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CONTEMPORARY QUEBEC FICTION

Articles

BY MARY JANE EDWARDS, NORMAND DOIRON, RICHARD G. HODGSON, ESTELLE DANSEREAU, JENNIFER WAELTI-WALTERS, FRANÇOISE MACCABEE IQBAL, JACQUES PELLETIER, EVA-MARIE KROLLER, LAURENT MAILHOT

Poems

BY DOUGLAS BARBOUR, JOHN BARTON, RON MILES, G. B. SINCLAIR, JOHN BAGLOW, TOM WAYMAN, KENNETH SHERMAN

Reviews

BY RONALD SUTHERLAND, EVA-MARIE KROLLER, RICHARD HODGSON, KEITH GAREBIAN, MICHAEL PETERMAN, LINDA ROGERS, FRANÇOISE IQBAL, VALERIE RAOUL, JACQUELINE VISWANATHAN, LAURENT MAILHOT, PIERRE SOMVILLE, ESTELLE DANSEREAU, JONATHAN M. WEISS, CAROLE GERSON, LORRAINE WEIR, PATRICIA MERIVALE, TERRY GOLDIE, PETER KLOVAN, ANTHONY J. HARDING, LAURIE RICOU, JANET GILTROW, DAVID JACKEL, GEORGE WOODCOCK, A. A. MCKINNON, PATRICIA KEENEY SMITH, PETER STEVENS

Opinions and Notes

BY DONALD SMITH, ALLISON MITCHAM, MICHELE LACOMBE, ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ

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editorial

OF QUEBEC, LATELY

As a title, "The Arts in Canada — The Last Fifty Years" has something of the sound of doomsday about it. And in these days of economic pressure on the arts — compounded, perhaps, by the kinds of political turmoil that Hugh MacLennan so ably evokes in his new novel *Voices in Time* — one might be forgiven for reading the title so dyspeptically. In fact it is celebratory and retrospective rather than gloomily prophetic, and is the title given to the *University of Toronto Quarterly's* fiftieth anniversary issue (also published separately as volume 261 in the University of Toronto Press' University Paperbook series). It thus offers a public occasion to congratulate the editors, past and present, for having sustained the quality of the journal over several decades, and for continuing to serve Canadian society by continuing to serve and celebrate the life of the mind.

There are more specific ways in which the *Quarterly* has engaged with Canadian literature: in the occasional article, either directly on a literary text or more often on cultural background; in the dauntingly inclusive notices which appear in its annual "Letters in Canada" survey; and, of course, in an issue like "The Arts in Canada." This issue includes survey articles by George Woodcock on anglophone non-fiction in Canada since 1930, by Jacques Allard on all aspects of book production in Quebec, and by Northrop Frye on progress in the arts; it also includes a number of more personal commentaries: Michèle Lalonde's "Petit Testament," explaining why, in poetry, "la prose est indécente et l'humeur subversif," and Gratien Gélinas's professional "credo." I found the most arresting articles to be among this latter group: for example, Hugh MacLennan's autobiographical account of changes affecting opportunities for writers to publish, changes in the nature of fiction between 1930 and 1980, and changes in the economics of publishing — a commentary which reads almost like a footnote to *Voices in Time*. Robertson Davies writes barbed reflections on the differences between creation and performance, between comedy and commerce, between national theatrical heritage and national dramatic limits; Ralph Gustafson's piece is a pyrotechnic revelation

of poetic process, which incidentally attacks the conventional view of Canada as a land of inferior people terrorized by their own landscape; Godfrey Ridout's account of fifty years of Canadian music comes with the disarming subtitle "Good Lord, I Was There for All of Them!" And Gérard Bessette's partly autobiographical, partly historical, partly polemical commentary on Quebec fiction manages at once to trace lines of development, draw attention to a large number of writers(many of them still unknown in translation), and make fine discriminations among them.

"Attention must be paid . . .," one thinks, passively, after commentaries like these. But who pays attention, actively? Who makes the works, so many unknown, widely available to readers? And who reads? As part of a postscript to "The Arts in Canada," W. J. Keith and Ben-Zion Shek record various phases of the history of their journal, and Shek writes: "One of the most significant aspects of the annual 'Letters in Canada' feature . . . has been its treatment of publications in French. Indeed, the journal has presented the longest continuous yearly review of francophone letters in the country, dating back to 1937." He adds:

> In his first review [Felix] Walter . . . took issue with the historian A. R. M. Lower who, in an article entitled 'In Unknown Quebec,' published in October 1936, had given short shrift to Quebec letters. Walter wrote: 'Far from agreeing with this writing-down of the merits of French-Canadian literature, it seems to me that, from the turn of the century at any rate, French-Canadian novelists, poets and critics have been marching steadily away from the 'romantic,' the 'tepid' and the 'stylistic. . . .'

With time, of course, perspectives change. It is now possible to see that the "romantic" was not so much left behind as reinvented by Quebec writers, that francophone writing in Canada is anything but tepid, and that critical fashion has once more claimed "stylistic" as a term of praise rather than a term of censure. After the Quiet Revolution, the October Crisis, the Referendum Debates, and the Montreal Olympics, it might even be impossible to write a satisfactory article called "In Unknown Quebec" any more. But despite an active government programme in support of translation, and despite a certain academic interest in Roch Carrier, Hubert Aquin, and Marie-Claire Blais, francophone *writers* still remain largely unknown in anglophone Canada. And because anglophones do not appreciate the significance that many Québécois attach to particular writers — Langevin is familiar as the author of books studied at school, Vigneault as a political *chanteur*, Ferron as the cultural mythographer, Aquin as an intellectual symbol (one of the buildings at l'Université du Québec à Montréal is called Pavillon Hubert-Aquin) — the social dimensions of Québécois culture remain at least still unfamiliar outside the province.

There are journals to which one can go for instruction, though they are not widely available on magazine racks: *Ellipse, Liberté, Québec/Amérique, Voix et*

Images, Livres et auteurs québécois, Ecritures françaises, Les Lettres québécoises. Since it began in 1959, *Canadian Literature,* too, has attempted to take account of Canadian writing in French as well as that in English. But many writers still remain undistributed, unstocked, unread, and unknown in the reading community at large. The results of the translation programme may well already be altering this state of affairs, but general awareness depends more on mass market paperback distribution than on the simple availability of a translated text, whatever its quality. I was reminded of this fact a few years ago, at a public symposium in the late 1970's, when it became clear that the only Quebec novelists who were widely known were Gabrielle Roy and Roger Lemelin. These writers were familiar because they had appeared in McClelland & Stewart's New Canadian Library. (Which demonstrates the utility and importance of this series, despite its limitations; the uncertainty of the future of the series is therefore cause for concern.) But the point about the familiarity of Roy and Lemelin had another dimension. Many of the people who were acquainted with these two writers felt, whether consciously or unconsciously, that such an acquaintance made them familiar with the entire spectrum of Quebec fiction. Somehow Roy and Lemelin — and increasingly Roy alone, despite her Manitoba roots — came to represent all that was modern about Quebec society, all that was true about Quebec lifestyles, all that was innovative about francophone literature. Clearly, Gabrielle Roy's accomplishment is substantial, and her modernism continues to develop; but it is not all-inclusive. Nor does it any longer serve to see foremost in her work — or to accept as the most recent development in Quebec writing — a rejection of the rural expectations and clerical biases of an earlier time. That was a stage of the 1940's and 1950's. More recent writing has accommodated itself to the rural past and the clerical presence; it has focussed more directly and politically than before on the plight of women and the possibility of independence; it has shaped the fable into a high political art, and has probed the passionate and often amoral recesses of emotional behaviour.

The 1960's and 1970's saw a great many talented writers change the textures of fiction in Quebec. To say that the work of Gérard Bessette, Yves Thériault, and André Langevin constitutes a kind of transition into the new idiom is not to diminish its contemporaneity; to call Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Michel Tremblay, Louky Bersianik, and Nicole Brossard currently the most experimental does not deny them the traditional role of artists: to elucidate the human condition. In between lie various territories: the subterranean worlds of Hubert Aquin and Marie-Claire Blais, the comic worlds of Roch Carrier and Jacques Ferron, the verifiable worlds of Jacques Godbout and Anne Hébert, the singularly stylized worlds of André Major, Jacques Benoit, Réjean Ducharme, and Jacques Poulin. These and other writers have already accomplished much, have already devised works that are stylistically sure and psychologically exploratory. They will appeal

to different tastes, and will affect other writers, in Quebec and outside it, separately. But we should also remind ourselves of the obvious: that fifty years from now, another retrospective on the arts in Canada may well be looking back to this time, reflecting on the individual talents and on the collective burst of literary energy which in these decades in Quebec have contributed so remarkably and so variously to the national heritage.

W.N.

EDGES:

Douglas Barbour

& how they edge closer in
sight in
situ
here
the long white stretch of beach below
the grey rocks
seas edge
grey & glittering
metallic

edge
the sun in clouds the clouds
edging in
over that edgy
ranging glitter
& beside me
standing on edge
1 great green tree
i touch .

the edge .

GERARD BESSETTE

A Tribute

Mary Jane Edwards

GERARD BESSETTE (b. Ste-Anne-de-Sabrevois, Québec, 25 February 1920), the editor of three anthologies and the author of one volume of poetry, eight novels, one collection of short stories, and several works of criticism, is a seminal figure in contemporary Québec literature. Yet, since 1946, when he left Montréal to teach French at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, he has lived almost continually outside his native province — in New York City (1949-51); in Pittsburgh (1951-58); and since 1958, except for one year he spent teaching at Laval, in Kingston, Ontario. Despite, however, his receipt of two Governor-General Awards, for *L'Incubation* and *Le Cycle*, his Fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada (1966), the publication of an English translation of three of his novels, and his presence among us, his is hardly a household name in English Canada. To reveal aspects of the life and works of Gérard Bessette is one reason for this interview.

There are other reasons, of course. I first met Gérard Bessette at Queen's in September 1960. I had just come to study for an MA, and he had just moved from RMC, where he had taught French for two years. In 1960-61, I was one of two students in a graduate course he gave on French-Canadian literature. I admired his teaching method and his critical ability then; I delight in his fiction now. This interview was thus also partly carried out to allow me to pay my personal tribute to Gérard Bessette.

I have culled this interview from two sessions we recorded in Kingston on 17 October 1980, and 21 November 1980. During the first, we concentrated on his criticism, although his fiction was never far from our conversation; during the second, we discussed his novels. I have included in the notes examples of, and bibliographical information about, Bessette's critical articles.

As it worked out, these sessions came at a very significant time in the life of Gérard Bessette. On the 7th and 8th of November 1980, the Department of French hosted the *"Colloque Bessette"* to honour the man who had retired from Queen's the previous July. On 26 November 1980, the Government of Québec awarded Gérard Bessette *Le Prix Athanase-David* for 1980, the highest award for literature that the province can bestow. *Canadian Literature*, of course, neither hosts colloquia nor bestows awards. I hope, however, that the publication of this interview will serve as its homage to a professor who pioneered the teaching of French-

Canadian literature, a critic who revolutionized our reading of it, and a novelist who has created some of its most exciting works.

EDWARDS: You started writing poetry and doing your criticism on poetry. *Poèmes temporels* (1954) was the first volume of creative writing you published. Your MA thesis and your doctoral dissertation both dealt with images in Emile Nelligan's poetry. Now why did you turn from writing poetry and talking about poetry to writing fiction and concentrating on fiction in your criticism?

BESSETTE: Who knows? I just lost interest in writing poetry. I suppose it had something to do with the fact that in my opinion, the only great writer we had when I was young was Nelligan. I admired him greatly, and it never crossed my mind that I should devote my time to foreign — that means French — literature, so I didn't have that much choice. I had not discovered Albert Laberge yet. No one knew about him. Gabrielle Roy published *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945) only when my MA thesis was almost finished. Anyway, at that time you could not write a thesis about contemporary writers. There was as well Ringuet's *Trente arpents* (1938), and that was it. So, after I quit writing poetry at the age of twenty-five or so, I wrote a few, not many, critical articles. Then there was a long silence as far as creative writing was concerned. I started again when I was thirty-six or thirty-seven. I say again, because I remember in New York writing the beginning of a novel in 1950 or so.

EDWARDS: Why do you think it never crossed your mind to work in French literature?

BESSETTE: Mind you, my doctoral thesis deals with French poets as well as French-Canadian ones. But to me it was absurd that I should devote my time to writers who were foreign, first, and who had so many critics in France, second. I still don't understand the *Québécois* who devote most of their time to French literature.

EDWARDS: But you were a pioneer in the criticism of French-Canadian literature, especially in the way you approached it.

BESSETTE: Yes, there's no doubt about this. I was one of the first to get a doctoral degree in French-Canadian literature, maybe the first at the Université de Montréal, I'm not sure, but certainly among the pioneers.

EDWARDS: In one of your early articles on Nelligan, you talk about the importance of *"la critique formelle"* as opposed to *"la critique fonçière"* and *"la critique historique."*[1] Why did you think in the 1940's that formal criticism was so important?

BESSETTE: Because I did not think then, and I do not think still, that history of literature is literature. To me that is history. I did not want to specialize in

history. I wanted to study literature in its specificity, let's say, so I was quite bored with the courses we had in literature. The only course that I loved was a course in history given by Lionel Groulx.

EDWARDS: You studied under Lionel Groulx?

BESSETTE: Well, I attended as an auditor. I was not enrolled in history, but he was an outstanding professor.

EDWARDS: Do you think he influenced your view of French Canada at all, because he is very nationalistic and very Catholic?

BESSETTE: Oh, I was an unbeliever even then. It was not so much his *patriotisme* that influenced me. It was his eloquence; using only notes, he spoke slowly, clearly, and well. He was, I think, a great teacher because he could both analyse and synthesize. When he lectured on French-Canadian history, he linked events in Canada to events in France, Great Britain, and other places in Europe and beyond. It was an excellent course in history. Maybe I loved it more because I did not have to attend. But my courses in literature weren't worth much.

EDWARDS: But what stimulated your interest in formal criticism? Did you read other critics, or did you just invent your own method yourself according to the text, because you do say that if you're going to do formal criticism, the text in a sense imposes on you the kind of questions you're going to ask? Isn't that right?

BESSETTE: Yes. You know, I have the impression that I did it more or less by myself. Maybe it's not true, but that's the impression I have. Of course, I read Ferdinand Brunetière, Jules Lemaître, Emile Faguet, and Albert Thibaudet, and quite often they would speak of literature.

EDWARDS: And then you took another step. In the 1960's, you moved into *"la psychocritique,"* a criticism based very much on Freudian ideas.[2] I notice that even in your criticism of Nelligan, for example, you went from talking about his images to talking about his Oedipus complex.[3] What psychologists and critics were you reading in the 1960's?

BESSETTE: I read Freud, of course — actually, as I explain in *Mes Romans et moi* (1979), I reread him — and Charles Mauron, who is considered to be the founder of psychocriticism in France. I read Charles Baudouin, and I loved Marie Bonaparte's book on Edgar Allan Poe. Psychocriticism gives you a feeling of power, for you have the impression and/or illusion that you are discovering things that the writer himself did not know. That's a great satisfaction.

EDWARDS: You get there, though, by looking particularly at images and patterns.

BESSETTE: Oh yes, oh yes.

EDWARDS: Do you agree, then, that to analyse the techniques of a work isn't really enough?

BESSETTE: Yes, formal criticism seems to me now a little *désincarnée*, a little disembodied. It would not satisfy me anymore just to study the form of images as I did in my thesis. My aim now is to delve into the unconscious of the author. In 1960, I had not written anything about psychocriticism, so I was still a formalist.

EDWARDS: That's right. And I think that's the difference between *La Bagarre* (1958), *Le Libraire* (1960), and *La Commensale* (1975), which dates from then, and *L'Incubation* (1965). The first three are very formal novels. In *L'Incubation,* on the other hand, it is almost as if you've thrown all form out, and you've gone so far the other way that the novel becomes a little shadowy. There isn't enough of the realism that is in *Le Libraire*, for example, or even in *Le Cycle* (1971), which has this quality of solidity, of concreteness.

BESSETTE: Oh yes, well, Gilles Marcotte thinks that with *Le Cycle*, I took a step backwards because it's too realistic.

EDWARDS: Oh, I don't think so. Anyway, I've been rereading your criticism of other contemporary French-Canadian novelists. You've deplored the fact that Hubert Aquin and Jacques Ferron have become what you call *"des monstres sacrés"* in French-Canadian criticism,[4] you've written long, important articles on each of Yves Thériault,[5] André Langevin,[6] and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu.[7] It seems to me, however, that the novelist you've returned to most frequently is Gabrielle Roy. At various points you've talked about the importance of *Bonheur d'occasion*, and you've praised it highly.[8] Do you have any general comments about fiction in contemporary Québec?

BESSETTE: Well, I have not followed it very closely these last ten years. I devoted maybe a fourth of *Le Semestre* (1979) to one novel, Gilbert La Rocque's *Serge d'entre les morts* (1976). Obviously, I think that La Rocque is important.

EDWARDS: What do you think of Victor-Lévy Beaulieu now?

BESSETTE: Well, his last half-dozen books have been, I think, extremely disappointing. When he returns to the family cycle, maybe he will again re-emerge, but I am not too optimistic.

EDWARDS: What about Langevin? You called *L'Elan d'Amérique* (1972) a disappointing, but basically a rather exciting new beginning for him because, when it appeared, he hadn't published a novel for a long time.

BESSETTE: I was hopeful. His last novel, *Une Chaîne dans le parc* (1974), had some success, but I didn't think it was very good. There was an error in point of view. It was third-person, and it should have been first. You know, I think if there is an optical mistake in a novel, it is enough to really ruin it. *Une Chaîne dans le*

parc is not alive, and about this matter I have not changed. To me the first quality of a novel is for the characters to be alive.

EDWARDS: You said that about Rose-Anna and Florentine in *Bonheur d'occasion.*[9]

BESSETTE: Yes, but many secondary characters in it are also very much alive.

EDWARDS: One article you wrote on Roy, *"La Route d'Altamont,* clef de *La Montagne secrète,"* particularly excited me.[10] In it your approach to Roy changed from formal criticism to a psychological analysis of her relation to her mother which I thought was brilliant.

BESSETTE: I was excited too when I discovered that. That's one of the strong emotions I have had in criticism. When I unearthed the key to Gabrielle Roy's anxiety and anguish, that was a real discovery.

EDWARDS: I think you're absolutely right because I can't read the ending of *La Route d'Altamont* (1966) without crying. I think any daughter especially who reads that and who has left her mother is very much moved. There is also her point that in the end the daughter becomes the mother, and it's almost at the precise moment that the mother starts to become the child that the daughter starts taking on the personality traits of her mother. So you don't just kill your mother; you incorporate her into you at a certain point in your life.

BESSETTE: That's very true, but I don't think I developed that. Well, maybe I touch on it in my study of *Alexandre Chenevert* (1954).[11]

EDWARDS: In later comments about Gabrielle Roy, you imply that after *La Route d'Altamont,* after she'd worked out her relationship with her mother, perhaps she had little more to say.

BESSETTE: Well, when I read *Cet été qui chantait* (1972), I said to myself, "She's finished." Then she published *Ces Enfants de ma vie* (1977), and that's a good book. But it's not a novel. It's *autobiographie romancée.* I think in that direction, she will still be able to produce something valuable, but I would be flabbergasted if she published another good novel.

EDWARDS: Do you still think, then, that *Bonheur d'occasion* is Roy's great work?

BESSETTE: Yes. But *Alexandre Chenevert* is also a good novel. There are these, and there are her works of fictionalized memoirs, *Rue Deschambault* (1955), *La Route d'Altamont,* and *Ces Enfants de ma vie.* The last is not as good as the first two, but it is still quite good. So there are these two *versants* in her production. They're both important. *La Montagne secrète* is interesting only because it permits one to know more about Roy's unconscious. I don't think it is a good novel.

EDWARDS: In your criticism, you use the term *la cénesthésie*, and I gather from what you say that a novel without this sort of tactile quality really lacks the kind of realism which makes it a good novel.[12] What qualities would your ideal novel have?

BESSETTE: Well, *la cénesthésie* is very important. It is the consciousness you have of the inner functioning of your body. The first sensations we have are tactile, but we also have very early, from babyhood probably, *une conscience cénesthésique*. When, in *Bonheur d'occasion*, Rose-Anna gives birth, that scene is very *cénesthésique* because you suffer when she is in labour. She is *extrêmement incarnée* at that moment. So Gabrielle Roy is a good writer obviously. It is extremely important to give the reader the feeling that he is touching something.

EDWARDS: Is that what you mean by realism then?

BESSETTE: Yes, but it also includes the different layers of consciousness.

EDWARDS: But I mean in terms of a style which allows the reader to get these feelings of touching and to know where he is at every point. When I was reading *L'Incubation*, for example, I felt sometimes *dépaysée*. I didn't know where I was, and that's what I meant when I said earlier that there didn't seem to be quite enough of this concrete placing of the reader to get him into the scene.

BESSETTE: Do you know what would have given me great pleasure?

EDWARDS: What?

BESSETTE: Your telling me that when you read *L'Incubation*, you had the sensation you were inside a womb.

EDWARDS: I know that's what I was supposed to have. But I was going to ask you about the techniques of language, content, and *optique* you use in your fiction to get the kind of realism you're looking for, because at your best, you do balance internal and external reality brilliantly. I think you do this in *Le Cycle*; I'm always aware, for example, of the fact that the first three narrators are standing by a corpse as they think. I feel the little details of the scene that come into each character's thoughts. Jacot, the little boy, watches his aunt, watches his mother and her lover, and reacts emotionally to them and the situation. I'm aware of the candles, and at the same time I'm aware that Jacot has to go pee-pee.

BESSETTE: That's *cénesthésie*.

EDWARDS: Exactly. Now, are you conscious of using certain techniques, certain kinds of language, or even choosing certain kinds of content to get that quality in your fiction?

BESSETTE: Yes, of course. I use the present participle to avoid pronouns and

subjects, and I omit connecting words because they are not necessary for comprehension. On the other hand, I tend to put together two or three words that are not synonyms because real synonyms hardly exist. In *Les Anthropoïdes* (1977), there are very many words that are joined with hyphens. These are not usually *des mots composés*. I just add hyphens. I also like to create new words. We had the noun *film*. Then the adjective *filmique* was created. That's a word I should have liked to coin. The creation of new words that the reader will understand right away is both legitimate and praiseworthy.

EDWARDS: Let's talk about your novels. When your first novel *La Bagarre* (1958) was published as *The Brawl* in English in 1976, Ronald Sutherland commented that it was still your "most intriguing book" because it was "almost uncannily prophetic with regard to labour problems, religion, language, education, and sex."[13] Are you pleased that in 1976, Sutherland should call your first novel your "most intriguing book"?

BESSETTE: I don't mind, but I don't believe it's true. Well, maybe from the standpoint of what I said about society and history, it had its importance, but as a work of art, I don't find it intriguing. Recently there was a long criticism of it by André Belleau in *Le Romancier fictif:essai sur la représentation de l'écrivain dans le roman québécois* (1980). He found the different kinds and levels of language and the character of Jules Lebeuf particularly interesting.

EDWARDS: In *Mes Romans et moi*, you say that Jules Lebeuf is the character closest to you. Now Jules is a student, he spends much time talking about intellectual subjects, and he wants to be a writer, yet he works as a sweeper, he lives with a waitress, and he enjoys what I would call, without trying to sound snobbish, fairly lower-class activities and friends. And in the end he opts for his job and his waitress. Why did you put yourself into the novel as Jules Lebeuf?

BESSETTE: But I am not just Lebeuf. All the characters in the novel are projections of the novelist, all of them. What I said in *Mes Romans et moi* was that when I wrote *La Bagarre*, I was still torn among not only levels of language — you can see that very well — but also levels of society. I was from a lower-class milieu, but because of my studies, I was out of it. There were then these two poles. There was also a third, I suppose, because when I wrote the novel, I was living in the United States; hence the American Weston. It is funny, you know, because others have been convinced that Sillery was mostly myself, even though I am not "gay," as you say now. It is dangerous to identify the author with one character only.

EDWARDS: According to the recent checklist of your work compiled by Carole Pilotte, there have been two editions and several reprintings of your second novel, *Le Libraire* (1960); it has been translated into English and Czech; and the CBC

has dramatized *Not for Every Eye* (1962), the English translation.[14] Why do you think that Hervé Jodoin and his adventures in St-Joachin have been so popular?

BESSETTE: I really don't know. I think that in a way he is a forerunner of the revolt among the young. You know, at the beginning he has dropped everything, and has had trouble with the Catholic Church. Then he gets into the book business and again has trouble with the Church. And then he just throws everything away and mocks the old régime. I suppose that is why it caught with the youth, because from all I hear, young students still like it.

EDWARDS: I find Hervé a rather nasty, passive aggressive little man. I am not sure that I like him, but I admire his wit, his irony, and his ability to plot and to exact revenge. Somehow he seems the perfect symbol for the society he depicts. Did you intend him to be both the agent and the object of your satire?

BESSETTE: I don't think that I plan characters that way. I do think, however, that I have a tendency to laugh both at others and at myself. I will attack others, but usually I attack myself also. I don't know that it is out of fairness. I think that it is a matter of a certain inner *distanciation*. So it is there, and I don't have to plan.

EDWARDS: It is also the role of the satirist. I think, for example, that the marvellous thing about Gulliver in *Gulliver's Travels* is that he is the gull and the gulled, especially at the end when, living in the stable with the horses, he almost totally fails to see his relationship with human beings. Swift, on the other hand, sees this relationship.

BESSETTE: I must read Swift again. I had forgotten about the horses.

EDWARDS: Yes, I was thinking of Swift and his horses when I was reading *Les Anthropoïdes*.

BESSETTE: Yes, but you must also remember how my "horse fixation" was analysed at the colloquium.

EDWARDS: *Les Pédagogues* (1961), your third novel, has not been translated into English and does not appear to have been discussed very much even in Québec. It was hardly mentioned, for example, at the colloquium. One question I have about it concerns Jules Lebeuf. He appears in the novel as the president of a union who eventually persuades Sarto Pellerin, the French professor who is the chief character in *Les Pédagogues*, to join forces with the workers. Now why did you reincarnate Jules? Did you intend to write a series of realistic, urban, socially relevant novels set in Montreal?

BESSETTE: No, but at the time — at the time, mind you, it is no longer my opinion — I felt strongly that there should be some kind of solidarity between the intellectuals and the workers. That was long before the labour unions became too

strong. It is also interesting that at the end of *La Bagarre*, Jules was forced against his will to go into management. I suppose I wanted him to swing back to the side of the workers, and that's what happens in *Les Pédagogues*.

EDWARDS: Despite the apparent disaster of Sarto's loss of his job at the Normal School, I found the ending ambivalent, but essentially optimistic. Did you intend Sarto to be seen as quietly triumphant in the final lines?

BESSETTE: Well, I wanted to leave the future open at least. I did not consider that he had undergone a final defeat, but that he still had a chance to do what he wanted.

EDWARDS: After *Le Libraire, L'Incubation* (1965) is your most popular novel. It has been translated into English and Czech, and it marks two new departures for you. You still use Montreal, but your main setting is now for the first time Narcotown, a small Ontario city where there is a university. And you plunge into a stream-of-consciousness technique where time, place, and action are all dislocated, and where conventional patterns of writing are broken. We've already talked a bit about *L'Incubation*. In *Le Semestre*, however, you hint that you may have another story to tell about a love triangle from the period of your life during which you wrote *L'Incubation*, and that in *L'Incubation*, there were things that you couldn't, or wouldn't, tell. I am wondering if that partly explains some of the vagueness of that novel for me.

BESSETTE: Well, that's possible, but from what I understood, your criticism was that at times when you were reading the novel, you literally didn't know spatially where you were. But I suspect that your objection goes beyond *la spatialité*, and you are probably concerned with the characterization as well. If this is the case, then the existence of another triangle below the visible triangle may explain why the location was blurry for you.

EDWARDS: Yes, I did mean more than location. T. S. Eliot says about *Hamlet* that it is not entirely successful because it "is full of some stuff / Shakespeare / could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art."[15] Now that I have read *Le Semestre*, I am suggesting that if you at that time couldn't respond clearly to a certain set of emotions, it is possible that everything in *L'Incubation* is also slightly askew.

BESSETTE: Yes, that's quite possible. Indeed.

EDWARDS: We have already talked about several aspects of your next novel *Le Cycle* (1971). In *Mes Romans et moi*, however, you say that the character closest to you in *Le Cycle* is probably Julien. Why do you see him as your *moi* character?

BESSETTE: Well, there is a revolt in him. There is a tendency to try to get out of his milieu through foreign influences, like the Dutch mistress and Marxism. —

Of course, I am not at all a Marxist, so when I say that he is closest to me, that has to be transposed also. But I have undergone non-*québécois* influences in my psyche. — And there is the great pain Julien feels when he remembers his father. One of my colleagues also pointed out that Julien was central because he is the fourth of seven narrators in the book. I had not thought about this, but it makes sense.

EDWARDS: Have you ever tested the theory that if you open a novel right in the middle, you get the central scene? The fourth of seven narrators is the same thing in another way. But you have another *tour de force* because four of the seven narrators are women. Now, some feminists might say that to try to go into the psyche of women is a dangerous undertaking for a man, especially when you start talking about the menstruation of the youngest daughter. That's very bold!

BESSETTE: I don't know that it's bold, but I think it was worth trying. As you know, male artists envy women because of their power to create life. So, it's only natural that I should feel the urge to put myself inside their skin.

EDWARDS: Let's talk about *La Commensale*. Although it was not published until 1975, it dates from the early sixties. When I read it, I noticed its similarities to both *Le Libraire* and the Oedipus, Freudian nightmare memory which you analyse in *Mes Romans et moi*, and which seems out of place in the novel.

BESSETTE: Well, you know, this passage was not planned at all. It just came to me suddenly. When I look at it now, I am tempted to say that *La Commensale* really didn't work as a novel because already something deeper was working in me. It came out in that passage, but I could not integrate it with the rest of the novel.

EDWARDS: I was especially interested in what you said in *Mes Romans et moi* about *Les Anthropoïdes* (1977), your novel about anthropoids. I thought it was brilliant. In the novel the first-person narrator, the adolescent Guito, works out his role as the *paroleur* of his *horde*. He plays this role partly because he is wounded and has a dead arm; it leaves him solitary and in exile from *"le fleuve géant,"* Kébékouâ, but the role is necessary to record the history and legends of his horde, and in a sense, to create his horde, because until he has spoken, his horde has verbally neither history nor legend and therefore doesn't truly exist. Would you agree that the *paroleur* of the Kalahoumes is equivalent to the artist of men and that the image you present of both is ambiguous, but essentially affirmative, triumphant, and even divine.

BESSETTE: There's nothing divine about it. Speech came to the species man little by little. What is surprising — and we are not surprised enough about this — is that words should sometimes have the power to give us sensations and visions that are just as vivid as if we felt and saw the real things.

EDWARDS: You claim that you don't have a visual imagination, but when each of those anthropoids wants to speak, *il image quelquechose*. Now *imager* means to see.

BESSETTE: *C'est le phénomène de la compensation*. When you lack something, you try to overcome it and you go even further than the people who have it naturally. That's why I made myself a vocabulary of all the traits of the human face and body. I knew I had to describe this animal, and I wanted to make the reader see things that I did not.

EDWARDS: I think that one reason why the ending of *Les Anthropoïdes* seems so triumphant is the stately, balanced rhythms of the language of its conclusion. I think, in fact, the rhythms of your language are one of the great strengths of your style. Are you aware of the music of language?

BESSETTE: Oh yes. The music of language I feel naturally.

EDWARDS: *In Le Semestre* (1979), we have another portrait of the artist, this time as an older man. In this novel, you present again Narcotown, Princess University, and Omer Marin, an almost sixty-year-old university professor, critic, and novelist. In order to present him, you abandon the first-person narration for the first time in years, even though you are still involved in stream-of-consciousness technique and the unconscious. Why?

BESSETTE: Well, although the *optique* is third-person, you see only Marin from either the outside or the inside, so you don't go over this double boundary. But I think that the third-person point of view was a necessity of *distanciation*. I didn't know how it would come about, but I knew when I began *Le Semestre* that I wanted to make a big swing from pre-history to something that gave the impression of being recent, even contemporary. But I still needed some way to achieve distance.

EDWARDS: You've also given the novel a very complex structure by writing in an analysis of *Serge d'entre les morts*, by mentioning other works of Québec writers — albeit slightly disguised — and by almost giving a history of recent Québec fiction, including that of Gérard Bessette, and by naming your chief character after Homer, the sailor, and the mother. So you've gone from La Rocque's novel and Québec literature to Homeric legend and Freud. Is this structure more *distanciation*?

BESSETTE: I have to rely a little on what others say about *Le Semestre* because this is my most recent book and very close to my personality. I don't really think that I am able or ready to analyse it yet.

EDWARDS: You have in some ways written a *roman à clé*. If you know Queen's,

you recognize many of the people in *Le Semestre*, and, of course, if you know Québec literature, you recognize many authors and books. Isn't this dangerous?

BESSETTE: I don't see why it should be dangerous. No novel is ever purely invented; all novels are always partly drawn from reality. I say nothing scandalous about other people.

EDWARDS: OK, three final questions. In *Les Anthropoïdes* and in *Mes romans et moi*, you express regret that you do not/cannot live in Montréal, but hope nevertheless to have many Québec readers. Several of them came to Kingston recently to honour you. Do you think you may become one of your *"monstres sacrés"* in Québec?

BESSETTE: I suppose the possibility is there.

EDWARDS: I wondered if that was one reason why nobody at the colloquium discussed the humour in your fiction. Everyone was treating you very solemnly.

BESSETTE: My "humour" is never mentioned. I think, for instance, that if *La Commensale* has one quality, it has some very funny scenes. But the critics have never laughed. They never say my novels are funny.

EDWARDS: Well, I'll say it. I think that even *Le Semestre* is funny, although it's a wise humour and therefore one chuckles quietly. But would you like anglos and *anglotes*, as you call us, to read you too?

BESSETTE: Sure. I'd like the whole world to read my novels. They would all have to be translated and published, of course.

EDWARDS: You mention in *Mes Romans et moi* your phobia about repeating yourself, and you give this as one reason why you did not publish *La Commensale* right after *Le Libraire*, and why you are tiring of psychocriticism. I sense too in *Le Semestre* that you may be leaving what you call your *"freudomanie."* Where do you think you're going?

BESSETTE: You're assuming that Marin is me! . . . But anyway, I hope that I am moving away from Freud, but I don't know where I'm going next. I'm still struggling with two novels. The last thing I actually wrote and published was a short story, "La Garden-Party de Christophine" (1980), in the collection of the same name. This was meant to be a prologue to a larger work, but the main body of that prologue has not been progressing well, and the other novel I'm writing is not satisfactory yet either. I hope that there will be something new, but I don't know how or what.

NOTES

[1] "Analyse d'un poème de Nelligan," 1948; rpt. in *Une Littérature en ébullition* (Montreal: Editions du Jour, 1968), pp. 27-41.

[2] "La psychocritique," *Voix et images*, 1 (1975-76), 72-79.

[3] "Nelligan et les remous de son subconscient," 1963; rpt. in *Une Littérature en ébullition*, pp. 43-62.

[4] *"L'Elan d'Amérique* dans l'oeuvre d'André Langevin," 1972; rpt. in *Trois Romanciers québécois* (Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1973), pp. 131-77.

[5] "Le Primitivisme dans les romans de Thériault," in *Une Littérature en ébullition*, pp. 111-216.

[6] *"L'Elan d'Amérique* dans l'oeuvre d'André Langevin."

[7] "Les Romans de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu," in *Trois Romanciers québécois*, pp. 9-128.

[8] See, for example, *"Bonheur d'occasion,"* 1952; rpt. in *Une Littérature on ébullition*, pp. 219-38.

[9] Ibid.

[10] *"La Route d'Altamont*, clef de *La Montagne secrète,"* 1967; rpt. in *Trois Romanciers québécois*, pp. 183-99.

[11] *"Alexandre Chenevert* de Gabrielle Roy," 1969; rpt. in *Trois Romanciers québécois*, pp. 201-37.

[12] "Correspondances entre les personnages et le milieu physique dans *Bonheur d'occasion*," in *Une littérature en ébullition*, pp. 257-77.

[13] *The Brawl*, trans. Marc Lebel and Ronald Sutherland (Montreal: Harvest House, 1976).

[14] Carole Pilotte, "Gérard Bessette: Bibliographie analytique et annotée (1939-1976)," Diss. Université de Montréal, 1978.

[15] *"Hamlet,"* in *Selected Prose* (Peregrine Books, 1963), p. 101.

TOUCHABLE

John Barton

the pain that knits
into my form
knits my form into an
other

it does not let go
and does not
mean
to

its marrow knits the bone
dark falling of my
echo into its own
shaft

I live in its socket
inside bones that howl
into the wind's
mouth I live in each
syllable hardening into my
skull

bone-flute of the dark
I live
in the caste I am
I live in the caste
I live in I am

UNIFORMS

Ron Miles

Sun leaves one warning
on my skin: the brown
steer's toughness
over ripening flesh.
On yours: that flesh
is beauty
not enough.

We watch our children
age, exchange their fears
for certainty.
My daughter's shadow
bruises your shoulder,
your son digs a grave
in sand.

Slowly the tide
repeats itself.

BESTIARE ET CARNAVAL DANS LA FICTION FERRONIENNE

Normand Doiron

"Je reprends à ma façon le discours de l'âne à son ânier: "Ah misérable! s'écria le dit âne, si je te reprends à brouter l'herbe de mon pré, eh bien! j'irai dans ta maison et je coucherai avec l'ânière."
"L'Impromptu des deux chiens,"
Théâtre 2.

"Il ne fait que commencer, ton carnaval."
Le Salut de l'Irlande.

Le Bestiaire

L'oeuvre de Jacques Ferron se révèle entier.[1] Suivant la comparaison désormais fameuse, il est, lui aussi, cathédrale. Certes les pierres n'apparaissent pas toutes si polies, si bien taillées qu'on n'y puisse découvrir quelque imperfection ou maladresse. Mais un certain maréchal a pris soin d'asseoir solidement l'édifice.

Le thème du salut en constitue la pierre angulaire, philosophale: salut individuel, de l'âme et du corps; salut collectif, national, universel. Le salut s'accomplit sur le mode particulier de la métamorphose, dont l'acception se limitera presque toujours ici à la transformation d'un animal en homme ou d'un homme en animal. Le conte "Mélie et le boeuf" reste exemplaire, effectuant les deux opérations inverses.[2] Nous n'insisterons pas sur la fonction de l'appareil rhétorique.[3] On a rapproché métaphore et métamorphose. Pour notre part, nous noterons le rôle crucial joué par l'ironie[4] dans leur accomplissement.

A l'analyse, le bestiaire ferronien s'avère d'une surprenante richesse (plus de 80 figures animales dans les *Contes du pays incertain*). Tante Donatienne, après avoir été trente ans modiste "de chapeaux à plume pour dames de la Société," se métamorphosera en un perroquet éponyme présentant quant à lui maints caractères de l'humain. L'égalité de statut entre Coco et la fille de M. Comtois est frappante. Coco, faute de parler, comprend très bien ce qu'on lui dit. On songe encore à la méprise qui vaudra au neveu Wellie de "la Corde et la génisse" de demeurer bon chrétien; à l'identification selon un découpage sexuel, du bonhomme Aubertin à l'original, et des six filles aux six perruches, dans *Cotnoir*; à la permutation Barbotte/François dans *Les Confitures de coings*; au centaure mythique que forment le cheval et le cavalier du *Don Juan chrétien*; au Mouftan du *Dodu*, devenant l'oiseau qu'il a tué; et Agnès, poupoule.

Le fomenteur de toutes ces métamorphoses, la Bête par excellence qui préside à "cette ronde de formes en mutation perpétuelle,"[5] c'est évidemment, omniprésent dans l'oeuvre, le diable, "Bélial, mandaté sur terre pour organiser la Bêtise" (*La Charrette*). La communauté du nom de Bélial, chien de Tinamer dans *L'Amélanchier*, maître de la nuit et de ses démons dans *La Charrette*; le cheval noir de ce dernier roman; "le Chien gris" des *Contes*, ou la patte de bouc dans *La Chaise du maréchal ferrant*, contribuent à tracer le portrait traditionnel.

Le diable et Jean (le) Goupil procèdent en outre à un échange de rôles. L'ambiguïté, que Ferron laisse entière, relative au choix de la majuscule ou de la minuscule,[6] offre un modèle du procédé général des métamorphoses. Ce "rusé animal" aux ancêtres médiévaux, "chassé de la bergerie" du pape Poulin; cet enfant exposé au nom d'origine amérindienne, réconciliant les Hauts et les Bas; qu'on soupçonne d'être le fils du "vieux renard," de "Maurice-le-Malin": il s'avère "plus malin que le malin." On s'approche déjà de l'inversion carnavalesque, dont le diable "dupé dans sa duperie" (*La Chaise du maréchal ferrant*) ou les gentlemen "chasseurs chassés" et le renard qui doit "être chasseur au lieu d'être chassé" (*Le Salut de l'Irlande*), nous fourissent le paradigme. Notre goupil, doué de la plus belle éloquence, voyeur, délateur, nous le retrouvons donc dans cette dernière oeuvre où, véritable totem de la famille Haffigan, il orne les armoiries irlandaises. Cette fois, c'est Connie qui, opérant la métamorphose inverse, mariant par ses amours les deux renards, deviendra lui-même renard, à la suite de son père, sous l'insulte finale des policiers. Il sacrifiera sa vie pour sauver l'Irlande, pour le plaisir du "fastueux déploiement de chevaux, de chiens, de chasseurs et de dames" qu'il commande.

Ces deux romans forment les volets d'un diptyque où Ferron prend plaisir à démesurément enrichir le symbolisme du renard. La thématique de la chasse, largement développée dans l'ensemble de l'oeuvre, devient ici obsédante. Le rapprochement de la prostitution et de la chasse n'en constitue qu'un exemple. L'Emery Samuel de *La Chaise du maréchal ferrant* est originaire de Rivière-aux-Renards. Il n'est pas jusqu'au nom de Connie que ne suggère l'opposition goupil/connil (de l'ancien français "lapin") répondant à la duplication des renards: l'Anglais-rusé et l'Irlandais-sincère (*Le Salut de l'Irlande*), le premier finissant par manger le second pour la conservation de l' "harmonie sociale."

La richesse du bestiaire ferronien tient, par-delà les lois du conte, à des raisons inhérentes à l'économie générale de la thématique: au rôle considérable de la médecine confondant dans la puissance du corps l'homme et l'animal, notamment au moment décisif de la mort; à la figure centrale, tantôt attachante et cocasse, tantôt grotesque ou tragique comme ce Poutré des *Grands Soleils* sortant de scène à quatre pattes, de l'habitant entouré de ses animaux; en général, à un homme souvent plus bête que ses bêtes elles-mêmes; à la récupération des représentations amérindiennes. A travers le bestiaire qu'il compose, identifiant, dénombrant, nom-

mant, tel Noé, tel le Cotnoir exalté et lucide fixant l'image du monde qu'il abandonne à sa femme, on imagine un Jacques Ferron donnant forme au pays incertain. Mais il y a plus: c'est grâce aux animaux que l'homme assurera son salut. Barbotte, le Christ-chat des *Confitures de coings*, l'oiseau sauvegardant par sa mort le bonheur des amants du *Dodu* et le cheval sauvant le médecin opiomane du conte "Les Méchins," apparaissent particulièrement probants.

