EDWIN SHRAKE: AN INTRODUCTION AND AN INTERPRETATION

THESIS

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By

Mary Beth VanRheenen, B. A.
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The purpose of this investigation is to provide a preliminary critical study of a contemporary Texas novelist, Edwin Shrake. No critical studies on his works have been published; therefore, the sources of data for the paper are limited to the novels and reviews of the books.

One chapter is devoted to each of Shrake's major works—But Not for Love, Blessed McGill, and Strange Peaches. The plot, characterization, themes, regionalism, and artistic techniques of each novel are studied, and the strengths and weaknesses of each are discussed in order to determine its literary merit.

The study concludes that Shrake is a regional novelist whose use of a limited setting does not limit the impact of his books. Through his universal themes, Shrake creates novels that are international in scope.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The three novels to be considered in this study were written by a contemporary novelist named Edwin Shrake. Shrake was born, raised, and educated in Texas, and all three novels are set in Texas and are concerned with the customs, folklore, dialect, and physical characteristics of the state. Shrake often indicates that the various qualities of Texas affect the lives of its inhabitants; therefore, he is a regional author, writing much in the vein of Bret Harte, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Hamlin Garland. One purpose of this study, then, is to treat the novels in terms of their being examples of modern regional literature.

Another purpose of this thesis is to examine Shrake's works in terms of literary merit. The plot, style, characterization, and themes of each novel will be examined in order to make this determination.

The approach of this study, then, is to examine the novels separately, with each book being the only source of information, a technique made necessary by the fact that no critical work has been done on Shrake. Each novel is studied in terms of the nature of its plot: the elements in conflict; the use of coincidence to entangle and disentangle the plot;
the use of subplots; the climax of the plot and whether it is natural or forced; and the denouement and whether it follows the climax logically or is contrived. The characterization of each novel is also discussed in terms of Shrake's success in creating complex and unpredictable characters, the manner in which the characters are presented, and whether the characters are logically motivated in their actions. In addition, the themes of the novels are considered in terms of the symbolism they employ and the manner in which they guide the author in selecting his characters, plot, and setting. Finally, the various stylistic techniques—point of view, sentence structure, diction, suspense, foreshadowing, and atmosphere—are examined.

Shrake began his writing career while attending Texas Christian University by accepting a summer job with a newspaper in 1951. Although he originally intended to go to law school, he continued in newspaper work, becoming a journalist for the Fort Worth Post, and later for the Dallas Times Herald and the Dallas Morning News. At these newspapers he worked basically as a sports writer, although he also did work as a rewrite man and police reporter. He continues to live in his home state and is currently an associate editor of Sports Illustrated. In addition to writing novels, he has written the original screenplay, Dime Box, and is the co-author of another screenplay, Rip.
Shrake's first attempt at fiction was the novel *Blood Reckoning*, a Western which is out of print and almost completely unavailable. Shrake himself has disavowed the novel and prefers not to discuss it because, he contends, it is not of the same quality as his subsequent works, an opinion that is supported by the fact that it has not been reviewed by any critics and has never been published in hardback form, as the other novels have been. For these reasons, then, this first novel will not be considered in this study.

Shrake's second novel, *But Not for Love*, was published in 1964. Although the time of this novel is never specifically mentioned, its concern with a power struggle for control of a large industrial complex is contemporary enough to allow it to seem modern even thirteen years after its writing. The book actually traces two different plots until its end, when the two major characters meet. The protagonist of the novel is a young lawyer, Ben Carpenter, who is fighting an apparently futile battle to keep Ramco Electronics from falling into the hands of a postwar Texas millionaire, Sam Guthrie, the other major character of the novel. As the plots develop, it becomes evident that their conflict is ideological as well as legal and financial. Although the novel ends without resolving the legal conflict, it is evident that Carpenter has won a moral battle over the unscrupulous, ruthless, and power-hungry Guthrie despite his temporary lapse into self-pity and retreat.
In many ways But Not for Love is Shrake's finest novel, but unfortunately he did not receive any critical attention until the 1968 publication of his third novel, Blessed McGill. The setting of this novel is the American Southwest of the 1880's, and it describes the picaresque adventures of an early Texan named Peter McGill. McGill's adventures begin with a mutilation and hanging and end with his own crucifixion by Octavio, a renegade Indian and former friend. Much of the brutality and violence of the Indian-white warfare of the time is graphically recreated as McGill witnesses or experiences various tortures, scalpings, and beatings. Finally, however, after leading a life of almost unlimited freedom among all kinds of people, he comes to have a vision of the unity of all men and willingly sacrifices his own life to save a small town of Indians, Mexicans, and whites. As a result of this action, he is declared Beatified, or Blessed, by the Roman Catholic Church.

Although this novel did not receive widespread critical comment, the reviews the book did receive are generally favorable. One Library Journal review says that the book "gives a tremendous picture of the violence, bloodshed, and lawlessness of the 1880's," and that the "description of a buffalo hunt is outstanding for its gore and pathos."1 Another

Library Journal review says that it is a "fast-moving yarn spun by an appealing character who shows a fine sense of irony and joy in the rugged frontier."\(^2\) A critic for New York Review of Books states that the "high adventure in Mr. Shrake's book is interwoven with a lot of fascinating material about the lives and customs of the Indians,"\(^3\) and he comments more extensively than other reviewers on Shrake's treatment of the Indians in the book:

Mr. Shrake's attitude toward the Indian combines the traditional concept of the Noble Redskin with sophisticated anthropology: there is a pervading sense of cultural relativism, and the book suggests that if the white settlers were bastards, the Indians they exploited and slaughtered were not, when it came to the point, all that noble either.\(^4\)

He complains that Shrake "shares the fashionable impulse to rub the reader's nose in revolting scenes of violence and mutilation,"\(^5\) but he concludes that this tendency does little harm to the book.

Shrake's latest novel, Strange Peaches, was published in 1972, and deals with the few weeks before and after November 22, 1963, the date of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. The protagonist of this novel is John Lee Wallace, a former

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\(^4\)Ibid.

\(^5\)Ibid.
television news reporter who becomes a movie and television actor. Although it seems to many of his friends and acquaintances that he is very successful in his role as Clive Riordan in the Western series "Six Guns Across Texas," he is actually extremely disgusted with the course of his life, for he sees that his work has been unrealistic, misleading, and basically worthless. He decides, therefore, to return home to Dallas in order to make a documentary film of Texas that will portray the state as it is.

John Lee's plans go awry, however; the scenes he has filmed are unrelated and unmanageable, and his own life has become confused and disjointed through his extensive use of drugs and through conflicts with a wide variety of characters ranging from a night club stripper and her employer, Jack Ruby, to a senile Dallas billionaire who wants to finance the film, provided it is another Western in the vein of "Six Guns Across Texas." Finally, the madness and confusion become crystallized by and vividly expressed in the senseless assassination of John Kennedy. John Lee's film of the event, however, is totally destroyed, and he is left with nothing except a desire to fight back against a corrupt and crumbling society. The result is his decision to become a gun-and-drug-smuggling outlaw.

This novel was reviewed more widely than Blessed McGill, but some of the criticism for Strange Peaches is quite negative,
as indicated by the following excerpt from Best Sellers:

Language and action on almost every page can be considered as grossly revolting and extremely vulgar. The range of disgust is far-reaching. The simplest bodily functions are put on display as well as the most involved descriptions of the sexual acts. Perhaps the author is making a sordid attempt at satire. He is using his creative powers to shock his readers into the realization that all is not so beautiful and pure in our modern society.  

Another reviewer's opinion is almost as harsh:

Set in Dallas at the time of the Kennedy assassination, Strange Peaches at first gives promise of some insight, but ultimately delivers none. The hero, a dope-saturated TV cowboy, decides to hang up his guns and make a documentary movie on Dallas, but nothing comes of it. Perhaps the book is supposed to be a slice of life, American documentary, but nothing comes of that, either. Instead, what we get is another emotional portrait of a group of degenerate misfits and their messed up lives. As characters they are never wholly realized; they seem mere stereotypes about whom it is difficult to care. We get some generalizations on American manners, morals, and types, but these appear only as a series of cliches.  

Other critics, however, are much more charitable, although their praise is always qualified. Publisher's Weekly says that it is "a fascinating, frightening, memorable, albeit drug-colored, one-sided view of Texas." Jay Cocks of Time magazine says that Shrake "captures superbly the feeling of combustible chaos that climaxed in the Kennedy assassination. But Author Shrake, who has kept his distance from John Lee

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8 Barbara A. Bannon, rev. of Strange Peaches, by Edwin Shrake, Publisher's Weekly, 10 April 1972, p. 51.
throughout most of the book, ends by indulging in a little unnecessary hero worship. This reviewer also says that the shift from Dallas to Acapulco is "crazily uncoordinated with the Texas part of the book." He concludes by saying that "the nightmare dwindles down to a good-ole boy's yarn that got out of hand, and a novel that first threatens to explode fizzes out like a firecracker tossed into a puddle."

A reviewer for the New York Times is also critical of the conclusion of the novel. He says that he is "not absolutely sure about the transformation of John Lee into an outlaw at the end. The symmetry is more fearful than credible." An article in National Observer agrees with this assessment. In the words of the critic, Shrake's narrative "just doesn't have any sense of urgency until the last, violent episode. Strange Peaches feels unbalanced and lumpy, as if it was put down and picked up once too often in the writing." He also comments that while most of the characters of the novel are "little

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
more than caricature of stereotypical Texans, the best are vital and fascinating. 

It seems clear, then, that the critical reception of Shrake's novels has been varied; while reviews of *Blessed McGill* are favorable, reviews of *Strange Peaches* are generally unfavorable, even though various critics praise specific aspects of the book. As the following chapters will show, *But Not for Love* is the most successful of the three novels, and *Blessed McGill* ranks second. Shrake seems more at ease with the times that he knows, for although his extensive research makes *Blessed McGill* a convincing portrayal of nineteenth-century Texas, his handling of present-day Texas is more complete and diverse in its range of thematic considerations and character studies.

Edwin Shrake, then, is a regional writer who studies the state of Texas in both the past and present centuries. Although he has not been recognized as a major American novelist, this study will demonstrate that he has succeeded in producing some thought-provoking and relevant reading material that should be of interest to people well beyond the borders of Texas.

\[^{14}\text{Ibid.}\]
CHAPTER II

BUT NOT FOR LOVE

If plot were the only standard by which Edwin Shrake's first major novel, *But Not for Love*, were to be judged, it might be considered a poor piece of literature. The two major reasons for this are that the action of the book is not unified and that coincidence is used at the most crucial point of the novel.

First, the action is not unified: through nine-tenths of the book, two separate story lines are developing which, although related, are not brought together until the last twelve pages of the long novel. The book begins with a detailed look into the life of the millionaire businessman Sam Guthrie, who, although involved in an important and undecided proxy fight for control of a large electronics company, is entertaining guests for the weekend. The entirety of Part One is devoted to a description of the two-day party which takes place on Guthrie's private airplane, at his weekend home, and on his yacht with Mr. and Mrs. Waddy Morris, Jr., and the elderly Senator Rose. Throughout these first eighty-seven pages, the other major character of the book, Ben Carpenter, never appears, is mentioned by name
once,\(^1\) and is only alluded to twice (p. 24 and p. 44), even though Ben and the law firm he represents are Guthrie's biggest obstacles in bringing his plan for a merger to fruition.

Second, because of the divergent natures of the Guthrie and Carpenter stories, Shrake is forced to use coincidence to bring the novel to its conclusion. The entire novel is built on the growing conflict between Guthrie and Carpenter, a situation which demands that they finally be brought together for a face-to-face confrontation. Shrake could have easily arranged this meeting had he limited his story to one setting, perhaps to Dallas since both men live and work in that city. By choosing different settings, hundreds of miles apart, Shrake creates a problem of credibility in staging the scene between his two main characters. Since this confrontation takes place in a third location, even farther removed from Dallas, it could only be accomplished through the coincidence that both groups travel to Mexico for the fiesta, and the even more unlikely circumstance that they go to the same town in Mexico and are able to see one another in a crowded, rioting stadium.

Fortunately, however, Shrake is able to take these potential problems and create a story which does not seem too

disjointed, slow moving, or coincidence-ridden. In fact, Shrake is able to take the problem of the divergent plots and make it into one of the greatest assets of the book. Contrary to any appearance of casualty, the separate Guthrie and Carpenter plots are carefully and artistically related, beginning with only the slightest interconnection, and gradually developing a closer association. This relationship is more easily visible when the contents of each part of the book are examined separately. Immediately following the detailed account of Guthrie's activities in Part One, Shrake devotes all of Part Two to a description of a number of Ben Carpenter's friends who are gathering to honor Ben's thirtieth birthday. Part Three, which continues to focus on the birthday party, begins to clarify and more fully explain the nature of the fight between Guthrie and Carpenter. Even though Guthrie does not appear in this third section, he is frequently mentioned (pp. 149, 151, 152, 153, 154, 156, 157, 159, 160, 161, 167, and 188). Then in Part Four, Shrake returns to the Guthrie plot, but this time his opponent, although he does not appear, is mentioned and discussed at greater length than ever before (pp. 211-12). Shrake continues to employ this parallel structure in Part Five, which returns to the Carpenter story, but contributes even more details about Guthrie, the proxy fight, and Ben's attitude toward Guthrie (pp. 235-36, 245-47); thus, the two stories are drawn together. Furthermore, the actual movement from Texas to Mexico begins
in preparation for the encounter between the two antagonists. The sixth and final part quickly establishes the fact that both groups of people are in Mexico; on page 261 Ben's group arrives, and, a few pages later, Shrake informs the reader that Guthrie and his associates have already arrived. For the first time in the novel Guthrie and Carpenter appear in the same chapter. This fact is significant because it emphasizes the drawing together of the two plots and continues to build toward the meeting between the two men which, characteristic of the entire plot line of the novel, takes place at the very end of the book (p. 360).

The action of the book is also unified through the use of subplots and flashbacks. The flashbacks are especially significant since Shrake uses them carefully and thoughtfully to supply the reader with the necessary background information, while managing to withhold the entire explanation in order to engage the reader's interest and to increase his involvement in the unfolding story. This device is used a number of times throughout the book; for example, Ben appears at his party drunk and depressed (p. 139); yet Shrake delays the full explanation for this, which comes in the form of a flashback (p. 155), until the reader is fully able to grasp the fact that Ben has somehow been completely devastated. Similarly, references are made to Ben's separation from his wife Jean
and the effect that this separation has had on him (pp. 161, 162, 163, 176, 181, and 185) long before any complete account of their problems is given (pp. 265 and 282).

Shrake's use of subplots also prevents the novel from seeming too sluggish and slow-moving. One of the more important subplots deals with Jacob Iles, Guthrie's boat captain and longtime friend, and his relationship with his wife, coworkers, and friends, especially Captain Sidney Burney. This subplot, although interesting, never threatens to obscure or overshadow the main emphasis of the novel. On the contrary, Shrake deftly uses it to provide indirect insight into Sam Guthrie, for in many ways Sam and Jake are very much alike: both are struggling for their own concept of the "good life," and both have literal and symbolic fights in an attempt to be the "cock of the walk" (p. 7). Furthermore, after establishing the similarity, Shrake is able to use Jake's encounter with Burney as a parallel to Sam's association with both Ben Carpenter and Waddy Morris; in the words of Jake, he, and by implication Guthrie, had "pushed too hard" (p. 196). His warning to Sam not to do the same goes unheeded, however, and the reader is left with the impression that Sam, like Jake, has met his match and is headed for defeat.

Shrake also uses subplots to provide the novel with humor. An example of this is his handling of Blossom, a very minor character, and her relationship to Cadmus Wilkins, a much more
important character. Blossom's limited vocabulary and her willingness to take off her clothes (p. 224) supply humor throughout the last two parts of the book. Another example of Shrake's using of subplots in this manner is his account of Chub Anderson and her escapades at Ben's birthday party where she is discovered under a bed with William Sheridan, her husband's business associate (pp. 129-32). The story of Jason Hopps and his continuing troubles with his wife Willie, his affair with Chub, and his experience in the bullring also provide much of the humor of the novel. Fortunately, these subplots support and complement the main plot and always hold the reader's interest, thus making an important contribution to the overall effect of the novel.

