

# THE FOURTH SEPARATISM

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**T**HERE ARE FOUR KINDS of Separatism in the Province of Quebec. The first kind, manifested in mailbox bombings and other acts of noisy desperation, forms the subject matter of Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode*, Claude Jasmin's *Ethel et le terroriste*, Ellis Portal's *Killing Ground*, and to some extent of Jacques Godbout's *Le Couteau sur la table* and Hugh MacLennan's *Return of the Sphinx*. Based upon the fairly reliable premise that an established power structure will never voluntarily relinquish power, it is an attitude which is hardly new to the world or to Quebec. It is, for instance, the theme of a minor French-Canadian novel published nearly thirty years ago — Rex Desmarchais' *La Chesnaie*. But with a hero modeled after the Portuguese dictator Antonio Salazar and a revolution somehow intended to take up where Papineau left off in 1841, Desmarchais' novel did not create much of a stir. Recently, however, there have been a number of stirs, and a great deal of writing in addition to the novels listed above. The first kind of Separatism, then, whatever menace it represents for the Canadian nation, has certainly been a shot in the arm for Canadian literature.

The second kind of Separatism in Quebec is illustrated by René Lévesque and his Parti Québécois; although there is some doubt as to how wholeheartedly all the members of the party share Lévesque's articulate moderation. He is, of course, just as dedicated to the goal of an autonomous State of Quebec as are the adherents of the first brand of Separatism. The distinguishing feature of his attitude is that he has repeatedly rejected violence and force. Like the Scottish nationalists, he feels that independence must be achieved by means of the electoral system. As soon as the Parti Québécois elects a majority of representatives to the Provincial Government, there will no longer be a provincial government.

Another distinguishing feature of Lévesque's philosophy is that a future separate Quebec would maintain economic union with the rest of Canada, thus possibly avoiding the often-suggested danger of becoming a hockey-stick and maple-sugar

republic. René Lévesque justifies his position by the argument that only national independence can cure the frustrations and inferiority complex which have long haunted French Canada. Only independence can restore group pride and self-confidence. A benevolent federalism, like a loving mother who will not or cannot untie the apron strings, can never fulfil the psychological needs of a people who have come of age. And just as a grown girl does not want her mother to choose her boy friends, Quebec wishes to conduct her own external affairs.

The other two kinds of Separatism have not been so widely publicized as the first two. There is the Separatism of those who do not really want a politically independent Quebec, but who have learned that the Separatist Movement can be a useful lever to obtain concessions from English Canada, and even from the United States and France. Whereas the other brands of Separatism are nourished by the fears in the hearts of French Canadians, this kind reverses the situation and exploits the fears and aspirations of those who are not French Canadians. Once again, the principle is time-honoured and productive — it has long been used by politicians in the American South and more recently by the “block-busters” in the American North.

The fourth variety of Separatism is the opposite of the third, and it is undoubtedly the most significant of all four. It is the genuine desire for group self-determination which is shared by thousands, perhaps millions of French Canadians who nevertheless refuse to declare themselves Separatists. These people are the confused masses. They know there is something wrong. They feel frustrated and dehumanized, manipulated by a system which they vaguely identify with English Canada and the United States. But because the identification is vague, and because the positive stance of the terrorist groups seems an over-simplification; because the terrorism itself is alien to their thinking and apparently futile; because these people have been conditioned over the centuries to accept the imperfections of life on earth, they have not as yet openly committed themselves. Many are afraid to do so; others do not know how. At the moment they are Separatists in as much as they wish to protect themselves, build a wall around themselves, escape from something, escape from the boiling ocean of North American society and gain the reassuring warmth of the family circle. As I have said, these people vaguely identify the oppression they feel with English Canada and the United States, often grouping the two together under the term *mentalité anglo-saxonne*. If ever Quebec actually does secede from the Canadian Union, it will be because this vague identification has been changed to something positive and specific. And not necessarily with benefit of logic.

The four kinds of Quebec Separatism, then — terrorist, political, opportunist and psychological — are quite distinct from one another, and it seems to me that a knowledge of these distinguishing characteristics is a necessary prelude to examination of the literature of Separatism. Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode*, for example, was written by a man who at one time openly embraced the attitudes of our first category; in fact, the book was composed while Aquin was being detained in a Montreal jail after his arrest for alleged terrorist activities. It is an unusual, highly original novel, interweaving an *apologia pro vita sua* with a spy story and using both threads to present symbolic or direct commentaries on the malaise of Quebec.

