

Writing the Montreal Mountain: Below the Thresholds at which Visibility Begins¹

A city, Michel de Certeau argues in his chapter “Walking in the City” from *The Practice of Everyday Life*,² is not what can be seen from a vantage point above the city but rather a text composed by the movement of pedestrians through city space, a network of idiosyncratic routes and paths that do not figure on maps. De Certeau is interested in the “ordinary practitioners of the city” (93) who live “below the thresholds at which visibility begins” (93) and who “make use of spaces that cannot be seen” (93) from on high. Among these ordinary practitioners are “walkers . . . whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it” (93). Their movements, crossings, pauses, everyday routines, and unexpected choices constitute the city, yet are imperceptible or “illegible” (Highmore 6-8) high above it. For de Certeau, the map-like overview that “makes the complexity of the city readable and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text” (92) is inadequate to the task of representing or of managing the city. The city, he suggests, is an unruly network of embodied practices, a system of bodily articulations akin to language whose enunciations take the form of “pedestrian speech acts” (97), “walking rhetorics” (101), and “turns of phrase” (100). In the critical universe of de Certeau, the literary text has no monopoly on the process of *writing* the city.

Taking New York as an example, de Certeau observes that “To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city’s grasp” (92).³ De Certeau does not discuss the circumstance of a city such as Montreal

which is organized around a mountain, a mountain with three distinct peaks,⁴ on which people live and walk. He does not consider the possibility of a lookout arrived at by foot, or which is part of a home. The vantage point for de Certeau's "voyeurs" (92) is the 110th floor of a skyscraper. Nor does "Walking in the City" address the question of differential access to particular spaces or vantage points. Nevertheless, its critique of the "panoramacity" (93), its attention to those who constitute the city by walking it, and its understanding of the city as the "most immoderate of human texts" (92), a text written and rewritten by a myriad of practices, can guide a reading of the Montreal mountain in texts such as Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* (1944), Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945), Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* (1945), Roger Viau's *Au milieu, la montagne* (1951), Yves Thériault's *Aaron* (1954), MacLennan's *The Watch that Ends the Night* (1958), Gérard Bessette's *La bagarre* (1958), Leonard Cohen's *The Favourite Game* (1963) and Gail Scott's *Heroine* (1987).⁵ In spite of their substantial differences, these works all stage—on the mountain—encounters between and within Montreal communities, and inquire into the relation of characters to urban social space.

Consistent with de Certeau's analysis, each of these works dramatizes the limits of looking, that is, the extent to which the city exceeds the occlusions and "imaginary totalizations produced by the eye" (93). At the same time, each complicates and nuances de Certeau's account of the view from above. More specifically, each constructs the lookout and the one who looks as part of the city. In most of these novels, the mountain is not simply a vantage point from which order and legibility are projected but a social space or, more accurately, three distinct social spaces, each organized by the meanings attributed to it, by the encounters, conversations, and reflections it makes possible and by the relations of power it exposes. Rather than reduce the character who looks to a pair of eyes, these typically present the viewer as an ordinary practitioner of the city, who *walks* up to or down from the lookout on the mountain. In other words, the voyeur is also a walker; little place is available for a binary formulation such as "voyeurs or walkers" (de Certeau 92). A character who is given a view from the mountaintop is often, although not always, a figure for the external narrator or a porte-parole for the writer. In any case, she helps dramatize the contingencies of the scene of looking as well as the tensions that structure the narrative—and the city of Montreal.

Voyeurs and Walkers

In texts by Graham, Roy, and MacLennan published in the mid-1940s, “the mountain” is frequently Westmount and is associated with the economic and social privilege of the wealthiest members of the anglo-Protestant community.⁶ In *Bonheur d’occasion*, set in 1940, Westmount is crucial to the text’s construction of Montreal’s social geography: “Mais au-delà, dans une large échancrure du faubourg, apparaît la ville de Westmount échelonnée jusqu’au faite de la montagne dans son rigide confort anglais. . . . Ici, le luxe et la pauvreté se regardent inlassablement, depuis qu’il y a Westmount, depuis qu’en bas, à ses pieds, il y a Saint-Henri. Entre eux s’élèvent des clochers” (36). This much-cited passage comes from a sequence in which Jean Lévesque is the focalizer. Jean never climbs the mountain but, like Florentine, he is heavily invested in moving up the social ladder (see Babby 53-55; Viselli 99). Yet to associate the mountain in Roy’s text primarily with this dream of upward mobility⁷ is to overlook the relationship of Rose-Anna and of Emmanuel to the mountain. Rose-Anna and Emmanuel are the two characters who climb the mountain. They are also, Anthony Purdy suggests, the two focalizers who “stand out” in *Bonheur d’occasion*, the former for her “intuitively compassionate vision” and the latter for the questions he asks (44-45). Florentine and Jean, on the other hand, can only look up at the mountain, locked as they are within a dynamics of looking and being looked at which, in Purdy’s view, sustains consumer capitalism (50-52; see also Babby 13-16). Emmanuel, more than Rose-Anna, *looks* at the expensive stone, wood and metals of the Westmount mansions but his moments of voyeurism, like Rose-Anna’s, ultimately serve the novel’s critique of prevailing social relations.

