

ORIGINS OF MARIA CHAPDELAINÉ

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IN 1921, when Louis Hémon's pioneer epic of the Lake St. John country first appeared in English, its heroine, Maria Chapdelaine, stepped at once into her own special niche in Canadian literature. Hémon's book was eventually translated into 13 different languages; its sales in English and French totalled well over a million copies. And Peribonka, the tiny Lake St. John village — not even a pinpoint on a map when the 32-year-old French writer lived there in 1912 — found itself suddenly spotlighted as the setting of the Chapdelaine story. Magazine and news correspondents as well as curious visitors arrived to plague the astonished villagers with questions:

“Who was the original for Maria Chapdelaine? Had Hémon shown interest in any particular local girl? Was life in backwoods Quebec really as Hémon had pictured it — primitive, crude, wholly without creature comforts and refinements?”

This was fame, but Peribonka didn't relish it. In fact not until the prying *étrangers* arrived did Lake St. John folk realize that a book had been written about them. When they did learn about it they were shocked and indignant. What did they care for literary fame — for having their lives and their village immortalized? And definitely they had no wish to be indebted to that “Fou of Bédard's”, the *engagé*, who harnessed a horse the wrong way round, who could not cut a straight shingle or drive a nail without crushing his fingers. The people around Peribonka remembered Louis Hémon simply as the worst hired man ever encountered north of Lake St. John; they still do so even today.

The whole of Hémon's life is shot through with such ironic contradictions. He

was Breton-born and Parisian by background and education, yet his own countrymen frequently mistook him for an Englishman. His blue-grey eyes (there was an O'Kelly among his ancestors), his somewhat long and heavy face, clean-shaven except for a small moustache, and his extreme reserve probably accounted for this confusion. He also spoke English like a native.

The Irish strain may have accounted for the fact that Hémon was a born rebel. From his early youth, he showed a devastating disregard for conventional values and consistently flouted his middle-class family's fetiches of worldly success and financial security. A brilliant but erratic student, he studied first for the law, but gave that up because, as he expressed it — he refused to be poured into the "mass mould". Later, he trained for the French Colonial Service and was on the verge of receiving a good appointment, only to throw it all up and depart for England, where he supported himself in London by working as a minor office clerk and wrote in his spare time.

He cared nothing for money or security, and did not stay long at any one job, preferring the kind of vagabond life which his family deplored. It was natural that Hémon's removal to Canada should confirm them in the conviction that their son was a drifter and a misfit. He was 31-years-old, without a profession. While his writings showed promise, most of the articles he had sold were on sporting subjects. He had published one undistinguished book — *Lizzie Blakeston*, a novel of London slum life. He had married while in England, but when his wife died shortly after their child's birth, Hémon sent his small daughter home for his family to rear.

And now he was setting off into a completely strange world. What about money? How would he live? He did not need much, he told them. In his last letter home Hémon wrote:

. . . Some things may make me appear unbalanced . . . Oh, well, little mother, I'm going to tell you a secret. I am not unbalanced at all. I know what I'm doing. While I cannot give you all the details, I have not lost the essential purpose . . . nor one whit of confidence. There will be good news for you one day or another. Not for a long time perhaps, but one day or another, some news will be pleasant. It will come in a series like the bad, but it is necessary to await it patiently, without ever giving up hope. And if these do not come, it will be something to have awaited them with courage until the end. But they will come.

There is a tragic irony about that prophecy. Success and world-wide fame, sufficient to satisfy Hémon's proud family, did come but too late for Hémon

himself. For his novel, *Maria Chapdelaine*, did not achieve either fame or financial success until nearly ten years after Hémon's death at the age of 33. He was struck by a train near Chapleau, Ontario, in 1913, as he was making his way west, with all his worldly possessions in a knapsack, en route to Fort William and the west.

The first slight edition of *Maria Chapdelaine*, some 2,000 copies printed in 1914 especially for French Canada, after the story had appeared as a serial in *Le Temps* of Paris, was virtually ignored, though it was the later reprinting in Paris, in 1921 as one of the famous "Cahiers Verts", and the translation into English the same year, that brought recognition to the novel, particularly among English-speaking Canadians. But in French Canada, Hémon's book, which one critic had described as "the most perceptive interpretation of the Soul of Quebec", aroused much controversy and even outright antagonism, especially north of Lake St. John.