This malaise is eloquently sung from the beginning to the end of the book. It is tied up with the narrator's personal frustration. "Le salaire du guerrier défait," says Aquin, "c'est la dépression. Le salaire de la dépression nationale, c'est mon échec." A little later he comments: "C'est vrai que nous n'avons pas d'histoire. Nous n'aurons d'histoire qu'à partir du moment incertain où commencera la guerre révolutionnaire. Notre histoire s'inaugurera dans le sang d'une révolution qui me brise et que j'ai mal servie; ce pour-là, veines ouvertes, nous ferons nos débuts dans le monde." Here as in Negro America, violence is regarded as a necessary ritual — the new identity must be baptized in blood and in fire: "Un sacrement apocryphe nous lie indissolublement à la révolution. Ce que nous avons commencé, nous le finirons."

But the novel has another aspect. Interwoven with the narrator's agonized protestations is a description of the events which make up the first episode, or at least the episode which precedes what is to be *le prochain épisode*. This story is an intriguing allegory. H. de Heutz in his several guises of historian, financier and government agent is a symbol of English Canada and the Canadian power structure, or the Establishment if you will. K., the girl with the long blond hair whom the narrator loves passionately and who is presumably his inspiration and accomplice in the attempt to eliminate H. de Heutz, is symbolic of *Québec* and the *Québécois*. In the usual spy-thriller way, the narrator follows the trail left by H. de Heutz, becoming more and more fascinated as he picks up additional bits of information about his many-sided quarry. The true identity of H. de Heutz becomes increasingly cloudy. He has other names and personalities. And he is cunningly dangerous. When the narrator eventually finds him in Geneva, he is himself overpowered and becomes a prisoner. Taken to H. de Heutz's chateau for questioning, the narrator invents a classic sob-story about abandoning his wife and two children because of debts and then lacking the courage to rob a bank or

kill himself with the gun found on his person. H. de Heutz, of course, dismisses the story, but the narrator manages to catch him off-guard, grabs the revolver, and the tables are turned.

Then the plot takes a curious twist. When the narrator has transported H. de Heutz to a forest and is about to shoot him, the latter begins to weep pitifully and plead for his life. Then to the narrator's mystification, he repeats exactly the same sob-story that the narrator had used shortly before. This incredible development has a hypnotic effect on the narrator. He hesitates. And before he can condition himself to perform the execution, a friend of H. de Heutz has crept up behind him and the intended victim escapes. The friend, incidentally, is a girl with long blond hair.

The narrator has one more unsuccessful encounter with H. de Heutz; then he is instructed to return to Montreal, where plainclothes policemen, one of whom is hidden in a confessional booth, capture him in the Notre Dame Church.

What does all this mean? For one thing, Aquin appears to be saying that the narrator, the would-be terrorist executioner, fails because H. de Heutz, despite his chateau with a reproduction of Benjamin West's "The Death of General Wolfe" hanging on the wall, does not correspond to the narrator's idea of what his antagonist ought to be. And the correspondence becomes less and less satisfactory the more the narrator finds out about H. de Heutz. Towards the end of the novel he says: "H. de Heutz ne m'a jamais paru aussi mystérieux qu'en ce moment même, dans ce château qu'il hante élégamment. Mais l'homme que j'attends est-il bien l'agent ennemi que je dois faire disparaître froidement? Cela me paraît incroyable, car l'homme qui demeure ici transcende avec éclat l'image que je me suis faite de ma victime."

Moreover, the narrator and H. de Heutz are strangely alike in many respects. They share a taste for history and historical objects. Their identical sob-stories indicate emotional interinvolvement and similar patterns of thought. At one point, the narrator even mentions that he feels he is almost a spiritual medium for H. de Heutz. In short, the narrator fails because he cannot really identify his intended victim with an enemy who must be destroyed. He has developed a Hamlet complex. He is like a boxer who, confronted with a certain opponent, is unable to muster enough killer instinct.

There is also the suggestion — more than a suggestion really, for why else would Aquin repeatedly include the detail? — that H. de Heutz's blond girl friend is actually the narrator's beloved K., who has been up to a little double-dealing. Aquin's terrorist group, as we know, was not supported by the populace

of Quebec. In fact, the ring was broken by Quebec police. And the capture of the novel's protagonist in a church is probably Aquin's way of saying that *la résignation chrétienne* which has long been preached in Quebec, is not the stuff to light the fires of revolution.