The second criticism of the plot--that Shrake was forced to use coincidence to bring the story to a logical conclusion--can be easily seen. As stated above, the likelihood of Guthrie's and Carpenter's going to the same town in Mexico when the entire country is celebrating Cinco de Mayo is very slight, and the fact that this scene is the crucial one of the book only serves to make the coincidence even more obvious. However, Shrake does attempt to lessen the possibility of negative reactions to this fact by having Guthrie state very early in the book his intention to go to Mexico for the celebration (p. 41). In addition, Shrake places Guthrie and Carpenter in different hotels on different sides of the border in another attempt to lessen the degree of the coincidence.
On the basis of these two attempts to conceal the coincidence, it seems safe to assume that Sh rake was aware of its existence and possible harm; therefore, he must have had a purpose for including it which he felt would outweigh this possible damage. The Mexican setting is important and appropriate in three different ways. First, Mexico symbolically represents neutral territory. As in legal matters it is out of the jurisdiction of the United States, in this novel it is out of the range of Guthrie's power and influence; therefore, Carpenter can meet him on common ground. Second, Mexico, especially during the wild Cinco de Mayo celebration, represents a primitive society where people release their inhibitions and put aside their mundane concerns to become immersed in the fiesta spirit. As the old Mexican tells Cadmus and Jason, the fiesta "is a revolt, like making love. We explode to keep from exploding" (p. 326). Similarly, the visiting Americans begin to lose their sense of social decorum, and their own primitive and earthy sides begin to emerge in their celebrations and in the confrontations that begin to take place between them, not only between Sam and Ben, but also between Sheridan and Walter Anderson, Sam and Jane, and Ben and Pippa. Third, by using a Mexican setting, Sh rake is able to include the bullfight, which will be discussed later as one of the major symbols of the novel.

As mentioned earlier, the basis for the main plot of the novel is the conflict between Sam Guthrie and Ben Carpenter.
At a concrete level, the plot is basically concerned with Carpenter's efforts as a lawyer to interfere with Guthrie's attempt to become even more wealthy and powerful by obtaining control of a large electronics corporation which he wants to merge with his own. Although Guthrie claims that such a change would be more profitable to stockholders in the form of larger dividends and to the public in the form of lower prices as a result of the end of wasteful competition and duplication (pp. 55-56), Carpenter sees it as an illegal attempt to establish a monopoly. According to Ben, Guthrie's "talk about developing the economy is a bunch of crap" (p. 362).

On an abstract level, however, much more is taking place than a fight over an electronics corporation. Rather, Guthrie becomes a symbol of what is "basically wrong and corrupt and destructive" (p. 235), as well as the symbol of men like him who are doomed to "collapse under the weight of their own greed" (p. 363). Ben, in contrast, is the symbol of integrity; he does "what he thinks is right" (p. 93), and, even at the end of the novel after all his suffering and doubt, he "can still feel" (p. 363). Thus, he still has his self-respect, and he vows to continue fighting corruption, even though he already appears to have been decisively defeated (p. 362). The conflict between these two men is revealed in the opening pages and continues to build in suspense as their rising hatred for each other makes a face-to-face meeting inevitable. This meeting results in a physical battle, but it begins as
an ideological battle, since both men express their differing views and attitudes. The struggle, however, does not have a decisive end; a riot breaks out in the arena and a mob in panic interrupts the fight. The book then quickly ends with Cadmus gathering together his friends for the return trip. Both the physical fight and the legal fight are left incomplete and undecided.

Shrake is not using the mob as an easy or contrived solution. The mob is not Ben's savior that arrives in the nick of time to snatch him from Guthrie's clutches. In fact, Ben is faring relatively well in the fist fight, but it seems that Guthrie is also; therefore, the outcome is not at all clear. The same is true of the proxy fight; although it is hinted that the fight is not over for Guthrie (p. 362), the reader is not allowed to see Ben experience a success. Again, Shrake does not leave the outcome in question in order to arrive at a quick conclusion; in reality, having all the struggles clearly ended would have been a neater and more concise ending, if that had been Shrake's goal. In contrast, by refusing to "wrap up" the story completely, Shrake is being consistent with reality: things just do not end neatly, and the ending of the novel reflects this.

Although the plot is interesting and well-handled, the effectiveness of a technique used extensively in Part Two is questionable. This second chapter is concerned with the people
at the party being given in Ben's honor. It serves to help set the stage for Ben's entrance, but the manner in which this is accomplished causes the section to seem disconnected and, at times, irrelevant to the major course of the novel. Jason Hopps, for example, is briefly introduced to the reader as a guest at the party (p. 91), and immediately afterward he suddenly becomes the focus of seventeen pages of detail about his marital problems and his extramarital affairs. Although this information is interesting, at the time it is not enlightening, for the reader does not know who Jason Hopps is in terms of his relationship to the two major characters in the story. Later, it is disclosed that Jason was one of Ben's roommates in college, but since his role in the novel's plot continues to be very small, it is surprising that so much time and detail is devoted to him at such an early stage in the novel. Then, after leaving Jason and returning very briefly to the party scene, a detailed flashback dealing with the early years of Walter Anderson, another very minor character, begins. This section is followed by similar accounts of Harry Danielsen and Cadmus Wilkins who, although they eventually play significant roles in the novel, are also unknown to the reader. Such material would have been clearer had Shrake made an effort to eliminate the reader's confusion by better identifying the characters and their relationships to Ben before giving detailed summaries of their lives.
On the whole, however, Shrake is quite successful in constructing a plot which is well suited to the themes of the novel. In many instances, his plot naturally and unobtrusively provides the circumstances which become the vehicles for expressing his ideas. One of Shrake's themes, and the one which is most basic in the novel, is the same as the theme of much modern literature: how does one live in a world gone awry? Both sets of characters are shown to feel the threat of extermination posed by the atomic bomb (pp. 197-98, 206), but it is the protagonist of the book, Ben Carpenter, who represents better than any other character Shrake's attitude toward the human condition: he is the symbol of all humans who struggle and fight in an evil and corrupt environment and are ennobled as a result of their efforts, even though success seems impossible (p. 363).

Shrake's system of symbolism, which he uses to help communicate this theme, is also well integrated into the plot. The major symbol of the novel is manure; in Shrake's world view men live and function in front of an outhouse that has no door, and they are simply forced to do "the best they can" (p. 264). This symbol of the toilet and of human and animal manure is repeated frequently throughout the novel (pp. 119, 159, 262, 263, 264, 276, 320, 332, 349, 351, 354, 357, and 367), and occasionally it becomes a point of focus, as in the flashback dealing with Harry Danielsen:
In Korea a phosphorous grenade exploded and showered across Lieutenant Harry Danielsen's back, and a few seconds before he became unconscious he was aware that he was lying face down in a puddle of wet manure deposited by a Chinese soldier who had been hit in the stomach. . . . Harry lay near the entrance to his command bunker, and the offending Chinese, the one who had dumped his bowels, sprawled just above him like a crushed and stinking bundle of dirty clothes that had been thrown on top of a sandbag. . . . Not that Lieutenant Danielsen cared. A man lying with his face in new manure couldn't make himself care about anything except his own predicament. . . . He thought that if he could move his face eight inches to one side or the other he would be the happiest man in the world. (p. 119)

Similarly, anyone who could escape from the existing human condition would be "the happiest man in the world" (p. 119); the point is, however, that such escape is impossible. Just as Harry could not move his head, the Mexican children cannot escape from the presence of their outdoor toilet, and Ben Carpenter cannot escape from the corruption of life that surrounds him.

Ben is the protagonist, however, because he tries ferociously, even though unsuccessfully, to help change the human condition. He recognizes that the world is surrounded by and steeped in manure, and he rebels against it. In indignation he exclaims that he is "sick of being crapped on" (p. 158) and that he does not like "to be crapped" (p. 176). But his long and hard struggle ends in an abrupt and cruel betrayal, and he is left with nothing. In despair he concludes that "life is absurd. . . . It's either absurd, or it's rotten. I go from one idea to the other" (p. 236). In reality, the term which is applied is immaterial since his meaning is clear:
life is hard, not only because of its filthy condition, but because the struggle against this condition is basically futile. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to be Ben (pp. 142, 146); more exactly, it is difficult to be anyone who fights against the human condition in an attempt to reduce its stench and corruption.

Unfortunately, however, Ben is completely devastated by what appears to be the utter failure of his long and tireless efforts. Throughout most of the book, Ben is suffering from a serious wound, bleeding profusely and pouring "his guts all over" (p. 308). In total despair he declares, "I haven't been fighting for anything except losing causes lately, and I'm sick of it. I'm sick of fighting for you or for me or for anybody else" (p. 157). Instead of struggling any longer, he decides to become a "barbarian" (p. 157), to accept the disgusting human condition, and even to wallow in it. He begins drinking heavily, sleeping with women indiscriminately, and, in general, "practicing up on being dissolute" (p. 159). His experiences lead him to conclude that struggling is not worth the effort and pain: "I've been a fighting man, and I've been a drinking and singing man, and being a drinking and singing man is better. I'm going to treat my soul to some awful wallowing" (p. 161).

Eventually, however, with the help of Harry Danielsen and Cadmus Wilkins, Ben is able to return to his former self.
Harry tells Ben that he is acting as if he wants to destroy himself (p. 160), and Cadmus bears down on him roughly in an effort to make Ben see that what he is doing is not right. He openly tells Ben that he is worried about the change that has taken place in him:

"You didn't use to be really in all this. . . . You used to get drunkern fourteen Frenchmen on Bastille Day and fight with ole Jean sometimes and vomit on your shoes and hustle women. You used to do that as good as anybody. But you was always a way back off from all this crap even when you was at your lowest. Like you was down there wallering but you was still sitting back looking and you knew you could step right out. You used to have you some dignity, ole son. Right now you ain't got enough dignity to be a men's room attendant in a queer night club." (p. 244)

When Ben protests, Cadmus says that his excuses are a "lotta crap," and he continues his lecture:

"You had some tough speriences. Who the hell ain't? That was sad about your daddy. But you was putting too much on him anyhow. You're in a perfect position right now if you take advantage of it. You're standing on your own two feet. By your own self. Bad trouble can either break you or make you strong. It'll always do one or the other. It's up to you. There ain't no heaven gonna open up and send down no golden babies with wings on their backs to take care of you. All you got is the fact that you're here and you got to make out of that whatever you can with whatever you got inside. You act like you can't understand why all this crap been done to you. That's because you all wrapped up in it. Take a good look at your own self and see what you got inside before you go whooping and yelling and crying about what's outside. Learn to get along with your own self." (p. 244)

When Harry asks if Ben has told him about his latest problems with Guthrie, Cadmus tersely responds that Ben "didn't have to tell me. It's bleeding out of his heart" (p. 245). He continues
by telling Ben not to "set around and blubber to a girl and try to make her feel sorry" for him (p. 245).

Unfortunately, however, Ben again protests against Cadmus' admonitions by claiming that Guthrie has beaten him (p. 246). It is soon after he makes this statement that the remnant of the people from the birthday party goes to Mexico and to the bullfight, setting the scene for a symbolic representation of Shrake's theme of struggling under hopeless and disgusting situations. Shrake makes his idea visible with his description of the bullring: a wild, yelling crowd on the verge of rioting is watching the artless torturing of a bellowing, moaning cow. In his description of the bull and bullfight, Shrake carefully combines much of his previous description of Ben Carpenter and his reactions to his struggle against the human condition. As Ben cries and bleeds, the bull moans, bellows, and stands "drowning in its own blood" (p. 354). As Ben states that it is hard to be Ben Carpenter, it is also "hard to be a bull" (p. 355), and like Ben, "the bull didn't know this was what he was growing up for" (p. 355). And as Ben wants to give up his fight against corruption after a severe psychological beating, the bull "with its neck bleeding . . . was less anxious to charge" (p. 351), and after being hurt again, "refused to charge" (p. 352).

Shrake's view of the human condition is also symbolized in other ways through the use of the bullfight setting,
especially in his description of the confusion, anger, and vulgarity of the noisy, abusive, garbage-throwing crowd, and in his description of the wounded bulls, which are twice described as being stained by manure (pp. 349, 354). Even the cows who fight bravely are cut down unmercifully. When Seton Parry says that the Mexicans should have let the bulls go, Cadmus tells him that "they claim to let one go now and then, but I've seen about ten thousand of these thangs and I never saw a bull turned loose yet" (p. 354). No one escapes from the pain of the struggle, no matter how valiantly he may fight.

Yet, it is the suffering that makes one wise. After all his pain and anguish, Ben is able to see the truth of Cadmus' earlier statement:

"Everything I've learned I learned because I don't know how to duck. Always got hit square. That's part of it. You don't want to keep from getting run over or you'll miss a lot. And let me give you a little tip. It don't quit hurting and you don't ever get used to it, but you get bigger and go long with it. Takes guts to live, and a lot more guts to be happy." (p. 337)

After making these discoveries for himself and after witnessing the life-and-death struggle that is taking place in the bullring, Ben is finally able to face Guthrie in one-to-one, face-to-face combat, declaring that he is "through crying" (p. 360) and ready to fight with more vigor and determination than ever before (p. 362). Now he is like the statue of the suffering boy that Guthrie keeps at Agua Verde: it has a
"face carved out of marble; a suffering, blinded face, mouth open as if trying to express an agonized knowledge that could never be grasped as thought or formalized into words" (p. 33). Guthrie likes the statue and is intrigued by it because he sees that the marble boy has "the secret of something, whatever it is, and he'd like to tell about it but he can't. . . . I sit and look at it and try to figure out what the old boy knows that I don't know" (p. 33).

By the end of the novel, however, the reader realizes that Guthrie will never know the boy's secret because Shrake has made it clear that only men of Ben's integrity can attain the knowledge and understanding which comes from suffering. This conclusion can be drawn from Shrake's negative comments about Guthrie and from his related theme of the importance of having integrity and a moral foundation. This theme is introduced in the very opening pages of the novel, and it is clearly referred to again at the end. Ironically, it is Guthrie who first introduces this theme as he tells Waddy Morris about the area around Port Arthur:

"We haven't had a big blow here for fifteen years. The last one wiped it clean . . . like the hand of God swept across the island. It raked most of that stuff into the bay. Blew away the docks, crushed the stores and cafes, drowned the business area, destroyed every house or building that wasn't anchored. Everything that didn't have a good moral foundation to it was squashed." (p. 30)

When Waddy questions Sam about what he means, Guthrie clarifies himself with the explanation that "things that had been built honestly and with patience and good materials, some of them
stood" (p. 30). At the end of the novel, however, it is Ben who takes up this theme in an attempt to show Guthrie that he failed to build a "good moral foundation" for himself, and was therefore "going down" (p. 360). In anger, he finally tells Guthrie what he himself has only recently discovered as a result of his struggle and pain:

"You haven't beaten me. You've beaten yourself. You're gonna collapse under the weight of your own greed, and I'm gonna be there to help it happen. You're corrupt. . . . You think you're getting what you want, but none of it's gonna mean a damn thing to you. It's all empty without integrity. . . . You don't have any respect for yourself, so you can't have any for anybody else. That talk about developing the economy is a bunch of crap and you know it. All you're doing is trying to feed your own dead soul, and it won't work. You're an insecure, frustrated man, Guthrie, or you wouldn't have sold out. I nearly feel sorry for you." (p. 362)

Ben, in contrast to Guthrie, is not corrupt because, as he says, "I can still feel. I've still got myself" (p. 363). In other words, he has integrity, and it is this integrity that makes him superior to Guthrie, despite the fact that Guthrie has finally swung the proxy fight in his favor.

This theme, however, is not limited to the two main characters; in fact, many of the minor characters are also destroyed or saved, depending on the degree of their integrity or corruption. Ben's father is one example of a corrupt character who falls, despite his carefully prepared facade. On the other hand, Cadmus survives, even though his business venture fails miserably. Harry Danielsen is a successful character because, like Cadmus, he is true to himself and
his beliefs. Walter Anderson, however, has no conviction; he just wants votes, and he admits that he will straddle fences in order to get them (p. 96). Although the reader is not told whether he is re-elected to the House, it seems clear that his lack of conviction is catching up with him and beginning to pose a threat to his continued success.

