

HUGH HOOD'S NEAR WATER : JOURNEY TO THE ' NEXT WORLD '



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John Blagdon Hugh Hood was born of mixed ethnic ancestry in Toronto on 30 April 1928. He has strong historical connections to Quebec, eastern Ontario, Nova Scotia, and more remotely to Britain. His mother's grandmother, a Quebecker named Aubeline Lemieux married a sea Captain named Blagdon from Levis. Hood's maternal grandfather, Alfred Esdras Blagdon, married Eugenie Sauriol from eastern Ontario and settled in Toronto. Hood's paternal grandfather, John, was born in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, and was a descendant of Admiral Samuel Hood, member of a famous naval family from Birdport, England. He married Katherine MacDonald from Antigonish and lived in Nova Scotia. It is therefore, not surprising to find in Hood a sense of a single, yet bilingual Canada. He even remembers hearing French spoken around his home from earliest childhood.

Hugh Hood received all his formal education in English, attending Catholic parish and in his high schools at where he received his grounding in Catholic doctrine and liturgy and in Scripture. His doctoral thesis on "Theories of Imagination in English Thinkers 1650-1790" got him Ph. D. degree from the University of Toronto in 1955. After teaching in Hartford, Connecticut, for six years, in 1961, he settled in Montreal and taught English literature ever since in the French milieu of the university of Montreal. He is fluently bilingual, and several of his books create a bicultural ambiance that bears witness to his perception of Canada as a dual nation in which minority French culture still possesses a strong sense of itself.

Hugh Hood is proud of Canadian biculturalism. In a letter to Naim Kattan in *Le Devoir* in 1964, following the publication of his first novel he articulated his aim to unite the whole of Canadian bilingual culture in his work. He was not material for sensationalism. He lived with his wife, Noreen Mallory who is an artist and their two sons and two daughters in Notre Dame de Grace, a quiet aging section of Montreal. Though he had a circle of artist- friends namely Seymour Segal and Louise Scott who are painters, photographer Sam Tata and writer John Metcalf, he was not a social creature given to gossip or glittering trivia around the cocktail circuit.

Near Water (2000) is the twelfth and the final volume of *The New Age / Lenouveau Siecle* series. Though it frequently refers back to people from the earlier books, resembles none of its predecessors. Indeed, Hood here develops an appropriate and distinctive though initially bewildering form for the culmination of his series; one might even suggest that an essential prerequisite for coming to terms with the book is to banish from one's mind all previously held assumptions about traditional novels. Not the least unusual feature of the book and one of which becomes aware of gradually in the course of reading is the way in which it is confined throughout to Matt and his consciousness. This is far

more than a mere matter of first- person narration. No other human beings are directly involved; there is no human conversation, no human interchange. Matt is either alone or surrounded by spiritual entities. Ultimately, *Near Water* can be appreciated as an extremely moving and rewarding book, but acclimatization to its particular mode is not easy.

At first encounter, *Near Water* dominated by angelic powers may well seem a bizarre development out of keeping with the concerns and methods of the earlier novels in the series. Such a reaction would be understandable, yet at the same time inaccurate. Once again, when one rereads the previous books of *The New Age* after experiencing *Near Water* he realizes that this preoccupation has been firmly, if unostentatiously, prepared for casual references, such as the phrase “infinite number of angels” in *Reservoir Ravine* (193) or the description of Squadron Leader Ferrier, who pilots Andrew Goderich across the Atlantic in *Black and White Keys* as “a good angel, a guardian” (52), suddenly take on new interest. One can now recognize a special significance not only in the incident early in *Be Sure to Close Your Eyes* where the young May-Beth makes her first drawing of an angel (BC 8).

And in *Dead Man's Watches* after considering the way in which the religious believer becomes accustomed to the notion of “the all-seeing wisdom of the Creator” (DW 85). Matt observes that “the watching of lesser invisible beings, angels, the saints in glory, seem equally normal” (NW 85), and he remarks a little later that each of “us may very well enjoy the attentions of a guardian angel” (NW 105). More over, in *Great Realizations*, while acknowledging death as “the final fundamental human act” (GR 35), he goes on to speak of “the permanent human need to treat imaginatively with the likelihood of existence in an afterlife” (GR 35). This is precisely what Hood attempts in *Near Water*. When appreciating the art of storytelling capacity of Hugh Hood, Michael Bliss makes a pertinent comment thus: “On my list of six finest novels written by Canadians, three are by Hugh Hood” (Book Cover)

A journey motif is the central theme of *Near Water*. In this novel, the protagonist Matthew Goderich who is in his octogenarian period tries to reconcile with his departed wife Edie. He is waiting for her arrival. Meantime, he is caught in stroke and starts his journey towards his eternal life. Matt is waiting for his wife to arrive and that allegorically represents his last journey and his soul to unite with the super soul like the theme of Bunyan's *The Pilgrims' Progress* or like Homer's *Odyssey*. Matt attempts his last journey guarded by nine angels in their hierarchical order. Even though he is not examined for his purity of soul to reach heaven, Matt invites all the angels one by one to rescue him from the fall or death. And thus he attains the condition of spiritual enlightenment in his death. Sam Soleck comments on the theme of *Near Water* and states thus:

The final installment of Hugh Hood's magnificent series, *The New Age*, is one of the most original novels of recent years. Artistically inventive, even extravagant, *Near Water* offers a vision that is wise and humane, a testament that belongs simultaneously to its hero Matthew Goderich, to Hugh Hood, and to the Canadian reader. It is a lyrical meditation on time, life and death, and the love that gives them meaning. If Proust was the inspiration for some of the earlier novels; he is joined by Dante of Purgatorio and Paradiso as the tutelary spirit for this one. (Book Cover)

There are nine chapters in *Near Water*, and their titles indicate the form of a listing of the hierarchical of angelic beings. The knowledge of angels has come down to Hood from scattered Biblical references, the church fathers, and early Christian tradition. In Hood's ordering, from lowest to highest on the heavenly scale, the heavenly spirits are placed one by one

Angles, Archangels, Powers, Virtues, Principalities, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim. This is a clear indication that the novel is to move into the direction of full-scale allegory. Since this may seem a daunting prospect, it offers highly satisfying conclusion to the series. For reasons that will become clear shortly when the nine part angelic levels as well as Matt's nine-part journey form the basis of the narrative part.

Matthew Goderich who expects his eighty-fifth birthday reaches his home town to have a reconciliation with his wife, Edie. As he is waiting for the arrival of her, he is caught in a kind of stroke. He could not move his body in the beginning but a little later he finds that he can hear and think. He thinks of the meaning for the word, “Periplum” (NW 3). Here the author's persona or Matt ridicules at the meaning of Periplum given by other literary writers, as the meaning for the word is not found in even Oxford English Dictionary. He says, “that the *Odyssey* had the form of a Periplum, a literary work having the overt and public form of say, an account of an epic journey, as well as a private, concealed form and purpose” (NW 3). Yet another levels of meaning run such as “multiple communications embedded in the various strata of a single work of art, a notion that for good or ill has had wide circulation and some serious acceptance among the intelligentsia. Periplum. I speak in the accents of comedy here; there is certain duplicity in play” (NW 3-4).

As stated, “The metaphor of human life as a voyage on strange seas is too appropriate to be left unspoken for very long” (NW 5), Matthew has travelled his long life and has come back to meet his end in his home town. Hence, he recollects in his memory his Periplum from his childhood to his present situation since he lies uncomfortably on a recliner. Now he understands the inevitability of death in man's life by saying “life is so plainly a trip over unplumbed depths” (NW 5). Matt thinks of how man treats his life superior to any other thing. Metaphorically, he compares the word, ‘lake’ to indicate life though the lake is small or big one has to steer his boat on it to reach the part:

Lakes are the truly Canadian bodies of water, always lakes. Some, like Lake Superior, are big enough to be rimmed with ports. Some are tiny, my lake and yours, for to be a Canadian is to possess a small body of water floating on your imagination. Large or small, our lakes have docksides to be treated with respect and caution. Messages of grace must have their carriers, buoys as markers, lights fuelled so as to shine by night. And they must be kept up to date; an outdated periplum is a wicked work, not to be tolerated. (NW 6)

Despite the immediate hint of allegory, the opening chapter begins conventionally enough. Matt Goderich's speech intonations, his idiom and mindset, and he specifically identifies Matt's conditions. The immediate situation is less clear, especially since the chapter is almost totally lacking in action, consisting as it does of meditational discourse. The chapter gradually reveals that Matt, now in his eighties, is driving leisurely fashion to his lakeside cottage in Southern Ontario in anticipation of a reunion with Edie that will perhaps become permanent. As he drives, his ruminates over a host of topics that pass through his mind, including memories from the past, uncertainties about the future, and ideas arising in the present from about what he sees around him indicate the reader about the passion and reason of Matt in his eighties. Indirectly, it also points out Hugh Hood's mental-process, who died in his eighties, and before the publication of *Near Water* in 2000. All this conforms to the tradition of free association that has become a recognized feature of contemporary fiction.