Some critics, understandably enough, have regarded *Prochain épisode* as a sort of manifesto for the first of the four brands of Separatism defined at the beginning of this analysis. Certainly it deals with terrorist ideas, and as we have seen, in certain moods the narrator calls for blood and revolution. On close examination, however, the novel is unmistakably a negation of terrorism, a striking dramatization of the futility of violent intervention. "Je suis devenu ce révolutionnaire voué à la tristesse et à l'inutile éclatement de sa rage d'enfant," says the narrator towards the end of the book. What *Prochain épisode* does provide is an expression, and a convincing expression indeed, of the desperate frustrations which have resulted in our fourth kind of Separatism, the Separatism of the confused masses. "C'est terrible et je ne peux plus me le cacher: je suis désespéré," writes Aquin. "On ne m'avait pas dit qu'en devenant patriote, je serais jeté ainsi dans la détresse et qu'à force de vouloir la liberté, je me retrouverais enfermé." The idea that to struggle for something better might well lead to something worse is undoubtedly one of the reasons why neither the terrorist front nor René Lévesque has yet been able to conscript the masses of French Canadians. Nevertheless, the malaise — the fear of being swallowed up and having all identity destroyed by the amorphous monster of North American society — remains undiminished: "J'ai peur de me réveiller dégénéré, complètement désidentifié, anéanti. Un autre que moi, les yeux hagards et le cerveau purgé de toute antériorité, franchira la grille le jour de ma libération." The narrator goes on to say that he does not know what the *prochain épisode* will be. But he does know that something has got to give, and I have no doubt that he speaks for millions more than himself when he says, "je porte en moi le germe de la révolution."

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PARALLELS between Aquin's book and Claude Jasmin's *Ethel et le terroriste*. Both novels derive from the F.L.Q. activities which led to the death of an elderly watchman in a bomb blast behind an Army recruiting centre on Montreal's Sherbrooke Street. Jasmin, however, takes an objective approach, analyzing the psychology of a young man who plants such a bomb, then goes to New York in an attempt to escape. Paul, the

young man, becomes a terrorist partly because of the same sense of personal and group frustration which haunts the narrator of *Prochain épisode*. His reminiscence of Quebec vividly reveals this feeling:

My country served up like rotten meat more than a hundred years ago to a band of long-toothed loyalists. My country stuffed with multicoloured cassocks, small-time grocers, skinny woodcutters, a few isolated giants, exceptions providing the material for our legends, which a great joker with a beaver face sings at the top of his voice to our pimply college boys, to our decrepit functionaries, to our street-corner clerks — in parliament we have nothing but a bunch of fat-arsed whore-mongers with their noses buried in huge cheeses made of taxes, taxes collected from the two-bit grocers and functionaries, nothing but an army of gnawing rodents who have themselves blessed every Sunday, who parade about spouting stupidities which are taken for promises. They get themselves elected with no bother at all by fooling the people, by muddling the wits of our grocer-functionaries. And in the wings of this theatre of vermin, the cassocks and the loyalists clap their hands.<sup>1</sup>

Quebec, curiously like Nova Scotia with its exiled Highlanders and dark clouds of religion, has nurtured its legends of giants to offset the nothingness in the lives of ordinary men. Paul, in Jasmin's *Ethel et le terroriste*, must have more than legends for sustenance. The author shows how the terrorist organization provides for him, as it does for other members, a chance to do something significant for the first time, a chance to fill a void which the conditions of life in Quebec and in Canada have not been able to fill. Speaking of his reception in the organization, Paul says, "Et on m'a serré les mains. On m'a dit que j'étais indispensable! Tu entends. On ne m'a jamais dit ça, sais-tu." On another occasion he says, "Je ne suis plus un simple 'canoque' de quartier du parc Lafontaine. Des héros." And when the time comes for Paul to do his part, he acts blindly, unthinkingly: "J'en ai des tics pour un long moment, et puis après? J'avais des ordres. Oui. C'est ce que je voulais. A un moment, j'ai fait ni un ni deux, j'ai dit aux gars: 'donnez-moi le paquet, l'heure, l'endroit.' C'est tout. Je ne voulais rien savoir. J'avais besoin d'un travail aveugle." And like many of the desperate men who jump from bridges or hijack airliners, Paul has his brief moment in the sun.

Jasmin's story, however, goes beyond the simple delineation of a character unbalanced by a need for recognition. The book suggests that many of the other members of the terrorist organization fit into that category, with various added personal neuroses to spur their hate; and so far as the typical terrorist is concerned, Jasmin is probably not far from the truth. But Paul, like the narrator of *Prochain épisode*, has enemy-identification problems. He finds it easier to love

than to hate. In particular, he passionately loves Ethel, who is Jewish. Ethel shares his feelings of frustration. She shares his moments of childlike joy, his essential innocence. She can even share his aspirations and understand his need for release through violence. But she cannot endorse group hatred and murder, and naturally the terrorist group is dependent on group hatred. Paul is told that he must abandon Ethel, something which he cannot and will not do. Thus he ends up in an impossible situation, alienated from his former gang members and being propositioned by the police to save himself by turning stool pigeon. His only sympathizer besides Ethel is an American Negro professor called Slide, who had been collaborating with the terrorist group, but who has become disillusioned by the group's drift from "Third-World" idealism to gutter xenophobia. Paul, then, like the protagonist of *Prochain épisode*, is a failure as a terrorist.