Le Carnaval

Le mythe du déluge dans sa version biblique lie salut et bestiaire: l'Arche, mais "inversée," car ce sont les animaux qui sauveront l'homme. L'inversion s'avère même la condition du salut. La descente d'Orphée aux enfers prélude à l'assomption de Rédempteur Fauché. Toujours la mort doit être traversée pour arriver à la vie. Et c'est au moment où tout paraît perdu; la mort, totale et irrémédiable, que le basculement se produit, que se révèle l'arcane, que la vie éclate. C'est l'image répétée du printemps sur lequel, dans *Cotnoir*, la porte condamnée tout l'hiver s'ouvre à la fin. Son sense se résume dans le schéma de type carnavalesque NAISSANCE-MORT-RESURRECTION.[7] Le temps d'une nuit, l'oeuvre de Ferron nous convie à une mascarade au terme de laquelle une lumière neuve illumine un monde régénéré.

Les masques ne dissimulent pas, ils révèlent: une autre *persona*, un dieu, un ancêtre, le sacre.[8] Il faut rapprocher la métamorphose de cette juxtaposition des êtres, de la transgression de l'individualité que permet le masque. Sous ce masque, étymologiquement, apparaît à nouveau la "sorcière" qui, telle cette Barbara fille de Caron et nautonière de la nuit dans *La Charrette*, jouera toujours un rôle déterminant dans les cérémonies de passage.

Les figures animales, tantôt assument cette symbolique rédemptrice, tantôt se présentent avec l'homme dans un rapport d'inversion carnavalesque. Attardons-nous à *La Charrette*: l'âne, la hyène, le chevreau.

Nul animal plus représentatif que l'âne monté par F-A. Campbell et ensuite par la catin. Il possède cette double fonction "rabaissante" et "régénératrice" caractéristique du schéma carnavalesque général. Il devient protagoniste d'une fête carnavalesque, l'Assouade (ou fête de l'Ane), qui commémorait la fuite en Egypte et que célèbre maintenant le couple errant dans le Vieux Montréal.

Comme le chacal et le corbeau de la démonstration de Lévi-Strauss, la hyène permet de résoudre l'opposition Vie/Mort. Médiatrice, elle se nourrit de la mort mais sans la provoquer, donnant la promesse que la mort sert la vie. Par ailleurs, la hyène rit (c'est même chez Ferron sa principale caractéristique), acte carnavalesque par excellence. Et Morciani, hanté par le rire des hyènes du Canada, se prendra à l'heure de sa mort d'un fou rire qui le métamorphosera.

Le chevreau demeure l'"émissaire," celui qu'on doit sacrifier, la mort nécessaire au retour périodique de la vie. Pour n'être que suggéré, le sacrifice n'en reste pas

moins manifeste. Ferron s'applique à associer les chevreaux accourant dans la cuisine lors de la naissance du dernier Rouillé, évoqués lors de la scène d'amour entre Barbara et le médecin longueillois, gambadant dans le dépotoir-cimetière, aux termes extrêmes de l'existence. Au dernier chapitre, Mme Rouillé offre à la veuve un chevreau qui finit par recouvrer la liberté au moment même où Marguerite affirme au diable qu'elle n'a pas perdu son mari. Chevreaux et charrette jouent sensiblement le même rôle, celui d'un symbole ambivalent de la vie et de la mort.

Pour le rapport d'inversion homme/animal, retenons seulement Rouillé tirant la charrette dans laquelle il a déposé le cheval.

Le carnaval ferronien s'anime de bien d'autres scènes encore. Au chapitre XVII, Bélial avec sa tête de cheval s'entretient avec le cardinal à tête de cochon. On assiste, pour déborder des représentations à caractère thériomorphe, au mariage d'Ange-Aimé et du travesti renvoyant d'une part à l'inversion des sexes très fréquente en période de carnaval, d'autre part au Charivari, fête qui marquait les mariages grotesques. On célèbre la parodie de la cérémonie religieuse. Le cabaret est d'abord sacristie, puis église. Le bar devient maître-autel. Il n'y a pas jusqu-aux propos blasphématoires, aux jurons, institutionnalisés en période de carnaval, qui ne concourent à la fête.

La métamorphose constitue l'aventure d'une nouvelle naissance. Se transformer, mourir pour survivre. Comme le dernier rire, spasmodique, de Morciani, l'ultime soupir de Cotnoir témoigne d'une superposition des êtres dont les esprits se croisent au rythme de l'"haleine chaude" des trains, d'une métamorphose coïncidant toujours avec le retour de la mort. Avec elle, c'est véritablement Emmanuel qui investit, qui prend et relaie le souffle extrême et la vie de Cotnoir: "Un billet pour Québec." Ce mythe polymorphe, lui-même susceptible de revêtir différentes formes, celles du changement perpétuel, de la circulation des êtres les uns dans les autres, voire de la métempsychose dans sa formulation platonicienne, il s'exprime dans le goût que marque Ferron pour les généalogies minutieuses. F-A. Scot en incarne l'interprétation initiatique. Il s'inscrit clairement dans sa version de mythe de croissance (agrolunaire) dans *L'Amélanchier*. L'anamnèse salvatrice, soutenant toute la narration, restitue dans son intégralité le monde de Tinamer. Car si les animaux peuvent sauver l'homme, ils ne possèdent toutefois pas cette faculté essentielle au salut final: la mémoire.

> On ne saurait finir dans le passé car le temps n'a qu'un mouvement; il vient du passé, passe par le présent et va vers l'avenir. On ne remonte pas à l'ancien, on en repart et l'on rejoint sous l'aiguille de la montre les gens de peu de mémoire qui ne sont que des animaux. — *Le Saint-Elias*

Or, pour échapper au cycle fermé des renaissances, c'est précisément la transformation capitale qu'opérera Ferron: d'un mythe rythmique, répétitif, d'éternel retour, il fera un mythe du progrès. Et si Tinamer nous raconte son enfance, nous

prévient-elle dès la première page de *L'Amélanchier*, c'est qu'elle "le fait pour son orientement."

Le Grand Oeuvre selon Jacques Ferron

Comment réduire la série d'oppositions qu'un Ferron manichéïste allonge inlassablement? Le salut s'accomplira par le passage du pôle dévalorisé au pôle revalorisé. La représentation transfigurée, et sans doute la plus puissante, de ce passage qui se creuse entre la vie et la mort, le petit et le grand village, le bon et le mauvais côté des choses, c'est le pont, le pont Jacques-Cartier fantastiquement décrit dans *La Charrette*. Il est frappant de constater à quel point l'itinéraire symbolique de Ferron correspond à l'analyse de Gilbert Durand: du régime diurne (glaive) au régime nocturne (coupe) et, de là, du denier au bâton (du cycle au progrès), la volonté d'accomplir ce dernier passage nous paraissant caractériser en propre d'entreprise ferronienne.

Dans *La Charrette*, les premières évocations de la mort appartiennent au régime diurne. Ce sont les images du cauchemar, de la tapinière, de l'araignée s'emparant de Dufeutreuille, de l'hydre participant à "l'oeuvre de chair." Mais Ferron prend soin d'annoncer la métamorphose: "je me recouchais en recommençant le cocon d'où la chenille évoque le papillon."[9]

Cette nuit où l'on ne sort "qu'obligé par [ses] devoirs professionnels," elle s'euphémise dans le régime nocturne qui commence avec le chapitre VI introduit par la chute du "je" au "il." Renversant les valeurs, on entame "l'hymne à la nuit." La mort devient reposante, maternelle; le lit, nef; Barbara, Marguerite et Adrienne. Dès lors, la nuit n'est plus que magnifique attente de l'aube qui vaincra finalement Bélial.

De l'euphémisation du temps, on passe naturellement au désir de le contrôler, par répétition, par progrès. Les structures "synthétiques" abondent. Retenons l'image d'"une des grandes roues à rayons d'ombre [qui] se détacha de la charrette ... et rejoignit le soleil," "emblème du devenir cyclique, résumé magique qui permet la maîtrise du temps."[10]

La lumière jaillit, victorieuse, une lumière aurorale, nouvelle comme la vie de Marguerite. Le cheval noir, personifiant le temps destructeur, fuyant irrémédiablement, si vite qu'il courre est toujours devancé par la vie qui dans son progrès triomphe. La roue est l'image même de l'inversion salvatrice, de ce mystère qui, faisant coïncider début et fin du temps, transmue la mort en naissance. Le tableau de la temporalité de *Cotnoir* illustre ce principe.[11] Au moment où, dans la chronologie réelle des faits, le chapitre I touche le chapitre IX, Emmanuel est sauvé. Du reste, la dernière apparition d'Emmanuel n'est pas sans évoquer la lame XXII ou zéro du Tarot, vagabond représentant le départ de l'homme vers d'autres naissances.

Mais "on ne se sauve pas sans faire quelques victimes," dira le procureur de *La Tête du Roi.* Il faut un sacrifice pour cette victoire: celui de Taque, du docteur Cotnoir, de *Tante Elise*, du docteur Chénier, l'accoucheur qui en mourant fait naître la patrie. Notre peuple émerge — jamais Ferron ne le dissimule — du sang d'un génocide amérindien. Et Eurydice sera sacrifiée à son tour, tuée par un autre cheval noir (l'Etoile blanche) incarnant la vengeance des mânes de la grande nation Mandan. Ainsi, Orphée, qui devait l'aller chercher aux enfers, obtiendra-t-il son propre salut. Le sacrifice est un marché, un gage, un échange, celui du passé contre l'avenir. Ici encore, "la philosophie du sacrifice, c'est la philosophie de la maîtrise du temps et de l'éclaircissement de l'histoire."[12]

Dans la série des antagonismes ferroniens, le sacrifice s'oppose anthropologiquement à la chasse dont nous avons relevé l'importance. Les animaux familiers utilisent des techniques de piégeage pour capturer la Tinamer de *L'Amélanchier* (les chassés chasseurs). On fait la chasse aux Acadiens des *Roses Sauvages.* La guerre devient chasse pour les Patriotes perdus des *Grands Soleils.* Or *Le Salut de l'Irlande* nous a dès le début lancés sur de fausses pistes. En effet, il ne s'agit ni de chasse à courre, ni de chasse-galerie, ni de chassé-croisé mais bien de chasse à l'homme. Le renard survivant au Montreal Hunt Club fait finalement basculer la thématique. Le gibier se change en victime.

La problématique révolutionnaire commune nous autorise à rapprocher ce roman de *Prochain Episode* d'Hubert Aquin. Paul Zumthor souligne que la question du carnaval débouche sur celle du double: "L'un et l'autre, l'un dans l'autre."[13] Non seulement un problème d'inversion, mais aussi un problème de coexistence, nous dirions presque de gémellité. Le visage, tel celui d'Eurydice, a toujours deux faces. Le temps d'une Fête-Dieu, double est le jeu du procureur de *La Tête du Roi*, se reconnaissant dans ses deux fils qui "s'opposent l'un l'autre." La lutte entre Canadiens-français et Canadiens-anglais peut se poser, Aquin nous l'apprend, en termes de suppression du double fascinateur. "Chasseurs et chassés finissent toujours par se ressembler," nous dit le renard du *Salut de l'Irlande.* Au demeurant, l'oeuvre entier de Ferron reprend à son compte les philosophies érigeant en principe la lutte éternelle des contraires. "Un vieux combat, celui de la vie et de la mort. C'est toujours le même, c'est toujours le seul combat" (*Les Grands Soleils*, III, iv).

Nul doute qu'il n'existe maints rapports entre cette philosophie explicite chez Ferron et les philosophies de type alchimique, telles qu'elles culminent dans l'Europe des XV^e^ et XVI^e^ siècles. Ferron le suggère par les nombreuses références au forgeron ayant toujours plus ou moins parti lié avec le diable. "[L]a métallurgie s'encadre dans un univers spirituel où le Dieu céleste . . . est définitivement évincé par le Dieu fort . . . ,"[14] où, comme dans *Le Ciel de Québec*, olympiens et prométhéens s'affrontent. A la création procédant d'un être suprême succède la création par hiérogamie et sacrifice. Le mythe alchimique, dont la fonction salvatrice s'avère

toujours constitutive, ménage sa place au coeur de l'oeuvre, soit en tant que *coïncidentia oppositorum* revêtant très souvent chez Ferron la forme d'un rite nuptial (les amours de Connie et de Doreen, celles de François et de Georgette dans *Le Ciel de Québec*) ; soit en tant que technique qui vise, en se substituant au temps, à maîtriser la nature, à accélérer l'histoire. L'idéologie techniciste de l'alchimie, comme "prototype de mythe progressiste et révolutionnaire,"[15] ne laissait pas d'être séduisante pour un acteur de la Révolution tranquille soucieux de précipiter le rythme temporel. Ferron réussit là où Charles Amand avait échoué.

Plusieurs images témoignent chez Ferron de ce glissement "du schème rythmique au mythe du progrès." D'abord le feu, feu alchimique se combinant à l'eau diluvienne; feu réchauffant le Cadieu des *Contes*; incendie recomposant l'univers de Léon de Portanqueu; feu des *Grands Soleils* qui ne sont qu'incandescence et symbole igné, depuis les discours incendiaires des Rouges, jusqu'à ce Fils, qui enflammera plus tard le vicaire Lupien, Fils éternellement condamné, tel un nouveau Prométhée, à "brûler vif pour que le soleil ne s'éteigne pas" (IV, i). Puis l'arbre, amélanchier éponyme, cerisier dans *Papa Boss*, mais surtout l'arbre généalogique, tel ce rosier des *Roses Sauvages*, ascendance prenant ici l'allure d'une malédiction atavique, aux dimensions proprement tragiques, qui, remontant au carnage de Moncton, pèse sur la famille jusqu'à ce que soeur Agnès l'en délivre et que, bouclant la boucle, Rose-Aimée épouse l'Acadien Ronald. Et finalement l'échelle, "spécialité de Saint-Amable," "dressée contre la barre du jour" dans *la Charrette*, "jetée du ciel sur la terre" dans *Le Salut de l'Irlande*, convertie en escabeaux dans *Papa Boss*.

La volonté alchimique de contrôle de la nature survit dans les idéologies modernes liées à l'industrie et aux sciences expérimentales. Ce projet, encore utopie pour Jean Rivard, dont les linéaments se dessinent déjà dans "Une vision" de Louis Fréchette, Ferron l'exprime comme un fait:

> une grande mutation s'est faite, qui changera toutes les mythologies: la nature, de mère toute-puissante qu'elle était, devient la fille de tous les hommes.
>
> — *Le Saint-Elias*

Accompagnant le passage d'une société traditionnelle rattachée au passé, rassurée par les cadences régulières, à une société industrielle et capitaliste moderne qui se projette dans l'avenir, apparaît une idéologie du progrès supplantant la vieille idéologie du rythme répétitif et purement cyclique.[16]

La thématique d'une renaissance périodique après transgression, loin d'être neuve, constitue l'un des principes les plus fertiles d'une littérature qui se présente comme l'instrument idéologique d'élection de cette société traditionnelle encore proche des rythmes puissants de la nature. La Rose Latulipe d'Aubert de Gaspé est punie pour avoir dansé "sur le Mercredi des Cendres." De même Louvigny de Montigny dans son "Histoire de Loup-Garou" fait apparaître la bête alors qu'on

se trouve "fair su' l'Mardi Gras." Chez Honoré Beaugrand,[17] Jos le Cook part courir la chasse-galerie la veille du Jour de l'An, à "l'heure de sauter à pieds joints pardessus la tête d'un quart de lard, de la vieille année dans la nouvelle." François Ricard note dans sa brillante préface l'importance de l'alcool comme élément transgressif, et aussi celle du contexte: la fête, cependant que "toute l'ordinaire disposition du monde et des choses se renverse." On remarque la tendance à substituer le traditionnel Jour de l'An à la Pâques chrétienne. Du moins sert-il souvent de relais, comme la Noël chez Fréchette. En fait, ce qui importe c'est la conscience aigüe d'une rupture dans le temps. Le Jour de l'An du chapitre X de *Maria Chapdelaine* marque effectivement le point central et tournant de l'oeuvre puisque Maria y apprend la mort de François. Mais la Pâques printanière conserve sa puissance d'explosion régénératrice. Le drame se dénoue au printemps par l'audacieuse prosopopée à la faveur de laquelle Maria, veillant le corps de sa mère transfigurée par la mort, invoque les mânes de ses ancêtres. Les contes du XIX^{e} siècle, de même que le roman de la terre, ne serait-ce qu'en raison de la problématique où s'installe le genre, ne peuvent se comprendre en dehors de cette thématique d'une succession régulière de la vie et de la mort.

Ce qui est neuf, en revanche, c'est l'utilisation qu'en fait Ferron. "Jacques Ferron a inventé . . . la folle espérance que le temps finira par arranger l'Histoire."[18]

En ce sens, non seulement il participe à l'idéologie de la Révolution tranquille, passant du "respect des traditions" au "défi du progrès,"[19] mais il emprunte largement à l'idéologie renaissante. Car Ferron fut sans doute très tôt conscient de la double articulation de sa thématique: renaissance remportant périodiquement une victoire sur la mort; Renaissance en tant que période historique, certes extrêmement ambigüe, mais réunissant tout de même un ensemble de caractéristiques relativement bien définies et sur lesquelles s'accordent la plupart des historiens.

Le parallèle doit s'entendre en termes de références explicites, inscrites dans les textes eux-mêmes, soit à l'histoire, soit aux idéologies, soit à la littérature de la Renaissance. Aussi les auteurs lèvent-ils, par leurs prises de position, les difficultés méthodologiques et théoriques relatives à l'histoire.[20] Qu'il s'agisse de l'esthétique baroque développée dans *Trou de mémoire*, du Shakespeare d'Aquin ou du Don Quichotte de V-L. Beaulieu, la représentation tranche le noeud gordien. Soulignons que c'est souvent par volonté de réaction contre les idéologies issues des représentations médiévales développées à l'époque précédente, que l'époque de "rattrapage" est amenée à utiliser l'image d'une "Renaissance québécoise." Mais cette dernière doit s'interpréter en définitive dans le cadre général d'une renaissance du monde, la conquête des espaces nouveaux répondant par-dessus les siècles à celle des nouveaux mondes que continue de découvrir *Le Saint-Elias*.[21]

Ferron multiplie les repères: la tradition carnavalesque; la philosophie alchimique; la question des langues nationales; la formation des grands Etats modernes (Duplessis, homme politique de la Renaissance dans *La Chaise du maréchal fer-*

rant[22]); le mythe progressiste d'un temps où "tout a été ramené sur terre"; le mode de réinterprétation de l'histoire, qu'il serait révélateur d'étudier dans les essais qu'ici nous avons négligés; et finalement, la figure obsédante, susceptible de résumer le projet ferronien: Faust.[23]

De Marlowe à Lenau, Faust le "Manichéen," Faust l'ingénieur, Faust inquiet, orgueilleux, prométhéen, héros de tous les doutes, aspirant à la connaissance universelle, sauvé par Marguerite.

Le diable, spécialement dans *La Chaise du maréchal ferrant*, apparaît, comme chez Goethe, "victime d'un déni de justice": "l'esprit qui affirme doit triompher de l'esprit négateur."[24]

Mais Ferron a pris garde à poser d'abord le problème de la rédemption dans toute son ambiguïté. "Après [sa] mort, si l'on daigne alors [lui] faire l'honneur d'un procès,"[25] pourrons-nous accorder au docteur Ferron un salut qu'il a laborieusement préparé?

NOTES

[1] Je tiens à remercier M. Laurent Mailhot, dont l'érudition et les conseils éclairés m'ont introduit à l'oeuvre, et MM. Stéphane Vachon et Maurice Lachance, qui furent à l'origine de cette étude.

[2] Voir Gérard Bessette, "Mélie et le boeuf de Jacques Ferron," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 22 (automne 1976), 441-48. Nous ne reviendrons pas non plus sur le serpent et le coq dans *Papa Boss*, dont traite Daniel Déry, "Le Bestiaire dans *Papa Boss*," *Action nationale*, 59, no. 10 (juin 1970), 998-1006.

[3] "Si le fantastique se sert sans cesse des figures rhétoriques, c'est qu'il y a trouvé son origine.... Le surnaturel commence à partir du moment où l'on glisse des mots aux choses que ces mots sont censés désigner. Les métamorphoses forment donc à leur tour une transgression de la séparation entre matière et esprit, telle que généralement elle est conçue." Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1970), p. 86 et p. 119.

[4] Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), pp. 145s: "L'Ironie consiste à dire par une raillerie, ou plaisante, ou sérieuse, le contraire de ce qu'on pense, ou de ce qu'on veut faire penser." Voir aussi, à propos des "traits retenus par Bakhtine" (*L'Oeuvre de François Rabelais et la Culture populaire au MA et sous la Renaissance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) "lorsqu'il parle le *littérature carnavalisée*"; Paul Zumthor, *Le Masque et la lumière; la poétique des grands rhétoriqueurs*, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1978), p. 133: "Je subsumerai ces traditions sous le terme rhétorique d' 'ironie', que j'élargis jusqu'à lui faire désigner toute rupture intentionnelle d'isotopie: 'ironiquement,' l'être s'échange avec le paraître, en un réciproque renvoi ambigu."

[5] M. Cinotti, *Bosch* (Paris: Les classiques de l'art Flammarion, 1967), p. 95. Relevons au passage l'indubitable parenté entre l'iconographie du triptyque *le Chariot de foin* et la symbolique de *la Charrette*. Voir aussi, C. Kappler, *Démons, monstres et merveilles* (Paris: Payot, 1980), p. 153: "Le spécialiste des métamorphoses est Satan qui transmet également aux sorcières le pouvoir de se métamorphoser et de métamorphoser les autres."

[6] *La Chaise du maréchal ferrant* (Montréal: Le Jour, 1972), p. 136: "O Jeannot, méchant goupil, tu te ris moi qui ne suis qu'une pauvre et humble fille!"

[7] Schéma donné par Marie-France Gueusquin, "Le Masque en France," dans Samuel Glötz, dir., *Le Masque dans la tradition européenne*, exposition du musée international du carnaval et du masque, Binche, 13 juin-6 octobre, 1975, pp. 161-73. Retenons encore, concernant le bestiaire carnavalesque, Jean Jacquot et Elie Konigson, dir., *Les Fêtes de la Renaissance*, 3 vol., communications du 15e colloque international d'études humanistes, Tours, 10-22 juillet 1972, Paris, Editions du CNRS, 1975. A notre connaissance, la seule étude soulevant comme telle la question des représentations carnavalesques dans l'oeuvre de Ferron est celle de Michel Guerrero, "La tradition carnavalesque dans les contes de Jacques Ferron," *Itinéraires*, 1 (juin 1976), pp. 29-36. Nous avons appris, malheureusement un peu tard, que M. Guerrero préparait en ce moment une thèse sur le sujet.

[8] Glötz, p. 2: "Sans masque, peut-on affirmer, pas de vrai carnaval!" Par ailleurs, notons le rapport génétique qui existerait entre rites funéraires et fêtes carnavalesques, conformément à l'hypothèse de Meuli: "à l'origine de la mascarade, il y aurait une fête marquant le retour sur terre des ancêtres," Glötz, p. 33. On songe évidemment à l'importance des cérémonies funéraires chez Ferron, et notamment à cette "cérémonie renversée" qui ouvre *Cotnoir*. Pour la fête de l'Ane, voir Bakhtine, p. 86s. Pour le masque, ibid., pp. 36 et 49.

[9] *La Charrette* (Montréal: Le Jour, 1968), p. 19. Chez Ferron, "cauchemar," p. 19; "taupinière," p. 19; "araignée," p. 14; "hydre," p. 15; mort/mère, pp. 110ss; lit/nef, p. 62. Chez Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Bordas, 1969), respectivement, p. 80, pp. 122-29, p. 115, p. 116, pp. 269-74, p. 285. "L'hymne à la nuit," Durand, pp. 247-56.

[10] Durand, p. 372; voir aussi Bakhtine, p. 19. Pour les représentations carnavalesques, Durand p. 355. Pour le cheval noir, ibid., pp. 78-89.

[11] Voir Réjean Robindoux et André Renaud, *Le Roman canadien-français du vingtième siècle* (Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa: CRCCF, 1966), pp. 185-96.

[12] Durand, p. 357.

[13] Zumthor, p. 126; voir aussi Bakhtine, p. 13.

[14] Mircea Eliade, *Forgerons et alchimistes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), p. 24.

[15] Durand, p. 349; "du schème rythmique au mythe du progrès," ibid., pp. 378-90.

[16] "[L]a fête archaïque relevant d'une résurrection du passé pour arrêter l'histoire, la fête moderne devant servir en fin de compte d'anticipation de l'avenir pour accélérer cette histoire." Jean-Jacques Wonenburger, *La Fête, le jeu et le sacré* (Paris: Editions J-P. Delagrave, 1977), p. 138.

[17] *La Chasse-galerie* (Montréal: Fides, 1979).

[18] André Major, *Le Devoir*, 30-04-68, reproduit dans Jacques Ferron, *Théâtre 1* (Montreal: Librairie Déom, 1975), p. 123.

[19] Denis Monière, *Le Développement des idéologies au Québec; des origines à nos jours* (Montréal: Editions Québec/Amérique, 1977), p. 320.

[20] Notamment celle de savoir s'il faut l'interpréter en termes de rupture ou de continuité. Nous nous dirions proche de la position de Eugénio Garin, *Moyen Age et Renaissance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), qui, déplaçant la question, insiste sur l'indubitable conscience d'une "rupture" qu'avaient les renaissants.

[21] Voir *Liberté*, 6-13 (septembre 1973). "Roman des Amériques," Actes de la rencontre québécoise internationale des écrivains, pp. 134s. Pour les représentations médiévales, voir A-J. Bélanger, *L'Apolitisme des idéologies québécoises; le grand tournant de 1934-1936* (Québec: PUL, 1974).

[22] *La Chaise du maréchal ferrant*, p. 155, p. 160; pape Poulin/Borgia, p. 75. Pour la réinterprétation de l'histoire, voir la dédicace de Ferron à Jacques Hébert dans *Historiettes* (Montréal: Le Jour, 1969): "l'histoire vit comme un roman."

[23] Wonenburger, p. 147: "la volonté faustienne de création d'idoles immanentes, fonctionnant comme substitut de l'archaïque sacré. La fête va être prise dans un réseau de justification de l'Histoire. . . ."

[24] Geneviève Bianquis, *Faust à travers quatre siècles* (Paris: Droz, 1934), p. 353.

[25] Jacques Ferron, "L'alias du non et du néant," dans "L'Ecrivain et le politique," *Le Devoir*, 19-04-80, p. 21.

GITSKAN WOMAN

G. B. Sinclair

charm visible, she enlarges it
small and silver, she envelops it
with growing visions
until it's large enough to take her
where she wants to go

Gitskan woman, she steps lightly
into the charm, the canoe rocks
slightly, under her feet
little fish-net to catch
the run-away soul

under the cedars, a man has lain there
fifteen days, he has lain there
in vain his wife's sad hands
his son's young laughter his eyes
lie dying in the embers

a rope of light, a man's life
stretching, she cries, from past to future
then like a snake, Gitskan woman
rubs herself against the rope
and finds the darkness

across the water, her charm guides her
in the canoe her song finds her
over the water, she brings his soul
back to the cedars, she sings his soul
back to the fire, she sings his soul

TIME AND SPACE IN ANDRE LANGEVIN'S "L'ELAN D'AMERIQUE"

Richard G. Hodgson

Claire Peabody chante, danse, s'écoule, moelleuse, alanguie, sous la douche, qui abolit le temps et l'espace....

WHEN ANDRÉ LANGEVIN PUBLISHED *L'Elan d'Amérique* in 1972, sixteen years after *Le Temps des hommes*, this technically innovative new novel was not very favorably received by the reading public, and since then it has not received the critical attention it deserves. Many readers have found it disjointed, esoteric, and difficult if not impossible to read.[1] Very few critics have been able to see that beneath the rambling, chaotic interior monologues of which the novel is composed lies a very carefully constructed set of interrelationships between the various points in time and the various places inside and outside Québec to which constant reference is made.[2] The unordered and seemingly unrelated images, memories and bits of dialogue which make up much of the text repeatedly refer to a limited number of experiences in the lives of the two main characters, Claire Peabody, the Franco-American wife of an American industrialist, and Antoine, a modern Menaud, *maître draveur*. In order to understand the social and other ideological *prises de position* which Langevin takes in *L'Elan d'Amérique*, we must first undertake a detailed study of the use of time and space in this very complex novel. Essential elements of any novel, time and space are of particular importance in all of Langevin's novels, but especially in *L'Elan d'Amérique*, a text in which meaning is produced largely through the symbolic use of historical and fictional events and real and imaginary places.

The major problem which confronts the reader of *L'Elan d'Amérique* is due to the fact that the events of the novel are presented in an order which is far from chronological. As in most *nouveaux romans*, it is the reader who must attempt to reconstruct a reality which involuntary memory and the physical condition of the two main characters have left in the form of recurring images and hazily recollected memories. In the first hundred pages of the novel, it is largely the past

experiences of Claire Peabody which are related, not in any coherent manner, but rather as they are remembered by a depressed, neurotic and inebriated woman. In the chalet in northern Québec which is the focal point of the novel, Claire has, at the beginning of the novel, just made love to Antoine, the *coureur de bois*, and in the shower she begins to recall her past, "livrée à l'eau chaude d'un flux intemporel."[3] Later in the novel, Antoine's memories are presented in a somewhat more coherent way, despite the fact that he has just had an attack of apoplexy. The twelve hours (approximately) which Claire and Antoine spend together in the chalet is the basic time-frame, the "present," of the novel, during which the previous events in the lives of Claire and Antoine are presented by the stream-of-consciousness technique, as images, characters and experiences float to the surface of "la vase mouvante de la mémoire." In an undoubtedly intentional reference to Faulkner, Claire (and later Antoine) abandon themselves to "the sound and the fury" ("au bruit et à la fureur") of their recollected experiences, which reverberate against "un espace et un temps aux frontières abolies." Only very careful re-reading of the novel enables the reader to determine the sequence of events and their interrelationships.

In addition to the apparently random order in which the principal events of the novel are presented, the various places in which Claire and Antoine have lived, their respective and very different "worlds," are not described in any systematic way. For example, Boston (where Claire, the daughter of a French-Canadian mother and an American father, grew up and was educated) and the cottage near the sea where she met David (possibly on Cape Cod) are both associated in her mind with specific memories, such as the elevated train tracks above the house where she spent her childhood or the slate-grey colour of the seaside cottage. Similarly, the two very different settings which Antoine vividly remembers, the corrupt, cosmopolitan city of Montréal and the vast uninhabited expanses of northern Québec, are never actually described. In *L'Elan d'Amérique*, space, like time, is fragmented and distorted by the functioning of the human mind, a psychological phenomenon which most *nouveaux romans* seek to describe through a radically new use of language. What makes it possible to make some sense of the unordered fragents of reality with which the reader is confronted is the fact that the number of specific locations in Québec and in the north-eastern United States where the events of the novel take place is actually fairly limited. It is only the chaotic and disconcerting way in which the places are alluded to and the lack of chronological order in which the sequence of events is presented which make reading *L'Elan d'Amérique* a very different experience from reading Langevin's earlier, much more traditional novels, like *Poussière sur la ville* (1953). In attempting to understand what Langevin has tried to achieve in this experimental novel, let us begin by analyzing the various aspects of the physical setting of the novel and their relationships with fictional (and historical) time.

Of all the places which Claire vividly remembers, her earliest memories are of the working-class neighbourhood of Boston, where she grew up, the daughter of Rose Greenwood (originally Boisvert), whose family had emigrated from Québec to the northeastern United States to find work in the textile factories. The dark house where she grew up was a place where the economic hardship was a part of every-day life and where freedom was only an ideal. This part of Boston, which Claire remembers well years after she left it to go to college across the river in Cambridge, represents in Langevin's eyes that part of American society which will always fail to realize its share of the American dream. It is very important to the meaning of the novel as a whole that Claire started her life as a victim of the injustices of the American socio-economic system and that even after her marriage to Mr. Peabody, the American industrialist who "adopts" her, her experiences with individual Americans (who often exemplify specific aspects of American society) are always unhappy and ultimately catastrophic.

The physical distance which separates the working-class Boston of Claire's childhood from the intellectual, upper-class world of Cambridge across the St.-Charles River is not great, but the two settings symbolize two very different features of American life. At the age of seventeen, Claire goes to college in Cambridge: "I-park-my-car-in-Harvard-yard." This intellectual hothouse ("serre chaude") has a profound effect upon Claire's personal and social development. It is in Cambridge that she discovers the outside world as well as the world of the mind and learns standard French, the *joual* of her mother's generation having completely disappeared. It is interesting that in *L'Elan d'Amérique* it is the female protagonist, Claire, who is the intellectual and it is the male protagonist, Antoine, who personifies animal instinct and the basic impulses of human life. This situation is in sharp contrast to that in *Poussière sur la ville*, where it is Alain who is the intellectual and Madeleine who is the wild and uninhibited creature of instinct. In addition to her intellectual education, Claire also comes into contact in Cambridge with the decadent America of the 1960's, personified by Allan, a cruel, arrogant, and suicidal sociology student who exemplifies "une jeune Amérique lancée à la conquête de la mort." From this point in her life, Claire will always be associated with that which is decaying in American society. She is permanently tainted with her Americanness — as Antoine tells her, she is "pire qu'une Anglaise. Une Américaine!"

SOON AFTER HER YEARS IN CAMBRIDGE (it is not clear exactly when), Claire's parents are killed in an automobile accident. Like almost all of Langevin's characters, she becomes an orphan, cut off completely from her cultural heritage (she has already been forced to re-learn French as a foreign lan-

guage). It is at this point that she becomes totally Americanized, marries Mr. Peabody, whose company owns the seaside cottage at Suoco Pool (as well as the chalet in northern Québec) and, like so many characters in recent Canadian fiction, goes into "un exil sans retour." It is significant that Claire's marriage to Mr. Peabody is a business arrangement, "un mariage d'affaires." Because of her association with Peabody and her almost entirely American background, Claire embodies all the negative aspects of American culture, particularly as it has influenced Québec society. In her relationship with Antoine, who is the embodiment of traditional Québec values, can be seen an allegorical confluence of the two cultures which does not fail to have disastrous results.

Three months later, Claire spends the month of October (one year before the October during which the last events of the novel take place) in the large slate-grey cottage at the seaside near Suoco Pool. Throughout the novel, constant reference is made to this cottage, to the nearby beach and lighthouse and to the sea. In Claire's mind, the sometimes hazily recollected memories of the weeks spent with her lover David in this seaside resort are of supreme importance, for this time period represents for her all that she has lost: her innocence, her freedom and David himself, who drowned (or committed suicide) in the sea. This fog-bound coastal location is above all a living symbol of purity: "Les grandes marées d'octobre restituent au sable blanc sa virginité des premiers âges." The events which unfold during this first October of peace and happiness repeatedly reach the surface of Claire's consciousness, as she remembers "son premier jour de deuil, en octobre, il y a un an," "un passé tellement proche qu'il est impossible qu'il ne lui appartienne plus." For Claire, this "daughter of the sea," the sea represents a freedom which she can no longer attain. The physical (and spiritual) distance which separates this New England coastal resort from the chalet in northern Québec in which she finds herself in this "second" October, the one in which she has met and slept with Antoine, is the point where time and space converge in *L'Elan d'Amérique* in a highly significant manner. Only a year has passed, but Claire has come a long way, both physically and spiritually, from the happy days of her affair with David.

Thus, Claire now finds herself in northern Québec, in a hunting chalet near a lake, alone with Antoine. It is the second October, the "present" of the beginning of the novel, the point at which the destinies of Claire and Antoine have converged. To Claire, it is as if the continent has shifted beneath her and she finds herself "étrangère et seule avec l'autre, à mille milles de la mer, dans cette cabine de douche. . . ." It is at this point in time and in this place that the final tragic events of Claire's life are to take place. A profound sense of loss of freedom, symbolized by the great distance from the sea, has made Claire more depressed than usual:

> [Mr. Peabody] n'avait plus qu'à la priver de la mer et à la mettre au continent sec et à l'eau douce de ce lac où, une fois encore, octobre a laissé couler un dernier or pâle pour le recouvrir aussitôt d'une cendre glacée.

The tundra surrounding the hunting chalet to which she has accompanied her husband on a hunting trip is referred to several times as a sea,[4] but it is a tideless sea, which cannot wash away the past, as had the North Atlantic at Suoco Pool. Feeling alienated, "une Américaine" despite her French-Canadian ancestry, Claire has come to know Antoine, the other main character of the novel, whose past is also revealed to the reader by the technique of interior monologue and whose experiences are related, much more directly than are those of Claire, to the parts of Québec (especially Montréal) where he has lived and to specific events in recent Québec history.

IN THE CHARACTER OF ANTOINE can be seen the confrontation between two fundamentally different aspects of Québec culture. Brought up to fend for himself as a lumberjack, hunter, and *coureur de bois*, Antoine represents the old Québec, the Québec in which individual physical prowess was the only means of survival in a hostile environment. This archetypal Québec hero, born and raised in the forest, comes into contact with modern, industrialized and Americanized Québec in Montréal, the meeting place of Claire's America and his own, rapidly disappearing traditional values. It is in Montréal that Antoine becomes aware that his world, his Québec, is on the point of extinction and that nothing will ever be the same. In cosmopolitan Montréal, he feels out of place. "C'est quasiment l'étranger," as his brother Hercule puts it. His contemporaries are members of a lost generation, "tous fils des bois, nés vagabonds et libres, ... marins sans voiles au fond d'un océan sans cartes." In his life time, Antoine has seen a complete transformation of Québec society:

> On vous a fait éclater au moins un siècle d'histoire en plein visage. De la culture des cailloux à la société d'abondance en une génération.

Montréal, where Antoine meets the Peruvian exotic dancer María, is both physically and symbolically the half-way point between Claire's urban America (New England) and Antoine's land of freedom, the northern tundra of Québec. As in many of Langevin's novels, space takes on, in the case of Montréal, a symbolic dimension which is one of the keys to the meaning of the novel.

The historical events of the 1960's and 1970's which form the background of Antoine's remembered experiences in Montréal, this great manifestation of the decay of traditional Québec society, are presented in such a way that it is obvious that the tragedy which befalls Antoine, and the moose to which he is often com-

pared, are linked to the tragic fate of contemporary Québec. In *L'Elan d'Amérique*, there is a very close relationship between historical time and the fictional time-frame of the novel. To a much greater extent than in his previous novels, Langevin has attempted to relate the fictitious events of *L'Elan d'Amérique* to the historical events which had a profound effect on the evolution of modern Québec. One of Antoine's earliest memories of the time he spent in Montréal is an obvious allusion to the FLQ bombing of mailboxes in Westmount in the early 1960's: "Une bombe pète dans une boîte aux lettres, chez les Anglais." Antoine's memories of Expo '67 are particularly vivid, as it was Expo which made him aware of the outside world and at the same time of the fragility of *his* world, Québec before the Quiet Revolution:

> Tout cela, c'est Montréal, l'étranger, l'endroit où il avait découvert avec accablement et stupeur, l'année de l'exposition universelle, à voir tant de touristes de toutes les couleurs et toutes les langues . . . à quel point lui et les siens étaient fragiles. . . .

By far the most important event in recent Québec history which Antoine experienced directly was the October crisis of 1970, when the fragility of his world became even more apparent:

> Antoine regarde, écoute, dans une incrédulité totale. Ce sont vraiment des étrangers. Il n'a lu que des mots anglais sur les tuniques. L'exposition universelle à l'envers. . . .

Undermined by the massive American influence which Claire represents, Antoine's Québec is, like himself, on the verge of annihilation.

In Langevin's eyes, what has happened to Antoine and to the world he has known is part of a phenomenon which extends far beyond the borders of Québec. In *L'Elan d'Amérique*, the primary function of María del Perú, the exotic dancer Antoine met in Montréal, is to remind the reader that the exploitation and cultural contamination which Québec has suffered at the hands of its American neighbours have also affected the rest of the hemisphere. María, like Antoine, is the victim of forces far stronger than the desire for freedom. María's name is significant not only because it evokes, ironically, the Virgin Mary, but also because the original name of the city of Montréal was Ville-Marie. An additional link between the fates of Antoine and Maria and their respective worlds is expressed in the form of frequent allusions to the condor, the South-American bird which, like the moose, has always been a powerful symbol of freedom. When the moose of the title is killed from a helicopter by Mr. Peabody, Antoine realizes that his world is at an end,

> . . . que la ville et ses femelles, si lointaines soient-elles, ont, depuis longtemps, conquis le monde, et que le Pérou, si inaccessible soit-il, et le condor, si haut, et le poisson et Maria, si vifs, n'échapperont jamais aux millions de becs avides. . . .

The social and political changes which Langevin is describing in *L'Elan d'Amérique* are also taking place far outside the confines of Québec.

This brings us to what is by far the most moving and dramatic scene of the novel, the killing of the moose with a semi-automatic rifle, an event which shocks Antoine and proves to him that he is powerless to overcome the forces which are encroaching on his world. The death of the moose is presented as an apocalyptic event, signalling the end of the world: "L'échine du mâle se rompt dans un beuglement de fin du monde. . . ." The entire forest seems to react to this crime against Nature, to this transgression of all the laws of the tundra:

> c'est toute la forêt qui hurle, des pierres à la cime des arbres, et le bouillonnement du lac qui s'offre tout grand devant le canot dans une chute de vent verticale qui le projette à folle allure sur l'écume noire, toute la forêt qui s'ouvre dans un déchirement de fin du monde. . . .

For Langevin, this event symbolizes everything which has happened to Québec, everything which has transformed Antoine's world into that of Claire. Even more than the October Crisis, this tragic event shows that there can be no turning back — the tide has turned and Québec has lost its battle for cultural survival.[5]

Following the death of the moose, the destinies of Claire and of Antoine are also sealed. Unable to continue to exist, Claire commits suicide by jumping through the open door of the Cessna, and drowns in the lake, seeking the same fate as that of David, one year earlier. From the point of view of time, the novel ends soon after it began, the previous lives of Claire and Antoine having passed before their respective consciousnesses, but the time elapsed being only half a day. It can therefore be said that the structure of *L'Elan d'Amérique* is essentially circular. At the beginning of the novel, Claire had felt relaxed in the shower, "tous muscles relâchés, absente à elle-même, elle flotte dans un temps circulaire. . . ." The fluctuation between past and present and particularly between "this" October and the October of the previous year in New England has revealed to the reader much about Claire's past and the various places in which the drama of her life was carried out. In the case of Antoine, the future is even bleaker than it would have been for Claire. The death of the moose has signalled the end of his world, the end of freedom, the end of the road.