Pippa Parry is another character who fails to act with integrity and, therefore, loses what she wants. Guthrie's prophecy is thus fulfilled repeatedly throughout the book.

In a way, Shrake applies this same principle of integrity to the two cities of Dallas and Fort Worth. Through Ben he states that the cities are different because one, Fort Worth, has a purpose for its existence: it was originally an Army post and a stopoff on a cattle trail. Dallas, in contrast, "had no reason for being at all. No genuine reason to exist" (p. 230) and had "no foundation" (p. 231), facts which Ben believes may explain "what's wrong with the place" (p. 231). As he continues to condemn Dallas and its ways, it becomes clear that much of what he says is applicable to Sam Guthrie and men like him:

"Dallas developed strictly on a mercantile basis. . . . A place to get money and hustle and run fast and stay ahead so the whole thing won't collapse. That's why Dallas has this frantic compulsion to get bigger and build taller buildings and show off, so you won't ever look down and ask what you're doing there. Dallas doesn't have any patience with people who want to stop and examine the values to see if they're real. . . . It's built purely on materialism and is greedy and ashamed to be asked about it. It's a city of salesmen--
well dressed, well fed, swallowing everything, selling everything, clothes, electronics, services. . . . A salesman has to be at least a little phony or he won’t be successful, and in Dallas to be successful is the only reason to exist. . . . It's a place to cooperate and conform. If you're not like that, it'll try to break you." (p. 231)

The fact that Guthrie lives and works in Dallas reinforces the comparison between the two, and Shrake carefully explains that Ben lives and works there because he "thought . . . felt like . . . Dallas needed me" (p. 231), again contrasting him with Guthrie and stressing Ben's desire to change the corrupted human condition.

Another of the themes of the novel is directly related to its title, But Not for Love. This title is partially explained early in the book by Jake in talking about his relationship to Guthrie. He tells his wife Marge that he is Sam Guthrie's friend only as long as he makes his own way, has something that Guthrie can use, and does not ask a lot of favors; when that is gone, Jake says that he is gone also (p. 12). Obviously, it is not true feeling or love that binds Sam to Jake, just as Sam's relationship to his wife Jane was not based on love (p. 35). In fact, Jake's relationship to Sam is very similar to Sam's relationship to Waddy Morris, or to anyone else: Sam is tied to them all for his own self-interest, desire for power, lust, and greed--but not for love.

The same is clearly true of Waddy Morris, who, as Sam knows, would never have condescended to spend a weekend with
Guthrie unless he wanted something (p. 41). He says that Waddy "must like a few people" (p. 41), clearly implying that he is not aware of any. Usually, Waddy treats everyone as inferiors--business associates, United States Senators, and his wife included.

Organized religion is another theme that is repeatedly brought up throughout the book. Shrake seems to agree with Harry Danielsen's statement that "Christianity was roasted at Hiroshima and Auschwitz" (p. 298). What happened in World War II, combined with the constant threat of global destruction, caused Christianity to be useless and out of touch with the way people think and live. According to Harry, people are "wandering with brains frozen like English peas," praying to something they no longer believe in, and not believing even the most basic of Christ's teachings, that "it's a virtue to give or that the humble are blessed or that their neighbors are lovable" (p. 298). In addition, most people do not even think they have done anything wrong, and yet they feel restless and dissatisfied, having "nobody to tell them what's right in the language they speak" (p. 298).

Ben's feelings about God and the church epitomize what Shrake is trying to express: when Pippa invites Ben into the church building, he replies, "There's nothing for me inside" (p. 322).

Shrake's feelings about the condition of Christianity, however, do not cause him to renounce God or religion. Rather,
through the character of Cadmus Wilkins, he preaches a new religion which he sees as suitable for man in the modern world. First, a new concept of God is necessary. Cadmus tells Harry that "all you know about God, son, is that you don't know nothing about God" (p. 299). He tries to explain to Harry and Walter and the others that their concept of God "setting up yonder on a platinum throne and puzzling himself about what's ever gonna become of this world" (p. 299) is immature, "like a little kid thanking about his daddy and wondering why his daddy ain't done right by him" (p. 299), adding that it makes him sick to his heart that people have not grown up yet. In addition, it disgusts him that people are still deferential to ministers that "nobody believes in anymore" (p. 299). He says that they rule people through fear, and not through the people's convictions that what the ministers, priests, and spiritual advisors say is right.

What man should believe and follow, instead, is the example set by Cadmus. In fact, Cadmus calls himself God at one point (p. 170) and proceeds to confer the love of God on everyone because "there's nothing small and cheap about nobody once you get down to it" (p. 171). Neither is there anything small and cheap about God, for as Cadmus tells the girl at Ben's party, "You ain't gonna die. You're ee-mortal and ee-ternal, and I make everybody ee-mortal and ee-ternal. I pass it around" (p. 171). In addition, he loves everyone. He tells Pippa that "inside this here massive chest,
underneath this here baby pink skin, is a soul big as all humanity. Gentle and loving and . . . damn good" (p. 345).

Although many times throughout the novel Shlake has Cadmus proclaiming this new, down-to-earth religion, he is also careful to show Cadmus living it. He is by far the most generous character in the book; although he is not rich, he takes nine people to Mexico for two days, insisting that he be allowed to pay for all expenses. He even includes William Sheridan quite cheerfully, even though he had not intended to invite him, figuring "that his own heart was big enough to include everybody" (p. 239). In addition, he is something of a father figure, standing a head taller than all of the others, keeping his eye on them, and getting them out of trouble when necessary, as in the cases of the riot-inducing Blossom and the imprisoned Jason. Cadmus is also compassionate toward strangers; he is the only one in the group to give money to the begging Mexicans (p. 261), and he is kind to the young Mexican reporter Alonzo Guzman.

Cadmus' general attitude and demeanor also reflect his philosophy. He says that man was put on earth to have joy, and he is determined to have all he can. He admits, of course, that everything is not always going to go well, but he advises Ben and the others to be like him: "Thangs I can do something about, I do. Thangs I can't, I wish I could. But anyhow I'm setting here on this earth and can't nothing get bad enough
to make me want it any other way. If it does, then I won't set here no more" (p. 345).

Cadmus also expresses another major theme. Where the Greeks would have said "know thyself," Cadmus puts it in more metaphorical language:

"Dig down inside your own self deep enough till you find something. Be a window to your spirit and don't be scared of what's in there because if you go down far enough it can't be bad, I wouldn't thank, but can only be life, and then throw out what's useless and face up to what's real and be joyous because there ain't no use being otherwise." (p. 299)

He is especially concerned about Ben, and he directs similar comments to him specifically, as when he tells Ben that when a man turns thirty he has to take stock to see what he has done and where he is going; thus, the sign at the party that says "BEN IS THIRTY" is purposefully mentioned three times (pp. 165, 227, 243). During the night of his party Ben begins to come to some realization of himself, and the next morning the previous night's happenings seem years in the past. A change begins to take place in him so that while he watches the sunrise he experiences "an uneasy eagerness that was almost like a feeling of discovery, a sense of finding the unexpected and of not being certain whether it was good or bad, only that it was new and for that reason, perhaps for that reason alone, appealing" (p. 243).

Another theme that is central to the book is the theme of the humanity of man. Part of Ben's problem is that he
expects too much of people: he expects Mr. Simmons to keep fighting even when the battle is clearly over; he expects Chub and Jason to have nothing to do with each other even though each has an unsatisfactory marriage; he expects Pippa to tell him the complete truth even though they have just met; and he expects his father to be perfect and free from the temptations that naturally come to a man in his position. Ben is dedicated to doing what is right, and he expects to find this same dedication in others, especially in those he loves. Unfortunately, however, Ben's father, Mr. Simmons, Jason, Pippa, and others, let him down, and eventually, he lets himself down. After condemning these faults in others, he is horrified to see them in himself, especially in his treatment of his wife. His disappointment and anger cause him not only to want to destroy himself (p. 160), but also "to hurt people because they're human like I am" (p. 235).

This same theme is evident in the character of Jason Hopps who clearly represents man's inner struggle between doing what he knows is right and doing what he wants to do. In Jason's case, it is usually what he wants to do that wins the upper hand and gives him the feeling that the scum in him is always rising to the top (pp. 118, 250). Throughout the book, Jason is at cross purposes with himself, having only the explanation that "He made us human. . . . He made us human. Can I help it?" (p. 336). It is this lesson that Ben has to learn before he can come to terms with himself and
others: man is human and is, therefore, going to make mistakes. The fact that the two closing lines of the book deal directly with this theme suggests its importance to the novel. When Jason says repeatedly, "I'm a scum of the very earth," Cadmus emphatically answers: "Naw. You're just a man" (p. 371.)

Jason's purpose in the novel, then, is to dramatize one of the major themes, just as Ben Carpenter dramatizes the major theme of man's struggle against a world steeped in filth and corruption, and Cadmus Wilkins dramatizes the need for a new, more practical religion. Yet, Shrake is also aware of the need to give these characters credibility and not just have them serve as symbols or representations of his ideas. At times, however, he seems to have difficulty with this. An example is Ben, who has already been discussed at some length. Shrake carefully sets the stage so that the reader will be familiar with Ben's character, his position among his friends, and his relationship to Guthrie before Ben ever actually appears in the novel. When he does appear as a foolish drunk, the reader hesitates to condemn him because he has already been told that Ben does what he thinks is right (p. 93) and that he has been on a crusade against the corrupt Sam Guthrie (p. 44). Later, Harry Danielsen tells Ben, as well as the reader, that people admire Ben. Unfortunately, however, Shrake has concentrated heavily on showing
the reader how devastated Ben is and has spent very little in showing the admirable side of Ben; the reader for a long time is simply told that he is admirable. In fact, a great portion of what the reader sees of Ben deals with his retreat from the conflicts with Guthrie, his wife, and himself that he should be facing. In addition, Shrake concentrates too intently on his portrait of the suffering Ben. He is described as a human sacrifice (p. 160), a "bunch of raw nerves" (p. 219), "a mass of open nerve ends" (p. 307), "needles and pins" (p. 220), and "worn out" (p. 176), with no more guts (p. 164), having been "crapped on" (p. 176), and kicked when he started to crack (p. 282). These and other descriptions become repetitious and almost boring, causing Shrake's concept of Ben to be too obvious, overdone, and one-sided.

Shrake's handling of Sam Guthrie also has a weak point, for in many instances he seems like a nice, reasonable man: he sends gifts to Jacob Ile's children (p. 12); he becomes excited and emotional over returning home to Agua Verde (p. 29); he is concerned about man's destruction of nature (pp. 29-30); he treats his servants well, in spite of Waddy's disapproval; he defends Jake and his ways to Waddy and Beth (p. 38); he expresses sorrow over his father's hard luck and untimely death (p. 68); and he goes to the hospital immediately after learning of Jake's accident, promising to pay all of Jake's bills and arranging to have someone to take care of
his children. He is even thoughtful enough to have some
clothes sent to the hospital for Jake's wife. The next
morning he calls the hospital immediately after waking and
also calls to have Jake's trailer house cleaned and stocked
with food. These instances and others give credence to
Cadmus' observation that Guthrie is just a hard businessman
(p. 245). Of course, the reader is supposed to share Ben's
hatred and disgust of Guthrie; therefore, he is repeatedly
told that Guthrie is corrupt and despicable, but, as is true
of Shrake's handling of Ben, the reader is told more than he
is shown. For example, the reader is told that Guthrie does
not love his wife (p. 35), Ben states that Guthrie is corrupt
and "power-grabbing" (pp. 44 and 235), Waddy says Sam is
"queer for money and power" (p. 207), and Jake declares that
Sam has changed for the worst (p. 81). Yet for much of the
book, little evidence is given to support these claims.

The most condemning information about Guthrie that
appears early in the book comes from Guthrie's own thoughts
and explains much about his character and motivations. As
he is reeling in the big marlin, he lets his thoughts wander
back to Arreoro, a Mexican prostitute who did not return the
love he felt for her. In retrospect, he decides that his
mistake was in revealing his feelings for her, and he resolves
never to make that mistake again:

Must never let anything show on his big angry face, or
they could read it as Arreoro had read it. Not worth
it anyway. Look into the abyss. Love is a fantasy, screwing is a game. Guthrie had to dominate all that. He had to be patient, ruthless, and cunning. No hurricanes of the flesh, no bleeding hearts, no pity for snots like that lawyer Carpenter from the sick family. (p. 72)

The reader is also told that Guthrie wants people to "get in line" and "beg a little; no, beg a lot" (p. 71), for a new power source that he and Waddy Morris are planning to develop. In addition, the reader can see this greed in Guthrie's hesitation to give Jake a raise (p. 82); he is a millionaire, yet he wants his friend to be satisfied with a raise of only five hundred dollars.

Aside from these few instances, however, the reader is not actually given much real reason for disliking Guthrie until the closing pages of the book. After being rather genial for most of the book, he suddenly begins to reveal the harsh side of his nature. He refuses his wife's request to build a house for Marge and Jake (p. 201), and he insists on going to Mexico even though Jane wants to stay in Port Arthur in order to be available should Jake need them (pp. 209-10). Later, he is rude to the innocuous Senator Rose (p. 274), but his greatest spite and wrath is aimed at Ben Carpenter, whom he threatens to "smash" for continuing to frustrate his plans to take over Ramco. His hatred builds until, when he finally meets Carpenter, he gives Ben an angry and vindictive warning: "I'm gonna dump you and Simmons and the rest of you bastards so hard you'll never stand up again. You made me mad, and
I'm gonna hurt you for it" (p. 362). Toward the end of the book the reader finally sees the truth about Guthrie: he will not let anyone, whether wife, friend, or enemy, have any dignity at his expense (p. 328). The result of such an attitude is that he can no longer show any real emotion to those who are closest to him (p. 329).

In reality, however, Shrake's characterization of Guthrie is not as deficient as this analysis may suggest. If Shrake had portrayed Guthrie as being thoroughly and consistently evil and corrupt, he would have merely created a type or a caricature rather than an interesting and unpredictable character. Shrake wisely gives Guthrie a complex and many-sided personality which he gradually reveals (through interior monologue, dialogue, and narrative detail) in order to create a realistic character. Such a character, then, aids the total impact of the novel since his actions are logically motivated, freeing the author from the need to manipulate him like a puppet. Fortunately, Shrake succeeds in making both Guthrie and Carpenter complex characters from whom the novel's action springs naturally and convincingly.

It is also much to Shrake's credit that he is also able to create numerous, varied, and true-to-life minor characters. Even though he is compelled to spend a limited amount of time on them, he is able to make them interesting and alive through the use of vivid, exact details. One good example
of this is Senator Rose. Shrake does not need to tell the reader that Rose is a foolish, vain, and ineffectual old man; rather, he clearly dramatizes it by detailing his excessive drinking and "hollering" (pp. 54 and 63), his bumbling interference on the boat (p. 64), his drunken challenge to Guthrie (p. 65), and his pompous declamations on subjects ranging from the weather (p. 204) to man's basic nature (p. 205).

Shrake's handling of Waddy Morris is also excellent because of his use of well chosen, concrete details. Shrake describes him as having "a vaguely puzzled grin, as if he were interested in what he saw before him but not ready to be fully involved in it. With himself he seemed pleased. With everyone else, he seemed dubious, holding back, testing" (p. 22). He is later described as being "enough with himself" (p. 27), a fact he pompously exhibits in his relationships with his wife, Guthrie, and everyone else. He bluntly tells Guthrie, "I don't really need you. I could get it done without you. The question you ought to be asking is what you need me for" (p. 61). Waddy also has a propensity to brag on himself without the slightest trace of hesitation or embarrassment. Even before Guthrie agrees to let Waddy become his partner, Waddy arrogantly tells Guthrie his estimation of the Guthrie-Ramco situation:

"I can make the deal. I'm a dealer. I've got influence. As a dealer, I make you look like a Cub Scout. . . . I'm a better operator than you are. I'm smarter. I would never have got myself extended in this proxy fight without
Ben Carpenter shrewdly realizes that Guthrie has a more "formidable" partner than he has realized (p. 156), a fact that is clearly shown in Waddy's attitude toward Guthrie. Within twenty-four hours of becoming "partners," Waddy begins to order Sam to get him a drink (p. 213), to come to his room immediately (p. 273), and to get him a car (p. 318). Although such treatment may have been a surprise to the self-important Guthrie, it is certainly no surprise to the reader. Shrake clearly establishes Waddy's character at the beginning of the novel, and the remaining glimpses at Waddy are only further manifestations of it.