Matt's meditation on the word, 'Periplum' leads him to think about many such periplus. Matt further goes on to discuss Homer's *Odyssey* as a classic Periplum, ostensibly "a more or less realistic narrative" of a "return home" (NW 4), but covertly, "like so many stories with an epic intention – my own story for one- the *Odyssey* is a traveller's handbook, a guide to navigation" (NW 4). Other cited examples of this genre include *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Acts of the Apostles*. Moreover, the statement that "a marine Periplum deals with small seas and lakes" (NW 5), gives the suggestiveness of the title, *Near Water*. In addition, Matt's thoughts about St. Paul's sea journeys "give rise to meditations about his survival techniques" (NW 6), and a later references to various tales of the sea as "salvation stories all" (NW 8) offers a subtle hint to the direction that Matt's own story may be taking. Such hints come to a climax when: "Novel turning into allegory from Homer to Dante, the greatest of endings, the essential arrival, SAFE AT HOME" (NW 9).

Near Water contains Hood's various attitudes towards Christianity. He is positive at some passages and audacious in some other passage by raising questions against the blind beliefs. Even though the author accepts Pauline epistles and Paul's theological ideas expressed in the fourteen books of *New Testament* as true, he questions the tale of Periplum narrated by Paul. Matthew Goderich or the author's person metaphorically states that the human life is a voyage on a strange sea. While during journey man has to face many ordeal like a traveler on a ship. In this sense, both, Homer's *Odyssey* and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* are good book of Periplum as they explain how tough man's voyage on the sea of life. Moreover, the books provide an infallible traveller's guide.

Like this St. Paul, the apostle mentioned in the Bible had a voyage on the sea. He has stated in his *Acts* "A night and a day I have been in the deep" (NW 9). In *Acts* a few commentators have noted the connection between medical practice and seamanship. Here, the metaphor is that life is so plainly a trip over unplumbed depths. The Periplum of St. Paul is about a big ocean. However, a marine Periplum deals with small seas and lakes and gives a complete guide to the shore. Not even a small single rock is missed in marine Periplum. Hood's expositions on Paul's survival strategy by clinging to a broken spar and reaching shore safely, and the same story is considered as miracle done by god on Paul, are ridiculed by Hood. However, Hood has a faith in Paul's teaching which ultimately brought out a new belief in Christianity:

The travellers' tales of Paul brought the message to the Gentiles and created Christendom, altering permanently the meaning and purpose of Western culture, turning the obscure newborn sect, one among many, into Christianity. (NW 7)

Even though there are big oceans and small seas in Canada, the truly Canadian bodies of water are lakes. Matthew believes that "salvation is a sea-story" (NW 7) which metaphorically brings out the idea that after facing all perils and pains on the sea reaching 'Home' the travelers are able to understand everything whether tough or easy, big or small and treat them as same, like men who face all ordeal of life. This is "Pauline hope of Heaven" (NW 8). Therefore Matt says that sea-story is not a travel but an arrival. It has the intense charm of the happy endings, which can be cherished ever and ever, ". . . it is called the perfect Periplum. Phone home. . ." (NW 9). Hood has strongly brought out the point that Periplum is a salvation to man as it is associated with 'arrival'. In fact, *Odyssey*, *The Pilgrims' Progress*, *Moby Dick*, *St. Paul's Voyage* and *T The Rime of the Ancient Mariners* are telling the story of successful arrival and this can be compared to the bliss of being at Eden: "Safe at home in Eden or at least "this other Eden, demi-paradise, the history of our salvation, Periplum!" (NW 9).

In fact, St. Paul's Acts and Homer's *Odyssey* constitute the fundamentals of western humanity, Hood has correlated the Christian faith through the Periplum of Paul. "Paul is even less an ordinary tripper than Odysseus" (NW 10). Thoughts of St. Paul and his journey give many survival techniques to the world. One does not know what he did when he traveled whether he preached or he was a victim of piracy. But all the records found in the scriptures are authentic. In fact, no one on this earth faced such problems as Paul experienced. The story of Paul itself has god's action in it. So, Hood, purposefully has narrated Paul's story here. Before addressed as Paul, he was called as Saul and his duty was to kill many Christians and to arrest many priests. One day an angel struck him to the ground and then God asked him "Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me?" (NW 9). Saul feared and asked him who he was. God replied that he was Jesus Christ. Immediately, Saul lost his vision. He repented after this incident and God forgave him, and he was given a 'vision' and on that day onwards he was called St. Paul who gave a message to all the Gentiles and created Christendom. Paul after this revelation started teaching the message of God and predicts the second coming of Christ to the people of Athens and Rome. He addressed the council in Areopagus about God:

Athens and Rome, where else to preach the Word, the good news of the risen Christ? Athens first, naturally, the capital of thought, the home of dialectic or reasoned argument, areios pagos, "the hill of Mars," the hill at the northwest corner of the city, dedicated for many centuries to the pacifying of debate, transforming war into peace. (NW 10)

However, man's reason always demands authentic proof for any action. So when Paul talks about the miracles - "the rising of the dead, the raising of some disciple from the tomb after three or four days" (NW 12) done by God, the council in the Areopagus ridiculed at him by saying, "We know all about miracle religions; you can see their signs in every corner of our arena. But reason cannot learn from miracle; don't attempt to persuade us by shows and fancies into acceptance of miracles... Give us reasoned knowledge, science. Precisely what Paul cannot supply (NW 12). The only person in the council who believed Paul's words was Dionysius. He, like a Talisman united, the Greek and Jewish. He was the first Bishop of diocese of Athens, he maintained a place in the history of Christianity because of his effort in maintaining the faith of Christianity which constitutes the "coalescence of Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Jewish religious reflection in a pan-Mediterranean synthesis" (NW 13). The European society still maintains the hostility between Jews and Christian even in the beginning of this millennium. Moreover the very name Dionysius "was not quite powerful enough to avert the Holocaust, at least it did confer on us the names and ranks of the angelic choirs and the philosophical notion of the hierarchy, a name and a word of immense consequence, value, importance" (NW 14). The Angelic Choir is group of angels who always praise the Lord. The choir of angels gets the name and rank according to the value and importance associated with them. Like this man gets his position according to his merit and wealth. Matt states that the faith instilled by St. Paul, Peter and Dionysius may not match with the doctrines of Aristotelianism or Freudianism. In Fact, towards the end of fifth century "human experience was conceived not in terms of Aristotle's biology or Freud's psychology but those of lofty metaphysics deriving its terms from the later Plato or otherwise called Neo-Platonism" (NW 15).

According to this faith: "Existence was a climbing, ascending activity, moving towards a presence of pure light and heart" (NW 15). This invisible ascending contains hierarchy.

In fact, St. Dionysius of the Areopagus described the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, because nothing is same in its any state. Hence Matthew faithfully correlates the words of W. B. Yeats “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.” (“The Second Coming”) When one says that two things are similar, it indirectly refers that they are not the same thing: “likeness isn’t sameness. Likeness divides; sameness unites” (NW 19). Based on this hierarchy the society especially the western society was built. Hierarchy is invariably vertical in structure. One can climb to the level of high or fall to the deep low based on his attitudes. Jesus Christ was raised to the level of God because of his good deeds and Lucifer, the archangel fell down into the deep pit of the hell because of his audacious nature of warring against God. Generally, “Hierarchies are full of complex relationship of sameness and difference” (NW 22) and that ultimately give way for class and rank system and “Rank is qualitative, class quantitative” (NW 22). Rank clarifies inequalities by raising questions about the exact location of the archangels in the celestial hierarchy:

Blessed Michael, Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil . . . and do thou, O prince of the heavenly host, thrust back into HELL Satan and all the other evil spirits that wander about the world seeking the ruin of souls. (NW 23)

Matthew when ponders over the class and rank in the hierarchical order also thinks about the hierarchal order in playing-cards. He speculates about the superiority of one over the other and that forms the rank. He says, “. . . that spades come first, then hearts, then diamonds, and finally clubs. How do spades precede hearts? Because death costs more than love?” (NW 23). Metaphorically, spade stands for death and heart stands for love. However, according to Matt it is easy to love than to die. As Matt is at the threshold of death, he thinks about colour-hierarchy. Of all colours black is placed high in the echelle, because “Death and sin over life and love? (NW 23) fell on mankind after his Great Fall.

Matthew even thinks about his rank. He believes that he belongs to upper-middle class and possesses a higher or middle rank, when compared to his contemporaries. This idea about himself makes Matt to think about the order and rank of angels. However, he is a bit happy to understand that there is no class struggle among the angels. The ancient story about angels danced on the head of pins gives Matt the idea that angels are “immaterial spirits” (NW 25) and are countless in numbers. He also believes that: “For to loathe the material world is to sin against humanity. We are not pure angelic beings; we are weirdly composite beings, created half to rise and half to fall, the bridge between spirit and matter. Angels have no gender; we are men and women” (NE 25).