Yet no one can seriously question the almost documentary fidelity of Hémon's portrayal of the courageous *défricheurs*, who early in this century literally cut their farms from then unbroken woodlands of northern Quebec. In Maria's father, Samuel Chapdelaine, Hémon shows us the *habitant's* passion for the soil and his joy in "making land," where there was only forest before. In Maria and her mother, Laura Chapdelaine, the author epitomizes the patient tenacity of their race, based on instinct, duty, tradition — and rooted deeply in religion.

IN CREATING CHARACTERS so near to life, Hémon had unwittingly sowed the seeds for all the ironic happenings which were to follow his book's sudden access to fame. Thousands of readers and even many sophisticated journalists insisted that the characters must be photographic likenesses drawn from living models. Many an author has been overshadowed by his fictional creations. Hémon, modest and retiring, would not have minded that. In his case, however, not only the prestige but also the personalities of his chief characters were appropriated by living rivals. In particular, the twenty-year-long association of Eva Bouchard, a school teacher from Peribonka, with the fictional Maria, represents one of the most interesting moments of literary history.

In 1929 at Montreal and later in Toronto at the First Canadian Book Fair in 1941, Eva Bouchard was introduced as the "original Maria" of Hémon's book.

She autographed copies of the book with the signature, "Maria Chapdelainé". And until quite recently, the original Bédard homestead, near Peribonka, in which Mlle. Bouchard set up what she called the "Louis Hémon Museum", actually bore the sign: "Foyer de Maria Chapdelainé". However, the collection of exhibits, which visitors could see here for a small admission charge, consisted almost solely of testimonials and tributes to Eva Bouchard in her 20-year-long portrayal of Maria.

Probably Mlle. Bouchard's chief disservice to Hémon's memorable story was that her commercial activities focussed visitors' attention upon this lower part of the Peribonka, close to Lake St. John, whereas Hémon's book locates the Chapdelainé homestead 12 miles further upriver, beyond the village of Honfleur in the midst of almost wholly uncut forest, where the Peribonka rushes deep and dark between high rocky banks to drop "steeply to the rapid water and the huge blocks of stone above the fall." The sound of the falls, one critic has said, is a sort of "intermittent bass" throughout the story. The Peribonka becomes almost a personality in *Maria Chapdelainé*.

But these more subtle and poetic aspects of Hémon's work were forgotten in the anxiety to identify the book's characters with living prototypes. The attempt around 1922 of journalists and curious visitors to "pin down" the originals aroused a wave of hostility among the people of Peribonka. They simply could not understand the excited interest of these prying "foreigners" in the peculiar hired man who had lived among them ten years before for barely six months, and then departed, leaving not a trace on their lives. Even the Bédards, with whom Hémon had lived, were surprised to discover that they had been harbouring a genius. They recalled that Hémon was always scribbling in a small notebook, but Samuel Bédard told inquiring journalists: "I never thought he had so much popularity. He did not look it."

However, after the first shock, the Lake St. John people also set about matching Hémon's characters with their neighbours. They knew his book only by hearsay, but since two of its chief characters bore the same first names as Samuel and Laura Bédard — they immediately assumed that these two must be the originals for Samuel and Laura Chapdelainé.

These simply French-Canadian farmers had of course no conception of the selectivity of the creative artist and certainly none of composite characterization. And they were justified to the extent that the cheerful, exuberant, kindly and talkative Laura Bédard obviously contributed a great deal to Hémon's characterization of the cheerful and practical Madame Chapdelainé. Her father, Samuel

Bouchard, had the same almost compulsive passion for clearing wild land as the fictional Samuel Chapdelaine. His moves, first to St. Prime, then Mistassini, and finally to the even more primitive area north of the lake near Peribonka, almost exactly parallel the moves of Maria Chapdelaine's restless father. Hémon made use of other information obtained from Laura Bédard. Certainly he heard her tell and retell the story of her mother's fatal illness on a savage bush farm, far removed from proper medical care and from the essential rites of her church. As he describes the similar death of Madame Chapdelaine — the climax of his book — it has the ring of almost eye-witness veracity. It can only have come from his having fully realized the depth of this family's bereavement.

