads into *Young Men and Fire*, the more one senses that Maclean's mind dwells simultaneously on his approaching mortality as well as that of the perished Smokejumpers. At times, it seems as if Maclean takes solace knowing that the same "Spinner of Years" (31) of Hardy's will one day speak again to claim him. It would be a mistake, though, to characterize Maclean's intrigue with fate -- his and his readers' -- as one marked by pessimism despite his prediction regarding a "tragedy that waits you and me" (156). As he concludes Part Three of *Young Men and Fire*, Maclean reminds his reader that in the wake of cataclysmic destruction optimism and hope may prevail:

Now, almost forty years later, small trees have just started to grow along the bottom of dry finger gulches on the hillside in Mann Gulch, where moisture from rain and snow are retained underground. Since even now these little evergreens are only six or eight inches high, the grass has to be parted to see them, but I look for such things. I see better what happened in

grass than on the horizon. Most of us do, and probably it is just as well. . . . (295-96)

That Maclean and Melville differ substantially is evident. Certainly Melville's scope, that is to say his depth and range, surpasses Maclean's, and Melville's literary output, of course, eclipses that of Maclean's; nevertheless, the reader familiar with Melville's *Moby-Dick* -- Melville's depiction of the universe, fire, and fate -- is in many ways a reader better prepared for a reading of Maclean's *Young Men and Fire*. In each writer, the reader experiences an aesthetic vision by an artist committed to exploring the mysteries of the natural world and the limitations of the human condition.

Hemingway and Maclean

If it can be said that possessing a familiarity with the nineteenth-century American literary canon can illuminate one's reading of and appreciation for Maclean, then the same could be said of another writer, twentieth-century modernist Ernest Hemingway. For while Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville speak to the evident strains of American romanticism in Maclean, Hemingway, a contemporary of Maclean's, provides readers with a twentieth-century

canonical writer with whom Maclean shares striking parallels. The fiction of each writer suggests that both share the same thematic impulses: a preoccupation with memory and loss, identity, and a heroic code. These commonalities place Maclean within the same aesthetic movement as Hemingway, the modernist period that is usually associated with the years 1910-1945.

Although Norman Maclean and Ernest Hemingway were contemporaries, no direct evidence (published correspondence or interviews) indicates the two men knew one another. Indirectly, though, the similarities between their lives and some of their works are noteworthy. Both men had deep roots in the Chicago area; Hemingway, four years Maclean's senior, was born in Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago, and Maclean came to Chicago in 1928, three years after *In Our Time* was published, to begin graduate work, earning both an M.A. and Ph.D. in English at the University of Chicago. During his years in Chicago, Maclean established friendships with two other prominent literary figures, Carl Sandburg and Sherwood Anderson, with whom Hemingway corresponded. "In those days," said Maclean, "there was a great interlacing between faculty and literary and artistic guys in Chicago that there isn't now. It was

really a more solid community" (qtd. in Kittredge and Smith 134). In a 1986 interview with Nicholas O'Connell, Maclean referred to Hemingway as one of the masters of his generation, an "idol," despite the "so-called modern critics" who dislike Hemingway (229). In particular, Maclean believed Hemingway's stories reveal a mastery of constructing dialogue and handling action. While conceding that Hemingway was putting on "kind of a show," presenting a somewhat overwrought masculinity, Maclean said, "I don't see how you could be a real American writer unless you knew Hemingway well, and had learned a great deal from him" (229).

Amid the critical attention devoted to *A River Runs through It*, remarkably, only two of these studies, one by Harold Simonson and the other by Wendell Berry, consider Maclean's fiction in relation to Hemingway's. In "Norman Maclean's Two Hearted River," Simonson quite rightly notes an essential tragic/redemptive contrast between the two storytellers: "Hemingway had said in 'Big Two Hearted River,' that 'swamp fishing' was a 'tragic adventure'; for Maclean, fishing the Big Blackfoot River was a redemptive one" (162). While Simonson offers a useful observation here, he does not wholly explain why the contrast exists,

suggesting only that it reflects tenets of Maclean's Calvinism: "divine grace" and "self-discipline" (162). To be sure, this redemptive quality contrasts the bleak pessimism found in Hemingway; however, a further explanation for the disparity could involve some quite basic stylistic elements of fiction: point of view, for example. Maclean's use of a first-person narrator lends itself to a more intimate point of view, which Hemingway's use of the third-person narrator precludes. Still another possibility exists. The tragic/redemptive difference between Hemingway and Maclean could be a function of age. Hemingway's Nick Adams is still relatively young at the time of "Big Two-Hearted River," and Maclean's narrator is in his seventies, "too old to be much of a fisherman" (104). Nick's reluctance to wade the river and enter the swamp is understandable and explained in the story's final sentence: "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp" (180). In "Fathers and Sons," the last Nick Adams story Hemingway would write, Nick does exactly this. An older, wiser Nick Adams no longer shrinks from fishing emotional swamps; he wades the murky, turbulent memories of childhood and of a father who failed him to find some level of redemption with his own son. Similarly,

Maclean's narrator offers readers an evocative backward glance over traveled roads, and, despite his age, still finds redemption, fishing "the big waters alone" (104) to wade the memories of those he has loved and lost.