Although dependent upon an external narrator who functions, in de Certeau’s terms, as voyeur, as all-seeing eye (92-93), *Bonheur d’occasion* is, at the same time, the product of walkers. The text is a trace of Roy’s walks into St. Henri as well as on the mountain (Ricard 222-224). When Rose-Anna walks up the mountain to see Daniel in hospital, for example, she stops and takes in the view of the city: “Rose-Anna contempla le spectacle à travers sa fatigue pendant qu’elle reprenait haleine; elle n’eut même pas l’idée de chercher au loin l’emplacement de sa maison. Mais, d’un coup d’oeil, elle mesura ce qui restait à gravir avant d’arriver à l’hôpital des enfants qu’on lui avait dit situé tout au haut de l’avenue des Cèdres” (225). Rather than lifting her clear of the city, the view confronts her with the material conditions of

her own life: factory smoke, inadequate space, and the monotony of rooftops. Her walk, which is made more difficult by her pregnant body, is prompted by necessity rather than leisure. As Rose-Anna walks through Westmount, chastising herself for not having been able to nourish her children better and, potentially, for having provoked Daniel's illness, Roy emphasizes the gap between living conditions in St. Henri and in Westmount, but also the interrelationship of the two, the extent to which the poverty of St. Henri is imbricated in the wealth of Westmount.

The mountain scenes in *Bonheur d'occasion* give a sense of what it might mean, in de Certeau's terms, to practice the city from below rather than from above. Roy's characters are, geographically and in social class, literally "from below," but practising the city from below is also a function of the text's attention to the corporeal and the sensorial, to the movement of bodies through the city, and to the pedestrian acts of "walking, wandering or 'window shopping'" (de Certeau 97). In *Bonheur d'occasion*, considerable attention is given, for example, to the experience of climbing Westmount. When Emmanuel walks up the hill, he carries St. Henri with him:⁸ "Toute l'inquiétude, toute l'angoisse du bas quartier semblaient s'être collées à lui au départ, et plus il était monté haut, plus elles étaient retenues, tenaces à son corps" (336). The feeling of uneasiness and, eventually, of anger destabilizes him and leads him to ask: "Nous autres, ceux d'en bas qui s'enrôlent, on donne tout ce qu'on a à donner: peut-être nos deux bras, nos deux jambes. . . . Eux-autres, est-ce qu'ils donnent tout ce qu'ils ont à donner" (337). As Emmanuel leans on the parapet at the summit, he does not take in the whole city. Burdened by questions of social justice, he focuses on a light in St. Henri that might be the light on the house where Florentine lives. His climb, like Rose-Anna's, takes him closer to, rather than away from those in St. Henri.

If Roy's text brings the city below the hill to bear upon the scene from above, MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* (1945) shows that one is never entirely "out of the city's grasp" (de Certeau 92), even in a Westmount mansion in the early 1930s:

From his library windows McQueen could look over the tops of his elms to the city. . . . Faintly, like the snore of an enormous beast he had managed to control but still distrusted, the noise of the city stole up the hill, through the branches of the trees and into his windows. It was a minor sound at this hour of the night, intermittent and far away. (269)

Although he stands at the top of the city, Huntly McQueen is high enough to escape its smoke, light, and noise yet too close for comfort: the "beast"

below requires careful management and control. As if to emphasize the continuities between McQueen's state of ease and the distress of the many on relief, the text goes on to present his reflections on the subject of unemployment: "Take the working classes. One was supposed to feel sorry for them, but candidly McQueen believed that their troubles were of their own making" (269). Throughout *Two Solitudes*, McQueen has access to extraordinary vistas, yet he is utterly blinkered. The scene in his Westmount home echoes an earlier scene during the last year of World War I, in his office on the top floor of a building on Saint James Street, an office which "overlooked one of the panoramas of the world" (105). "McQueen's satisfaction," the narrator explains, "constantly renewed itself through his ability to overlook all this" (105).

MacLennan, like Roy, uses scenes in which characters contemplate the city from above to question the presumption of the Westmount elite. However, whereas *Bonheur d'occasion* gives Rose-Anna and Emmanuel a view, and takes their perspectives seriously, *Two Solitudes* lends little credence to the perspective of a character such as Marius. Unlike Rose-Anna and Emmanuel, Marius never walks up the mountain. As Linda Leith points out, he is presented, like McQueen, as limited and retrograde in his vision (52). In *Two Solitudes*, Paul and Heather are the characters given a perspective from the mountain. In Leith's terms, they represent a "new wave of tolerance and liberalism that descends . . . from Yardley and from Athanase Tallard" (52).⁹ Heather and Paul are able to stand for a new Canada because their sense of Montreal and of the social comes from walking the city as well as looking down at it.

Both characters, in different ways, draw attention to what cannot be seen from on high. Paul's intimate, walking knowledge of Montreal gives him a certain breadth of vision when he looks out at Montreal. His Montreal (of 1921) includes the East, the church spires, the islands, the Lachine canal, and the factories of Verdun, as well as the homes of the wealthy (251). What is more, his reflections, as he walks up Mount Royal, on changes in his social and economic circumstances (249-250) are in many ways more crucial to the narrative than the scene on the summit. Indeed, the lookout is only one stop on a long walk that takes him from the apartment he shares with his mother in the McGill ghetto, up the mountain, down the mountain, through downtown, to the port, and back home. In the chapter immediately following Paul's walk up Mount Royal, there is a parallel scene on Westmount, albeit more than ten years later, in which Heather leaves alone from a dinner party at McQueen's and looks out over Montreal: "Spread below, the city

was moon-coloured, the great sweep of it starred by lights; it was almost like looking upside down at a patch of night sky” (267). The Westmount vantage point, a location which allows Heather to see “only a portion of the city” (267), has its limits and she soon gives it up to be with Paul. What Heather sees at the lookout is less important than what she imagines, especially about the people in the houses around her: “She wondered how many of them were lying down there now with eyes closed in lightless rooms. How many of them were young, conscious of a warm, silent form beside them?” (268). Heather’s attention to spaces of intimacy, part of the text’s project of bringing Paul and Heather together, is also presented as a desire to live “below the thresholds at which visibility begins” (de Certeau 93).