Unlike his earlier, more traditional novels, Langevin's *L'Elan d'Amérique* is a *nouveau roman*,[6] a novel whose structure is not based on the narration of a linear series of events but rather on the interrelationships between time and space, between specific points in fictional and historical time and real and imaginary places. Traditional narrative forms had sufficed to depict the old Québec, the Québec of Antoine's youth, but to evoke the present situation in Québec and the dissolution of traditional values, Langevin chose a radically new form of fiction.[7] In *L'Elan d'Amérique*, his vision of the cultural dilemma of Québec in the years

following the October crisis is presented in a form which is at least as disturbing to the reader as his pessimistic view of the problems faced by Quebecers in the early 1970's. Through the symbolic use of the physical settings in which the action of the novel takes place and by creating close links between fictional time ("le temps de la fiction") and historical time, Langevin has produced a powerful novel, whose merits far outweigh the difficulties which the reader initially faces. Like any good novel, *L'Elan d'Amerique* is meant to be read several times, for it is only through re-reading that the meaning of the novel emerges.

NOTES

[1] The problems encountered by the reader of *L'Elan d'Amérique* are well summarized in Gérard Bessette's long review article entitled "*L'Elan d'Amérique* dans l'oeuvre d'André Langevin" in *Livres et auteurs québécois* (1972), pp. 12-33. As Bessette points out, "sa compréhension, même sommaire, exige une seconde lecture," p. 12.

[2] In an interesting study of narrative techniques in *L'Elan d'Amérique*, Denis Saint-Jacques points out that in this novel there is much which is not obvious on first reading, "le hasard de la fiction ne pouvant être qu'un subterfuge ..." (Denis Saint-Jacques, "*L'Elan d'Amérique*," *Études littéraires*, 6, no. 2 [août 1973], 262).

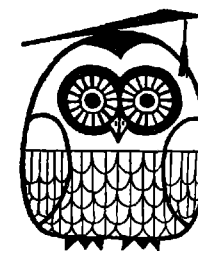
[3] André Langevin, *L'Elan d'Amérique* (Montréal: Cercle du livre de France, 1972).

[4] For example, "cette mer rocheuse" (p. 106); "la mer plate de la toundra" (p. 181).

[5] As André Gaulin points out, the killing of the moose also has metaphysical implications: "Tous les personnages sont saisis de vertige devant cette fin de monde.... Le monde est d'autant plus absurde que l'homme apparaît comme le plus précieux collaborateur de la mort." (André Gaulin, "La Vision du monde d'André Langevin," *Etudes littéraires*, 6, No. 2 [août 1973], 165).

[6] "La structure de *L'Elan d'Amérique* ... pourrait en effet être assimilé au nouveau roman, car ce récit rompt avec la convention romanesque." (Gabrielle Pascal, *La Quête de l'identité chez André Langevin* [Montréal: Aquila, 1976], p. 3).

[7] "Avec l'âge, les jeux de la fiction deviennent savants chez Langevin" (Saint-Jacques, p. 257).



LE FANTASTIQUE CHEZ ROCH CARRIER ET JACQUES BENOIT

Estelle Dansereau

Il n'est ni nécessaire, ni suffisant de peindre l'extraordinaire pour atteindre au fantastique. L'événement le plus insolite, s'il est seul dans un monde gouverné par les lois, rentre de lui-même dans l'ordre universel.

Sartre, Situations *I.*

LE PRIX DE LA PROVINCE DE QUÉBEC dans la section des oeuvres de l'imagination a été accordé en 1965 à Roch Carrier pour *Jolis Deuils* et en 1968 à Jacques Benoit pour *Jos Carbone*. Depuis chacun a démontré dans ses autres oeuvres le souci de la réalité et du fantastique. Les critiques ont caractérisé les oeuvres de Carrier "réalisme fantastique"; celles de Benoit "réalisme macabre," "histoires rocambolesques" et "récit fantastique." Bien que les appellations soient diverses, deux mots dominent: réalisme et fantastique, traits qui paraissent contradictoires. C'est par la combination qu'en fait l'auteur que ces deux peuvent caractériser un seul texte. Chacun sait que toute oeuvre littéraire est une création de l'imagination. Et dans le domaine du fantastique, l'écrivain peut introduire des événements ou des personnages irréels, bizarres ou surnaturels qui côtoient des événements banals ou ordinaires. Tout événement qui ne suit pas les lois naturelles connues, qui viole nos habitudes, peut être qualifié de fantastique. Les moyens dont se sert l'écrivain pour intégrer le fantastique au texte et l'effet produit par ce procédé font partie de notre appréciation globale de l'oeuvre.[1] Un des moyens les plus souvent utilisés au vingtième siècle est le grotesque qui est caractérisé par l'exagération bizarre qui peut à la fois susciter le rire et choquer le lecteur par sa vérité.

En Amérique Latine, les oeuvres d'écrivains tels que Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez et José María Arguedas ont popularisé le réalisme magique jusqu'à ce qu'il devienne synonyme du nouveau roman hispano-américain. Ainsi, le traitement subjectif de la réalité crée un effet de mystère, de magie. Le tout fonctionne comme une métaphore qui traduit la réalité turbulente d'une société nouvelle. De même au Québec, les innovations de Carrier ont été accueillies comme un souffle nouveau, un espoir de créativité et d'imagination, une ouverture sur la littérature. Les oeuvres de Benoit, moins accessibles et plus étranges, sont également remarquables pour leur authenticité et leur originalité. Afin de le démontrer, nous limiterons notre étude à quelques oeuvres choisies pour leur em-

ploi du fantastique tel que nous l'entendons: *Il est par là, le soleil* et *Le Jardin des délices* de Roch Carrier, et *Patience et Firlipon* et *Les Princes* de Jacques Benoit.

Carrier et Benoit présentent dans leurs romans un monde à la fois absurde et cruel; un monde où la transcendance, même l'évasion, sont impossibles. Mais l'emploi qu'ils font du fantastique dans leurs oeuvres est si différent qu'il est nécessaire de discuter de chaque auteur individuellement. Carrier se sert de trois formes du fantastique: le rêve, les personnages étranges et l'exagération d'événements.

Le rêve, selon Franz Hellens,est un phénomène générateur du fantastique réel.[2] Selon ce procédé, un élément qui figure dans la narration est isolé et sa valeur symbolique est développée dans le rêve. Dans *La Guerre, Yes Sir!*, le cercueil de Corriveau, dans lequel Henri voit tout son village pénétrer, devient symbole de la mort, de cette mort qui, un jour, unifiera les québécois et les soldats anglais. L'homme-bottine, dans le rêve d'*Il est par là, le soleil,* devient le symbole du travailleur opprimé qui est assujeti par son travail. La bottine offre à Philibert, dans le rêve, la revanche qu'il ne peut pas se permettre dans la réalité: "Je me suis élancé comme un sabot de cheval et je me suis enfoncé entre les fesses du contremaître. Je me suis réveillé à ce moment-là. J'étais plus une bottine, mais un homme. Mais je sentais encore le cuir. . . ."[3] Le rêve devient, non une vision gratuite, mais un moyen par lequel l'auteur peut démontrer sa perception du monde québécois: une position sociale inférieure qui n'est que prison et angoisse.

La Neuvième Merveille du Monde est presque le seul personnage, dans les romans de Carrier, qui s'approche du fantastique. Ce colosse, cet homme d'acier, lance un défi à ceux qui payent pour le frapper. Mais ce géant, peut à peu, s'humanise: Boris commence à être sensible aux douleurs, le sang coule et enfin il doit s'échapper. Boris est, selon Philibert, une richesse naturelle qu'on a trop exploitée et qu'on a enfin perdue.[4]

Ce sont, cependant, les événements bizarres qui caractérisent l'emploi du fantastique dans les romans de Carrier. Fidèle à son style dans la trilogie, l'humour noir et le grotesque abondent. Carrier se sert de représentations illogiques pour souligner certains thèmes. Le Portuguais, par exemple, qui a osé s'offrir en sacrifice, représente l'homme pensant qui ne peut plus continuer à participer au viol de la terre québécoise: "Si on était pas fous, on ferait comme le Portuguais, et toute cette baptême de ferraille qu'on est en train de tricoter pour les riches serait arrosée d'une pluie de viande humaine hachée à la dynamite."[5] La réalité sociale, présentée sous une forme si brutale, ne peut que choquer et éveiller le lecteur.

Le deuxième événement insolite est introduit lors de la mort de Philibert. L'auteur permet au lecteur de partager la douleur de Philibert: le sang qui coule "comme un fleuve"[6] suggère une immolation nécessaire pour la rédemption du peuple québécois:

> Le sang coule sur les montagnes, arrache les villages, innonde la ville; la mer ouvre de grands yeux éraillés.

> Le sang brûle les moissons, emporte les arbres et les pierres, déracine les gratte-ciel, Phil ne peut plus lutter, tant d'efforts l'ont épuisé, un homme seul ne peut rien, il ferme les yeux, il serre les lèvres, ramène les bras le long de son corps et accepte de se noyer sans regret ni colère. Il n'a plus la force de refuser.[7]

Donc, Philibert, par cette présentation symbolique de sa mort, marque la fin d'un Québec passé. Un nouveau Québec doit naître: "Il est par là, le soleil." Cette dernière pensée de Philibert promet la fin de la souffrance, de l'humiliation et de l'exploitation et annonce l'avènement d'une ère plus généreuse. Le milieu baroque ainsi créé complète les innombrables images grotesques et satiriques permettant ainsi à l'auteur d'évoquer symboliquement les maux sociaux avant le réveil.

Tandis que les personnages et les événements d'*Il est par là, le soleil* étaient encore essentiellement réalistes, le monde présenté dans *Le Jardin des délices* est désordonné, tumultueux; les hommes agissent instinctivement plutôt que logiquement. Les villageois s'affolent quand ils entendent les paroles de J. J. Bourdage qui leur promet:

> L'paradis terrestre, c'était pas dans le passé; c'est devant nous. La science le prouve. Sortez de votre maudit passé.... Débarrassez-vous du passé. L'avenir est icitte. Y a plus d'or dans vos montagnes qu'y a d'enfants dans votre descendance.[8]

Le roman entier joue sur la dichotomie or/amour et tous les personnages agissent en fonction de l'un ou de l'autre. Pour les villageois, la promesse de l'or représente la naissance, le commencement d'une vie douce et confortable. Par contre, le notaire, qui a toujours eu de l'or, cherche l'amour. La jungle romanesque qui s'anime est riche en fantastique, en grotesque, en satire, en personnages. Ainsi, Démeryse, qui ne peut pas se lever depuis sept ans, délivre miraculeusement du feu l'or de l'église; le nouveau professeur lance, par ses rituels sensuels, l'invasion par les zizis japonais; Gros-Douillette qui a mis le feu à l'église, est brûlé vivant dans cette église qu'il avait déjà incendiée; les villageois brûlent leurs granges afin de rompre avec le passé; et ils parient sur l'or qu'ils n'ont pas encore trouvé. Ces actes illogiques accentuent le tragi-comique du roman comme le soulignent les paroles du jeune étudiant sobre: "Tu viens acheter not'patrimoine, terre par terre pour le restituer au grand capitalisme tentaculaire et multinational. Bourdage, t'es un traître à la nation québécoise."[9] L'absence de charité, de générosité et d'amour dans le roman met en valeur les dernières paroles du notaire: "L'or, c'est de la lumière, n'est-ce pas? Si vous ne pouvez pas trouver la lumière sur la terre, vous ne pourrez pas la trouver dans la terre."[10] Symboliquement, Bourdage est crucifié et transporté hors du village sur le toit de sa Cadillac blanche. Cet acte inhumain devient ainsi l'indication d'une action positive, du refus de se laisser exploiter.

ALORS QUE CHEZ CARRIER le fantastique est toujours accompagné du grotesque, chez Benoit, au contraire, il fonctionne plutôt comme struc-

ture. Dans son premier roman *Jos Carbone*, l'auteur crée un milieu idyllique: la forêt où habitent des êtres qui cherchent la solitude et l'harmonie. Ce n'est que lorsque la réalité pénètre cette idylle que la violence domine. Benoit crée souvent des personnages irréels ou excessifs; il fabrique une réalité à la fois étrange et connue.

Dans *Patience et Firlipon*, un roman d'amour, Benoit se sert de la structure du conte de fées tout en situant l'action non dans un passé héroïque mais dans un futur concret. Cependant, tous les événements sont contrôlés par un réalisme exigeant, suscitant une ambiguité frappante. Patience, la belle innocente, ne possède pas une beauté extraordinaire: elle est décrite trop minutieusement pour exercer le charme et le mystère de la Belle des contes:

> Sa peau était blanche, crémeuse, ses cheveux, blonds et touffus, tombaient librement sur ses épaules.... Ou plutôt, elle était belle, mais de cette beauté émouvante, chaude et fondante, qui fait dire d'une femme qu'elle a l'air confortable.... Les seins, la taille, les bras, les jambes, le ventre étaient à l'avenant, bien formés mais sans rien de vraiment remarquable. Musclée, mais à point, rondelette, mais à peine, c'était, comme on dit, une femme *mangeable*.[11]

Mais déjà au début du roman, Patience perd cette pureté et cette innocence qui la distinguaient des autres femmes, devenant, au cours du récit, de plus en plus ordinaire. Firlipon Roger, l'amant, nommé aussi "le Gorille," "n'était pas bel homme, loin de là."[12] Ce héros ne possède ni la beauté, ni la grâce typiques des chevaliers des contes de fées; son aspect physique contredit plutôt son rôle d'amant irrésistible:

> La charpente était massive, presque démesurée, les épaules, plus larges que le tronc était long, faisaient penser à une porte de coffre-fort, les traits avaient quelque chose épais et de lourd qui l'aurait fait passer pour un démesuré, n'eussent été deux yeux noirs au regard perçant.[13]

Firlipon n'est ni brave, ni héroïque: il est un séducteur brutal. Son travail, la préparation d'une modeste plaquette historique qui l'oblige à consulter cent quarante-trois tonnes de livres, est banal, inutile et ridicule.

Après avoir séduit Patience, profitant d'un soir où celle-ci regardait le feu d'artifice qui l'avait mise dans un état d'excitation, Firlipon tombe finalement amoureux. Au lieu de parcourir le monde à la recherche d'exploits héroïques afin d'être digne de sa belle innocente, Firlipon parcourt la ville, détruisant tout, violant et battant des inconnus, échappant aux centaines de gendarmes qui le poursuivent. La déclaration d'amour qui suit ces événements annonce non l'extase du couple, mais le retour au banal et au quotidien, un quotidien presque grotesque. L'exemple le plus poussé est le mariage des amants qui devient une occasion d'excès à la Fellini et au cours duquel le marié charme deux femmes dans la cuisine tandis que la mariée est violée par les locataires. Dans le dernier chapitre, le

rêve de Firlipon, peuplé de bêtes fabuleuses et d'une femme blonde, contraste avec le réalisme exigeant du conte.

En bref, Benoit a réussi à respecter la forme du conte de fées tout en violant le contenu traditionnel. C'est par le moyen d'un style plein de grâce et de pudeur, par lequel il décrit scrupuleusement les actions et les pensées des personnages que Benoit joue avec la forme traditionnelle et qu'il fait la satire implicite de la société actuelle.

Tandis que dans *Les Voleurs* Benoit nous donne la déformation, ou le contraire, du *bildungsroman* traditionnel, dans *Les Princes*, nommé d'après le traité politique de Machiavel, il propose ce qui d'abord parait être une utopie. Il crée dès le début une société insulaire, bien hiérarchisée, peuplée d'êtres insolites: des Hommes Bleus, des monstres, des chiens qui parlent et se gouvernent. Bien que ces êtres soient étranges, Benoit, en adoptant un style sobre et rigoureux, semble, au début, jouer le rôle d'historien. Il crée pour nous un monde nouveau et en présente le milieu, les habitants, les coutumes, et les lois. Egalement, la carte de la ville qui précède le roman, indiquant quartiers, rivières, voie, et château, donne plus de crédibilité au récit. Les chiens sont des êtres pensants qui font partie d'une hiérarchie sociale bien définie, dont l'instance suprême est le Grand Conseil. Ainsi le fantastique est enté sur la réalité.

Les maximes de la morale traditionnelle, établies dans le roman sous l'égide de "la loi," ne sont pas respectées. Un acte, interdit par cette loi, déclenche l'action: Ronule, un des Hommes Bleus, tue un chien et le dévore. Le fantastique, qui joue un rôle dans la création de cette société utopique, ne tarde pas cependant à être supplanté par la réalité. François Ricard a perçu avec exactitude le passage du fantastique au réel et l'effet de ce mouvement sur le lecteur:

> Le dépaysement, qui a d'abord pu rassurer le lecteur en lui permettant de maintenir entre lui-même et ce monde de cruauté une confortable distance, ne conserve pas bien longtemps cette vertu protectrice. L'univers romanesque, en effet, a beau être aussi étrange et irréel qu'on voudra, sa description et la narration des événements qui s'y produisent se fait avec tant de justesse et tant de cohérence, et sur un ton si uni et si dépourvu de tout vain éclat comme de toute intention d'épater, que l'invraisemblance, au bout de quelques pages, devient de moins en moins évidente, de moins en moins sensible, au point que le lecteur a tôt fait de l'oublier presque complètement et de se laisser convaincre par cette histoire farfelue comme par le plus réaliste des récits.[14]

Il n'y a aucune indication de la part de Benoit, ni de la part des personnages, que le récit est invraisemblable. Tout événement, tout illogique qu'il paraisse, est présenté comme un fait indisputable et donc doit être accepté comme tel par le lecteur. L'utopie, annoncée dans le deuxième chapitre, sombre dans le désordre le plus inhumain. Le règne du plus fort, désigné dans le roman par le décret non-officiel "dévore ou tu seras dévoré," rappelle la déformation moderne du traité politique de Machiavel. Poussé à son degré extrême, cette règle n'apporte pas de règne uni

et puissant, mais la destruction presque totale des chiens et celle de l'ingénieur du massacre, Kroknell. Bien que cette oeuvre appartienne au genre fantastique, elle ne respecte pas cependant un élément essentiel: ce qui Irwin appelle le jeu.[15] Pour Benoit, le jeu, si jeu il y a, est en réalité un stratagème qui cache des intentions sérieuses: à savoir, une leçon morale.

La tâche de l'écrivain québécois, telle que l'explique Benoit, serait de "tracer un portrait vrai des Québécois, un portrait qui fasse la part des choses, qui rende compte de nos plaies comme de nos zones de chair intactes."[16] Il est nécessaire de dire la vérité sur l'homme québécois afin de "précipiter l'effritement de cette image avilissante de nous-mêmes que nous avons héritée de nos maîtres, c'est hâter notre libération à tous."[17] Benoit, comme Carrier, conçoit la tâche de l'écrivain en fonction de la purification, de l'exorcisme que peut exercer un réalisme impitoyable. Chez Carrier, le grotesque et le fantastique sont des procédés littéraires essentiels à la démystification de la société québécoise. Le grotesque distingue les traits mythifiés du Québécois tandis que le fantastique souligne les actes et les perceptions qui, en réalité, ne sont pas encore réalisables mais qui annoncent déjà un Québécois libre et sûr de lui-même. Dans les oeuvres de Benoit, le fantastique devient plus compliqué car il pénètre la structure même du récit. François Ricard a bien reconnu la discipline et la maîtrise du métier que possède Benoit: "Qu'est-ce, en effet, que *Les Princes* sinon l'élaboration d'un vaste univers imaginaire dont toute la cohérence et le fonctionnement dépendent à chaque instant de certaines conventions préalables, rigoureusement établies au début de la narration et respectées ensuite de façon quasi systématique?"[18] Le thème structural du roman est complété par la forme littéraire elle-même. L'oeuvre qui en résulte demande du lecteur une sensibilité et une connaissance peu ordinaires. C'est pourquoi l'oeuvre de Carrier continue à charmer de nombreux lecteurs; elle leur est plus accessible. Les images grotesques, les événements fantastiques ne masquent pas la narration; l'humeur, bien que passager, rachète un récit qui risque de déprimer complètement. Dans les romans de Benoit, au contraire, rien n'intervient pour réduire chez le lecteur l'intensité et l'accablement de sa vision du monde.

NOTES

[1] Franz Hellens souligne ceci: "comme le poétique, le fantastique n'est qu'un des caractères de l'oeuvre littéraire. C'est une façon de voir, de sentir, d'imaginer," dans *Le Fantastique réel* (Bruxelles: Sodi, 1967), p. 11.

[2] Ibid., p. 61.

[3] Roch Carrier, *Il est par là, le soleil* (Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1970), p. 65.

[4] Ibid., p. 109.

[5] Ibid., p. 123.

[6] Ibid., p. 135.

[7] Ibid., p. 136.

[8] Roch Carrier, *Le Jardin des délices* (Montréal: La Presse, 1975), p. 8.

[9] Ibid., p. 174.
[10] Ibid., pp. 209-10.
[11] Jacques Benoit, *Patience et Firlipon* (Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1970), p. 11.
[12] Ibid., p. 13.
[13] Ibid.
[14] "Deux romanciers de trente ans," *Liberté*, 16, no. 2 (1974), 95-96.
[15] W. R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 190.
[16] "La Tâche du romancier," *Liberté*, 13, no. 2 (1971), 72.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ricard, p. 97.

THE AL PURDY POEM IN THE ATHENS ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM:

Douglas Barbour

another too long hot day in Athens & im unhappy
with the place these people not the greeks i know
in books or on Kriti not know but meet feeling
somehow safely at home not at home
but feeling like that not here Athens
is out to get me my tourist drachmae
till we enter the relative coolness of
the archeological museum

wander among the statues & jewelry the
armour of too many ancient wars corpses
fed back to earth their coverings only
to be dug up for this display

& then in one room
some perfect marble physiques behind me
i find it:
on the wall a single arm the hand
gesticulating finger lifted (no not that but)
as the man's rhetoric lifted the crowd

& so waking too early next morning
as the men yell to assemble the market
just behind our 'quiet in the centre of town' hotel
i know that arm was for someone yes

the al purdy dream poem announces
& yet you will have to do you know
what such a long lost arm would mean

& the al purdy dream poem begins to speak
of those centuries lost when the lost
arm gestured lonely deep in earth &
now it's in the open air (more or less)
but still alone
                not just the sculptor long dead
& unknown but the sculpture that
orator philosopher whomever hortative
before his audience &
there it is lonely thru the eons
that arm so full of human gesture

as the crowd rose & roared approval
the man's eyes bright with promise
(& the artist's too promising
what immortality to that famous speech
we never heard)
                only the al purdy dream poem
wandering too the world looking
for such signs of a human past
broken as all people are broken
by the earth which crushes stone or smooth
marble

        that arm spoke to me
or: the al purdy dream poem did

saying it is like that it is
always like that
drinking cold cretan wine in Aghia Galini
cold canadian beer in Ameliasburg
& wondering about the dark the arm
in the dirt now
speaking so softly i cant quite hear

so much is lost & yet so much
is found
        sometimes angrily awake
in a city you dislike & wont ever comprehend
too early in the hot morning
flies buzzing above you in the still dark room

june 1978

GUILT

The Prison of This World

Jennifer Waelti-Walters

IN ALL HER EARLY WORK, Marie-Claire Blais is fascinated by three major themes: sin, guilt and powerlessness, but nowhere are their roles in Quebec society schematised as clearly as in *The Execution* (1968),[1] her first play. On the surface *The Execution* is the story of an absurd and gratuitous murder set in a boys' boarding-school, and as such its action is brutally disconcerting in the manner of that of Gide's Lafcadio in *Les Caves du Vatican* and the theme of Camus' *Le Malentendu.* It is a very stylized piece, however, in which there is far too much discussion and too little action to provide a gripping drama. Clearly then it should be read otherwise and it seems, upon reflection, that the play is in fact a description and indictment of Quebec society, its values and above all its codes of behaviour both implicit and explicit.

The Execution presents a school run by monks — a society in which values are taught to men by men; a society controlled by the church and in which that church is felt as the dominating force. It is, however, a force which remains invisible. This is thus a male society to which women are extraneous. Indeed women appear very briefly in the play in the roles traditionally attributed to them by the Church: mother and sister — virgin nun (and so sister in both her forms). In both cases they are used or perceived as victims of their men-folk and, true to tradition, adore their sons and brothers while being abused by them both materially and emotionally.

The character-structure of the play thus provides a parody of the world as described in Christian writing. And *The Execution* provides a parody of the church's teaching also. Eric, the child who is perfectly innocent is killed, Lancelot and D'Argenteuil, imperfect but innocent people, are punished and Kent, the truly wicked one amongst them, emerges unharmed. The question is, of course, whether divine justice is less imperfect than that of the Church which allows a Christ-figure to be sacrificed again within its very walls.

The Catholic church is therefore the major object of criticism. Its doctrine of original sin is illustrated and many aspects of guilt are explored, particularly in the discussions between Kent who instigated the murder and thus is morally guilty and Stéphane who carries it out and therefore is legally guilty. The concept of duality that is the very basis of Christian culture is drawn to our attention over

and over again, as the opposition between sin and purity, guilt and innocence, and the role of the Devil in Christianity are discussed and illustrated.

Above all, the Church is seen as a prison within whose walls everyone is held captive. The school is full of bars; the world outside is impassable because of the snow and cold; the prison in which Stéphane, Lancelot and D'Argenteuil are held is purely symbolic — a visual representation of the sin and guilt which bind mankind in its human condition.

Once again, however, the dual nature of occidental perception is made apparent as two kinds of freedom offer ways out of captivity: escape through death is given to the innocent Eric (escape presumably into paradise), and Kent creates a sort of liberty by his rejection of all human emotion and therefore his rejection of guilt also. He has freedom in this world but it is freedom of a faustian sort and in him we sense very occasionally a fear of death and ultimate judgment.

The physical prison thus represents the other prisons whose bars are more redoubtable: the prison of school, education and religious training, which is the prison of social values and that of the mind, the prison of irrational (and socially fostered) emotion. Both of these prevent the human being — in this case Stéphane — from taking effective action: Stéphane neither refuses to kill Eric nor accepts his responsibility in the murder and his attitude is reflected in his situation when no-one believes his confession. He stands between Christ (Eric) and the Devil (Kent) and proclaims his love of the former while doing the bidding of the latter — the perfect illustration of man the sinner.

This is a brutal and pessimistic play, for not only is man seen as a helpless sinner but all hope of human justice is denied in the face of man's imperfection and his weakness is illustrated at a social level also. Not only does the right-thinking Christian — Stéphane — give in to the wiles of the Devil, but on a lowlier plane all his liberal and right-thinking protestations collapse before the calculated ruthlessness of Kent. Here we have a lesson in the successfulness of naked power and cynicism over idealism and innocence. Power creates victims and men must choose which side of the struggle they will espouse. Stéphane, our "everyman," is caught not only in the combat of ideals between good and evil, but also in the practical struggle for success in an unjust world. His lesson is stark and hard: he can live or die, succeed or fail, be the aggressor or the victim, and, simultaneously, in the same struggle he can be wrong or right, guilty or innocent, sinful or pure. Yet the success of a martyr, which he tries to claim, is no longer to be had. In the world of *The Execution* strength goes with evil and with manliness, goodness is weak and attributed to women and children. (Eric is 14.) Men who espouse it are to be scorned. This is a curious code of behaviour to be found within a society that has as its totem a Good Man depicted in his deepest abjection as crucified victim, and it sets up an interesting dialectic with the previous code discussed here: that of man between God and Devil.

It would seem that the social structures created within a strong religious context have become empty of significance for society today and that power and the rhetoric of power are all.

THE ENTIRE PLAY TURNS on the exercise of cynical power which is manifest both in its character development and its overall structure. Kent controls everyone by his language, his skill in debate and personality. He compels Stéphane to kill Eric although in discussion the things he, Kent, stands for are no better and are considerably less acceptable than those defended by Stéphane. The difference lies in the orientation of the characters: Stéphane is a thinker, Kent a man of action. Their predilections provide a chart of standard oppositions as we see:

Stéphane	*Kent*
justice	violence
guilt	liberty
cemetery	forest
books	action
ideal murder	perverse murder
faithfulness	betrayal
obedience/hypocrisy	power
weakness	control
escape situation	revel in situation
die for others	die for self only
lucidness	will
extra-ordinary nature of action (expect world to be changed)	normality of action (maintain routine)
tormented	cold and hard
humiliated	proud

Stéphane is good, thoughtful, yet he vacillates because of his breadth of understanding. Kent is self-centred and willful. His energy is concentrated and directed to his ends. Hence he can move crowds and dominate individuals. Indeed, in a scene terrifyingly reminiscent of the power of the political and religious demagogues of history, he persuades all his classmates to assume the responsibility for Eric's murder. Only one of his fellows understands what he is doing: Lancelot says "Tu ne présides pas, tu écrases" and with fine irony Kent makes sure that it is he, Lancelot, who is accused of (Kent's) crime.

That this is a drama turning upon injustice and rhetoric is underlined by the references to *Phèdre* in whose name Eric is killed and to *Electre* which Hélène, Stéphane's sister, is reading at the end of *The Execution*. The structure of the play shows this power of language and the fundamental opposition between rhetoric

and justice very clearly as it moves through the same progression from false trial to transfer of guilt twice. The acts are perfectly parallel.

Act I		
Scene I	Scene II	Scene III
Choice of victim false trial	Discussion of guilt, etc.	Transfer of crime (1) physically to Lancelot (2) psychically to class
Act II		
Scene I, II and III	Scene IV and V	Scene VI and VII
Confessions	Discussion of innocence, evil, etc.	False guilt attributed

It is interesting to note that justice is not a major theme in this play, nor indeed is crime. The main spoken interest lies in the attribution or self-attribution of blame and an exploration of the subsequent sense of guilt. The play is a study in the making of a victim and in the maintenance of power.

There is, however, a third message transmitted implicitly in *The Execution*, not this time by the overt illustration of a set of values or code of behaviour but rather by the violation of a code of ideals. Here we leave the social plane as well as the religious one and enter the realm of literary convention. Eric is our Prince Charming, the beautiful, pure and innocent hero who should reign triumphantly over evil at the end of the story. Yet Eric is the victim of a senseless and bloody murder, and Lancelot is accused of the crime. If we consider first the names of these two characters we see that through their defeat the whole hero tradition, the chivalrous and godfearing search for the good, the beautiful and the holy is called into question, rejected as a code appealing to children only, and a code of ruthless expediency takes its place as man's mode of successful operation today.

The play offers the elaboration and juxtaposition of the three codes operating in a contemporary Catholic society: one provided by faith and dogma, one by daily experience, and the third by literature and tradition, and all brought together in a ritual of explanation.

Stéphane is a latter-day everyman or pilgrim trying to make progress in a confusing world — confusing because the three codes are incompatible. In the first he is caught between the Devil and Christ; his desire pulls him towards the good though he is not firm in his choice. In the second he can choose to be powerful or weak, aggressor or victim, and his inclination leads him to want to be in a position of strength. Finally, reader in a world of books, he must opt for reality or fairytale, cynicism or idealism, the world or the book in fact. Trapped, then, in his own indecision, seeing all too clearly the conflicting demands made upon him, he subsides into dream behind the bars of the prison society has created.

Here, as in Marie-Claire Blais' other works to this date, the ordinary person is

a helpless victim in an intolerable situation. Instructed by his education to believe in moral values, justice and aspiration to higher things (of which Eric and Lancelot are the symbols) he is also taught by his religion that he is a poor weak sinner who will always fall prey to the Devil. This creates an intellectual and emotional dilemma sufficient to incapacitate any thinking individual — hence Stéphane's indecisiveness. The interesting thing is that this double-bind situation is created and maintained by one and the same institution: the Church. In this way man can be held subservient, in a state of paralysing guilt at all times, blaming himself if he does not improve his situation and guilty of some kind of sin if he does.

Kent is therefore shown to be right in that the only way to break out of this vicious circle, this prison of the mind, is to take on the characteristics of the Devil and attack the Church and its God directly. His behaviour, however, is inhuman, dehumanizing and anti-humanistic; as such it is unacceptable to the likes of Stéphane. The prison is intolerable, the way of escape is unacceptable; it is no small wonder that Stéphane thinks of suicide. But there again he is caught in yet another trap because suicide is a mortal sin.

Guilt: the prison of this world. Stéphane-everyman feels guilty all the time he stays within its walls, and is guilty (according to the rules of the establishment at least) if he escapes them. As long as he accepts the ritual of blame he has been taught to practise, he will remain a prisoner, punished by others or by himself.

The Execution is a bitter analysis of the imprisonment, even the killing, of a people. It is a presentation of the spiritual and rational conflicts created by traditional dogma and education in a modern world and is cast in the form of an inverted fairy-tale — one in which the prince is defeated and the agents of wickedness triumph — in order to provoke an unconscious emotional reaction as well as an intellectual one.[2] The play is a revolt against the Roman Catholic Church and an indictment of its hold over a society, a society reduced to powerlessness by the opposing nature of the demands made daily upon each of its members. It is also a revelation of the power of rhetoric to create and transfer guilt; from Pontius Pilate to Phèdre and on to Kent, the path is clearly delineated and it is the men of the Church who have used it most frequently. Guilt is the weapon by which a Christian adversary may be rendered helpless. Once a sense of sin is bred into a people it has no way of escape: it is a nation of potential victims waiting for condemnation. *The Execution* is a title with a double-edge: execution takes many forms and here all of them are sinful.

NOTES

[1] Marie-Claire Blais, *L'Exécution* (Montreal: Editions du Jour, 1968).

[2] *La Belle Bête* works on this principle also. See J. Waelti-Walters, "Beauty and Madness in Marie-Claire Blais' *La Belle Bête*," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, no. 25/26 (1979), pp. 186-98.

VIOLENCE ET VIOL CHEZ AQUIN

Don Juan Ensorcelé

Françoise Maccabée Iqbal

LA VIOLENCE TRAVERSE L'OEUVRE AQUINIENNE sous divers masques. Empruntant principalement dans *Prochain Episode*[1] le visage de l'espionnage, du terrorisme et de la révolution, elle se réfère dans un premier temps transparent à une violence d'inspiration politique mue par un idéal social, dans un deuxième temps opaque, à une soif de vengeance contre le mal de vivre, la vie se résumant "à une reptation asthénique et à l'interminable expérimentation de l'ennui" (PE, p. 23). Dans *Trou de mémoire*,[2] la violence se drape dans une étoffe tissée des fils du cri, du blasphème, du discours indépendantiste, du viol, du suicide et de l'homicide, d'où elle participe de la violence verbale, sociale, physique et psychologique, sa fonction de catharsis et de revendication virile compensatoire étant ouvertement reconnue par le narrateur. Avec l'*Antiphonaire*[3] et *Neige noire*,[4] le costume se dépouille de sorte que seuls s'entrecroiseront désormais les trois fils du viol, du meurtre et du suicide, à la différence cependant que l'un optera pour la quantité, l'autre, pour la qualité, l'*Antiphonaire* multipliant les actes d'agression physique et psychologique, *Neige noire* se contentant du raffinement sadique.

Dans ce survol, deux éléments retiennent notre attention, l'un a trait au déplacement de la violence révolutionnaire vers le viol après *Prochain Episode*, l'autre, à ce qui en est la conséquence, la femme-victime. Dans chaque cas, néanmoins, le sacrifice demeure, sauf que le bouc-émissaire change: la femme vient occuper la place d'un peuple que la révolution rêvée, orgie de violence analogue à un bain de sang, aurait sûrement anéanti et non délivré eût-elle eu lieu. Il importe de souligner dès maintenant la fugacité du thème de la révolution politique chez Aquin, fugacité qui infère que la révolution ne saurait se réduire à cette connotation politique, ce que corrobore en somme l'absence de ce thème dans l'oeuvre d'imagination qui précède et qui suit *Prochain Episode*, à l'exception de quelques passages dans *Trou de mémoire*. Du reste, à leur sujet, le narrateur Magnant invite

à plusieurs reprises à une lecture au deuxième et au troisième degré, tantôt en comparant la "jouissance collective," que déclenche l'un de ses discours séparatistes, à un "viol impudique au terme duquel la partenaire multiple a échappé un cri rauque de plaisir" (TM, p. 45) et ce, d'autant que l'orateur précise que son glorieux discours n'était que manoeuvre d'un stratège en séduction féminine (TM, pp. 46-47), tantôt en confessant que c'est grâce au viol d'un nombre toujours croissant de belles inconnues qu'il finit par pouvoir s'identifier au révolutionnaire dont il projette l'image (TM, pp. 111-20). Enfin, mentionnons que Léandre Bergeron a déjà démystifié le révolutionnaire de *Prochain Episode* qui se mue, sous sa plume incisive et percutante, en "cowboy révolutionnaire."[5]

Cette présence passagère et particulière de la révolution suggère qu'un drame personnel et profond a pu, à la faveur de la crise nationale, se jouer au niveau de la collectivité, drame qui se déroule *sans éclat* dans le premier roman-"mémoires" et qui hante de ses sourds accords les fictions *autobiographiques* consécutives. Dans ces pages, nous nous mettrons à l'écoute de ce drame chiffré en quête de déchiffrement. Evoquer chiffre et déchiffrement, c'est convier au départ le mystérieux cryptogramme dont un héros a hérité à son insu (PE). Or, d'apparence anodine, le cryptogramme a de capital que son "amas informe de lettres majuscules" (PE, p. 21) reproduit les mots magiques d'une tablette d'envoûtement, laquelle servait dans la sorcellerie antique à vouer un ennemi ou un adversaire aux dieux infernaux.[6] Dès lors surgit une double interrogation, d'une part, quel est ce sortilège qui lie le héros aquinien? d'autre part, y a-t-il une filiation entre le maléfice et la violence à l'endroit de la femme? Nous chercherons à y répondre en explorant les méandres de la route qui porte les traces de la première femme-victime.

Ces traces, elles se trouvent dans *Prochain Episode* et la victime se présente sous les traits de l'épouse-mère que le héros a abandonné pour le moins subrepticement (pp. 60-63). Il est révélateur que l'ensorcelante K l'éclipse totalement car aux yeux du héros aquinien, qui est un émule de don Juan, seule importe l'amante-vamp à conquérir, aussi se détache-t-il infailliblement d'une conjointe 'légale' ou de celle qui risque de le devenir. Sur ce point, Magnant est typique:

> Quand Colette a divorcé ... j'ai distancé cette chère Colette de plus en plus.... Pourtant, elle avait procédé légalement contre Thomas à seule fin de faciliter notre rapprochement.... Mais — je ne sais trop pourquoi — sa manoeuvre m'a incliné à me séparer, moi aussi, mais d'elle! Je me suis alors engagé dans un nouveau combat.... Colette, Joan ou plutôt: Joan I, Joan II ... une femme et une autre ... (TM, pp. 59-60).

Ainsi, chaque roman se situant dans le prolongement de *Prochain Episode* quant à l'"histoire" de la femme désertée, y a-t-il sollicitation à ne pas passer outre sa première incarnation. Du reste, l'insistance dont témoigne la répétition de ladite histoire à l'intérieur du récit ne peut qu'attirer l'attention sur ce que recèlent ses deux versions.

La première narration, la plus brève, s'attarde surtout à la culpabilité d'un père déprimé. Celui-ci a lâchement fui ses deux enfants et il désire se suicider devant son incapacité à commettre un quelconque hold-up en vue de les secourir financièrement. La paternité ici invoquée a de marquant qu'elle est caractéristique de chacun des romans. Dans les uns et les autres se perçoit cette absence du père charnel en regard de la présence d'un père spirituel aux attributs solaires. En effet, pour ce qui est de son inexistence, le "père indigne et dégénéré" de *Prochain Episode* ne manque pas d'homologues: dans *Trou de mémoire*, le futur enfant de RR a un père qui se suicide avant sa naissance; dans l'*Antiphonaire*, d'une part, les hommes ont fait des enfants à Christine sans se soucier de leur progéniture ou de la mère, d'autre part, Albert Franconi vit séparé de ses deux filles depuis quatre ou cinq ans; dans *Neige noire*, Michel Lewandowski n'est près d'une de ses filles qu'à titre d'amant. Par contre, la glorification du père héroïque s'opère par l'identification du protagoniste à Balzac/Ferragus/de Heutz (PE), par celle de P. X. Magnant au soleil (TM), de Christine à Jules-César Beausang (A) ou encore de Nicolas Vanesse au conquérant Fortinbras et à l'auteur-géniteur (NN).

DANS LA PERSPECTIVE PSYCHANALYTIQUE, la substitution d'un héros au père appartient au passage de la latence à l'adolescence. Cette transition se désigne, sur le plan des fantasmes, "par un glissement de la valorisation d'une toute-puissance motrice, guerrière, marquée par l'analité, vers une dévalorisation massive de l'image paternelle à laquelle est substituée celle du héros. *Ce passage constitue une vraie révolution.*"[7] Cette époque est celle où le garçon devient membre d'un groupe dominé par la figure du meneur. Ce héros, réel ou imaginaire, devient centre d'attraction et d'intérêt pour ses fervents adeptes de sorte que l'investissement libidinal du Moi, que le Surmoi monopolisait auparavant, se déplace sur lui. En raison de ce déplacement, au cours duquel le meneur prend la place du Surmoi individuel, le cachet homosexuel prédomine dans la sexualité de groupe, ce qui n'élimine pas l'activité hétérosexuelle, mais une activité alors "brunie par l'analité" selon l'expression de Fain (d'après EA, pp. 18, 19, 22). Cet auteur précisera encore que la régression à ce passage de la latence à l'adolescence s'effectue chez certains adultes qui se sont mariés sans avoir vécu pleinement leur adolescence. Dans pareil cas, le mari échappe à la mainmise de son épouse maternelle et rend sa puissance à l'homme:

> Le meneur, fantasme commun, est "le mari dégagé de tout lien avec Bobonne (i.e., épouse/mère)." Sous son influence le groupe de mâles se dégage du matriarcat, pour un court moment. La femme jusque là toute-puissante au foyer va devenir substituivement la femme châtrée, mésestimée, qui va servir d'exutoire sexuel (EA, p. 22).

A la lueur de ces considérations et en tenant compte de la toile de fond du *groupe* révolutionnaire, la première version de l' "histoire alambiquée" contient les éléments de la phase initiale en ce qu'un mari se libère de l'épouse/mère toute-puissante:

> J'ai abandonné ma femme et mes deux enfants ... Je n'avais plus la force de continuer à vivre ... j'étais acculé au désastre, couvert de dettes et je n'étais plus capable de rien entreprendre, plus capable de rentrer chez moi ... j'ai fui comme un lâche (PE, p. 61).

La deuxième version, elle, fournira les éléments qui complètent le profil de la régression ci-haut esquissée. Dans cette version enrichie et commentée, de Heutz imite le héros-narrateur dans son rôle de pauvre hère. Son jeu de miroir captive et fascine le héros à tel point qu'il lui vaut de passer du rang ennemi à celui privilégié d'hypnotiseur:

> A vrai dire, la puissance de H. de Heutz m'envoûte encore plus qu'elle me terrifie. A qui ai-je affaire au juste? A l'ombre métempsychée de Ferragus? Cet inconnu que je regarde m'attire ... je reste pantelant devant lui, incapable de diriger mes pensées vers un autre objet et de combattre l'attirance morbide qu'il exerce sur moi (PE, pp. 87-88).