Wendell Berry's "Style and Grace" provides an equally useful discussion of Maclean and Hemingway. Berry observes that in Maclean, unlike Hemingway's *Big Two-Hearted River*, the Big Blackfoot River does not empty into a swamp, yet he believes "the whole story takes place in a dark swamp of sorts: the unresolved bewilderment of human conflict and affection and loss" (216). One of the most overlooked points is that in both "Big Two-Hearted River" and *A River Runs through It*, fishing the rivers heals psychic wounds associated with memory and loss; the river restores and recreates both Nick and Norman. For Nick, the river is "home;" it is "the good place" (167). Likewise, for Norman the river is "a world perfect and apart" (37).

Both Simonson and Berry offer instructive insight to the texts, but neither goes far enough in his analysis. In fact, Maclean's artistic debt to Hemingway is far greater than either Simonson or Berry are willing to concede, for there are many instances in which Maclean seems to have Hemingway's text in mind, if not in hand. To be sure, his

language is, at times, identical to that of Hemingway's. For example, both Norman and Nick fish for what is unseen "in the half light," and the trout each catch are described with the same adjective. Hemingway's Nick states, "They were fine trout" (180); Norman describes his trout as "the finest fish I ever caught" (94). At times, the texts seem to be quite inter-connected, in dialogue with one another.

Stylistically, too, Maclean demonstrates an appreciation for Hemingway's iceberg theory that neither Simonson nor Berry note. In *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway explained "the dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water" (192). In other words, a writer could consciously omit certain things, and the omission, ironically, would help create better understanding within the reader. This theory would help influence a generation of modernist prose writers, and Maclean, though he is writing in a post-modern period, likewise employs this modernist principle. Maclean offers a corresponding theory of omission when Paul explains his success catching trout with the right fly: "All there is to thinking," he said, "is seeing something noticeable which makes you see something you weren't noticing which makes you see something that isn't even visible" (92). All

one needs to do is substitute "writing fiction" for "thinking" and Hemingway's iceberg theory surfaces. Indeed, each time that Maclean withholds information from the reader about Paul's shadowy dealings -- his gambling, street fights, heavy drinking, and, ultimately, his death -- Maclean's text demonstrates the validity of Hemingway's iceberg theory, for readers understand better the complexity and ambiguity inherent in all human relationships.

With little doubt, the construction of modern identity -- racial, social, and class -- remains unique and one of the most intriguing characteristics of the modernist movement. A generation of intellectuals, artists, and writers explored through their works the essence of individual identity in the wake of a world at war. Though the violence and chaos associated with World War I undergird many of the Nick Adams stories, Hemingway's "Fathers and Sons" transcends the others, for in his rendering of the tenuous relationships between fathers and sons, Hemingway strikes a universal chord, one that resonates deeply within most human hearts. "Fathers and Sons," the last of the Nick Adams stories, remains Hemingway's most candid, direct treatment of his fragile

relationships with his father, Clarence Hemingway, and his son, Bumby.

At base, "Fathers and Sons" can be read as a story of identity and relationships between fathers and sons and how little one generation can know of the other. With his son asleep next to him, Nick Adams chooses to avoid the detour through the main street of the city. Ironically, though, his attempt to avoid a detour, in fact, creates a different type of detour altogether: one of memory. As Nick traverses the landscape, hunting it in his imagination in the manner his father taught him, memories, not quail, take to the wing. Nick's memories are of his father: "nervous," "cruel," "abused," "sentimental," who dies at his own hand in a trap not wholly of his making (370). The bulk of Nick's digression into memory surrounds his father's shortcomings and failures: his "unsound" treatment of sex, for example, and his "sound" introductions to hunting and fishing, for which Nick is grateful. Readers know the relationship is tenuous, for after the age of fifteen, Nick "had shared nothing with him" (375). When Nick's son awakens, he asks his father a series of questions. The boy, curious about his father's youth and the Indians he came into contact with growing up, asks "What was it like,

Papa, when you were a little boy and used to hunt with the Indians?" (375). Nick radically abridges the lengthy, detailed memory of his youthful sexual exploits with the Ojibway girl Trudy. "'I don't know,' Nick was startled . . . 'We used to go all day to hunt black squirrel'" (375). The boy then asks his father about his grandfather, and Nick's reply intimates a stark, diminished capacity for knowledge: "He's hard to describe. He was a great hunter and fisherman and he had wonderful eyes" (376). This, then, constitutes all that Nick will say he knows to be true of his father. In the same way, readers sense that Nick's son's understanding of his father will be likewise partial, for what will Nick's son know of him? Not much. In both instances, Nick's unwillingness to communicate the truth to his son illustrates how difficult it is for one human being to truly know the other. Some fears, desires, and memories either cannot or will not be communicated.