Of Parks and Lovers

In addition to being associated with alternative views of the social, views which complicate the figure of the social ladder, the Montreal mountain is a space of leisure in works by Graham, Viau, Thériault, and MacLennan. The tension between mountain as social ladder and space of leisure can, to some degree, be attributed to the fact that Mount Royal is a public park and Westmount and Outremont, wealthy residential neighbourhoods. Compare, for example, Paul’s walk up Mount Royal with Emmanuel’s walk up Westmount. Whereas Emmanuel, like Marc Reiser in Graham’s *Earth and High Heaven*, is acutely aware of being somewhere he does not belong, Paul is able to feel a part of Montreal in all its heterogeneity. Indeed, in the middle of the city, the Mount Royal park takes the place of the rocky, wooded spaces Paul used to know around the village of Saint-Marc. Only when Heather, whom Paul associates with the more affluent world of his childhood, rides by on horseback does he feel uneasy. In the novels of Graham, Viau, and Thériault, lovers meet, walk and, in some cases, ski on Mount Royal. At stake is the question of access to the spaces of Westmount and Outremont or, in the case of *Aaron*, access to worldly success. Such access is limited for at least one member of the couple and, in this way, these narratives of heterosexual love¹⁰ expose the uneven social relations which structure Montreal.¹¹

Before turning to *Earth and High Heaven*, *Au milieu, la montagne*, and *Aaron*, I would like to pause over MacLennan’s *The Watch that Ends the Night*, a novel which was written after the other three but whose idealization of the mountaintop scene provides a helpful contrast to the scenes structured through difference which I read in this section.¹² In *The Watch*, looking out at the city is the moment of union for two generations of anglo-Protestant

lovers. Sally, a member of the younger generation, describes the view of Montreal in the mid-1950s in terms reminiscent of those of Heather in *Two Solitudes*: “It was just as if the whole sky had turned upside down and fallen flat all around the mountain without putting the stars out” (39). Later in the novel, her mother Catherine recalls the evening of Jerome Martel’s proposal in the 1930s: “He took me up to the Lookout on Westmount Mountain and we stood staring down for hours like a single person” (152). Interestingly, MacLennan’s 1959 text makes no distinction between Westmount and Mount Royal. As George explains to Sally, “When I was your age the top of Mount Royal had genuine prestige. Once I was there with a girl and she asked if this meant we ought to get married” (39). In *The Watch*, the lovers have a sense of entitlement: they feel comfortable standing for hours at the mountain lookouts. Looking down at the city, they become one with each other by way of a single panoptic gaze and, in so doing, they contain the city’s unsettling heterogeneity, a heterogeneity which is marked elsewhere in the text by the rift between employed and unemployed, between French and English, between newcomers and those who “know the city in their bones” (255).

Graham’s *Earth and High Heaven*, whose events unfold during 1944, addresses the anti-Semitism which underwrites anglo-Protestant privilege in Westmount (see Ravvin; Coleman). Lawyer Marc Reiser turns away from a party in the Drake home in Upper Westmount, a party he is ready to leave, to take in the view of Montreal:

The whole city lay spread out below him, enchanting in the sunlight of a late afternoon in June, mile upon mile of flat grey roofs half hidden by the light, new green of the trees; a few scattered skyscrapers, beyond the skyscrapers the long straight lines of the grain elevators down by the harbour, further up to the right the Lachine Canal, and everywhere the grey spires of churches, monasteries and convents. Somehow, even from here, you could tell that Montreal was predominantly French, and Catholic. (6)

Marc, a Jewish man from a small town in Northern Ontario, is still fascinated by this view as he falls in love with Erica Drake a few minutes later. Looking out from the Westmount drawing room, he is able to gain a certain perspective on the social, cultural, and religious differences that structure both the city and his relationship with Erica (see Coleman 167-170). However, this view is contingent upon the vantage point, a vantage point that would not routinely be available to him. As soon as Charles Drake discovers that Erica is dating him, Marc is banned from the house and is never represented looking out over Montreal again. Even when Marc and Erica walk on Mount

Royal, they do not go to the observatory. In Graham's text, as in Roy's and MacLennan's, this shift between looking and *walking* is significant.

Graham subtly contrasts Westmount, site of Charles Drake's home, with Mount Royal, site of the public park designed by Frederick Olmsted. Given the number of people "on bicycles, on foot, or riding by in carriages," Mount Royal reminds Erica of roads in Europe (119). As she and Marc walk on the mountain one Sunday, Marc makes reference to the character of Hans Castorp from Thomas Mann's 1924 novel *The Magic Mountain*. As an anti-fascist writer (see Beddow 138-140), Mann would have been an important literary and cultural figure for Graham. *The Magic Mountain* is a suggestive intertext for a reading of mountain scenes in *Earth and High Heaven* insofar as it highlights the coming together in a mountain sanatorium in Switzerland of various, often conflicting intellectual currents and cultural practices. Mount Royal is a similar space of encounter and of possibility for Marc and Erica.¹³ In Westmount, however, Marc must leave Erica at the door of her father's house before heading for the streets below: "it was as though Charles and Margaret Drake were determined to put Marc down on the level on which they apparently thought him to be, and not as he actually was" (120). Charles Drake eventually shifts his attitude. However, the text's challenge to anti-Semitism lies less in the latter shift than in Erica's critical reflections upon the codes which govern interactions among communities in Montreal (see Coleman 170) and in the text's exploration of spaces where different communities coexist across tensions and contradictions.

