

Remembering the Sixties: A Quartet

Only now, in retrospect, do I wonder what would I be like, and what would I be doing if I had been born ten years earlier or later. Leaving home and moving into the sixties wasn't quite like living through the French Revolution, but it sure explains why I took so many courses on the Romantics. And what if I had chosen to do a degree in Modern Languages at Trinity College, as I had planned, instead of going to Glendon College and doing one in English and French? Glendon, with a former diplomat, Escott Reid, as principal, was structured in terms that prefigured the Trudeau years, as a bilingual college that recruited heavily among the children of politicians and civil servants. And every year, the college provided money to the students to run a major conference on a political issue. In first year I met separatists (which is how I know that René Levesque was as short as I am and that he could talk and smoke at the same time. Probably, I didn't understand a word he said.) I learned I was anglophone. In second year I met Native people for the first time in my life to talk to. I demonstrated against the Liberal White Paper introduced in 1969. (Harold Cardinal summed up its position: "The only good Indian is a non-Indian.") I learned I was white. In first year I wore miniskirts, got my hair cut at Sassoon's, and shopped the sale racks at Holt Renfrew. I learned I was middle class. In second year I went on the pill and got my first pair of jeans. (And I did—even then—connect the disappearance of the curfew and the porter at my residence with the appearance of the pill.) I learned that being female carried some political disadvantages. I sat on Trudeau's lawn to

protest the abortion laws (but I did not chain myself to a seat in the Public Gallery in the House of Commons, as some of my friends did. Not brave enough.) By third year, I was living in Rochdale and volunteering at the Campus Community Day Care Centre. In fact, I first encountered my PhD-supervisor-to-be, Claude Bissell, at an occupation of University of Toronto's administration building over its refusal to support that centre. (Unshaven, and with no visible security, he wandered in after a few hours and appeared to sort things out.) Also at the occupation were the bikers who ran security at Rochdale, flying their black flag out the window, not to mention the Trots, the Maoists, and members of other parties and factions whose positions I did not know and whose names I do not remember. I helped bail out people arrested in the demonstration in front of the American embassy over Kent State. I learned I was Canadian. In the meetings before and after these demonstrations some of the American draft dodgers and deserters treated their Canadian "comrades" like pathetic country cousins. And some of them advocated violence in words that didn't seem all that different from official US rhetoric. I decided mild-mannered and polite was ok.

Too many people moved into Rochdale that summer who were only interested in loud music, drugs, sex and throwing bottles out the windows (It was a tourist destination by then, I think.) I worked at the day care centre at York University until the faculty members who were a majority of its parents decided that it shouldn't take staff and student babies. By fourth year (maybe I was aging), things seemed to have died down—except for the FLQ crisis and the War Measures Act. Perhaps that brought it home to people where all that rhetoric could lead. My then-husband and I left the country to teach English in a Zambian secondary school for two years. When I came back, everything had moved on without me. By then, of course, it was 1973. M.F.

It might have been a T-shirt; it might have been a placard. I can't remember; either way, though, the words were the same, stencilled on in bold caps so as to signal their authoritative gesture against authority: MAKE LOVE NOT WAR. The occasion was Hallowe'en; the date, the late sixties. Again, I can't remember exactly, though I do recall what I was up to: I was trick-or-treating, dressed up as a hippie. Little matter that I didn't yet know what the phrase "make love" really meant (it puzzled me, that I remember, but it was clearly a better thing to do than to "make war");

I was in training for adulthood. Not a doctor, not a garbageman (I often confused the two, since the men who emptied the cans in our neighbourhood wore white coats), not butcher, baker, or rake—I was going to grow up to be a hippie. My parents were displeased of course; they were already fortysomething, immigrants from post-WW II Scotland, and none too keen to see their eldest child renounce what they had gained quite late in life: access to the excess that made tuning in, turning on, and dropping out a leap with a fairly soft landing (voluntary “poverty” was not a noble ideal to those whose lives had mostly been lived in involuntary poverty). The problem was, we lived near S.F.U., and my bedroom window looked out onto a route travelled by VW vans in psychedelic colours, the vans themselves a chaos of bangles, bojangles, sandals, bongos, bongos, and tiedye (the closest I could get to these mobile edens was to walk around with a transistor radio pressed to my ear). There were other vehicles, too, but none that caught my fancy; not even firetrucks and firemen could compare with these colourful explosions of dissidence (“pelting” other children with orange peels at recess was still punished by strapping in my school). I hadn’t any real idea what these auto-schools of Jesus-headed hippies were about (even the women had that odd iconic look I first saw in Sunday School pictures), but they held my eye and shaped my imaginative life; they also steered me towards the university, making me wonder about a place that apparently gave space to things that got most adults I knew worked up. That place appealed to me, since (although I couldn’t have articulated it then) its mysterious workings seemed to sit well with the go-your-own-way Protestantism in which my mother was not quite bringing me up, just as it seemed to fit with my father’s outright rejection of Christian traditions (his family were Catholic). Eventually I went to university (but I bussed and biked it, since the flowery vans had long since faded), and it has so far held me there the way flypaper holds a fly (it was designed for them, after all). Which is not to suggest that I’ve grown up to be Gregor Samsa—even as the sixties butterfly has shrunk back to a larval state in sundry niche-market cocoons. It has more to do with Hallowe’en, since I now get paid to go trick-or-treating in the classroom, where my costumes are still transparently traditional: a ghost in the machine, a skeleton in a disciplinary closet, a stuffed shirt, even sometimes a hippie, professing to love made and making words. I.H.