Interestingly enough, a similar exchange occurs between the Reverend John Maclean and his son Norman, at the end of *A River Runs through It*, although the line of questioning centers on Paul. Father and brother are left wondering what, if anything, they could have done to keep the tragedy of Paul's beating death from occurring. When

Norman is asked if he has told his father everything he knows about Paul's death, Maclean's text, again, echoes Hemingway's: "I've said I've told you all I know. If you push me far enough, all I really know is that he was a fine fisherman" (103). In a moment of extreme crisis, father and son recognize the limitations inherent in human relationships: "'Are you sure you told me everything you know about his death?' he asked. I said, 'Everything.' 'It's not much is it?' 'No,' I replied, 'but you can love completely without complete understanding.' 'That I have known and preached,' my father said" (103). Apart from its pathos, this passage suggests the complexity of human relationships in the modern world; moreover, it affirms that a limited capacity for understanding and knowledge should not limit a capacity for love, for empathy.

Beyond the significant biographical similarities and some rather general thematic and stylistic observations, at least one specific, extremely critical dimension of these artists needs consideration: the code hero. As one might expect from writers coming of age during World War I, the fiction of both Maclean and Hemingway depicts the uncertainty associated with modern life and offers readers a code of conduct that, if followed, will help one navigate

a way. As Philip Young and others have observed, the Hemingway hero adheres to a code; courage is defined as grace under pressure (63). Adherence to the code distinguishes a man, setting him apart from others who "follow random impulses, let down their hair, and are generally messy, perhaps cowardly, and without inviolable rules for how to live holding tight" (63). Many of the Nick Adams stories, particularly those published in *In Our Time*, demonstrate the process through which Nick Adams acquires and exemplifies the code. In the first Nick Adams story, "The Indian Camp," a young Nick watches his father perform a Caesarean on an Indian woman. With no anesthetic, a jack knife, and nine-foot, tapered gut leaders, Dr. Adams skillfully saves the Indian woman and the baby: "That's one for the medical journals," he boasts (68). Here, Nick witnesses the code for the first time. In his father, Nick observes the code fulfilled: grace under pressure. The Indian woman's screams do not distract him; he retains his poise and prevails. In the suicide of the Indian woman's husband, though, Nick recognizes the code unfulfilled. "Why did he kill himself, Daddy? I don't know, Nick. He couldn't stand things, I guess" (69). Clearly, the stakes are high, for in an afternoon, in one

room, Nick experiences life and death, success and failure. In many ways, the code as demonstrated in "The Indian Camp" pervades subsequent stories. One need only to consider other stories -- "A Day's Wait," "The Killers," "Fifty Grand," "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" -- to understand that the degree to which Hemingway's characters succeed or fail is determined by their ability to embrace the code.

One does not have to read too far into *A River Runs through It* to sense that, like Hemingway, Norman Maclean's fiction relies heavily upon the notion of a code, albeit fundamentally different in texture. "In our family," Maclean's opening sentence begins, "there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing" (1). Norman and his younger brother Paul learn the code from their father, the Reverend John Maclean, a Presbyterian minister, a Scot, and a dry fly fisherman. As he prepares to give his sons a lesson in casting, he reminds them that "It [casting] is an art that is performed on a four-count rhythm between ten and two-o'clock" (2). If we consider fly-fishing and casting metaphorically, the Maclean code begins to surface. Although the cast is functional and regular, it is an art. Performed skillfully, with grace and control, the graceful

cast can restore harmony and balance within the soul because it taps into the rhythm found in nature. Maclean's father believed "God could count and that only by picking up God's rhythms were we able to regain power and beauty" (2). To fish well is to live well, and while the four-count rhythm performed between ten and two o'clock is functional, its objective remains undeniably sublime. Furthermore, the Maclean code includes being on time for church, work, and fishing, and, it is important to note, fishing means fly-fishing. In the Maclean family and its family code, there is no place for bait fishing, for it requires no artistry. "To him [Maclean's father] all good things, trout as well as eternal salvation -- come by grace and grace comes from art and art does not come easy" (4). The Maclean code, then, values work, fosters grace and control, and appreciates beauty and art.