It was perhaps similarities of this kind that induced the Lake St. John people, who had first identified Madame Chapdelaine with Madame Bédard, to change their minds and decide instead that Madame Bédard must be Maria. They pointed out that Laura Bédard, like Maria, had taken over the responsibility for her small brothers and sisters after her mother's untimely death. And so they continued to snatch at such fragmented resemblances in their efforts to identify Hémon's characters.

They did not have too much trouble with the book's minor characters, for many of these Hémon lifted whole from life. Tit'Sèbe, the bone-setter from St. Felicien, who admitted he could not help Madame Chapdelaine in her fatal illness, was a well-known character around the lake. Tit'Bé and Da'Bé, the nicknames of Samuel Chapdelaine's two sons, were also the nicknames of Ernest Murray's two boys, whose family farm adjoined the Bédard's. Edwige Légaré, the Chapdelaine's hired man, was immediately recognized as the Bouchard's hired man, Joseph Muré, whose favorite swear-word, like Légaré's was "Blasphème!" And so it went, with everyone fascinated by the book and at the same time resenting it.

Samuel Bédard, once a salesman and something of a man of the world, was quick to sense possible financial advantage in all this publicity. He immediately realized that the book could attract attention to the Peribonka area and boost business for the hotel which he had taken over in the village, having given up farming some years before. At once, he changed his establishment's name to "Hotel Maria Chapdelaine". In this hotel, visitors naturally enough, sought the original "Maria", and Madame Bédard, simply by not denying it, was confirmed in this role. Actually, Laura Bédard, and later on, her younger unmarried sister, Eva Bouchard, were at first not at all happy to be identified with the simple uneducated farm girl Maria. Both were all too conscious of their superior convent education.

When, in 1918, a well-known Quebec journalist suggested that Eva Bouchard might possibly have served as Hémon's model for Maria, the idea met with indignant repudiation from Mlle. Bouchard. She refused to attend the dedication of the monument which was erected in 1919 at Peribonka by the Society of Arts and Letters for the Province of Quebec. Madame Bédard on that occasion told the guilty journalist: "You'd better not fall into the hands of my sister Eva. In saying she was Maria Chapdelaine, you've made her a figure of ridicule. You may be sure she won't show up here!" Yet less than ten years later (1928) Eva Bouchard (her sister, Madame Bédard having died in the meantime), suddenly turned face, and deliberately sought the acclaim and financial advantages which she realized would be hers by identifying herself with the heroine of Hémon's book. Certainly the rôle opened up new vistas for Mlle. Bouchard. She went abroad and visited Hémon's sister in France; she attended the Coronation of George VI in 1939.

ALL THIS HAS IRONICAL OVERTONES, for Eva Bouchard was basking in the reflected glory of a young farmhand whom, we must believe, she considered to be only a figure of ridicule. "What *innocent* (half-wit) have you hired now?" she is reported to have asked her brother-in-law, when she saw Hémon for the first time, with the ear-flaps of his cap dangling over his eyes.

Admittedly, this opinion of Hémon was pretty generally held by Peribonka people. And even today, his book is far from popular among them. They feel it presents a derogatory picture of their lives and they can remember only Hémon's representation of them as *colons*, a term of opprobrium in the area.

While the special sensitivity of the Canadien must be allowed for, the questions arise: Was there justifiable basis for their resentment? Is Hémon's book a realistic picture of life at the turn of the century in the Lake St. John area? How much of *Maria Chapdelaine* represents factual reporting?

The answers can largely be found in the Bédard's account of Hémon's six-month stay with them near Peribonka. The very naïveté of the information they supplied to inquiring journalists is its pledge of its authenticity.

Today in this lower flat part of the Peribonka valley where Hémon lived in 1912 with the Bédards on a primitive bush farm, broad fields of lush green hay and oats have replaced the rough bush which he depicted in *Maria Chapdelaine*.

Yet scarcely twelve miles upriver, where Hémon set the fictional Chapdelaine homestead, rocks and muskeg still make farming much the same back-breaking task as Hémon described so vividly. And in this bleak upriver area still can be seen many of the same kind of primitive unpainted one-story cabins, with tiny kitchen lean-tos, which Hémon encountered when he came to work for Samuel Bédard. At that time, Bédard apologized for the primitive accommodation, but the new *engagé* said he had not expected the comforts of a palace and that these things made no difference to him.

Hémon's dislike of the artificial, the false, the insecure drew him naturally to simple folk, the poor and humble. It also accounts for his distaste for city life, and his eagerness to get out of Montreal, where he had spent a few months, following his arrival in Canada in February 1912.