In Viau's *Au milieu, la montagne*, whose events span a period from 1927 to summer 1935, Mount Royal park is such a space of (dis)continuity.¹⁴ But here, Mount Royal is set against Outremont rather than against Westmount. Dramatizing the relationship between a woman whose father is often unemployed and a man from a wealthier family, Viau's text is reminiscent of *Bonheur d'occasion*. In *Au milieu, la montagne*, however, there is a greater gap in the social and economic status of the lovers, a gap not easily negotiated by Jacqueline, whose family rents a flat on rue Plessis in the East or by Gilbert, whose family owns a house in Outremont. An event early in the novel suggests the irreconcilability of these differences: Jacqueline's father's attempt to cut wood from an already fallen tree in Outremont in order to keep his family warm during the winter ends with the landowner demanding a price per cord that, however reasonable, Jacqueline's father cannot pay (121-123). As in Roy and Graham, the mountain represents economic privilege to which

Jacqueline has limited access—except for the ski slopes of Mount Royal. Until Gilbert takes her to the observatory on Mount Royal, Jacqueline’s only experience of the view from the mountaintop is a childhood trip to Westmount and Outremont with an uncle who had a car (52-53; 167). On that trip, Jacqueline’s mother remains silent about her work cleaning houses in these neighbourhoods.

At the same time, Viau’s text shares Graham’s vision of Mount Royal as a public park, a space which is especially crucial to Montrealers who have no land of their own. The mountain is “au milieu,” between the East and the West and, as such, is not so much a vantage point as a space for the meeting of differences. Insofar as Jacqueline and Gilbert happen upon one another while skiing on the mountain and insofar as Mount Royal’s “place du Belvédère” allows them to contemplate together “leur ville” (233), the mountain is presented as a democratic space, a space for all Montrealers. The city is “theirs” not because they *see* the same thing, not because they become “one,” as do Catherine and Jerome in *The Watch* but because of a shared sense of belonging within the city and of ethical relation to each other. Over the course of several conversations prior to the scene at the lookout, each begins to recognize and allow for the difference of the other, difference that is expressed, among other things, in their geographies of the city: whereas Jacqueline is familiar with the port, for example, Gilbert is familiar with the mountain (163-168). Although Gilbert ultimately gives in to his parents and leaves Jacqueline, Viau’s text reinforces the idea of the mountain as the exclusive space of the wealthy. *Au milieu, la montagne* dramatizes the betrayal of a dream, a dream of democratized space even more than a dream of upward mobility which would give Jacqueline access to the mountain only through the middle class. Indeed, a tension wavers between the individual’s failed opportunity for advancement and the disruption of class ideologies produced by Jacqueline’s relationship with Gilbert.¹⁵

In Thériault’s *Aaron*, none of the characters lives on the mountain, but Mount Royal park is nonetheless the place in which the lovers, Aaron and Viedna, negotiate the material circumstances of their lives, specifically, the way their cultural and religious identity as Jews circumscribes their chances of prosperity in 1920s and 1930s Montreal. In Socken’s terms, *Aaron* dramatizes “the confrontation between tradition and change in the modern world and the absence of a mediating force” (131).¹⁶ The mountain is crucial in figuring this confrontation between discourses of tradition and of modernity,

between the spiritual and the secular. What Aaron finds walking on Mount Royal, Socken points out, is not sacred laws handed down from generation to generation, laws associated with the orthodox Judaism of his grandfather Moishe, but “modern culture in the form of a young woman, Viedna” (132). Aaron’s relationship with Viedna unfolds more on the hillside than at the lookout but in one scene the two stand at the summit: “D’où ils étaient, ils dominaient Montréal” (80). In this scene, Viedna explains that Canada has not allowed her father to forget his Jewishness. Aaron, who would like to construct Canada (equated here with Montreal) as a positive space for Jewish immigrants, finds that he cannot. In spite of “dominating” the city, then, Aaron and Viedna have no mastery over it; looking is not synonymous with power. They stand well above the streets in which they are routinely aggrieved, yet the streets are strangely with them. Aaron, like Viedna, eventually effaces his Jewishness and breaks with his heritage, gestures which suggest the need for change both in Moishe’s rigid understanding of that heritage and, importantly, in attitudes toward Jews in Montreal.

Resisting Imaginary Totalizations

Early in “Walking in the City,” de Certeau wonders “what is the source of this pleasure of ‘seeing the whole,’ of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts” (92). By “the most immoderate of human texts,” de Certeau understands the city as a trace structure of movement, exchange, and quotidian practices which appear nowhere on maps of the city. Each writer discussed in this section raises a question similar to that of de Certeau and each uses mountaintop scenes to stage and interrogate the terms of its own representation. Insofar as the main characters are writers, the texts of Bessette, Cohen, and Scott are able to raise conceptual issues related to the process of writing the city within the time and space of the narrative. The question in Bessette’s *La bagarre*¹⁷ is not simply why the desire to look down on the city but why *write* such a scene. One of Bessette’s characters, Jules Lebeuf, wants to write a novel about Montreal, a novel that would bring the city to life in all its complexity (29). As Gilles Marcotte explains,

Écrire, pour lui [Jules Lebeuf], écrire un roman, c’est inévitablement, nécessairement, écrire le roman de Montréal, créer Montréal, lui “donner une âme.” Il met ainsi en plein jour un désir qui habite, plus ou moins masqué, bon nombre de romanciers montréalais. Dans un des passages les plus explicites du roman, à ce propos, Jules Lebeuf monte au sommet du mont Royal—comme le font, depuis le

XIXe siècle, la plupart des écrivains québécois qui ont voulu saisir Montréal, le donner à lire dans sa totalité—et appelle pour ainsi dire la ville à l’existence. (29)