One of the least developed characters in the novel is Waddy's wife, Beth Morris. Basically, she is a caricature of the cold, vain, demanding, and self-centered woman. Yet Shrake never tells the reader this; she demonstrates it herself. Shrake takes full advantage of the few times she is mentioned in the novel to make her a convincing character, rather than merely a stereotyped one. Again, this is largely achieved through the use of detail as in the scene at the Morris's hotel room. While Waddy is loudly and angrily discussing a very important business matter on the telephone, Beth unconcernedly searches for the thermostat to turn up the air-conditioning and calmly begins to examine herself closely
in the mirror. Shrake has already made Beth's character clear, but this final touch gives impact to what could have been just an ordinary portrayal of an often-used character type.

Another factor that often contributes to the success of Shrake's characterization is his use of the third person omniscient point of view. By having the freedom to reveal a character's thoughts, Shrake is able to portray each character concisely and quickly, an advantage which is particularly important in this novel, since it has such a large number of characters. If Shrake had not employed this point of view, it is very likely that the majority of the minor characters would have been underdeveloped and much less significant, making it extremely difficult for Shrake to dramatize several of his important themes.

Shrake's choice of point of view is just one artistic technique that contributes to the total effectiveness of the novel. Another is his style. Throughout the novel, Shrake seems conscious of his sentence structure, varying the sentence beginnings, interspersing short and long sentences throughout each paragraph, and constructing clear, lucid, and very readable prose, as in the following passage:

In that barren time, bright with pain, Harry decided he wanted to be an artist. Unlike his closest friend, Ben Carpenter, Harry Danielsen had never set himself a goal. He was majoring in history in an offhanded way, and had minors in English and philosophy, when he and Ben quit school to enter the Army. There was no reason for Harry
to resume those studies. He didn't want to teach. He really didn't want to do anything at all. Being an artist, he thought, would be an allowable and semi-respectable way for him to bum around. He decided he wanted to be a painter, and to be in love, and to have at least one friend. (p. 120)

Shrake also sprinkles his writing with original and image-provoking descriptions and comparisons that bring clarity and vividness to his writing. For example, he describes three old men sitting on the fishing dock "who crossed their legs like women and showed the ill white of their ankles" (p. 4); he pictures the patrons of Jake's party fishing boat as "broiled, retching tourists" (p. 10); he vividly describes a leaf that "skittered a few inches on the broken sidewalk before it hung against a crack in the concrete" (p. 242); and he accurately describes the muddy tracks that wet feet leave on an apparently clean floor (p. 276). Again, as is true of his characterizations, Shrake effectively employs detail to give the novel a polished and complete appearance.

Another characteristic of Shrake's style is his frequent use of similes which are generally effective in creating vivid and illuminating pictures. Sometimes these are used for completely descriptive purposes, as when he describes the sea and other physical surroundings. Here, he again uses much visual detail, as in his description of the "ruin of a dairy barn that had somehow stopped in the act of toppling sideways and had hung for years looking as if a child could push it over with his foot" (p. 139), but he is also capable of creating
good auditory effects, as when he says "the water moved against the pilings with a sound as gentle as a child sloshing his hand in a bucket" (p. 50). In addition to description, however, Shrake uses similes to enlarge upon the personalities of the characters. He deftly adds to the reader's concept of both Blossom and Chub, for example, by describing this brief scene: "Sheridan was sitting on a couch in the rear talking to Chub, who blinked and yawned, and to Blossom, who looked dazedly at him as if he were trying to teach her Latin" (p. 259). Unfortunately, all of Shrake's attempts at similes are not successful. At times he becomes trite, as when he says "the channel was flat as a mirror" (p. 3), and sometimes he stretches the comparison too far as when he says, "the boats and fish and the Gulf were like ventilating fans that blew sweet air through his soul" (pp. 3-4). Generally, however, Shrake employs a careful and effective style.

Two artistic techniques which Shrake does not seem to employ extensively are foreshadowing and suspense. A concentrated effort to include either in the novel would probably not be effective, since the structure of the work as a whole naturally determines the moments of suspense and indications of future events. Part One, for example, ends with Jacob Iles insulting Sidney Burney in the bar, the result of which is not immediately revealed because the emphasis changes to the party at Harry's house. When the novel returns to Guthrie and
his group, however, the result of Jake's action is immediately revealed. The same type of suspense is created when Waddy begins to call Acey Johnson for the second time, prepared to use pressure to persuade Acey to change his proxy votes. Again the scene is switched, and it is not revealed until the book returns to Guthrie that Acey did in fact surrender to Waddy's pressure. The most important use of suspense, however, is that which is gradually built up throughout each successive part of the novel and finally comes to a head in the closing pages of the book. This, of course, is the confrontation between Guthrie and Carpenter. The delay in having them meet is a very effective use of suspense, but, again, it is largely made possible by the general structure of the book and not by any single effort to include suspense artificially or spasmodically.

The same is generally true of Shrake's use of foreshadowing: its use is determined naturally by the structure of the novel. The reader knows, for example, that the partnership between Guthrie and Morris is to be dominated by Morris, but this truth does not have to be flatly stated in order to warn the reader; rather, the snowball effect of adding facts and impressions little by little tells the reader that this is going to be an ill-fated decision for Guthrie. Similarly, the reader knows that Guthrie and Carpenter will meet, but this fact is not made suddenly apparent in some
ominous statement that often passes as foreshadowing. Rather, it is made clear by the general structure and movement of the novel. In short, Shrake probably does not add these two techniques because they are not needed; instead, they are built into the novel by its structure.

One final consideration of artistic technique is Shrake's success at giving his work a particular atmosphere. Setting in this novel is very important; most of the action of the book takes place in Texas, and Shrake consciously attempts to portray his native state through descriptions of it and through attempts to reproduce its dialect. Of these two, lesser emphasis is given to physical descriptions of the state, but the novel does contain several descriptive passages dealing with the state, particularly at the beginning of Part Six as "Ole Ben's Happy Time Minstrels" travel to Mexico. Shrake takes advantage of this natural opportunity to convey the character of Texas to the reader. The following passage is an example of this:

As the light broke along the highway, swatches of bluebonnets looked purple against the green of the fields. Smaller patches of pimento and yellow Indian blankets wove in with another flower as delicately pink as lingerie. The bus came across dozens of hidden meadows, each as green and clipped as a golf course, with low hills climbing slowly beyond against a fine clear sky. There were hundreds of ponds, very still, some newly dug with red dirt around their lips, others quiet beneath shading umbrellas of trees. Oaks and pecans grew along the road, where gashes of red clay mixed with the black earth. Young green corn stood in the fields. (pp. 253-54)
When the group reaches Austin, Shrake describes some of its peculiarities: the red tile roofs of the campus, the "great dun sword of the university tower," and the dome of the State Capitol, "looking like the spiked helmet of Kaiser Wilhelm" (p. 255). As they continue their trip, Shrake continues to describe the changing countryside, detailing some of the oddities of Texas culture and thought: the huge statue of a peanut and a sign claiming that Pearsall had the largest peanut in the world and a sign outside of Dilley advertising the "World's Largest Watermelon" (p. 259). Through Cadmus, Shrake emphasizes the unusual nature of Texas by saying that "without ever leaving the borders of this here state you can be in New Mexico desert or Mexico mountains or Maryland countryside or Louisiana swamps or Georgia pine forests or Kansas prairies" (p. 256). Through both description and dialogue, Shrake is trying to make the reader see that, like the people who inhabit it, Texas is a strange land of contrasts, a combination of conflicting values, experiences, and characteristics.

Even within the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth, Shrake attempts to give the reader a sense of place, not so much by description, but by the listing of actual places and sights. The major landmarks of Fort Worth are detailed for the reader by Jason Hopp's nighttime drive through the city:

He went through the stone gates and down the hill past the softball diamonds into Forest Park. . . . He went through patches of canary light from high lamps, beside the dark narrow fork of the Trinity River, past the
field where Sunday people flew model airplanes on wires. At the bridges over the river, Jason turned left onto the wide boulevard of University Drive and went up the hill between dark bluffs where big houses stood as monuments to dearer times. The zoo with its fearful noises and night odors was down below on one side, the golf course of Colonial Country Club down below on the other. He came to Texas Christian University, its yellow brick buildings as comfortably plain and ugly as old shoeboxes, and he drove beyond the university and into a parking space in front of the Oui Oui Club. (p. 98)

Even the "Oui Oui Club" is a real place in Fort Worth, although its name is actually the Oui Lounge. Shrake gives the reader the same kind of general tour of Dallas, mentioning the downtown traffic, the "narrow defile between cliffs of buildings" that is Commerce Street, the "plain, square gray" Neiman-Marcus building, the new hotels "which put potted plants on the sidewalks," the "red brick campus" of Southern Methodist University, the residential areas of North Dallas, and one of the major arteries through it all, North Central Expressway (p. 148).

In contrast to these scattered descriptive passages, Shrake uses the dialect of Texas throughout the novel to give the reader a sense of its setting. This use of dialect is especially visible in the speech of Cadmus, who continually makes statements similar to the following: "Who that lurking back thur? Step out here, sweet thang, and let us look at you. We ain't gonna hurt you. We white gods that just swum ashore. . . . Just brang me a banjo and let me play till everybody dances and they hearts leap up" (pp. 170-71). As is true of many Texans, Cadmus consistently substitutes the "a" sound
for the "i" sound, thus pronouncing "drink" as "drank" (p. 170), "thing" as "thang," "think" as "thank," and "finger" as "fanger" (pp. 256-57). Even the more sophisticated Harry frequently slips into dialect, as when he says "everwhere" (p. 256) and "lot's" for "a lot has" (p. 265), and the well educated Ben, as might be reasonably expected, occasionally slips out of his usual use of standard English (pp. 176, 183, 186).

Shrake's use of dialect and the vernacular includes the use of vulgar and "dirty" language, but its use is limited, never overdone, and never unrealistic or unlikely. Much of Shrake's book is dialogue; therefore, he is actually forced to write in the manner in which people talk. For him to exclude such language from Ben's angry tirade against Simmons, from the conversation between the men at the bar, from Cadmus' enthusiastic lectures, or from the normal conversation of hardened men like Guthrie and Iles, would have been highly unrealistic. As with his use of Texas dialect, Shrake attempts to be consistent with local speech patterns.

It is clear, then, that Shrake purposefully gives But Not for Love a strong sense of place. It is also clear, however, that recreating the language, customs, and characteristics of Texas is not Shrake's major concern; these are merely secondary to his real purpose, which is to re-create some of the problems and conflicts which are common to all people.
Rather than simply creating a regional piece of literature, Shrake created a novel that, although set in a specific locality, is universal in its meaning and presentation of reality.
CHAPTER III

BLESSED MCGILL

Blessed McGill is the story of a nineteenth-century Texan named Peter Hermano McGill. The son of a wild, hot-headed Texas Ranger and an educated, aristocratic Spaniard, McGill is a unique blend of roughness and enlightenment. Although on the surface he appears to be the "scalp hunter, buffalo shooter, gambler, brawler, gold seeker, and family man"\(^1\) that his father had been, the experiences he has with his former friend, the murderous Indian renegade, Octavio, cause him to discover truths about the nature of God and men that lead to his sacrificial death.

The major theme of the novel is McGill's oneness with all humanity. In contrast to the majority of people of his time, he can see goodness and worth in all races of people, and he does not hesitate to come into close contact with any of them: "Since I was a boy I have hit, shot, stomped, got drunk with, spraddled or even loved most everybody who appeared in my path and many that I had to chase" (p. 2). In addition, he admires the "independence of the Indian," the "joy of the Mexican," and the "strength of the Negro" (p. 202).

He also is greatly admired by many white people; he "got along well with most Mexicans . . . and favored a number of them highly" (p. 19), and he is a friend of and hero to a vast number of Indians whom he calls by their Indian names, the Human Beings (p. 91) and The People (p. 214), demonstrating his acceptance of them as equals. His mother once commented that he "was the most human fellow she ever knew" (p. 79). As his middle name, Hermano, indicates, he is a brother to all humanity and dreams during a peyote ceremony of one of his greatest desires--that all men would become brothers: "I wanted to reach out and hold hands with Barney and with the murderer on the other side, making the entire circle hold hands, as though that would be important. I knew there was unity if we would seek it" (p. 185).

McGill, however, also knows that there are "savages of all kinds," even among white men (p. 2). He has seen "calm decent folk" (p. 98) jump off trains and go almost mad, senselessly slaughtering buffalo that were the major source of sustenance to the already abused and struggling Indian. He is of the following opinion:

When taken individually, white men can be very decent. Some, like Barney Swift, are as fine as ever a human could be. But when encountered in the mass, white men are sorry rascals, indeed. Their prominent characteristics are greed, selfishness, arrogance, scurrility, impatience, vanity, and deceitfulness. In the mass they are a rabble that swarms like termites, gnawing up what is beautiful and reducing it to their own insignificant dimension." (p. 202)
In addition, even as a young man he could see that the brave but lawless Octavio is a mixture of the noble and the beast:

His face was haughty, arrogant, intelligent... his voice was resonant, his body splendid, but his costume barbarous... He had actually become tender when he lifted out my lion's tooth and religious medal for inspection, and the smile on his mouth and in his eyes was genuine, and now, looking at the Kiowa Apaches, he was a different being: without a decent emotion. (p. 155)

Yet, McGill himself has a similar dual nature. He is the son of "an Irishman and a fighter" whose "knowledge of life was broad" (p. 4), and an educated, religious, Spanish-born mother who gave him his education and his introduction to the Catholic church. Although as an adult he rejects the church and refuses to enter it (p. 218), he is never entirely able to escape its influence, a fact that irritates him and soothes his mother:

"Poor Peter. You don't understand yet. But you will. You are as much a part of me as you are a part of your father, who was never free. He was an agonized soul, just as you are, and he never found his peace until he embraced it... I have taken a different and more useful means. The secret to peace is to be used." (p. 117)

At the time, McGill fails to understand his mother's meaning. He feels that her religious asceticism is extreme, purposeless, and unrelated to the way he and the people about him, both red and white, think and live. As he tells Father Higgins, "in my life, whenever I wanted to pray I didn't have time to, and when I had time I didn't need to" (p. 226). Furthermore, he sees no need for the Catholic priests or anyone else to try to change the Indians' religion. To him, it is
"as sensible to believe the Ancient One came up from a hole in the earth as to believe that first there was one man and one woman in Paradise" (p. 7-8). It is also reasonable to him for the Indians to assume those parts of the white man's religion that appeal to them while holding on to their own traditional beliefs (p. 7). Although he likes the Franciscan priests, considers them his friends, and listens to them as they try to bring him and the Indians into the church, he believes that neither he nor the Indians need the word of God (p. 228), for he cannot see that any religion is superior to any other. He is personally tolerant of the priests' as well as the Indians' religion (p. 216) because, to him, "all things are one" (p. 154). As he sees the oneness of all humanity, he sees the oneness of all religions; for that reason he can wear the lion's tooth, a symbol of the Indian religion, on a chain with the images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Jude, symbols of the Christian religion, with the belief that they serve the same function, that of good luck charms. Aside from this, however, McGill has no interest in any religion, and although he occasionally enjoys reading a New Testament (p. 48), he rarely gives deep thought to religious matters (p. 159).

