SAINT-DENYS-GARNEAU'S TESTIMONY TO HIS TIMES

Jean Le Moyne

I CANNOT SPEAK of Saint-Denys-Garneau without anger. Because they killed him. His death was an assassination prepared over a long time. I will not call it premeditated because I refuse to credit those who choked his life with so fine a thing as conscience. Who were in fact, his closest enemies? The half-dead, victims themselves, diminished and sick with a miserable fear which, unluckily, was only strong in its power of contagion. One cannot get angry with mindless creatures, though one cannot help resenting the spirit that animates mindlessness.

On February 12, 1935, in one of the first pages of his *Journal,* Saint-Denys-Garneau wrote this magnificent and moving passage:

> How dangerous happiness is, and all power, all intoxication! It takes a self-mastery acquired through a long discipline of submissiveness and love to resist the danger of happiness. When the child thinks he is strong enough to act by himself, how joyfully he escapes from his mother's watchful gaze and guiding hand to plunge into danger; And for us, so often beaten down and torn by misfortune, how completely, even at the instant of emerging from our abasement, do we forget all that experience of misery, how blinded we are once again by this intoxication of being! You would return, my heart, as to a festival, to the same fire: and what you knew yesterday, what was so bitterly learned, you know it no longer. To be, to love, to glow with the youth which paints your cheeks like a sunrise, to embrace all things, obey all impulse, scatter around you the efflorescence bursting within you! Ah, you soon forget God when God no longer keeps you crushed. You thought you *knew,* like a grown man — and see, you are the child who would seize everything, possess everything, and who, once those toys are given him, tires of them so quickly and then finds himself saddened and more avid than before. Learn to cast even your human joy on God, and devote it all to drawing nearer to him.[1]

[1] From John Glassco's translation of *The Journal of Saint-Denys-Garneau,* (McClelland & Stewart, 1962).

The style of the passage is that of the great classical French moralists. Its special austerity is that of the French school of spirituality with its clearly recognizable touch of Augustine. What we have here is a direct continuation of our highest tradition of humanist and Christian thought, and we find ourselves completely at home in it. So much so that before we fully realize it something in us assents to this captivating wisdom. Well, that assent, whether complete or partial, or even if it is only the memory of assent, is a false step taken into the trap of alienation. During his lifetime Saint-Denys-Garneau had no more business than any of the rest of us with the kind of clumsy crass stupidity, incarnate in a Père Ubu with his hook for raking noble living creatures into his pit. That would have been far too simple! Ubu is such a showy villain that we forget the danger of having his little switch stuck in our ears or his trampling on toes. And when one pertinently knows, because it is so advertised, that disembraining is carried on every Sunday in Rue de l'Echaudé, why, one simply makes a detour.

But change the setting. When the decor is severely plain, of a most generous and familiar simplicity, when everything shines with the polish of age and experience, and when you have contributed no little yourself to the wear, or so you believe, by your frequent comings and goings, you step out onto the stage with a fine bold gravity. But the planks are not worn, they are covered with a treacherous wax and your confident stride threatens to turn into a neck-breaking skid. And what you thought you had to say is whispered at you from the wings and from the cracks in the floor.

In this theatre the severely plain is really emptiness and experience is really illusion, for the prompters as well as for the actor. True experience and severity would have said that if happiness, power and intoxication are dangerous, unhappiness, impotence and abstinence are even more so. They would have said, right off, that happiness is difficult and desirable, that power is indispensable, and that to feel intoxication you only have to have thirst and a stomach. They would have said that it is better, even in your use of images, to shake off supervision, maternal or other, in order to run the risk of desire and to expose yourself to dictates of joy. That after one feast it is well to prepare the next. That fatigue is not necessarily an initiation to annihiliation. That to share in the flowering of the world and to feel the youth of the universe is not necessarily to lose sight of God. That the man who is utterly crushed is not more conscious of God than anyone else.

Does this amount to saying that Saint-Denys-Garneau's striking passage is radically untrue? That depends on your point of view. If you read it according to the letter it is unacceptable. According to the spirit it is blurred and incomplete.

If I make such a point of this, it is to show up what was lacking in the poet's thought. And what was lacking was not so much something that Saint-Denys-Garneau had not yet acquired, but a possession — a whole part of reality, capacity and possibility — that he had been deprived of, without his knowing it. He was robbed of his faculty for happiness by being led to associate the fact of being happy with a sense of an unpardonable guilt.