As is the case in Hemingway's fiction, Maclean's fiction presents characters whose success or failure is linked to a code. Most readers would concur that Norman best represents success, for he is able to adhere to the code while those around him fail, some clearly worse than others, and some more comically than tragically. Neal, Norman's brother-in-law, best typifies a class of men with

no concept of the code. He represents the world in conflict with the close-knit Maclean family. Although Maclean remembers the three words "God Is Love," painted on the side of their Sunday School wall, the words "had no reference to the world outside, which my brother and I soon discovered was full of bastards, the number increasing rapidly the farther one gets from Missoula, Montana" (7). Neal comes from California, the "West Coast," a soulless place, according to Paul, populated by people who have failed miserably as fly fishermen and are now "lawyers, certified public accountants, presidents of airline companies, gamblers, or Mormon missionaries" (10). Neal's request to fish with the Maclean brothers suggests some faint awareness that they possess something intrinsically desirable, but he remains unable to transcend his own foolish impulses: he drinks too much, lies to women, fishes with worms, forgets tackle, and steals beer. Readers witness the sin for which there is no pardon when Neal screws Old Rawhide, a whore, on a sand bar in the Big Blackfoot River. Though the scene is decidedly comic -- replete with two sunburned asses, the whore's with LOVE tattooed on it -- the subtext remains solemn, for with this deed, Neal defiles the purity and sanctity of the Big

Blackfoot River, a river Maclean earlier in the text describes "as a family river, as a part of us" (13). The point, wryly made, comes as Maclean concludes the anecdote: "I never again threw a line in this hole" (68). As Wallace Stegner notes in his "Haunted by Waters," Neal "matters only in that he demonstrates the lack of everything that makes Paul great" (159). As a counterbalance to Neal, whose failures are both pathetic and comic, Maclean presents Paul, whose fall is at once both profound and tragic.

Part of what makes Maclean's *A River Runs through It* reverberate within the imagination of its readers is Maclean's evocative rendering of Paul's character. As boys, Norman notices his younger brother possesses the makings of an artist: "He had," remembers Maclean, "those extra things besides fine training -- genius, luck, and plenty of self-confidence" (5). These "extra things," however, along with Paul's "small bets on the side just to make things interesting," (6) set him apart from other men, even Norman and his father, those with whom he is closest. In fact, Paul's "fine training" that he receives from his father is the Maclean code. In Paul, though, the "extra things" that define his character are what make him an

artist, what make him beautiful, and what ultimately destroy him. It would be shortsighted to view Paul as some critics, Helen Lojeck, for example, have viewed him. Lojeck argues that Paul remains nothing more than "a loner idealized by American literature in general and idolized in lower case westerns," an heir to the traditions perpetuated by writers such as James Fenimore Cooper and Louis L'Amour (147). While Paul certainly possesses qualities that define the frontier hero in American Western literature -- he is a loner, self-reliant, skilled, determined, and tough -- Maclean's presentation of his brother as an artist suggests that Paul is more than a flat, one-dimensional stereotype.

Paul's artistry, his "performances" on the river, comes only when he breaks free from the strict, rigid code of the four-count rhythm. His unorthodox casting technique demonstrates to readers that Paul's art is not his father's art. A point overlooked by Lojek is that Maclean, through his depiction of Paul's life and his brutal death, reminds readers that true artistry remains inherently perilous for both the artist, and those close to him, a point Norman makes pondering Paul: "He is my brother and an artist and when a four and a half ounce rod is in his hand he is a

major artist. . . . It is a shame I do not understand him" (28). The tragedy of Paul's death is the tragedy of the artist, admired (perhaps), misunderstood, and ultimately destroyed by society for living beyond its strict limitations. By design, then, when Maclean's narrator recalls the last fish that he and his father saw Paul catch, he remembers Paul "both as an abstraction in artistry and as a close up in water and laughter" (101). Ultimately, all the narrator and his father can agree on is that Paul was a "fine fisherman" and "beautiful" (104). A final point of comparison between Hemingway and Maclean should be made. Maclean seems at peace with the realization that partial understanding of loved ones is the best one can hope for. As Norman tells his father, "You can love completely, without complete understanding" (103), a concept at the very core of "Fathers and Sons," for example.

The fact that Maclean's work was influenced by major American authors is not in itself remarkable. This fact does, however, raise particular questions as one tries to reconcile Maclean's particular system of thought among these writers who possess such seemingly disparate philosophies. The optimism that Maclean shares with

transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau sharply contrasts the skepticism/pessimism he shares with Melville and Hemingway. While this schism may lead readers to conclude that Maclean articulates a system of thought that is inconsistent, or perhaps incoherent, this division is entirely consistent with other major divisions in his life: the woodsman/academic, western/Midwestern, and provincial/urban. As Maclean noted numerous times in lectures and interviews, he was well aware of "some pretty big splits" in his personality, and writing about them was his attempt to reconcile them. "Before I die and disintegrate altogether," said Maclean, "I wanted to put some pieces of myself together" ("Montana Memory" 68). In "An Incident," for example, Maclean traces the numerous dichotomies that marked his life/work to his upbringing. Citing a "difference in opinion" between his mother and father on how he would be raised, Maclean concludes that he "seemed to have ended up as a tough flower girl" (116). While Maclean's life seems marked by dichotomy, he never expressed regret or contempt for dualities, for he never saw them as mutually exclusive.²⁵ Consequently, it should