La décennie soixante marque certainement l'une des périodes les plus importantes du Québec contemporain. Entre les bouleversements engendrés par la Révolution tranquille et l'Exposition universelle de Montréal (1967), à travers les dédales d'un pluralisme idéologique naissant, d'une tendance à vouloir tout séculariser, d'une rhétorique liée aux droits individuels et d'une morale sexuelle propagée par un mouvement universel de libéralisation, la société québécoise connaîtra, durant cette période, une transformation à ce point important que des mots comme «révolution» et «innovation», «identité» et «modernité», «décolonisation» et «contestation», «ouverture sur le monde» et «mutation profonde» sauraient décrire mieux que tout autre. Passage obligé entre un passéisme canadien-français et l'affirmation d'une identité "québécoise" orientée vers le futur, la Révolution tranquille sera aussi un point d'ancrage qui permettra aux institutions du Québec, et notamment à l'institution littéraire, de se renouveler pour mieux s'affirmer. Dans ce contexte d'ébullition, qui marquera l'idéologie d'une société toute entière et forcera un grand nombre d'écrivains à prendre position dans des discours politiquement engagés, la littérature québécoise se consolidera peu à peu, deviendra omniprésente dans les nouveaux programmes et systèmes d'enseignement du Québec (les écoles dites "polyvalentes", les collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel [Cégep], le réseau des universités du Québec) et sera reconnue à l'étranger.

Témoin d'une époque où les transformations s'enchaînent avec rapidité les unes aux autres, où les questions d'identité nationale côtoient les problèmes liés à l'urbanisation, au fléchissement de la pratique religieuse aussi bien qu'à la multiplication des mariages civils, des unions libres et des divorces, la fiction narrative des années 1960 traduira, dans des oeuvres de plus en plus polymorphes, la contestation, le refus et la révolte qu'entraîne inévitablement l'émergence de nouvelles valeurs et de nouveaux désirs dans une société en mutation. Alors que certains romanciers, comme Gérard Bessette, Gabrielle Roy et Yves Thériault, poursuivront leur oeuvre en abordant diverses questions liées au phénomène d'«identité», de nouveaux venus (Hubert Aquin, Marie-Claire Blais, Réjean Ducharme, André Major et Jacques Renaud, en tête) feront état d'un climat de révolte généralisée contre l'ordre établi. À la même époque, Jacques Godbout et Jacques Poulin évoqueront à travers l'utilisation d'une langue populaire (le «joual») l'aliénation sociale et la dépossession culturelle de jeunes Québécois pendant que

d'autres auteurs, comme Anne Hébert et Jacques Ferron, élaboreront des ouvrages enracinés dans un destin à la fois personnel et collectif, contribuant ainsi, et à l'instar des auteurs mentionnés ci-haut, à faire des années 1960 l'une des périodes les plus déterminantes pour le roman écrit au Québec.

De la même manière la décennie soixante permettra au théâtre québécois de prendre un essor des plus remarquables. Alors que des troupes et que des institutions théâtrales permanentes apparaissent en se multipliant, le domaine de l'édition, sous l'égide du Centre d'essai des auteurs dramatiques (1965) et de la collection «Théâtre canadien» (1968) chez Leméac, rendra disponibles aux lecteurs les textes de théâtre les plus importants, incluant ceux de Marcel Dubé, de Gratien Gélinas et de Françoise Loranger. Bien que la plupart de ces auteurs exploiteront le filon de la révolte (contre la famille québécoise, notamment) à travers des personnages en quête d'identité et de liberté (ce que la pièce *Les Belles-Soeurs* [1968] de Michel Tremblay illustrera un peu plus tard avec brio), certains dramaturges déborderont la problématique spécifiquement "québécoise" et poseront (comme chez Jacques Languirand, par exemple) les défis soulevés par la guerre froide ou, encore, par la société moderne de production et de consommation.