But while both Claude Jasmin and Hubert Aquin dramatize the futility of terrorism, they nevertheless confirm the existence of an explosive malaise in Quebec. Jasmin does not see it as something limited to Quebec. He sees Quebec's problem as part of a fairly universal unrest, which of course it is. Towards the end of the novel, Paul tells Ethel:

The campaign that must be fought. You know, the war, the true war. The struggle to throw off this great fat cow, this diseased and lazy animal that is lying on top of us all. On your country and on mine. On the black people, on the people of Greece, on those of Turkey and on those of China and Scotland. An enormous beast. The evil, Ethel, the true evil, the only one — it's ignorance. That is what should be fought. That is the true enemy. Our only enemy. Ignorance. Nothing, Ethel, is more serious or worse than ignorance. That is what seeds confusion, what fosters mediocrity, taboos and prejudices.<sup>1</sup>

Jasmin thus identifies the desperation currently manifest in Quebec as essentially part of a worldwide phenomenon. He is, of course, not alone in making such an observation. Other Quebec writers, including Aquin, have said much the same thing. The term *nègre blanc* has come into use, and its legitimacy with respect to French Canadians was recently the subject of a lengthy analysis by Max Dorsinville.<sup>2</sup> Such books as Jacques Renaud's *Le Cassé* or Roch Carrier's *La Guerre, yes sir* convey a sense of depression and hopelessness subject to momentary eruption in violence, as a condition of life hardly peculiar to the Province of Quebec. Jacques Godbout's *Le Couteau sur la table* is even more explicit.

It is a cunning book, packed with subtle undertones and connotations. As in the novels of Aquin and Jasmin, the deep involvement of the protagonist with a

girl has particular symbolic meaning. Godbout's Patricia — rich, blond, beautiful, the ultimate in female comfort and accommodation — represents the affluent North American society, the land of the Lotus Eaters from which the protagonist cannot easily withdraw. She is the jet set, gourmet food, flashy motels and Florida vacations. When he speaks to her of the struggles of oppressed peoples, of the threat of nuclear bombs, or of his own bitter existential vacuum, she responds by offering him her splendid body, showered and perfumed. Then being half Jewish and half Irish in origin, Patricia combines two ethnic traditions which have long had special significance in French Canada. Each of the two groups has had a love-hate relationship with *les Québécois*. It has been possible to identify with the Jews as a cultural-religious entity surviving against great odds, and with the Irish as Roman Catholic Celts victimized by English oppression. On the other side of the coin, French Canadians have thought themselves exploited by Jewish businessmen and endangered by the assimilation potential of their English-speaking, *vendus*, Irish co-religionists. It is, therefore, understandable that Godbout's protagonist should have a love-hate relationship with Patricia.

At the end of the book he acquires another girl friend, Madeleine, who symbolizes French Canada, the quiet, obedient French Canada of days gone by. But he does not give up Patricia. Indeed, the three of them live together in an apartment on Mountain Street in Montreal, with Madeleine temporarily occupying the hero's emotional energy and Patricia his prime-time Sunday afternoons. Shortly, however, Madeleine is killed in an accident — decapitated by a truck while riding the narrator's motorcycle. A funeral parlour scene symbolizes the death of Quebec's old order, which the protagonist can witness with interest but without particular regret. Then he proceeds to seduce Madeleine's little sister Monique.

Throughout *Le Couteau sur la table* Godbout makes recurrent reference to nursery rhymes. Such rhymes, of course, are the most basic and simple indicators of cultural differences. Moreover, the rhyme "I, ni, mi, ni, maï, ni mo," which turns up most often, signifies the state of indecision in the narrator's mind. As the story ends, despite the stirrings aroused by Madeleine, her sister and the Separatist Movement, the protagonist remains in a state of indecision. Patricia is still there, but his attitude toward her has changed. "Je ne te ferai aucun mal, si tu ne dis mot, Patricia," he says. "D'ailleurs il ne te servirait à rien de te débattre ou de crier ou même de parler de nos amours anciennes. Le couteau restera sur la table de la cuisine." The knife is on the table.

In essence, therefore, all of these French-Canadian novels dramatize our fourth



kind of Separatism. All of them emphasize the pressing desire for action and the potential for violence. As the announcement on the back cover of Jasmin's *Ethel et le terroriste* puts it: "Tout jeune Québécois de vingt ans porte théoriquement une bombe sous le bras." The factor which prevents the theory from becoming practice and wholesale support of Separatism is the difficulty of isolating and identifying the enemy. English Canada and federalism have been readily pinpointed by some, but have not as yet been accepted as the malignant tumour by the many.