Despite his lack of formal religion, McGill essentially has a very moral view; he does not like profane men and has "always tried to stay in touch with the nobler emotions"
In addition, he admires and respects "a really good or virtuous man or woman who behaves slightly less well than my mother thinks they should behave, and at odd times in my life I have dreamed of being able to be virtuous" (p. 200). He is in touch with all humanity and for a period of ten years is on a constant journey to know, understand, and have peace with all men. He has a personal code of preserving his integrity and trying to do what he thinks is right in each situation. He feels obligated, for example, to follow the Indians' traditions when he is among them, yet he also feels obligated to save Ellen from the Comanches since she is one of his own kind and is in need of his help; he prefers not to have to kill Charlie Otter in order to fulfill this responsibility, but he knows that a man "does as he must" (p. 54), and he is prepared to kill his Indian friend if it becomes necessary.

Furthermore, McGill does not "reckon on sin" as Father Higgins does, simply because he does not view truth as absolute, as does the priest. Instead, he has found that "all sorts of things will pass as truth" (p. 3). At the end of an eventful life that has brought him into contact with many different kinds of truth, he arrives at the following conclusion:

"There is a truth that Father Higgins speaks, for I now know it to be a kind of truth. There is the truth that Badthing speaks, which is more like poetry. What the final truth is I do not comprehend, nor am I
certain there is such a quality apart from the whole, nor am I convinced that it matters. My father told me that birth is real, death is real, and all between is a game. It is hard to quarrel with that." (p. 3)

He attempts, therefore, to live as he thinks best, refusing to bend himself to another's code. Both of these desires are evident in his approval of a Navajo prayer that he learned with his son; he considers it the "nicest prayer" (p. 226) he has ever heard:

Oh our mother the earth  
Oh our father the sky  
Your children are we and with tired backs  
We bring you the gifts that you love.  
Then weave for us a garment of brightness  
May the warp be of the white light of morning  
May the weft be of the red light of evening  
May the fringes be the falling rain  
May the border be the standing rainbow.  
Thus weave for us a garment of brightness  
That we may walk fittingly where the birds sing  
That we may walk fittingly where the grass is green.  
Oh our mother the earth  
Oh our father the sky.  
(pp. 226-27)

His is a natural religion; since he loves mankind, he loves nature and wants to live in fairness and harmony with it and all its creatures, as emphasized by the lines "that we may walk fittingly where the birds sing/ That we may walk fittingly where the grass is green."

It is finally his love for humanity and his desire to "walk fittingly" that cause him to die voluntarily, sacrificing his life to satisfy the demands of the murderous Octavio. As a result of his death, Taos and the priests are saved; in addition, McGill is deified, not because of his Catholicism,
as Higgins tries to picture it, but because of his love for humanity. Higgins tells McGill, before either of them knows of Octavio's demands, that McGill "could do a great service for the Lord in fighting evil over this territory. You have a tremendous influence on these Indians. They regard you almost as a prophet. If you went out to spread the word of God among them, they would listen" (p. 228). It would have been to McGill's great surprise if he could have known that this prophecy of Higgins' had come true. Higgins had thought it would only be possible within the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church, but, in reality, McGill and his type of natural, humanitarian religion surpass the limitations of any one sect; his "religion" is more universal than either of those that he comes into contact with, and, therefore, is more acceptable to Indian and white alike, becoming a basis for fulfilling McGill's dream of unity among all people.

As the book gradually reveals, however, McGill is more a Christ-figure than merely "a prophet" (p. 228). As Christ associated with all men--Jew, Gentile, and Samaritan--so McGill is no respecter of racial differences; as Christ came with a religion of love and acceptance that was less complex than the highly traditionalized Jewish religion, McGill does much the same for a society torn between two highly ritualized religions; as Christ died a sacrificial death at the age of thirty-three, so does McGill; and as Christ was a healer and a man of God,
McGill is beatified, declared a martyr to his faith, and is attributed with "at least two of the three miracles necessary for sainthood" (p. v). Even the mule Excelsior is a part of this symbolism, for as Christ made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a mule one week before his crucifixion, McGill rides out of Taos on this mule through the assembled villagers to the accompaniment of a dozen Indians who follow him carrying candles and singing (p. 231). The form of Christ's and McGill's deaths is also similar: Christ was crucified, and McGill is "crucified upside down and burned alive" (p. 233). In short, McGill, like Christ, does what Mrs. McGill told him to do early in his life: he renounces himself. That, she told him, is the key to finding purpose in life and to coming to peace with oneself and with God (pp. 118-19).

The obvious difference between McGill and Christ, however, is that Christ was raised again and McGill is not. In fact, McGill sees death as a complete end: "A fellow hollers or does not and then he is gone and all that is left is a punky bag of flesh" (p. 2). Furthermore, he states that he "never could see any point to death if it isn't final" (p. 216). He has spent enough time "in the high mountains and among savages of all kinds" to be able "to judge what is immortal and what is not" (p. 2). Yet this knowledge of his own mortality does not cause him to feel that his life is too high a price to pay for the salvation of Taos. In fact, he does not
"much mind dying" because he has "seen that there is a unity in all things" (p. 2).

After first hearing of Octavio's demands, McGill is naturally distressed, but after reflecting on his life he realizes that there is nothing else to do; "there was really no other choice" (p. 231) because all his life "had worked in combination" to bring him to this point, and "there is no way out" (p. 231). At the last he sees that he has "a reason to die" (p. 2), that, as his mother had told him long before, his life could only find purpose in sacrifice and in renouncing himself. For this reason, he does not try to avoid his fate; he does not kill Octavio's messenger or leave his home because facing Octavio is how it "must be" (p. 2). And in following this course of action, he becomes virtuous as he has "at odd times" in his life dreamed of being (p. 200).

Actually, however, McGill has never been as far away from his ideal as he seems to think. Throughout his chronicle, he continually mentions the mountains which, as a part of nature, seem to symbolize his spiritual side and his need to be close to his god, "our mother the earth, our father the sky" (p. 226). In the mountains, he says, "there is a feeling of ancientness . . . there is a feeling that life began here" (p. 7). The mountains constantly draw him (pp. 7 and 214), and looking back on his life he sees that the only places he has ever been happy are "in the hills of central Texas, up here
in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of Taos and Santa Fe and in the mountains of Mexico" (p. 143). It is his opinion that a man needs to "be in the mountains now and then to remind himself of his true size" (p. 195), and he is "sure that whatever God there is must dwell in this place" (p. 8). McGill's sacrificial behavior, then, is not unbelievable or out of character: his whole life has been lived in close association with humanity and his concept of deity.

These themes of the unity of humanity, the unity of religions, and the greatness of self-sacrifice are the major themes of Blessed McGill, but they are not the only ones. It is also Shlake's purpose to explore man's inhumanity to man, the concept of justice, and the nature of reality. Obviously, the theme of man's inhumanity to man is closely related to its opposite theme, the unity of all humanity; yet so much of the book is devoted to the atrocities that men commit against one another that this seems to become a separate point of emphasis: Shlake presents the ideal, then repeatedly and emphatically reveals the actual. The contrast between the two is overwhelming, and Shlake seems to want to make this perfectly clear to the reader by relating literally dozens of the cruel, inhumane acts that had been witnessed in the short life of just one man. In addition, Shlake has McGill describe many of these events in nauseating detail, not for any sensational effect, but for emphasis to make his point clear. Shlake also makes it obvious
that no one race is guilty; the white men that constitute the
Haengebund are as cruel to Gerhardt and his family as Charlie
Otter and his Comanches are to the English buffalo hunter and
his nephews.

It also becomes clear that justice or retribution is not
always swift or sure, and often, when it is carried out, it
does more harm than good. The death of Ellen's parents, for
example, is never avenged, and the murderer of Ellen and Paul
lives to die of old age. One of the Haengebund is killed for
the murder of Gerhardt, but the retribution comes years later
and takes the life of another innocent person. The idea of
justice is not what Shrake is criticizing: after the English
colonel and his nephews maliciously and senselessly cause the
deaths of two Indians, McGill sees that vengeance is "inevitable"
(p. 101). Unfortunately, however, the punishment is more cold-
blooded and heartless than the crime and only leads to more
hatred and killing. The only solution that would really work,
and the one that McGill seems to realize vaguely, is for men
to view one another as brothers. Only then would senseless and
horrible slaughter cease, making justice a much simpler matter.

The final thematic consideration, the nature of reality,
is possibly the least developed and the least important one in
this novel, yet Shrake's brief handling of it in Blessed McGill
is a forerunner of his much more detailed discussion of it in
his next novel, Strange Peaches. The Indian magician and
prophet, Badthing, best personifies this theme. He is very concerned with the nature of reality and frequently poses "riddles" about the subject to anyone who will listen. He establishes the fact, for example, that light and sound both take time to travel through space. He then asks whether the light from a burnt-out star that is still reaching the earth is actually a star or only the picture of a star; does the fact that the light has vanished at its source make the light any less real? This unanswered question is indicative of the fact that man truly does not understand what is real and what is not and often is not even aware of the discrepancies which exist between the two.

Even during the nineteenth century, however, men were attempting to better understand the nature of truth and reality through the use of drugs. At the peyote ceremony at Octavio's rancheria, Eagle Dancer intones the following prayer to the mescal button: "Oh, Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (p. 183). Although this prayer is almost a direct quotation of the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, the phrase "he shall teach you all things" seems to have a special significance in this setting, for it is at this ceremony that McGill has his overwhelming vision of the unity of all men (p. 185). Under the influence of mescaline, McGill is able to come to a fuller understanding of reality. It is
also significant that McGill continues to go to peyote ceremonies even after he marries (p. 218), showing that he approves of a limited use of this drug which he calls an "Indian balm" (p. 218) and indicating that he sees value in it.

These six themes, the unity of humanity, the unity of religions, the value of self-sacrifice, the nature of reality, the difficulty of achieving justice, and man's inhumanity to man, are somewhat divergent, but Shrake is able to construct a plot, setting, and time period that makes it possible to draw all of them together without incongruity or awkwardness. The story is the recounting of the life of one man, Peter Hermano McGill, and his recurring struggles for survival in the wild, desolate areas of Texas, Mexico, and New Mexico during the late 1880's. At times, McGill naturally comes into conflict with the forces of nature, especially in the form of floods and snowstorms. His main conflict, however, is with the inhumanity that he encounters in different forms during the course of his life, but is best symbolized by the renegade Apache, Octavio. Although McGill and Octavio were close friends early in their lives, the conflict between them is inevitable for the simple reason that they are opposites: McGill is basically civilized and humane, while Octavio is basically savage and inhumane. It is Octavio and men like him who keep people of all races from being united in peace and harmony.
Many of McGill's experiences would have been less
effective, and much of the humor of the novel would have
been lost, if the story had been told through a third person
narrator; Shrake chooses, therefore, to have McGill tell his
own story, using the device of a chronicle which McGill begins
to write while waiting for his final encounter with Octavio.
Such a device has the definite advantage of reducing the
appearance that the author manipulates his plot and forces
his characters along despite their natures, for this arrangement
allows the main character to explain his thoughts and motives,
which then makes his actions more believable and natural.

Unfortunately, however, in this novel the first person
narrative technique also has definite disadvantages. First,
_Blessed McGill_ is left without a true climax. Much of the
story of McGill's life involves his growing conflict with his
one-time friend, Octavio; but the final encounter between them,
which precipitates the telling of the story, is necessarily
excluded since it ends with McGill's death. After building
toward this meeting through twenty chapters of exposition, the
reader is given an erroneous, unsatisfying, and second-hand
account of it. Naturally, this causes the denouement also to
be sketchy, impersonal, and second-hand. The reader is simply
given the following conclusion:

_The New Mexican_, in April 1883, reported McGill had been
crucified upside down and burned alive. The outlaw
Octavio was never captured. It was rumored that he died
in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, but that was never
confirmed. The latest miracle attributed to the Blessed McGill was the curing of a Zuni called Randolph Fat Toes who claimed to have leukemia. (pp. 233-34)

This first person approach severely limits the scope of the novel; McGill is almost completely limited to telling of his own experiences, and, therefore, no room is left for subplots. In fact, the characters are important only in the way in which they relate to McGill, and none of them, with the exception of McGill, demonstrates any real character development. Some attempt is made to explain the character of Octavio, but generally even the handling of him, the second most important character, is vague and largely stereotyped. The reader is informed that, although he is a full-blood Lipan Apache, he is the stepson of a Dutch farmer named Gerhardt who marries Octavio's widowed and pregnant mother after buying her from some Mexicans who had taken her as a slave. Gerhardt treats his wife well, and she "evidently became fond" of him (p. 21). As for the child, Octavio or Jacob, he is raised in Gerhardt's household as a "Christian more or less" (p. 62), but after witnessing the brutal murder of his father and being himself blinded in one eye, he decides that "that God up there is useless" (p. 30). While living with Peter's family he enjoys hearing Bible stories and occasionally goes to mass, but during the prayers Peter "would look around and catch him smiling and studying the people in church with his good eye" (p. 67). His attitude toward the Christian religion is completely ambiguous:
he decides to torture and kill Gerhardt's murderers himself, for he has depended on God to protect him from his enemies and has found that "it does not work so well" (p. 64); but when asked whether he believes that God and Jesus are real, Jacob quickly declares, "Why, of course I do" (p. 64). Throughout his adult life he continues to believe in God and Jesus; in fact, he believes in all magic and all gods (p. 156), and much of his conversation is concerned with religion and religious beliefs. The irony of this is one of the basic messages of the novel: the man who cares so greatly for religion and religious practices is a murdering savage, and the man who cares almost nothing for religion becomes a martyr and saint.

The character of Octavio, however, lacks full development, for, in actuality, little about him is explained. One might assume that his early experiences with the Haengebund cause Jacob to become Octavio, but the novel does not really support this. His heredity seems to have something to do with it, but, again, the extent of its influence is not clearly defined. Basically, Octavio is pictured as self-willed and irrational, doing whatever he wants with impunity, but what truly makes him become a savage renegade remains a mystery. Again, this can be largely attributed to the first person narration of the tale, for in reality McGill himself cannot know the answer to such a question.
For the same reason, the characters of Peter's mother and father are also undeveloped and flat. It would have been impossible for McGill to have known much of their motives and thoughts, especially since he loses contact with both of them when he is relatively young. Mrs. McGill, therefore, is largely portrayed as a strong-willed, religious, and almost aristocratic Spanish woman. McGill describes her as a "tough little lady" (p. 65) who wears Spanish-style clothes and has the "strength of the Conquistadores" (p. 13). When Peter was a child she took him to mass and kept him at his school work, but when Peter leaves home she retires to a convent, turning to the life of a religious ascetic.

Mr. McGill is also basically a type. His character is essentially built around the one central quality of being a hot-headed Irishman who becomes a tough, taciturn, adventure-seeking Westerner. As a young man, he roams in the mountains of Tennessee, goes to St. Louis for the fur and hide trade, and continues making his way to the West "with many adventures such as shootings, etc." (p. 2). He becomes a bullwhacker on the freight trains of the Santa Fe trail, a Texas Ranger, a buffalo hunter, and an Indian fighter. In short, he does everything that might be expected of an adventurer of his time. A serious injury, however, ends his roving career, and he settles down to family life rather ungraciously; he becomes a successful wagon maker, but his real fervor is spent at Dutch John's
Saloon where he frequently enjoys orgies of drinking, cursing, and fighting. As might be expected of someone of his background, he never becomes reconciled to Indians, Mexicans, or carpet-baggers. After impatiently chafing for some time under the humiliation and restriction of Reconstruction, he purposely has himself put in the Bull Pen, the prison stockade erected by the provisional government. Peter is not surprised; in his words, "if ever a man was destined to be clapped into the Bull Pen, it was my father" (p. 111). Neither is it surprising when he is finally killed in a gunfight at the saloon. Such a death is in keeping with his character and a fitting end for an unnaturally confined and "agonized" soul (p. 117).

The characterization of Ellen McGill, however, is so sketchy that she does not even become clearly identified with a type. She is a strong-willed girl who rather irrationally falls in love with the man who rescues her from the Comanches. Apparently, she is a good wife and mother, but little of her character or relationship to McGill is revealed. This is one of the more major faults of the novel, for it is unlikely that a man writing such a detailed account of his life would so totally exclude one of the people closest to him. A fuller treatment of Ellen would have been more realistic and would also have given the reader more insight into Peter.