Cette citation et son contexte rendent manifeste le transfert de la puissance à l'homme et la mobilisation de la libido homosexuelle qui l'accompagne. Il est intéressant de noter que "c'est à partir de l'observation de cette foule à deux que constituent hypnotiseur et hypnotisé que (Freud) va comprendre les liens libidinaux unissant une foule" (EA, p. 21). Il est également intéressant de signaler que des émanations de l'analité, propre à la sexualité de groupe, se dégagent tantôt de l'orgie révolutionnaire (PE) ou du choeur orgastique des singes voyeurs et des partisans séparatistes (TM), tantôt de la prostitution d'Antonella et de Christine (A) ou des blessures et de la manducation de Sylvie mutilée (NN).

La poursuite de l'investigation nous ramène à la séance d'hypnose et à son interruption. Une complice, tapie dans l'ombre depuis le début à épier les mouvements du héros, intervient et sort de Heutz du pétrin, complice dont la chevelure rappelle étrangement celle de K. Cette position médiane de K entre les deux hommes nous projette devant un triangle, autre constante de l'oeuvre romanesque.[8] Ce premier triangle se compose d'une figure héroïque, d'une figure filiale et d'une déesse lieuse, laquelle débouche sur la mère en raison de sa filiation avec le pays.

L'image de la déesse lieuse rallie autour d'elle toutes les héroïnes aquiniennes, d'où l'emporte leur féminité nocturne qui est féminité inquiétante et redoutable. C'est sans doute dans la dernière personnification de cette déesse lieuse que ressort le mieux son association avec la mère. Beauté ensorcelante, Sylvie Vanesse est une jeune épouse qui a une liaison incestueuse avec son père. Frustré et jaloux, le mari Nicolas se vengera en immolant Sylvie en sacrifice, immolation qui s'accom-

plit selon un rituel sadique. Qu'il y ait un règlement de comptes sous-jacent au sadisme, c'est ce qu'illustre l'épisode répété du pendentif qui dévoile en Sylvie la manipulatrice, la castratrice et la fille de feu. En effet, la description de l'énigmatique pendentif au moyen duquel elle violente Nicolas insinue que l'éclat solaire, symbole mâle, est son apanage: "On distingue bien l'hyacinthe de Compostelle qui est le coeur obscur de cet ostensoir" (NN, p. 42).[9] Ainsi, l'homme lésé se transforme en justicier anxieux de rétablir l'identité usurpée et de soigner sa virilité blessée, ce faisant il métamorphose une Gaïa dévoreuse en mère nourricière, ce que transmettent la tétée et l'absorption de sa chair à l'apogée de l'acte sacrificiel (NN, pp. 237, 238, 242).

Les composantes jusqu'à maintenant discernées d'un père méprisable/figure héroïque, d'une mère castratrice/femme amante et d'un fils conquérant/fils conquis n'aboutiraient-elles qu'au classique triangle oedipien? En l'occurrence, chaque récit romanesque ne serait que variante de ce drame unique qui s'élabore dans les profondeurs? C'est à la rencontre de don Juan que ces questions acheminent car il faut, pour y répondre, marcher sur les pas du célèbre amoureux à l'exemple des divers protagonistes. Comparant don Juan au héros classique, Michel Fain constate de prime abord celui-là est un héros contradictoire par rapport à celui-ci:

> Alors que le héros classique né de l'imagination d'un poète se détachait de la masse pour assumer le rôle du père et ce, après avoir occis le monstre totémique, don Juan tue les pères réels à la douzaine et finit victime du monstre totémique. Il n'assume jamais le rôle paternel, il recommence encore et toujours le même scénario et ne connaît le repos que des mains du convive de pierre (EA, p. 30).

Par la suite, il induit que ses meurtres répétés symbolisent non pas une castration du père rival mais un refoulement de son existence, cette répétition visant à vrai dire "au maintien de la masse homosexuelle des frères" puisque par elle "il lutte pour que ces derniers ne créent pas la famille" (EA, p. 30).

Cette recherche du groupe homosexuel pénètre l'oeuvre romanesque pour parfois s'exposer avec transparence, parfois se dérober dans l'opacité. Evidente dans les couples lesbiens que forment Joan-RR (TM) et Eva-Linda (NN), elle sous-tend aussi la communion et la complicité entre les frères révolutionnaires comme entre H. de Heutz et le héros (PE), entre Ghezzo Quénum et Magnant (TM) comme entre Christine et Antonella (A), ou encore entre le cinéaste et les "spectateurs masqués" de *Neige noire*. Même l'oeuvre d'art a charge de véhiculer cette poursuite, ce qu'elle fait par le biais des deux guerriers qui ornent la commode en laque du Château d'Echandens (PE), par le tableau des deux *Ambassadeurs* de Holbein (TM) et par l'invention de la gémellation entre Fortinbras/Amlethe et Hamlet/Amlethus (NN).

Parce que le désir de don Juan de maintenir le groupe homosexuel des frères empêche la constitution du groupe familial, il prévient du coup "la renaissance d'un patriarcat rénové." Or, le patriarcat empêché signifie le règne du matriarcat,

d'où cet héros/anti-héros ne serait en somme qu'un instrument au service de la déesse-mère toute-puissante. Ainsi donc resurgit, par l'entremise du donjuanisme, le culte en existence à l'origine des temps "quand Dieu était femme," pour reprendre le titre d'un livre désormais célèbre (d'après EA, pp. 30-31).

C'est en étudiant le modèle parental d'un don Juan que Fain éclaire l'expulsion du père par le fils et le culte de la déesse-mère. Il montre que don Juan est un fils sans père. Comment? Parce que ce père lui-même se donne inconsciemment auprès de son fils le rôle d'un frère aîné, attribuant de la sorte celui de cadet à son fils. Comme pour l'aîné, le cadet est le fils bien-aimé de la mère, le père provoque son exclusion du couple formé par la mère et le fils:

> Réagissant alors en frère aîné impuissant et amer, (le père) assure non pas la défaite de l'image paternelle, mais sa quasi-inexistence ... ayant fait inconsciemment de ce fils-frère cadet un objet du Moi fascinant éliminant l'influence de son propre Surmoi, il lui confère de ce fait le statut de chef de clan disposant de la femme sans entrave (EA), p. 33).

Il est expressif que Fain relie à la situation de cadet, et par conséquent à don Juan, une aspiration manifeste chez Aquin: l'aspiration à être rédempteur. Selon lui, "la rédemption ressemble beaucoup à l'amour inconditionnel de la mère pour son dernier-né" (EA, p. 32) et ce, parce que Jésus représente à la fois l'enfant parthénogénétique de la Vierge (inexistence du père) et une forme juvénile de l'Image divine qui demeure éternellement âgée de trente-trois ans, âge donné à don Juan. Chez Aquin, le messianisme qui s'infuse dans les romans, après s'être proclamé sans équivoque dans le récit intitulé "Les Rédempteurs,"[10] s'avoue dès les écrits de jeunesse:

> Comme je n'avais pu trouver aucun endroit pour coucher dans tout Jérusalem, et qu'il se faisait tard, je me rendis au tombeau du Christ. Le soir était frais; j'entrai sous la crypte de Joseph d'Arimatie et refermai la pierre sur l'entrée ... D'abord on pense un peu à Jésus: je commençais même de m'émouvoir à son souvenir. Je me sentais des penchants de rédempteur, et, couché dans cette ambiance évangélique, il me semblait que je venais de mourir pour les péchés des hommes. Je fermai l'oeil en Dieu.[11]

Il ne saurait échapper que le thème des deux frères, tantôt invoqué, se glisse dans chaque fiction romanesque. C'est cependant dans *Neige noire* que ce drame du père-frère rejeté s'exprime avec le plus d'éloquence puisque c'est lui que les références à *Hamlet* et les extraits de la pièce mettent en scène. En effet, il y a, d'une part, le frère cadet Claudius qui a pris couronne et femme à son aîné, le père de Hamlet, d'autre part, Fortinbras qui, s'il échappe à la mort à titre de frère *jumeau* de Hamlet, n'y échappe plus lorsqu'il devient successeur de son père adoptif. L'échange et l'intrication des rôles de père et de frère aîné sont dans ce cas si poussés que le fils Fortinbras/Amlethe sera "par une ambiguïté de l'histoire ... enterré sous le nom de Fortinbras (père) dans son propre pays" (NN, p. 194).[12]

Après ce procès du père d'un don Juan, à la mère de comparaître, d'autant que la résurgence de son culte ci-haut indiquée met en relief que c'est elle, en dernière ressource, qui commande à son fils de dominer violemment la femme, domination que le héros aquinien s'assure en ayant recours à son viol ou à sa réduction à un objet éphémère de séduction. Fain allègue que "la mère d'un émule de don Juan n'est pas n'importe quelle mère" (EA, p. 33). Au départ, il y a en elle une femme qui, pour combler un manque narcissique de base, cherche un substitut phallique dans son mari. Elle tente donc de faire jouer à ce dernier le rôle de l'homme désiré, ce à quoi le mari se dérobe — ouvertement ou discrètement — en raison de son identification au grand frère. Déçue, elle reportera ses espoirs sur son fils:

> Consciemment elle espère que ce garçon lui apportera la gloire qu'elle n'a pu obtenir de son mari. Inconsciemment il porte l'espoir qu'il déshonorera les femmes ayant atteint cette respectabilité qu'elle n'a pu atteindre. Cette constellation entraîne chez le fils une sexualité post-pubertaire dénuée d'inhibition mais ignorante d'amour (EA, p. 34).

Que les émules de don Juan dont les exploits et prouesses amoureuses s'exhibent d'un roman à l'autre soient fils d'une déesse-mère et d'un père-frère aîné, c'est ce que confie dans son carnet secret le plus exhibitionniste d'entre eux, Pierre Xavier Magnant. A l'examen, l'enchaînement des révélations de ce conquérant noue ici un noeud conforme au propos de l'analyste puisque maintes de ses observations s'y réfléchissent, à savoir peur intérieure de castration, réaction d'agression, refus du rôle paternel, destruction de la famille, répétition d'un même scénario, retour à la mère:

> Je vis dans la terreur, parfois l'éprouvant avec honte, parfois l'engendrant.... Engendrer la terreur: oui, j'aime faire peur. J'aime provoquer des réalités politiques qui m'effraient; j'aime aussi troubler des vies innombrables.... Je viole, chaque nuit, un nombre toujours croissant de belles inconnues que j'abandonne terrifiées.... Je sais quel triomphe destructeur je vais désormais chercher ... dans les rues quand vient cette période chargée d'effluves nyctogènes, pendant laquelle une quantité indéterminable et inintéressante de couples s'unissent en accomplissant des gestes équivalents ... je tiens à conserver cet écart d'initiative entre ma puissance incomparable et celle des autres hommes qui s'abolissent dans un flot visqueux, quand ils ne le laissent pas courir jusqu'au delta de muqueuses d'où leurs enfants partiront pour reprendre, à quelques changements près, la même chanson de mort ... j'ai d'autres preuves à faire que celle de ma puissance génitale auprès d'une seule et même femme qui ne meurt jamais, qu'elle s'appelle Joan ou je ne sais trop comment ... (TM, pp. 117-18).

L'absence d'amour ou de communion affective que Michel Fain souligne chez le don Juan se constate dans cet extrait. Cette absence s'explique du fait que sa constitution narcissique est telle qu'il ne ressent pas la perte de l'objet, d'où une multi-

plication des femmes-objets, ce que Magnant appelle fort pertinemment "prolonger la guerre de succession" (TM, p. 59).

Cette dernière réflexion s'insérant dans un contexte d'exclusion de sa vie de cette Colette qui venait de divorcer à seule fin de se rapprocher de lui, elle accentue le rapport d'exploitant à exploitée que le séducteur entretient avec la femme. Or, ce même rapport prévaut chez le jaloux aquinien qui, lorsqu'il est en proie à sa jalousie, ou profane sa partenaire à l'instar d'Olympe Ghezzo Quénum (TM), ou la brutalise à l'instar de Jean-William Forestier et de Robert Bernatchez (A), ou la mutile et l'assassine à l'instar de Nicolas Vanesse (NN). Dans ces cas extrêmes où se conjuguent violence physique et violence psychologique, le compagnon n'épouse l'attitude et le masque du Grand Inquisiteur que pour mieux torturer et manipuler la compagne, Christine le décrit bien qui consigne dans le détail une crise délirante de son amant Robert:

> Il m'humiliait carrément ... il savait fort bien que son attitude était vindicative, intensément vindicative et consciemment vindicative ... il m'a obligée de parler. ... Je me confessais de tout ... même des plus anciens incidents ... ceux qui se rattachaient alors au triangle que nous formions, Robert, Jean-William et moi. Et sur ce point, il ne voulait rien moins que tout: l'heure de chaque rendez-vous ... la séquence de plaisir physique dans chaque rencontre, le minutage de mes orgasmes quasiment ... les moyens contraceptifs utilisés.... J'étais en larmes.... Il m'interrogeait avec une froide rage ... et m'annonça sans aucune émotion qu'il allait bien volontiers se priver de repas afin de continuer cette "conversation" ... (A, pp. 76-77. Voir toute la séquence, pp. 73-82).

Sans respect pour l'autonomie de Christine, ce que réclame au fond ce Robert tyrannique et susceptible, c'est la sécurité de l'attachement de l'autre. De même Olympe auprès de RR (TM) et Nicolas auprès de Sylvie (NN) cherchent monopole et exclusivité de l'intérêt et de l'amour. En d'autres mots, un enfant a besoin des soins de sa mère.

Que l'on analyse chez le héros aquinien l'émule de don Juan, le rédempteur, le jaloux ou l'être narcissique,[13] que l'on analyse dans l'oeuvre le symbolisme de l'eau, celui de la femme ou bien la prolifération des habitacles, c'est à la croisée des chemins l'éternel retour à la déesse-mère toute-puissante: envoûtement d'autant plus maléfique qu'il est clandestin!

NOTES

[1] *Prochain Episode* (Montréal: Le Cercle du livre de France, 1965); désormais désigné par PE.

[2] *Trou de mémoire* (Montréal: Le Cercle du livre de France, 1968); désormais désigné par TM.

[3] L'*Antiphonaire* (Montréal: Le Cercle du livre de France, 1969); désormais désigné par A.

[4] *Neige noire* (Montréal: La Presse, collection Ecrivains des deux mondes, 1974); désormais désigné par NN.

[5] "*Prochain Episode* et la révolution," *Voix et Images du pays VI*, pp. 123-29. Peu avant de conclure son article, l'auteur écrit: "Notre héros est un grand malade. Dans ses moments de grande dépression . . . il constate son impuissance . . . l'emprisonnement de son énergie. . . . L'énergie bloquée se retourne contre elle-même. . . . D'où ce besoin de destruction de soi, de suicide, de risque fou. Dans le deuxième temps de sa maladie, dans le pôle 'agression' l'énergie vitale bloquée est surexcitée. . . . C'est la fébrilité et le désir intense d'éclatement. Ce sont les tentatives de destruction et de mort. Et c'est l'appel à la révolution dévastatrice. . . . A ce moment-là, la révolution n'est plus la libération d'un peuple opprimé. Au contraire, elle n'est qu'un incident-instrument à l'anéantissement-cure d'un malade" (p. 128). Ajoutons qu'au dire de plusieurs personnes que nous avons interviewées, *Les Damnés de la terre* de Frantz Fanon (Paris: François Maspero, 1970) ont profondément marqué Hubert Aquin. Ceci nous paraît significatif, d'abord, de l'influence d'un livre sur un esprit puisque la pensée de Fanon nourrit le discours et l'action révolutionnaires d'Aquin, ensuite, des correspondances occulets entre hommes et événements et ce, parce que le psychiatre Fanon procède à une psychanalyse de la violence qui met en relief les relations d'exploitant à exploité entre colonisateur et colonisé, relations qui gouvernent les échanges entre personnages de l'oeuvre aquinienne comme nous le verrons.

[6] C'est de Clermont Doyon que nous tenons ce renseignement communiqué oralement en mars 1978. Il y a une illustration et une description de la tablette en question dans le *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines d'après les textes et les monuments* de Daremberg et Saglio, tome V, pp. 4-5. Cette tablette, trouvée en Afrique, est aujourd'hui propriété du Louvre.

[7] Michel Fain, "Réflexions à partir de certains aspects de la sexualité masculine," dans *Eros et Antéros* de Denise Braunschweig et Michel Fain (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, collection Science de l'Homme, no. 170, 1971). Désormais désigné par EA. C'est nous qui soulignons en liaison avec les précédents propos sur la révolution.

[8] Il y a prolifération d'exemples. Mentionnons: Quénum/RR/Magnant, Magnant/Joan/éditeur, Magnant/Colette/Thomas (TM); Jean-William/Christine/Robert, Renata/Chigi/Antonella, Franconi/Christine/Robert, Franconi/Suzanne/Robert . . . (A); Nicolas/Sylvie/Michel, Eva/Nicolas/Sylvie, Nicolas/Linda/Stan, Hamlet/Gertrude/Fortinbras (NN).

[9] Voir à ce sujet et au sujet de la déesse lieuse notre livre *Hubert Aquin romancier*, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, Vie des lettres québécoises 16, 1978, pp. 237-240.

[10] Paru dans *Ecrits du Canada français V* (1959), pp. 45-114.

[11] Hubert Aquin, "Pèlerinage à l'envers," *Blocs erratiques* (Montréal: Quinze, collection "Prose entière," 1977), p. 21. Ce texte a d'abord été publié en 1949 dans le *Quartier latin*.

[12] Les projections de Nicolas en Fortinbras, le "héros rejeté," ainsi que l'ambivalente rivalité fraternelle/masculine qui jaillit de l'oeuvre romanesque suggèrent que le frère cadet s'est fait, à son tour, usurper son titre et s'est retrouvé dans la peau de l'aîné à la naissance d'un autre frère. Le manuscrit inédit d'un roman d'Aquin, "L'Invention de la mort," développe longuement cette traumatisante blessure narcissique. Voir à ce sujet notre article: "L'Appel du Nord dans *Neige noire*: La quête de Narcisse," *Voix et images*, 5, no 2 (hiver 1980), p. 377, note 16.

[13] Voir à ce sujet: "L'Appel du Nord dans *Neige noire*."

ANDRE MAJOR ET LANGAGEMENT

*Les "Histoires de déserteurs" (1970-1976)**

Jacques Pelletier

De 1968 à 1974, du *Vent du diable* à *L'Epouvantail*, Major ne publie rien, si l'on fait exception des *Poèmes pour durer*, réédition en 1969 de poèmes anciens accompagnés de quelques inédits, et de deux courtes pièces radiophoniques, *Le désir* et *Le perdant* en 1973.[1] Ce silence ne correspond pas toutefois à une absence d'écriture. Dès 1970, en effet, il travaille à *L'Epouvantail*, roman qui constituera en 1974 le premier volet d'une "suite" qui sera baptisée en 1976 "histoires de déserteurs" après avoir été d'abord définie comme "histoire d'une survivance" en 1975.[2]

Cette production est élaborée, écrite et publiée durant le règne de Bourassa, de 1970 à 1976, donc à un moment bien délimité de l'histoire contemporaine du Québec. On se rappellera que Robert Bourassa, succédant à Jean Lesage à la direction du parti libéral du Québec, sort vainqueur des élections d'avril 1970 qui opposent ce parti à la fois à l'U.N., parti au pouvoir, et au P.Q., né deux ans plus tôt et qui réunit l'essentiel des forces néo-nationalistes: ce parti enregistre alors une première percée, obtenant 24% des voix exprimées (presque deux fois et demi le score réalisé par le R.I.N. et le R.N. aux élections de 1966). A l'automne 1973, le parti libéral remporte à nouveau les élections qui ont lieu à la fin du mois d'octobre tandis que le P.Q. atteint la barre de 30% des voix exprimées. Ce qui apparaît alors une défaite (le parti n'a fait élire que quelques députés et bien des militants sont cruellement déçus) cache en réalité une victoire: désormais le P.Q. représente la seule alternative sérieuse au parti libéral, l'Union Nationale faisant figure de formation politique vouée à disparaître: les données du jeu politique sont donc profondément modifiées, ce qu'on réalisera pleinement avec la victoire du P.Q. en novembre 1976.

Si l'affrontement, sur la scène politique institutionnelle, met aux prises le parti libéral et le P.Q., sur le plan social, il oppose le mouvement ouvrier organisé au régime de Bourassa. On en verra des manifestations particulièrement éloquentes lors des "fronts communs" de 1972 et de 1975-1976. Par ailleurs, le mouvement

* Cet article constitue la troisième partie d'une étude à paraître dans un livre en préparation, *Le roman québécois contemporain: une lecture politique.*

syndical, durant la même période, affronte aussi durement les employeurs du secteur privé comme en témoignent les "grèves historiques" fameuses de la United Aircraft, de Firestone, de Canadian Gypsum, de Québec-Téléphone, etc. Ces conflits âpres (avec l'Etat comme avec les employeurs du secteur privé) provoqueront une radicalisation idéologique dans les centrales syndicales et trouveront un écho déformé dans les "groupes politiques" qui apparaissent alors. Le P.Q., pour sa part, développe un "préjugé favorable" pour les travailleurs tout en évitant toutefois de s'impliquer trop activement dans les luttes syndicales, se contentant généralement d'appuyer les revendications des travailleurs tout en leur prêchant la modération et faisant appel à la "bonne volonté" de l'Etat et des entreprises privées. Reste que le "préjugé favorable" rencontre un écho certain auprès de larges secteurs du mouvement ouvrier qui voteront pour ce parti lors des élections de novembre 1976.

Sur le plan culturel, la situation évolue aussi. La problématique "parti priste" de la littérature a été abandonnée et a cédé la place à la problématique de la "québécitude" qui en est d'une certaine manière un prolongement, mais déformé, travesti. Le "joual," chez V. L. Beaulieu et M. Tremblay, ne correspond plus en effet à une révolte politique mais à une volonté "littéraire": il s'agit de créer un langage nouveau pour exprimer une civilisation nouvelle, d'inventer en quelque sorte une nouvelle langue apte à exprimer adéquatement un nouveau pays. C'est là une tendance importante qui apparaît dans le champ culturel au tournant des années '70. Autre tendance significative: la contre-culture (*Main Mise* qui en sera l'expression la plus répandue est lancée en 1970) qui ralliera de nombreux jeunes désenchantés du politique et désireux d'assumer leur "vécu" hic et nunc. Dernière tendance importante enfin: la culture révolutionnaire dont les tenants s'expriment dans un certain nombre de revues "théoriques" nés au cours des premières années '70: *Stratégie*, *Champs d'application*, *Chroniques*, etc. Comment concilier la politique révolutionnaire et la culture? C'est la question centrale à laquelle essaient de répondre les militants et artistes/écrivains animateurs de ces revues.

Major n'appartient à aucune de ces trois tendances. Ayant renoncé au joual, il ne se sent guère d'attrait pour la "québécitude." Il est de même réticent devant la "contre-culture," phénomène d'origine américaine dans lequel il ne se retrouve pas. Enfin, ayant rompu avec le marxisme de sa jeunesse, il ne se sent manifestement pas concerné par les préoccupations des nouveaux intellectuels "marxistes-léninistes."

Ceci dit, dans sa recherche d'une voie nouvelle, il va se reposer, sur d'autres bases, la question qui était au centre de sa réflexion au début des années '60: quel est le rapport entre l'Histoire et la littérature? Comment penser et mettre en forme ce rapport?

Cette interrogation survient dans la foulée d'une évolution qui l'amène à prendre ses distances avec l'*Action Nationale* et son nationalisme conservateur et à se rapprocher du P.Q. En 1972, dans un article publié dans *La Barre du jour* il répudie le terrorisme pour lequel il avait eu des complaisances naguère et il fait siennes les thèses exposées par Vallières dans *L'Urgence de choisir*.[3] En 1973, à la suite des élections du mois d'octobre, il revendique publiquement et fortement son appartenance au P.Q. dans un texte publié dans *Liberté* en janvier 1974.[4] En 1975, il participe à la création de la revue *Interventions* avec d'autres écrivains et intellectuels du P.Q. qui ne désespèrent pas de voir le socialisme être pris en charge par ce parti.[5]

En septembre de la même année, il publie dans *Voix et Images* un article important sur sa conception de la littérature qui relève pour l'essentiel de la problématique "sartrienne"; l'écrivain écrit pour dévoiler le monde et, ce faisant, il contribue à sa manière à la transformer (ce qu'exprime bien le néologisme: langagement).[6] C'est cette conception de la littérature qui sert de toile de fond, d'horizon théorique à la suite romanesque qu'il publie au même moment.

Or, assez curieusement, il semble que la critique n'ait pas perçu cette dimension dans les "*histoires de déserteurs.*" André Brochu, rendant compte *L'Epouvantail*, s'attarde surtout à l'analyse de la structure formelle du roman et notamment à l'organisation temporelle, fort ingénieuse, de sa narration. François Ricard met bien en lumière le caractère "ouvert" du roman mais n'aborde, pas plus que Brochu, le probème de sa signification. Pierre L'Hérault souligne très rapidement que le héros, l'espace et la thématique de *L'Epidémie* "ont quelque chose de dépassé" mais il s'empresse d'ajouter que "l'aventure ne se situe pas ici au niveau d'une recherche thématique, d'un engagement politique, mais à celui d'une recherche formelle." Et il conclut que l'on se trouve "en face d'une oeuvre solidement charpentée, solidement établie, en dehors de références socio-politiques."[7]

Dans les trois cas, on le voit, tout se passe comme si on hésitait à aborder le problème central de la signification et de la fonction de ces textes. Cette dérobade, moins accusée chez L'Hérault que chez Brochu et Ricard, est étrange et suspecte. Elle indique à tout le moins qu'il y a dans ces productions matière à questionnement: on ne valorise pas innocemment la seule dimension formelle d'une oeuvre au détriment de son sens sans souligner du coup que celui-ci fait problème. Comment expliquer le malaise évident des critiques, leur hésitation à attaquer résolument la question de la signification de l'oeuvre? Il me semble que la réponse à cette question doit être cherchée dans l'oeuvre elle-même, dans son aspect ambigü et déroutant.

L'*Epouvantail*, PREMIER VOLET DE LA SUITE romanesque, se présente au premier abord comme un *roman policier*. La première partie du récit

est organisée autour d'un meurtre — celui de Gigi, une barmaid, ex-amie du héros, Momo Boulanger soupçonné d'être l'assassin; la seconde partie est structurée autour du chef-enquêteur, l'inspecteur Therrien, qui effectue des recherches à Saint-Emmanuel, lieu de naissance et refuge probable de l'assassin hypothétique. Rapidement cependant on se rend compte que le meurtre a une importance secondaire et que c'est le présumé meurtrier qui intéresse surtout le romancier; de même, dans la seconde partie du roman, la recherche policière cède rapidement la place d'une part à l'analyse de la personnalité du chef-enquêteur, d'autre part à l'évocation de Saint-Emmanuel. Insensiblement on passe donc du récit policier classique (crime déclenchant la recherche de l'assassin) à la chronique d'un village perdu — physiquement et historiquement — du Québec. Dans les trois autres volets de la chronique (si l'on y inclut *Une soirée en octobre*) c'est Saint-Emmanuel qui sera également le lieu privilégié des événements et, on le verra, le micro-cosme, la représentation symbolique du Québec d'aujourd'hui, ce qui ne manquera pas de poser problème.

Le narrateur de *L'Epouvantail*, tout compte fait, ne nous dit pas grand chose sur Momo Boulanger. On sait seulement qu'il vient de sortir de prison, qu'il est originaire de Saint Emmanuel, qu'il se sent perdu à Montréal, ville qui lui semble hostile, qu'il ne s'accepte pas comme Québécois francophone — exigeant qu'on l'appelle non pas Boulanger, mais Baker, on ne sait trop pourquoi, Major ne faisant qu'esquisser cette thématique — enfin qu'il est prisonnier de son passé, condamné à toujours poursuivre Gigi depuis qu'il a fait un jour l'amour avec elle dans un champ de blé, cet événement ayant en quelque sorte scellé son destin.[8] L'analyse de cet enfant perdu s'arrête là. De même, à un autre niveau, Gigi, Marline et leurs protecteurs de la petite pègre prolétarisée de Montréal ne sont qu'évoqués: leur destin n'est pas vraiment expliqué par une mise en contexte précise et rigoureuse, tâche que l'auteur semble s'être gardée pour Saint-Emmanuel.

Dans ce premier roman, donc, le projet[9] de la chronique n'est pas clair: il y a oscillation du faux roman policier à la représentation sociographique d'un milieu choisi pour sa valeur représentative. Le projet de la chronique — qui s'est sans doute précisé en cours de rédaction — n'apparaît très clairement que dans *L'Epidémie*, second volet du cycle.

Là dessus on ne pourrait citer exemple plus significatif que l'épigraphe qui figure en tête du roman: "Ce sont d'étranges survivants, privés de traditions, et qui semblent vivre de n'importe quoi plutôt que de la terre où ils habitent. Peut-être ont-ils tout perdu, y compris le goût de l'avenir. Quand ils se réunissent, c'est pour continuer à oublier en buvant plus qu'il n'est convenable" (texte tiré d'*Un Village québécois au XX^e siècle*, de Paul H. Prot). Il s'agira donc de dresser la monographie (imaginaire) d'un village québécois à travers le destin individuel de quelques-uns de ses habitants et, au-delà, de s'interroger sur le présent et l'avenir

du Québec comme collectivité globale dont Saint-Emmanuel constitue en quelque sorte un modèle réduit.

Le projet, déjà, était mis en marche dans *L'Epouvantail*, les principaux acteurs de la chronique, outre Momo, soit Therrien, Marie-Rose, Phil et son père Jos, Calixa, étant évoqués dans la deuxième partie du roman inaugural de même que les lieux où ils consument leur vie à petites doses: le magasin général, l'hôtel où ils passent de longues soirées à essayer de noyer leurs ennuis dans l'alcool, la forêt dont quelques-uns vivent et qui sert de refuge aux autres lorsque, comme Momo, ils sont poursuivis par la police. De même étaient mises en place deux des principales intrigues de la suite romanesque: les amours de Therrien et d'Emerence, celles de Marie-Rose et Momo. Mais cet univers ne trouve sa représentation extensive que dans *L'Epidémie*.[10]

LE PERSONNAGE PRINCIPAL de ce roman est l'inspecteur Therrien, qui est à la fois un *étranger* — n'étant pas originaire du village qu'il semble dominer du haut de sa maison promontoire — et un *familier*, y ayant ses habitudes depuis longtemps. Therrien est, dans le domaine affectif, un impuissant et un voyeur. Amoureux d'Emerence, il ne la dispute pas au gros Jérôme, propriétaire de l'hôtel de Saint-Emmanuel qui en a fait sa femme, et lorsqu'elle s'offre à lui, il se dérobe et se contente de la photographier vicieusement. Amoureux pusillanime, il se révèle au surplus piètre mari avec Julienne, soeur d'Emerence qu'il a épousée et qui l'abandonnera, lasse de son indifférence. Le gros Jérôme est encore plus médiocre que Therrien: lui non plus n'a pas su aimer Emerence[11] qui finira par le quitter pour Florent Dupré, le maire du village et l'homme politique en vue de la région. Phil, le garçon boucher, est également un mou qui n'a su aimer ni Gigi ni Marie-Rose que lui a volées Momo. On pourrait ainsi continuer longtemps l'énumération des personnages faibles et ternes qui peuplent Saint-Emmanuel, à l'exception des frères Boulanger, ces solitaires qui font bande à part, échappant ainsi à la condition pas vraiment misérable, mais médiocre et résignée des résidents du village.

Saint-Emmanuel, par ailleurs, est représenté comme un "village vivant au ralenti une sorte de *patiente agonie*,"[12] comme un "*village-fantôme* transformé en *hospice pour impotents*,"[13] habité par des "*mourants* qui font semblant de vivre."[14] Therrien, de sa maison-promontoire, éprouve la sensation de dominer "ce pays de *rien du tout* — ces *maisons naines* à travers lesquelles l'étroit ruban gris de la route semblait s'écouler, puis se tarir dans la carrière, derrière la boulangerie — de dominer ce croquis et d'échapper, lui, à la *dérive* lente qui avait commencé à le *gruger*, à le *ronger* et à le *pourrir* du dedans."[15] Plus loin, le narrateur précisera dans des termes voisins: "Et ce qui le terrifiat le plus, ce n'était pas cette marée

destructrice, c'était de demeurer là, cramponné à son soc, *isolé* comme sur une île alors que dehors tout disparaissait, s'enfonçait dans une lente *moisissure* que ne dissimulaient plus ces centaines de chalets proliférant comme des champignons sur le flanc décimé de la montagne. Oui, cramponné sur son promontoire, avec le séntiment de vivre au-dessus du *vide*, attendant de cruler dedans d'un instant à l'autre."[16] Saint-Emmanuel, en somme, et pour faire vite, apparaît pour l'essentiel comme un univers en décomposition, frappé par une "épidémie" aussi cruelle que mystérieuse, formé de morts-vivants, qui tout à la fois fascine et remplit d'horreur un Therrien indissociablement lié à cette communauté d'une part et conscient d'en être différent par certains côtés (ne serait-ce que par sa lucidité) d'autre part. Je me contente pour l'instant de souligner cette donnée, me proposant, après un examen rapide du troisième volet de la suite romanesque, de formuler une interprétation de cette mise en situation.

Les Rescapés, troisième (et provisoirement?) dernier volet de la suite romanesque, relancent d'une certaine manière l'entreprise dans une nouvelle direction. Therrien, personnage central du roman précédent, disparaît violemment, victime d'un meurtre (ou d'une tentative de suicide, on ne sait trop) tandis que Momo revient au premier plan, suite à son évasion de prison: il prend le maquis avec Marie-Rose, tentant d'échapper aux recherches de la police et de refaire sa vie. Mais il n'est pas le seul personnage important du roman qui nous fait assister à la réussite sociale du gros Jérôme, devenant maire de Saint-Emmanuel puis député libéral et insufflant une vie nouvelle au village: "Mais sa plus grande satisfaction, écrit le narrateur, était quand même d'avoir mis en vente des centaines de terrains où s'établissait une population estivale grâce à laquelle le village avait cessé de péricliter,"[17] vie nouvelle qui ne provient pas d'un développement endogène mais d'une opération purement artificielle qui ne transforme pas vraiment les habitants du village qui demeurent, dans leur très grande majorité, des "morts-vivants." Tandis que Jérôme "monte," Florent Dupré, qui a quitté son travail et sa famille pour Emerence, "descend": il est progressivement réduit à vivre aux crochets de celle-ci qui le trompera avec son patron, provoquant du coup son départ. De nouveaux personnages, d'importance secondaire, apparaissent: Cherry, l'épouse de Gene, frère de Jérôme, Palma, Manchotte, Labranche, etc. Le narrateur s'intéresse, en ordre dispersé, à l'un et à l'autre, donnant ainsi, volontairement ou non, un caractère disparate, éclaté[18] à son roman qui se termine d'une certaine manière *en queue de poisson* (quatre ans après on attend toujours une suite qui ne viendra peut-être jamais).

Ce qui guide Major, on l'a vu plus haut, dans l'élaboration et l'écriture de cette suite romanesque, c'est une certaine conception "sartrienne" de la littérature perçue comme *entreprise de dévoilement* du réel (et par là même *agent de transformation* du réel, puisque montrer c'est en soi contribuer à changer la perception de celui-ci).

Ceci dit, se pose très concrètement la question du *découpage* du réel à représenter, du fragment (et/ou des fragments) de réalité qui seront au centre du tableau. Ce découpage, à son tour, n'est pas le fruit du hasard: il est le résultat de la vision que l'écrivain entretient du réel, il est donc réalisé, produit à partir d'un point de vue précis, de la *vision du monde* propre au romancier (et à la communauté à laquelle il se réfère).

Or l'oeuvre, il n'est pas inutile de le rappeler, a été élaborée et écrite durant le "règne de Bourassa," à partir d'une *vision critique* du régime se nourrissant essentiellement de l'idéologie néo-nationaliste véhiculée par le P.Q.[19] Si cette prise de distance par rapport au régime libéral permet incontestablement à l'écrivain de montrer les faiblesses de celui-ci — songeons par exemple à la présentation lucide du caractère artificiel des transformations réalisées par le gros Jérôme à Saint-Emmanuel — il n'est pas sûr qu'elle lui permette par ailleurs de saisir les contradictions propres à l'idéologie néo-nationaliste dont la principale est peut-être la perception du Québec comme "classe ethnique" (ainsi que le définissaient Dofny et Rioux au début des années 1960), comme communauté homogène, grande famille, provisoirement divisée, à réunifier (c'était le thème central de la propagande des partisans du "oui" lors du référendum du 20 mai).

Cette limite n'est pas sans conséquences comme l'illustre fort éloquemment la représentation de Saint-Emmanuel qui apparaît comme le symbole de la société québécoise sous Bourassa qui ne serait formée que de survivants condamnés à une fin dérisoire, à moins qu'elle ne soit sujette à un sursaut, un réveil collectif qui n'est rien moins que certain. Et, par ailleurs, les personnages qui ne sont pas des morts-vivants sont soit des "déserteurs" (comme Momo renonçant à son identité et fuyant sa communauté — il en va de même, d'une manière différente, pour son frère Calixa),[20] soit des spectateurs impuissants comme Therrien. Celui-ci, d'une certaine façon, représente les intellectuels, à la fois membres de la communauté et isolés, marginalisés dans celle-ci: intellectuels impuissants, conscients de la dégradation de leur société, mais n'agissant pas pour en freiner le processus (qui apparaît comme *inexorable*).

Cette mise en scène de la réalité québécoise inspirée par l'idéologie néo-nationaliste a bien sûr une *portée critique* indéniable (que mon analyse de 1976 ne mettait pas suffisamment en lumière; j'en profite pour faire, sur ce point, mon autocritique) mais *limitée* dans la mesure où elle ne rend pas compte de ce qui bougeait dans la période représentée par l'écrivain (et pas seulement dans le mouvement ouvrier dont plusieurs grèves témoignèrent de la vitalité mais aussi dans le milieu rural traversé par d'âpres luttes visant à stopper son hémorragie au profit des villes et sa mort lente).

De cette limite, de cette restriction de champ, de ce manque de perspective, *Une Soirée en octobre* constitue un excellent exemple.

Cette pièce sur les événements d'octobre 1970, Major a choisi de la situer à Saint-Emmanuel (l'intégrant, du coup, dans son cycle) surprise dans sa tranquillité par cet épisode de bruit et de fureur. Les principaux personnages de la pièce, sauf Antoine ("le cabochon"?), un péquiste en fuite, appartiennent à l'univers déjà mis en forme dans les romans. Le gros Jérôme, devenu député libéral, se barricade dans son hôtel, craignant (ou feignant de croire) à une révolution imminente. Phil, le garçon boucher, exprime le point de vue de la majorité silencieuse conditionnée par la propagande officielle; lui aussi a peur et fait confiance à la police. Seule Cherry, la danseuse de l'hôtel, n'est pas dupe: elle sent bien que cette crise n'est pas vraiment sérieuse, mais elle n'en a pas une compréhension politique, d'où les limites de sa critique. La morale de la pièce — qui sombre progressivement dans des drames de la vie privée: obsessions sexuelles de Jérôme et de Phil, aspirations romantiques de Cherry, etc. — c'est que la crise d'octobre, ainsi que le dit l'auteur en préface, "est toujours là, toujours possible, du moins tant que les Cherry, Jérôme, Antoine, Ben et Phil seront ce qu'ils sont."[21]

Sans doute mais cette "leçon" est un peu courte. En réalité un autre choix était possible, qui aurait eu pour "acteurs les grands responsables de la crise"[22] et l'auteur en est conscient. Cependant il a effectué un choix différent qui escamote les données essentielles de la crise qui se situent d'abord au niveau politique. Il aurait été bien plus instructif par exemple de faire voir comment la crise a été fabriquée et exploitée par le pouvoir ou encore de montrer quels problèmes l'action terroriste posait à ses propagandistes tant au niveau moral que politique. Dans sa préface, Major, pour justifier son choix, fait appel à la notion sartrienne de situation — limite qu'il prétend avoir appliquée, ce qui n'est pas faux, encore qu'il aurait pu en faire un tout autre usage dans le sens que je viens d'indiquer, ce qui aurait eu pour mérite de mieux faire ressortir les véritables enjeux de la crise.

En somme, autant la pièce de théâtre que les romans renvoient à l'idéologie néo-nationaliste du début des années 1970 dont ils expriment la dimension progressiste (par rapport au régime en place et à la société qu'il tient sous sa coupe) et les limites (la conception du Québec comme une communauté familiale). Par là, Major et son oeuvre se démarquent des positions (et des productions) à la fois des tenants d'une contre-culture a-historique et a-politique et de ceux d'une culture révolutionnaire trouvant ses fondements dans l'histoire et les traditions du mouvement ouvrier posées comme axe central du processus historique.

NOTES

[1] *Poèmes pour durer (1960-1969)* (Montréal: Editions du Songe, 1969). *Le désir,* suivi de *Le perdant* (Montréal: Leméac, 1973).

[2] Ce "déplacement" est intéressant: en 1975, Major inclut dans sa suite les trois romans de sa chronique publiés jusqu'ici, plus la pièce, *Une Soirée en octobre* qui

date de cette année-là et le *Journal d'un collectionneur de frissons* (récit autobiographique?), livre alors à paraître (toujours non publié en 1980). En 1976, "l'histoire d'une survivance" est devenu les "histoires de déserteurs" et ne comprend plus la pièce de théâtre et le livre (autobiographique?) annoncé l'année précédente. Ce "glissement" signifie-t-il plus qu'un changement d'appellation? Voilà une question à laquelle l'analyse nous permettra peut-être de répondre.

[3] "Un long détour," *La Barre du jour* (hiver 1972), pp. 36-49.

[4] "Le 29 octobre et après," *Liberté* (janvier-février 1974), pp. 73-96.

[5] Sauf erreur, cette revue n'a publié qu'un seul numéro, consacré pour l'essentiel à la crise d'octobre 1970. Un second numéro, annoncé sur le thème des deux Canada, n'a jamais vu le jour. La revue comptait notament parmi ses animateurs: François Ricard, André Brochu, Pierre Turgeon et Jacques Godbout.

[6] "Langagement," *Voix et images* (septembre 1975), pp. 120-24.

[7] Compte-rendu publié dans *Livres et auteurs québécois 1975*, pp. 38-41.