When Matt tells that “I’m drawing near Athens now. And from there it’s no distance to the lake” (NW 27) symbolically announces that he is going to face his end in his life and he may proceed his life in another world. The world which one needs to face after his death is in a form of that contains a circle and a triangle and that represents the Divine. “God in a circle” (NW 26). When the equilateral triangle is set down in the centre of the circle touching its perimeter at three equidistant points, then it forms the ‘Trinity’. The mysterious, silent, and the invisible number generated by the reciprocal relations of the triangle in the circle leads to the agreement of one and three, probably the silent two. The three in – one contains “Ascent, descent and the way, “Father/Son/Holy Spirit” (NW 27). This triadic structure is perhaps a necessary one for the integral element of ‘Being’.

Near Water is divided into nine chapters so as to ensure the hierarchy in the world of angel. The first three chapters namely, “Angels, Archangels and Powers” are closer to

the world of man. Though man knows this theological doctrine he never minds this while doing his action. The next three chapters namely “Virtues, Principalities, Dominations” form the middle-path and that leads man to the higher level by considering his good or bad deeds. The last three chapters namely “Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim” make man to ascend faster into the world of heaven or hell based on his deeds. Matthew Goderich, the protagonist of *The New Age* series has travelled a long way in his life and now comes to his lakeside home to encounter his last moments in life - which is a complete Periplum. The unknown critic who commented the theme of *Near Water*, in a few words avers the success of Hood’s *The New Age* series especially the last novel, *Near Water*:

Near Water is the final volume in Hugh Hood’s spectacular *The New Age* series, an epic saga that is already treasured and revered as a meticulous chronicle of late twentieth and early twenty –first century Canada.

Beginning with an almost stream-of-consciousness meditation on identity, religion, angels, Dionysius, Aristotle, Freud, and you name it, Hugh Hood’s prose scintillates in *Near Water*, animating a kinetic imagination that never misses a beat.

Son of a Nobel Laureate, father of space voyage, friend of a movie star, estranged husband of a painter, and semi-famous because of it all, Matthew Goderich is driving up to the lake for a possible reunion with Edie, from whom he has been separated for thirty years. Then it happens, and we feel it happening too- the pain, the delusions, the awful, sudden, interior crisis of a cerebrovascular accident. A stroke. And we stay with him, this self-proclaimed “hope man” who is never alone, while his mind roves over the vivid details of the life he has loved at this place near water. (Book Cover)

A time sense of Christian belief is explicit in the act of Matt’s Children, because they believe that salvation comes to one when one repents and then man’s life becomes a meaningful one: “Not because it would be good for the family image but out of a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation” (NW 70). Hence, it is decided that Matt and Edie must meet at their family house in lakeside for their reconciliation and a new start and for which Matt is now waiting for Edie to arrive. Hence, Matt’s cherished experiences have made him to think about the world of angel which is responsible for man’s birth, life and death. In his last days, he philosophically makes a lot of speculation about Christian faith by bringing out various concepts and ideas expressed by world famous philosophers, psychologists and theologians. Hence, this book can be considered for Hood’s axioms which express the author’s strong faith in Christianity. Probably it becomes a guide book for many Christians in the postmodern or the post-Christian era. Matt explains the difference between metaphysics and theology, he says that”

Metaphysics is not supernatural theology; it is merely the kind of thinking and perceiving that supervises nature from above it; it is above the physical but not removed from it. . . .”

In a naturally ordered and logical world view there can be no place for angels. This may be why so few of them are named in Scripture. Michael: in the likeness of the Lord. Gabriel: the Lord is mighty. Raphael: the healing of the Lord. In each of these cases it is an attribute or possession of the Almighty that is spoken of, not the appearance or character of the archangel in question. Appearance and character are human forms, not to be attributed to those quite other representatives of El, the Lord. (NW 32)

Matthew Goderich expects his wife to reconcile with him in the lakeside house, probably that is their home at where as they started their life and now have decided to live there till their end. The idea of reunion with his wife, Edie makes Matt to ruminate many things that happened in the past when they were together: “Maybe she’ll come back for good this time; she likes driving, especially in the city.... It’s always been like that, so far as I can recall, and I’ve passed over fifty years in the region. Edie, of course, is a native of Leeds –Grenville. Come home, Edie; it’s time you did (NW 34-35). Yet Matt has a doubt whether she may come or not. So, he correlates a line, “You’ve grounds for hope that she won’t come back at all” from T.S. Eliot’s *The Cocktail Party*. The oxymoronic statement “grounds of hope... won’t come back” heavily strikes Matt in his eighty-five. Hence, he experiences a sort of pain in his heart.

As Matt feels the pain in his heart, he recollects many incidents that happened in his life since his divorce from his wife in 1970s. There was a question over sharing of all the properties in a fifty-fifty ratio. However, that took nearly twenty years for them to make an agreement and at that time they were in their sixties. Matt thinks about the marriage between Andrea and Jack, Adam, his brother’s sudden death leaving many of his doctoral thesis unpublished, the effort made by Matt to publish those theses, Matt’s contributions to the world of book by writing books namely *Stone Dwellings of Loyalties Country*, *The Canadian Style*, and *Marketing Hardware*, and *The Films of Adams Sinclair*, his father who got Nobel Prize for peace, and his effort to try his pen in writing a book on the teachings of Dionysius. He also thinks about the settlement made between Edie and himself. And one can perceive in these lines the author’s person who died just before the publication of *Near Water* in his eighties. The following lines, like Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* announce the literary world about the completion of Hood’s writing career:

No more books, Matthew, settle your accounts with Edie and forget any further adventures in the book trade.

Invest your savings in religious books and enjoy a worry-free old age. (NW 39)

Matt then, talks about the true physical pain as well the pain of life. He says that he has never experienced physical pain till his forties but experienced one such pain when he underwent “root canal work without anesthetic” (NW 42-43). Now once again in his eighty-five he experiences both the physical and mental pain. So Matt makes a doubtful question, “was it Samuel Johnson who noted that if toothache were mortal it would be the most dreaded of ailments?” (NW 43). Hence, it is clear that morality is associated or approaches man with pain as Bacon in one of his essays “OF Death” explains about the associated pain during death.

Matthew Goderich makes philosophical speculations about the names of people and all things and finds out a reasonable solution for naming things. He ridiculously says that man is such a fellow who even named the Supreme Gods. Even the angels are addressed by their different names. Only after the naming ceremony, a baby is identified by its name. The name itself helps the baby to escape from the existential peril in the first step. The name gives him a sort of ‘myself’ in him. Hence, Matt says that it is “A case of Identity” (NW 49). As man baptized the child with a name and so christened the names of angels. In the order of angels, each angel gets its name according to its attributes and not to its form. As said “Holy Michael, Archangel, be our protector against the wickedness and snares of the Devil.” That’s Toronto for you, solidly on the side of the great Archangel Michael. The winning side” (NW 49). In the same way a small village in Ontario, Canada which was named as Farmseville in 1895, was named as Athens later in the twentieth century as the place consists many good schools in it. The picturesque description of baptism is worth mentioning here:

Why is baptism the start of the fully human life? I don’t necessarily mean Christian baptism. You understand me. Other communions practice similar sacramental rites, giving the new life a name, getting it off to an identifiable start in life. I AM John Smith. That’s my name. It may also be the name of millions of others, but for me it’s the name for me. That’s who I am. I am my name. (NW 48)

Matthew Goderich decides to go to the lake and waits for Edie to arrive since it seems she may arrive before late afternoon or she may not turn back. The thought of Edie makes Matt to think about their early life in the lakeside and their neighbour Mr. Bronson who is in Robert Frost’s sense a good neighbor who repaired the dividing wall to maintain good relationship. Edie had good relationship with Mr. Bronson and his wife Vivanne than Matthew. Edie always addressed Mr. Bronson as “Man thinking” (NW 52). But according to Matt, Mr. Bronson is a “Man Sailing” (NW 53) because Mr. Bronson was a good seaman who “handled his little craft with an assurance” (NW 53). Besides all these Mr. Bronson was a kind-natured fellow and he only informed Matt about Matt’s father’s death:

It was he who called me to go up and turn on the CBC news at six p.m. They were reading the bulletin about my father’s death, on “The World at Six.” That’s how I heard first. “And now once again tonight’s news headlines. The veteran NDP member of Parliament for the suburban Toronto riding East Gwillimbury, Mr. Andrew Goderich, collapsed and died suddenly today near Peking while on a hiking tour of the Great Wall. Mr. Goderich, who had recently celebrated his seventieth birthday, was participating in exploratory talks between Canada and the Chinese Republic. He will be remembered as Canada’s first Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1950s.” (NW 53)