Two kinds of guilt are involved. The first is subjective and has to do with that inevitable and normal difficulty of gradually assimilating, as we grow older and more mature, our own potential for life. From powerless and weak we must become powerful and strong before those awesome persons who seem so enviably favoured: our parents, our teachers and other adults, real or symbolic. Nor is it enough to receive certain rights recognized by authority, or even to take possession by force of rights which authority has refused or denied. One must, in a sense, draw one's rights out of oneself. It is not enough to act because such and such an action is permitted or because right to it has been won, legitimately or not, but only because to do so fulfils a personal imperative. Once the act is seen and accomplished in this light, there is no need for concern if it clashes with the irreducible core of the world with which it must come to terms. We can rest assured that such a coming to terms, such a compromise, will be as original as the first springs of the action itself. The ability to act is not acquired without discomfort, for it is dangerous to seize the necessary power to act, and mortal not to seize it. This discomfort easily turns to anguish which the psyche experiences as remorse or a sense of guilt. As long as the difficulty and its attendant anguish are not insurmountable, the guilt remains healthy, and, as one element in the struggle of life, it contributes to the formation of character.

The other kind of guilt is objective. It remains subordinate to moral considerations. It is healthy by definition and subsides before a higher purpose, human or supernatural. Though the two kinds of guilt can only be likened by analogy, they have several extremely dangerous similarities: both are experienced through similar mechanisms; both tend to breed a hatred of action, projected or undertaken.

When, so to speak, the climate is favourable, as it is in our French-Canadian milieu, the two guilts coincide, sharing motives, exchanging symbols and references, profiting one another, mutually perverting each other, widening their range until finally they form, in the eyes of the distracted conscience, a single monstrous guilt, which is, at the same time, paralysing and endowed with an irresistible vigour of invention.

I HAVE REDUCED this extremely complex reality to a sketchy outline, but there is scarcely a sector of French-Canadian life to which it does not apply, and it explains, at least partially, the most basic peculiarities of our society. But let us restrict ourselves to the literary domain. I maintain that if this sense of double guilt that I have outlined does not explain our constant failure in literature or, at the most our very fractional successes, why then our writers must be nothing more than a congregation of dreary little jokers. And if that is the case, they must have passed the word along for centuries, from the solemn innocents of our literary origins to the angry young malcontents of the present day. One can imagine a sort of plot running through the limbo of French-Canadian imagination from Laura Conan to Marie-Claire Blais. For that old-fashioned old maid and this new girl-novelist are really sisters, similar even to the point of sharing the sisterly characteristic of choosing the common theme of disfiguration.

But it is nonsense to speak of a plot between the living and the dead. The truth is that the author of *Angéline de Montbrun* and the author of *La Belle Bête* share the same psychological heredity.

In their works we encounter, with a maximum of explicitness, certain constants in Quebec literature which can be summarized as follows: it is forbidden to love and be happy because — guess why — because it is sin. Any means are valid to insure that this edict is respected: sicknesses of various sorts, especially TB, noble sacrifice, ingenious family tortures, circumstances said to be uncontrollable, murder by firearm or by runaway horse, or simple suicide. All of which makes these books of the Laurentian library considerably less droll than Rabelais catalogue of titles in the Saint Victor Library.

When I say love, I mean, first of all, the most difficult kind, the love of self, and after that the love of others and love of things. For the first principle of all love, of all possession, of all gift of self is this difficult love of oneself. In fact, these distinctions describe only different moments of love, for love moves within us and around us in a single and uninterrupted motion.

If, then, we see the critics, in even the most positive cases, taking so many precautions, stewing over our literature, considering a work now from the point of view of form, now of content; if they praise exclusively its introspective power or its spiritual life or the truth of its portraiture or the liveliness of the story or the interest of the subject; if they continually bog down in secondary considerations and hardly ever come to the point of dealing with the work's internal necessity,

it is because the essential element of human experience is missing. Since they are never possessed by love, our literary works cannot be creations that adequately match being, which is to say, they cannot be forever nourishing, habitable and fundamentally beyond question. They can be instructive, or interesting, can mark an advance or a decline from what has gone before, can stir strong or weak emotions, or stimulate hope, but they are incapable of awakening in us that love that always lies in wait, and whose true contact is never tiring but refreshes us perpetually for new encounters.