[8] Le narrateur, évoquant les retrouvailles de Momo et Gigi à Montréal après une séparation de plus de deux ans, écrit: "Et quand elle l'apperçut grimaçant une espèce de sourire, elle avala autant d'air qu'elle pouvait, respirant sa sueur épicée avec l'impression, la certitude même, que tout *s'était déjà passé et que ce n'était là que la reprise d'un événement oublié*" (p. 17, je souligne). Et plus loin, décrivant la situation de Momo condamné à fuir après le meurtre de Gigi, il écrit encore: "C'était lui maintenant qui allait courir, aussi désorienté qu'une bête prise de panique, simplement parce qu'un dimanche d'été il avait entraîné Gigi dans un champ de maïs" (p. 141). Il y a donc pour le personnage de Momo (comme pour les autres) à l'origine des conduites présentes au événement originel, une sorte de "traumatisme de la naissance" qui pèse sur lui comme une chape de plomb dont il ne peut se délivrer. Cette *fatalité* qui s'acharne sur les personnages n'est pas sans rappeler l'univers de Faulkner dont elle est, on le sait, un trait central. De même il y a quelque chose de "faulknerien" dans l'utilisation "technique" que Major fait de la temporalité, dévoilant peu à peu, dans un mouvement de va-et-vient du passé au futur, la vérité de ses personnages et des événements qu'ils vivent (richesse formelle que la présentation linéaire que je fais ici ne prend pas en compte — mais ce n'est pas là mon propos, qui est plutôt de signaler et de dégager la signification du *temps vécu* (comme destin, fatalité) sur laquelle je reviendrai.

[9] La notion de projet renvoie ici à l'intention de l'auteur (soit telle qu'il l'a définie explicitement lui-même, soit telle qu'on peut la dégager à la suite d'une lecture attentive de l'oeuvre) à la fois quant au mode de narration — récit policier vs roman descriptif façon "chronique sociale" — et quant au segment de réalité à mettre en scène — milieu de la petite pègre de Montréal vs univers fermé de Saint-Emmanuel. Je précise cette notion qui peut, semble-t-il, faire problème si j'en juge par l'article de François Ricard consacré à réfuter une analyse produite par moi en 1976 sur les "histoires de déserteurs" (re "André Major ne va pas, il écrit," *Liberté*, 109 [janvier-février 1977], pp. 67-74).

[10] A l'inverse, plusieurs intrigues et personnages de *L'Epouvantail* disparaissent: ainsi en va-t-il, par exemple, du personnage du "curé," St-Pierre, client de Gigi qui joue un rôle central dans "l'affaire" du meurtre de la danseuse et auquel le narrateur s'intéresse de près durant quelques chapitres, lui donnant de la consistance et de la profondeur, et qu'il abandonne ensuite à son sort (cet abandon tenant, à mon avis, au changement d'orientation de la suite romanesque).

[11] Cet abandon est présenté comme un dénouement logique, prévisible, "programmé" depuis déjà longtemps, dès les commencements de l'union d'Emerence et de

Jérôme. Décrivant la "nuit de noces" des époux, le narrateur écrit: "Il lui semblait (à Jérôme) s'enfoncer à chaque seconde, plus profondément dans le courant irreversible de cet *échec initial*" (p. 59. Je souligne). On retrouve là à nouveau le "mythe des origines" (à la résonance faulknerienne très nette) déjà mis en forme dans le premier roman.

[12] *L'Epidémie,* p. 74. Je souligne.

[13] Idem, p. 83. Je souligne.

[14] Ibidem. Je souligne.

[15] Idem, p. 35. Je souligne.

[16] Idem, pp. 98-99. Je souligne.

[17] Idem, p. 107.

[18] Il est vrai que "la liste des principaux personnages de la chronique" qui suit le roman peut aider le lecteur à se retrouver de même que le dessin des lieux qui l'accompagne éclaire la topographie du récit (un procédé qui, là encore, rappelle Faulkner).

[19] Dans le "portrait" de l'auteur présenté au début d'*Une Soirée en octobre* (texte vraisemblablement écrit par celui-ci; il s'agit-là d'une pratique courante dans les milieux de l'édition) il est précisé que celui-ci est "fasciné" par "le problème québécois dont la clé lui semble une identité collective que l'absence de pouvoir réel sur l'Histoire rend de plus en plus hypothétique" (*Une Soirée en octobre* [Montréal: Leméac, 1975], p. 18).

[20] D'où la pertinence, en un sens, des deux titres de la suite romanesque qui est à la fois effectivement la "chronique d'une survivance" et la mise en forme "d'histoires de déserteurs."

[21] *Une soirée en octobre,* p. 17.

[22] Idem, p. 16.

CANADIAN FRAGMENTS

John Baglow

i. quarry

not the glimpse through leaves,
a red/gold screen ensuring
the getaway, myths borne home
instead

but all around us
the precious threads

ii. exile

years spent trying
to leave that vile town —

house after house st-lambert
swells in the road,
mouthing its riddles at my back

iii. fireweed

sprouts in the livingrooms
through the carpets as though
ice were breaking

the delicate walls ajar,
engraved with leaves,
aiming their windows
at the troubled moon.

at daybreak the voices
refuse to scatter.

iv. prism

the one exact light
was here. leaving
the seasons to the eye

is now
on the far side of the mountain,
the trail long cold.

v. this magazine

keeps the powder
dry. and that one
is here for a little time yet.
on with your clothes
at first light. shiver
at first frost. this
is basic training:

forward, if someone can find
the horizon or the way back,
the new man wisely
scrounging a meal.

vi. forum

in chaste valleys the old play
their stately checkers
as though in a trance

the young barge past, shouting
poems, or words to that effect.
another game before sundown,
exchange of kings.

vii. tamarack

will advance
not so far north the tundra
invades the eyes. far enough
to avoid the prickly pear —
pelee welcoming spring.
between these brackets
anything goes.

viii. branching out

your body
so much dead weight
after the act,
something left behind.

the red candles blown out,
the barricades down at last.
a merciful lack of
mere speech.

ix. storm warning

midsummer sun
dripping honey,

stone tents
at the outskirts of space,

the blue dome
intact

— the fiery night
is swollen beyond its banks

loosening us,
wearing the earth away

x. it needs to be said

johnson, evans, etc.,
their black world
stopped in the law's name

kiss the alien soil;
their bodies become
canadian

xi. fiddlehead

fingers unaccustomed
to the ancient chords,
numb with our
long winters strings
quivering with practice —

virgin forest redefined.
noble animals,
silently grazing. near
the stone-heap
the settlers, giving voice.

LA LAMPE DANS LA FENETRE

The Visualization of Quebec Fiction

Eva-Marie Kröller

On seeing Claude Jutra's film *Kamouraska* (1973) and Jean Beaudin's *Cordélia* (1979) and *J. A. Martin photographe* (1977), one cannot but notice the repeated references to windows. Although the camera's insistent focus on windows is, in each case, realistically motivated (and an all too obvious part of each heroine's everyday existence), it soon becomes clear that these windows also establish a metaphorical correlation between the female protagonists and the way in which they respond to their environment. More specifically, the window can be seen to embody the imprisonment of nineteenth-century Québécoises like Elisabeth d'Aulnières, Cordélia Viau, and Rose-Aimée Martin in their sexual and domestic roles; but, conversely, the image may also function as an opening into self-recognition and release.

To appreciate the changing metaphorical values of the window-image (and others closely related) in Jutra's and Beaudin's films also has, I would like to argue, a retrospective bearing upon the texts that two of these films are based upon, Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska* (1970) and Pauline Cadieux's *La Lampe dans la fenêtre* (1976). Both *Kamouraska* and *Cordélia* originate in husband-woman-lover triangles, but the connections between text and film differ. Jutra's visualization and patterning of cues found in Hébert's novel enhance its sense of authenticity: Quebec architecture is seen to provide a natural metaphor for the prison which Elisabeth's spinning memories have created for her. *Cordélia*, since it is directly based upon a criminal case history, provides the opposite relation between text and film: here, the text contains meticulously collected data regarding the Viau case. The film orders these in the logic of an artistic genre, a logic which, in itself, is an ironical statement upon the irrationality of Cordélia's case. J. A. Martin may be placed between *Kamouraska* and *Cordélia*, both chronologically and metaphorically. Although it is not itself based upon a literary or documentary model, it derives much of its impact from re-defining the visual leitmotifs found

in Jutra's and Hébert's *Kamouraska* on the one hand and in *Cordélia* and Cadieux's book on the other.

The element of movement is probably the feature in which *J. A. Martin photographe* differs most strikingly from *Cordélia* and *Kamouraska*. The setting in the latter two is literally confined: Elisabeth and Cordélia spend time in gaol or else remain in their respective homes. The fact that Elisabeth moves from a house in Sorel to another in Kamouraska and yet another in Québec does not widen her field of range; these houses have become almost interchangeable in her memory. Conversely, Antoine Tassy, Elisabeth's first husband, and her lover George Nelson travel freely; Nelson escapes into freedom to Burlington, across the American border; Isidore Poirier, Cordélia's husband, leaves his young wife behind to seek work in California. Rose-Aimée, however, refuses to let her man go on yet another photographic trip through Québec and Maine without her. The Martins travel in a cart, "une charrette," a means of transport frequently associated with spunky women — ranging from Brecht's Mother Courage (evoked, as an allegory of Québec, in Gaston Miron's "L'Octobre") to Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie-la-Charrette* (1979). Among the means of transport we see in *Cordélia* are carriages with men spying on her and the cart that carries Cordélia to gaol. Similarly, carriages in *Kamouraska* are oppressive miniature houses, an impression much emphasized in Jutra's film; "Secouées par le mouvement rapide de la voiture, Elisabeth d'Aulnières et sa belle-mère, Mme Tassy, demeurent aussi défendues, l'une contre l'autre, que des noix entrechoquées dans un sac."[1] For Rose-Aimée, the cart becomes a genuine means of escaping her home and the five children crowded in it. All through the first sequences of the film we see Rose-Aimée nervously trying to clear space around her, chasing the children outside, forbidding them to play in her presence. As long as her mind is preoccupied with her home, the cart, too, remains a "mobile home." Even when she has begun to renew her self and her marriage with J. A., a miscarriage reminds them of the biological limitations of her newly-found freedom. One of the most powerful scenes of the film, one realized entirely without dialogue, shows Rose-Aimée lying on the cart, suffering through a miscarriage. Her body is hidden under the covering of the cart which, here, becomes an ambiguous combination of protection and confinement, especially so since J. A. sits apart helplessly looking on. Yet the couple also teams up to pull the cart, literally and metaphorically, out of the mud. That scene, again, has a negative correspondent in *Kamouraska* which uses the ancient romantic ploy of a sleigh overturning to throw the lovers into each other's arms. What at first appears as the delirious fulfillment of erotic desire, soon serves to project Elisabeth's ever-increasing solitude: "Nous restons dans la neige. Couchés sur le dos. Regardons le ciel, piqués d'étoiles. Frissonnons de froid. Longtemps j'essaye de me retenir de claquer des dents." Not surprisingly, the sleigh scene under the stars is immediately followed by images of captivity. At the Governor's Ball, Elisa-

beth is "prise, entraînée, poussée, tirée. Capturée" by her scandalized aunts,[2] a scene which Jutra frames by using oppressively low ceilings in his film.

Rose-Aimée's resurrection as an individual is accompanied by clothing imagery that, following the Christian tradition of the soul divesting itself of its earthly shell, gradually releases her into her freedom. From the beginning of the film, clothing serves as a synecdochic expression of Rose-Aimée's efforts to leave the chrysalis of conventionality and of her fears to forfeit its protectiveness. We first see Rose-Aimée doing the laundry and folding sheets; coming close to J. A. for the first time during their trip together is a result of her pulling the cart out of the mud and having to take her clothes off. Before they enter the hotel, she clears the clothesline with which she has festooned the cart and worries about "faux-plis" in her dress. Listening to a couple noisily making love next door makes her aware that houses are not necessarily protective if they are not her own; thus she falls asleep fully clothed — her dress a substitute for an environment she feels safe in. Yet her personal liberation, temporary as it may be, culminates in her enjoyment of a wedding-party, at which she sings a naughty song about a woman removing her clothes; J. A., the photographer of the wedding, temporarily assumes her role by sitting apart, holding a tired child.

CORDÉLIA, ALL THROUGH THE FILM, is locked not only in her clothes but also in her skin: she suffers from a skin disease, and the film corroborates the restructions she experiences through her illness by showing her in tight clothes, buttoned up to her neck, that scarcely seem to leave her space to breathe in. As her trial proceeds, Cordélia increasingly loses control over her body until she degenerates into an animal in her cell, helplessly exposed to the stares of the villagers. In direct opposition to Rose-Aimée, who re-possesses her body, the images of her past, and, finally, her house, Cordélia loses power over all of her existence. In the final sequence of the film when she is prepared for execution she is seen in a tight black dress, with straps around her knees and hands, her face covered with a black veil, the noose around her neck. The last sound we hear from Cordélia is her laboured, anxious breathing. The film's credits are superimposed on a shot of Cordélia's deserted home, "La maison, maintenant détériorée, les persiennes pendantes, les vitres brisées, il n'y a plus de porte. . . . Une jeune fille . . . lance une pierre dans la bay-window qui n'a pas été brisée."[3] *Kamouraska*, again, seemingly contrasts with *Cordélia*. Elisabeth is forever shedding her clothes in crumpled heaps about her; in one of the crucial scenes of both the novel and the film, Nelson orders her to strip, and the couple make love behind a window brightly lit by a lamp. But nudity in *Kamouraska* does not imply freedom and resurrection. On the contrary: during her wedding-night, Elisabeth regards "avec

effarement ses vêtements jetés dans la chambre, en grand désordre, de velours, de linge et de dentelle." George Nelson, the seemingly ideal counterpart to Antoine Tassy, orders her to strip in order to humiliate her, and she describes their love-making on top of her crushed clothing as an act of murder, with "Son sexe dur comme une arme." The men in Elisabeth's life try to divest her of her individuality by giving her clothes to other women; Antoine presents them as gifts to his whores; George uses Elisabeth's best dress to bribe Aurélie Caron. Elisabeth's marriage to Jérôme Rolland has forced her to make do with the left-overs of her hopes and passions. When Jérôme, on his death-bed, more states than asks: "Elisabeth, tu as eu bien de la chance de m'épouser, n'est-ce pas," she replies in terms of clothing: "Jérôme, sans toi, j'étais libre et je refaisais ma vie, comme on retourne un manteau usé."

Throughout *Kamouraska*, Elisabeth is seen framed by a window, looking out into the present as well as into the world of her memories. The gothic and metonymic implications of this motif in Hébert's novel and in Jutra's film have been thoroughly analysed elsewhere and need not be repeated in this context.[4] The motif of Elisabeth framed by a window suggests confinement, suffocation, solitude, responses corroborated in Jutra's film through the use of tiny glass-panes set in solid house-walls. *J. A. Martin photographe*, on the other hand, develops the window-motif by interpreting it as a means of framing a moment of sharp self-recognition. In one take, Rose-Aimée, occupied with the laundry, glances out of the window at the grandmother who is napping in the garden. The first shot shows the grandmother from Rose-Aimée's perspective; then, the camera angle changes to show Rose-Aimée, framed by the window, as she, in turn, would be seen from the garden. The exchange of angles corresponds to Rose-Aimée's mounting fear that her marriage will result in a life like the grandmother's, and in contentment that J. A. is "travaillant pis y boit pas."[5] Shots directed from the interior of a room towards a window, as well as angles showing Rose-Aimée in the frame of a window or a door are soon established as one of the visual leitmotifs of the film. The final sequences of the film close the circle of these enclosure images by showing the Martins arriving back from their journey. Rose-Aimée looks at her home which now appears spacious and fresh: "R'garde la maison ... y m'semble qu'était pas si grande que ça ... regarde comme la galérie est blanche." The exchange of interior and exterior angles and their ironical implications as modes of seeing things are particularly revealing in scenes where J. A. is unable or unwilling to get involved, an attitude which Rose-Aimée likens to his profession as a photographer where he hides his head "toute la journée en dessous de ton maudit voile noir, à rien entendre pis à rien voir." When the Martins give a ride to a small boy and subsequently stay at his house so that his father can fetch a priest for his dying mother, J. A. is seen, outside, urging Rose-Aimée to leave. She responds, "On peut pas la laisser comme ça ... viens la voir." J. A. refuses. A little later, J. A. lets the boy

look through a close-up lens he is polishing, only to have him called into the house by Rose-Aimée: "Julien! Ta mère voudrait te voir." In contrast to J. A., who remains outside, equipped with at least the mechanical means to view things more clearly, Rose-Aimée's voice is heard describing pictures of Rome and Versailles she is showing the children, while the camera is directed at a window.

The most extensive use of the window-motif in *Cordélia* occurs while Cordélia is in gaol, standing below the barred window of her cell, hysterically proclaiming her happiness and freedom. The gaol scene is prepared by repeated allusions to "la lampe dans la fenêtre," placed in Cordélia's bay-window to attract visitors, and a habit of her that is used by the villagers to push Cordélia to her condemnation. When she and Sam, her supposed lover, dance a waltz in her living-room, the camera moves back to show the couple framed by the window as well as the silhouettes of villagers observing them. Cordélia, then, is trapped not in memories the way Elisabeth is, but in the contempt and distrust her environment projects upon her. Thus, the bay-window frames the image others have made of her. A newspaper article of December 18, 1897, assesses the Cordélia Viau case; it sums up its observation by drawing the reader's attention to a photograph which, in its opinion, summarizes Cordélia's predicament: "Cette femme se croyait très forte et incomprise. Le monde dans lequel elle vivait lui pesait, elle rêvait d'une existence de luxe et de folies et ne pouvant satisfaire ses goûts, elle singeait la vie élégante. Pour s'en convaincre, il suffit de voir cette pauvre femme de journalier se faire photographier à cheval, en amazone, chapeau haut de forme et escortée d'un petit chien bouledogue. Une caricature de la femme riche et élégante."[6] Beaudin's film tells the story of how this photograph came into existence. Cordélia sews herself a "robe d'amazone" and has her picture taken by a photographer whose apparatus is as slow and cumbersome as J. A.'s. Shortly afterwards, village urchins throw stones at her and she comes home, her splendid dress ripped, her face bleeding. Isidore receives a photograph in California which eternalizes Codélia in a pose she held for precisely four seconds, yet a pose that becomes part of the public evidence against her. Photographs in *Cordélia* are primarily police evidence, mugshots, photographs used in the scandal press. The increasing violation of Cordélia's privacy begins with Paul Gravel, journalist of *La Presse*, searching through her clothes and old pictures. Her portraits further her entrapment in the prejudice of others, a process underlined in Beaudin's film through the use of a very still camera framing the heroine at almost all times of the film. The camera moves considerably in only three sequences, each time in scenes when a large number of members of the community are seated together, "in the church, at the trial, and at the hanging. The camera tracks slowly across the townspeople in a different way each time, finally, directly accusing the faces of legal murder."[7]

A similar method of establishing the identity of individuals in a group occurs in the miners' scene in *J. A. Martin photographe*. J. A. takes great care in arrang-

ing the workers for a group photo; he includes, against the foreman's orders, a boy who has been fired a few days before. The men are ordered to keep still "pendant huit secondes" and, while they are doing so, the camera lingers on individual faces before showing the final product, the group photograph. Yet whereas the camera in *Cordélia* becomes an accusing eye, singling out Cordélia's tormentors from their protective group, J. A.'s camera (hence, by implication, that of Beaudin) is a means of bestowing individual dignity upon those whose picture is being taken. The group-taking session coincides with the turning point in the Martins' relation: their ways of perceiving their environment begin to complement each other. This convergence of perspectives corresponds to a gradual replacement of old photos, in the film, by photos about to be taken. At the beginning of her quest she discovers, in various old photographs, images of J. A. and herself that she did not know about or that she had forgotten. When they stop at J. A.'s regular hotel, Rose-Aimée, mistaken for an unattached "créature de passage," contemplates a photo of J. A. and a woman and cunningly asks a bystander, "C'est sa femme qui est avec lui?" At uncle Joseph's, Rose-Aimée looks at wedding-pictures of herself and J. A. which her aunt has preserved, and taunts J. A., when one of the wedding-guests, her old admirer Adhémar, appears, still unmarried, obviously still full of tender feelings for Rose-Aimée. At the beginning of the journey, taking photos together is a painful experience; Rose-Aimée is reduced to being a hand-maiden, holding a backdrop, collecting the money, and suffering verbal abuse from J. A. Later, after Rose-Aimée has flared up at J. A.'s behaviour, she participates, through her presence and commentary, in creating the miners' photo described earlier.

AMONG THE TEXTS AND FILMS DISCUSSED, *J. A. Martin photographe* is the only one which explores the partnership between a man and a woman, thus denying a permanent entrapment in any one role or habit.[8] Pictures are static but may be looked upon with fresh eyes or replaced by new ones. Rose-Aimée's energy and innocence in this respect contrast sharply with Elisabeth d'Aulnières's cynicism. For her, pictures are lies. Their rituals must be adhered to in order to maintain a falsely decorous front or to freeze the hypocritical misery of a scene in the past. In one of the early scenes of the novel, Elisabeth efficiently cleans up the disorder in the nursery, gathering her children about her in "un . . . touchant tableau." Elisabeth's own negligent appearance, however, strikes one of her daughters as "une fausse note." Little Anne-Marie's comment breaks the illusion, "la fausse représentation rompue." In Elisabeth's memories, the scenes of her marriage and motherhood appear arranged in the poses of conventional portraits and sculptures; bride and groom are perfect like a "Gravure

de mode pour Louis-Philippe de France"; both have the air of a "mannequin de cire," "une poupée mécanique." Antoine Tassy, in an attack of self-mortification and guilt, smashes the mirror reflecting his face; the fragments busily recompose the image he has tried to destroy: "Un fragment de miroir tient encore au-dessus de la commode de la chambre conjugale. La suie détache en poussière de velours. Dégage un petit hublot de tain pur. Quel joli tableau se mire dans cette eau morte. Un portrait de famille. Le père et la mère confus se penchent sur un nouveau-né tout rouge."

Anne Hébert's novel uses, as its framework, the more than conventional genre of the detective novel. Here, however, its mechanisms of repeated interrogation and verification gradually turn against themselves. Words and concepts assume uncanny echoes and acquire trap-doors of inverted meaning: "La matière romanesque, tout en mimant certains gestes du roman policier se métamorphose en aventure politique et métaphysique."[9] *Kamouraska* re-sensitizes conventional motifs; Jutra's film confirms this process. *J. A Martin photographe* subjects the same motifs to a radical re-definition by releasing the "woman in the window" into a lush countryside[10] and into a dialogue with her man. *Cordélia*, in its combination of visual beauty and oppressive atmosphere, appears as an anachronism; not surprisingly, the film has been criticized for its self-indulgent exploration of surface textures.[11] Here, then, are the limits of exploring a single subject through chronologically separated texts and films — the trap-door of traditional conceptualization may close again. Cordélia's bay-window should, more appropriately, have been "une fenêtre à guillotine": the film not only executes her but, in retrospect, also obscures the truth glimpsed through Rose-Aimée's and Elisabeth's window.

For these (and other) reasons, feminist writers like Nicole Brossard, Louky Bersianik, and Suzanne Lamy have expressed their distrust in the representativeness of any one of the traditional literary genres. In one approach to the creation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Louky Bersianik incorporates strongly integrated visual allusions in her mock-Platonic dialogue, *Le Pique-nique sur l'Acropole* (1979).[12] The redefinition of conventional philosophical and literary forms goes hand in hand with a defamiliarization of print through the insertion of black pages, scribbled notes, incomplete sketches. Book design is no longer merely decorative but part of *l'écriture*; writers express their distrust in the printed word as an adequate symbol of truth that defies the tradition of linear argument which the printed word stands for.[13] The text of *Le Pique-nique sur l'Acropole* is interspersed with black pages containing Jean Letarde's sketches, in white, of different kinds of windows. The names of these windows are chosen to reflect, in their ambiguity, upon the quotations scribbled inside the sketch. The "jalousie pour fenêtre à guillotine," for instance, frames statements by Aristotle and Jacques Lacan to the effect that "La femme est femelle en vertu d'un certain manque de qualités" and that "La femme n'est pas toute." Similarly, the "meurtrière" (murder-weapon; loophole)

condemns women to be "courtisanes," "concubines," "épouses," and "gardiennes." Revealingly, most of the affirmative statements concerning women are made within windows of circular or half-circular shape (*imposte*, *vitrail*, *Judas*, *hublot*, *lunette*), whereas many of the quotations entrapping them in their traditional roles are placed within square frames (*meurtrière*, *chausse-trappe*, *croisée*.) Windows of circular shape and the telescope (*lunette*) suggest words said in parentheses, truths glimpsed through a spy-glass, much in the way in which the black pages suggest photographic negatives, with the image as yet undefined. Square frames frequently correspond to the impact of linear print: they suggest definitiveness and orderly division into glass panes, at the expense of cutting the image perceived behind them into equally orderly segments. Bersianik, then, uses visual cues to enlarge upon the topics discussed during the picnic and, as it were, to open windows on factual documentation of the statements made within the fictional context of the symposium. Similarly, factual subjects are released into fiction to find a promise of freedom. Bersianik includes the photo of a young African girl who has just undergone clitoridectomy; unlike Cordélia, Adizetu is not forever trapped in her anguish. Released from the picture, she becomes an active participant in the women's symposium.

Visual allusions, as techniques constituting an integral part of *l'écriture*, are an innovative feature in Québec fiction. Yet they also remind one of other literary periods in which writers felt that the capacities of language needed to be widened in order to include new views and experiences and that verbal communication ought to be complemented by visual images. Such experiments were, for instance, conducted during the Romantic Age when William Blake illuminated his poems and those of others with illustrations that frequently developed ideas only touched upon in the text itself, and when Friedrich Schlegel postulated the novel as the all-embracing, never-completed genre typical of great national, metaphysical, and personal turmoil. Their art may be interpreted as an attempt at imposing adequate form upon the fragmentary components of an emerging ideology. Similarly, it may be argued that the closeness of film, fiction, and documentary in Québec is one expression of its artists' awareness that the traditional limits of *écriture* must be transcended to include new forms of communication both linguistic and pictorial, if an adequate expression of a politically and intellectually re-defined Québec is to be found.[14]

NOTES

[1] Anne Hébert, *Kamouraska* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970).

[2] Suzanne Lamy has shown in her book *d'elles* (Montréal: L'Hexagone, 1979) how feminist literature makes use of "litanies" to exorcise petrified concepts. It seems to me that Hébert's enumerations such as the one quoted serve the opposite purpose, namely to confirm the action described.

[3] Jean Beaudin, *Cordélia*, scénario et dialogue (National Film Board, 1979), p. 172. I wish to thank the NFB for making the scripts of both *Cordélia* and *J. A. Martin photographe* available to me and for permitting me to quote from them.

[4] Cf. for example, E. D. Blodgett, "Prisms and Arcs: Structures in Hébert and Munro," in Diane Bessai, David Jackel, eds., *Figures in a Ground* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978); Margot Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 53-61; Yves Lever, "*Kamouraska* — un film de Claude Jutra," *Relations* (mai 1973), pp. 157-58.

[5] Jean Beaudin, *J. A. Martin photographe*, dialogue (National Film Board 1977), p. 4.

[6] Pauline Cadieux, *La Lampe dans la fenêtre* (Ottawa: libre expression, 1976), p. 24.

[7] Mark Leslie, "Jean Beaudin's *Cordélia*," *Cinema Canada* 64 (April 80), p. 38.

[8] From the beginning of the film, Rose-Aimée insists that the outcome of her trip with J. A. might be "qu'on s'parle."

[9] Albert Le Grand, "*Kamouraska* ou l'Ange et la bête," *Etudes françaises*, 7 (1971), p. 115.

[10] Cf. Marshall Delaney's comment on *J. A. Martin photographe* in *Saturday Night*, 92 (December 1977), p. 95, comparing Beaudin's film with "art and fiction dealing with that time and place"; unlike earlier pieces, *J. A. Martin* is conceived "against an idyllic summer landscape."

[11] Leslie, p. 38.

[12] Bersianik's book was published by vlb éditeur; the lavish illustration of *Le Pique-nique* . . . is undoubtedly connected with Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's own conception of the novel as a genre comprising all of the traditional literary as well as visual genres. In his trilogy, *Monsieur Melville*, for instance, he has his narrator, Abel Beauchemin, claim that "Ecrire ne constitue pas une orientation parce que cela ne fait que se recommencer pour occuper tout le champ de ses fissures et, par cela même, en produire de nouvelles, et d'autres encore, jusqu'à l'extinction de soi." Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, *Monsieur Melville: Dans les Aveilles de Moby Dick* (Montréal: vlb editeur, 1978), p. 14.

[13] Not surprisingly, the editors of *La Nouvelle Barre du Jour* acknowledge poet-artist Roland Giguère as one of those "qui annonçaient déjà les temps de la liberté." See *Ellipse*, no. 23/24 (1979), p. 24.

[14] This seems to be confirmed by the cameo appearances of well-known Québec singers like Claude Gauthier and Gilles Vigneault in *Cordélia*, and the general mobility of Québec artists between different artistic genres.

OVERLAND POEM

Tom Wayman

This autumn morning, the good grey asphalt
winds along a shelf men built
above a lakeshore
until the yellow line
takes the traffic up into a wooded stretch
on a hillside
among trucks and motorhomes,
passing a survey crew's markers,
and houses and a few stores
and an open gas station
that could be the outskirts of somewhere
or a spot with a name all its own
and then cresting over a rise
with far-off mountains
visible in the sunshine
then woods again,
in the tire's noise, and the motor's,
and me travelling
among friends and strangers,
happy with the car and the wheel
and the new day, singing
Long live the Road.
May it last as long as the sea —
connector, distancer,
hour of peril and joy,
escape and workplace and executioner,
complete, yet constantly rebuilding.
May I always have
a good car and a destination
and may you roll, Road,
until this continent, drifting west,
touches Asia
and they link you onto another continent,
pushing you forward into new corners of the Earth,
and then another continent
where you descend beside a river for most of a morning
before sweeping out to cross a broad plain . . .

ROMANS DE LA PAROLE (ET DU MYTHE)

Laurent Mailhot

"Petit à petit, j'entrais dans mon histoire" —
JACQUES POULIN, *Le Coeur de la Baleine bleue*

À CÔTÉ DE LA PRODUCTION romanesque théorique, expérimentale, métaphysique — de Nicole Brossard à Louis-Philippe Hébert ou à François Hébert — il existe dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine une fiction qu'il faut situer quelque part entre l'oral et l'écrit, entre la tradition et la modernité, entre l'épopée et la critique (l'autocritique). Je ne pense pas ici aux "dynasties" de Jacques Lamarche, aux tableaux de moeurs villageoises de Bertrand B. Leblanc ou à d'autres veines d'un pittoresque daté. Les textes donc je voudrais parler sont d'une autre teneur: ils mélangent le sang à l'encre, le vécu au représenté, le transmis au construit.

D'apparence folklorique ou populiste, mais d'une rhétorique sophistiquée, ouvrant le réalisme au fantastique, ces oeuvres plus ou moins romanesques vont d'*Un dieu chasseur* aux *Anthropoïdes*, des cycles ferroniens (*Le Saint-Elias, La Chaise du maréchal-ferrant*) aux "voyageries" de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, des déserteurs d'André Major à *L'Emmitouflé* de Louis Caron, des dérives de Jacques Poulin au "samedi 2 mai 1942" de la famille Tremblay. Ces romans ou récits se situent dans le prolongement du conte (chez un Carrier, un Ferron, un Thériault), à proximité du théâtre (monologues, choeurs, découpage). Alors que les romans de l'écriture affichent une intertextualité européenne, les romans de la parole sont plutôt (nord-)américains. Ceux-là sont volontiers intellectuels, abstraits, schématiques, brillants, d'un formalisme étudié; ceux-ci, pragmatiques, se donnent jusque dans le mythe une apparence de *naturel*.

Au commencement de l'histoire

Il s'agit de prendre la parole au mot, d'attraper les "histoires" au piège, d'articuler le *je* au *il*, aux *ils*. Remonter à des affluents, à une source? Fixer un *Repère*, c'est-à-dire devenir père à son tour, "renouveler l'alliance avec le commencement de l'histoire," comme le fait Joseph Bonenfant dans un roman de l'écriture, de la culture? Remonter le temps et l'espace sans quitter le lieu actuel du travail, de l'oeuvre. Les "Pays d'en haut" ne sont plus au Nord ou à l'Ouest, hors frontières, ils sont repérés, dessinés par des "cartographes de l'imaginaire." *Les Grands*

Marées entourent l'île Madame, *L'Emmitouflé* se cache près des marécages du lac Saint-Pierre.

"J'ai été parlant — sans l'être — toute ma vie," observe *Moi, Pierre Huneau*, dont le jeu pronominal n'est pas sans rappeler d'autres *Anthropoïdes*: "(dit Guito se dit Guito moi Guito je me dis)." La "terre promise" d'Agaguk, la "montagne" sacrée d'Antoine, *L'Ile introuvable*, le "paradis" érotique, écologique, ethnologique, ont toujours à voir avec la tradition, le mythe, la création continuée. Parmi tous les héros d'Yves Thériault, contestataires, marginaux, minoritaires, passionnées, cruels, délirants, le plus radical, le plus primitif est une sorte de poète *naturel* qui connait les signes et les pistes. L'initiation (sexuelle, technique, socio-politique) est d'abord un accès aux symboles, aux légendes (*Le Ru d'Ikoué*).

Plus haut encore dans l'histoire, dans la préhistoire, chez les *Anthropoïdes* de Gérard Bessette, "l'épreuve rituelle de la parole" est "plus éprouvante et plus terrible (au dire de Lato) que le rite du coupoir." Et le texte n'a pas été coupé.... Chez Bessette comme chez Thériault ou Jean-Yves Soucy, l'épopée antique est signalée par la chasse et/à l'amour, les épithètes homériques, les archaïsmes, la solennité, le hiératisme. Les "parolades" et "parolages" de Guito sont un brillant exercice scolaire. L'hominien a beau "imager" — "penser en images," "se rappeler des souvenirs (visuels)," selon la définition donnée en appendice — il n'imagine guère. Le roman d'aventure(s) des *Anthropoïdes* fait partie des sciences humaines appliquées.

Les Cornes sacrées de Roger Fournier pointent vers une Antiquité gréco-latine, des Humanités savoureuses, une Méditerranée ensoleillée. Des chroniques beauceronnes ou abitibiennes (*Johnny Bungalow*) se tournent avec nostalgie vers la Passé de l'enfance, de l'agriculture, de la guerre. Le Michel Beauparlant de *L'Isle au dragon* est beau parleur — "dans le vide du fleuve," avec ses bouteilles à la mer — plutôt que bien parlant. Il est celui "qui ne fait que parler," donc ni Gilles Vigneault ni Réjean Ducharme, malgré ce qui prétend l'auteur,[1] qui rattache laborieusement sa dragonnade écologique aux *Mille et une nuits* — par le pétrole et les Arabes! Va-t-on du mythe à la parole ou du "parolage" (parlage) à la mythologie?

Le cycle "du plateau Mont-Royal," de Michel Tremblay, se concentre sur une date, un jour, et rayonne du passé au présent, sans régression, sans fixation. Le décor de *Pierrette et Thérèse à l'école des Saints-Agnes* est visiblement théâtral: façades baroques, "ange suspendu," coulisses d'une Fête-Dieu populaire. *La Grosse Femme d'à côté est enceinte* allait plus loin, non pas avec Duplessis et Godbout (chat et chien), mais avec les trois Parques, Mauve, Violette et Rose, avec la prostituée ouatouaise, le Violoneux, l'homosexuel, l'enfant, avec la grosse femme elle-même remplie de lectures et de rêves exotiques.

Avec son air très sage, Adrienne Choquette (*Le Temps des villages*) affirme tranquillement: "Là où l'on a commencé à aimer ou à haïr, là était le village."

Mais où commence la passion? Où se trouve le village actuellement, sinon dans la fiction? *C'est ici que le monde a commencé*, prononce avec assurance Adrien Thério au seuil d'un "récit-reportage" plus anecdotique que fondateur. Ne commence pas qui veut, ni où il veut. "C'est justement de commencer qui est difficile," reconnaît Victor-Lévy Beaulieu (*Pour saluer Victor Hugo*). Il faut de longs détours, via les U.S.A., *On the Road*, jusqu'au XIX^{e} siècle puritain. Ventre-de-soufre (*Blanche forcée*) sera pour Beaulieu ce commencement, cet enfantement dans la douleur et la violence.

Parole, parabole, parolade, parade: le roman/récit québécois cherche son commencement, son histoire, son sens. "Mais moi je n'ai jamais commencé. Mais moi je suis comme mon pays, je suis la demi-mesure même de mon pays," écrit Beaulieu à la fin de *Monsieur Melville*. Il est déjà beau de pouvoir mesurer, fut-ce à moitié, l'immensité d'un territoire imaginaire. Beaulieu mesure sa propre "impuissance," son propre "échec" à ceux de l'auteur de *Moby Dick*. Voilà au moins une borne, une frontière, un horizon à la médiocrité ("demi-mesure") du pays.

Hubert Aquin se mesurait à Joyce, Jacques Ferron se mesure à Molière, à Lewis Carroll, à l'éloquence indienne; Emile Ajar et Le Clézio pourraient se mesurer à Ducharme. Mais la démesure de la parole, du mythe, passe les bornes et déplace les frontières. Où situer telles nouvelles fantastiques? *Rue Saint-Denis*, est-ce au coeur du nouveau quartier latin et de la bohême touristique? Qui sont ces "hydrocéphales adultes," ces "buveurs attardés" que font parler Charbonneau-Tissot ou Michel Tremblay? Sont-ils sans commune mesure avec les enfants, les vagabonds, les aïeux des "grands contes"? "Dans le contexte où il s'écrit aujourd'hui, le conte est une forme critique, une machine de guerre dirigée contre le roman et la vision historique du monde qu'il transporte," remarque Gilles Marcotte.[2] Les machines sont primitives, épiques, carnavalesques, théâtrales. La guerre se fait à l'intérieur même de l'univers fictionnel d'Antonine Maillet, de Carrier, de Ferron. . . .

Des grands-pères aux "grands contes": ils sont une fois . . .

Les grands-pères qu'on rencontre, çà et là, dans le roman québécois contemporain — du spectre de *Serge d'entre les morts* au nonagénaire *Moi, Pierre Huneau*, sans compter l'immense Grand-Mère Antoinette d'*Une Maison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* — sont moins des personnages (émouvants) que des moyens (efficaces). Plutôt que de parler d'eux, et même de les faire parler, la narration passe par eux. Ils font le pont entre l'ici-maintenant du conteur-scripteur et l'ailleurs-autrefois du mythe. Ils *sont* une fois, multipliée, actualisée par chaque lecture. Ils sont eux-mêmes auditeurs des histoires lues ou écrites par leurs petits-fils.

Le Vieux-Thomas de Roch Carrier (*Il n'y a pas de pays sans grand-père*) est sauvé — non pas de la mort, mais de l'attente sans objet, de la bouillie mentale — par les histoires de Jean-Thomas, son quasi-homonyme. Ces deux Thomas, du nom

de l'apôtre du doute, ont une certitude: "Les paroles donnent la vie." Elles la retiennent aussi. Jusqu'à un certain point. "Oh, pourquoi l'impuissance des mots si facilement vaincus par la mort?" demande le *Jos Connaissant* de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu. Facilement vaincus? Grâce à la mémoire, à la tradition orale, à l'intertexte, la victoire de la mort n'est pas absolue. Toujours, un mot attend l'autre, attend tous les autres. S'ils n'ont pas un pouvoir direct sur la mort, les mots exercent leur action sur la mémoire et l'imagination du futur. "Ne restait plus qu'à s'exprimer une dernière pensée qui ne se formulerait pourtant que de l'autre côté du miroir, dans le pays immobile et blanc," peut-on lire (indéfiniment) à la fin des *Grands-pères* de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, au moment où le sabbat envahit la nuit, où des diables aux "queues puissantes" montent "de la cave et d'entre les murs," bientôt suivis d'anges, d'incantations, d'exorcismes: "tout avait goût de chair grillée et de sang trop chauffé dans les veines." Milien, alias le Vieux, est vivant jusqu'au dernier mot.

Les premiers contes de Roch Carrier, *Jolis deuils*, en 1964, étaient présentés comme de "petites tragédies pour adultes," sobres, sèches, désabusées sinon cyniques. La série suivante, parue dans les *Ecrits du Canada français* en 1969, s'intitulait magnifiquement "Contes pour mille oreilles": petits drames sans tragique, contes ouverts à une écoute multiple. *Les Enfants du bonhomme dans la lune*, dix anx plus tard, sont des récits plus ou moins autobiographiques, des Mémoires d'enfance pour adultes et enfants. N'allons pas jusqu'à dire, cependant, avec René Dionne, qu'il s'agit là d'"essais en forme de récits" et que "Carrier n'écrit de contes que ses romans."[3] Carrier écrit divers types de contes, du tableau à la fable et au monologue. *La Guerre, yes sir!* est un conte, même au théâtre.

"L'originalité du roman québécois consiste peut-être à tenir grande ouverte la contradiction entre un désir de conter qui demeure extrêmement vif, indéracinable pour ainsi dire, et une conscience non moins vive de la fragilité du récit, voire de son illigitimité."[4] Ducharme, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, quelques autres poussent au bout et à écartèlement. Ils se font un sang d'encre, une histoire toujours à venir appelée, refusée, reprise. Ils écrivent "à perte" (Aquin), "de force," devant et derrière le miroir, dans une zone extrême qu'ils ne veulent ni conquérir ni brader.

Dans l'"échec fabuleux" de Melville, ce qui fascine Beaulieu, ce n'est pas l'échec, c'est évidemment la fable, le monstre, le mythe à retuer, à récrire. Son *Don Quichotte de la démanche* est un microscope-télescope, un microcosme géant. "Nous sommes arrivés bien au-delà de la continuité." Nous sommes dans les châteaux en Espagne, les romans de chevalerie, les moulins à vent. Nous sommes dans le sablier lui-même, dans le temps répandu (comme du sang), renversé, détrôné (comme un roi). Dans le temps qui recommence sans commencer. Mais ce pays *démanché*, désarticulé, convient à la gesticulation folle de *l'homme rapaillé*. Homme et pays, écriture et histoire se mesurent l'un à l'autre. Comment?

Là où l'écriture se contente d'adapter ou de mimer un discours, elle n'est fidèle

ni à ses origines ni à sa fin. Le commencement de l'histoire (racontée) n'est pas à retrouver, mais à inventer. De l'oral à l'écrit, le pont est un passage incessant.

> Le conte fait l'histoire, mais *une autre histoire*, différente de celle qui construit le roman; non pas séquentielle, linéaire, axée sur l'idéologie du progrès, mais revenant sans cesse sur ses pas, retournant au 'grand commencement' pour en repartir de nouveau et, par ce mouvement, ouvrir le présent à l'infini des possibles.[5]

Gilles Marcotte suggère que, pour la conteuse et romancière Antonine Maillet, "l'Acadie est un lieu propice à la création — à toutes les formes de création — dans la mesure même où elle n'est pas un vrai pays, dans la mesure où elle n'est que la région, le 'coin', le 'boute'."[6] Et le Québec est-il, lui, un vrai pays? Où? Pour qui? Les *Romans du pays* qu'étudie Gabrielle Poulin sont les récits, contes, nouvelles d'un territoire (de l')imaginaire. Pays de papier, du sang, des jeux, "pays-manège" ou pays fantastique, dans aucun cas il ne s'agit du même pays. Sa seule parenté — équivoque — est avec le fameux thème du pays de la poésie des années soixante: *Terre Québec, l'Homme rapaillé, Pays sans parole*. . . .