Matthew Goderich once again thinks about the order of angels as mentioned in Pseudo-Denis’, *The Celestial Hierarchy* when he looks at his home. Here home is metaphorically used and that really represents the Heaven. In fact, in the passages that express the view on god and angels, the readers could perceive the author’s person in Matt. Hood believes that all the actions of human beings are guided by the guardian angels: “as a triad of triads, three by three, nine choirs in all, whose ranks and grades from high to low and from low to high, forming our interior speech, direct our actions at every point” (NW 54). In fact, the angels in group consisting of three in number collect together to carry out the orders of God. This Trinitarian view of Catholic Christianity was imbibed by Matt, of course, by Hood from his childhood and so Matt at his octogenarian quite naturally thinks more about this operation of angels on man. Therefore *The New Age* series which is a Periplum of Matt from book one to book twelve, *Near Water* explicitly discusses the relationship between man and God through the guiding spirit called angels:

The seraphim, the highest of angelic choirs, stand immediately next to the Divine Presence and are radiant with the Holy Fire, burning with perfected love and communicating inexhaustible love and warmth directly to the two other members of the highest choirs’ ensemble. Then the Cherubim, whose name means “heavenly knowledge,” and the Thrones, the transcendent worshippers, whose office consists of perpetual presence in the perfect state. (NW 54)

Even man’s life is made three in number by God – birth, living, and death. Man’s life is a departure from heaven and his death is a return to the heaven, once again. In between these acts namely birth and death there is life. Moreover in this novels birth is associated to the act of awake and death to

asleep. “One two three, going turning returning in three threes” (NW 55). Hood represents this pulsating of life “as a three-sided figure, an equilateral triangle, inscribed in the perfect circle with a non-spatial centre” (NW 55). Matt thinks that life is a Periplum, a perfect circle of water body that feeds man to quench his thirst. However this water body is thirsty. So one must “drink the flowing in at every moment of eternal thirst blended into assuagement” (NW 55). Matt’s journey to the ‘lake’ has a metaphorical connotation. He pleads God for his salvation before he meets his end in life:

I thirst.
Which of you can drink of this cup?
Save me, O Lord, or I will drown! (NW 55)

Matthew Goderich after reaching home in the lake decides to procure two recliners, one for him and another for his wife and is ready to wait for Edie and to “have a late lunch together on the dock in the sun near the water” (NW 56). Left all alone, and lying on the recliner, Matt once again thinks about his life given in the hands of guardian angels. He has a strong belief that either luck or ill that is brought by the guardian angel who is very close to human being. In fact, he named his guardian angel “Zasper” (NW 60) who is a good companion to him at the time of his crises. He also believes that this guardian angel is “Powers” in the hierarchy:

I invoked the assistance of my invisible companion at all moments of stress, a sovereign remedy for neurosis, by the way. At exam time or at high school dances. And yes my guardian had a name, known only to me like the personal bank numbers of today. . . .

. . . Zasper, guide me and guard me. I call out and the great angelic power replies. And saves. My guardian is my closest friend. (NW 60-61)

Matt states that whenever a good or evil that happens in the life of man, it is because of the action of the guardian angel like Zasper. He also states that modern man calls his guardian spirit with different names: “Chance, Fate, Fortune, Destiny, Luck, Accident” (NW 63). According to Matt, man, angels, and Holy Trinity are the three entities in the triangular structure. He says that man is inferior to all these and inactive until he is activated by the angels. Angels are inferior to the Holy Trinity because they react after getting order from the Holy Trinity. And in the Trinity, Father-Son-Holy Spirit forms a three-way structure in which Holy Spirit is superior to Father and Son. Matt also adds that when man is in his teen, he calls the angels for his rescue for knowingly committed mistakes. Generally man lacks judgment in his early age and so willingly trades his virtues: You would willingly trade a barrel of virtue for a cupful of good judgment; that’s the crux where the Powers meet the virtues, as each of the choirs merges into its neighbours, Powers from Archangles into Virtues. Good living, righteousness, and prudence border one another” (NW 64).

Matt, then makes a comparison of how the rescue boats, life jackets and warning board of the lakeside direct man about the depth of the lake and how the invisible angels warn man about the danger of doing wrong or sinful acts. Now he recalls from his memory in a stream of conscious mind, what had happened to him when he was a little boy who did not care about the warning board while he was swimming. When he drowned into the water, he was saved by some men, probably some fishermen. Seeing young Matt back again to life many said that it was a mere luck that saved Matt. But Matt even in his young age did not believe in luck. He believed that he was saved by his guardian angel. He said to himself “I don’t believe in luck. I believe in the Powers and the Virtues, and in my guardian” (NW 67)

Matt even thinks about the life led by himself and Edie with their three children till their separation in 1973. He now is all alone leading a simple as well as partly a VIP life as he is the son of a Nobel Laureate, father of a space walker, friend of a movie star, brother of a writer, and estranged husband of a painter. Thirty-five years were over after Matt and Edie’s separation: Edie left me and moved to London with my brother and our three children, all of them now middle-eyed adults, one a worldwide celebrity. . . .” (NW 70). He is now waiting for the arrival of his wife as he never hates her, even though she left him all alone and went to London to live with his brother, Tony Goderich. He is eagerly looking for Edie for a “complete reconciliation” once again to live as husband and wife:

The start of a new cohabitation, probably based on Toronto, where I still maintain an old but elegant apartment in mid-city. I don’t think I need to explain the situation more explicitly. We’re back on terms that might allow us to share a living space. If not terms of passionate romantic love, at least those of reciprocal forbearance. I never stopped loving Edie. No. No. Hold the thought. Can I truthfully make that statement? Can we be more accurate?” (NW 70).

Matt states that even the thought of separation numbs his mind: “They fled to London with the children, leaving me in the position of a husband and father without wife or family. I’ve been crippled emotionally ever since then, from the seventies of the last century until now” (NW 71). He also recalls his love with Linnet. He painfully remembers how he and his first son, Anthony fell in love with the same girl who in fact, did not suit to any of them as her age did not go with either the father or the son: “Anthony was born in 1958 and Linnet was born in 1941 – I believe it was 1941, which made her eleven years younger than me, and seventeen years other than my son” (NW 74). However the rival between Matt and Anthony for Linnet made Anthony to leave the family and to settle at northern British Columbia as a bachelor professor. Even though the attraction for Linnet came to an end with the death of Linnet, it also brought a break-down in the relationship between Matt and Anthony. This incident made Matt a poor father expecting his son, Anthony at least to turn up at his funeral:

I think I could name this syndrome. Father and son unwilling rivals for the love of a woman just about halfway between them in age. I suspect that Anthony was filled with resentment because of this triangular set-up. Then Linnet died in that terrible accident, all alone in Venice with neither of us on hand to protect her. When that happened, my son and I became permanently estranged; we haven’t exchanged anything but a few phone calls for more than thirty years. (NW 74-75)

Matt also recalls his association with his other two children. He is happy enough to think that Andrea and John are caring children who pay attention in the affairs of old Matt and Edie. They often visit Matt in his Toronto flat and help him in housekeeping. In fact, Andrea and her husband, Josh helped Matt to keep Adam a famous actor’s room as a memorable place after his death: “Adam’s bedroom. . . the room he died in. I often use that room deliberately to keep it aired out and lived in. I don’t mean to turn it into a shrine. It’s a family venue, not one of the Holy places” (NW 75). Andrea and Josh and John and Emily have proposed the idea that both Matt and Edie must reunite. Though Matt has become a stale-mate to Edie, Edie still is a fresh wife as she hasn’t given up painting even in her seventies. As a good painter, Edie always finds market for her paintings in many places: “Besides a sale or two in Britain and now and then in France and Germany, she has always had good representation in Toronto and New York” (NW 75).

Recalling all the incidents that took place in his life Matt resets his posture on the recliner and suddenly finds that he is in a struggle to breathe. He is affected by “CVA? Cerebrovascular accident” (NW 95). To come out this attack, Matt has to move his tongue, eye-lids, toes, fingers, and other parts of his body. Even he tries to inhale and exhale with more effort. He perhaps believes that he can take his next breath only with the help of Powers because “Power and strength seem almost the same mode of action, whether in the animal kingdom or among humankind. . . Angels, Archangels, Powers. These are the angelic powers nearest to us. . .” (NW 96). Hood explains the duties and functions of the nine angels, based on his Catholic Christian belief, in the passages when he talks about the sudden unconsciousness of Matt and his immediate gain of consciousness to prolong his life till the arrival of Edie:

. . . Virtues. Principalities. Dominations. And these middle ranks move in their being towards the third and the highest triad of all. Thrones. Cherubim. Seraphim.

Between the Powers and the Virtues, then, there is continuous reciprocal movement. Power requires Virtue in order to initiate and complete action. Virtue orders action and gives it direction and significance; Power learns from Virtue the control that makes life possible as it moves upwards. And so into the hierarchies that form the ladder of pure angelic intuition reaching to the Presence. Thrones. Cherubim. Seraphim.