²⁵ See "Interview with Norman Maclean." *The Norman Maclean Reader*. Maclean discovered that teaching was the profession that would allow him to continue "the two world"

not come as a surprise to readers that Maclean's writings portray the individual's relationship with nature as being simultaneously regenerative and destructive.

As readers -- and certainly as teachers of readers -- choices must be made, particularly for those in the latter group whose task it is to present a survey of literature to a group of students over a specific time period, the fifteen-week academic semester, for example. Oftentimes choices regarding reading selections are hard to make, especially as new, often de-valued, authors and texts appear in the pages of anthologies. Certainly, careful attention should be paid to presenting a representative cross-section of writers, especially to those whose voices have not always been heard, for much is to be gained learning about experiences different from one's own. The American literary canon has always been and always will remain a vital, dynamic entity, capable of expanding and contracting, including and excluding writers to mirror the culture's particular tastes and preferences at any given time in its history. Certainly, the elasticity of the American literary canon over the last thirty years has

existence he sought. "I don't feel that because I love both places I'm living the life of a schizophrenic. I feel that they work for each other. I can see more about each one, because of the other" (177).

demonstrated this fluidity. Still, these decisions must be made with some pause, some prudence, as the canon's Darwinian struggle unfolds before us. In Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, Bloom astutely reminds one of an essential truth: "If we were literally immortal, or even if our span were doubled to seven score of years, say, we could give up all argument about canons" (32). Bloom reminds us that being highly selective is paramount to being a good steward of our time and that "stuffing that interval with bad writing, in the name of whatever social justice, does not seem to be the responsibility of the literary critic" (32). One would be making a mistake to suggest that the contributions of writers like Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, and Hemingway have little left to offer contemporary readers. Together, these writers, along with others, can still construct a rich context against which readers may better understand and appreciate the work of writers such as Norman Maclean.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The work of Hannah Arendt suggests that we will only meet with frustration if we rely on the language of philosophy to determine "who" someone is (181). One's identity "remains inexpressible within the language of philosophy; but does not, as a result, remain utterly ineffable" (181). Instead, the narrative -- the life story -- provides this knowledge, however limited or partial it may prove to be. The recent work of Adriana Cavarero further contributes to our understanding of Arendt's observations regarding the differences between philosophy and narrative: "The first [philosophy] asks 'What is Man?' The second [narrative] asks instead of someone 'who he or she is'" (13). The critical insights of both Arendt and Cavarero justify the approach to Norman Maclean's literary career I have suggested -- as an exploration of the "problem of identity." In his role as storyteller, in his tragic vision, even within the literary canon, Maclean's quest for self-hood inevitably leads him to "finding a story that somehow tells him about himself."

It is probable that Norman Maclean's literary reputation will rest on his novella *A River Runs through It*. In this respect, he may be considered alongside other well-known twentieth-century American authors such as J.D. Salinger, Harper Lee, Joseph Heller, Ken Kesey, and Jack Kerouac, writers who continue to be widely recognized and regarded despite their limited body of work. Although these figures may have published more than the one work for which they are best known, they may as well not have. Distinguishing Maclean from these authors, however, is the fact that he did not begin to pursue a literary career until he was in his seventies. Consequently, the interested reader of Maclean often finds himself contemplating the direction his work might have taken had he begun his efforts earlier than he did. Fortunately, his essays, letters, lectures, and interviews possess the same qualities that distinguish *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* and *Young Men and Fire*: imagination, intellect, wit, and humor.

On the broadest of scales, Maclean's art conveys an essential quest toward self-hood, an attempt to unify the whole life in the final stage of the life cycle. One

senses a queer appropriateness in the fact that Maclean died before *Young Men and Fire* could be published, for it suggests to us that the problem of identity -- the quest for self-hood, continues well into old age: until death. The objectives of this extended study have been numerous and varied, drawing upon what is not an extensive amount of scholarly attention. In part, one aim has been to lay bare the essence of Maclean in his principal role as storyteller. Through discussion and analysis of his texts, interviews, essays, and lectures, one realizes how inextricably linked Maclean's concept of self-hood is to the act of storytelling. The assumption of this approach casts Maclean as a person, a continuous but ever-changing self, who constantly revises his self-narrative throughout his development. More specifically, the goal has been to present some plausible explanation of how stories function in Maclean's body of work.