OF THE TWO ENGLISH-CANADIAN NOVELS dealing with Separatism, Hugh MacLennan's *Return of the Sphinx* and Ellis Portal's *Killing Ground*, the second need not occupy much of our time. Portal's novel is not an attempt to analyse motivations or to offer insight into sociological and psychological realities. Rather it is a projection of what would happen to Canada if ever civil war were to become a fact. As such, it makes a point. Canadians are just as capable of bestiality and cold-blooded slaughter as any other civilized Christian nation. Naturally there would be a mess. Portal's novel, however, is marred by overabundance of sensational detail, which reinforces rather than suspends the reader's disbelief. Raping the enemy's beautiful women is a common human response hallowed by tradition; chopping off their breasts with Bren gun blasts is a little too bizarre. The book eventually deteriorates into a comic-opera sequence of events including wife-stealing and interchange of roles. The more I think about it, the more I seriously doubt if *Killing Ground* has any value at all.

Hugh MacLennan's *Return of the Sphinx* on the other hand, contains a great many insights which are pertinent and valuable. Toronto book reviewers and the Governor General's Award committee notwithstanding, it is probably the most important Canadian novel to appear for many years. I emphasize the word Canadian, and I am going to make a general observation about the works of Hugh MacLennan which may disturb some critics in this country. As I have become more and more deeply involved and conversant with Canadian literature in both languages, it has become increasingly evident to me that Hugh MacLennan is one of the few writers in the emerging mainstream. By mainstream I mean that sphere of experience, consciousness and identification which is essentially and peculiarly Canadian. Every writer must perforce operate within a particular emotional and intellectual sphere of consciousness, and among Cana-

dian writers several such spheres can be discerned. With few exceptions, these spheres of consciousness are defined and restricted by geographical area — Ontario, the small town, the prairies, the Atlantic seaboard, rural, Quebec, Quebec City, English Montreal, French Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg. Furthermore, for English-Canadian writers the broader spheres of consciousness are ones which have been defined by American writers, or at least are shared with them. The small town of Sherwood Anderson, for instance, is much the same as the small town of Sinclair Ross or W. O. Mitchell. The border does not really exist for the prairie sphere of consciousness. Stephen Leacock made a point of leaving his readers free to imagine that his settings could be almost anywhere in North America.

What, then, is a sphere of consciousness essentially and peculiarly Canadian? I should think that the main distinguishing feature would have to be dependent upon the main distinguishing feature of the Canadian Nation — the co-existence of two major ethnic groups. To be in the emerging mainstream of Canadian literature, therefore, a writer must have some awareness of fundamental aspects and attitudes of both language groups in Canada. It is just such awareness on the part of a few which is slowly moulding a single, common Canadian mystique out of the previous parallel threads of evolution.<sup>3</sup> The parallel threads, of course, are still there, and the majority of Canadian writers seem content, in some cases consciously determined to continue the process. But Hugh MacLennan is one exception. And not only is MacLennan one of the few in the mainstream; his body of works is the current which has given that mainstream definition and momentum. It is not surprising that the perceptive American critic Edmund Wilson, in describing his reaction to Hugh MacLennan, should say, "I came to recognize that there did now exist a Canadian way of looking at things." Nor is it without significance that George Woodcock should entitle his classic essay on MacLennan "A Nation's Odyssey." So many other Canadian writers — good writers such as Sinclair Ross, Morley Callaghan, Margaret Laurence, Sheila Watson, Stephen Leacock — are in the tributaries rather than the mainstream. And what is more, they are in the tributaries of American literature, not Canadian. Which does not mean, of course, that the work of these authors has any less literary merit. Indeed, in terms of universality of theme and appeal it could mean, and in some cases has meant, the very opposite. The mainstream is a matter of sphere of consciousness, not artistic skill; although sometimes the latter can be conditioned by the former.

So far as French-Canadian writers are concerned, until recently the great majority have been caught up in the various Quebec tributaries of Canadian literature. In other words, they have been regional in spirit as well as setting. Lately, however, a number of authors — Jacques Renaud, André Major, Roch Carrier for example — have embraced spheres of consciousness which, like those of many of their anglophone colleagues, are more or less extensions of spheres already defined in the United States. But these writers, and other such as Gérard Bessette, Réjean Ducharme, Aquin, Jasmin and Godbout, by virtue of a broadening awareness which includes English Canada to varying degrees, are moving definitely toward the Canadian mainstream. As their awareness shifts from the general implications of English-speaking America to the particular implications of English-speaking Canada, they will enter the mainstream more and more.

Hugh MacLennan, on the other hand, is already there. Provided that Canada continues to exist as a single nation, he may well be creating for himself a special status. I suspect that the day will come when Hugh MacLennan is considered to occupy a position much like that of Mark Twain in the United States, as the prime mover in the emergence of a distinctive Canadian literature.