"Québec de mes fesses!" et "maudit pays de zouaves," dit Limoilou, héroïne à la Ducharme de Jacques Poulin (*Faites de beaux rêves*). Par toutes sortes de greffes (*Le Coeur de la baleine bleue*), d'errances (*Mon cheval pour un royaume*), de circuits, de dérives, les jeunes héros de Poulin se dépaysent radicalement. Leurs messages sont bloqués. Pilote sur pilotis, *Jimmy* émet des signaux de détresse, des "questions pour les chaises." "Je suis prêt à tout raconter, mais je n'ai jamais réussi à parler vraiment avec quelqu'un," dit-il. Jimmy pourrait être, après quelques années de naufrage, le héros des *Grandes Marées*. Pour parler, celui-ci dessine, écrit: "Dans les bandes dessinées, il faut obtenir un ton intermédiaire entre le langage parlé et le langage écrit. . . ."

La parole comme lieu de travail

Depuis quinze ou vingt ans, le roman québécois est passé "d'un *discours humaniste* à un *humanisme du discours*," note Jacques Michon. Après la recherche angoissée "d'un être, d'une vérité et d'une identité de l'homme universel," on a mis l'accent "sur le sujet particulier qui s'énonce au Québec et sur la diversité de son langage."[7] Au "Qui suis-je?" a succédé un "Qui parle?" à la fois plus littéraire et plus politique, ainsi que les questions connexes: d'où parle-t-il? à qui? comment? Le conte est toujours sans commencement, et le roman sans fin.

C'est dans cette perspective qu'on peut situer l'utilisation systématique dans le roman des niveaux de langue populaires, de l'autobiographie et du témoignage, de la parodie, de la rhapsodie. . . . "Les limites de la littérature sont désormais celles de la société elle-même, et non plus celles d'une convention ou d'un public lettré restreint," conclut Michon.[8] Là-dessus, je ne suis pas d'accord. Société et littérature ne coïncident pas. Les bornes de l'une sont les seuils de l'autre. Les conventions changent, sans cesser d'être des conventions. Par delà la "solidarité his-

torique" de l'écrivain et du peuple (grâce à l'intégration des langages), des clivages se manifestent, des ruptures s'annoncent. Une société n'est jamais *totale*. Le public "lettré" est passée de la bourgeoisie libérale, clérico-conservatrice, aux milieux de l'enseignement, des communications, et à divers secteurs marginaux. Dans la société comme en littérature, cependant, la somme des minorités qui parlent — fussent-elles la jeunesse, les femmes — constitue rarement une majorité (silencieuse).

Le Dragon multinational et polluant de Jacques Godbout (*L'Isle au Dragon*) est un polichinelle à côté de la Baleine melvillienne de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu. Godbout réussit mieux la caricature politique et la bande dessinée (voir son film *Ixe-13*, interprété par les Cyniques); Beaulieu traverse l'actualité, préférant la passion à l'action. Le *je* de Godbout est un jeu grammatical, rhétorique, *moderne*; le *je* de Beaulieu est métaphysique. Signataire de nombreuses chroniques, tribunes et lettres ouvertes, VLB romancier n'a (presque) rien du journaliste: quelques allusions, quelques clés. "Moi, décalcomaniaque reproduisant tout mais n'étant jamais" (*Don Quichotte de la démanche*)? C'est pousser la mauvaise conscience trop loin. Heureusement, Beaulieu répond à Victor-Lévy: "Par la déformation du mot, l'on entre dans une espèce de paradis de la parole, dans un lieu de liberté dont l'expérimentation peut déboucher sur quelque chose d'important (*Race de monde!*).

De la parodie livresque (*Mémoires d'outre-tonneau*) aux grandes "voyageries," par toutes sortes de nuits, de rêves, de délires, Beaulieu se dirige, à travers les calembours, viols du langage et autres violences, au centre du monde et de lui-même. Sa quête a quelque chose de la géographie intime, cosmique, d'Alain Grandbois. La navigation du romancier croise les îles, rivages, étoiles, feux à la dérive du poète. Ils plongent tous deux à l'origine, à la racine, à la fin du monde.

La démiurgie de Beaulieu a des résonances bibliques. *Race de monde!* est-il un titre de malédiction ou d'amour? Un romancier nommé Abel, fils prédestiné, préside à la destinée des Beauchemin. La tribu connaît l'exode, le désert, l'exil; elle a ses petits rois, ses femmes-esclaves, ses prophètes. Pour rendre Job jaloux, la fidèle France, après avoir délégué Ruth en vain, imagine à ses côtés la présence d'un certain Abraham. Le "cantique" de *Sagamo Job J* est un long prologue (pp. 11-172) et un épilogue chantés par la voix de France, compagne délaissée, entre lesquels se glisse un bref intermède. "J'appelle écriture tout ce par quoi je suis vécu . . . ," écrit le héros-victime de *N'évoque plus que le désenchantement de ta ténèbre, mon si pauvre Abel*. Cette "lamentation" est un hymne pascal, une Passion active, la mort et résurrection du *moi-je*.

La vie peut-elle passer toute entière dans (par) l'écriture? "La vie est des mots," mais "la vie ne s'écrit pas, il n'y a que l'imagination de la vie qui s'écrit . . ." (*Mémoires d'outre-tonneau*, dont le sigle serait M.O.T.). Alors, forçons (sur) l'imagination. Il faut que celle-ci l'emporte constamment sur la vie. La lutte est

épuisante, sans victoire ni défaite définitives. L'écriture est elle-même de l'imagination en acte, en mouvement. *Blanche forcée*, comme toutes les figures de la Baleine mythique, c'est le viol de la conscience trop claire, l'irruption du réel (de la mort, de l'oubli) dans le tissu des mots et des images.

Comment savoir, non seulement qui je suis, mais "si je suis vraiment et que signifie ce mot exister?" se demandait *Malcomm Hudd*. La question du quoi dire ou du pourquoi vivre ne peut s'aborder, difficilement, que par un comment dire (vivre). Où, par où commencer? Il faut d'innombrables recommencements pour qu'un sens, une direction se dessine. Le temps a besoin d'espace, d'épaisseur où loger sa mémoire. L'oeuvre de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, qu'on a pu croire surabondante, bâclée, est pressée par le temps. Elle n'avance si vite que pour mieux prendre sa distance par rapport à elle-même. Quel chemin parcouru de Victor Hugo à Jacques Ferron, de Kerouac à Melville, de Diogène à Don Quichotte, de Miami à Morial-Mort, de Satan Belhumeur à Job, à Jonas. . . .

De même que Blanche pourrait être "le fantôme d'Una, la forme dont Job a revêtu l'absence de sa petite fille,"[9] ainsi l'écriture est la forme — pas seulement le vêtement — d'une absence signalée: celle de la parole immémoriale, quotidienne. La "ténèbre blanche de l'écriture," comme dit avec bonheur Gabrielle Poulin, est une contradiction indépassable: relire ici le poème "Soir d'hiver" de Nelligan. Nul chasseur-pêcheur, nul reporter ne saurait capturer, disséquer ce Ventre-de-soufre. On peut à peine éclairer de l'intérieur, par intermittences, cette bête scandaleuse. Tout commence et se termine avec Ventre-de-soure. Non plus un ventre (de femme) qui souffre, qui enfante, mais un antre (de sorcière) qui souffle, qui insuffle. Chez Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, la parole et l'écriture meurent, vivent l'une de l'autre. La "vraie saga" des Beauchemin est à venir, jamais à suivre.

NOTES

[1] Dans une entrevue accordée à André Renaud, "Jacques Godbout romancier: le voyage, le dragon et l'Amérique," *Voix et images*, 5, no. 1 (automne 1979), p. 30.

[2] Gilles Marcotte, "La problématique du récit dans le roman québécois d'aujourd'hui," *Revue des sciences humaines* (Lille), 173, no. 1 (1979), 66.

[3] Dans Gabrielle Poulin, *Romans du pays* (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1980), p. 135.

[4] Gilles Marcotte, p. 61.

[5] Ibid., p. 64.

[6] Ibid., p. 65.

[7] Jacques Michon, "Le roman québécois des années soixante," *The French Review*, 53, no. 6 (mai 1980), 815. Voir aussi Laurent Mailhot, "Le roman québécois et ses langages," *Stanford French Review* (Spring-Fall 1980), pp. 147-70.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Gabrielle Poulin, p. 411. "Elle s'appelle Blanche. Qui est-elle, sinon la mémoire de Job, comme un immense *blanc*; la page *blanche* sur laquelle il devra faire surgir, une à une, les lignes comme autant de chemins du passé" (p. 417).

FAIRY TALES

Kenneth Sherman

The fairy tales have no simple endings.
Hansel and Gretel do not go home.
And that spidery wart of a witch,
that black-laced bitch who waits
in the woods of sly-eyed rodents
and owls who rotate their conspiring heads,
has a thousand and one sugared plans
to keep you here and in pain.

In the stinking saw-toothed dungeon
of her face your gingerbread dreams
dissolve. The family members will cook
one another alive (for love,
they say, for love). And the dove
who once returned you safe and sound
is now a crow, sniggering
on the home's thatched eaves.

There is no reconciliation. The longer
you stay the more sluggish your feet
the heavier your lids and your brain
begins defending those rusted chains
of fear. Nor is there a hunter near
with glimmering axe, waiting for
your sobs, waiting to rush in and
split the hag's dry pod of a head.

Stealth, my dearest; childhood is over.
Put away your green balloon and slam
the oven door. The smell of her sizzling
flesh is not so bad as you imagined.
Later, in the blue bruise of forest
you will leave your sister,
whisper your own name over and over.
You will lie down and sleep
beneath the clear and separate stars.

books in review

PLURAL QUEBEC

PAUL CHAMBERLAND, *Terre souveraine.* Editions de l'Hexagone.

JACQUES GRAND'MAISON, *Une Foi ensouchée dans ce pays.* Leméac.

JEAN-MARC PIOTTE, *Un Parti pris politique.* VLB Editeur, $12.95.

DOMINIQUE CLIFT and SHEILA ARNOPOULOS, *Le Fait anglais au Québec.* Editions Libre Expression.

SINCE THE ELECTION of the Parti Québécois in 1976 there has been a veritable explosion of books on Quebec and its people, including sociological and economic studies, philosophical treatises, political pamphlets, government white papers, confessions, observations and cries from the soul.

Paul Chamberland's *Terre souveraine* falls into the last category. Actually it is a prose poem marked by a "tristesse" and an idealism which contrast sharply with the cynical attempts at manipulation of public opinion on the part of many of the province's politicians.

Unfortunately, Chamberland's vision seems often to be far removed from the realm of the possible. "Nous pouvons faire ici une *terre de paix*, et un *laboratoire de la nouvelle humanité*," he writes, alluding to what could happen if the people were to opt for sovereignty, presumably in the Quebec Referendum. He goes on to urge that the "impératif catégorique" of constant increase in material production be rejected as anti-human and anti-earth.

Poet Chamberland must have been devastated when Finance Minister Jacques Parizeau, attempting to reassure the population that there would be no change in Quebec's attitude to business and commerce, stated that sovereignty would involve nothing more than the cost of a case of beer.

Jacques Grand-maison's *Une Foi ensouchée dans ce pays* is the *apologia* of a priest for his desire to enter politics as a candidate for the P.Q. The author does not fear to criticize his own superiors, notably "le cardinal irlandais Carter de Toronto qui, à la télévision anglaise, accusait les catholiques francophones de pécher contre l'unité."

Nor does he spare the intellectuals who "veulent promouvoir un Québec indépendent, socialiste, laique et quoi encore," but who have chosen to ignore the will of the people. Since the book was written before the recent directive from the Pope that Catholic clergymen must not become active politicians and since Grand'maison repeatedly states that he has no intention of abandoning the priesthood, one must therefore presume that the Vatican has pulled the plug on his aspirations.

One of the intellectuals whom Grand'maison had in mind perhaps is socialist Jean-Marc Piotte. His *Un Parti pris politique* is simply a collection of his own articles published between 1963 and 1978, and thus it adds nothing new to the Quebec debate.

It does, nevertheless, underline how rapidly and extensively the province has changed over the past two decades, possibly more than during the previous 350 years of its history. Throughout the book Piotte reveals the dilemma of so many Quebec socialists and Marxists: on the one hand they wish for the separation of Quebec, which would then be able to divorce itself (vertical division) from the North American capitalist system; on the other hand they are obliged to subscribe to the idea of the unity of the workers of Canada, indeed of the whole of North America and the world, against the scions

of multinational capitalism (horizontal division).

Of the four examples of Quebec's publication explosion, Clift's and Arnopoulos' *Le Fait anglais au Québec* is undoubtedly the most significant in terms of content and implication. While the other books deal with past events and personal fancies, it deals with current realities and their likely effect upon the future of French Canada.

Curiously enough, the book does not provide a great deal of insight into the actual "English fact" in Quebec. The historical perspectives are sketchy at best, and many of the observations are broad generalizations. Rather than "le fait anglais," the subject which Clift and Arnopoulos do indeed treat is the changing configuration of the "le fait français."

They point out, for example, how for years pluralism was thrust upon the majority of non-francophone Quebeckers, because immigrants and the children of immigrants were not welcomed into francophone schools and institutions even when they wished to be, which often enough they did not because of the association of English with the power elite. The result was that French Canada was able to evolve quite exclusively, "en famille" as it were.

The falling birthrate, however, brought Quebec leaders to the realization that French Canadians were doing to themselves what the surrounding millions of North America anglophones had failed to do — unbreeding themselves out of existence, effecting the revenge of the empty cradle.

The solution was Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language, which among other things obliges the children of immigrants to go to French-language schools and has already caused a dramatic plunge in the number of pupils attending English schools. New Canadians thus now become integrated into the francophone rather than the anglophone community.

Ironically, as Clift and Arnopoulos outline, the ultimate effect of the new policy will have to be either the disappearance of the erstwhile exclusive and somewhat xenophobic Quebec "famille" society, or else a society fraught with bitter ethnic conflict.

Not only has the province received thousands of basically francophone Haitians, Belgians, and North African Jews in the last few years, but however reluctantly, many other thousands — of Italians, Greeks, Germans, West Indians, Spaniards, South Americans, Asians, Poles, Ukrainians and various other nationalities — are being integrated into the Quebec francophone community, not to mention the fact that native anglophones have been rushing to take immersion courses in French.

The whole of Quebec, therefore, is quickly being transformed into a pluralist society, whether or not that is what the framers of Bill 101 had in mind.

In the books by Paul Chamberland, Jacques Grand'maison and Jean-Marc Piotte there is a strong tone of wistful thinking combined with a hint of nostalgia. One can well understand why. The Quebec of the future will obviously not be theirs alone to shape, and the Quebec they have known will never be the same.

RONALD SUTHERLAND

REASSEMBLING GENRES

CLAUDE JASMIN, *La Sablière*, Leméac, n.p.

VICTORY-LEVY BEAULIEU, *Les Grands-pères*. vlb, $6.95.

"ON EST DE SON ENFANCE comme on est d'un pays": Germain, in Claude Jasmin's *Revoir Ethel* (1976) remembers Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's words and, thus, summarizes the thematic centre of Claude

Jasmin's work to date. His two primary concerns are the search for his country, Québec, and for a lost childhood. The two searches are interrelated; as Québec battles against the predominance of its anglophone environment, children lead a precarious existence under the pressures of parents and educational institutions. In *Le Loup de Brunswick City* (1976), Jasmin adapts a news story of a young boy who wandered into the woods while his family was moving from Québec to the United States, grew up with a pack of wolves, and made his way back to Québec and his lost childhood, years after American society had reclaimed him. The hero of Jasmin's latest novel, *La Sablière* (1979), fifteen-year-old Clovis Jhie, tries to retain his childhood through his young brother, Mario, a retarded child. Mario, like the wolf-child, is exceptional because adults cannot reach and train him as efficiently as they can a "normal" boy. Clovis uses his young brother as a barrier between himself and his family (significantly, there are no other brothers), because Clovis himself is afraid of growing up. All summer long, he and Mario play in a gravel-pit, acting out the historical events described in Clovis's encyclopedia. He receives the volumes through vouchers from a cereal box, and their games are dependent on the appearance of further instalments. When volume 7 fails to arrive, the Jhies' games are stalled. Through the remainder of the summer, Mario and Clovis worry about the outcome of the battle between Charles Martel and the Arabs. Their love of the colour and romance of Islam and their latent fear that Christianity might have won the battle coincide with their dread of losing their childhood dreams to the restrictions of adult life. But, from the beginning of the novel, the range and freedom of their dreams are manacled by the cornflake box advertisements; even Mario's dreams are haunted by the heroes of American cartoons. In a feverish monologue, he mingles them with the exotic princes and creatures of Arabic fairy-tales, but it is obvious that Mickey Mouse and Roy Rogers will, in the end, be stronger than Aladdin and the Saracens. Clovis' and Mario's games find no support from the rest of the family who think they harm Mario psychologically. There is talk of an Uncle Ferdinand who ran off to Africa and is blamed by everyone for his irresponsible conduct (here, as in Michel Tremblay's *La Cité dans l'oeuf*, Africa serves as the metaphor of an exotic and demonic dreamland, unspoilt by consumerism), but Ferdinand is obviously too far away to help his nephews.

Twice, when the family decides to have Mario consigned to a mental institution, Clovis tries to kill his young brother. Clovis' attempts at mercy killing are as much directed against himself as against Mario, as much a desperate wish to preserve his own childhood as the desire to spare Mario humiliation. Clovis's preoccupation with himself is reflected in the fact that Mario remains pale as a character throughout the narrative; we are told that he is a retarded child, but besides his occasional stuttering and his misspelt letter, Jasmin has made no serious efforts to re-create Mario's exceptional psyche. As a result, Mario assumes an uncomfortable position between allegory and realism, and his parents appear like perfect ogres to a reader who has not been convinced that Mario, indeed, needs special treatment. His portrait is especially unsuccessful when compared to that of the wolf-child in *Le Loup de Brunswick City* and the many other children in recent Québec fiction (e.g., in Jacques Poulin's *Jimmy Trilogy*, Gabrielle Roy's *Ces Enfants de ma vie*, Michel Tremblay's *La grosse Femme d'à côté est enceinte*). The final impression the reader retains from *La Sablière* is

that there is something too cute about Mario, and something too self-indulgent about Clovis. In the end, Mario finds a third father in Don Gabriel who promises to tell him the stories Clovis's encyclopedia missed out on, and Clovis comments in self-pity, "Il tapote la petite main de Mario. Mon coeur se serre. On dirait qu'il en a pris possession à jamais."

While Claude Jasmin is preoccupied with childhood, the new vlb edition of Victory-Lévy Beaulieu's *Les Grands-pères* confronts us, even on the cover, with the representative of another group that has received much attention in Québec fiction in recent years: *les vieux*. The first and last pages show the same photograph — that of an old man's head, seen from the back: "Le crâne du Vieux était une boule de poils blancs qui poussaient en désordre." Most of the narrative of the novel unfolds itself inside this old man's head, a narrative as disorderly (in terms of chronology) as his white hair. Milien, le Vieux, lives the last days of his life pondering over his existence on the farm in Saint-Jean-de-Dieu; memories of his children and his wives, the two Miliennes, pass through his mind; he recalls the warmth of the animals he has owned. Age, fatigue, and sickness blend images of the past and present in Milien's perception, yet Beaulieu has accentuated the transitions between dream and reality with parentheses and thus made it relatively easy for the reader to follow the meanderings of Milien's consciousness. The long sentences and lack of paragraphing may suggest a chaotic interior monologue, but the presence of the parentheses indicates that the narrative sequence remains firmly in the hands of the narrator who, in one of them, confesses, "Rien n'avait lieu que dans l'esprit de quelqu'un immobile devant la tasse de café froid, un livre inactuel devant les yeux." We may assume that the narrator speaking here is Jos Connaissant, Milien's novelist grandson who appears in one of the other two Beaulieu novels about the Beauchemin family (*Race du monde*, 1969; *Jos Connaissant*, 1970). Jos Connaissant's attempt to delve into his grandfather's mind is also an attempt to return to the origins of his family, their rural environment, their desires and beliefs, their attachment to their animals. In Milien's mind, not only past and present are blended, but also men and animals. Lovingly, he helps the cat give birth; he himself laps up his coffee, "tlappe! tlappe! ... comme un chat," and even the garbage can in the kitchen opens up "toute grande comme une gueule de chat." Animals are also bearers of erotic power; Milien's sexual memories of the first Milienne, a fat woman he adored, are associated with a stallion; significantly, the second Milienne, a thin woman he detests, is seen drowning the kittens he watched being born. In his attraction to animals, sexuality and scatology are fused; through a process of mental transfer, this fusion also applies to his attitude to women. It is this element that, for me, spoils a brilliantly conceived novel; Beaulieu's obsessively anal language becomes unbearable when it is coupled with the notion of woman as cloaca.

Les Grands-pères, first published in 1971 by Editions du Jour and winner of the Grand Prix de la ville de Montréal, was saluted as a landmark in Québec fiction, a judgment that still holds true after almost a decade of very prolific novel writing in Québec. *Les Grands-pères* was hailed as the first successful rural novel since *Le Survenant*; some critics pursued its literary ancestry back even further by comparing it to Albert Laberge's *La Scouine* (1918). Moreover, *Les Grands-pères* marked the triumphant entrance of grandfathers into Québec fiction, after years of domination through "la mère canadienne-français," not to

speak of grandmothers of grand-mère Antoinette's calibre. Since then, Roch Carrier has published *Il n'y a pas de Pays sans grands-pères* (1977) and confirmed the literary presence of *les vieux*. Beaulieu's novel is a writer's probing into the rural world he left behind to go to "le grand Morial": les grands-pères, despite their passionate involvement in their world, are doomed to die; they live on only in their grand-children who, to use Joyce's words, "forge in the smithy of [their] soul the uncreated conscience of [their] race." Needless to say, Beaulieu's novel is not a return to idyllic regionalism; its association with *La Scouine* is derived from the fact that Laberge was one of the first writers in Québec to expose the seamier side of village life. The presence of a narrator who is himself a novelist indicates that *Les Grands-pères* is the mental reconstruction of a lost time and place; writing is thus not simply recording, but literally creating an old farmer's consciousness and, in doing so, re-defining a literary genre much despised by the writers of the Quiet Revolution. Beaulieu's *Les Grands-pères* joins the many other literary works in contemporary Québec whose form is a result of ironizing, destroying, and re-assembling traditional genres that no longer suit the reality they purport to enclose.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

REGIONAL QUEBEC

HUBERT DE RAVINEL, *Les Enfants du bout de la vie*. Editions Leméac, n.p.

JACQUES BRILLANT, *Le Soleil, se cherche tout l'été*. Editions Leméac, n.p.

BERTRAND LEBLANC, *Y sont fous le grand monde!* Editions Leméac, n.p.

THESE THREE WORKS, which all appeared in Editions Leméac's "Roman québécois" collection, illustrate an important current in contemporary French-Canadian prose fiction: the trend toward works of an increasingly regional nature. Hubert de Ravinel's collection of short stories, *Les Enfants du bout de la vie*, deals with the problems of senior citizens in east-end Montreal. Jacques Brillant's extremely traditional novel, *Le Soleil se cherche tout l'été*, is set in various parts of the Gaspé peninsula and attempts to do for the Gaspé what Antonine Maillet's novels have done for Acadia. The events of Bertrand Leblanc's much more innovative novel, *Y sont fous le grand monde!*, unfold in the Matapedia River valley, between Rivière-du-loup and Campbellton, N.B. The very narrow perspective on French-Canadian life presented in each of these works leads one to accept Roch Carrier's affirmation that the only literature which is possible in Canada is a regional literature.

The ten short stories which make up *Les Enfants du bout de la vie* all concentrate on the financial and emotional crises undergone by elderly characters who live in poverty and desperation in run-down tenements or sterile, dehumanizing homes for the aged. Two of the stories, "L'Invitation" and "Le Père Noël," relate the experiences of lonely pensioners who must spend Christmas alone due to unfeeling relatives and bureaucratic inefficiency. As the title of the collection suggests, the characters de Ravinel has created are like children, abandoned by society and deprived of everything except the basic necessities of life. The main characters in "Monsieur Charbonneau et Rose," for example, are respectively blind and deaf, as well as poor and alienated from society. In all the stories, the day-to-day difficulties of Montreal's senior citizens are set against a background of rapid social change, urban renewal and inadequate social programs administered by inefficient and insensitive bureaucrats. The world to which de Ravinel intro-

duces the reader is one in which there are few pleasures and from which the only escape is death.

Each story in the collection is told in a very simple, almost documentary-like style, sometimes with a touch of irony. The plots are neither complicated nor very skilfully constructed. In fact, most, if not all, of these stories are more interesting from a sociological rather than from a purely literary point of view. By far the best story in the collection is "Hectorine Pagé," which describes in detail an elderly widow's search for a suitable home and a cure for the loneliness which drives her at one point to count the number of meals she has eaten alone since her husband's death. With one exception, these chronicles of human suffering are told from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, whose apparent objectivity helps to avoid the sentimentality which might have otherwise marred the book.

In the tradition of the Quebec *roman du terroir*, Brillant's *Le soleil se cherche tout l'été* follows the evolution of the Gaspé region from the Depression to the mid-1950's. To some extent, it is an historical novel, as one of Brillant's main concerns is the political and religious life of the inhabitants of his beloved "finistère paradisiaque," before and after the Second World War. The main character of the novel is a fisherman whose wife becomes the mistress of the local *abbé*, and who seeks revenge not only on his wife but also on the illegitimate son she has by her ecclesiastical lover. The very loosely constructed plot includes, not surprisingly, a moose-hunt sequence, which culminates with a detailed and very realistic description of the butchering of the carcass. Throughout the novel, historical reality is combined with melodrama to produce a disconcerting mixture of realism and Romantic idealization of the life of this "peuple ténébreux."

Brillant, whose style is often reminiscent of the stylistic excesses of Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, deliberately uses archaic expressions such as "la gent féminine" and "l'hyménée" and indulges in frequent lyrical descriptions of nature and of some of his characters. In many ways, *Le Soleil se cherche tout l'été* is a nineteenth-century novel which tries to portray life in a part of Quebec which has never really emerged from the nineteenth century. Its basic themes are remarkably similar to those of much of Newfoundland literature: isolation, physical hardship, suffering and death. As is often the case in both Newfoundland and Quebec literature, the physical setting acquires a symbolic meaning. Like the land, where the sun rarely stays for long, even in summer, the inhabitants of the Gaspé peninsula live in a world where the forces of darkness are more powerful than the forces of light, where evil systematically triumphs over good.

The diary form of Leblanc's *Y sont fous le grand monde!* enables its author to present a satirical and frequently humorous view of life in the Matapedia valley of Quebec in the 1930's, as seen through the eyes of a naïve but sometimes precocious nine-year-old boy. The fact that the young diarist's name is Bertrand is not the only indication we are given that the novel is to a large extent autobiographical. The events of the novel, which span a period of approximately one year, include the young narrator's first stay in hospital, excursions with his Acadian father to horse-races and lumber camps, and the inevitable hockey games, sleighrides, and St.-Jean Baptiste celebrations. Everything which happens in the novel is filtered through the consciousness of Bertrand, who often fails to understand the adult world in which he spends much of his time, a failure which leads him to adopt the skeptical attitude expressed in the novel's title.

The charm and also many of the weaknesses of the novel result from its basic premise that "un p'tit gars de neuf ans, ça peut pas comprendre."

By far the most interesting aspect of *Y sont fous le grand monde!* is the attempt to reproduce the spoken language of the characters as faithfully as possible. The youthful Bertrand's attempts to spell English words (which he does not recognize as such) are extremely amusing. The reader unfamiliar with English might easily be confused by his references to Sister *Loqueouelle* ("Lockwell") and his descriptions of an *ail-riche-sept-heures* ("Irish setter") and *l'homme-beurre- jacques* ("lumberjacks"). Also interesting from a linguistic point of view is the contrast between the *joual* spoken by Bertrand's father ("Papa lui y a l'droit de dire moé pis toé . . .") and the language of his mother, who always uses standard French, particularly in front of her children. Aside from questions of language, Leblanc also uses the fiction of a nine-year-old narrator as a vehicle of social satire and as a pretext for a somewhat superficial treatment of social and economic problems. While Leblanc's latest novel is certainly no masterpiece, it does make interesting reading and is undoubtedly one of the best novels of its type to be published in the last few years.

RICHARD HODGSON

TRITE PARABLE

ROCH CARRIER, *The Garden of Delights*, trans. Sheila Fischman. Anansi, $6.95.

ROCH CARRIER'S LATEST PARABLE is a trite black comedy that is old cider in an old bottle. In some ways, *The Garden of Delights* is a departure from Carrier's first four novels, but, like those earlier ones, this one is didactic and exposes the savagery in Carrier's vision of man. Ostensibly a tale of greed, manipulation, and destruction that evokes the more obvious emblems in a medieval allegory of vice (the covers reproduce Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Delights* triptych), the book squanders its opportunities to be more than just this.

The victim in this tale is not an individual but an entire society of Quebec villagers who, it is evident, are still very much constrained by the customs and institutions of an outmoded culture. As one Chou Racine puts it, "When we were brought up they taught us more fairy tales than real things." And religion, as Carrier implicitly believes, is probably one of the largest breeders of such useless fantasy. Religious indoctrination has apparently created a society of folk simpletons who believe that true gold lies under "the rocks of life." These are a people who are "owned" by institutions. They are "always customers, never partners," and to the extent that their products are priced by foreign powers, their freedom is limited. Here Carrier is surely right, though hardly unique, in seeing an inveterate, subtle relationship between economic dependence and cultural freedom.

But who is the enemy? As a contemporary tale, *The Garden of Delights* could hardly revive old anti-British feelings, and so settles on the Americans as a foe. The resourceful, determined, cold-bloodedly ambitious rogue-hero, J. J. Bourdage, is passed off tellingly enough as the Vice-President of an American company. He comes on as a latter-day "good guy" with his white hat and shining white Cadillac. When he begins the madhouse antics by buying a round for everyone at the Auberge du Bon Boire, he creates the impression of a Western hero, generous in spirit and free with coin. Even his speech sounds American in its rhythm and colloquial ease: "A Heaven on earth ain't something out of the past, it's right in front of us. There's scientific

proof. You have to get out of the goddamn past you're sitting on like you once sat in your mothers' bellies. Today's already the past. The future's out there ahead of you, sputtering like the motor in a sports car ready to jump the first mile." If this recalls Sam Slick or one of Mark Twain's sly, glib flim-flam figures, it's probably supposed to do so. Bourdage, in fact, is none other than an ex-convict, sworn to redressing the damage inflicted upon himself by several indignities of personal circumstance. He is obsessed by the image of gold and, a keen reader of human vanity and weakness, he is a smooth crook.

There's nothing radically American about Bourdage's dishonesty, guile, or ambition, but his style and attitudes are what set him apart from the common man in this French Canadian setting: "On the road he has chosen, truth does not exist. Nor falsehood. All that exists is the next step to be taken. All that exists is the uncertain earth of the vast night where he must put down his foot for the next step."

Bourdage spreads the rumour that the local graveyard is full of buried gold. The villagers respond with manic greed, and anarchy becomes the prevailing norm by which we measure the myriad vanities of man. Carrier parodies human nature, and his characters are stereotypes that don't really have credible lives of their own. They are what their names suggest: no more, and no less. The Curé lusts secretly after Miss Catechism; Tristesse Lachance, steeped in goodness, has an unhappy life; Mme. Genéreux is overly generous with her ample bosom; and so forth. They pass to and fro, play out their follies, and spill maxims along the way in the very manner of a parable. We are never allowed to forget that there is a moral to this tale: "When you look for the truth in life, you're bound to get dirty"; "Money that's earned dishonestly always gets its revenge in the end"; "The poor are a lot happier than the rich." The trouble is that none of these is more than banal, and despite the bawdy elements, the absurd passions, and the racing tempo, Carrier's novel hardly ever gets beyond conventional satire.

There could hardly be any surprise about the fiery ending, the figurative serpent sinuously finding its way in this "garden," or the bloody fate for the rogue-hero. Carrier works his way through one calculated irony after another, setting down symbols without expanding them, relentlessly pursuing a generalization about greed and folly, and his many infelicities of style make for a bumpy journey across a darkly limned hell. Like his society of villagers who don't give up (especially when they're wrong), Carrier puts his energy and will to a sturdy test, but this novel is not likely to be remembered as a stylistic advance for its author. Indeed, Carrier's writing has never again been as powerfully concentrated or as seductive as it once was in *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* and *The Garden of Delights* exposes some of Carrier's literary failings as much as it does Sheila Fischman's uneven translation.

Admittedly *The Garden of Delights* is a quick read, but this is not to say that it is a graceful one. Cliché appears to be Carrier's mode of parody and irony, and strong images are indiscriminately mixed with weak, vague ones ("like things slipping into oblivion"). Carrier often strains after a poetic effect but, unhappily, the results are not always sound or even sensible. It is one thing for him to call a winter scene a "black jungle," but what, oh what, does he mean when he writes that "Winter is a long night that neglects to grow dark"? Is winter like one long night without variation of hue or colour? (Not true!) Is winter simply dull? (Again, not so.) How can you have

a night without dark? Carrier could simply mean much less than meets the eye.

I applaud the ribaldry, the tall-tale episode, the occasional rhetorical parodies, but couldn't Sheila Fischman have done something about her lumpy literalism? She is, of course, labouring under a handicap when it comes to finding witty English equivalents for French names that are emblematic puns. What, for instance, could she ever do about such names as Gros-Douilette, Petit Lecourt, Aristotle Fait-Toute, or Ti-Queue, except allow the comic points to emerge from the sounds and connotations? Hence, Gros-Douilette has a downy sense in accord with her ample proportions; Petit Lecourt isn't just short, but short-sighted as well; and Ti-Queue looks for "tail." Aristotle Fait-Toute says things succinctly in bursts of aphoristic wit, but when we come to Bourdage, Caillouette, Imelda Boucher, and Déméryse, we need the help of a dictionary to obtain the full comic point. We discover that *Boucher* is a good name for a seamstress, one who stops a hole by a stitch in time; and that the notary Caillouette must have pebbles (*cailloux*) in his head at times; or that the neurotic Déméryse, usually rooted to her bed, feels obliged to risk her life and limb in a burning church (*demeurer en reste avec* ...). The best name is probably Bourdage's, for it connotes both a fibber and a blunderer (from *débiter des bourdes* and *faire une bourde*).

Carrier's parable is quite without R. K. Narayan's delicacy and subtlety, Donald Barthelme's grotesque inventiveness, or Jorge Luis Borges' intellectual sophistication. It confirms our impression of Carrier's skill with parody and surrealistic images, but it does nothing to extend its author's talent. Carrier fails, not because he has attempted too much, but because he hasn't attempted enough.

KEITH GAREBIAN

ORDERED MADNESS

ANDRE MAJOR, *The Scarecrows of Saint-Emmanuel.* McClelland & Stewart, $10.00.

VICTOR-LEVY BEAULIEU, *Don Quixote in Nighttown.* Press Porcépic, $10.00.

REVIEWING TOGETHER novels by different authors is seldom a congenial task. Usually it is the differences that necessitate attention, differences which don't readily lend themselves to improvised contrasts. Such is the case with two relatively recent Quebec novels, André Major's *L'épouvantail* and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Don Quichotte de la démanche.* They do of course have certain things in common. Both were originally published in 1974 and appeared three years later in skilful translations by the very busy Sheila Fischman. Both have exclusively Quebec settings and make use of traditional themes like the conflict between generations and the differing atttractions of city and country. Certain critics might even argue that the respective protagonists are in some sense symbols of the torn, uncertain life of modern Quebec. Overall, however, the similarities are far less persuasive than the differences, and it is to Sheila Fischman's credit that she has modulated her approach to render as clearly as possible the distinctive approach to subject matter, narrative distance, and point of view, to mood, tone, and irony in each novel.

Of the two, Major's *The Scarecrows of Saint-Emmanuel* (*L'Epouvantail*) appears the more straightforward, though it incongruously juxtaposes the violent action of an urban gangster thriller with the more leisurely pacing of a countrified detective story. Its first part takes place in Montreal among the pimps, prostitutes, hoods, and transvestites who frequent low-life, neon strip-joints like the Paradise. But as brutal as this world is, it does have its own order and coherence which are upset by the appearance of the

central figure, a tough, swaggering country boy named Momo Boulanger. The second half of the narrative is set in Momo's birthplace, "a hole in the woods called Saint-Emmanuel de l'Epouvante," to which he is unceremoniously returned after the stabbing death of his former girlfriend in Montreal. Yet even at home his presence constitutes a threat to that particular order. He is there less than a day when an unseen townsman revengefully attempts to kill him. As Momo is taken to hospital, Inspector Paul-Emile Therrien, who has come to arrest him, not only enters the action of the novel but replaces Momo as the apparent centre of narrative attention. The remainder of the novel concerns the rural policeman's rather bumbling efforts to track down the man who shot Momo in the shoulder.

A curious shift of attention it would seem. With interest keyed upon Memo, Major offers a sort of village comedy of manners, Therrien dreaming of his imminent retirement, toying with his incompetent partner, flirting decorously with a former girlfriend (now the aging wife of the obese hotel owner), and dealing sensitively with the townsfolk. The question of Momo's fate is not, however, totally lost from sight. Even as he lies in hospital, it is clear that he remains the victim, the scapegoat. In Saint-Emmanuel (ironically, "God is with us"), "no one wanted to suspect that Momo might be innocent" of the murder of Gigi. Neither is Therrien interested in getting involved in the Montreal side of the case. Moreover, the one man who could clear Momo of the frame-up, a former priest named Saint-Pierre, takes refuge in other alternatives rather than calling the police.

Overall, then, the effect of the novel is to take the reader behind the sensationalist headlines of a typical tabloid story — "Call Girl Victim of Knife-Wielding Madman." It presents the circumstances and background of the crime and allows the reader the chance to consider its underlying causes. At the same time it reveals the cruelties and injustices inherent in the two social orders presented and the peculiar aura of doom a character like Momo carries in his very nature.

Momo Boulanger, or Mo Baker as he likes to be known, is a figure not unlike Faulkner's Joe Christmas in *Light in August*. Like Christmas, he seems plagued by oppositions in his own blood. Rumour has it that his mother (whom he never knew) was an Indian, and his passion for knife-throwing scarcely lessens that impression in the town. Neither does his family, all of whom are labelled "different"; accordingly, within the insulated little world of Saint-Emmanuel, they are proud outsiders who are content to live at a remove from regular activities. Momo, however, is a special case, for unlike his relatives he is feared and despised. He is the pariah of the town, his swagger angering the men even as it proves exciting to some of the young girls (thus further angering the men). And, like Joe Christmas, Momo is curiously innocent, both in his inchoate ideas and his lack of awareness of the effect his presence creates. His instincts, though often violent, are of a pure, simple nature. In seeking out Gigi in Montreal after his release from prison, he had in mind some idea of revenge (she had revealed Momo as a thief); more importantly, however, he maintained some vague romantic hope of regaining the great moment in his life when, as teenagers, they had first made love. Later he dreams of going "north" to escape the swirl of brutal events that have confused and wounded him. Accordingly, his life, like Joe's, might well be imaged as a containing circle, going nowhere. Indeed, for all his furious activity, he is more acted upon than he is a man who acts.

It is this aspect of the novel that Major impresses upon the reader by his organization of the narrative. In the first two sequences of events, for instance, he chooses to begin *in media res* with Momo's painful regaining of consciousness after brutal beatings at the hands of Gigi's pimp and his thugs. Momo is never in control of his fate, however much he strives to make his presence felt or to prove his courage, toughness, and masculinity.

André Major does not strive obviously to make Momo an explicit example of modern or Quebecois alienation. In *The Scarecrows of Saint-Emmanuel,* it is rather the presentation, the drama, that dominates. Major minimizes his intrusions, letting the various characters speak from their limited perspectives. One important result of this is that the reader gains a rich sensory awareness of the two settings. Momo's acute sense of smell for instance, does much to create the impression of Montreal in the novel. Yet for all the palpability and vividness of the settings, beyond the bleakness of Montreal and the coziness of Saint-Emmanuel, beyond the expectations aroused by the gangster and detective story forms, the reader remains aware of Momo's dilemma. He shows himself to be many things to many people: hick, thief, wild Indian, lover, punk, bore, even madman. Finally he becomes "killer," the perfect stooge for the set-up arranged by Gigi's pimp. In fact, though he would scorn aid if it were offered, he is constantly betrayed by those who might help him, by Gigi, by Saint-Pierre, and by his "home," just as Joe Christmas is failed by woman, minister, and community. Of all the scarecrows of Saint-Emmanuel, he is the one who most arouses fear, dread, and anger wherever he goes. Hence, he has the ability with Joe Christmas to reveal the hollowness and limits of the people around him. What he is defines what others are not. Nothing, however, can save him from the confusion, the undefined alienation, the innocence, which accompany his disruptive power.

While Major's novel underplays its literary dimensions, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Don Quixote in Nighttown* is a highly self-conscious literary performance. Its protagonist and centre of consciousness is Abel Beauchemin, a 27-year-old Quebec novelist who is suffering from a "peculiar sickness," which at its most serious might be termed a kind of literary madness, at most absurd a mammoth case of writer's block. More precisely, as the original title suggests, Abel is meant to be seen as a modern Quixote, but a Quixote "démanché": that is, without his handle, out of control, breaking down mentally and physically. It is a theme fit for both comic and serious purposes. Beaulieu's Beauchemin (one notes the deliberate similarity in names) was born near Trois Pistoles and came to Montreal as a writer and publisher's reader. Working compulsively — "a million words in seven years" — he has produced five or six novels. However, in the novel's present, a mere twenty-four hours at the height of Abel's "peculiar sickness," his ability to write has abandoned him. Trying to comprehend his condition he muses, "the more you wrote and the more you felt obliged to write, the less you understood what was happening inside and outside yourself, as though everything was scrambled up, the dream and reality."

Everything is indeed "scrambled up" in Abel's consciousness and in the novel. The reader thus faces the considerable problem of sorting out fact and fiction, reality and dream. And since these distinctions blur in any novelist's imagination, since dream feeds reality and reality feeds dream, the problem is clearly something more than mere aberration. Moreover, for a certain kind of novelist (many

of whom, like Lowry, Joyce, Melville, Burroughs, and Kerouac, are Abel's touchstones), the idea of madness is a central preoccupation. Thus, when the reader shares Abel's thoughts and conversations over the 24 hours, he faces the problem of trying to "understand" the madness that has affected Abel even as he tries to figure out point by point what is really happening, to whom Abel is actually talking, and what the event or conversation might signify. A sort of simultaneous puzzlement and fascination confront the reader at almost every turn in a narrative where past and present converge, where sickness may mean health, where madness may mean lucidity, where dreams and obsessions gain special prominence.