When Jules finally puts pen to paper, he begins with a scene, narrated in the third person, in which a man contemplates the moving patterns of light he sees from the Mount Royal observatory at night. Such a perspective affords both an overview of the city and, importantly, a way to begin. To begin a novel in such a way is, as Marcotte suggests, to replay a paradigmatic scene in Quebec writing. It is also to replay a scene of New World conquest, a scene which reaches back to the sixteenth century, to a moment often taken to be originary in histories of Montreal: Jacques Cartier’s climbing and naming of Mount Royal in 1535.¹⁸

Given that Jules dreams of writing a “new world” novel, a novel in French but of Montreal (and not France), the mountain might seem a plausible place to start. However, as soon as Jules sets down the scene, he questions its romanticism, its grandiloquence, and its pretence to represent the city:¹⁹

“D’où me vient la manie de commencer par une vue panoramique?” Il fallait au contraire débiter dans le vif du sujet, au milieu d’une scène; . . . “Une vue panoramique! Quelle naïveté! Pourquoi pas un recensement de la population montréalaise? Ce serait tout aussi intelligent! À l’ouest, les Anglais; à l’est, les Canadiens. Entre les deux, une coulée israélite.” (97)

The problem of the mountaintop view is one of representation, of how to frame a narrative and of how such framing organizes social space. Practices of seeing, Jules’ comments suggest, are also practices of space. In many ways, Jules’ comments dovetail with those of de Certeau: the view from above allows subjects to map urban space, to determine various routes, zones, and lines of demarcation, but it cannot capture the city’s illegibility, the ways in which subjects inhabit the city, the ways in which they “speak” the city through their movements. As David Leahy points out, conversations Jules has with his friends Sillery and Weston suggest that language is a conundrum for Jules and is, perhaps, key to his inability to write. Leahy cites, for example, Jules’ desire to make his language more “French” and his resistance to suggestions that he write across several languages (Leahy, “The Carnavalesque” 70; Bessette 57). Is *La bagarre* the novel Jules is struggling to write?²⁰ Certainly, *La bagarre* operates at street level, intercalating different modes of discourse or ways of speaking, allowing the reader to “assemble” the city, and refusing to present an image of Montreal in its entirety. The narrative perspective, while omniscient, is not panoramic. Moreover, as it is presented in *La*

bagarre, Jules' mountaintop scene is a scene of writing—at a folding table in a Montreal apartment—as well as a scene of looking. In this sense, Bessette's text incorporates the way in which space is lived or practised as well as the way in which it is seen.

In Cohen's *The Favourite Game*,²¹ the self-questioning and self-mockery in which Jules engages after writing his scene on the mountain, are integrated into the very discourse of the novel so that every line or passage potentially subverts its own meaning and value. The following passage, for example, both replays the conventions of the night-time view from the mountaintop and marks its difference from those conventions. Moreover, it slips between external and internal narration; the "he," a young Jewish man from Westmount named Lawrence Breavman, is also the "I":

He looked in awe at the expanse of night-green foliage, the austere lights of the city, the dull gleam of the St. Lawrence.

A city was a great achievement, bridges were fine things to build. But the street, harbours, spikes of stone were ultimately lost in the wider cradle of mountain and sky.

It ran a chill through his spine to be involved in the mysterious mechanism of city and black hills.

Father, I'm ignorant.

He would master the rules and techniques of the city, why the one-way streets were chosen, how the stock-market worked, what notaries did.

It wasn't a Hellish Bunny Hop if you knew the names of things. He would study leaves and bark, and visit stone quarries as his father had done. (38)

The discourse of romanticism which Jules Lebeuf rejects in his own writing—and which one finds in MacLennan's *The Watch*—is present here in the "chill through his spine," in "the mysterious mechanism of city and black hills" and, above all, in the "awe" Breavman experiences in the face of that which lies beyond him. Cohen's text, however, undermines the atmosphere of wonderment and fear by breaking the passage into single-sentence paragraphs, and by shifting registers between the extraordinary and the mundane, the serious and the frivolous. If a reader is tempted to believe Breavman's commitment to "master the rules and techniques of the city," the final assertion about studying leaves and bark, and visiting stone quarries, suggests that something is amiss both in Breavman's strategy and in the rules and techniques to be mastered.

Another of Cohen's lines, "Westmount is a collection of large stone houses and lush trees arranged on the top of the mountain especially to

humiliate the underprivileged” (48), is similarly multi-voiced. This statement, which is never spoken out loud but which raises questions about the terms of its own enunciation, surfaces in the narrator’s account of Breavman’s and Krantz’s confrontation with several francophone men in a downtown dancehall. The statement has the unruly status of being what Breavman and Krantz “knew . . . [the francophone men] wanted to hear” (48, my emphasis). As Sherry Simon observes of the confrontation, “Neither side has much of a vocabulary beyond the stereotypes they’ve been taught about each other” (17). In this sense, the statement says as much about the clichés of Montreal’s social geography and about the volatile mixture of fear, overstatement, appeasement, complicity, and self-interest which lies behind the statement as about relations between Westmount and the underprivileged. In *The Favourite Game*, Westmount is not nearly as orderly or stable as it might appear. Breavman’s obsessive rounds of the park²² near his family’s house, for example, involve examining the upper ponds for “sail-boat wrecks or abandoned babies or raped white nurses” (69). Beneath the surface of everyday life in Westmount is violence. Breavman’s critique of and flight from Westmount is fraught with contradictions, contradictions that structure his identity as a “refugee . . . from Westmount” (85) as well as “his penance through manual labour” (110). A totalizing view, Cohen’s text suggests, is suspect, and a totalizing critique—of the kind one finds in the statement about Westmount—even more so.