The characterization of Peter McGill, however, is basically rounded and individualized. He is clearly pictured as the
product of both the peace-loving Mrs. McGill and the adventure-loving Mr. McGill. His father tells him as a boy that "whatever of Ireland is in you will show itself soon enough" (p. 6), and, like his father, he enjoys wandering in the open areas of the West, looking for adventure. In some ways, though, he is different from his father and more closely akin to his mother. In contrast to John McGill, Peter and his mother have a great tolerance and respect for people of other races. In addition, Peter has his mother's love for words and education and a sense of duty that borders on being a personal religion. His father is able to drift along during the Civil War without taking a stand for one side or the other, but Peter is never to do the same in any situation. John McGill has a physical and spiritual weakness that could not be found in his son or his wife. The result is that Mr. McGill dies an "agonized" soul (p. 117), while Mrs. McGill and Peter are able to find a purpose for their lives, and, therefore, to find peace.

Yet, during the course of the book, it is not obvious which of these two influences will prevail on Peter at any given time. His early treatment of Ellen is characteristic of his father's gruffness and suspicion of affection, but his friendship with the two Franciscan priests shows his mother's influence. At times Peter reacts with his father's quick temper and lack of moderation, as when he skins "Chinamanface" and takes pleasure in it (p. 51), but on other occasions he
has his mother's calm judgment and discretion, as when he keeps Jacob from mutilating Luther Freeman and when he deals diplomatically with Charlie Otter (pp. 52-60). In addition, Peter is a combination of morality and what most people would consider immorality. He is an honest man, is loyal to those he loves, and generally has an accurate sense of what is fair and just. Still, he is capable of killing and stealing and is once tempted to rape a woman (p. 175). He admits that he is not proud of everything he has done (p. 198), but neither is he guilt-ridden, for he does not "reckon on sin" (p. 2) as his Franciscan friends do. In short, McGill is a complex combination of forces and motivations and is, therefore, a very human and realistic character.

Unfortunately, however, the plot of Blessed McGill does much to belie the credibility that the character of McGill helps to establish for the novel, for the action of the book relies heavily on coincidence. It is also unfortunate that coincidence is not limited to minor details or occurrences, but is instead the major means of entangling the plot. The turning point in the relationship between McGill and Octavio comes after their search for the Tayopa Mine in Mexico. After returning unsuccessfully, many of Octavio's men fall ill and die, having contracted measles from No Nose, who began the journey with Badthing, Barney, and McGill. What is extremely unlikely, however, is the means by which Octavio and his men
come to join McGill's party. McGill and the others have been traveling for days in a vast, largely uninhabited area that is occasionally visited by Octavio and his men, who are accustomed to quick and erratic journeys through large areas. McGill, Barney, and Badthing are experienced scouts and sign readers and, since they have no desire to have themselves or their mission discovered, are traveling with the greatest caution and care. At one point they quietly watch a group of Kiowa Apaches who, after eating and bathing, oblivious to the presence of the white men, continue on their journey. Almost immediately afterward, this same group of Apaches comes unexpectedly upon McGill and his friends during the first few minutes in which they are atop a knob, studying their map and the surrounding area. McGill believes that they are doomed to die, and if the novel were realistic, they would have died. Instead, the reader is asked to believe that the Apaches, who are also very wary and cautious travelers, are being closely tracked by Octavio and his band who arrive unexpectedly within minutes of the Apaches, thus saving McGill and two of his companions in the nick of time. Even if Octavio had been tracking these Apaches for weeks, as he says, it is highly unlikely that he would have come upon them at that precise moment. It is also hard to believe that they are only minutes behind. As McGill himself observes, "This knob was becoming a veritable way-station for travelers" (p. 153).
Many other examples of coincidence can be found throughout the novel. Some are almost inconsequential, but many others have some bearing on the outcome of the novel. For example, it is unconvincingly convenient that Charlie Otter and Knows Nothing both escape death during the buffalo stampede, but the reader is told that Charlie Otter is able to find protection behind the body of his dead horse, and Knows Nothing is able to jump on the back of a running buffalo. The fact that Shreve does not mention how the Indian gets off and how he is able to appear at the camp shortly afterward without any sign of damage is also indicative of the unlikelihood of the event. It is also extremely coincidental, and unbelievable, that Badthing appears in the camp just as Charlie Otter is getting ready to take Ellen to his tepee, and it is even more unlikely that when on the verge of fulfilling his desire for her he falls over unconscious. Later on, the reader is told that Barney finds the almost invisible door to the Tayopa by chasing a deer that he has wounded. Then, when threatened by an impending flood, Octavio is able to delay it long enough to save all his men by causing, with a few shots of his rifle, an avalanche which falls into place just as the water is about to sweep over some of his band. In addition, the reader wonders how the renegades could poison some dogs immediately after losing all their supplies, how McGill could remember all the details of the peyote ceremony,
how the severely wounded Valentine could pull a bigger and stronger man over the cliff with him, and how McGill could remember all the details of a poker game, down to the exact cards that each player held in his hand. Many such questions arise when one begins to note that such occurrences, which in small numbers would have been acceptable, are so common as to become unbelievable and begin to detract from the realism of the novel.

Another major problem of the novel is that although the structure of the individual sentences is clear, lucid, and varied, the overall structure of the novel is confused and difficult to follow. Since McGill is writing his story at the age of thirty-three, it is obvious that much of the book would have to be written in flashback. There is nothing wrong with this method; in fact, it can be highly effective and very useful. The problem with it in this novel, however, is that the flashbacks are not handled in any systematic or organized manner. While telling of some past event, McGill often suddenly leaves his narrative unfinished and begins to recount another event that happened even earlier. In effect, the reader is given a flashback within a flashback. This, itself, would not necessarily be confusing, but the novel is further complicated by the fact that the frequent use of the technique gradually pulls the novel further and further away from any logical or chronological telling of events. Chapter three, for example, tells the story of the
marriage of Maria Guzman and John Patrick McGill; then, continuing in chronological order, it relates some of Peter's earliest memories, his life during the Civil War, and his witnessing of the murder of Gerhardt when he is thirteen years old. Chapter four begins to tell the story of his coming accidently upon a Comanche camp at the age of twenty-three. It is here that he first sees Ellen Baggett and learns about the murder of her family by the people who are entertaining him. While enjoying a feast with Charlie Otter and his men, Peter relates the details of how at the age of seventeen he went hunting buffalo with the Tanima Indians, and how he was afterward attacked by the Penetakas, a skirmish which resulted in his being named "Refuses-to-Die." Chapter five returns to the story of Ellen and tells how Peter successfully removes her from the Comanche camp, but instead of following this line of action, chapter six again returns to the thirteen-year-old Peter and his friendship with Jacob immediately after Gerhardt's death. Chapter seven goes even farther back into Peter's life; it deals with him at the age of twelve when he first met Barney Swift. Halfway through the chapter, McGill returns to conclude the story of how he delivers Ellen safely to her aunt and uncle in Austin. Yet this is only the beginning of the confusion. The order of events in the next few chapters becomes increasingly
confusing, jumping from one period of Peter's life to another without any apparent reason.

It should be obvious, then, from even this very simplified retelling of the first nine chapters of the novel, that the narrative is very confused and disorganized. It should also be obvious that very little, if any, suspense is created by this confused telling of the facts. Instead, the reader could easily lose the chronology of events, and, thereby, perhaps lose interest in the entire story. At any rate, up until this point the novel is unnecessarily hard to follow. In fact, the narrative is so disjointed that at the beginning of eight of these eleven chapters, McGill returns to the present, perhaps again to make contact with the confused reader.

The remaining nine chapters, however, are totally different. Beginning with chapter twelve the events of McGill's life are told in a chronological order. The result is that the novel begins to pick up momentum; the entire book seems to move faster and the reader becomes more engrossed in it. In this section, only two chapters begin by returning to the present, a fact which in itself indicates that the second half of the book, being more straightforward than the first half, is able to carry itself over an extended period of time without losing the reader.
A second major question in regard to the novel's style and technique is whether it can be logically accepted as what it purports to be. Could the novel be taken as a hurriedly written journal of a nineteenth-century Westerner? In an attempt to forestall any skepticism in this regard, Shrake includes an "Introductory Note" which attempts to make the novel more realistic by preparing the reader for the quality of the writing. The supposed editor notes the following:

Prior to publication, the manuscript was edited for spelling and to a lesser degree for punctuation and grammar, of which the Blessed McGill had an amazing grasp for a man of his education and period. (p. v)

Although this technique is artistically unsatisfying because of its obvious purpose, the answer to the question of credibility would probably be "yes"; in general, the novel could be accepted as being what it purports to be.

The reasons for this authenticity are varied, but Shrake, through various means, is able to give the novel a great deal of the flavor of the period and its people. One way he achieves this is through McGill's expressions and phrases that often are obviously from another time or have at least passed out of general modern usage. He talks about "fracases," "stompeeds," a "pestiferous" itch, "Gotch Eye," a "viga," and how he "hunkered" by a fire. Second, he fills the narrative with humor that seems to have come directly from a "scalp
hunter, scout, buffalo shooter, gambler, brawler, gold seeker, and family man" (p. 2), a listing which in itself is humorous. He describes how his father came to be able to marry the daughter of an unconsenting Spanish merchant:

"My father discovered the Comanches had rid him of a certain problem by puncturing the merchant with arrows and removing his hair along with two wagon loads of coffee, sugar, salt, flour, mirrors. . . . Possibly he had irritated them in some way, such as by cheating. Had they been Apaches the reason would be clear, as Apaches consider the sight of a Mexican or Spaniard provocation for murder, but my father insisted they were Honey Eaters, who also in those days needed little excuse for rascality." (pp. 6-7)

Later, he says that some warring Apaches were being "frisky" (p. 144) and describes his interview at the newspaper office as a "brush" (p. 210), as though it had been a threatening encounter with some enemy. Shrake's inclusion of historical people also gives the novel a greater sense of reality, especially since he describes these men in non-heroic terms and attributes most of their astonishing deeds to the imagination of the press. By having McGill expose their lack of reality, his own believability is enhanced.

In addition, the use of many details makes the novel more realistic. Instead of going to a "saloon" several afternoons a week, John McGill goes to "Dutch John's Saloon on Congress Avenue" (p. 13) which is "down the street from the Hancock store and the Sutor Hotel" (p. 198). Shrake's vast and detailed research also does much to make the book seem real. Much of the novel contains detailed descriptions of the
Indian's customs and culture. For example, Shrake tells how the Tanima Indians sprinkle bile on the liver of a freshly killed buffalo, eating it while still warm. He explains that the word Comanche was derived from Komantcia, a Spanish corruption of the Ute word for enemy (p. 35). He describes the Comanche's dress, the customary size of their camps, their love for oratory, their custom of taking two horses to war, their system of government, and their leaders' practice of giving their share of the plunder to their warriors. He describes the Indian's method of hunting and dressing buffalo in great detail and even describes how the male buffaloes stand in a protective ring around the grazing cows and calves that are always divided into two separate groups. Shrake even does research on some of the very minor details of the book, such as the rules to the game of monte (p. 192), the cost of riding the train and stage (p. 201), and the origin of the term "going to Green River" (p. 152). All of these techniques work to give the novel and the character of McGill a sense of authenticity which, in turn, enhances the impact that the novel has on its readers.

Finally, as in But Not for Love, most of the action of the novel takes place in Texas and Mexico, but unlike the previous novel, Shrake describes these areas in only the briefest terms, and the life styles and customs of Texans and Mexicans are not a point of focus. Instead, Shrake concentrates
on trying to communicate the flavor of a large and diverse area which is inhabited by many different groups of people; whites, blacks, Mexicans, Spaniards, Dutchmen, and a large number of Indian tribes are all the concern of this book. As the protagonist of But Not for Love is a very human character who is fighting to help humanity, the protagonist of Blessed McGill is also very human and in love with humanity. Yet, in this novel, humanity is pictured in much broader terms than in the previous novel. Shrike, in throwing off the limitations of the region of Texas, also throws off the limitation on the scope of this recurring theme; But Not for Love deals with the unity of humanity, as does Blessed McGill, but the novel fails to include specifically anyone other than Texans. Blessed McGill, however, clearly extends the bond to include people of all races. The result is that, although it is inferior to But Not for Love in the areas of characterization and structure, Blessed McGill is superior in its expression of this theme that is central to Shrike's writing.
CHAPTER IV

STRANGE PEACHES

Unlike the action in the two previous novels, the action of Strange Peaches is presented in a very direct and chronological manner. Its narrator and main character is John Lee Wallace, a dissatisfied thirty-four-year-old Dallas newsman-turned-actor who is struggling to change the course of his confused, disjointed, and basically purposeless life. In an effort to make this change, he comes into conflict with his family, friends, and, most directly with society--forces which demand that he conform to standards he no longer believes in. Ultimately, these pressures triumph over John Lee and lead him to revolt completely; he deliberately becomes an outlaw in partnership with his old high school antagonist, Erwin Englethorpe.

At the beginning of the novel, however, John Lee is almost completely unaware of the struggle before him. As an actor he has made three poor movies and has starred in an unrealistic and unartistic television series named "Six Guns Across Texas." Despite the high ratings of the show, John Lee "had a very low opinion"¹ of it and, therefore, decides to quit, go home, and

make a movie telling "what the place was really about" (p. 4). John Lee rather calmly announces these plans as he is a guest on the "Tonight" show, and his struggle to carry them out immediately begins.

John Lee's agent, Annie Nash; his producer, Norman Feldman; his ex-wife, Geraldine; his girl friend Dorothy; and many of his acquaintances are shocked and sometimes annoyed by his behavior. The criticism of some friends is subtle, but Billy Bob Teagarden asks flatly, "Ain't it kind of stupid to quit?" (p. 8). Surprisingly, even one of John Lee's closest friends, Francis Franklin, the employee of the billionaire "Big Earl," opposes John Lee's documentary project on the basis that it is too "far-fetched" unless he gets a "reasonable angle" (p. 7). John Lee ignores most of the criticism, not even bothering to defend himself, and slowly he begins to make his movie. He and his roommate Buster shoot film everywhere imaginable: at Neiman-Marcus, a livestock auction, a quarterhorse farm, a revivalist church service, the First National Bank of Fort Worth, a slum, a night club, and a dress factory (p. 153). As a result of the lack of continuity, John Lee finds it difficult to write a script or even to find a unifying thread to tie the reels of film together. Yet he does not seem to become discouraged, apparently believing that something will happen that will be a turning point in the making of the film.

Ironically, the assassination of John F. Kennedy decides the course of John Lee's film and also works to change the
course of his life drastically. This event convinces John Lee of what he has suspected for a long time, that everything is "out of control" (p. 14) and is "coming apart" (p. 333). The film of Kennedy's assassination gives structure and meaning to the other segments of the film and clearly represents for John Lee the madness and dissolution that he has felt but has been unable to express. The assassination, then, is the point in the story where it becomes apparent that there is no turning back for John Lee. The forces that he has feared for so long are now loosed and can no longer be ignored.

Kennedy's assassination is also the climax of the novel, and its importance is made even greater by the fact that there is very little action in the other chapters and their events generally do not have much relationship to one another. Except for the fact that they all happened to or are witnessed by John Lee Wallace, the events that occur often seem absurd, senseless, and confused. The opening chapter takes place in a hotel in New York City, but the scene quickly shifts to a long discussion of politics which takes place on an airplane. This is then followed by an insane ride in a hearse with a lion. Franklin's birthday party and the turkey chase which becomes a part of the celebration are followed by Dorothy's mother attempted suicide and a graphic description of almost unlimited misery and agony at the emergency room of the hospital. The unlikely assortment of the stripper, Jingo, Buster, Jack Ruby, Erwin Englethorpe, Norman Feldman, Little
Earl, Big Earl, Dorothy, Annie Nash, President Kennedy, Geraldine, and others drift in and out of the plot without much apparent order or reason. Almost all of the individual chapters deal in some way with madness, death, or dissolution, but it is not until Kennedy's assassination in the twenty-first chapter that the chaos of the preceding chapters is tied together and brought to a natural culmination. The novel, like John Lee's life, seems to drift without motivating force. The plot grows naturally from his character, and, for this reason, Shrake does not have to use force or coincidence to any noticeable degree. This, it should be noted, is in direct contrast with the two previous novels, which rely heavily on coincidence to entangle and disentangle the plot.