Take an example from another literature, Julien Sorel, for instance. He gets his throat cut. But that doesn't leave me downcast, because he has really lived his life, and his love. He took what he wanted and what he loved, and that fulfilled him, and it fulfils the reader, too. As a result Julien Sorel is immortal. The same is true for Madame Bovary. As miserable and distraught as she is, she is fully present in every event in her life, and when she abandons herself, I am fully convinced. It is the same for Constant's Adolphe. Things go badly for him, but they go badly so beautifully that we feel a lasting satisfaction. And if Frédéric in Flaubert's *l'Education Sentimentale* fails, I do not feel frustrated any more than by the death of Tristan and Isolde or by the fate of Claudel's Mésa and Ysé. One feels like congratulating such lives, lived out in the natural evolution of an initial mastery over oneself and the world, because the consequences which impinge upon them do not arise from anything exterior to themselves. In such lives deception, bereavement or joy, hardening of character, conversion, happiness, unhappiness, or death have only one source. It is freedom to love, morally or not, illicitly or not, for such evaluations have nothing whatever to do with the heart of the matter. That is why to deprive us of these creatures of Constant, Stendhal, Flaubert, Wagner and Claudel would be like severing us from our souls or our vital parts. Whereas the loss of all our Angélines would mean no more than the disappearance of a few pale images that only stick in the memory because they are cemented there by a few odd theses and a little literary research. And the main reason for the insubstantial quality of these characters is that they owe nothing to what they basically are, that they are not, in any significant sense, in any real contact with themselves.

Alienation of this kind strikes so deep into French-Canadian life that Saint-Denys-Garneau died of it after giving it its highest expression. If it is objected that the novel does not fairly represent this alienation, add poetry, add criticism, and if that is not enough, investigate the pastoral. There is no shortage of witnesses there, and there are plenty more, among them our thinkers who have only

their poor silence to put forward as recriminating evidence.

Long before he began his *Journal* in 1935, Saint-Denys-Garneau began to feel uncomfortable about the ambiguity and alienation that I have tried to define in outlining the two kinds of guilt and that I have attempted to verify by analysing the lamentable failure of our fictional characters.

I go back in memory to the first years of our friendship. Those were the days when he was one of the group who, in 1934, were to found the review *La Rèleve*. The preoccupations of the group were such that, when their first essays were published, certain of us were taken to be members of the priesthood. As for Saint-Denys-Garneau, since his death and the appearance of his *Poésies Complètes* and his *Journal*, he has been surrounded by an aura of tragic gravity. But we were never a chapter meeting or a committee. We were just friends around a table whose only programme and intention was a quest for the absolute, solidly motivated despite the incoherency of our enthusiasm. There was no order of the day, only the disorder of the evening meetings, especially on Sunday evenings when we exchanged heated and tumbling accounts of what we had done during the week, during those weeks so full of discoveries and excitement, shot through with ecstatic perspectives and darkened with anguish. Among these friends Saint-Denys-Garneau was one of those who was most fully present, one of the most gifted, one of the gayest. And he was the subtlest and the wittiest. His liveliness was that of one who is intoxicated with life and who could expect a liberal and exquisite share of it, generously divided between love, art and thought. When I now hear, clear in my memory, through the murmur of those distant conversations, a phrase thrown out by one of us with a kind of anxious conviction, something like: "Gentlemen, it is absolutely essential to restore to sin its proper grandeur and dignity," I tremble for him in retrospect. Not for the others; for them it was a password to salvation. Such a statement was an obscure but valuable claim to an indispensible autonomy. It was a refusal to accept that the question should be raised in a spirit of fear or that judgment should be passed under the rule of any illusion. It was a key for the liberation that was to come. And, as far as the other members of those reunions are concerned, they are all still alive. But as for him, it was already too late. I shudder, in retrospect, at the thought that already he did not dare assert his instinctive hold on life, that already he was on the verge of committing the irreparable error of mistaking his healthy uncertainty for the sign of an interdiction, an interdiction that was to be studded with false crosses. And I firmly believe that this confusion was the cause of his death, and that it has killed others before and after him, and that it goes on

killing today. I assert that it paralyses and sterilizes and prevents and misguides many, and that this poisonous confusion is the most damnable of our official impositions.