Cohen offers an apparently straightforward response to de Certeau’s question of what is gained in looking down on the city. “The park,” explains the narrator, “gave the young merchant princes views of factories so they could imagine power” (69). Breavman is ambivalent toward his own status as “young merchant-prince.” In one scene, he “look[s] gravely from the lookout to guarantee the view” (69); in another, he and his friend Krantz “practis[e] a soft-shoe routine at the Westmount Lookout, delighting in their own absurdity,” then “[sit] on the stone wall, their backs to the river and city” (81).²³ Views of factories are no guarantee of power; they simply allow the viewer to imagine a privileged position within relations of power. Power, like the view from the mountaintop, is unstable and intangible. It can only be imagined through a repeated act of looking in order to be “guaranteed.” McQueen, we remember, looks out at the city on more than one occasion in *Two Solitudes*. That “McQueen’s satisfaction *constantly renewed itself* through his ability to overlook all this” (105, my emphasis) signals the

importance of repetition in the performance of power. Breavman's acts of dancing at the Lookout and of turning his back on the view are gestures of privilege, but they are also refusals to participate in the process of renewing or guaranteeing the view.

Scott's *Heroine*²⁴ opens with a scene at the Mount Royal lookout, a scene which insists in its own way upon the impossibility of guaranteeing the view:

Sir. You can on-ly put ca-na-dian monee in that machine. No sir. No foreign objects nor foreign monee in that macheen. It's an infraction you see. The guard's finger runs tight under the small print. The wooden squirrels in the rafters are silent. The Black tourist descends the steps with an astonished stare towards the telescope aimed at the city skyscrapers. (9)

In this passage, the public spaces of the lookout and the chalet on Mount Royal are once again sites of encounter, not between lovers but between an African-American tourist and a Québécois coffee machine guard. The guard is concerned with the rules. Yet the rules, "no foreign objects nor foreign monee," are disrupted by the guard's use of a language not his own and by the difficulty, in Montreal, of distinguishing foreign from familiar. The scene is also about authority, about who calls whom "Sir." As Nicole Markotic has observed, Scott's text undercuts the guard's authority "by pointing out the halting English he uses to politely address [the] tourist" (38). Given the number of factors in play, the relations of power which subtend the scene are highly unruly. The francophone official both adopts a position of authority in relation to the African-American tourist and defers to him by speaking English. In a sense, the guard is obliged to adopt English in order to be understood by the American. If the tourist "descends the steps with an astonished stare," the astonishment has to do with the recognition that he is in another country and that he cannot use American money in either the coffee machine or the telescope. As Frank Davey suggests, the tourist's position of power "as an American, as one enabled to travel, as one standing on top of the mountain" is presented by Scott's text as "a winnable position, one only recently won" (63). The relative tenuousness of this position is signalled by the fact that the guard's discourse silences the tourist.

But the tourist is not consistently silent. In an episode from the second section of the text, the unnamed "Middle," the heroine engages in an automatic writing exercise based on "*la cartographie du hasard*" (76). At the same time, she remarks upon her male comrades' inability to address differences of sexuality and gender in their surrealist views of protest and desire. After

becoming disenchanted with the scene at the McGill Gates where she is sent by the toss of a coin, she climbs the steps to the chalet on the mountain. Before reaching the top, she comes upon R, one of the surrealists, in conversation with a “Black guy” (78) who questions the parallels R draws “between the québécoise and Black revolutions” (78) and who undermines R’s illusions about Canada as free of racist violence. The African-American points out that if he appeared in a novel, the writer would be likely “at every mention . . . [to] state [his] colour” (78). Of course, up to this point in the text, *Heroine* is guilty of precisely this convention. The heroine, who like Jules Lebeuf is trying to write a novel, is overwhelmed by the contradictions and runs back down the mountain. At the bottom, she reflects upon her writing and upon her surrealist practice but in ways symptomatic of her own take on protest and desire: “If I were to start the novel what would be the opening? Quick, free associate. A shrimp in the labia” (78). The trip up and down the mountain, then, provides her with two of the elements she needs to write the first two paragraphs of *Heroine*: the tourist who, as Markotic points out, “is eventually allowed to lose the adjective” (38-39), and the “small point” on which the water from the faucet falls as the heroine lies masturbating in the bath (9).

Scott’s text returns again and again to the scene of tourist and telescope. Through the lens on the mountain, the tourist sees things that do not figure in other accounts of Montreal as seen from above: a field of car wrecks, a grey woman who sleeps in parks and wanders the downtown area, a demolition pit, acts of political resistance, graffiti, the cafés of the Main, the flashing sign for the WAIKIKI TOURIST ROOMS above the apartment of “I,” the woman narrator.²⁵ Looking through the telescope might be read as a metaphor for the process of narration. However, the brief, externally-narrated accounts of what is seen through the lens consistently give way to lengthy, internally-narrated passages from the perspective of the heroine in the bath. What is narrated exceeds the physical and temporal constraints of the bath as well as the telescope. Allowing one scene to open onto the next, and making “each body . . . an element signed by many others” (de Certeau 93), Scott’s text operates by way of metonymy or, to be more specific, contiguity, a form of adjacency that emphasizes material links. This compositional strategy of assembling elements whose only relation to one another is their contiguity marks a substantial departure from a realist practice of metonymy which presents a part of the city and allows readers to extrapolate a sense of

the whole. Such proliferating lateral movement speaks to de Certeau's metaphor of the city as "the most immoderate of human texts" (92), as composed of practices and pathways that are not visible from on high. In *Heroine*, then, the view from the mountain is part of the text's project of practising the city from below. The telescope is not primarily a device for taking in or representing a view of the city. Rather, it is a technology that draws attention to the apparatus of looking and reminds readers that there is always a lens mediating the view of the city.