Still another purpose has been to explore the scope and origins of Maclean's tragic vision, extending them beyond extant criticism. While some critical analysis has mentioned Maclean's heritage as a neo-Aristotelian critic/thinker, few have explored the extent to which

Maclean's *A River Runs through It* illustrates tenets found in Aristotle's *Poetics*; moreover, although it is a well-known fact that Maclean read, taught, and revered Shakespeare, this inquiry is the first to look carefully at the Shakespearean dimensions of Maclean, in particular the shared strategies of crafting alternating scenes of merriment and solemnity, and the pairing of male/female characters to underscore the text's larger themes.

Finally, one of the most significant objectives of this project was to illuminate further that which may or may not be evident to readers of Maclean: Maclean owes an enormous debt of gratitude to the classic works of the American literary canon. While it is not currently in fashion to favor or esteem these works, this analysis does precisely that. The intention of this discussion was to demonstrate that the canon should not be dismantled or devalued; quite to the contrary, the American literary canon provides readers of Maclean an extensive and intriguing context against which he may be read. An appreciation and familiarity with the major literary figures such as Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, and Hemingway

remain useful, if not wholly essential, to readers wishing to make the most of their reading of Maclean.

Clearly, a great deal remains to be said, not only about what this study has been able to bring to the fore, but also about other approaches to Maclean's art. New questions and avenues of inquiry remain to be pursued for those who are interested. For example, one possibility is a study of Maclean's ideas regarding the essence and role of the artist. Throughout his texts, Maclean often regards this special class of person, whether it be his brother Paul, "the master of an art"(6), when fly-rod and reel are in his hands, or Bill Bell, "a major artist" (128) who as "head packer"(129), personifies the "pinnacle of the profession" (129) as he packs a mule train in the United States Forest Service, or Wag Dodge, the expert crew chief in *Young Men and Fire*.

Maclean's primary view of the human experience was that it was ultimately tragic; however, his abiding faith in the human spirit and in the restorative powers of nature and art certainly prohibit one from labeling Maclean a pessimist. If one detects a sadness in Maclean it is akin to the sorrow found in the Old Testament -- a wry yearning

to return to an age of innocence, a pre-lapsarian state. While the Big Blackfoot River and the Bitter Root mountains of Western Montana represent for Maclean nature's ability to regenerate the blighted spirit, he rightly acknowledges that these "spots of time" inevitably dissipate. As a result, Maclean's attraction to art -- in particular the art of storytelling -- makes perfect sense. Maclean's life and work demonstrate the power of the narrative, its ability to impose order and meaning on the past, present, and future. The personal tragedies of his life and personal history were chaotic; this is the case with most human tragedy, including yours and mine. However, when rendered into story form, that which was once chaotic becomes ordered, transfigured, occupying an eternal, transcendent realm. Unlike these Wordsworthian "spots of time" that dissolve, stories -- especially those in which the reader may see himself -- endure.

In December 1950, William Faulkner stood before a room of dignitaries gathered in Stockholm, Sweden, and accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature. In his speech, Faulkner outlines the sole criteria for the next, post-atomic generation of writers:

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed - love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without

pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.

While there is no direct evidence that Maclean was familiar with Faulkner's acceptance speech, at some intuitive level, he most certainly knew the efficacy of its words. *A River Runs through It and Other Stories* and *Young Men and Fire* reveal a writer whose work, because it embodies "the human heart in conflict with itself," remains neither "ephemeral nor doomed." If there is universal appeal to Maclean's work, if it will continue to garner the attention and appreciation of future generations of readers, it is because his griefs are our griefs; his scars are our scars; and his quest for self-hood, the "problem of identity," is likewise . . . ours.

WORKS CITED

- Alves, Teresa Ferreira de Almeida. "Gazing at the River, Throwing the Line, Daring the Waters." *Rivers and the American Experience*. Ed. Jerzy Durczak. Lublin, Poland: Maria Curie-Sklodowska UP, 2000. 13-33. Print.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957. Print.
- Aristotle. "The Poetics." *Criticism: the Major Statements*. Ed. Charles Kaplan. Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2000. 18-46. Print.
- Avallone, Charlene. "What American Renaissance? The Gendered Genealogy of a Critical Discourse." *PMLA* 112.5 (1997): 1102-20. Print.
- Berry, Wendell. "Style and Grace." *McFarland and Nichols* 213-19.
- Blew, Mary Clearman. "Mo-Nah-Se-Tah, the Whore, and the Three Scottish Women." *McFarland and Nichols* 190-200.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1994. Print.
- Boardman, Kathleen A. "Reading the River: Mark Twain, Ann Zwinger, and Norman Maclean." *Halcyon: A Journal of the Humanities* 11 (1989): 137-54. Print.