Yet his first impressions of the Lake St. John country could scarcely have been cheering ones. Spring comes late in this area, and the prospect of grey sky, chilling wind and gaunt grim bush, which met Hémon's eye as the small lake packet, "Le Petit Nord", pulled out from Roberval for Peribonka, 25 miles across the lake, may well account for his book's sombre picture of a bleak, inhospitable land and austere threatening forest.

Among the roughly-dressed *défricheurs* (farmer settlers) who were returning home with farm supplies and stock purchased in Roberval (then and now the market centre for most of this area), the slightly-built Hémon in his straw hat and city clothes must have looked very much out of place. It was fortunate for Hémon that Samuel Bédard happened to be aboard for compared with the other *colons*, Bédard was well above the average in education and background. In his youth he had hoped to become a priest, like his brother, whom he had assisted in Labrador. Bédard was about 30 years old when Hémon met him — a restless, nervous, rather impractical man who had tried many different types of work — none very successfully. He had been a salesman in small Quebec towns and had served as a guide to fur buyers and government survey parties north of the lake. After marrying Laura Bédard, he settled near Peribonka on a farm beside that of his father-in-law, three miles outside the village. Restless still, he was even then toying with the idea of selling his farm, for he did not like the rough heavy work on this bush homestead. And for this reason, too, he usually hired farm hands, few of whom stood the hard life for very long.

Bédard engaged the stranger in conversation, perhaps because he scented in Hémon a possible buyer for his farm. He was not surprised at Hémon's Parisian accent, for at this time the Quebec government was encouraging French immi-

gration to Canada. Already one French family, a father and two sons, had settled near Honfleur; these are the French immigrants whom Hémon put into his book to illustrate how difficult and almost hopeless it was for anyone but a *Canadien habitant* to undertake pioneer settlement in this rough bush country.

After a few comments to break the ice, Bédard asked Hémon if he was planning to remain in Peribonka.

"Perhaps — I don't know yet."

"Probably you intend to buy land of your own?" Bédard probed.

"I'm planning simply to hire myself out as a farmhand," Hémon told him.

"*Comme s'adonne!*" Bédard still thought Hémon was a possible buyer, but figured he was wisely trying to gain some experience first.

So he told Hémon that he had contracted to work with a survey party that summer, and that he would need someone to leave behind to help Madame Bédard with the heavy farm work. How would Hémon like to work for him?

"For you or another," Hémon said bluntly, "though I prefer you, since I know you."

"What about wages?" was Bédard's next question.

"Can you pay me \$8.00—"

"By the week — Oh no . . ." Bédard countered, not letting Hémon finish. Actually the usual rate for farm help was \$25 to \$30 monthly, and Bédard was prepared to bargain.

"By the month, Monsieur Bédard . . . by the month," was Hémon's startling reply.

Bédard was always eager to tell questioners that Hémon set this low rate himself. However, the stranger made one condition; each Saturday afternoon was to be solely his own. Hémon wanted to write and undoubtedly realized that in working for and living with the Bédards he would harvest a wealth of intimate impressions of the land and its people.

So the bargain was struck. Returning home with the new farm hand, Bédard boasted to his wife about his smart "deal", but Laura Bédard, the practical one of the pair, was dubious.

"For \$8.00 a month, you've probably picked up just a tramp, a good-for-nothing, someone we can't even trust in the house!"

Hémon's appearance reassured her. This slender young man with his brown hair, neatly brushed back from a middle parting, his shy diffident manner, his cultivated accent — Madame Bédard was quick to realize that he was no tramp,

despite the fact that his entire worldly possessions consisted of only a blanket (Hémon's steamer rug), some handkerchiefs and a toothbrush.

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE BÉDARDS and their new hired man were necessarily close. The main part of their home consisted of a single room, divided by a curtain to provide sleeping quarters for Samuel and his wife. Their two adopted children, Thomas and Roland Marcoux (the Bédards had no family of their own), slept like the Chapdelaine boys in the loft, to which they had access through a trapdoor at the head of a set of rough stairs. The layout of this cramped one-storey farmhouse corresponds almost exactly with Hémon's description of the Chapdelaine home. In a kitchen lean-to, so small that Madame Bédard could stretch out her arms and touch all four walls, Hémon slept on a camp cot in a kind of nook, with his steamer rug for blanket. The great three-decked stove, as described in *Maria Chapdelaine*, which supplied heat for the entire dwelling, is today one authentic exhibit in the "Hémon Museum".