I could almost recapture the moment when the balance of forces in Saint-Denys-Garneau began to swing over towards absence and death. A long scandal and one which wounded me deeply began when, with Robert Elie, I undertook to publish his *Poésies Complètes* and his *Journal.* I have never been able entirely to get over this scandal, and I understand now that if I were ever to bury it I would become an accomplice of the enemies of life. It is precious and I want to make it public as a humble but necessary piece of evidence in this case.

Why death for him, why life for the others? The question of relative merits has, of course, no bearing. Psychologically his disorder was in no way exceptional. The same degree of morbidity is quite common with us. Not to admit that is to understand nothing of our society: a certain neurotic quality is part of our cultural heritage. Saint-Denys-Garneau had then, as they say, problems. Moreover he was gifted with an extreme delicacy of conscience and was possessed by a need to be fully present in whatever he did, which prevented him from paying himself out in mixed doses, from compensating, as many do, for hindrance in one direction by increased activity in another, for uneasiness in one matter by a carefree attitude in others. In other words, the Christian humanist in him could accept no local solution. He was made for total presence.

Physically, his constitution was rather weak, and he certainly lacked that brute energy which might have been, despite himself, his saving grace. He did not have the strength that would have let him disobey those imperatives, true and false, which were then so inextricably intermingled in him. He lacked the strength that might have let him override them, roughshod, that sly and ruthless perseverance of an animal fighting for life. His body was thin, his heart weak, his walk faltering. But from time to time he would get his teeth into something and tear it to pieces without a second thought. And occasionally he would surprise us by getting hold of something big and, whether it resisted or not, would devour it with a savagery that was absolved by his hunger.

So much for the natural man. Spiritually there is the question of a vocation and in this respect we will see later that everything changes value. But before this it was important for him to have tasted a life free from restraints accepted for God or for men.

Saint-Denys-Garneau was the first to disappear from our reunions. At that time we could not tell how significant his absence was, or how prophetic. We

were ready to accept the general scattering of friends during the summer, but we always regretted that he spent his holidays in his family home at Sainte-Catherine-de-Portneuf. To begin with, he would prolong his Christian visit or leave us earlier in the summer. Then he would stay on there into the autumn, and so on. Finally he was absent almost half the year, held by this country which was the nest of his childhood and death.

It would be wrong to picture our friend coming back to us sad and lifeless. Until his final retirement I don't believe we ever saw each other without falling into ecstacies of laughter. His gift for fantasy had reached an extraordinary height and subtlety. With a gesture, an intonation, a raised eyebrow, or the inspired use of colloquialism, he could shake the foundations of reality. And in his daily life, especially when he was alone in the country, he was a bohemian of the first water. He awarded himself the temporary distinction of a beard many times. And as far as outlandish accoutrements were concerned, or disconcerting attitudes and all like rebellious baggage, he could have taught our little beatniks a thing or two. He clearly surpassed them in versatility, for the same hairy peasant that he so readily became in the country could easily have been the most elegant young aristocrat at a fashionable ball two weeks earlier.

But in the midst of this picturesque behaviour, so often carried to doubtful extremes, his laughter frequently struck a false note and he would lapse into a sudden gravity, would fall silent, would stare intensely like a cat attentive to some reality in the walls or outside them.

If we go back to the year 1935, we find Saint-Denys-Garneau working on the poems that were to make up the collection *Regards et jeux*, published two years later. It is also in 1935 that he began his *Journal*. This is the period when he began his decisive self-interrogation and his definitive life's work. For us it marks the start of an irrefutable testimony.

His solitude as a poet was complete. It is scarcely necessary for me to say that he took our Canadian rhymesters for what they are: exactly nothing. As far as his own poetic genesis was concerned, his parentage was purely French. Verlaine and Baudelaire were his breviary: he used them constantly, absorbed them and passed beyond. Though he was very fond of Pierre Jean Jouve, Reverdy and Nerval, they left no discernable mark on his work. He admired Claudel but was on his guard against the overpowering old man. Super-

vielle perhaps helped him to develop certain formal elements. But on the whole *Regards et jeux* stands out in our literature as the first product of an authentic necessity. It is the first work to come from so pure, personal and highly aware a source.

In evaluating the substance and the amount of concentration and effort required to produce *Regards et jeux* one should not forget the ghastly cultural vacuum of Montreal in the early thirties. Today one can contract heavy debts of humanity in this city, dispersed throughout a society that is relatively rich and diversified, but in those days it was inconceivable to owe anything to more than a few friends. Strictly speaking Saint-Denys-Garneau's intellectual and religious milieu was made up of four or five intimate friends.