- Booth, Thornton Y. "Standing Up to God." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 17.1 (1962): 33-43. Print.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California P, 1988. Print.
- . "The Struggle to Tell the Story of the Struggle to Get the Story Told: The Genre of Norman Maclean's *Young Men and Fire*." *Hypotheses: Neo-Aristotelian Analysis* 20 (1997): 13-14. Print.
- Borroff, Marie. "The Achievement of Norman Maclean." *Hypotheses: Neo-Aristotelian Analysis* 20 (1997): 2-7. Print.
- Brittan, Gordon G. Jr. "Common Texts." McFarland and Nichols 182-89.
- Brown, Jane K. "Discordia Concors: On the Order of A *Midsummer Night's Dream*." *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History* 48.1 (1987): 20-41. Print.
- Bruner, Jerome. "The Narrative Construction of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 18.1 (1991): 1-21. Print.
- Bryant, William Cullen. "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood." *The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant*. Ed. Park Godwin. Vol. 1. New York: Russell, 1967. 23-24. Print.

- Buell, Lawrence. *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution through Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986. Print.
- Butler, Douglas R. "Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*: Word, Water, and Text." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 33.4 (1992): 263-73. Print.
- Cavarero, Adriana. *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1987. Print.
- Cooper, James Fenimore. *The Prairie*. New York: Penguin, 1987. Print.
- Crane, Milton. "Shakespeare's Comedies and the Critics." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.2 (1964): 67-73. Print.
- De Quincey, Thomas. "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*." *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*. Ed. David Masson. Vol. 10. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1890. 389-94. Print.
- Dervin, Daniel. "Casting Shadows: Filial Enactments in *A River Runs through It*." *American-Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture* 51.3 (1994): 343-57. Print.
- Dexter, Peter. "The Old Man and the River." *McFarland and Nichols* 140-50.

- Dollar, J.Gerard. "Misogyny in the American Eden: Abbey, Cather, and Maclean." *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*. Ed. Michael Branch, et al. Moscow: U of Idaho P, 1998. 97-105. Print.
- Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton, 1963. Print.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Nature." *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Stephen E. Whichter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960. 21-57. Print.
- . "Self-Reliance." *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Stephen E. Whichter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960. 147-68. Print.
- Faulkner, William. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1949 Banquet Speech." 10 Dec. 1950. Web. 25 Mar. 2009 <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1949/faulkner-speech.html>.
- Ford, James E. "When 'Life ... Becomes Literature:' The Neo-Aristotelian Poetics of Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*." *Studies in Short Fiction* 30.4 (1993): 525-34. Print.
- Freeman, Mark. *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*.
Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957. Print.
- Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*.
Trans. Jane E. Lewin New York: Cornell UP, 1980.
Print.
- . *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Trans.
Newman, Channa, and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln:
Nebraska UP, 1982. Print.
- Grattan, George F. "Climbing Back into the Tree: Art,
Nature, and Theology in *A River Runs through It*."
*Reading under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in
Ecocriticism*. Ed. John Tallmadge. Salt Lake City: U of
Utah P, 2000. 231-42. Print.
- Halleck, Rueben P. *History of American Literature*. New
York: American Book Company, 1911. Print.
- Hardy, Thomas. "Convergence of the Twain." *British Poetry
1820-1920: Edwardian Voices*. Ed. Paul L. Wiley. New
York: Appleton, 1969. 17-18. Print.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest
Hemingway*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987.
Print.
- . *Death in the Afternoon*. New York: Charles Scribner's
Sons, 1932. Print.

- Hesford, Walter. "Fishing for the Words of Life: Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*." McFarland and Nichols 169-81.
- Hubbell, Jay. *Who Are the Major American Writers? A Study of the Changing Literary Canon*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1972. Print.
- James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*. Ed. Deborah Esch. New York: Norton, 1999. Print.
- James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1. New York: Dover, 1890. Print.
- Jay, Gregory S. "The End of 'American' Literature: Toward a Multicultural Practice." *College English* 53.3 (1991): 264-81. Print.
- Kittredge, William, and Annick Smith. "The Two Worlds of Norman Maclean: Interviews in Montana and Chicago." *Tri-Quarterly* 60 (1984): 412-32. Print.
- Lojek, Helen. "Casting Flies and Recasting Myths with Norman Maclean." *Western American Literature* 25.2 (1990): 145-56. Print.
- Maclean, John N. *Fire on the Mountain: The True Story of the South Canyon Fire*. New York: William Morrow, 1999. Print.

Maclean, Norman. "A Grudge Runs through It." *Harpers Feb.*

1991: 35. Print.

---. "A Man I Met in Mann Gulch." McFarland and Nichols

100-12.

---. "An Incident." *Weltzien* 116-129.

---. *A River Runs through It and Other Stories*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976. Print.