The positioning together of Powers and Virtues allows for reciprocal acts of exertion and relaxation. And we human beings imitate the angels unawares, continually flooding the light and truth of virtue with the power to act. (NW 97)

Matt can listen but cannot move his body after affected by the stroke. He now prays his Zasper to come for his rescue. He also wishes for Edie or “some passing fisherman or waterskier” (NW 98) or Bronson should sight him and take him to hospital. Though Matt cannot move his body, he could feel pain and so he consoles himself by saying that “I had only the pain that everybody has in the ninth decade, nothing more” (NW 99) and hopes to regain life again. His brain cannot control the actions of his body. Then, he is afraid that he has to stay for the whole night without any rescue. The very thinking makes him to realize that he may catch Pneumonia. When he meditates that “If the Powers supply reality with force and action” (NW 101), he now prays Virtue to execute his guard on him as “Virtue would be powerful enough to furnish a guard on all humanity” (NW 101). He dreadfully thinks that the stroke may lead him to death: “Could it be the prelude to death? Am I starting to die now? (NW 101). However, he talks to himself making many introspection about his present ambition. He tries to breathe and also he realizes that his digestion is still continuing. He can even sweat. The last moment between life and death is terrible. This picture has brought out by Hood painfully in this novel through Matt.

Matt imagines himself that he is slowly drowning into his periplum. In his hallucination he believes that he is rescued by someone as he was rescued by Jackie’s dad when he was boy who boldly swam deep into the water. Now, Matt divides the mental action from his physical action as he can hear though he cannot see anything as his eyelids are tightly packed together. Hence, he now commands his eyes to open, focusing his senses. “All at once the left eye is open. . .” (NW 106). He then tries to open his right eye and tries to move his body. However, he senses that he cannot move even the finger of his hands or the toes. He is now very much afraid and prays his guardian spirit, Zasper to come for his help. Then he orders his brain to concentrate on his body’s action. When he orders his brain to move his finger, the brain obeys and he moves his little finger. And once again he makes retrospection about which angel in the hierarchy helps him at that moment: “The Virtues are reasserting

their control over the powers. No that’s not it. The Principalities come next in the hierarchy, and they are beginning to make their presence felt. . .” (NW 110). He realizes that he has arrived into the middle part of the hierarchy of the heavenly spirits: “The middle Kingdom, the place of rule, in human life the site of command. Command that finger to move again and see what actually happens. . . (NW 110).

Matthew Goderich in the condition of ‘tarpon’ the exact word used by Hemingway in his *The Old Man and the Sea* to explain the condition of numbness that Santiago was caught with. Moreover Matt can hear a noise in the brain and that interrupts the orders that he makes to it. The chattering voice of his brain talks something with Matt probably about the past incidents that happened in his life. Hence, he orders his brain to “SHUT UP! NOT ANOTHER WORD!” (NW 118) to facilitate himself concentrate on the action of the body. He believes that the command made by him may be carried by Principalities because Principalities is to obey the orders like a true servant to a king because “My mind to me a Kingdom” (NW 119). However, the triads in the middle namely Virtues, Principalities and Dominations coordinate with one another by looking up and down in the hierarchy for the other triads to coordinate for executing the orders made by the mind of human being:

The middle triad if Virtues, Principalities, and Dominations look low towards the earth, looks high towards perfection, and draws together every state of being under the archos of Divinity. (NW 120)

Matt believes only his guardian angel Zasper, now in the form of Principalities alone can command him to hold his breath. He is worried that he may die before the arrival of his wife. He wants to reunite with her. Hence, he struggles to hold his breath. Metaphorically reconciliation with his wife by Matt stands for ‘his soul’s union with the supersoul and for which he has to prepare his last moments. Even though he is a good man who did good things to many in his life time he feels that he has to make his soul mature enough to lead his next life after his death. Therefore he orders his Zasper to hold his breath in his body for some more time. He wants to regain his energy atleast to crawl in order to reach his cottage and to get medical help:

What I have to do, in these next hours and days, is to make an attempt to preserve my life. That’s the fundamental instruction we were all given at birth, or perhaps at the moment when we were conceived. Stay alive! Stay alive as long as you can. Fight for life! Even as you are undergoing your fatal stroke, go on to the end, acting out the commitment to life. (NW 121)

As Matt is at his threshold of death, he makes introspection about light and darkness, vision and blindness, and sleep and death. Hood’s dilemma between faith and fiction or faith and scientific truth is explicit in these passages. Matt says that one cannot entirely eliminate light or colour from his consciousness. Therefore even the blind can perceive colours as they appear as small dots of colour inside the closed lids. The absence of light is termed as darkness and the darkness approaches man only at his death at when the total cessation of his ‘vision’ takes place: “The only total darkness in us, complete absence of light, is found either before birth or after death. . . . But experience of some kind of light certainly proceeds our birth” (NW 122). The little light that appears before man’s birth may lead him to find his ‘Vision’ in future. Metaphorically ‘Vision’ means ‘Spiritual Vision’ and that can lead man after death. Matt states that Principalities though obey the orders it has the capacity to cure the wounds or ailments of human body: “. . . Principalities, learning anatomy. Medicine is a possession of the middle choirs, the triads of action and order.” (NW 128). So Matt requests Principalities to cure the wounds caused on his body.

Matthew Goderich understands that moving his finger itself is a Herculean task for him though he commands the Principalities. Besides he consoles himself that the first stroke itself may not take the breath out of his body as he enjoys good health even at his old age. Recalling his past life with his family members he tries to relieve himself from the stroke. Yet Matt slowly loses his hope for the arrival of Edie. Now, Matt can slightly see the twilight in the west sky which symbolically suggests that Matt is in his evening of life: "It's beginning to have the look of early twilight. I don't think Edie ever turn out for the big midsummer garden party and picnic" (NW 131). Matt like a child tries to roll his body to get off the recliner. He calls the Dominations and Principalities for help because they "oversee the decisions of divinity" (NW 134). He prays Domination to give him energy to pull his body out off the recliner and to drag his body towards the cottage. When he tries to move his body out off the recliner, he falls on to the concrete ground. In fact, it is a fall "Not a metaphorical concrete but a hard reality. I hurt myself when I hit it in my sudden fall" (NW 139).

It is the duty of the Dominations to introduce any one of the states – Presence and Absence. The state of presence indicates one's state of being alive and absence indicates his state of death. "They preside over our farewell to reality, valuation, understanding, wisdom, even vision itself" (NW 148). Matt tries to move his body after his fall from the recliner. During that time he totally lost his eye sight. Though his real vision is lost, he hopes for that a spiritual vision may guide him. However, he is eagerly waiting for the arrival of Edie:

For all that time I might very well have subscribed to the gnomic utterance if the charlatan in *The Kindly Ones*. "The Vision of Vision heals the Blindness of Sight." That form of words is supposed to be the merest pretense of wisdom, a mean acting – out of a faked appearance if truth. I used to laugh when I thought it over, that sentence and the invocation that served as the other, prior view of all life: "The Essence of the All is the Godhead of True." (NW 149)

Matt imagines himself that he moves upward as he tries to move his body towards the cottage. The journey of Matt from the recliner to the middle passage that contains trees and their new foliage and finally towards the home climbing the steps upwards metaphorically, indicates his last journey towards 'Home' crossing the lower triads and then the middle triads and now reaching the lower part of the upper triads. Climbing is the only action that he can do at this level:

I'm going higher and higher up, directed to move out of the middle level and to climb the walkway up to the foot of the stairs. Farewell to the dock and the boats. Climb. Climb up the rocks. Climb through the night if necessary, the night coming when no man nor woman can accomplish any task. (NW 153)

However, this task is very tough to Matt as he is hurt on his chest when he tried to fall off from the recliner. When he drags all the way, he loses his T-shirt. He is afraid that he may be bleeding. In fact, he starts to bleed when he moves further. He imagines himself like an infant bird which tries to learn to fly but bleeds. Now he feels himself like fallen infant bird without energy to go further: "I'm flat on my chest, stomach and thighs, face down with my head twisted round to the right and my left cheek scraping the hard surface of the dock whenever I move; . ." (NW 155) However, Matt believes that he can master his body through meditation: "sufficiently to inch forward onto the natural rock formation that leads from the dock up to the staircase and the sundeck. . ." (NW 155). When he moves in a slow pace he experiences the pain associated with death. Still he has a hope for life. As he moves forwards he slowly goes back to the condition of "near-coma" (NW 162). Hence, he calls his guardian angel to save him from death: "Let the Dominations direct the body/

soul structure towards a new state of being, moving the person away from its long – continued previous mode. . ." (NW 162).