*Return of the Sphinx* provides a panoramic view of the different kinds of Separatism. Daniel Ainslie, son of the protagonist, becomes a would-be terrorist. Like the heroes of Aquin and Jasmin, he is a failure, and for the same reasons. He cannot make a positive identification of the enemy, his problem being especially complex in view of mixed ancestry and a father who is Minister of Cultural Affairs in the Federal Government. A weakness in *Return of the Sphinx* is that MacLennan's characterization of Daniel is incomplete. The young man is believable enough, particularly after one has examined the supporting evidence in *Prochain épisode* and *Ethel et le terroriste*. But the characterization of Daniel lacks the psychological penetration and necessary intricacy of the portraits of terrorists by Aquin and Jasmin. Comparatively speaking, Daniel is a skeleton. The trouble, it would appear, is that Hugh MacLennan, despite considerable power of empathy, cannot sufficiently withdraw from the regions of sweetness and light. With regard to Daniel, the author is at his most effective in the scene where Marielle, a mature, passionate and attractive emigrée from Algeria, introduces the young man to the delights of physical love, while at the same time from her own experiences making him painfully aware of the bitter harvests of hatred.

Aimé Latendresse in *Return of the Sphinx* is an example of the second variety of Separatism, and he is presented quite sympathetically and convincingly. Like René Lévesque, he makes a lot of sense when he speaks of the disadvantages and

humiliations long endured by French Canadians and the absolute need for new confidence and self-respect, for simple dignity. But in all fairness it must be said that MacLennan gives Latendresse an attitude much more sinister than any ever indicated by René Lévesque himself, although it is identical to that of certain other independentists. Latendresse, as might be expected, is a *prêtre manqué*. At another time, in another age, his energies and intellect would have been quietly expended within the greystone walls of a *collège classique* nestled at the outskirts of a small town. But now, like many of his counterparts in real life, he is at large, a man with an undeniable sense of mission coupled to a knowledge of history and great cunning. Here is no mongoloid misfit about to place a bomb in a mailbox. Yet because of the sincerity and determination arising from his sense of mission, Latendresse is not above manipulating others to do what he might not do himself. If the means serves the end, he will not question it too deeply. "I sincerely hope so," he replies, when asked if independence can be achieved without bloodshed. But then he adds, "In the entire history of the human race, has that ever happened?" Marielle tells Daniel that Latendresse is an evil man. But that is because she — and one suspects that Hugh MacLennan feels the same way — is convinced that anyone who would endorse a cause which is likely to lead to hatred, bloodshed and misery has got to be evil. Latendresse, however, is only evil inasmuch as the great majority of the world's leaders, revered and unrevared, have been evil; that is to say, having dedicated himself to an end, he is willing to grant that a certain number of individuals must be sacrificed to achieve that end.

Daniel's Uncle Ephrem provides an example of our third kind of Separatism. Chantal tells Gabriel of his views: " 'This is a good thing, this movement. It's the first thing that's ever made les Anglais squirm.' But I tell you, Gabriel, that if the Queen visited Quebec tomorrow, Uncle Ephrem would probably be in command of the guard of honor, and if he wasn't he'd be furiously angry."

It is Joe Lacombe, however, the R.C.M.P. officer and former Air Force buddy of Alan Ainslie, who expresses the fourth brand of Separatism, and he does so in a way quite similar to that of the heroes in the French-Canadian novels we have discussed. Contradicting the ancient Quebec dictum dramatized in *Maria Chapdelaine* — "Rien ne changera" — Lacombe says:

Ca change! Ca change! And the feeling's wonderful. Tabernacle, haven't we suffered enough? Supported enough for more than two hundred years? Prayed enough? Gone to mass often enough? Given the Church enough? Taken the lousiest jobs and eaten pea soup long enough because there were too many mouths

to feed on much else except once a week and sometimes not even that often? Why should it always be us to carry the load for everyone? Be tired all the time like *sa mère*, smile like *sa mère* because there wasn't anything else she could afford to do? Work for the English boss all the time like P'pa speaking English always to him in our own home? Or suppose we want to work in our own *milieu* — what then? In some dirty way with our own dirtiest politicians because they were the ones the English always liked because if they took money they knew they had them, took money under the counter and then did the opposite to what they promised the people who voted for them? Why can't we be free and clean and proud of ourselves? *Why can't we succeed as French Canadians* and not as imitations of the English and Americans? Why should they be the ones to judge whether we're any good or not? Why can't we judge that ourselves?