"I will feed these musings on my own marrow", he wrote. This is the ultimate material of every artist, and studying his use of it one can only have admiration to express if he succeeds, and nothing at all to say if he fails.

The incredible poverty of his milieu forced Saint-Denys-Garneau to draw doubly on his own resources to nourish his work. If only he had been free to spend his gifts without keeping track of how much he had exhausted. But such was not his case. He had to compensate for what he called a loss in volume. Working against the clock he had to make up for a permanent leaking away of life and energy. It is this feeling of ineluctable loss, of ever increasing deficit, that he expresses in the extraordinary parable of the beggar who carried all his possessions in a sack with a hole in it, and by the terrifying image of the corpse that becomes his double:

> There is certainly someone dying
> I have decided to take no heed
> and to let the corpse drop by the way
> But now I have lost my start
> and I am myself
> The dying man adjusting himself to me.

Elsewhere, the fatal wasting away is felt as a dispossession in time and space:

> The future makes us late
> Tomorrow is like yesterday one cannot touch it
> Life lies before one like an iron ball at one's heels
> The wind at our back crushes the forehead against the air.

The irreparable loss of inner content, the rupture of temporal ties, the invasion of the living being by its own death, these are some of the most common and

original themes. There is another that he has not treated explicitly in his work but which was the subject of countless discussions among us, the theme of general misunderstanding.

By the idea that sin had been deprived of its grandeur and dignity, I think we expressed, without knowing it, the depths of our alienation. Not entirely aware of this, we conscientiously sought to assume a just degree of responsibility. The unlimited extension of guilt revolted us but, on the other hand, the only logical and effective absolution — total self denial — seemed inhuman to us, despite the seductions of the cloth. Seriously afflicted by this sickness, the part of us that remained healthy protested that there was a total misunderstanding. How we struggled with those exhausting and ridiculous anxieties! But in as much as our protests were real, our anxiety bore fruit and became fruitful question. And obscurely a decision was taken in favour of life at any cost.

It was then that I had the feeling that our friend was separating himself from us. Not because of any loss of contact, but because he accepted the equivocal terms at the heart of this misunderstanding as the expression of an ultimate reality. There was some immediate proof of this, and two years later, in 1937, I had come to the heart-rending certainty that we were losing him, that he was lost to life. That does not mean that as early as 1935 the debate was closed in his mind, but that, badly begun, it had taken a fatal turning, as illustrated by that seductive page on the danger of happiness that I quoted at the opening of this essay.

Many times Saint-Denys-Garneau had an intuition that there was something wrong at the centre of his self:

> Identity
> Always broken
>
> The knot begins to feel
> The turns of the cord that makes it up.

Labouring under the terrible suspicion that he had been robbed of it, he brooded over his lost joy:

> Now when did we eat up our joy
> All other questions for the moment have
> closed their mouths on their thirst
> And one only hears that one that remains
> persistent and painful
> Like a distant memory that tears the heart even now.

That promise and, as it were, interview with
the promised one
And now that we have torn a furrow this far
As far as we are
This question catches up with us
And fills us with its voice of despair
Where did we eat up our joy
Who ate up our joy
Because there is certainly a traitor among us
Who sat down at our table when we did sit however many we are
However many we were.

In his desolation he saw himself blocked off from any avenue to the outside and questioned where and when the roads had been cut or had run astray:

In my hand
The broken end of all the roads

When was it that the lines were cast off
How is it that all the roads are lost
The bridges broken
The roads cut
The beginning of all presence
The first step of every companionship
Lies broken in my hand.

Then, faced with the scandalous and all-pervading menace, he began a meticulous examination, making an inventory of his limbs and articulations, of all his energies and faculties:

We are going to detach our limbs
and put them in a row to make an inventory
To see what is missing
To find the joint that doesn't fit
For it is impossible to sit quietly and receive
this growing death.

But he could not find the defective, the missing part, and in his *Journal* the theme of the inventory ended up as the mutilation of the poor, as reduction to the very lowest terms, to the vertebral column, symbol of the last vital obstinacy, symbol of the last evidence of being, of a man from whom everything had been taken, everything stolen, to the point where he judged, in all sincerity, that nothing

good had ever belonged to him, and accused himself of having been one of the unworthy poor.