Mathew Goderich suddenly realizes a kind of awkward movement on his legs. His "ugly yellowing old toes curl and thrust, backwards and up, in a motion contrary to their natural curl" (NW 173). The poor old Matt lies there in the wet, unnoticed, and dampened by dew and bleeding on cheek and chest. He still makes a struggling motion towards the home by heralding a long climb. However, his toes curl grotesquely. He then realizes that he is attacked by cerebral hemorrhage. He philosophically thinks that this long life-journey is close at its end without any assurance for atonement: "Perhaps it just comes at the appointed time, when you've put as many miles on your body as it was meant to travel. Then you're off the warranty, and there are no guarantees in effect" (NW 174). When he slowly crawls upward, he is caught in a small pool of water. His face is partly immersed downward in the water. When he tries to breathe, the water that flows nearer to his nose makes a feeble bubbling sound. But the sound is not noticed by anyone: ". . . a minute bubbling sound But nobody is listening. Any hearer would find it hard, to guess the source of such a sound. . . ." (NW 176). A raccoon crosses the path very nearer at where Matt is lying. It does not notice him and "There is no expression of hostility between the two life forms, nor any enmity detectable between them" (NW 176).

However, Matt's meditation for his survival starts working when tries to "breathe more regularly than before" (NW 177). Even he feels that he is hungry: "The body can still feel hunger, desires nutriment" (NW 177). Dissolution and final collapse do not create hunger in man. Moreover, hunger cannot be experienced after one's death and even in hell or heaven: "The imminence of post-temporal life (I mean eternal life) and the cessation of ordinary bodily process erase hunger from motivation. More simply, no food is served in Heaven or in Hell" (NW 178). He crawls on his body a step further and rolls it in order to lick water with his tongue. The water collected on the edge of the rock pool contains plankton in it and "has the taste of rotting organic matter" (NW 179).

However, Matt cannot sustain for a long time even though he quenched his thirst. He feels that his head does not fit into proper control and within "a few seconds my lips are parted and can admit breath. Then my head sinks into the pool and something in me realizes that I could draw myself trying to drink. Human error!" (NW 179). He realizes that slowly he loses his control over his discourse: "I couldn't even talk to myself" (NW 180). And to his surprise once again Matt regain his power to speak or at least to mutter because he believes that "the Dominations meet their next neighbor, the superintendents of access to finality, the Thrones, officers of perfection" (NW 180). Matt then is able to move his shoulder and head after sometime. He watches the moonlit sky and wonders at its whiteness like a day light.

Matt generates energy to move still further as he realizes that "I've passed out of the middle neighbourhood presided over by Dominations. I'm not to be found there anymore" (NW 189). He tries to cross the boundary, climbs up to the upper end of the pathway and mounts the staircase to the sundeck. When he moves forward he can see stars, the shrubs and other small plants. The day is almost born and the morning breeze blows by the time Matt reaches his midway to his cottage. He can also feel that the branches of juniper needles make a scar on his body and there is oozing of blood from the tiny cuts and he states to himself "I can do nothing to prevent it" (NW 193). He makes a strong plea to Thrones for his redemption: "Thrones, help me! Open the gates and help me to pass through!" (NW 196). Matt imagines that Thrones make circle of fire which is red in colour. In fact, this circle is the periplum of one's life and Matt is very close to the point in the circumference to make it as a full circle:

Cherubim, Seraphim, and Thrones have their place around the Godhead in the anteroom of Divinity. They have no defect or imperfection, lacking nothing. Thrones guide, guard, worship eternally. Cherubim exercise the perfection of idea and wisdom and understanding. Seraphim are in the fire of the Divine, the perfect love beyond love. We reach the place of fire by way of the last nine steps. The Cherubim and Seraphim are light and fire united within the place of the Thrones, around the Being of mercy and the lovely. Love is the Divine centre and the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones exist around the centre. (NW 201)

The way to the home contains nine steps which are divided into triads and the guardian spirit of Matt namely Zasper at the centre of the circle to protect him from every fall make Matt to think about the expansion of his angel's name. It seems funny as Matt gave this name to Zasper when Matt was young. Though the name given by young Matt to the angel is childish, the name Zasper has angelic quality in it: "I had never understood my guardian's name before, though I guessed that he was among the Thrones: *zealous angelic song like paternal easy royal*. All these qualities have defended me in the battle and now they are leading me home. Nine steps up to the deck" (NW 202-203). However, Matt could not understand the meaning behind his birth, life and the final part of his life. Even his identity as Matt is erased when he is in the final triads:

Thrones: action, water.

Cherubim: thought, air.

Seraphim: love, fire.

Summary of creaturehood. Action brings me to the start line. Thought enlightens me. Love consumes me. The three have burnt out my name. (NW 203)

Matt tries to stand up after reaching the last triads in his Periplus. Now it seems that he is in his hallucination and orders his body to stand up. Metaphorically the Thrones push Matt into the next step for he is to be guided by Cherubim. Matt is in confusion whether he is alive or not, still to confirm his living state he orders his body to stand erect: "Must I lie prone or can I stand? If I don't manage to stand up, I'll never go any higher. Proprioception. Knowing and feeling one's body-space. Whether in the body or out of the body, I know not, God knows" (NW 204). However, Matt stumbles against the staircase and rolls down. His face, cheeks, and nose escape from injuries. But the experience a fracture on his arms is felt by him and that causes pain. The normal human brain in Matt aches for Edie's arrival and his consequent rescue: "She should arrive in a real car, not in some floating chariot on its way to Heaven" (NW 206). Once again, he imagines himself in his hallucination that he loses his body and becomes a ghost-like figure that ascends on the steps. This clearly indicates that Matt's memory about his real human being condition often disappears and he goes into his other world: "I'm doubled. Here and there simultaneously: time and timeless" (NW 209). Hence, he prays "Cherubim-fullness of knowledge or generator and outpouring of wisdom" (NW 208) to enlighten him to enter into the fire at where the sun's rays are at their most penetrative and intensity. Matt's spirit strongly believes that after ascending to the level near Cherubim and Seraphim there won't be any descend or falling back:

All that is behind me now, as I move upwards in the light and strength of perfect, quasi-Divine illumination. Light me up! Carry me higher and higher still, and let my cry come unto Thee, O maker of all things. Hear me and bring me the power of Thy angelic ministers into the pure light of Thyself! (NW 209)

Matt's consciousness resides and retires as he struggles to breathe. But in his journey towards heaven, is not like Christian's in *The Pilgrim's Progress* Matt does not want to

look back for the fear that he may fall back. He also thinks that it is a waste of time to ruminate about the cross-path in his post-temporal mode. Hence, with the help of Cherubic act in the full light he wants to move to the next position: "I have no plans to look back. I can't turn my head but I don't want or need to see what's behind me. Waste of time, that's what I'd call it. I need to see upwards, so that I can make my way into full light, midday light. How? When? How long have I been at this task? Am I in a post-temporal mode?" (NW 210)

Cherubims are the recording angels and they record all the actions and deeds of human being to be used on the Judgment Day. The calculation done by Cherubim never goes wrong because it clearly see every action of man even he does some wrong deeds in disguise. Even mathematicians and philosophers fail to calculate as Cherubims do. But Cherubim's transcends the red algebraic calculation and makes the credit of every man's action in an exact manner even in first calculation: ". . . whereas the angels don't have to reason: they see the problem, its postulates, and all possible conclusions about them in the first single instant of attention. This is the pure angelic intuition, the drawing together of act, idea and adoration" (NW 215). Introspecting all these powers of the angels Matt is happy to realize that he has made such a long journey to get nearer to God: "I'm getting near it, the supernatural union of the three elements of pure being" (NW 215).

Matt's heart leaps out in joy for the reason that he soon will be introduced not only to the dead members of his family but also to St. John who baptized Jesus Christ. Hence, he tries his level best to creep high and to stand erect. Like a snail he ascends high. He can smell some unexplainable scent around him as he now stands nearer the gate. In fact, the smell now leads him to a correct steady path for his next move: "These last choirs form a, closed ring around the fiery fountain, and as I close on the last steps in the ascent I feel the flow of invisible vapour sliding past me and preventing me from following any deviant path. I steady myself, try to feel the airy way around me, beg assistance from the Thrones, the airy agents of pure attention, supervisors of the course of all ascents" (NW 222). Exercising his legs left and right in a slow pace Matt now finds himself on the ninth step. Matt is so eager to meet the angel, Seraphim who is at the top in the hierarchy:

I've made my way to the top. Here I am, old Matthew Goderich the tax-gatherer, the collector, at the top, coming into the place of warmth, no, heat.

Step onto the deck, near the All-Highest. Nearer . . . nearer . . . Into the Blessed Light. Burning.

O Cherubim, think of me as I make my final approach.