Another difference between this novel and the two previous ones is that the climax takes place much earlier in the story. In both *But Not for Love* and *Blessed McGill*, the climax comes during the closing pages of the novel, leaving little opportunity for a real denouement to be developed. The major concern of this book is to establish the impending dissolution of society; the denouement, therefore, requires that John Lee decide what action to take in response to this discovery. His immediate response to strike back blindly and violently quickly subsides into a desire to get away, and it is on vacation in Mexico that he is approached for the second time by the gun-and-drug-smuggling Erwin Englethorpe. The effect Kennedy's
death and Buster's absurd arrest have on him work together to make Erwin's second offer acceptable and even attractive. In a world that is coming apart, becoming an outlaw is the only "respectable" thing John Lee can do (p. 375).

The plot of Strange Peaches, then, is better constructed in some ways than either the plot of But Not for Love or Blessed McGill. It is more direct, less forced, and less dependent on coincidences. The two earlier novels, however, make good use of subplots to give dimension and interest to their stories. Strange Peaches, in contrast, makes no real use of subplots. At times, the past of some minor character is hastily revealed; yet on all of these occasions John Lee remains the central figure. In fact, as the narrator of the novel, he appears in every chapter and completely overshadows all the action, giving the reader no relief or change of pace.

As might be expected, this approach also minimizes the importance of all the characters but John Lee. The result is that most of these minor characters are built around one central idea or quality and, therefore, are often predictable. John Lee's friend Buster is basically a fun-loving, woman-chasing free-lance photographer whose main interest is doing whatever he wants without regard for social or legal norms. Dorothy is very similar; she "would sleep with you for a set of tires if she needed them, or if she thought you really had to have her, or if she thought you were cute" (p. 38). John Lee believes
that she "could have been a good model, but she would never stick at anything for very long" (p. 30). Like Buster, she wants to do whatever appeals to her and is never embarrassed to take what she wants from Buster, John Lee, Francis Franklin, an Arab sheik, or any other man.

John Lee, Buster, and Dorothy are the major representatives of middle-class America, but Shrake also examines some inhabitants of the upper and lower classes of society. A ninety-three year old Dallas billionaire called Big Earl and his "kind of simple-minded son Little Earl" (p. 5) are the representatives of the wealthy class. Throughout the book they fail to arouse the reader's respect. Big Earl is revealed as a silly and foolish old man who constantly confuses the real with the unreal. To him, John Lee Wallace is Clive Riordan, Prell shampoo is a wrinkle-erasing "permanent beauty" lotion (p. 102), and his fictionalized Family Chronicle is reliable and important reading material (p. 103). Yet, it is clear that he has not always been such a harmless and ineffectual man. In fact, Shrake makes it clear that he could not have become a billionaire "without doing damage to a lot of people" (p. 286).

Although Big Earl lives in great luxury, his home and staff of servants are modest when compared with the ostentatious splendor of his son's home, complete with llama-carpeted floors and gold-plated toilets. The father's opinion of Little Earl's intellect is quite accurate: his son is
"dumb" (p. 230). Little Earl's favorite leisure activities involve playing potentially dangerous (and definitely inconsiderate) practical jokes on his friends. As John Lee stated, Little Earl never understands what is funny (p. 23), but he is always extremely pleased with himself over the success of his jokes (p. 27). His Yale education does not do much to help his common sense or savoir-faire. His lack of concern for the arts is the least of his failings as a leader of society and business: his wife is an uneducated ex-convict (p. 43), and he has the lack of grace to greet his party guests with the question, "'You ever puke chicken enchiladas?'" (p. 42).

Such characters as Jingo, Erwin Englethorpe, and Jack Ruby are the best representatives of the lower classes. Jingo is depicted as a maladjusted night club stripper and drug addict who, although friendly enough to Buster and John Lee, has menacing underworld connections. Her language, actions, and attitude are often vulgar, but somehow, she persists in viewing herself as a "stah" (p. 177). Jack Ruby is a male counterpart of Jingo: he is a rough, hard, hot-headed, and dangerous man who considers Jingo's tiger act "pure beauty" (p. 34). Like Jingo, he has questionable mob-like associates; according to John Lee, the gun-carrying Ruby is "attracted to violence" (p. 269), and his pill-taking habits make him even more dangerous. The third character in
this vein, Erwin Englethorpe, has, like Jingo, a rough back-
ground that apparently leads him to become a gun-and-drug
smuggling felon. Yet, like Jingo and Ruby, he is proud of
what he has accomplished and, as Jingo considers herself an
artist, Erwin considers himself an "adventurer" (p. 189)
who deals in "real experiences" (p. 338).

Amazingly, John Lee is relatively well acquainted with
all these people. Naturally, being the novel's protagonist,
he is more completely explored than his friends; yet somehow
his inner feelings are not fully clear to the reader. His
heart, his motivations, and his humanity are often hidden
despite the fact that the reader is often told his thoughts
and is constantly a witness to his words and actions. The
first person point of view restricts the manner in which
John Lee is revealed; he is made visible only through his
own eyes, and often he conceals himself from complete view.
The result is that the reader often does not sympathize
with John Lee or really even become involved with his fears
and struggles. Instead, John Lee occasionally is an unsym-
pathetic character, as when he ruthlessly and repeatedly
kicks Dorothy and when he unfeelingly lectures the horribly
wounded Erwin. John Lee is a strange and unpredictable
character; the result is that he is complex and realisti-
cally human-like in his actions. In order to make him such,
however, Shrake has to sacrifice some of his appeal as a
hero.
More specifically, John Lee is a confused and unstable man. In the words of Norman Feldman, he is "erratic and . . . even bizarre in his behavior" (p. 8). John Lee defends himself by saying that he likes "to keep it moving" (p. 8), but the truth is that he is often eccentric and irresponsible. He basically wants "to have a good time" (p. 13), to pull off crazy antics with Buster (p. 26), and to "eat and drink and fool around, and not hurt anybody" (p. 14). This way of life includes extensive drug use: yet he considers that he and Buster have attained the "good life," eating, drinking, working, sleeping, and getting high without coercion or restraint (p. 35).

John Lee also has a deeper, more serious side, however, for he has foreseen the ultimate collapse of society and the disintegration of the world as he has known it. As he tells Colonel Burnett, "It's all out of control, anyhow. Anything that's not a mystery is guesswork" (p. 14). He also feels that his own life has been "insane" and "without significance" (p. 199), truths which he has long suspected that are finally clearly revealed to him during one of his trips on speed. In addition, he sees that this truth also applies to the people around him:

The people at the studio were like dolls to me. Their mechanisms and fears, their efforts to make themselves coherent and worthy of living, were so obvious and pathetic and simple as not to be worth my interest. All the unconsidered underpinnings that had held myself together
were suddenly seen in what I took to be a clearer vision, and were disposed of. I knew the unknowable. My own life was useless chaos, wired together by idiots, and pretending otherwise was ridiculous. (p. 199)

The imminence of chaos and dissolution is one of the main themes of *Strange Peaches* which is repeatedly alluded to throughout the novel. To some extent, the characters themselves represent this idea, for, as stated earlier, the members of all three classes of society are basically confused, maladjusted, and unproductive. Francis Franklin especially represents the dissolution on the individual level. Even though he is an intelligent and powerful man, "it was not uncommon for Franklin to have chickens in his suite" (p. 3), and he literally has to be dragged out of a bathroom to testify at a friend's trial. Another minor character, Colonel Burnett, thinks that he is going to "take care of politics" (p. 14); yet his own personal life has fallen apart with his divorce and the running away of his drug-addicted daughter. Even the most important businessmen of Dallas are nothing to admire. As members of the Breakfast Brigade, their goal is to sell Dallas to the world, but, as one of their more perceptive members is aware, when it comes to speakers, "the less you have to say, the better they like it" (p. 64). Another group of successful men comprise a Dallas hunt club where they enjoy "really great sport" (p. 115), shooting helpless animals raised in pens.
Another powerful expression of death, decay, and dissolution is Shreve's portrait of the emergency room of the hospital. In this scene, limitless misery, sorrow, and anguish are suffered in the faces of policemen and nurses who persist in their routines, apparently feeling nothing. Even nature seems to be affected to an abnormal degree: when John Lee returns to the farm with his father, almost all of his memories of living there close to the land and animals deal with death and decay. He remembers the mule which drowned in the bog, the milk cow that had to be shot because of the wound in her leg that became infested by maggots, the chickens that had their heads torn off, the German shepherd that was shot and left for the buzzards, his prized catfish that were eaten by turtles, and the pregnant rattlesnake and opossum that he killed and cut open. Even the people who live close to the earth are vulgar and corrupted, as evidenced by the malicious and warped Edgar Bramlett.

The ultimate expression of the impending collapse of the world, however, is the assassination of John F. Kennedy. John Lee's fear of "madness, death and dissolution" had been crystallized while he was under the influence of LSD; but after Kennedy is killed, he can again sense their presence as vividly as before, without the stimulation of any drug. As a result of the events of November 22, 1963, he completely believes that "madness and murder" represent "the forces that
ruled us. Our truth was lunacy and our destination oblivion" (p. 262). Society, government, and everything is "about to come apart" (p. 265), and "lunacy was unburied" (p. 265); the madness has been lurking under the surface but is now released. It is for these reasons that John Lee feels that "the only respectable thing" he can do is to become an outlaw (p. 375). Buster has the same reaction, wanting to go to Mexico to find someone to teach him how to start revolutions (p. 312). It is too late for half-way measures. Change has to be made at the roots of society and the times call for a new order: guns are now politics (p. 349).

Another important theme of Strange Peaches, and one that is closely related to the theme of dissolution, is the theme of the nature of reality and truth. Many times in the novel John Lee tells people that his film is to be a documentary that is "going to tell the truth" about Texas and especially Dallas (p. 7). Francis Franklin, in response to one of these statements, asks "what kind of truth are you talking about?" (p. 7). Later in the book when John Lee further explains that he wants his movie to be "the real stuff, about what I see and do" (p. 115), nothing is really explained, for, as Shrake make clear, everyone has his own version of reality. Even John Lee realizes this, especially in relationship to his ex-wife, Geraldine:
The difference in our views of events used to alarm me. A man could fall down in the street before our eyes and break a sack of eggs, and Geraldine's vision of what had transpired would compare to mine as a giraffe to a zebra. Listening to her recount incidents so vastly removed from what I believed them to be, I used to think I was losing my mind. Perhaps her vision was true enough to suit her, but mine was the one that worked best. (p. 87)

This theme is also dealt with throughout the novel in discussions about Clive Riordan, Tarzan, and movies in general. The majority of the people who meet John Lee associate him almost completely with one of the fictional characters he portrays, being unable to distinguish the real John Lee from what they have seen on the screen. The Arab Sheik, for example, calls him "a genuine Tarzan" (p. 60) and asks John Lee to do his "famous ape-man yell" (p. 60); still, he also is dimly aware that John Lee is an actor. This realization, however, never comes to Big Earl, who is completely convinced that John Lee is Clive Riordan:

"Yes, young man, you are an embodiment of what all young Americans should be. . . . Strong as a good Christian soldier should be strong! Clean of mouth and mind. Fearless. . . . Last week I thought they had you for sure. . . . It took a tremendous amount of courage and ability to get out of that one. Only a young man who could ride and shoot as superbly as you could have escaped and captured those theives. It made me feel warm and proud."

(pp. 100-101)

Dorothy's mother, Ina Mae, is a hard and practical woman of thirty-eight, but even she identifies John Lee with what she has seen on television, telling Dorothy that "John Lee's so good and decent. . . . You be nice to him, baby. There's not
many good men in this world" (p. 76). And, surprisingly, even John Lee's parents have confused their son with the character he plays, as evidenced by his mother's greeting of him when he comes home for the first time in many months:

"Let me look at you, Johnny. Or should I call you Clive? How do you say that, anyway, is it Clive or Cleeve? . . . Your daddy says it Clive to rhyme with hive. But he says Eye-talians, too. Honey, is that real hair you've got on?"

Even though it is obvious that John Lee does not appreciate these instances of mistaken identity, he generally humors his fans, answering their questions as if he really were Tarzan or Clive. Then at other times when there is no danger of offending these gullible people, he reveals that it is the lack of reality of the Tarzan and Clive roles that caused him to give them up. In his own eyes, he is a pathetic excuse for a Tarzan, for the producers of the movie use a double "for a lot of body shots and swinging in the branches and swimming underwater and for most of the animal rassling" (p. 9). In "Six Guns Across Texas" he does all his scenes himself. He hates this role even more than his role as Tarzan, for Tarzan is removed from society in some far-off jungle, but Clive is presenting a false picture of Texas and the values held by its people to a large and undiscerning audience. He tells the producer, Norman Feldman, the following about Texas:

"This is a foreign country. . . . There's a lot of people down here who don't speak English. You may
fly across America every week and think you understand what we're doing down here on the ground in these villages between New York and Los Angeles, but your ideas about us are about thirty-seven thousand feet off. . . . Your subject doesn't have anything to do with Texas. That title just sells better than 'Six Guns Across Iowa.' I mean, all those ice-cream peaks and redwood forests we ride through chasing those thousands of Indians and rustlers every week. One time I'd like for us to have a chase through cedar brakes and wind up murdering a Mexican for eating one of our cows."

(p. 212)

Feldman's defense of the show is pathetic, for he tries to justify the show's specific lack of reality on the basis that it still portrays the larger and more important reality of many true American values that, in actuality, are only another set of lies:

"This is a very big thing we're doing with our little show. . . . Is there honor in being an American? You grew up believing without question in your head that an American is superior to anybody—a better fighter, more resourceful and ingenious, better at sex or at least preferable, handsomer in a wholesome way, unselfish, morally certain. We've got a responsibility. We can't make a television show that tells the American people that all these things they believe are a pile of rat turds. They don't want to hear that. In fact, these things they believe are closer to the truth than not. That's my opinion. So you want to give the whole country an inferiority complex? No! In 'Six Guns Across Texas' we are sure of our virtue. We don't mind killing our enemies because they're wrong and we're right, and there's always more of them than there are of us." (pp. 213-14)

Feldman's eloquent speech, however, does nothing to persuade John Lee to stay with the show. He is simply tired of living a lie. His only ambition is to make a movie that will be a
type of response to the lies he has been portraying, for once giving the public a "good, true, and fair" view of Texas (p. 212).

Ironically, Erwin Englethorpe is one of the few people who can appreciate and approve of John Lee's plan for a documentary film. Although John Lee is in a profession which society deems respectable, he has no respect for himself because of his overwhelming awareness that he is a "fake" (p. 198). Erwin, however, is proud of his profession and himself and feels superior to John Lee because, unlike John Lee, he deals in real experiences. And, strangely, he feels a need to prove to John Lee that his way of life is more "real":

"Look here, Johnny, I keep telling you this is real life I'm dealing with. ... I guess you make a hell of a lot of money for playing like you do what I really do, but it seems to me you'd like to get out and experience it one time instead of keeping on playing-like." (p. 187)

Eventually, the two become partners, agreeing that after they have their real-life adventure they will co-produce an "authentic" film about what it is like to live "on the true edge" (p. 185).

_Blessed McGill_ touches briefly on the idea that drugs can sometimes help reveal truth and the nature of reality, and in _Strange Peaches_ this idea is further developed to become one of the themes of the novel. According to John Lee, his experiences with drugs cause him to discover personally
certain truths. For example, the first lesson that LSD teaches him is that "there is no authority for any belief. What is perceived in one condition to be one thing may in another be something else altogether, and in neither case are you certain" (p. 196). Another truth he learns from LSD is similar to what McGill discovers about the unity of humanity during the peyote ceremony. John Lee expresses it as the insight that "one is a unit of the cosmos" (p. 370).

Some aspects of the nature of reality also become clearer to him, as his discovery that "time and space are not just words, and that in considering them we are like babies playing with dynamite" (p. 195).