Unlikely Links

Although my discussion is organized in roughly chronological order, my project is not so much literary historical as genealogical (see Foucault). To construct a genealogy of the Montreal mountain would require the examination of a far greater range of discourses and practices than I have considered. A literary genealogy is, in this sense, a preliminary gesture. A genealogy is based not on lines of continuity of the kind that generate a literary tradition, but rather on contradiction and discontinuity, on unlikely links among texts written in different languages, among texts marked by different aesthetic practices, among texts that figure in several fields of writing (Québécois, anglo-Quebec, Canadian, Montreal) at the same time, and among texts that may be deemed more—or less—"significant" in a given field at a given moment. Approaching my corpus genealogically allows me to attend to the specificity of each text and, at the same time, in the place of any supra-historical or totalizing perspective, to allow connections and contradictions to emerge. Among these contradictory connections is the link between the figure of the grey woman in *Heroine* and that of Rose-Anna in *Bonheur d'occasion*. Indeed, in spite of substantial differences, both figures insist upon the "murky intertwining daily behaviours" (de Certeau 92) of bodies and streets, and both bring the city below to bear upon the view from above.

Particularly striking in these nine texts are the continuities and discontinuities in the constructions of Westmount, Mount Royal, and Outremont.²⁶ If, as I suggested earlier, Westmount is central to texts published in the mid-1940s, Mount Royal also plays a role in those texts (Graham, MacLennan), and is increasingly a focus in subsequent decades. Mount Royal is characterized as a democratic space, a space for lovers to meet (Graham, MacLennan, Viau, Thériault), a space of interaction and sometimes antagonism among communities (Roy, Graham, MacLennan, Cohen, Scott), a space of

inter-generational conflict (Thériault), or of inter-class conflict (Viau), and a space for breaking the frame of realist representation (Bessette, Scott). Like Outremont in *Au milieu, la montagne*, Westmount is a figure of social hierarchy in *Bonheur d'occasion*, *Two Solitudes*, and *The Favourite Game*. But the Westmount of the latter texts, more than Viau's Outremont, also enables the elaboration of alternative social visions. What is more, the interventions of Cohen's text open new avenues for reading *Bonheur d'occasion* and *Two Solitudes*. Breavman's ambivalence and self-irony are very different from McQueen's self-satisfaction, even when that self-satisfaction is ironically undercut by MacLennan's text. However, Cohen's text allows us to read Huntly McQueen's act of looking as his way of representing for himself, and for others, his social and economic privilege. Similarly, the earnest tone of *Bonheur d'occasion* differs substantially from the instability and excess of *The Favourite Game*. Yet the questions Cohen's text raises about the statement "Westmount is a collection of large stone houses and lush trees arranged on the top of the mountain to humiliate the underprivileged" invite us to revisit our readings of *Bonheur d'occasion*.

The application of linguistic analysis to non-linguistic practices—for example, de Certeau's analogy of city to language system and of walking to language practice (97-102)—has its limits. These limits make it difficult for de Certeau to account for the *contingencies* of the view from the top, that is, the question of access to the vantage point, the combination of looking and walking we find in many of the texts and the role of the mountain as site of encounter and intervention. At the same time, de Certeau's idea that subjects constitute the city through their everyday practices, actualizing certain possibilities and displacing others, allows both for agency and for social change. The heroine's climb up Mount Royal in Scott, Erica's and Marc's walk in Mount Royal park, or Emmanuel's climb up Westmount are, in de Certeau's sense, "pedestrian speech acts" (97) and "walking rhetorics" (100) that intervene in the organization of urban social space. Literary texts are not, specifically, the everyday practices de Certeau has in mind in "Walking in the City." In fact, de Certeau's text makes us reflect upon the use of visual metaphors in literary analysis as well as upon the pitfalls of literary mappings which attempt to make the city "readable." Yet, as I hope to have shown, literary texts also enable critical understanding of the oversights of de Certeau's analysis and of the productive cultural work of scenes on the Montreal Mountain.

NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Richard Cassidy and Najla Bahri for their research assistance and to SSHRC for financial support.
- 2 Because I incorporate phrases from de Certeau into my sentences, I have used the English translation of his text, *L'Invention du quotidien*. Otherwise, my practice is to cite texts in their original language.
- 3 For a discussion of how to read de Certeau's use of the World Trade Center after 9/11, see Marla Carlson.
- 4 "Mount Royal" can be used to refer the landform as a whole, that is, to all three peaks but given the specific literary, social, and cultural meanings associated with each peak, I use the names Westmount, Outremont, and Mount Royal. The latter refers to the peak with the Chalet, the Peel Street Lookout, and Frederick Olmsted's park.
- 5 For a sense of the range of texts which feature the Montreal mountain, see Bryan Demchinsky and Elaine Kalman Naves, Barbara Godard, Monique Larue, and Antoine Sirois.
- 6 In the words of Sirois, "Sur le plan social, [la montagne] illustre surtout une domination financière et, ou, ethnique" (268). For Larue, "la montagne est une illustration trop saisissante de l'échelle sociale de la ville pour que cet aspect ne soit pas fréquemment évoqué" (86). Santé Viselli suggests that there are two mountains in Gabrielle Roy's works; whereas *La montagne secrète* poses a philosophical and aesthetic challenge, Westmount, in *Bonheur d'occasion*, poses a social and moral challenge (98).
- 7 Paul Socken notes Mount Royal's association with "secular values (amusement, skiing) and, in the Quebec imagination, with worldly ambition (cf. *Bonheur d'occasion*)" (136). He is not alone in the latter view but, as I argue, more attention needs to be given to the critique of "worldly ambition" (136) that informs Roy's text. Although "Mount Royal" can refer to all three peaks, it would be more accurate to call the mountain of *Bonheur d'occasion* "Westmount."
- 8 Babby contrasts Jean's and Emmanuel's climbs, characterizing the former as "strictly visual" and the latter as "physical" as well as visual (54-55).
- 9 Leith is troubled, however, by the text's use of the marriage of Heather and Paul to resolve French-English tensions. "Paul cannot," she argues, "both bridge the solitudes in his own person and represent French Canada" (52). That the hardships of Marius and Émilie are used as a kind of lesson against Quebec nationalism is, in her view, a weakness of MacLennan's text (57).
- 10 The mountain is also a space mapped by gay men. See, for example, texts by Michel Tremblay, John Raymond Woolfrey, and Luther Allen.
- 11 In the fiction of Mordecai Richler, the street is far more important than the mountain. Nonetheless, the adventures of Jake Hirsch and Duddy Kravitz in *St. Urbain's Horseman* reveal the comical side of parks and lovers: "They found some butts, lit up, and climbed Mount Royal in search of couples in the bushes" (38).
- 12 Earlier versions of my readings of *The Watch*, *Earth and High Heaven*, and *Heroine*, versions which focus more on the mountaintop scene as sublime encounter, were presented in Madrid at the 1997 meeting of the Spanish Association of Canadian Studies and published in the conference proceedings.
- 13 In Montreal fiction, Mount Royal is not always constructed as a space of positive encounter. In Ted Allen's 1949 short story "Lies My Father Told Me," for example,