---. "Episode, Scene, Speech, and Word: The Madness of Lear." *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern*. Ed. Ronald S. Crane. 1952. 595-615. Print.

---. Interview. *The Best of NPR: Writers on Writing*. NPR. 1997.

---. "Montana Memory: Talk at the Institute of the Rockies." McFarland and Nichols 68-74.

---. "Teaching and Storytelling." McFarland and Nichols 88-99.

---. "The Hidden Art of a Good Story." McFarland and Nichols 23-38.

---. *Young Men and Fire*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992. Print.

Manning, Richard. "The Failure of Literature." *Northern Lights: A Selection of New Writing from the American*

- West. Ed. Deborah Clow and Donald Snow, New York: Vintage Books, 1994. 67-75.
- Matthiessen, F.O. *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. New York: Oxford UP, 1941. Print.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1964. Print.
- McAdams, Dan P. *The Person: An Introduction to Personality Psychology*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1995. Print.
- . "Unity and Purpose in Human Lives: The Emergence of Identity as a Life Story." *Studying Persons and Lives*. Eds. A.I. Raibin, R.A. Zucker, R.A. Emmons, and S. Frank. New York: Springer, 1990. 148-200. Print.
- . *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. New York: Morrow, 1993. Print.
- McAdams, Dan P., Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich, eds. *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative*. Washington, DC: APA, 2006. Print.
- McElroy, George. "Norman Maclean: Teacher and Chicago Aristotelian." *Hypotheses: Neo Aristotelian Analysis* 8 (1994): 13-18. Print.

- McFarland, Ron, and Hugh Nichols, eds. *American Author Series: Norman Maclean*. Lewiston, ID: Confluence, 1988. Print.
- Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker. New York: Norton, 1967. Print.
- Myerson, Joel. *The Transcendentalists: A Review of Research and Criticism*. New York: MLA 1984. Print.
- Neisser, Ulric, and Robyn Fivush, eds. *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994. Print.
- O'Connell, Nicholas. *At the Field's End: Interviews with Twenty-two Pacific Northwest Writers*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1987. Print.
- Polkington, Donald. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1988. Print.
- Pyne, Stephen J. *Fire: A Brief History*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 2001. Print.
- . *How the Canyon Became Grand: A Short History*. New York: Viking, 1999. Print.
- . *Year of the Fires: The Story of the Great Fires of 1910*. New York: Viking, 2001. Print.

- Russell, Charles M. *Trails Plowed Under*. New York: Doubleday, 1927. Print.
- Sewell, Richard B. *The Vision of Tragedy*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1959. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974. 1135-97. Print.
- Simonson, Harold P. "Norman Maclean's Two-Hearted River." *Western-American-Literature* 17.2 (1982): 149-55. Print.
- Stegner, Wallace. "Haunted by Waters." *McFarland and Nichols* 153-60.
- Taylor, Charles. *Source of the Self*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989. Print.
- Taylor, Walter Fuller. *The Story of American Letters*. Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1956. Print.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Orleans, MA: Parnassus, 1987. Print.
- . *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*. 2nd ed. Ed. William Rossi. New York: Norton, 1992. Print.
- Toole, David. "Wonder, Grief, and Tragedy: A Nietzschean Defense of *Young Men and Fire*." *Soundings: An*

Interdisciplinary Journal 81.1-2 (1998): 195-211.

Print.

Tuval-Mashiach, Rivka. "'Where Is the Story Going?':

Narrative Forms and Identity Construction in the Life
Stories of Israeli Men and Women." *Identity and Story:*

Creating Self in Narrative. Ed. Dan P. McAdams,

Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich. Washington,

DC: APA, 2006. 249-68. Print.

Utley, Robert. "Professor Maclean and General Custer."

Montana: The Magazine of Western History Spring 1993:

75-77. Print.

Walcutt, Charles Child. "The Fire Symbolism in *Moby Dick*."

Modern Language Notes 59.5 (1944): 304-10. Print.

Weltzien, O. Alan. "Norman Maclean and Laird Robinson: a

Tale of Two Research Partners." *Montana: The Magazine
of Literary History* Spring 1995: 46-55. Print.

---. "Norman Maclean and Tragedy." *Western American*

Literature 30.2(1995): 139-49. Print.

---, ed. *The Norman Maclean Reader*. Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 2008. Print.

Wharton, Edith. *The Age of Innocence*. New York: Appleton,

1920. Print.

Williams, William Carlos. "Tract." *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*. Ed A. Walton Litz, and Christopher MacGowan, Vol. 1. New York: New Directions, 1987. 2 vols. Print.

Womack, Kenneth, and Todd F. Davis. "'Haunted by Waters': Narrative Reconciliation in Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 42.2 (2001): 192-204. Print.

Young, Philip. *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1966. Print.