What we do know of Abel does help in understanding the particular strains upon him and the consequent shape of his elaborate fantasies. We know that his left side is weakened by polio, that he suffers from fears about his heart, and that, rightly or wrongly, he is convinced that he is about to die. The novel begins with that startling assertion. We know that he is desperately lonely and given to curious sexual fantasies, having been deserted by his beautiful wife Judith who at some point has given birth to a stillborn child. We know he has two brothers whom he admires perhaps excessively: Steven, an expatriate poet and translator of Joyce, and Jos, a self-styled visionary and revolutionary. We know he lives in a conventional Terrebonne bungalow with his two cats (to whom he talks in a serious manner), that he writes (when he is able) on orange crates in the basement, that he drinks gin excessively, and that his house at the novel's end has been sold. We learn as well a good deal about his family or "tribe," particularly his mother, who died gruesomely, and his lonely father, who works as a "watchman in a madhouse" and whose loneliness and pain Abel feels acutely, even though he isn't able to reach out to him. There is also a Negress named Johanne who seems to have committed suicide in her consuming love for Abel.

Yet even with such facts (culled from the novel as a whole), it is still exceedingly difficult to gain a coherent sense of all the elements at work in Beaulieu's prose. Indeed, in such a novel, conventional expectations of coherence can only be of limited help. When, for instance, Abel encounters Don Quixote near the end of the novel, it is difficult to know what to make of the statements the Don makes. Is he a creative guide interpreting signs and offering cogent advice? Is he merely Jos disguised (he is clearly Jos, and the disguise does stimulate Abel's nighttown vision) and thus the voice of Jos's revolutionary obsessions? Or is he a further figment of Abel's fictional aberrations?

Don Quixote in Nighttown is less a novel than an anatomy of the strains and obsessions that haunt a particular kind of writer as he struggles to understand his outer and inner lives, as he waits, in the words of the novel's Malcolm Lowry epigraph, "for my house to pass." The "waiting" is both for the death Abel anticipates and for the understanding of his "tribe" to which he has long aspired. In this sense at least there seems to be some consolation in his final realization that "I'm still and in spite of everything among them. Even if everything is lost, at least I've got that." But it isn't clear from the ending whether or not Abel dies after gaining this realization.

Clearly, *Don Quixote in Nighttown* is a difficult novel to deal with in any simple or precise way. The fact that it is translated suggests further problems, since however well Sheila Fischman has done her perilous job — and the novel reads smoothly for all its internal disjunctions — a writer as devoted to wordplay, allu-

sion, and the theme of madness as Beaulieu, is bound to generate many areas of perplexity. Still, *Don Quixoxte in Nighttown* (which won the Governor-General's Award in 1975) merits close attention, both for the way in which it gets at the writer's dilemma (in Quebec and at large) and for its comic and verbal energies.

MICHAEL A. PETERMAN

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

HUBERT AQUIN, *Hamlet's Twin*, trans. by Sheila Fischman. McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

THERE IS A COVER SCHOOL of criticism, usually resorted to in desperation or for comic relief. After the obligatory second read, the reviewer, who has resisted temptation thus far, searches the dust cover for a clue. It is a mode requiring great self-control because, being human, we have this urge to read the cover and the last page first.

In the case of Hubert Aquin's black novel, *Neige Noir* (*Hamlet's Twin*, in translation), I nearly hurled that block of ice into the fire and almost denied myself the first spot of levity in several painful hours. On the back cover, in comely red letters, the artist assures the reader that he has intended "to enter into a loving, erotic relationship with him. In a way [he was] trying here to make love to the reader." This comes hard upon a score of mindless physical acts which have a grotesque sexual mutilation of the female protagonist as their climax.

Hamlet's Twin, no sibling or even a distant relative of the original, is as cold and cruel at its heart as its more appropriate French title. Hamlet is merely a hook on which Aquin has hung what we presume to be his script for revolution.

The book is a polyglot: film script, political and philosophic treatise, aesthetic manifesto — and blue movie, already (as they say) in the can, because we have the film within the film on which the duplicity is based. There is no unity in the multiplicity of this unweeded garden, except for the metaphors we recognize too easily because they are all borrowed from Hamlet and Freud with a soupçon of Cocteau thrown in.

Hamlet's Twin is a toneless catalogue of violence without passion. Being the legatees of Freud, we think we understand Hamlet's dilemma so much better than the Elizabethans who, were we to resurrect a few, might still make a distinction between the penis and the sword. Nicolas, Aquin's impotent hero, does not. And his ultimate political helplessness is transformed into the astounding image of his own codpiece sandwiched between two sanitary napkins on a flight to his aborted honeymoon in Norway where, like Fortinbras, the character he has recently portrayed on a T.V. film, he will wait (while his fleshy sword mends) to assume power.

Because Sylvie is guilty of the sin of incest, she will drown in the northern snow, her hair splayed out like Ophelia's. This is the big orgasm, death by violence, "when we lose all identity, to be reborn and live in the Christ of Revelation."

The question that arises out of this montage of desperate and angry sex and dying is this: what exactly is the significance of Fortinbras? Will he survive to put things right in this most boring of all possible worlds, or, as Hamlet's twin, is he affected with the same political impotence? Perhaps there is no Fortinbras, only a cheap imitation Hamlet acting on the C.B.C. Tune in next week. Aquin lards clues in his irritating thematic interjections. "Names don't give birth to subterranean meanings; that would be tantamount to a purely literary process, anti-

cinematographic, you know. Designations of reality add nothing to reality, except a nominal mask." In that case why bother?

The novel functions best without words, as a cold and silent movie journey to the black snow. Words are the impediment to a reality he tells us may not exist.

When the characters speak, it is without meaning, lies on lies, "fiction trapped by a reality it didn't contain and which hypocritically invades it." Eva, Sylvie's successor, describes the movie dialogue as artificial, and Nicolas tells her, "I want dialogue that will be more articulated, more complicated than the exchange of lines we've become used to. For me, dialogues that run a little false have the power of rendering the fantastic more effective than realistic conversations can do."

There is the danger here of creating a purely intellectual exercise that engages neither the heart nor the mind of the reader. One is hard pressed to find Ophelia's flowers in the snow, since Aquin refuses to describe them in the real language of compassion.

Sex is no metaphor for love when it is ugly, mechanical, and violent. The salvation promised in the Christ of Revelation is buried too deep in the snow to be felt or even anticipated. Aquin seems to have deluded himself here, for he explains that sex in films has its correlative in the painted nude. Somehow, he expects the naked human form to invade our unconscious and find its creative archetype. There is no synthesis, however, in the copulation of antagonists.

The revolutionary is often criticised for his lack of synthetic energy and imagination. It is not enough to destroy. There is no compensation in *Hamlet's Twin* for acres of smothering black snow, the death of art. In the end, there is not even a whimper, just the silent movement of frozen lifeless earth.

LINDA ROGERS

LES FORMES CHEZ AQUIN

RENE LAPIERRE, *Les Masques du récit*, lecture de *Prochain Episode* de Hubert Aquin. Hurtubise HMH, Cahiers du Québec, collection Littérature, n.p.

DANS UN AVANT-PROPOS qui s'intitule "Anciens et modernes," l'auteur des *Masques du récit* livre les prémisses théoriques qui gouvernent son analyse de *Prochain Episode*: les caractères de l'art moderne et *Le Livre à venir* de Maurice Blanchot. Par la suite, René Lapierre reprendra l'idée, souvent répétée depuis la vogue du nouveau roman et de la nouvelle critique, que l'écriture romanesque n'a plus, sous l'égide de la modernité, à s'astreindre comme jadis à une fidèle représentation du réel et à une histoire régie par la logique cartésienne. Dorénavant, le jeu du langage, ses possibilités et ses résistances déterminent son cours. Cette primauté accordée à la fabrication du roman conduit l'auteur à revenir avec insistance sur la perspective de Blanchot selon laquelle l'écriture fait problème pour l'écrivain qui s'y abandonne, d'autant que la tentation du silence, de concert à un violent désir de naître à la parole, miroite sans cesse à ses yeux. A l'origine des paradoxes de l'écrivain et de cette contestation de l'écriture dont témoigne toute oeuvre véritable, il y a la poursuite d'un absolu inaccessible, la totalité du livre, auquel Lapierre se réfère comme au Récit. La fiction se subordonne par conséquent au Récit/pré-texte et son rôle est d'être métaphore de la littérature: "Toute la difficulté d'écrire un roman tient en cet incroyable défi: créer une fiction qui soit, dans sa cohérence particulière, l'image des empêchements de l'écriture romanesque. Tout y doit donc être relatif et légèrement ambigu, tenu à distance raisonnable d'un absolu que la seule logique d'une intrigue ne peut assumer. Le Récit

incréé censure sans cesse par ce moyen le récit commençant, appelant et menaçant — depuis l'acte même d'écrire — l'existence du roman."

A notre avis, la force et l'originalité de ce livre s'affirment lorsque René Lapierre s'attarde de préférence non plus aux considérations théoriques de Blanchot mais à leur application au texte "relatif" de *Prochain Episode*, ce qu'il fait surtout dans ses deuxième et quatrième parties. Son analyse de la "matière humaine et brute" du récit met en relief, outre l'essentiel secret qui s'insère et se maintient au fil des pages, les formes chez Aquin du détour, de la poursuite et de la fuite, des doubles et des masques. Avec art et pénétration, elle fait ressortir, d'une part, le piétinement de ce récit d'espionnage qui, à l'image du héros-narrateur, se cherche en se niant et se construit en se déréalisant, d'autre part, l'utilisation qui est faite de ce piétinement puisque un héros ne manque jamais de transformer ses empêchements en stratégie et un narrateur de rentabiliser les failles de son énonciation.

FRANÇOISE IQBAL

WAITING FOR THE BONE-SETTER

MARTHE B.-HOGUE, *C'était dimanche*. Editions Naaman, n.p.

JOSEPH BONENFANT, *Repère*. L'arbre H.M.H., $8.25.

JACQUES GARNEAU, *Les Difficiles Lettres d'amour*. Editions Quinze, $4.95.

LOUIS CARON, *Le Bonhomme Sept-heures*. Laffont, n.p.

C'ETAIT DIMANCHE, by Marthe B.-Hogue, bears the sub-title "roman social québécois." The label, by its presence as much as by its judgment, consigns the novel to an "old-fashioned" category. The "roman social québécois," a living phenomenon in the 1960's, has long since given way to other types of novel in Québec. This work is a throw-back to an era when any expression not found in the *Petit Robert* had to be italicized and accompanied by a footnote for the benefit of non-Québécois readers. It is, admittedly, part of a series destined to appeal to "la francophonie," and therefore not competing on home ground.

In the presence of the body of her student son who has committed suicide, a woman listens to the opinions of others on the causes of his death. The hackneyed judgments of the older generation are exposed as false (but who can believe in a character who is glad her nineteen-year-old son prefers holding hands with his boy-friend to seducing girls?). A stilted and stereotyped dialogue between two professors, one a priest, one a free-thinker, presents the principal arguments surrounding adolescent suicides. We realize that no-one knows that the character whose internal monologue we share is the mother of the dead youth. She faints, and the "concierge" who attends to her turns out to be a "psychologue stagiaire": switch to a lengthy flashback in which the internal monologue becomes an oral one as the narrator remembers her last interview with her son, when she revealed the true identity and nature of his parents and recounted her life story. Here the language becomes more "québécois" (and extremely self-conscious). The discussion of suicide is converted obliquely to one of abortion, since the truth is out: Mark killed himself on learning that he was the son of a fifteen-year-old nobody, who would have resorted to abortion if it had been available. The heroine is revealed as the victim of a Jansenist upbringing. The argument belongs to the past, as does the novel, since the discussion centres on the rôle of the church, rather than on the rôle assigned to women. While the nar-

rator almost comes alive in the second half of the novel, the son becomes less and less credible or likeable. The main effect of this well-intentioned work is to recall others which make better use of some of its elements (*As I Lay Dying*, *Kamouraska*). The happy ending eliminates even the positive aspect of a plea for the liberation of fifteen-year-old mothers, since the narrator's salvation appears in the person of her silent and long-suffering husband. Her redeeming mission is to return to her home and children. One wonders what the author thought of *Les Fées ont soif*.

At the opposite end of the scale, Joseph Bonenfant's *Repère* bears all the marks of a first novel written by a university specialist in modern French criticism. The "story" as such is non-existent: the protagonist is supposed (according to the cover) to have murdered someone, but the circumstances and the victim remain nebulous. At the beginning of the novel the character, who is not the narrator, emerges from a womb-like crevasse somewhere in Crete, to relive his childhood and more recent happenings in Québec through a series of flash-backs. Why his father is now living in Crete is not elucidated, but the classical venue serves as a vantage point for a protracted panorama of Homeric and Biblical allusions. The text is divided into a series of short chapters which alternate between the personal fantasies of the protagonist and (his?) reflections on his reading, interspersed with comments which can only emanate from the omniscient narrator. The fictional character is in fact eclipsed by the personality of the implied author. The implied reader is evidently familiar not only with Homer and the Bible but also with Hubert Aquin and Julia Kristeva. One chapter in particular provides an analysis of the story of Potiphar's wife and Joseph which would not be out of place in *Poétique*, except that she commands him to "Couche avec moé!" in best joual. The intrusion of events from Québec history and the current affairs of 1975 (as reported in *Paris Match*) contributes to the density of a text which must remain for many readers inaccessible without an encyclopaedia at hand. Paradoxically, the narrative is most convincing when it admits to being metanarration, a commentary on fiction, writing, and above all reading. The passages which delve into the Freudian depths of the hero's subconscious suffer from a superfluity of severed heads (or other members) and all-pervasive bloodiness.

A bloody emergence fro the womb (as metaphor for the birth of the book) is equally central in Jacques Garneau's *Les Difficiles Lettres d'amour*. This novel is also remotely related to *C'était dimanche* by its treatment of abortion. Another almost anonymous character (Philippe may be his father's name, or his, or both) relives his childhood, marked like that of both previous protagonists by scenes of butchery and covert opposition to sex-rôle stereotyping. In this case the narration is a written one at the intradiegetic level, since the character records in a series of diary-like notebooks his memories fantasies and "letters" to his mother, sisters and finally "la femme." The parallel between birth and writing is explicit from beginning to end, as the epigraph is also the final statement: "Ceci est le livre que tu composas et tu es la femme que je suis" (Anaïs Nin). The male child is depicted as devoured by a vain desire to return to the womb or in his turn to give birth. Rather than communicating with his mother or sisters he shuts himself up in his womb-like room to write. The grown man adopts the same strategy, until he meets "la femme" and recognizes that the only way to return to the womb is to plant his seed in someone else's. The resultant abortion is necessary in order that he assume his sex and

autonomy, and be made fertile himself by contact with the woman who enables him finally to deliver his book. He is born again as a writer, "en s'écrivant," the product of what Barthes terms the "middle voice" activity of writing, which while producing an object also transforms the subject. The object in this case is enriched by the exuberance of Garneau's imagery and the intensity of his evocation of a fantastic world, more often found in poetry than in the novel.

One of Garneau's narrator's fears is of the "bonhomme sept-heures" — the seven o'clock bogey-man imagined by the Québécois from the English term "bone-setter." This mythical character provides the title for Louis Caron's second novel, a work which proves that it is still possible in Québec to write a traditional (that is, non-narcissistic) novel, without falling into the pitfalls of "déjà lu." The novel is based on an actual earthquake which took place in Nicolet in 1955. The events are recounted in the tone of a traditional "conteur," and the Québécois expressions are an integral part of the narration. They are seen through the eyes of a group of naive, innocent characters: a gang of children, a physically deformed old man, a nature-loving monk. The last two, one of the children, a cook and a baby are the victims of the disaster. The reactions of the various townspeople provide a scaled-down version of *La Peste*, as seen by a naive painter. A generous dose of humour and fantasy cloaks the question raised by Camus, or by Voltaire in his poem on the earthquake of Lisbon: why should the innocent suffer? The village idiot is shown as knowing more than the townspeople, but unable to communicate her knowledge except by her perpetual cry of "Malheur!" which she uses indiscriminately to express joy or anguish. Caron, by contrast, makes something joyful from the tragic facts: death is a new life in the world of myth for those who were too vulnerable for this world. It is the only alternative for those who refuse to grow up.

All four of the novels considered are concerned with the relationship between childhood and adulthood, with the nostalgia for a state of primitive innocence. Is this still typically Québécois, or simply part of life?

VALERIE RAOUL

LE JEU DU TEXTE

Adrienne Choquette lue par Suzanne Paradis. Les Presses Laurentiennes, n.p.

HUGUES CORRIVEAU, *Gilles Hénault: lecture de Sémaphore*. Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, n.p.

FRANÇOISE MACCABEE-IQBAL, *Hubert Aquin, romancier*. Les Presses de l'Université Laval, $12.50.

DANS LES TROIS OUVRAGES présentés ici, il s'agit de la critique interne d'un texte ou d'une oeuvre particulière. Aucun ne vise à l'élaboration d'une méthode critique ou à l'insertion du texte dans un contexte historique et littéraire. Ces trois livres témoignent chacun à leur façon de la créativité d'une lecture à la fois ouverte et respectueuse du texte.

Suzanne Paradis choisit Adrienne Choquette avec l'intention avouée de sortir cette romancière d'un oubli immérité. Elle s'attache donc avant tout à révéler les qualités de son oeuvre. La majeure partie de l'analyse critique est consacrée à l'unique roman de la journaliste, *La Coupe vide* (publié pour la première fois en 1948). Choquette y raconte l'emprise d'une femme sensuelle et mystérieuse, dont l'obsession les poursuivra toute la vie, sur quatre adolescents. Le roman fit scandale à l'époque (il n'en fallait évidemment pas beaucoup!). S. Paradis présente aussi brièvement les quelques nouvelles et récits (surtout, *Laure Clouet*,

1961) qui constituent le reste de l'oeuvre assez réduite d'Adrienne Choquette. L'étude contient également des poèmes et fragments inédits.

Avec une approche critique et un métalangage fort traditionnels, S. Paradis s'efforce de dégager les lignes thématiques de force de l'oeuvre de Choquette. Elle insiste surtout sur le thème d'une prédestination dépourvue d'un contenu chrétien. Elle met aussi en évidence l'utilisation particulièrement habile de certaines techniques narratives, notamment l'emploi du dialogue.

Dans son souci de réhabilitation, S. Paradis s'attache à communiquer son admiration et la ferveur de sa lecture. On peut regretter que ces louanges si bien intentionnées s'expriment souvent par des clichés vagues et rebattus: ainsi, est-il bien utile de parler de "la finesse et de la profondeur de l'analyse psychologique" ou de dire que A. Choquette "sait diriger un dialogue ou planter, à l'aide de quelques images et d'un peu de couleur un décor vivant!"? Cependant, dans son ensemble, ce livre se lit sans ennui, avec sympathie pour l'entreprise de Suzanne Paradis. L'image d'Adrienne Choquette qu'on emporte avec soi, a des côtés fascinants, ne serait-ce que le contraste entre la journaliste prudente et bien pensante des chroniques de *Terre et Foyer* et *Ecole et Education* et la romancière torturée et exigeante de *Laure Clouet* et de *La Coupe vide.*

Hugues Corriveau nous propose une lecture remarquablement riche et novatrice d'une oeuvre restée elle aussi relativement peu connue, la poésie de Gilles Hénault et en particulier son poème "Sémaphore" extrait de *Signaux pour les voyants.* L'organisation de cette étude reflète à merveille la démarche d'une lecture critique "jouant le jeu du texte" à laquelle aspire Corriveau. D'abord, le texte même du poème, référence indispensable du commentaire critique. Ensuite, comme point de départ, une analyse du champ sémantique d'un mot-clé "signes" dans le cadre du poème. Corriveau retrace les fascinantes métamorphoses du signifié, aboutissant à des schémas d'oppositions qui soustendent toute la poésie de Hénault. La troisième partie présente un commentaire strophe par strophe, inspiré surtout de Bachelard et de Durand (*Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*). Le dernier chapitre relie le commentaire détaillé avec le reste l'oeuvre et d'autres textes critiques sur Hénault. L'étude contient également une entrevue entre Corriveau et Hénault où le poète parle de ses rapports avec son oeuvre. La bibliographie exhaustive inclut non seulement la poésie et la prose littéraire mais aussi les très nombreux articles publiés par Hénault pendant sa carrière de journaliste.

La valeur de la lecture de Corriveau repose dans son respect de la multiplicité des significations de l'oeuvre. Loin de représenter une réduction de sens, comme c'est souvent le cas de la paraphrase-explication de textes, elle donne aux poèmes une dimension supplémentaire par un réseau de rapprochements et de correspondances. Corriveau nous permet de suivre pas à pas l'activité créatrice d'une lecture exemplaire jouant le jeu d'un texte exigeant qui s'affirme de plus en plus comme l'une des oeuvres majeures de la poésie québécoise.

Pour Françoise Maccabée-Iqbal (*Hubert Aquin, Romancier*), il ne s'agit pas de donner sa place à un auteur peu connu puisqu'Aquin est un des écrivains québécois qui ait suscité le plus de commentaires critiques. Son travail se distingue des études précédentes par son envergure et sa richesse. Il est heureux que la première étude abordant l'oeuvre d'Aquin dans sa totalité, la première publiée depuis son suicide, ne soit pas, comme c'est souvent le cas, le résultat du travail bâclé d'un opportunisme commer-

cial. L'étude de Françoise Iqbal restera un des livres majeurs sur Hubert Aquin.

Chaque roman — *Prochain Episode* (1965), *Trou de Mémoire* (1968), *L'Antiphonaire* (1969), *Neige noire* (1974) — fait l'objet d'une analyse approfondie tenant compte à la fois de la substance et de la forme. L'orientation de la première lecture ainsi que l'utilisation de certains passages comme références ultérieures sont grandement facilitées par la division de chaque partie en chapitres et sous-chapitres titrés et sous-titrés. Cette organisation, parfois suivant des rubriques assez scolaires (structure du récit; personnages, temps, espace, langage ...) permet de mieux suivre les rapports et les distances entre les quatre romans. On s'étonne de la présence inutile de "résumés sommaires de l'intrigue" (en plusieurs pages!) puisqu'il est évident qu'une telle étude s'addresse à un public qui a déjà lu Aquin. F. Maccabée-Iqbal s'attache à l'exploration de quelques thèmes-clés parmi lesquels domine l'association entre écriture et alchimie, toutes deux à la recherche d'une expérience totalisante transcendant la hantise du double qui est au coeur de l'oeuvre d'Aquin.

Aquin inclut dans chacun de ses romans un métadiscours critique, exégèse de la forme et du fond. Chaque oeuvre propose ainsi sa propre mise-en-abyme à travers des gloses riches en allusions mythiques et littéraires. F. Maccabée-Iqbal poursuit brillamment le commentaire amorcé par le romancier lui-même. Ainsi, par exemple, elle analysera la "structure en spirale" de *Prochain Episode* suivant l'image de l'ex-libris décrite par le narrateur; elle décrira le protagoniste du même roman comme "baroque et romantique," poursuivant ainsi les multiples allusions à Byron. De même, ce sont les commentaires de la narratrice au sujet de son livre "composé en forme d'aura épileptique" qui servent de fil conducteur à toute l'analyse de *L'Antiphonaire*. C'est dans l'analyse de *Trou de Mémoire*, à notre avis la plus riche et la plus intéressante de cette étude, que la critique s'aventure le plus loin du métalangage d'Aquin lui-même, pour nous donner une interprétation remarquable du roman comme rituel dyonisiaque et une analyse du langage comme triomphe de l'écriture célébré dans le roman. F. Iqbal exploite avec aisance les travaux de Bachelard, Durand, Jung, Eliade et d'autres pour éclairer le contexte mythique et psychanalytique de l'oeuvre d'Aquin. Elle situe aussi par rapport à certaines oeuvres de psychanalyse l'obsession meurtrière, l'exhibitionnisme et l'érotisme, constantes des quatre romans.

Françoise Iqbal nous a donné une lecture parallèle de l'oeuvre d'Aquin, en remarquable symbiose avec les propos de ses narrateurs. La co-existence harmonieuse du style de la critique et de celui du romancier en est sans doute une preuve supplémentaire. A notre avis, il faudrait maintenant prendre ses distances vis-à-vis de l'autorité des commentaires des narrateurs et les aborder par le biais possible de l'ironie. Le rapprochement avec les oeuvres de Nabokov et de Borgès suggéré par Mme Iqbal nous y engage. Il faudra aussi insérer les textes d'Aquin dans le discours de sa société et de son époque et en explorer le contenu idéologique.

JACQUELINE VISWANATHAN

SOUVENIRS

GERARD BESSETTE, *Mes Romans et moi*. Cahiers du Québec/Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

ROGER LEMELIN, *Les Voies de l'espérance*. La Presse, n.p.

MES ROMANS ET MOI comprend d'abord "Mes premiers souvenirs," en partie diffusés à CBF FM en 1978, et, sous le titre même du livre, quatre sections dont les deux premières ont paru dans *Voix et*

images en 1978. Il ne reste donc qu'une trentaine de pages inédites, les plus "auto-analytiques" de l'ouvrage.

Les souvenirs de l'enfant sont beaucoup plus que des réminiscences anecdotiques. Ils constituent un récit fort bien organisé où "se conjoignent déjà la fabulation et le vécu" (Jacques Allard, préface). Avant la rupture de l'adolescence à Montréal, voici le plein et les déliés de la vallée du Richelieu avec sa "sécurité domiciliaire," ses animaux fabuleux (le "kyâkyâ"), ses jeux de langage à la Ducharme, l'amitié intelligente d'une soeur aînée, quelques lectures fantastiques qui préparent sans doute le roman préhistorique *Les Anthropoïdes*.

Quant à l'histoire de Baptiste-la-Baloune, agrippé par le crochet de fer d'un aérostat, qui tombe un arbre, "puis sur le landeau d'un bébé, lequel mourut des suites de cet accident, alors que Baptiste s'en tira avec une cicatrice sous le menton," elle se situe à la limite du conte picaresque et du cauchemar bien dessiné, entre Mark Twain et Roman Polanski. C'est la plus *romanesque* de Gérard Bessette.

A la suite de ses Mémoires d'enfance qu'on pourrait intituler "Moi et mes romans," Bessette nous présente une sorte de Mémoires de romans (et de romancier), mais non pas une véritable autobiographie intellectuelle. "Mes romans et moi" est plus proche de la conférence, de la confidence, des souvenirs et de l'autocritique que de la confession structurée et structurante. C'est au hasard, le plus souvent, je veux dire: librement et sans système, que le romancier suggère des liens entre tel passage de son oeuvre et tel événement de sa vie consciente ou de son "scénario intime." Il pose d'ailleurs plus de questions qu'il n'apporte de réponses.

Quelques coups de griffe aux "péquistes de plume," à Léo-Paul Desrosiers, "conservateur à la triste figure," mais, dans l'ensemble, l'atmosphère est sereine, le ton n'est ni au pamphlet ni au roman à clefs. On s'étonnera peut-être que la "première idole littéraire" de l'auteur de *La Bagarre* ait été Chateaubriand. Les autres écrivains qu'il a "admiré avec passion" sont Benjamin Constant, Nelligan ("à part") Valéry, Gabrielle Roy ("un rôle de premier plan"), Sartre, Dos Passos, Claude Simon et — plus inattendus — deux de ses professeurs: le linguiste Jean-Marie Laurence et Lionel Groulx.

Lecteur de ses romans, Bessette distingue soigneusement son projet des plaidoyers *pro domo* ou des réquisitoires contre les critiques auxquels se livrent certains confrères. "Sans m'interdire certaines confidences d'ordre biographique et affectif destinées à éclucider mes oeuvres, je me propose de les analyser le moins subjectivement possible," dit-il. Et, en effet, l'écrivain réussit de façon assez remarquable à devenir son propre lecteur, commentateur, professeur. Il interprète peu, et avec prudence, mais il fournit divers renseignements, dessine quelques pistes.

Il explique la "scission affective" du *Libraire* vis-à-vis des livres (capharnaüm = refoulé). Les doubles du protagoniste (Chayer) forment un couple antithétique (Paulo et Athanase) dans *La Commensale*, où la scène de la "cage grillagée" s'éclaire par la "fixation horaire, ou horlogère" d'un enfant. La structure triangulaire est plus évidente encore dans *La Bagarre*, où le protagoniste Lebeuf est partagé entre une projection française (Sillery ou la Culture) et une "tentation américaine" (Weston ou la Sociologie, l'observation extérieure du milieu). Ailleurs, Bessette souligne le côté loufoque d'un nom (Allaire-Ducul) ou son sense caché (Lagarde). Sur le thème de l'orphelin, sur la parataxe, sur le monologue, sur le réalisme, etc., le critique littéraire complète le psychanalyste.

Les deux dernières tranches de "Mes romans et moi," inédites, moins scolaires, sont un peu plus autobiographiques. L'auteur y évoque son journal intime, son hospitalisation (en 1963), l'effet des drogues, l'incubation de *L'Incubation*. A propos du *Cycle*, Bessette fait une observation psychologique dont on pourrait tirer des conséquences politiques. Les Québécois qui suivent la génération du héros central, Julien, ne sont plus à la recherche d'un père fort mais d'un leader fraternel. La stature de René Lévesque, son allure et ses tics, ainsi que l'aspect tâtonnant de sa pensée (lorsqu'il improvise) l'apparentent beaucoup plus à un fils, à un adolescent qui se cherche qu'à un père pompeux jouissant de la "possession tranquille de la vérité." Or, conclut Bessette (avis à Claude Ryan), "le Québec se trouve beaucoup plus près du pôle fils que du pôle père...." On n'en a jamais fini avec le "kébékouâ" sur lequel hésite et revient Bessette jusque dans *Les Anthropoïdes*. Par delà les complexes d'Oedipe, tout se termine et recommence par les "paroles, parolages et parolades."

Mes Romans et moi, malgré son caractère partiel et limité, prépare la voie à la critique (et autocritique) fiction du *Semestre*.

Les Voies de l'espérance est un recueil de discours, conférences, reportages, billets, éditoriaux faits par Roger Lemelin depuis 1971 (à deux exceptions près). Le livre, présenté de façon dithyrambique par un subordonné de Lemelin, est dédié au grand patron, Paul Desmarais.

Les deux premières pièces, qui remontent à 1952 et 1964, comptent parmi les plus importantes du recueil — avec la dernière, dont nous reparlerons, et la fameuse "Autopsie de la grève," qui occupait presque toute la une de *La Presse*, le 8 mai 1978, pour écraser "la pieuvre CSN."

D'abord, un article substantiel du *Maclean*, à l'occasion du centenaire de l'Université Laval, qui valut au jeune journaliste l'honneur d'une dénonciation cléricale pour avoir présenté la vénérable institution comme "un instrument efficace de conservation," dont la "poétique ancienneté" (selon André Siegfried) ne saurait compenser le manque d'ouverture intellectuelle. L'article est rempli d'idées stimulantes et de vifs portraits de quelques professeurs d'avant-garde: Mgr Parent, le Père Lévesque, MM. de Koninck, Pouliot....

Le second "jalon" de l'itinéraire est un échange de lettres, en 1964, entre Lemelin et Stuart Keate, qui avait été chef du bureau du *Time* à Montréal au moment où Lemelin en était le correspondant, vers 1948. En 1964, ce sont quelques bombes du FLQ, des manifestations indépendantistes ou syndicalistes, une littérature et une chanson engagées qui tranchent sur la "joie de vivre" traditionnelle qu'adorait Stuart Keate. Lemelin a quelques éclairs dans sa réponse au futur éditorialiste du *Vancouver Sun*: "Qui dit maturité sociale en formation, dit aussi éléments d'anarchie, car c'est dans les sociétés en transformation qu'apparaissent les mouvements anarchistes." Dans l'ensemble, cependant, le romancier d'*Au pied de la pente douce* en est resté, comme son correspondant, à l'image idyllique des bons pauvres rieurs et insouciants. Il trouve "trop forte" l'équipe francophone au sein de la Commission Laurendeau-Dunton, qu'il présente d'ailleurs comme un "piège."

Le passage le plus éclairant des *Voies de l'espérance* est sans doute celui où l'ex-reporter de *Time/Life* avoue avoir compris que son rôle était "d'étonner, de piger au Canada français les aspects, les personnages, les situations cocasses du milieu... Il ne s'agissait pas pour moi de donner de ma province un portrait véritable, mais de servir l'image que les éditeurs de New York s'en étaient faite." Depuis 1972, c'est à *La Presse* que Roger

Lemelin *sert* l'image que les tenants du *statu quo* veulent bien se faire de la belle province. De quoi se plaint donc "notre peuple français, nourri et protégé par la grande famille nord-américaine"?

Si *Les Voies de l'espérance* ne sont pas insondables, elles sont parfois incohérentes, malgré leur conservatisme polymorphe, qui s'épanouit avec une suffisance béate à la fin des banquets de chambres de commerce ou de *Canadian Clubs*.

A la Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec, l'auteur des *Plouffe* parle d'esthétique, multiplie les citations — de Mauriac à Lysiane Gagnon — et déclaire que "l'écrivain véritable est un être asocial, un délinquant sublime qui oppose son univers à ceux qui l'entourent." Cela ne l'avait pas empêché de soulever démagogiquement les foules contre la murale de Jordi Bonet et Péloquin au Grand Théâtre de Québec; cela ne l'empêche pas, ici même, de traiter Jacques Ferron de Diafoirus.

Aux membres de la Presse canadienne, à Toronto, Lemelin ne parle plus d'art mais d'or, c'est-à-dire de politique. Et comme n'oserait le faire aucun ministre ou député libéral quelque peu sensé. "Je suis venu vous dire que le Parti québécois est en train 'd'iraniser' le Québec . . .," affirme-t-il d'entrée de jeu. Ce n'est pas seulement contre la souveraineté-association du P.Q. qu'en a l'éditorialiste devenu pamphlétaire, c'est aussi contre les idées "égalitaristes et socialistes qu'il préconise." "J'ai toujours cru aux honneurs et aux privilèges dus au mérite," ajoute candidement le docteur ès lettres *honoris causa* de l'Université Laurentienne de Sudbury (patrie de M. Paul Desmarais).

Il faut insister sur cette conférence torontoise de mai 1979, intitulée "L'unité canadienne et la liberté," qui conclut et ferme à tous points de vue ces soi-disant *Voies de l'espérance*. Lemelin y va loin dans l'étalement de ses préjugés et de ses ignorances. "Et le dollar canadien se mit à baisser," chantonne-t-il comme conséquence économique de l'élection de 1976; au plan social, "les professions libérales sont lentement asphyxiées," les pauvres. Cette élection fut d'ailleurs un "coup d'Etat de la part du P.Q., pacifique peut-être, mais un coup d'Etat quand même."

"Où est la liberté quand vous ne pouvez envoyer vos enfants à l'école de votre choix, quand vous devez prouver votre identité culturelle pour obtenir un laissez-passer scolaire?" M. Lemelin pose cette question rhétorique à Toronto, mais — son auditoire l'a bien compris — c'est au Québec de la loi 101 qu'il pense.

Au fait, nulle part M. Lemelin ne parle de la R.C.M.P., de la provocation policière, etc. Il se contente d'innocentes plaisanteries sur le déficit d'un milliard occasionné par les Jeux Olympiques. Mais contre la Révolution tranquille qui nous a inoculé la "strychnine des radicalismes européens," contre René Lévesque et ses "diverses mesures sociales qui nous ont coûté en espèces sonnantes des centaines de millions de dollars," il se déchaîne. Sans cette "espérance calme, froide, raisonnée" que croyait remarquer l'introduction publicitaire.

Les Voies de l'espérance — titre à la Malraux pour un médiocre pêle-mêle d'allocutions de circonstance et de propagande réactionnaire — semblent parfois aussi désespérées qu'exaspérantes. Lemelin n'est pas un oiseau de bonheur: "j'ai tendance à moraliser, à dire que les valeurs traditionnelles fichent le camp, que le monde moderne est envahi par la barbarie," etc. Sa formation et ses connaissances sociologiques, économiques, politiques, culturelles, sont étonnamment faibles pour un directeur de journal. Qu'il parle de McLuhan, de "l'homme de la Nouvelle Renaissance" ou du "nouvel homme de la Renaissance," il ressasse les clichés les plus éculés. "Le Canada, c'est le paradis terrestre."

Claude Ryan a jadis écrit dans un bloc-note du *Devoir* que Roger Lemelin ne connaissait pas grand-chose en dehors de la publicité, du foie gras et du jeu d'échecs. En publicité, il devrait d'urgence se recycler. Quant à l'écrivain, il est disparu au haut de la pente douce il y a une trentaine d'années, même s'il dîne quelquefois chez Drouant à titre d'agent (associé) de relations publiques.

LAURENT MAILHOT

TEXT, STORY, SPEECH

G.-A. VACHON, *Rabelais tel quel.* Presses de l'Université de Montréal, $7.00.

M. MAISANI-LEONARD, *André Gide ou l'ironie de l'écriture.* Presses de l'Université de Montréal, n.p.

VACHON'S IS A VERY GOOD STUDY of Rabelais, paradoxical as he himself was and initiatory as his work is less known to be. To begin with the paradoxical, as well as the transcendence of it, one can mention the pages dealing with *festina lente* and "Silènes" (in every way remarkable) and those dealing with the apparently unorthodox chronology of the narratives. In each case the author presents the liberating assumption of all contradictions as the very spring of Rabelais' thought and of his language, which is nature itself, evoking a pre-Babel time antecedent to the great break of things and words. If laughter sometimes hides nothingness just as the little "Silènes" conceal their drug (and as Socrates eloquently evokes Phedrus), there could have been no other way; there are the tricks and trickiness of the alchemist Alcofribas Nasier, who conceals to illumine, dissembles and leads the world astray in order to enlighten it (by telling its name) and must be sober to speak so much about drunkenness!

As to the initiatory aspect of Rabelais' work, it is to be found behind the lewdness, the drinking bouts and the scatology considered not in themselves but as elements of parody emblematic of our condition and in no way exhaustive when seen in the comic light. Isn't the fountain of Thélème (through which Vachon reveals the centre of Rabelais' canvas) evocative of Jouvence and its water, symbolising at the same time — o Spinoza! — knowledge and love?

The concept of hieroglyph, rather quickly dealt with in its opposition to metaphor, attempts to convey the passage to unity beyond all contradictions. By pointing this out, Vachon suggests that Rabelais' text can be read as a perfectly credible *Bildungsroman* or as a "mystical journey."

Taking the distinction between "story" and "speech" established by Benveniste as his starting-point, Maisani-Leonard proposes to discern how far the Gidian narrative meets such criteria. What will be the status — real, fictive or truncated — of the narration? To what difficulties and mirror-effects will the distant narrator, caught red-handed intruding into his own narrative, expose himself? It can be seen that the stakes are high and the undertaking not unattractive. The enquiry proceeds by the comparative study of the part played in various narrations by linguistic (and stylistic) "gearing" devices such as, in particular, the opposition of the simple past with the past perfect and the historical present; the (dialectical) relationship between different adverbs of time; the mechanism of the passage from direct speech to indirect, etc. The whole is meticulously listed, classified and comprises numerous word-counts, tables and graphs. The writer gives us in conclusion a variation on the familiar theme of the study of style as defined by the measure of departure from the norm. Gide seems to cover his traces and deliberately muddle the accepted

categories of linguistic structuralism. A meagre result considering the amplitude of the work and the toil involved: Gidian aesthetics thus reduced to a mixture (haphazard or not) of certain grammatical categories.

Formally, however, this thesis is remarkable: it shows a total respect for all the rules of its kind: readings, quotations, references, index are all there. The bibliography, very well presented thematically, will be of considerable use. However, after closing the book, I felt it to be cruelly inadequate. Firstly, applied to the field of literature, this type of formalistic approach seems to me in no way decisive, methodologically speaking. Indeed, such criticism does not seem to go beyond the level of pure description, even if it is of the workings of its subject. Moreover, if we must observe and describe, let us eschew the "do-it-yourself" approach and rather turn resolutely to a computer and the statistical analysis of word-frequencies. Taking a wider view, Robinet has done this for Leibniz and others with some usefulness. The method has also been applied successfully to the stylistic analysis of the classics. Some points of detail could also be criticized — the drawing-up of a *corpus*, for example, limiting the "narratives" to the eleven following works: *Cahier d'A. Walter*, *Paludes*, *El Hadj*, *L'Immoraliste*, *La Port étroite*, *Isabelle*, *La Symphonie pastorale*, *L'Ecole des femmes*, *Robert*, *Geneviève* and *Thésée*. Of course, the author justifies his selection, not even excluding the easy solution (*Les Nourritures terrestres* is dropped, "the proportion of narrative being judged insufficient"), but this is somewhat controversial. Lastly, I must say that the discrepancy between the title and the content of this work comes as a shock. The reference to the Van Eyck convex mirror does not appear again after the epigraph, just as the extrapolation of stylistic counts as existential "notions" [such as "irony" (see Kierkegaard in this connection) or "writing" (see Barthes or Derrida, whom the author has read and quotes)] is not as clear as the title and the blurb would have us believe. In short, a work of university standard can only lose by being made falsely attractive.

PIERRE SOMVILLE

RACONTANT ET RACONTÉ

JEAN-PAUL SIMARD, *Rituel et langage chez Yves Thériault*. Fides, n.p.

ANDRE BELLEAU, *Le Romancier fictif: essai sur la représentation de l'écrivain dans le roman québécois*. Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, n.p.

VOICI ENFIN DEUX ETUDES ambitieuses et pénétrantes sur le roman québécois qui proposent des considérations nouvelles dans le domaine de la narration. S'appuyant surtout sur les concepts de la nouvelle critique française, Jean-Paul Simard et André Belleau préfèrent analyser inductivement les oeuvres choisies ainsi permettant à la matière de suggérer les principes théoriques et méthodologiques. La dernière phrase de l'étude de Belleau précise le procédé fondamental des deux: "L'idéologique n'existe pas dans le texte sous une forme idéologique mais textuelle, et . . . chez l'écrivain, les problèmes historiques et sociaux appellent des réponses dans l'ordre du langage et de l'écriture."

Jean-Paul Simard analyse, dans les oeuvres importantes d'Yves Thériault écrites entre 1944 et 1964, les différents moyens d'expression — gestuel, rituel, oral et écrit — utilisés par le personnage primitif à la recherche, non de la parole ni de l'écriture, mais d'une "façon fondamentale d'être et d'exister." Tout en démontrant que le signe et le référent dans un système verbal civilisé ont des rap-

ports trop distants, Simard remet en valeur la fonction du langage pour l'homme primitif où la conceptualisation est remplacée par le geste et le rite, par la lecture des signes de la nature même. C'est en ayant défini l'homme primitif thériausien en fonction du langage que cette analyse dépasse celles des autres critiques. Ce personnage vit le "drame de la parole" et déchiffre les signes de la nature sans jamais être écrivain dans le sens traditionnel. Comme Christine dans les nouvelles de Gabrielle Roy, ce sont l'acquisition et l'intériorisation du monde qui remplacent l'écriture même chez le primitif.