I'm on the level. (NW 223)

Reaching the highest position in the ladder, Matt still now imagines that he is surrounded by sweet smell and melodious sound. Even now Matt is in his hallucination. In this condition, he thinks that his eyes sense a boat which is coming from the centre part of the sea. However, Matt's 'other-self' is happy about the condition of standing at the ninth step at where he is going to experience "the Divine Love" (NW 228) which will be poured out by the Seraphim because they "are the servants of the fire, the burning outpouring of the Divine Love" (NW 228)

Counting his last few hours in his life Matt's real sense feels proud enough for his Canadian Origin, because Canada is a country at where no people died for want of water. As water is the life-giving source for all living beings on the earth, Canada is a blessed country for its geographical position - being nearer to water: "In Canada one seldom goes in want of water. We have had drought conditions from place to place and

from time to time, but we are not a thirsty folk. One rarely hears of Canadians dying of thirst. We call on the Lord for water, and behold, down she comes!" (NW 231). Matt's real-self now is able to stand and walk towards the house. But he feels very tired to climb "Another staircase to climb, only six steps" (NW 231). So he decides to stay back to watch things going around him and to wait for the arrival of Edie or someone to help him to reach home. The thought of Edie and the children namely Anthony, John and Andrea makes Matt to recall their familial bond that was built on 'love' - a pure love among the family members. However, Matt realizes that their love for one another cannot be compared to the Pauline love mentioned in Corinthians in the Bible.

Pauline love and Dionysian love can be compared to the love of the Seraphim, because with the help of 'love' Seraphims perfect human heart for God: "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (NW 235). Matt also thinks that he has done his duty on the earth assigned by God, though he does not like the word duty for its associated meaning for 'command': "We have all felt the enslaving force of duty. We respond to daily life as if it were a series of petty commands. Duty is never loveable, yet it has a commanding force" (NW 239). Like the creator who is waiting for man to turn towards Him Matt is looking for his wife to arrive at the right time to save his life. But his expectation fails when Edie does not come back. However Matt is fortunate that he could vision his guardian angel, Zasper who is found with one of the three spirits namely Throne, Cherub, and Seraph. Matt's periplum has reached its perfect point in the circular water body and the three angels come towards Matt to make him realize the Divine Presence:

The three great ones Throne Cherub Seraph step forward and stand side by side disappearing into the light, then reappearing in front of it as though being breathed out of the Divine Presence.

Zasper is one of the three. I see now that my guardian is a Seraph, a message from perfection. I see the three step forward on towering legs.

Faint crunch of gravel.

The three mighty forms towering stilt-like coming for me. Coming across the water for me now. (NW 251)

The author of *Near Water*, Hugh Hood artistically as well realistically has brought out the Christian faith in this novel. The journey made by the protagonist, Matthew Goderich in his eighties to his home town metaphorically represents his Periplum and the completion of it as he faces death in his attempt to reach home. The author painfully picturizes the effect of stroke on a dying old man. Matt who caught in coma recalls his life from his childhood to his present condition. He thinks about his marriage with Edie, the birth of his three children, his wife who deserted him and went to London to live with his brother Tony, and now his wife's consent to reconcile with him at his native place, Lakeshore. At the same time his hallucination about his travel towards heaven has explicitly brought out by the author through his Christian faith. Thus Hood amalgamates Matt's life in the fictional part and his metaphorical journey in the part of faith in apt proportion in this novel. Hood's strong Catholic Christian faith is highly palpable in the passages that talk about the "triads of triads" - the nine angels and their action for atonement and salvation.

If the 'overt and public' level of meaning is to present Matt's return to the lake, in *Near Water*, the readers begin to perceive that the initially hidden meaning may well imply a "return home", in a deeper, mystical sense involving Dionysius and the nine angelic orders. Hood, through Matt, gives some basic information about the work and influence of Dionysius in the first chapter of the book, his writing in general and his

The Celestial Hierarchy in particular for their theological importance in earlier centuries, which are virtually unknown to many in this modern-era. Hence, it is helpful for the readers to understand the Christian faith which is offered by the author in the first few pages of the book.

Dionysius was the name of the single identified male member of the Aeropagite council in Athens who was converted when St. Paul preached there about God. According to the custom of earlier centuries, his name was later appropriated to serve as a pseudonym for some extremely influential theological writings that played an essential role in introducing strands of neoplatonic thought into early Christian thinking. As Evelyn Underhill called him, "... strange and nameless writer who chose to ascribe his work to Dionysius to Aeropagite, the friend of St. Paul and to work to address his letters upon mysticism to Paul's fellow-worker, Timothy" (456), wrote a number of generally short treatises, including, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *The Divine Names* and *The Mythical Theology*. It is *The Celestial Hierarchy* which is primarily concerned in *Near Water* by Hood for its information about angelic order.

Dionysius who is often referred as Pseudo-Dionysius by scholars in *The Celestial Hierarchy* develops clues from references in the Bible and early Christian commentators to work out the orders, or choirs, of angelic beings that mediate between human world and the ultimate Divine Presence. These orders include many such as Angels, Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim that are still familiar, while the rest are encountered from time to time in theologically oriented literary writings such as Dante's *Paradiso* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is no longer generally known that the systematization of this hierarchy was the work of Dionysius, and that in so doing, he provided a precise map for the medieval Christian universe. In *Near Water*, Matt describes him, in terms that may at first inflated as "one of the most important mystical theologians" (NW 39) and praises the ranks and grades of *The Celestial Hierarchy* as an influence, "on you and me from the moment of our conception. . . forming the interior speech, directing our action at every point" (NW 54). But Evelyn Underhill bears out these tributes to his influence:

From the ninth century to the seventeenth, these writings nourished the most spiritual intuitions of men and possessed an authority which it is now hard to realize. . . (456)

It is for Dionysius, the nine orders of angelic beings are divided into a triads of triads. In his discussion he begins with the Seraphim, the level closest to God, and proceeds in threes down the scale to those closest to the human world, the Angels. However, the word 'angels' has always been potentially ambiguous, since it refers to the lowest level, but also serves as a generalized word describe all such spiritual beings. Hood lists them in order in *Near Water* as the way Matt encounters them. While commenting Hood's art of making use of these angels for his convenience W.J. Keith takes privilege in bringing out the qualities all the nine angels in one small passage. He states thus:

The first triad, then in ascending order, consists of the Angels, Archangels, and the Powers, which in Matt's words, "are the angelic powers [= choirs] nearest to us". The choirs of the Middle Kingdom - the virtues, Principalities and Dominations - prepare the ascending soul for its separation from what we all reality and its introduction to a higher level of awareness and existence. The last three choirs - the Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim - "form a closed ring around the fiery fountain" in the centre of which is the Reality we call God. (183)

Although it would be easier for human comprehension if the divisions between the orders are clear-cut, such is not in fact the case, because each angelic power on the hierarchical ladder mediates between the immediately lower and higher states, blurring of distinctions invariably occurs. In Matt's words "each grouping of three blends and merges into the next so that the operations of the most high angelic spirits show through and participate in the motions of the lower choirs" (NW 54). For an initial reading of *Near Water*, then it is less important to identify the special characteristics of the individual levels than to appreciate the pattern of ascent which is involved and to recognize the way in which the novel, like Dionysius's hierarchy, divides into three sets if three.

Hood's fundamental procedure has been glossed in the second and third chapters as already he explains triads in the first chapter. Matt brooding over religious and secular triads, the significance of names and the fact that the Catholic-church in Athens is dedicated astonishingly, to St. Denis the Areopagite are purposely brought out by Hood to form the base of the novel. There is reference to "mythical theology" (NW 51) another Dionysian title and even the discussion of Bronson, his neighbourhood-cottage tells remarks about "some sort of guardian angel and the powers of the heavenly host" (NW 54). The things of this world and the possibilities of the timeless other world have been blended by Hood tactfully to form the mythical atmosphere in *Near Water* and that makes the readers to think and rethink about the life after death.

The narrative voice shift from first-person to third-person as Matt becomes unconscious immediately after the attack of the stroke. The third— person narrative voice, probably the author says, "He prepared to take inventory of his body, what he can feel, what he can move and what is powerless, and he begins with sight" (NW 95). It is uncertain, at this point, whether this voice represents an aspect of Matt that has become separated from his physical self, a traditional "Omniscient narrator" or a spiritual power. Given the occasional interpolation of Matt's 'I' (NW 95), the mixed "is he/ am I" (NW 96) construction, and the reference to "we human beings" (NW 97), the first of these possibilities may be considered the most likely, though all may ultimately take part. But more important than the establishing of narrative certainty is the sense, growing stronger as these middle chapters proceed that Matt's personality is slowly but surely slouching off its customary connections with the norms of this world.

What are witnesses in the rest of the chapter is Matt's gradual regaining of control over his thoughts. He eventually clarifies his position and is able to admit and articulate the fact that he has had a major stroke. The essentially inner nature of the narrative is reinforced, however, when he remarks, "I make perfect sense inside my head" (NW 101) but "I can't form the right sound" (NW 102). Readers are thus in a curiously privileged position, rather like that of the angelic beings whose presence Matt is coming increasingly to recognize. Henceforward he is preoccupied with such small but significant advances as opening his eyes and moving the little finger on his left hand. The chapter ends with what is under the circumstances, a triumph: "the assertion that I am still me" (NW 111).