Privacy of course was nil. Hémon usually sat on the side of his bed to eat. And it was here, after the evening chores were finished, and on Sundays after church, in the midst of the family conversation, with the two small children (8 and 3) playing about, that Hémon briefly jotted down those day-to-day observations which serve to give almost documentary accuracy to his saga of pioneer life.

The new hired man set himself to the farm chores with energy and stubborn persistence, if also with incredible awkwardness. Sometimes Laura Bédard grumbled about this inept *engagé* of theirs. "But we just had to put up with him," she explained naïvely to interviewers years later. "Naturally we couldn't drive him because of the small wages he got."

Hémon's first job the day he arrived was to roll some cut logs from the bank into the river. Panting and pulling, he was struggling with them unsuccessfully, when Ernest Muré, the Bouchard's hired man, came to his assistance. In his book, Hémon was to depict Muré as Edwige Légaré, the Chapdelaine's hired man, whom the author describes as a dull brutish "Man with the Hoe" kind of creature, "clad in shirt and trousers of brownish homespun — wearing huge dusty boots, he was from head to heel of a piece with the soil . . . Nor was there aught in his face to redeem the impression of rustic uncouthness." Perhaps

Hémon was quietly “paying back” for the way Muré on that first day took pleasure in letting the rough logs fall back on those soft white hands of “Curé Hémon”, as he called him. Muré, the yokel, was admittedly out to “show up *Ce Monsieur*.”

But Hémon stuck stubbornly to the task, and when Bédard drew attention to his crushed hands, he replied with characteristic wry humor, “The job got into my bones.”

There can be no question that Hémon in *Maria Chapdelainé* was describing from actual experience the heavy tasks on such primitive bush homesteads. We know from Madame Bédard’s account that he took part, however ineffectually, in the back-breaking work of “pulling stumps” on those roughly-cleared acres, “sweating fit to kill” as Laura Bédard expresses it. He not only shared in clearing land, but also in seeding the hay and grain, in haymaking and harvest, in picking the wild blue-berries, which cover the burned over lands with a veritable carpet of blue during July. All these operations — a veritable saga of the countryman’s year — he describes in *Maria Chapdelainé*.

“Il était si endurant.” “Il était si maladroit!” “Il était si silent.” These were the three comments interviewers, questioning the Bédards about Hémon’s stay with them, were to hear again and again.

“He was always the calmest thing,” Madame Bédard told curious reporters, but at times this energetic, excitable woman found this peculiar hired man, whom nothing appeared to excite, somewhat exasperating, although in retrospect, she was inclined to laugh.

The crowning example of Hémon’s irritating calm occurred on one of his Saturday afternoons, when as usual he retired to the bank of the Peribonka, just a stone’s throw from the house, with his tiny notebook. There he sat writing, his bare feet dangling in the water, on his head a large red handkerchief tied at the four corners as protection from the blackflies, when suddenly Madame Bédard called excitedly from the farmhouse door: “Monsieur Hémon! Monsieur Hémon! the cows are getting into the grain!”

Hémon did not move, so Madame Bédard, thinking he was rather hard of hearing, ran toward the river, calling . . . “M. Hémon! Quick! The cows are in the grain!”

Still no sign from Hémon.

“But the cows are eating our grain, M. Hémon.” Laura Bédard wailed.

“Oh, well, Madame, what they eat this summer, they won’t be able to eat next winter,” Hémon replied and went on writing.

Even reproof did not appear to affect Hémon's calm. Once when Bédard was milking the cows, with black flies driving both man and beast nearly insane, he lost his temper when Hémon was unable to light a smudge.

"It's obvious you can't even light a fire, M. Hémon," Bédard said crossly, and proceeded to do the job himself.

"You see, M. Bédard," Hémon explained calmly. "I never had any occasion in France or in England to light a smudge."

But how well he managed to describe it in *Maria Chapdelaine*!

Hémon's very ineptness at these various tasks gave him a special appreciation of these northern Canadiens' unique qualities, their hardly resourcefulness and withal their cheerful good nature in the face of hardship — characteristics which make this race pre-eminent as pioneers.