- a boy's sleigh-ride on the mountain with his grandfather is interrupted by francophone children throwing stones and shouting "Juif . . . Juif . . ." (51).
- 14 The treatment of Jewish characters, however, is not the same. As Ben-Zion Shek notes, Viau's novel is one of those in which "la caricature du Juif atteint au grotesque" ("L'image" 259). See *Au milieu, la montagne* (65; 221).
 - 15 Shek suggests that Jacqueline is resigned to her "lot" (*Social Realism* 162); Maurice Lemire compares Viau's novel unfavourably to Roy's: "Ainsi la remise en question par Gabrielle Roy d'un capitalisme, sans ressources pour nourrir décevement les hommes, mais plein d'expédients quand il s'agit de les faire s'entretuer, se réduit chez Viau à un phénomène de stratification social normal dans toute société qui s'urbanise" (87); and David Leahy shows how the gender (and class) transgressions of the effete figure, Serge, an upper-class gay man, parallel the class (and gender) transgressions of Jacqueline, and how neither is successful in their attempts to "pass" ("Race, Gender" 38-41).
 - 16 The modernity-tradition dichotomy, Robert Schwartzwald argues through Linda Cardinal, Claude Couture, and Claude Denis, is a false one which is sustained, among other things, by "anglo-American political theory's tendency to identify 'others' who fall outside its universalistic articulation of modernity-as-individualism with 'collectivism' and 'tradition'" (118).
 - 17 The action of *La bagarre* takes place toward the end of the 1940s.
 - 18 Given that indigenous histories of the place now known as Montreal pre-date (and post-date) this moment, the latter moment is hardly originary.
 - 19 Similar reservations might be raised with regard to mountaintop scenes in MacLennan's *The Watch*, published a year after *La bagarre*. MacLennan's text does not fall completely into the trap Lebeuf sets for himself and ultimately resists. After all, it does not use the mountaintop scenes to open the novel and it ironizes the first of the two scenes through George's intervening comments on the feasibility of love at eighteen below (30). At the same time, however, MacLennan's text does offer a panoramic view, focus on the lights of the city, and engage a quasi-romantic discourse of the sublime and the beautiful.
 - 20 Leahy suggests as much when he argues in a footnote that "*La bagarre* . . . serves as an example of what was lacking in Lebeuf's writing and imaginary" ("The Carnavalesque" 81n27).
 - 21 Various cultural and political references, along with the date "August 1958" (231), suggest that the novel is being narrated/written in the late-1950s about a childhood and adolescence in the 1940s and 1950s.
 - 22 Identified by Demchinsky and Kalman Naves as King George Park (177).
 - 23 This turn away from the city toward Westmount takes a different form in Richler's *Joshua Then and Now*. A resident of Lower Westmount, Joshua "ascends the mountain into Upper Westmount" on his walks not to take in the view of the city but "to peer boldly into living room windows" and "to [seek] out old classmates to bait. St. Urbain urchins who had struck it rich" (108). Joshua Shapiro, the son of a prizefighter, is married to the daughter of a Westmount senator. The text's satire is directed inwards at Joshua's own class envy and at what he considers to be the pretensions of the new Jewish establishment as well as at W.A.S.P. privilege. Westmount of the mid-1970s is shown to be heterodox, a place which disturbs the easy assignment of class or cultural identity to geography.
 - 24 The moment of narration takes place in October 1980 but the heroine's thoughts reach back to the late 1960s and 1970s. Within the heroine's narrative, *Heroine* appears to be both already written and still to come.

- 25 Davey reads the tourist's relation to the telescope as "a long history of male dominance" which connects him to Jon, the other "specular man" (64). I read the relation as ambivalent, riddled with contradictions; the tourist is both a "specular man" and a man who is able to see the derelict spaces and subjectivities of the city.
- 26 In many ways, my corpus leaves me better equipped to discuss Westmount and Mount Royal than Outremont. The francophone inter-class dynamics which often feature in literary portraits of Outremont are not a major focus of this essay. Nevertheless, texts such as Ringuet's *Le poids du jour* (1949), Réjean Ducharme's *L'hiver de force* (1973), Francine Noël's *Maryse* (1983), and Denise Bombardier's *L'enfance à l'eau bénite* (1985) would be important to consider in a longer study.

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