Si les débats politiques entre fédéralistes et souverainistes, au cours des années 1960, fourniront le sujet explicite de plusieurs pièces de théâtre (qu'on pense, par exemple, à l'oeuvre de Jacques Ferron et à celle de Robert Gurik), c'est dans le domaine de la poésie et des essais critiques que ceux-ci auront le plus d'écho. Élaborée par des écrivains fortement engagés, comme Gaston Miron, Jacques Brault et Paul Chamberland, la poétique de "l'homme colonisé", perçue avant tout comme "la poésie du pays", s'engagera également dans le combat quotidien, individuel et collectif qui incombe universellement à la condition humaine. Dans le domaine des essais critiques, une surabondance d'écrits, surtout d'ordre politique, prendront souvent de forts accents polémiques, notamment chez Marcel Chaput, Raymond Barbeau, François Hertel et Pierre Vallières, alors que figureront dans d'autres oeuvres, celles de Pierre Vadeboncoeur, de Fernand Dumont et du Frère Untel (Jean-Paul Desbiens), en particulier, la mise en évidence de certains faits sociaux liés au cheminement de la collectivité québécoise. C'est d'ailleurs dans cette perspective que s'inscriront des ouvrages portant sur l'ensemble de la situation intellectuelle du Québec des

années 1960, une réflexion sur l'art, des monographies à tendance autobiographique et historiographique qui connaîtront un regain tout à fait naturel au cours de la décennie soixante, en raison des interrogations essentielles qui prévalaient alors.

En somme, s'il fallait résumer en quelques mots seulement l'importance qu'ont eu les années soixante au Québec, on pourrait sans doute dire que la mise en place de réformes institutionnelles, à l'époque de la Révolution tranquille, bouleversera les valeurs d'une société entière tout en favorisant l'émergence d'une "parole spécifiquement québécoise" qui, depuis plus de trente ans, ne cesse de se renouveler dans l'universel. A-M.R.

In 1967, I entered the University of Bonn, fresh from the Ursulines' girls school in Koblenz. The baroque archbishop's palace that houses the university seemed an odd place for the long-haired, pot-smoking, and poetry-reciting youths that the nuns had told us to avoid, but there was no getting away from them. In particular, they crowded the cafeteria where we collected a thick wad of hand-outs announcing demos, sit-ins, and readings by Paul Celan on our way to atrocious food (I will never forget the sight of a six-foot tall and very thin fellow student trying to fill up on scrambled eggs made from yellow powder.) Bonn was, however, not the hotbed of student revolution that Frankfurt or Berlin were: demonstrations seemed to feature more police than students and tended to peter out on the large ornamental lawn flanking the university. (Some of my older colleagues at Bonn now hotly challenge this impression, assuring me that the place was restless enough, thank you.) As for me, the nuns kept their grip for the three years I spent there. Wishing to raise us as Catholic wives and mothers (I am able to report that, with me, they have failed on all three accounts), they had spent much of their time teaching us "manners" that were hard to shake. Among these was the requirement, on leaving a room, to turn in the door and bow to the ones inside. Several of my professors watched in amazement as I pirouetted my way out of their offices, and I don't blame them.

My sixties happened in the seventies, and not in Bonn but in working-class Yorkshire where I taught at two grammar-schools and in a prison for men, and then in my five years in graduate school, at the University of Alberta. Yorkshire meant a first confrontation with real poverty, with those who make sure it persists (in those days, Thatcher became known as "milk-snatcher" for taking away school-children's free milk), and with a leftist

activism of long standing. Immersed in a very lively and politically committed international student community at the University of Alberta (I served as president of the International Students Organization for some time), I caught up with other things I had missed in Bonn. Discussing Memmi, Fanon, and Berque with fellow-students from everywhere but literature departments, I read Canadian Literature from a post-colonial perspective from the first. And I got myself arrested, together with sixty-odd students and faculty, at an anti-Apartheid rally, an episode which occasionally provides me with the opportunity to respond to some greying academic's "I don't think we have met" with "Oh yes, we have. We once spent a night in jail together."

With this issue, we welcome yet another addition to the editors of *Canadian Literature*: Alain-Michel Rocheleau, a specialist in Québec drama, introduces himself with one of the editorials opening this issue and with the obituary for Gaston Miron closing it. Laurie Ricou, who has been with *Canadian Literature* for fourteen years, is leaving us but will remain a friendly associate. We thank him for his commitment, generosity, and advice.

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