Once Matt's new situation is understood and the readers grow accustomed to the clipped, staccato rhythms of his inner speech. It is interpreted that Matt manages not only to gain some control over his muscles but to work out strategies for limited action after the consciousness of his-self is regained a bit. In the end, perhaps, he has been able to maneuver himself off the recliner on the hard concrete of the duck. From this moment onwards the focus of Matt's life and of Hood's narrative begins to tilt away from the earth and ascends towards the Divine.

The further narrative with its delicate description of vegetation and sunlight, contains more retrospective passages for very

person that Matt has become aware that he is leaving behind what he has hitherto known as "reality". Indeed it is told that it is the main function of the Dominations, who rule over the sixth level, "to persuade us to quit reality in favour of something more" (NW 148). Hence, the appearance of Dominations is a "farewell to reality" (NW 148). Emphasis is still placed on the fact that Matt must persevere in the intense physical effort that belongs more obviously to the literal level, but in terms of the allegorical aspects of the ascent, he is more and more dependent on external guidance: "I don't know whether I can manage this ascent without special grace" (NW 154). When the last links with earth fade, night falls, and it is well be reminded of the traditional Dark Night of the Soul! At the beginning Matt is in some respects at his lowest ebb, indeed, he falls into a coma and his life seems in the balance:

Time has passed, is passing, will continue to pass, and the body on the dock lies still, face down in the water, waiting. . . .

This is the first time since April 30, 1939, that the world has experienced a sense of being without a Matthew Goderich conscious and active within its boundaries. (NW 164)

These lines indicate that Matt is now at the threshold of death. In any case, it is realized that death as predicted in the early part of the book is near. Hood does not require the readers to accept unquestioningly an ascent of Matt's journey. The references in the novel to Matt's "waiting for Edie" reminds one of the work of Samuel Beckett and it is possible to see Matt's attempted journey as a brave, but absurd because doomed, progress towards an inevitably dissolution. Ideally, perhaps, the readers are invited to regard Matt's Periplus as subtly poised between two alternative readings such as a presentation of Matt's physical and conscious collapse or a triumphant entrance into the external Presence. Whatever course the readers choose, however in Hood's imaginative terms at this point the story is not yet over.

Matt is assuredly "very near to the edge" (NW 168), but an edge beyond which there is light. The Dominations drag Matt towards the "a new state of being" (NW 162). The coma in fact represents a significant spiritual boundary. Once he emerges from the highest level of the third, he will have bussed into a field of influence that has cost all earthly connections and where "an approach to a nameless Absence/ Presence seems possible" (NW 152). Ahead of him is "the great change" (NW 162). Hence, the next chapter opens, appropriately with the word, "Detachment" since Matt's entry into highest of the triads implies "separation from a previous state of being" (NW 171).

A New pattern is now assured and initiated in the action of Matt. Hitherto, his journey has, in physical terms, been one of descent, culminating in the induced fall from the recliner. He reached his lowest point in his physical ascent which ended with the question "will he climb?" (NW 176) However, he manages to crawl from the lakeside deck to the foot of the cottage stairs, getting cut by thorns and juniper bushes in the process. Yet the literal and allegorical readings though seemingly opposed blend readily enough. In Matt's effort to climb on the stairs, conveys both fictional and allegorical meanings. The physical effort and suffering at this stage are registered, yet the emphasis falls positively on the spiritual progression.

The intermingling of the literal and the allegorical is nowhere more evident than in the last two chapters of the book. Here the steps up to the door of the cottage-nine in all indicate a ninefold ascent and within a ninefold ascent there is a merge into a concentrated version of the journey through the angelic hierarchy. Within the process of reading, they are accepted

simultaneously as “this creosoted staircase” (NW 214) which belongs to the ‘real’ world and “the nine-stepped staircase that is the road back to the Father” (NW 202). The former remains a factor in the narrative, but the spiritual journey now becomes primary: “The staircase can no longer injure me, because I’m climbing the ninefold structure that has passed through and over everything that is in the old world” (NW 208).

However Matt has succeeded in climbing the steps and raising himself upright and he can now claim to be “on the level” (NW 223). The final chapter presents Matt’s arrival at his ultimate destination which means either death or the approach of the divine, depending on whether one favours the literal or the allegorical level of interpretation in Dantesque terms. However, it is perceived that in the realm of the anagogical, the God-like perspective that absorbs, unites and transcends the other levels of meaning. At this stage, all that Matt can do is to wait and meditate. The resulting meditation, which becomes a culminating specimen of the digressive method prominent in the whole series focuses on three primary images. These are music, the Periplum, and a swing, all of which are structurally as well as thematically important.

The last chapter opens with a quotation from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, a play whose tone is profoundly opposite to Hood’s purpose: “Sometimes me thought a thousand twangling instruments did clime about my ears” (The Tempest 3.2.146-147). A musical allusion is doubly appropriate here. If Walter Pater was right in asserting that all art aspires to the condition of music, it is a suitable culmination to the concern for art that has been major preoccupation of the series. But the lines are appropriate for another reason. Later when Matt hears a “reverberant voice” (NW 244) which he first interprets as “an invitation, a calling to attention” (NW 245) and then identifies as, “the voice of Seraphim” (NW 245), who presides over the ninth level. This is Hood’s equivalent to the concept of the music of the spheres traditionally associated with any spiritual ascent.

However, *Near Water* itself begins with a discussion on “Periplum”. Although the novel is not involved in a full circumnavigation, the lake, along with its shoreline is a perpetual pretense. Throughout the narrative references to journeys on lake, whether fictive or actual boat journey observed or recollected are naturally inscribed by the author. Moreover, Matt’s own journey has now reached its climax on a level from which he can look out on a large stretches of the lake. At the end, he imagines himself on the Asian side of the Bosphorus looking across at the “wide and happy prospect” that is Europe (NW 227). Descriptions and discussions of the lake recur throughout the book and at its close Matt imagines that the islands of the lake, “draw together, closing the circuit and forming the new ring” (NW 251). This ‘ring’ implies at one and the same time the image of the Periplum, Matt’s earthly journey. It is worth quoting the observations of W.J. Keith here regarding Matt’s Periplum. He observes thus:

The title of this last novel also reminds us of the central presence of water throughout the series, including Matt’s near drowning and the exploit in . . . (201)

Hood’s favourite narrative strategy in *Near Water* enjoys its final flowering within the series as the sight of the swing sparks off Matt’s retrospective and unifying imagination. In a classic example of free association, the swing recalls an incident when Anthony Earl, his oldest child, has a near accident while swinging on it at about the same age as Matt was at the beginning of the series. The resulting noise disturbs Matt and Edie out of “a boat of mild lovemaking” (NW 234), which in turn leads to a consideration of the varieties of love “from Eros to Agape through the troubadours to modernity” (NW 234), as inspired by St. Paul duly “brings us around the circle back to the thought of St. Dionysius and his insistence on the hierarchical principles” (NW 234). And so to the “love of the Seraphim”

(NW 235), the guardians of the ninth level and the ultimate love which is synonymous with the Divine. Moreover, the phrase, “bring us around the circle” (NW 237) itself echoes the “Periplum” image in the sense of a circumnavigation of a sea or lake. Beyond this allusion, the discussion of love recalls Matt’s relationship with Adam Sinclair, his “best friend, from the opening page of my story to the last” (NW 237).

The final passages of *Near Water* are subtle poised between the literal and the allegorical. From the view point of this world, Matt, at the point of death, listens yearningly for the sound of Edie’s car even though the time for rescue and recovery has long passed. Whether Edie arrives or not, is in a sense, immaterial. Matt comes close to believing that she does, but if she does, she is too late. In human terms, Matt’s death, like all deaths, is agonizing. But Hood is careful to associate Matt’s death, not with the shocking and sudden deaths that have appeared distressingly in the last books of *The New Age* series but with the most calm and satisfying of deaths, such as May-Beth’s in the final chapter of *A New Athens*. Hood makes the connection deeply in penultimate paragraph, which reproduces the last sound that Matt hears or thinks that he hears on earth: “Faint crunch of gravel” (NW 251). This is a subtle but clear echo of the passage where May-Beth is found by Matt and Edie apparently asleep in her chair. Hood’s maturity and experience after writing many novels, had made him to deal the subject matter ‘death’ as a soft and subtle spiritual encounter.

The last scene is one of the artistic triumphs of *The New Age*. But the ending of *Near Water*, in its own way, is comparably affecting. Matt’s last words, as he moves into the next order of reality, acknowledge the trinity of angelic spirits that are to accompany him into eternity and the Divine Presence: “The three mighty forms towering stilt-like coming for me. Coming across the water for me now” (NW 251). The circle is complete, the periplum achieved, the series finished. Analogically speaking, Matt, his Canadian Odyssey, at an end, returns to his original and ultimate home.

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