*Return of the Sphinx* thus echoes the message of *Prochain épisode* and *Ethel et le terroriste*. What is more important, however, is the novel's additional dimension, the observations MacLennan makes on English-Canadian attitudes. At the beginning of *Return of the Sphinx*, we are introduced to Herbert Tarnley, the prototype of the Anglo-Canadian businessman. Tarnley, of course, is concerned about only one thing — the security of his investments. MacLennan endows him with a curious, yet typical duality: through various informants he has a good idea of what is happening in French Canada and he is obviously worried; at the same time he can state categorically that if an independent Quebec were to try to nationalize industry, she "would find herself an appendage on the Latin American desk of the State Department [in Washington]." Tarnley, like so many of his counterparts in real life, is clearly a dynamic, capable man, the sort of person one would want to organize a blood drive or charity campaign. He believes in solutions, and his solution for the unrest in Quebec is that the authorities should be firm and show no weakness. Clearly everyone benefits from a stable society; therefore Quebec should be maintained as such. Tarnley's great deficiency is that he cannot understand spiritual and psychological aspirations. He is incapable of communicating with his son, but he does him the precious service of having his paintings evaluated by experts to establish that the boy has no artistic talent. When Ainslie is more or less kicked out of the government, Tarnley offers to endow a college and make him president. In other words, he knows what is good for everyone; and when Herbert Tarnley has control, everyone is going to get what is good for him whether he likes it or not. Tarnley and Latendresse are thus brothers under the skin; and if Latendresse is an evil man, then in the end Tarnley is equally evil. Neither of these men will solve the problems of Quebec or Canada.

Nor will the mighty politician, Moses Bulstrode. Fearless, absolutely honest, competent, built like a bear and Bible-bred, Bulstrode is the epitome of all the old warrior values. He takes no nonsense from anyone — members of the opposition, shrewd businessmen like Tarnley, editors or college professors. His attitude to Quebec is neatly summed up in a remark he makes to Ainslie: “What gives the French Canadians this idea they’ve had it so tough? . . . It was twenty times tougher in the Yukon than it ever was in Quebec.” And looking at the situation in Bulstrode’s terms, undoubtedly it was.

MacLennan makes clear that Bulstrode is far from being anti-French Canadian. Indeed, Moses Bulstrode sympathizes with the people of Quebec who have suffered from the exploitation of Westmount financiers, whom he regards as ruthless and corrupt. But as a strict matter of principle Bulstrode refuses to believe that French Canada should be accorded any special consideration. And it is here that Hugh MacLennan puts his finger on the crux of the Canadian riddle. If Bulstrode were a political operator or opportunist, if he were pro-English or anti-French, if he were simply ignorant, then he would not constitute much of a threat. But he is none of these things, and I believe that he represents a dominant body of opinion in English Canada today. Sincere and dedicated to the admirable principle of equal treatment for all, Bulstrode will never accept or comprehend the subtle distinctions which put French Canadians in a special category. To his mind, the poor in Toronto slums or Newfoundland fishing villages are just as deserving of attention as the residents of St. Henri, and who can argue the point?

*Return of the Sphinx*, as the title intimates, does not solve the Canadian riddle. Ainslie, who has struggled to create an entente between the English and French of Canada, ends up effectively excommunicated by both groups. In this novel MacLennan reverses the *Odyssey* pattern of his previous books — the hero returns to a house in disorder, but his wise Penelope, in this case Constance, dies when he needs her most, and his son is bent upon stirring up more disorder. Still, as MacLennan states at the end of the novel, Ainslie continues to believe that Canada will endure.

And we, gentle readers, are left with the question — will it really endure? Or from another viewpoint — should it endure? Or to become completely involved in the puzzle — how will Canada endure?

I am not a prophet, but I remain convinced that one can learn more about people and society from creative literature than from scientific reports. In MacLennan’s story, Herbert Tarnley and Moses Bulstrode are obviously of the type

of person who would never waste time reading fiction. Consequently, they get to know the facts, but they are unlikely to be attuned to the underlying fears, hopes and frustrations. And the one point which surfaces from the troubled waters of the novels of Aquin, Godbout, Jasmin and MacLennan is that the significant brand of Quebec Separatism is precisely a matter of fears, hopes and frustrations. All four writers advance the thesis that Quebec is psychologically sick. Bilingual civil servants and bilingual districts may salve a few of the superficial irritations, the skin diseases, but they will not cure the disturbed psyche.

Is there anything which can effect such a cure? Is there any way to instil self-confidence, a sense of cultural security and a feeling of dignity in the masses of French Canadians who have not actually committed themselves to the Separatist Movement? I think that there are certain moves which would have a definite remedial effect. For one thing, the egalitarian attitude represented by Bulstrode in *Return of the Sphinx* and apparently an entrenched principle of English-Canadian thinking, must be modified. French Canadians, as the novels we have examined clearly illustrate, think of themselves first as a group or nation rather than as individuals. Thus the idea of equality does not have the same bearing in French Canada as in English Canada. In Quebec, it signifies equal treatment for the French-Canadian nation — on a group basis rather than on an individual basis. What matters is how the French-Canadian collectivity is treated. In other words, French Canada as a whole must have a special status. And in the light of the psychological problems discussed in all the novels, such a special status, including the greatest degree of autonomy possible within a confederate system, makes sense.