Another side of drug use is revealed in this novel, however, as John Lee begins to discover some of the drawbacks of using drugs:

The drug began to outlast my endurance for it and my interest in it; there was always a time when I looked in the mirror and saw myself ugly and deranged, and was tired and wanted to sleep, and the acid would not let me go. (p. 196)

He even comes to realize that the amphetamines which he uses regularly and depends on to keep him going (p. 4) and to help him reconcile his view of things (p. 320) are physically damaging to him (p. 154). By the end of the novel his use of drugs has considerably decreased, as the following passage explains: "I had been getting tired of being out of my head so much. . . . It was wiping out a large piece of my life that I occasionally thought I missed" (p. 320).
Another minor theme of *Strange Peaches* is religion, a theme that is also present in *But Not for Love* and to a larger degree in *Blessed McGill*. Like Ben Carpenter and Peter McGill, religion does not have much appeal for John Lee. He "lost" his "childhood God" (p. 196), and he has never replaced this loss with any kind of consistent religious practice or belief. Like Ben Carpenter, John Lee is floundering and suffering, feeling a powerful guilt that is his frequent companion (p. 255), but he has no way to expiate it. As a boy he attended Baptist revivals and summer camps; at these times he would ask forgiveness and rededicate his life to the church (p. 121), each time meaning it sincerely. Every few months, however, he would again feel that he had fallen and would repeat the process. His problem is the same as Peter's and Ben's: organized religion does not reach him on an everyday, continuing level. It simply does not meet the actual needs he faces each day. Ben finds relief from this problem by fighting the forces of evil, and Peter turns to a type of natural, pantheistic religion. Unfortunately, John Lee can find no satisfying, permanent escape. The use of drugs temporarily helps, but he constantly lives with the knowledge that "our souls must be boundless with evil" (p. 280). His final decision is simply to strike back blindly, to become a renegade from the standards of society and ideals of most people, things to which he can not conform.
Unlike *But Not for Love* and *Blessed McGill*, *Strange Peaches* never develops a very involved system of symbols to help express its themes. In fact, very little symbolism is employed at all. John Lee's hair and mustache, however, are mentioned often throughout the book as being unusual and causing negative reactions in the people who see and know him. John Lee makes no effort to change his appearance, for he apparently views it as a sign of his difference and lack of conformity. The pink stucco house in Hollywood is also mentioned often and, again, usually is used to indicate John Lee's unconventional tastes and lifestyle. Also, it is apparently while he is living in this house that John Lee becomes more and more involved with drugs; in a way, then, living there is representative of a major turning point in his life. A third symbol is Mexico, and the significance it has in this novel is much the same as it has in *But Not for Love*. It represents a wilder, more primitive society where people lose their inhibitions and return to their more natural selves. John Lee, for example, can not become an outlaw while still within the United States, even though Erwin makes him an attractive offer. After arriving in Mexico, however, his perspective changes, and he accepts Erwin's second offer with little hesitation. Secondly, playing the part of a gun-slinger and smuggler comes to him naturally; for example, he is able to shoot the revolutionary, Carlos, "without a conscious thought" (p. 356).
Shrake's symbols and thematic concerns represent important ideas. The theme of the decay and dissolution of American society is especially accurate and well substantiated by the incidents which take place in the book and by the visible disintegration which occurs within the central character. Unfortunately, however, this alone is not enough to carry the novel; artistic techniques are important as well, but in *Strange Peaches* Shrake's handling of these matters is extremely weak. One obvious weakness, for example, is that the novel makes no use of suspense or foreshadowing. Some suspense might have been developed during the Dealey Plaza scene, but the fact that the assassination is a famous historical event makes suspense impossible. Unfortunately, this scene contains practically all of the significant action of the novel, leaving no more opportunities to develop suspense. The rest of the book well fits John Lee's description of how the drugs he took had transformed the Thanksgiving party into "hundreds of fragments of conversation, hundreds of disconnected scenes, as with a puzzle that had been dumped on the floor and the pieces kicked around" (p. 231). With this kind of fragmented material, Shrake has little opportunity to work with building suspense or to create foreshadowing.

In addition, the author's choice of the first person point of view seems to be the wrong one, or at least is
handled the wrong way. Although first person is not of necessity a liability, in this book the reader becomes so saturated with minute details of what John Lee is doing day by day that the story frequently becomes bogged down and tedious. Sh rake's handling of the first person point of view would have been more adroit had he deleted some of these unnecessary details and concentrated on more significant action.

Another artistic weakness is Sh rake's language and choice of detail, both of which are often vulgar and disgusting. His graphic description of the lion in the hearse, for example, is unnecessary and very unappealing. The details of Carlos' death are almost nauseating, his description of Peggy's sexual excitement at La Scala (p. 148), and the story of Edgar, Molly, and the little schoolboys are nothing but crude. These instances of vulgarity and many others are distinctly different from Sh rake's use of common or "dirty" language in the previous two novels. In both Blessed McGill and But Not for Love, Sh rake's use of this type of language serves specific purposes and is realistic and, therefore, is probably unoffensive to most readers. In Strange Peaches, however, vulgarity is used without discretion or purpose and works to degrade the entire novel.

At times, however, Sh rake's artistic ability is still visible, especially in some of his descriptive passages. His description of John Lee's mother, for example, is both vivid and imaginative:
I kissed her on the mouth and then hugged her for a moment. She felt very soft, ample in form but without enough stuffing, like a cloth figure that had been leaking, and the squeeze of my arms seemed to mash her slightly out of shape... Her hair smelled faintly like an old quilt and felt crushy as flowers against my face. (p. 117)

At times, his narrative and descriptive details are perceptive to the point of having an arresting effect on the reader; the reader can see exactly what he means and feel the emotion of the situation. One example of this is found in chapter twelve when John Lee and Mr. Wallace are visiting the farm together:

"My father laughed. He put his hat back on and flipped the brim down at a stylish angle like a leading man of the 1930's, and he was at once transformed in my mind to a person I remembered with a strange yearning" (p. 134).

Through his description, Shrake can even make a common event like a football game have unexpected force or meaning:

Watching from the stands, or on television, I never really remembered that the players were boys of eighteen or twenty; seeing them move on the field with grace and power, hearing them crash into each other, watching them throw and catch and run and tackle with skills that had taken all their lives to develop, I thought of them as being of no particular age, but men, surely. (p. 203).

At times his descriptions are also humorous, as when he describes his apartment after the Thanksgiving party: "It looked as if a battle had been fought inside between several platoons armed with cigarette butts, buckets of water, cups and bottles, record jackets, tinfoil, cardboard, paper bags, and other refuse" (p. 242). Even his short, off-handed
description of Oswald is perceptive and powerful: "He looks like the guy whose name you never knew in high school" (p. 269).

As these passages demonstrate, Shrake's sentence structure is varied and is generally clear and lucid. His use of dialogue is also good, for it is patterned after natural speech and is generally well suited to the established personalities of the characters. Big Earl's mysterious servant, Mr. Clwyd, is consistently respectful to his employer, yet slightly menacing to outsiders such as John Lee. Jingo's self-centered, high-strung chatter is appropriate to her tendency to view herself as an underrated star, and Norman Feldman's pompous declamations and angry threats are characteristic of the overly self-important director who refuses to admit failure. By letting these people speak for themselves in such realistic ways, Shrake makes them more convincingly alive and understandable.

Unfortunately, however, dialogue and description are not enough. Although they are proof of Shrake's ability to write well, these abilities and talents are obscured in this novel almost to the point of becoming unnoticeable, simply because of the great amount of vulgarity that constantly eclipses these finer aspects of the novel. *Strange Peaches* has the potential in terms of theme, characterization, and description to rival *But Not for Love*, but, because of its overwhelming seediness, it fails to achieve the success of Shrake's first major work.
Finally, **Strange Peaches** should be examined in light of its setting and use of dialect to determine whether it can be considered a regional novel. As in *But Not for Love*, much of the dialogue of the characters is written in Texas dialect. Naturally, the degree of the use of non-standard English is dependent on the speaker, but throughout the book words like "dawg" (p. 3), "hidy" (p. 5), "podnuhs" (p. 116), "nigras" (p. 117), "maw" (p. 275), and "ruint" (p. 3) and phrases such as "I've did worse" (p. 6) and "would of got" (p. 27) appear with regularity. Such pronunciations and phrases are clearly a product of the region of Texas and serve to give the novel a regional identity.

Another characteristic of *But Not for Love* that Shlake includes here is the habit of dotting his narrative with short descriptions of some of the landmarks of Dallas. He mentions North Central Expressway, Southern Methodist University (p. 83), the intersection in Dallas where crowds annually meet to heckle one another before the Texas-Oklahoma football game (p. 178), the streets and buildings around Dealey Plaza (p. 259), the Dallas Country Club, Highland Park Village, and Preston Road (p. 38). Although **Strange Peaches** is different from *But Not for Love* in that it concentrates exclusively on Dallas, while *But Not for Love* also includes glimpses of Fort Worth, Austin, Port Arthur, and South Texas, the novel definitely conveys much of the character and attitude of
Texas during the early 1960's. Shrake accomplishes this by concentrating on the psychological, rather than the geographical, characteristics of Dallas. For instance, he deals with how Dallas hates Jews (p. 212), how Dallasites attacked Adalai Stevenson (p. 223), how the majority of Dallas did not appreciate President Kennedy (pp. 245-46), and how, in general, Dallas was a "city in foment" (p. 224). After Kennedy's assassination the narrator spends a great deal of time discussing "Dallas' guilt" in the murder (pp. 266, 269, 274, 279-80, 301) and tries to describe the city's reaction to the terrible event.

Yet it should be remembered that one of Shrake's major objectives is to explore the dissolution of society and this, obviously, cannot be taking place in only one city. Dallas is simply a focal point for a representative study of what is beginning to happen all over the country. John Lee's escape to Mexico is not the action of a frightened Dallasite getting away from a mad and violent city, but that of an enlightened American trying to escape the total decay and dissolution of an entire country. Although Strange Peaches is a regional novel, being set in Texas and attempting to reveal the feelings, customs, and habits of Texans, the story is not solely about Texas, but about the country in general. Therefore, like But Not for Love, it is a regional novel with universal themes and applications.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As this introduction to Shrake's work has shown, a number of similarities exist between But Not for Love, Blessed McGill, and Strange Peaches, even though the temporal settings and story lines are widely divergent. One of the most important similarities is found in the protagonists of the three novels. Ben Carpenter, Peter McGill, and John Lee Wallace are all bleeding or suffering heroes, struggling with the corruption of their respective societies. Ben's struggle is basically against a single antagonist, Sam Guthrie, but in a larger sense Guthrie represents the countless number of people who ruthlessly use and abuse other humans for their own selfish advantage. In the course of his struggle Ben temporarily falters, but the realization that the human condition can only be improved through the efforts of each individual leads him to return to his fight, a stronger, more admirable man.

Peter McGill's conflict is also primarily with a single individual, the renegade Octavio. As in But Not for Love, however, this antagonist represents evil in general, but more specifically, evil committed against another human being who, despite his race or color, is a brother. As with Ben, the sacrifice that Peter is asked to make seems excessive and
unfair, but, like Ben, Peter willingly embraces his lot and gives himself to save others.

In contrast to the first two novels, John Lee Wallace is not faced with a single antagonist. In this book the conflict is with society in general; John Lee comes into conflict at different times with high society, with his own respectably employed agent and producer, with his friends, girl friend, former wife, and with people from the lowest ranks of society such as Erwin Englethorpe and Jack Ruby. After the senseless arrest of his closest friend, Buster, and after the destruction of his efforts to create one thing that was good, true, and fair, he is left in a quandry with nowhere to go and nothing to do. Unlike Ben and Peter who return to the struggle after similar periods of doubt and disillusionment, John Lee concludes that there is no sense in pursuing his respectable efforts. The only direction for him to go is down, and he purposely chooses to become an outlaw, apparently thinking that it is better to help destroy a corrupt society than to try to soothe over its festering decay and filth. In a way, then, he, too, is working to make changes in the undesirable human condition.

Carpenter, McGill, and Wallace are also similar in that they are all anti-heroes to some extent. None of them is totally admirable or flawless. Carpenter is a womanizer and heavy drinker, McGill is a killer and thief, and Wallace is a
confused and disoriented drug user. Despite these faults, however, they are sympathetic characters; their flaws make them human. In addition, the fact that they are able to overcome these obstacles within themselves adds significance to their successes in overcoming the many external obstacles. Shrake clearly shows that everyone can and does have the responsibility and capability to fight corruption in its various forms.

The themes of the three novels are also closely related. The theme of humanity is very important in But Not for Love and Blessed McGill, and it is also treated in Strange Peaches. The two latter novels deal with the unity and oneness of all humanity. Blessed McGill particularly stresses that color and race are not natural or inevitable divisions among men; in actuality, unity is natural and imminently possible, if only mankind would reach out and embrace it. In But Not for Love Shrake studies the theme of humanity on the individual level. Through the characters of Ben Carpenter, Jason Hopps, Cadmus Wilkins, and others, he demonstrates that all men have weaknesses and that one must accept these failings within himself as well as within others. In this novel Shrake shows that tolerance is the key in bringing all men to an acceptance of themselves and others.

All three novels also deal somewhat pointedly with religion, particularly with the Roman Catholic Church, and
all three reach the conclusion that the relevance of organized religion for the individual's life has ended. In a world torn by violence and threatened by complete annihilation, the man-made forms and doctrines of the Christian religion seem out of touch with the way people think and live. Neither Ben nor Peter, however, renounces God or the idea of religion as a result of this realization. Instead, both have a type of natural religion in which the prime ingredient is the individual's own integrity and his relationship to man and nature. In *Strange Peaches*, however, it is not clear whether John Lee has found a viable substitute for organized religion. His major source of peace comes through his use of drugs, which is certainly a temporary and often unsatisfactory escape.

All of the novels also attempt to portray realistically the human condition, which, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is far below the level of desirability. The protagonist of each novel is struggling for survival; in *Blessed McGill* the struggle is often literal, but in all three novels the main characters are struggling to retain their self-respect, peace of mind, and integrity in the face of great opposition. The struggle, however, is not purely selfish; in struggling to overcome these forces they are also working to improve the human condition for others, even though their contribution often seems futile.

Finally, the novels are similar in their settings. Texas is the primary setting of all three novels, and in each the
action moves to Mexico, which always appears as a wilder, more primitive place. The customs, dialect, physical characteristics, folklore, and history of Texas are discussed or portrayed at various times in each of the novels, indicating clearly that Edwin Shrake is a regional writer. The limited setting, however, does not work to limit the impact of the books. As William Faulkner was able to express universal truths through a very particular setting, Shrake is able to use characters and plots that are basically Texan and still, through his themes, create novels that are universal. The unity of all mankind, the corruption of society, the impotence of organized religion, and the atrocities that men commit against one another are themes that transcend region. Shrake, like Faulkner, is able to preserve the identity of a specific locale and use it as a basis on which to create regional characters, atmosphere, and situations, while expressing attitudes and beliefs that are much more general. In fact, he handles this tension deftly, without awkwardness or conspicuous manipulation.

But Not for Love is the most successful of the three novels, having several well-developed characters, an interesting plot, a well-organized and suspenseful structure, a healthy assortment of artistic techniques, and a polished writing style. Blessed McGill is generally successful; it has a good plot, but its structure is extremely disorganized.
and distracting, it has only one well developed character, and the style, being the product of a mountain man, lacks the polish and artistry of the previous novel. *Strange Peaches*, however, is markedly different from either *But Not for Love* or *Blessed McGill*. Although its themes are still significant and noteworthy, its plot is extremely thin, its characterization sketchy, and its artistry poor.

Although Shrake's small output of novels and his failure to produce subsequent works of the quality of *But Not for Love* have caused him to remain a minor literary figure, he still follows some of the traditions of great modern novelists. Like many of the major figures of modern literature--Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Ford Madox Ford, Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh, Kurt Vonnegut, John Dos Passos, and F. Scott Fitzgerald--Shrake is a realistic writer who concentrates heavily on revealing the corruption and decay of modern society.

In short, Shrake does not live and write in a vacuum; he is a modern novelist who simply works in a particular mode with particular materials. His novels, although not always of the highest quality in every aspect, are worth reading and generally are original and thought-provoking. It is to his credit that he is not limited by his environment, but instead uses it as a lens through which to see a broader vision of the world.
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