Nonetheless, in a flash of anger the poet identified his immediate enemies — who are also ours — and called down a terrible accusation on them:

It is they who killed me
Fell on my back with their weapons, killed me
Fell on my heart with their hate, killed me
Fell on my nerves with their shouts, killed me
It is they in an avalanche who crushed me
Broke me into splinters like wood

Broke my nerves like a steel cable
That breaks clean and all the wires, a mad bouquet
Shoot up and bend back, naked points

Crumbled my defenses like a dry crust
Picked apart my heart like white bread
Spattered everything into the night

They trod everything underfoot without seeming to
Without knowing it, wanting it, without being able to
Without thinking, without heeding
By their one, terrible, strange mystery
Because they did not come forward to embrace me

One can recognize those who killed this living man as the same ones who had whispered to him their insinuations about the danger of happiness. In the name of that warm and abundant life that he had locked up in the self-denial of misunderstanding, in the name of that life which suddenly invigorated him with its pure power, he judged them in the level light of scorn:

There are some who didn't want to leave
Who wanted not to leave, but to stay

One looks at them one doesn't know
We are not of the same kind.

They woke up as animals penned there
Who spend their soulless ardours in the brothels
And come back to sleep without knowing it
They woke up as book-keepers, as busybodies
As neighbour-eaters, as sin-classifiers

As tax-collectors, as assassins by small dose
Soul-gnawers, the satisfied, the prudent
Ass-kissers, boot-lickers, bowers-and-scrapers
They abdicate long-windedly without knowing it
Having nothing to abdicate

It's a country of little bugs that one steps on
One doesn't see them because they are dead
But one would like to kick their rears
And see them sink underground for the beauty of uninhabited space

As for the others, we are wild, we are all alone
We have only one idea in mind, to embrace
We have only one taste, as pressing as hunger, to leave
We are already no longer where we are
We have nothing to do here
We have nothing to say and we can't hear the voice of a comrade.

When there was coincidence between his servitude and his own springs of life, Saint-Denys-Garneau grasped reality with great lucidity and judged it with an impeccable objectivity. The same internal juxtaposition of forces which allowed him suddenly, and with such energy, to name his enemies led him to attribute French-Canadian lack of good taste to the absence of any positive tastes whatsoever, and by going on to show that taste is a matter of being and loving, he uncovered one of the major features of our alienation. The same clearsightedness illumines his reflections on nationalism, which he denounced as a usurper of first things. It is true that human factors take precedence over national ones, and that these fortuitous and secondary national interests become nothing but tools of alienation if they claim the right to prevent us from risking our essential humanity. Nationalism has been a favourite tool of the forces of alienation in this country and, despite various corruptions of that fact, we are not ready to forget it. One could find many other moments of similar ease and assurance in Saint-Denys-Garneau's thought, but unfortunately they are only moments and his analysis never goes to the root cause of the alienation. Instead, his powers of penetration tended to turn inward, to work against him, to attack him on all sides, to strip him of everything. His analytical drive led him to undervalue the worth of his own talent and work, to accuse himself of being an imposter, to sentence himself morally and spiritually with extreme severity, even to deny the presence of desire in himself and, the supreme error, led him to the conclusion that he lacked existence, that his own identity was too weak to justify its external reality. His thought

seems to me to be the most perfect expression of the deadly equivocation of the two guilts.

SO WE BEGIN to see in what way Saint-Denys-Garneau is a witness for his time and his society. He is so by merit of the crucifying scope of his suffering and because he gave such an exhaustive account of it, transposing it into poetry, into critical reflection, into the dialogue of his correspondence and the self-examination of his *Journal.* Better than anyone before or since he described all that had been done to him and what, at the same time, threatens all of us. But he did not explain it. His mind did not dominate it. And, paradoxically, it is due to this deficiency that his testimony is so complete, so indisputable. By laying himself bare in this unjust fashion, until the tragic twistings of his thought finally led him back to bear against his own identity, he warns us of the dangerous reach of the alienation that is our constant menace. Saint-Denys-Garneau became exemplary through self-negation.