Everything Hémon saw, experienced or heard became part of his book. On Sundays, he attended church with Samuel Bédard, who sang in the choir. And on the first Sunday after his arrival in Peribonka, he witnessed the gathering of farm folk on the church step, heard the announcement of parish news, saw the small runty pig in a sack put up for sale.

"Now, I know why he was always the last to go in — and the first out," Bédard remarked later to interviewers. "He was spying on us."

Hémon had an unequalled opportunity to gain insight into the warmth and affection so characteristic of Canadien family life through his close contact with the Bédards and their two adopted children. Bédard was himself a great story teller, and in the long winter evenings in the Bédard home, Hémon must have heard many a tale of his employer's earlier life in Labrador, of his contacts with Indians, of his work as a guide for fur buyers. All this information can be recognized in the background of François Paradis, the guide whom Maria loved. An oft-repeated account of an experienced but somewhat headstrong local guide's disappearance in the pathless winter forests, probably suggested to Hémon not only François's reckless character, but also his similar tragic fate.

Hémon and the Bédards' two adopted boys were on excellent terms. Roland, the older lad, probably inspired the mischievous Telesphore, Maria's small brother, who was so adept at lighting smudges. Thomas Louis, "Tit'homme", was just three years old and like many small Canadien boys still had long curls and wore dresses like a little girl. Hémon teased Tit'homme about his dresses. "See here, Tit'homme. You know very well you're not a little girl." The little fellow would turn red with embarrassment, but took it all in good part. Each Sunday, when Hémon returned from church, Tit'homme was waiting to play "their game."

"Here, little one, would you like some sweets?" Hémon would ask.

"Bien sûr."

Together they would go to the trap-door of the loft, from which a long string hung. Hémon would always repeat the same hocus-pocus. "Taquino, taquino, Le Chocolat sortira."

Tit'homme, intent on pulling the cord, would fail to see the chocolate falling from Hémon's sleeve, where he had concealed it. But for the rest of the week, Madame Bédard recalled, Tit'homme kept pulling at the trap-door cord, but no chocolate came.

Living with the Bédards, Hémon gained insight into every facet of the *habitants'* lives. At the neighbouring *veillées* on Saturday evenings, which were occasions for spirited reminiscences and retelling of local stories, he undoubtedly heard tales of encounters with wild animals, information about *les sauvages*, as Canadiens call the Montagnais Indians who still hunt and trap in this area north of the lake, of the work in the "shanties" and the log drives, which still supply seasonal work and ready cash to farmers around Lake St. John. At these *veillées*, one of which he described in *Maria Chapdelaine*, he must have met many of the lesser characters who people his book — old-timers like Nazaire Larouche, with his sly jokes, expatriate Canadiens, like Lorenzo Surprenant, Maria's prosperous suitor — home on a visit from the States, and many a dull young farmer like Eutrope Gagnon, whom Maria finally agreed to marry.

Toward the end of his stay in the Lake St. John country, Hémon was to experience, at first hand, life in the woods with the survey party, which Bédard had originally contracted to work for. He suggested that Hémon take his place instead, for by this time Bédard had realized he could not leave his farm to this inept hired man — with the heavy work of haying now due. When Hémon returned the end of November, he insisted on handing over to Bédard the \$70 he had earned. "I am supposed to be working for you for \$8.00 per month," he explained with a characteristic disregard for money and a quixotic honesty.

So Hémon spent the last Christmas of his life with the Bédards at Peribonka. Some time toward the end of December, Samuel Bédard undertook to drive him to the southern side of the lake, to St. Gédéon. They went by *berlot*, the low flat *habitant* sleigh, following the road east along the river, finally crossing the frozen Peribonka just below the Chutes of Honfleur . . . the trip across the ice which Hémon describes in the first chapter of his book, when Charles Eugene, the Chapdelaine horse had to make the leap through soft ice in order to reach the opposite bank.

Certainly, almost everything Louis Hémon saw, heard or experienced in his six months stay north of Lake St. John is recorded in *Maria Chapdelaine*. But, though he saw the crudity of pioneer life in northern Quebec around the turn of the century, it emerges in *Maria Chapdelaine* suffused with spiritual radiance and significance. It is this deeper insight which establishes Hémon's creative genius, gives his characters their heroic stature and his book its rank as a sensitive interpretation of a unique people.