But if a genuine feeling of cultural security is to be created once and for all in Quebec, a cultural security which will make the novels we have examined historical documents instead of reflections of actuality, there is one vital step which must be taken — Quebec must become an officially unilingual, French-language province. I can see no other way to create a sense of cultural security and to make French Canadians as a group equal to English Canadians. After all, the other nine provinces are essentially unilingual. Whatever the glories of bilingualism, so long as it smacks of necessary accommodation it will be regarded in Quebec as a threat to the French language and to French-Canadian culture, as a step away from cultural security. To the average English Canadian, bilingualism means acquiring a second language; at the moment, to many French Canadians it means the likelihood of losing a first one. Yet, if through official unilingualism a sense of cultural security were to develop in French Canada,

then the current linguistic tensions would undoubtedly diminish, and the result would be more genuine bilingualism than ever before. Right now, to French-speaking Quebecers cultural security means more than even the tourist dollar. Settle the problem of security, and the tourist dollar will take care of the rest. In short, ironic as it may seem, an officially unilingual Quebec would be the greatest possible boost for Canadian bilingualism.

I might add that a unilingual Quebec, legally instituted rather than forcefully imposed, need not present any danger or special inconvenience to English-speaking Quebecers. According to the 1961 Census, nearly 30 per cent of them already speak French, compared with less than 25 per cent of French Canadians who speak English. Where English Canadians are in sufficient numbers they should be permitted to maintain schools and other institutions, but with adequate and efficient teaching of French as a condition. And with more than half of the television channels seen in Quebec already coming from over the American border, English-speaking Quebecers are not going to develop a complex about the imminent disappearance of their mother tongue.

Now if Quebec is to have special status amounting to virtual autonomy and if she is to become officially unilingual, why not go all the way and declare an independent nation? Do not these concessions amount to independence? In effect, they do. But as agreed-upon concessions, they could be a means to avoid the hatred, violence and bloodshed which are described or suggested in each of the novels we have considered. They could be a means to avoid outright separation and the dangers of economic chaos, political anarchy and possible American intervention, against which even René Lévesque can offer no guarantee. In a conversation with his son, MacLennan's protagonist Alan Ainslie says: "Well, perhaps Quebec *will* separate. But if she does, let it be done decently. Let it be done without hatred and murder and all this paranoia of you and your friends." Special status and official unilingualism do not mean separation, but they are important steps Canada can take to relieve the malaise so vividly portrayed in the novels of Aquin, Jasmin, MacLennan and Godbout. They are a means to foster the cultural and spiritual independence Quebec clearly must have, an independence which French Canadians would thus be able to achieve decently.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Claude Jasmin, *Ethel et le terroriste*. All translations are my own:  
 Mon pays livré comme charogne, il y a plus de cent ans, à une bande de loyalistes à grandes dents. Mon pays bourré de soutanes multicolores, de petits épiciers, de maigres scieurs de bois, quelques géants isolés, exceptions qui entretiennent



nos légendes, qu'un grand gaillard à l'air d'un castor chante à tue-tête à la face de nos collégiens boutonneux, de nos fonctionnaires cacochymes, de nos commis des coins de rue — il y a, au parlement, une bande de grosses morues, tous le nez au fond de gros fromages à taxes, taxes des "p'tits culs" épiciers et fonctionnaires, une armée de rongeurs, qui se font bénir tous les dimanches, qui parquent en déclamant des âneries qui font des promesses. Ils se font élire sans peine en trompant le peuple, en débauchant les cervelles de nos épiciers-fonctionnaires. En coulisses de ce théâtre de vermine, les soutanes et les loyalistes applaudissent. (pp. 67-68)

La campagne qu'il faut mener. Tu sais, cette guerre, la vraie. Cette bataille pour terrasser cette grande vache grasse, ce veau malade et paresseux qui est couché sur nous. Sur not pays et sur le mien. Sur le peuple noir, sur le peuple de la Grèce, sur celui de la Turquie et sur celui de la Chine et de l'Écosse. Une grosse bête. Le mal, Ethel, le vrai mal, le seul, c'est l'ignorance. Voilà une bonne raison de se battre. C'est là le vrai ennemi. Notre seul ennemi. L'ignorance. Ethel, l'ignorance, rien n'est plus grave, ni plus mauvais. C'est elle qui sème les confusions, qui entretient la médiocrité, les tabous et les préjugés. (pp. 113-114)

<sup>2</sup> Max Dorsinville, *A Comparative Analysis of the American Negro and French-Canadian Protest Novel* (Thesis presented for Master of Arts Degree in Comparative Canadian Literature, Université de Sherbrooke, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> For discussion of this common mystique and the parallels in French-Canadian and English-Canadian Literature see my essay "Twin Solitudes," *Canadian Literature*, No. 31 (Winter, 1967).