I do not doubt that this destiny was accompanied by grace, or question that this progressive impoverishment may have revealed itself as a vocation in the desert. I fully believe that in the depths of a misery visited by Christ Saint-Denys-Garneau truly realized the gift of himself that he aspired to. On this level his spirit does take on a dominant dimension, for in God's secret kingdom he triumphs over his enemies. I am certain of all that. But I want to confine myself to the strictly human aspects of life, to remain in the human element — which usually goes so cheap in this country. And I will not give up my scandal. To let that go would be to run the risk of somehow granting absolution to complicity in guise of Grace. Everything is Grace, yes, including the bad boss and starvation wages as well as union agitation. Everything is Grace but there is no humanly discernable reason in heaven or on earth that makes it permissible, before or after the fact, to justify the filthy, dismembering, paralysing, killing work of fear.

When salvation and sanctity are obliged to fulfil themselves in the limbless trunk of a man, or in a man poisoned and ravaged to the point of not being able to go on living, the only reference one can decently make to God is to the very time he had in Gethsemane, is to the loving responsibility of love contracted by Christ, the creative and incarnate Word. We have not been removed from the world and the world is our business. And our worldly duty is to fight the misery-makers of this world — for example, to prevent any other man so richly

foliaged with genius, so full of creative sap, so made for fruitful fulfilment, from being so mutilated limb for limb.

But how can we do this? It is already an enormous help to know, as we do today, that hateful and authoritarian fear — of the world, of matter, of the flesh, of sex and, by extension, by way of association, the scornful fear of all liberty — comes from the same source: from the most ancient, the subtlest, the richest and most stubborn of all heresies, that of dualism. It is this dualism which brings about the alienating confusion between the two guilts, making the moral guilt degenerate into neurosis and giving neurotic guilt the rigid structure of a code. In this way dualism imposes an impossible purity, and in this way it succeeds in preventing all fulfilment by enclosing everything in a false sinfulness to serve the ends of a fallacious spiritual reality.

To know that much, instinctively or otherwise, is an immense step towards liberation. Those of my generation ignored it who desperately strained after remedies which only aggravated the evil. This side of Saint-Denys-Garneau's drama is particularly painful to me. All the references that he had, and all the ones we gave him were, of course, bad references and he came back after having tried them a little more confirmed in his error and that much more troubled and discouraged. When we finally discovered that the solution to the misunderstanding lay in the domain of psychological techniques rather than in religious asceticism, he spurned our opinions, judging that an explanation by sickness was insufficient, or so he wrote, which showed how far his way of thinking had been conditioned. We certainly failed to understand it well enough to be convincing, for in those days Freudian concepts were not current mental equipment as they are today. Due to the fact that since then they have become commonly accepted in many milieus, and are available as a perfectly natural critical approach in others, young people today do not exhaust themselves over questions of guilt and authority as much as their elders did. But how many of those writing today are left untouched by this characteristic French-Canadian anguish? How many recent works have been written out of an authentic inner necessity? How many newly created characters really determine their own actions and the events of their own lives? Rare indeed are those authors who do not exhibit at least some of the grave symptoms of our French-Canadian alienation, rare and extremely discreet. It is not enough then, that the principle of liberation be in the air and in our minds; the ferment of perversion must also be held in check. It should never be forgotten that it is still actively at work, well protected behind the screen of intellectual evolution, and that, as always, it attacks whatever it touches. Moreover the trans-

mission of the poison is so linked to the organization of our little, probably too little, society that it works in a vicious circle. In fact, as free as you may be, nothing guarantees the freedom of your children. They are in hands you have no right to choose.

Well then? Well, the only immediate measure to take, the only near means to get out of this situation, is to break the vicious circle at the link of education. Unfortunately, one can scarcely say that any progress has been made in this sector. And nothing is in the offing, since the forces of liberty are neither aware enough or strong enough on the one hand, and on the other find themselves solicited — perhaps even compromised — by the permanence of our history. Nonetheless something must be done, for if not we will see the general spread of a solution that has become more and more current: a total disaffection towards the faith with which the system claims to identify itself. It is a deplorable solution, certainly, but one which no half-measure will delay, and it is one which no one here has the right to condemn, because the first need of art, thought, truth, the gift of oneself and sanctity is the free possession of life, because without life those things are nothing but illusion. We cannot tolerate that a single person, in the name of any one or any thing whatsoever, should be cast out into the desert like Saint-Denys-Garneau in order to fulfil and surpass himself. A society whose internal dynamics are so warped that it makes such extreme demands deserves nothing better than to be evacuated. By the scandalous cruelty of his vocation Saint-Denys-Garneau has already brought down a judgment on such a society.

(Translated by Philip Stratford)