Le seul écrivain thériausien pour qui l'acte d'écrire est conçu comme moyen de retrouver l'harmonie de son héritage et d'exprimer la conscience collective de son peuple est Ashini. Selon l'étude de Simard, l'écriture semble dominer comme sujet non comme objet de la narration. Il faut regretter que ce n'est qu'à la fin de son analyse qu'il se concentre sur la technique du narré et découvre que, dans le roman "d'outre-tombe" qu'est *Ashini*, l'écrivain narrateur possède une disposition poétique et un style de poète primitif. C'est ainsi que Simard peut comparer l'écrivain primitif aux poètes québécois des années cinquante et soixante qui cherchaient leur voix à travers la découverte, l'énumeration et l'acquisition des signes de leur monde. Ne serait-il pas aussi révélateur de l'analyser dans le contexte du roman traditionnel québécois où le personnage écrivain subit, pour des raisons socio-historiques, l'échec de l'écriture?

Par sa structure même, le roman provoque des questions fascinantes quant à la narration car l'échec raconté, qui se termine par la mort du racontant, est nié par notre lecture. Elle transforme l'échec en réussite. Bien que Simard fasse ressortir cette métamorphose, il ne cherche pas à pénétrer les conséquences de ce procédé qui mène à une sémantisation fort importante. Cette lacune souligne les limites de l'analyse dans laquelle le langage comme sujet succède au langage comme moyen. Néanmoins, en démontrant que le langage joue un double rôle de revendication et de contestation dans la quête de "l'unité originelle de l'homme," Simard nous fournit une appréciation enrichie du langage dans les oeuvres de Thériault et de ceci décèle à la fois l'uniformité et la complexité du personnage primitif.

André Belleau ne définit pas les limites de son analyse afin d'éclairer un thème déjà perceptible mais pour identifier un genre à travers l'émergence inconsciente de "traits singuliers." Se basant sur un phénomène de plus en plus courant dans la littérature contemporaine ainsi que dans la littérature québécoise, il fait l'enquête de la représentation de l'écrivain dans une quinzaine de romans publiés entre 1940 et 1960, à l'exception de *Les Demi-civilisés* (1934) et *La Route d'Altamont* (1966). Cette clôture, souvent utilisée pour classer les divers phénomènes québécois par catégories, désigne l'arrivée d'un nouveau personnage-écrivain "en situation d'écriture." Belleau propose, en créant le paradigme de l'écrivain fictif, examiner comment ce trait générique décide de toutes stratégies textuelles. Loin de tomber dans le piège du modèle sémiotique pré-construit auquel s'ajoute l'analyse, il préfère retracer transtextuellement les procédés tout en se basant sur les grandes théories de la narratologie, surtout celles d'Auerbach, de Luckács, de Barthes, et de Genette. Il évite les méthodes socio-historiques et autobiographiques, et opte pour une étude socio-textuelle — un mélange heureux d'analyses inductives, basées sur le texte, et déductives, tirées du contexte socio-historique.

Indicatif de l'attention qu'il porte sur les procédés narratifs, Belleau distingue de façon claire et pénétrante entre l'auteur et le narrateur, entre l'auteur racontant et l'auteur raconté:

> Quand on parle de narrateur ou même d'auteur . . . il s'agit d'une fonction inscrite dans le texte. Cet auteur-narrateur, dans la mesure où il devient lui-même l'objet d'une représentation, est aussi fictif que tous les autres éléments du récit. Il semble cependant qu'on doive l'envisager sous deux aspects: interne et externe.

Ainsi, il a pu clairement mettre en valeur le discours du récit dans les romans fortement mimétiques de Roger Lemelin. S'inspirant de la structure du contenu narratif, Belleau a fait ressortir les éléments socio-textuels qui vont à définir Denis Boucher comme écrivain et n'a invoqué l'extratextuel que pour la vérification. Les critères, les structures, et les contenus narratifs à considérer varient selon l'oeuvre analysée. Donc, la nature de Christine, l'écrivain-narrateur de Gabrielle Roy dans *Rue Deschambault* et *La Route d'Altamont*, exige des considérations propres au discours autodiégétique. Les observations de Belleau sur ce personnage qui se sent promis à l'écriture mais qui ne s'engage pas clairement comme écrivain pourrait éclairer et enrichir toutes lectures. Le rapprochement se fait pour les deux de Roy entre "l'éclosion de la vocation d'écrivain" et la découverte du monde tout en évitant la tentation du hors-texte (à laquelle, nous le rappelle Belleau, a déjà succombé Bessette).

Comme son intention est de formuler des généralisations et des regroupements d'ouvres dans lesquelles la représentation de l'écrivain-personnage peut définir le genre, Belleau propose trois catégories qui témoignent du rapport entre l'écrivain et la narration: le roman du code dans lequel le contexte social et les intentions des personnages dominent, le roman de la parole qui privilégie "le rapport de la littérature au sujet," et le roman de l'écriture qui fait l'expérience même du langage. Ainsi Belleau démontre que la littérature de l'écrivain fictif reste nettement idéaliste jusqu'en 1955 après lequel elle se contextualise. Comme l'écrivain devient le sujet de l'énonciation, disparaissent l'innocence devant l'oeuvre et le détachement entre l'écrivain et l'écriture qui caractérise les romans précédents, tandis que s'accroit l'incertitude du lecteur devant l'oeuvre naissante. L'esprit perspicace de Belleau permet une lecture sensible de *La Bagarre* de Gérard Bessette, "le roman à la fois le plus attachant et le plus révélateur de la période 1955-1960." A travers un analyse subtile et convaincante de la contextualisation linguistique qui se cache derrière une narration apparemment neutre, il révèle le contexte social et idéologique d'un Québec avant la révolution tranquille et il marque le début de l'écrivain trop conscient de lui-même et de la littérature.

Comme conclusion et aussi comme ouverture sur une étude future, Belleau analyse le roman de Jacques Godbout, *D'Amour, P.Q.*, en fonction des traits distinctifs qui caractérisent les romans à personnage-auteur écrits depuis 1960:

> La situation d'écriture, la possibilité ou l'impossibilité du texte même, les choix énonciatifs et formels tendent à en constituer la substance narrative ou du moins à la subordonner manifestement à leur expression propre.

Un des nombreux mérites de l'analyse de Belleau est le raffinement critique qui ne perd pas le lecteur non-initié à la terminologie de la sémiotique. Espérons que cet essai (comme les autres monographies dans la collection *Genres et discours*) encouragera des études bien desirées sur la structure de la narration et sur la sémiotique textuelle.

Simard et Belleau offrent à la critique littéraire deux études qui révèlent la richesse et la complexité de la littérature québécoise. Il n'y a aucun doute que celle de Belleau surtout servira de modèle à d'autres études textuelles comme sa conclusion nous le laisse prévoir.

ESTELLE DANSEREAU

TREMBLAY'S SECOND

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Anges*. Leméac, n.p.

WITH *Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Agnes*, Tremblay has published the second volume of his *Chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal*, the first being *La Grosse Femme d'à côté est enceinte* (1978); a third sequel, entitled *La Duchesse et le roturier*, is announced. Thérèse and Pierrette are characters we are familiar with from *La Grosse Femme*; here they form an inseparable trio with their school-mate Simone. Tremblay's new book tells us of the relation between these little girls, of their teachers at the convent school they attend, and of a religious procession in which Thérèse, Pierrette, and Simone are the stars. In addition, the narrative follows up on events in the lives of Gérard, a beautiful young man infatuated with Thérèse, little Marcel and his beloved tomcat Duplessis, "la grosse femme," and the three knitting sisters Rose, Violette and Mauve with their mother Florence. It is because of these episodes which allude to previous ones in *La Grosse Femme* that Tremblay's book cannot be satisfactorily read in isolation; the plot centred upon the three little girls, however, is easily comprehensible on its own.

In the first volume of his *Chroniques*, Tremblay covered in as much as 329 pages, one day, May 2, 1942, tracing in minute detail the daily routine of his characters in a limited territory of Montreal. In a technique reminiscent of *cinéma vérité*, the narrator's eye remains directed for a duration of time upon a given scene and reports as dispassionately as possible what occurs before it. Little attempt is made to edit what is being observed; that is to say, no apparent effort is made to impose an extraneous, rational pattern on the events. Tremblay underlines the associative nature of his writing by almost completely dispensing with paragraphs within one sequence; when there is paragraphing, it suggests a shift in perspective. *Thérèse et Pierrette* generally follows this precedent, but the author has suggested an overall structure by likening the four parts of the book (corresponding to four days: June 1, 2, 3, and 4, 1942) to the four movements of Brahms' fourth symphony. Tremblay's tendency to speak of literature in terms of music is well-known from his experiments with the form of the string-quartet in *Toujours à toi, ta Marie-Lou* and other plays. There, the analogy to musical structures could be made audible through the quality of the different voices, the cumulative effect of chanting, the accentuating effect of percussion instruments. In narrative, the analogy must be created in the reader's mind, through the pace of action and the repetition as well as development of themes. Brahms' symphonies were distinguished through their ability to combine the classical ideal of progressive development in structure with the romantic one of the associative thematics. Similarly, Tremblay combines the structure of the *Bildungsroman* with the repetitive motifs inherited from *La Grosse Femme*.

The convent community in *Thérèse et Pierrette*, with Soeur Sainte-Catherine as their leader, undergo an emancipation from their tyrannical, unpedagogical "directrice," and little Simone, not even found worthy of inclusion by name in the trio of "Thérèse pis Pierrette," literally rises to giddy heights as the "ange suspendu" of the procession. These progressive developments are delayed by numerous misunderstandings, injustices, or simply contemplative passages, and even counterbalanced by the gradual deterioration of Gérard who, close to madness, finally enlists in the army. The theme most responsible for both the progress and the delays in the novel is that

of language, of effective communication. Several characters in *Thérèse et Pierrette*, in particular those who succeed within the framework of the novel, learn to speak. Their success is often accompanied by the improvement of a disability affecting their mouths and speech: Simone is getting used to being beautiful after her hare-lip has been operated upon, and four-year-old Marcel learns to enunciate properly ("il ne zozote plus"). In contrast, the unsympathetic directrice has foul breath, and Thérèse continues to hide her crooked teeth. Despite Simone's and Marcel's maturing, and despite Soeur Sainte-Catherine's and Simone's mother's courage in speaking their minds to the directrice, there remains ample evidence of the communication impasse frequently found in Tremblay's plays: children misunderstand the vocabulary learnt at school, their parents resent their children's increased linguistic versatility, children misinterpret their parents' vocabulary, and children and adults alike are confused and deceived by the language of the media.

Most of *Thérèse et Pierrette* adheres to the rules of realism, even radical realism, as I have tried to suggest in the analogy with *cinéma vérité*. Yet there are two factors in the novel affecting the scope of its realism, one with intriguing potential, the other, I believe, superfluous and annoying.

In the three knitting sisters and their mother, Tremblay has introduced a fantastic, even mythological element into the story. Only visible to Marcel, these women incorporate the Fates, the weavers of destiny, but also the Muses who teach Marcel the secrets of music, poetry, and art as alternatives to the deadly routine of his family's life. Their supervision through their mother Florence ensures that errors in the destiny they have woven are corrected, not in "reality" perhaps, but in a child's imagination; thus the tomcat Duplessis comes alive again for Marcel and his dying grandmother Victorine alone. In its combination of super-realism and fantasy, Tremblay's novel continues features from his earlier prose, especially *Contes pour buveurs attardés* and *C't à ton tour, Laura Cadieux*, and it parallels similar tendencies in contemporary North-American fiction as found in the work of Carrier, Hébert, Hodgins, Kroetsch, Tom Robbins, John Irving, and others. Not surprisingly, the epigraph of *Thérèse et Pierrette* is a quotation from *The World According to Garp*.

The disturbing feature about both *La Grosse Femme* and *Thérèse et Pierrette* is Tremblay's occasional tendency to moralize, a tendency ironically associated with the generally omniscience of his narrator. The mass of intellectually and emotionally alarming detail observed seems to be too much for him at times to remain detached — he *must* insert a comment to express his personal displeasure. But the reader, too, has witnessed the scene and been given more than enough material to form his own opinion. A comparison with Claire Martin's *Dans un gant de fer*, which deals with a similar theme but uses the tightly controlled point-of-view of a young girl, will immediately reveal the problems attending the narrative focus of Tremblay's *Chroniques*.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

THEATRE IN QUEBEC

JEAN-CLEO GODIN and LAURENT MAILHOT, *Théâtre québécois II*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

ANDRE FORTIER, *Le Texte et la scène*. Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, n.p.

PIERRE PAGE, *Le Comique et l'humour à la radio québécoise*. Fides, n.p.

THE THEATRE IN QUEBEC is far more than the sum of its parts. The plays themselves, or the productions, do not tell the

whole story; around them is a veritable swarm of critics, analysts, professors of literature, and others, who examine and expound upon everything produced on or off the stage. In addition to the ample space accorded the theatre in literary reviews such as *Etudes françaises*, *Voix et images*, and *Etudes littéraires*, there is an excellent review, *Jeu*, which appears four times a year and is devoted entirely to Quebec theatre production. If relatively few books have appeared on contemporary dramatists, numerous works have come out which synthesize the theatrical developments of the past fifteen years, from Michel Bélair's rather tentative *Le Nouveau théâtre québécois* to Pierre Gobin's mature and rich study of *Le Fou et ses doubles*, and not forgetting the thousand-page collection of essays (of unequal quality) entitled *Le Théâtre canadien-français* (the fifth volume of Fides's *Archives des lettres canadiennes*). All this makes Quebec theatre one of the most scrutinized, analyzed, and just plain talked about in the world.

This situation is similar, in some ways, to that of the French theatre of the 1950's and 1960's. Then, it was people like Martin Esslin, David Grossvogel, or Jacques Guicharnaud who made this theatre known to many who had never seen the plays of Ionesco or Beckett, and institutionalized it for a whole generation of students. Similarly, Jean-Cléo Godin and Laurent Mailhot, both professors at the Université de Montréal, have, for the past ten years, been the foremost interpreters of current Quebec theatre to the academic community and the general reader. They began in 1970 with *Le Théâtre québécois*, an introduction to ten dramatists including Dubé, Languirand, Françoise Loranger, Tremblay, and Ducharme. The book sold well and a second edition was issued in 1973.

Now Godin and Mailhot are back again with *Théâtre québécois II*, subtitled *nouveaux auteurs, autres spectacles*. This is somewhat more than an updating of their previous book. The period 1970-1980 has seen the rise in importance of some new dramatists (Germain, Garneau, Barbeau), the significant development of some already established authors (Tremblay, Gurik, Françoise Loranger), and the emergence of a new form of theatre based on improvisation, best represented by the Grand Cirque Ordinaire. Since 1968, when Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs* caused such a commotion on the Montreal stage, new forms of theatre have developed so rapidly in Quebec that dramatists like Dubé and Gélinas, although still writing, seem curiously *dépassés*.

It is this new theatre, which turns its back on naturalism, which rejects the bourgeois standard of the well-made play, and whose medium is usually *joual* rather than "standard" French, that Godin and Mailhot examine in their new book. Readers familiar with their previous work will find here the same awareness of the complexity of the theatrical phenomenon; Godin and Mailhot are among the few academic critics of theatre who take into account more than the printed word, who realize that *mise en scène*, acting, and audience response are as much a part of the play (the only part, in fact, for improvisational theatre) as the text. Their recent book takes into account the latest developments in French methodology of theatre analysis, and attempts an "aller-retour constant" between the sociocriticism of critics like Jean Duvignaud and the more literary, structural analysis of people like Anne Ubersfeld.

Godin and Mailhot combine the tradition division of chapters by author with the analysis of a certain number of "fonctions, formes, spectacles," which they see as characterizing contemporary theatre in Quebec. The principal function of this theatre seems to be to provide a mirror which reflects contemporary society (es-

pecially politics) but which also gives a vantage point from which to observe the continuing progression of history and even the development of theatre itself. Thus the historical dramas of Germain (*Un Pays dont la devise est je m'oublie*) or of Jean-Robert Rémillard (*Cérémonial funèbre sur le corps de Jean-Olivier Chénier*) provide an opportunity for audiences to re-evaluate some of the myths of history in the light of current realities, and plays like *Le Quadrillé* by Jacques Duchesne or *Les Comédiens* by Roger Dumas put into question the whole idea of theatrical illusion. There is a tendency, observes Godin, to use theatre to reflect a "pays incertain qui joue sa vie avec assurance et conviction, mais qui ne l'a pas encore assurée." The roots of this theatre in the independentist movement are thus deep, and are more complex than the political allegories of Françoise Loranger and Claude Levac (*Le Chemin du Roy*) or Robert Gurik (*Hamlet, prince du Québec*). As Mailhot puts it, "l'oeuvre québécoise ... sert d'abord à identifier un homme et un espace, à montrer une société possible, à faire une expérience de solidarité et de liberté."

In their analyses of specific plays and of playwrights the authors rightly feature those whose experimentation, even when results are less than successful, has been the most influential. Godin, for example, points out the persistent contradictions between Jean Barbeau's theories and his plays (though, curiously, he doesn't take into account his latest plays, in particular *Le Théâtre de la maintenance*, in which the playwright at least admits the existence of these contradictions); Mailhot shows how Robert Gurik's theatre, for all its pretentions to be liberating and democratic, is severely limited by an ideological infrastructure which imposes on the spectator a single type of analysis. Other chapters include a very sensitive study of the poet/playwright Michel Garneau, an analysis of Jean-Claude Germain which traces the still incomplete itinerary of Quebec's most outspoken man of the theatre, and a study of the whole of Tremblay's *cycle des Belles-soeurs* which provides some of the most original and illuminating insights into the significance of the transvestites in *Damnée Manon, sacrée Sandra* and of the father-son relationship in *Bonjour, là, bonjour*, that I have read. Eschewing parochialism, Godin and Mailhot include in their book a chapter on the Acadian author Antonine Maillet, whose work has in common with that of Quebec writers the evocation of a "pays incertain" with "frontières ouvertes, généreuses."

It would be hard to find any serious fault with this book. I would have wanted a few photographs or illustrations of the productions, especially to complete the chapter on the Grand Cirque Ordinaire, and I find the pages a bit too compressed with type for easy reading (the bibliography reads more easily than the text). These are details which do not detract from the overall excellence of Godin and Mailhot's analyses. *Théâtre québécois II* will be indispensable in the universities of Quebec, and can provide other readers with some important insights into contemporary Quebec culture.

Of illustrations there are many in André Fortier's book, *Le Texte et la scène*, but there is not much else of value. In fact, one wonders why the Centre de Recherche en Civilisation canadienne-française of the University of Ottawa, which has edited works of quality like Wyczynski's study of Nelligan or Jean-Louis Major's *Le jeu en étoile*, bothered to publish this book at all.

The title, which leads one to assume that the contents will concern the relationship between the dramatic text and the performance, is deceiving. No such theoretical problems preoccupy Fortier. What he offers us is a series of essays on

all of the plays presented in the 1977-78 theatre season in Montreal (well, not really *all* of them; he missed a few, he says, because he couldn't get tickets or because he got his dates mixed up). Most of these essays were originally written for the Ottawa newspaper, *Le Droit*; some were based on the dramatic productions, some on the written text, and others on the novels that inspired the plays. Consistency of methodology is not Fortier's strong point.

Fortier's essays are less analytical than descriptive, and are generally superficial. He really didn't understand that Carrier's play, *Il n'y a pas de pays sans grand-père*, was more than an anti-English diatribe, or that Réjean Ducharme's *Ah! Ah!* ... was anything other than a melodrama with Beckettian overtones. His article on Antonine Maillet's *La Veuve enragée* might have gotten somewhere if he hadn't decided to write it in his own watered-down version of the Acadian dialect.

Fortier says that he had two purposes in writing this book: to encourage people to attend the theatre, and to incite them to buy the texts of the plays. These are noble ideals, but I'm not sure that they are well served by Fortier's efforts.

Le Comique et l'humour à la radio québécoise, volume II, continues the work that Pierre Pagé began in 1976, and brings this major anthology of radio plays and texts up to 1970. One cannot deny the role of radio comedy in the development of Quebec popular culture. More than public affairs programmes, these *divertissements* provided, says Pagé, an uninterrupted commentary on the national consciousness, social and economic structures, and cultural ideology. When one realizes that between 70 and 85 per cent of the population of Quebec had radios after 1945, and that a programme like *Chez Miville* reached an audience of between 80,000 and 134,000 *families* (and these were not small!), one see the importance of the work Pagé and others are doing at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières.

Radio humour began, according to Pagé, with the *esprit critique*, which characterized production during the years 1930-1950, and gradually evolved into more profound social criticism. And while satire dominates in some of Jacques Languirand's sketches of the 1950's, social analysis is very evident in other presentations, especially in the series *Chez Miville*, which stayed on the air for 14 years, from 1956 to 1970.

For those (like myself) unfamiliar with the radio of the past, Pagé's anthology provides some new material by familiar authors (Eloi de Grandmont, Jacques Languirand) as well as some good material by names which were undoubtedly household words in Quebec 25 years ago (Eugène Cloutier, Louis Pelland, Carl Dubuc) but are largely forgotten today. The book is an important step in providing access to documents which, in the past, have been ignored by students of Quebec culture.

JONATHAN M. WEISS

L'HIVER, LA NUIT

LOUISE SIMARD, *Un Trop Long Hiver*. Les Editions la Presse, $6.50.

CHARLES-AUGUSTE LAVOIE, *A Deux contre la nuit*. Les Editions la Presse, $7.50.

SANS CE COMPTE-RENDU, je n'aurais sans doute jamais lu *Un Trop Long Hiver*. Il s'agit, je crois, d'un premier roman dont je ne connaissais pas encore l'auteur. Le livre vaut bien une lecture cependant. Discret, sans originalité marquante mais aussi parfois émouvant et sans prétention, il mérite qu'on le signale à d'autres lecteurs.

Comme bien d'autres romans contemporains, celui de Louise Simard est en-

tièrement centré sur la vie intérieure d'un seul personnage. A travers une saison, on suit pas à pas la vie quotidienne, les rêves, les peurs, les hantises et surtout les souvenirs d'enfance d'une jeune femme, institutrice, mariée, sans enfants, qui se sent mal dans sa peau. Secrète et farouche, elle se livre peu et mal, même à ses proches, Seul, le lecteur à le privilège de pénétrer dans son intimité. L'intérêt que nous pouvons éprouver pour Julie s'attache surtout à sa peur et à son insécurité. On suit, avec la sympathie clairvoyante d'un observateur très proche, la lutte de la jeune femme contre elle-même, contre son instinct irrésistible de fuir la vie et de se réfugier dans son châlet et dans ses souvenirs. La progression du roman correspond à la progression, inconsciente pour Julie mais perceptible pour le lecteur, d'une crise de dépression de plus en plus aigüe qui la mènera jusqu'au bord du suicide. A travers les nombreux retours vers le passé, on peut remonter aux sources du mal de Julie: la solitude de l'enfance, le rapport avec la mère médecin, lointaine et sûre d'elle, et surtout ce père, détesté mais trop semblable qui a fini ses jours dans un asile psychiatrique. C'est en découvrant la vulnérabilité d'un mari, qu'elle croyait aussi fort et efficace que cette mère admirée et enviée, que Julie parvient peut-être au bout du tunnel de "ce trop long hiver."

Comme on le voit, ce roman frôle parfois la bluette sentimentale et n'évite pas toujours les poncifs. On souhaiterait la disparition de certains passages de style vieillot et laborieusement scolaire, comme par exemple dans cette description: "Cet hiver qui s'achève dans une symphonie de pépiements d'oiseaux, dans le gazouillis de la neige fondante." Mais pour les lecteurs qui apprécient, avant tout, dans un roman, de pénétrer dans l'intimité d'un personnage, *Un Trop Long Hiver* ne pâtit pas entièrement de ces maladresses de langage. Julie, à travers sa lutte quotidienne contre la peur des autres et de la vie, reste un personnage attachant.

A Deux contre la nuit de Charles-Auguste Lavoie, publié dans la même collection "Romans d'aujourd'hui," aux Editions La Presse, est sans doute aussi un premier roman (le premier publié, en tout cas) qui s'attache lui aussi à la vie intérieure d'un personnage replié sur lui-même. "L'homme" (ainsi bizarrement dénommé par le narrateur) est professeur d'histoire dans un CEGEP. Le roman se déroule tout entier dans la grisaille feutrée de sa vie d'académicien, avec un parti-pris d'attention pour la médiocrité quotidienne qui finit par fasciner à force d'insignifiance. A côté des mesquineries, des petites chicanes avec les collègues, de l'irritation contre les étudiants, les syndicats, le radicalisme facile en politique, les éclairs de deux passions: l'intérêt pour ces personnages du passé dont l'homme écrit l'histoire et surtout, l'amour pour John, son compagnon et son amant.

A Deux contre la nuit tire sa force et son originalité des contrastes du personnage, vieux garçon maniaque mais aussi amoureux passionné. John est habilement présenté. Les limites de la perspective de l'"homme" préservent les côtés fuyants et énigmatiques de son amant. C'est à travers l'incapacité de "l'homme" à cerner la personnalité de son compagnon qu'on ressent le mieux le désarroi de son amour. Lavoie manie avec beaucoup d'habileté tout le registre des techniques narratives ouvrant au lecteur la vie intérieure d'un personnage. De nos jours, ce n'est plus une gageure ou une marque de grande originalité d'écrire un roman où il "ne se passe rien." Encore faut-il pouvoir donner au texte suffisamment de relief, et de variété pour rendre acceptable cette austérité délibérée. Ainsi, le cercle étroit des ruminations intérieures de l'homme s'élargit par l'insertion de très beaux textes mystiques de Marie de l'Incarnation.

Il est facile de regretter le brio et l'exubérance du roman québécois des deux décades précédentes où presque chaque nouveau roman apportait au lecteur non-québécois la surprise et le plaisir d'un dépaysement radical. Dans ces deux romans, le dilemne et l'angoisse de la marginalité sont affaire d'individu et non plus de communauté. L'aliénation des personnages s'exprime en sourdine et sans éclat mais elle ne devrait pas pour cela en mériter moins notre attention.

JACQUELINE VISWANATHAN

REMEMBERING, FRAGMENTING

DIANE GIGUERE, *Wings in the Wind*, trans. Alan Brown. McClelland & Stewart, $10.95.

GABRIELLE ROY, *Children of My Heart*, trans. Alan Brown. McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

IN 1961 DIANE GIGUERE'S first novel, *Temps de jeu* (translated as *Innocence*) won the Prix du Cercle du Livre; her third novel, *Dans les ailes du vent* (translated as *Wings in the Wind*), was awarded the 1977 Prix France-Quebec. Gabrielle Roy has been honoured many times in both France and Canada; her most recent book, *Ces Enfants de ma vie* (translated as *Children of My Heart*) received the Governor-General's Award for fiction in 1978. It is therefore rather intimidating to be asked to review the English versions of these two works. August committees have rendered their verdicts: who am I to judge? And yet, if a translation is adequate — as Alan Brown's work certainly appears to be — some of the applauded brilliance of the original text should shine through the medium of another language. *Children of My Heart* does afford a respectable glimmer of the author's talents (although I suspect it received a GG as much in tribute to Roy's overall contribution to Canadian literature as for its merits as the best French work of fiction that year). With *Wings in the Wind*, however, the reader peers into a shadowland composed of pretentious imagery, vague characters, and wavering narrative lines.

Both books use first-person voices to establish the subjective nature of the experiences they recount, and the main characters of both are women. There their resemblance ends. Roy's work is a series of sketches rather than a novel, a memoir in which the narrator recalls and muses over her years as a teacher on the prairies during the nineteen-twenties and thirties. Despite occasionally tedious reflective passages, a masterful hand controls both the content and the structure. The indefinite, rather sentimental presentation of many of the children, which some readers may regard as a weakness, in fact accurately reflects the filtering process of memory. Memory itself, rather than its contents, appears to be the book's primary concern. Its title is therefore ironic: the reader's eye tends to dwell on the word "children," but the real subject is "my heart" (or "ma vie").

What the teacher remembers is not her individualized pupils — many of whom are mellowed through a golden haze of nostalgia — so much as her emotional responses to them: her delight in the candid affection of the little ones, her satisfaction at creating a line of communication between an abusive father and his son, her concern and admiration for a child shouldering adult responsibilities, and her bittersweet entanglement with an unruly adolescent. Through her re-creation of the children's youth emerges her regret for her own loss of innocence; indeed, the impulse to return to childhood is built into the time scheme of the book. In ordinary chronological fashion the children grow older as the anecdotes progress: the opening section

recounts the joys and terrors of five-year-olds on their first day at school, the last analyzes the distresses of an adolescent passing from childhood to maturity. In counterpoint, the teacher herself grows younger, gradually reaching further into the past until, in the final section, she describes her complex relationship with a boy only a few years her junior. The book ends — as it must — before the two timelines merge; it reaches towards a desired but impossible union of adult and child, subject and object, present and past.

In contrast to the simplicity and clarity of Roy's book, Giguère's offers confusion and obscurity. Its structure resembles a parable of artistic creation, but this, unfortunately, is defeated by its cloying language. Presumably, the author developed a style intended to reproduce the claustrophobic, labyrinthine mind of her narrator. However, she appears to share, rather than direct, her character's loss of control. In the book, there appears a woman who fills boxes with pieces of paper:

> Each scrap contained a little poem organized around a word which formed its nucleus, with further words added by association, tracing the relationships of each part to the others, and to the whole. She worked by the adjunction of words, units in a luminous flow, repetitions with variants of the original locution.

Giguère often works the same way, concocting disjointed sequences of imagery: "The infinity of time was forever scattered, a world was suddenly abolished, a world in decomposition in which tragedy showed its distorted face, a horrid, indecipherable scrawl which jealousy had tinged with blood like flesh opened in the soul's chamber of slow tortures." Such confusion may be effective in small doses; a whole novel-full makes one gag. Brown's translation often clarifies the original text, although he necessarily loses some of its sound patterns.

Written with more restraint, *Wings in the Wind* would be a compelling study of a fragmented mind. The book, like the psyche it records, is split into several sections. The first, "Amédée," is the diary of a young woman trapped in mental limbo after a hospital cure for alcoholism. She describes her lethargy and the monotony of her present life. "What do you do," she asks, "when you've given up drinking, given up smoking, and even lost your taste for food.... How do you fill up the time you used to spend in cafés and good restaurants?" By filling your diary with the details of your boredom, alternating with convoluted images reproducing the free association of your thoughts. The news that her friend Rosalie has died spurs Amédée to take a holiday, but the trip simply increases her alienation. She detaches herself by narrating her travels in the third person and she writes long letters to her dead friend. Her final diary entry indicates that she is sinking deeper into claustrophobic subjectivity. She announces, however, that "Other characters come to populate my sleep, voices other than Rosalie's call to me from unwritten pages...." These other characters take over the second half of the book.

This section, titled "Elizabeth," creates yet another version of that familiar, inturned world of much Quebec literature. Included are a pensive young woman, religious obsession, baroque symbolism, a decaying mansion filled with tattered remnants of the past, the isolation of winter, and characters who inhabit a twilight realm between dream and reality. As the narrative progresses the boundaries between the rational and irrational gradually dissolve, each character retreating further into her own kind of madness. Most spectacular (and by far the most powerful and focussed piece of writ-

ing in the book) is Elizabeth's dream in which figures from a book of Velasquez paintings come to life. Giguère joins her schizoid narratives in the last few pages when Amédée returns to consciousness, and we watch her watch one of the figments of her imagination jump in front of a train. Her lethargy has transmuted into anguish and despair, but here, as in most of the book, the effect of her language is to distance rather than engage the reader.

CAROLE GERSON

WOMEN'S LIVES

JOAN AUSTEN-LEIGH, *Stephanie.* A Room of One's Own Press, $5.95.

GEORGINA BINNIE-CLARK, *Wheat and Woman.* Introduction by Susan Jackel. Univ. of Toronto Press, $7.50.

SUZANNE LAMY, *d'elles.* L'hexagone, n.p.

TO READ THESE WORKS in this sequence is to move through a century of women's experience and women's thinking and writing about the meaning of their lives and work. It is also, in two instances at least, to reflect on the growth of feminist thought in Canada and on the characteristic difference between the Anglophone tradition of empiricism and the Francophone of metaphysical speculation.

In order to do this, it is easiest to set *Stephanie* aside from the beginning — which, I suspect, is what most adult readers would be inclined to do with it in any case. Its one claim to distinction is — as the hot pink cover informs us — the fact that the author, Joan Austen-Leigh (better known as the playwright Joan Mason Hurley), is "a collateral descendant of Jane Austen and one of the founders of the Jane Austen Society of North America." Be that as it may, her first novel shows nothing of her great ancestor's satiric skill, for *Stephanie* is the saga of the proverbial British private school girl, up to all sorts of thrilling adventures and astonishing social revelations, apparently intended to be all the more revealing for their setting in Victoria rather than the English countryside. Badly written, badly designed (the cover is a new low for this press and the text full of some marvelous typos), mawkish and "profound" in the worst sense, *Stephanie* would perhaps make a suitable gift for a literary ten-year-old (if there are any left) on vacation from private school.

Despite its rather dull title, *Wheat and Woman* does merit our attention. First published in 1914, it has been reissued in the University of Toronto Press's Social History of Canada series, with an informative if rather longwinded introduction by Susan Jackel. Though on the whole not particularly well written, this record of the author's wheat farming in Saskatchewan from 1905 to 1908 succeeds in being memorable partly because it does convey very clearly Binnie-Clark's great conviction that farming in Canada constituted a viable solution to the problem of "redundant women" of the upper classes in Edwardian England. Through not always skilful dialogue, Binnie-Clark endeavours to catch her English reader's attention, offering a good deal of information about everything from crop failure to the quality of various makes of farm implements as well as about the daily routine of farming in a difficult climate. Her gradual adjustment to the life of a homesteader is presented, as is her own increasingly articulate, feminist understanding of her situation as a farmer who happened to be a woman and was clearly made to suffer for it by neighbours who were ill prepared to accept such a deviation from the norm. The volume is a valuable addition to the collection of works demonstrating the courage and tenacity of Canadian pioneer women.

Neither autobiography nor criticism as usually understood, Suzanne Lamy's *d'elles* situates itself within the context of contemporary French feminist polemic and literary theory. Its debt to theorists like Hélène Cixous, Chantal Chawaf and, to a lesser extent, Luce Irigaray is clear. But Lamy moves into several interesting new areas within the current feminist concern for the relationship between language and the body, the expression of women's experience in a language free from what Jacques Derrida terms "phallocentrism." Thus in her chapter on gossip, Lamy is concerned with investigating the ways in which a phallocentric ideology has seen women's language as inconsequential, illogical, and so on precisely because that language is characterized by a sense of flow, sharing, intermingling, communion rather than the combative, power-motivated style of debate as (male) *self*-definition (Cixous' concept of "phallogocentrism" — logos operant as male ego).

Lamy extends this discussion into a consideration of that favourite contemporary French instant form, the interview with an intellectual celebrity, comparing the openness and responsiveness evident in dialogues between women with the closed, set pieces which she finds typical of interviews between men, noting that such subjects often edit the transcript into print perfection in an effort to produce "official" statements. By comparison, the all-inclusive and sometimes almost rhapsodic interchange between women which is "gossip" is equally the form of the litany which, as Lamy demonstrates, is a frequent element in much contemporary writing by women.

I have sharply abbreviated the major threads of Lamy's work, rendering it "linear" at the same time. Readers who search out the text will discover it to be a collage of extracts from major sources (from Freud to Marguerite Duras), punctuated by reflective passages which move through a variety of tones and styles in skilful presentation of Lamy's manifold subject. *D'elles* is an intertext whose voices have many analogues in English Canadian writing but whose equivalent in feminist theory we have yet to produce. Readers of *Stephanie* may well believe that our need for such a study is urgent.

LORRAINE WEIR

POTPOURRI

YVETTE NAUBERT, *Tales of Solitude*, tr. Margaret Rose. Intermedia, $13.95; pa. $9.95.

JACQUES POULIN, *The Jimmy Trilogy*, tr. Sheila Fischman. Anansi, $8.95.

VICTOR-LEVY BEAULIEU, *Race de monde*. vlb éditeur, $4.50.

LOUKY BERSIANIK, *Le Pique-nique sur l'Acropole: Cahiers d'Ancyl*. vlb éditeur, $10.95.

MICHELE LALONDE, *Défense et illustration de la langue québécoise suivie de prose et poèmes*. Editions Seghers Laffont, n.p.

LARRY SHOULDICE, ed. and tr., *Contemporary Quebec Criticism*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $20.00; pa. $7.95.

WHAT'S NEW FROM QUEBEC? Five fictions first published between 1967 and 1972 have only just reached us about a decade after leaving their source, like light from the nearest star. In two cases, Yvette Naubert's *Tales of Solitude* (*Contes de la solitude, II*, 1972), and Jacques Poulin's *The Jimmy Trilogy* (of which the three volumes, *Mon Cheval pour un royaume*, *Jimmy*, and *Le Coeur de la baleine bleue*, appeared in 1967, 1969, and 1971 respectively), the time gap is one of translation. In the third case, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Race de monde* (first published in 1969, with an exclamation point after the title), the author himself has chosen to re-issue the book in a "nouvelle version," though I am not clear in what respects, if any, it has become a work of the late

seventies rather than of the late sixties.

These works have in common a tone which mixes in varying proportions wistfulness and earthy jollity; either mode can subside at times into cuteness. *Tales of Solitude* is almost wholly wistful; the stories read like slightly eerie enactments of metaphor, taking place in a mist at some distance from the reader. Their use of "magic realism," of the mildly fantastic nature of everyday events, is not unlike Ferron's, though the tales are told in much flatter language (in French as in English) than his. They tend to suffer either from the intangibilities of underplotting or from the jarrings of overplotting; most end with inadequately motivated murders or suicides. The most interesting story is "The Transplanted Heart," in which the hero's emotional life, down to the specific objects of his affection, is determined by that of the previous owner of the heart: the metaphorical implications of "heart" are schematically acted out.

The concluding novel of the Poulin trilogy, "The Heart of the Blue Whale," curiously enough employs this same conceit, but to much more interesting effect. The dying narrator-hero, Noël, is led gradually into the death-world by a Hermes-like young girl; her heart was the one transplanted into him, to extend his life, ambiguously into this "hovering between life and death." It seems he must learn to accept a gradual gentle shedding of the outer elements of his own life, and an equally gentle entering into the world of his own imagination; he must come to understand the relationship of "gentleness and death." After a ghostly love-scene between Noël and the girl, he is taken to the visionary world of his own books; he has been working on the novel "Jimmy" all along, and is probably also the author of "My Horse for a Kingdom." He re-encounters the characters of both those books in this visionary world, and chooses for himself the death that might have been intended for the "gentle terrorist" of the first story. The tying together of the three apparently quite disparate tales is neatly done; echoes of "Kingdom" lightly punctuate "Jimmy"; echoes from "Jimmy" cluster ever more thickly in "Blue Whale," and echoes of both culminate in the discovery of the box of grenades. . . .

"My Horse for a Kingdom" reads like a deliberate answer to Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode*. A hero called Pierre, isolated within his carapace of stones (not all the puns in the original can be translated), drifts into a minimal terrorist action; he begins and ends his story from inside that other carapace of jail. His strongest affinity is with the city of Old Quebec itself, like him trapped within its own stony walls; his strongest relationship is a curious ménage à trois with a woman and a Charon-like calèche driver, Simon, who kills himself rather early in the story. Simon has clear connections with the girl of part III; both are sentimentalized characters of wistfulness and wisdom, belonging to the world of magic realism. "[B]ehind every mirror there's another world, the only real one perhaps. And who can say which side of the mirror we are on?"

As Aquinian themes are, perhaps, transposed into the key of gentleness in the first story, so are Ducharmean ones in "Jimmy." The titular hero seems a gentle re-working of that most violently psychotic of creative brats, the heroine of *L'Avalée des avalés*, by Réjean Ducharme; his Beatrice, the artist-as-disturbed-child, is herself, in turn, a morbidly intellectual heiress of brat Zazie in the Queneauvian Métro. Jimmy is as precocious as they, but far more docile and long-suffering; he turns his frustrations inward into vivid anecdotes structured on refrains, whose repeated rhythms and bizarre, hilarious contexts suggest even in

translation his (or Poulin's) wonderful ear for language and eye for magic: "Catshit!" [Crotte de chat!]; "zouave" [used as several parts of speech, with subtle varieties of nuance]; "at a hundred miles an hour"; and, most important, as it provides Jimmy's own definition of himself as an artist and of artists as morally dubious "tale-tellers": I'm the biggest liar in the whole city of Quebec."

Jimmy of course does not know that he shares the sensitivities of Salinger's Holden Caulfield, expressed in an at times Queneauvian idiom, and is creating for himself a world of magic realism like Boris Vian's. But of course Noël knows this and takes care to tell us. The author-narrator of part III once exchanged a copy of *L'attrape-coeur* (Salinger) for a copy of *L'arrache-coeur* (Vian) and afterwards felt "as though Boris Vian and Holden Caulfield knew one another."

The theme of "Blue Whale" does not lend itself to the verbal dynamism of "Jimmy." The first two-thirds of the story are rendered diffuse by "gentleness" in both theme and style ("tendresse," or more often "douceur," in various grammatical forms, in the original), to the point of lapsing into sentimentality. But although the first two parts are page by page more satisfying, at least the conclusion of part III justifies the whole of this gentle tri-partite artist-parable and (it turns out) tenderly self-reflexive text.

Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Race de monde* is the first volume (revised) of a huge *roman fleuve* (four volumes published, six more under way) which will no doubt constitute a Human Comedy or Rougon-Macquart of Quebec. It is full of earthy jollity from the beginning to very near the end, where it modulates into a sentimental wistfulness analogous to Naubert's or Poulin's. As the shadows darken over the family Dentifrice Beauchemin, some characterizations, notably those of Bibi, the narrator-novelist, and his brother Steven-le-poète, struggle to emerge out of the "characters" who have roistered with a comic lovability occasionally edging over into ethnic cuteness throughout the book. This comic mix of "déménagements," poverty, roguish or even villainous adventures, much local colour and occasional satire is eminently readable and entertaining, though neither especially demanding nor profound. If even the two grotesques, le Cardinal — impotent hippie, "craquepotte," and would-be Svengali-guru — and Festa, the astonishing nyphomaniac who gives the narrator those most invigorating nights in which he fails to "déposer son cul dans son lit," wind up, the latter insane, the former hanged by his own necktie, they have at least been very entertaining for most of their fictional lives. Many of Beaulieu's jokes are easy and indeed even patronising ones. There are a few highbrow puns, for the most part obscene, but the staple language jokes, which wear a little thin over the long run, are an amalgam of joual phonetics (le grand Morial; zaller), nicknames, and slang constructions (piépiés) that is much closer to caricature, while far less witty and inventive than Poulin's language games. Further, these Rabelaisian boyhoods, so farcially sexual as to seem most lovable when crudest, seem in their uncritically funny affirmation-of-life to both sentimentalize and sell short the Quebec experience. Too often, the narrative makes it merely cute.

A minor but structurally essential theme is the familiar one of artist-growing-up, becoming through his experiences the sort of person who can transcribe those experiences. I suspect this theme will be a more important part of later volumes in the series; here it seems very old-fashioned, especially when compared to Poulin's gentle, neo-modernist interlacings of Text and Life.

* * *

The books by Bersianik and Lalonde, by contrast, are both polemics centrally concerned with language as power, as a means of oppression. The amalgamation of genres in each book makes them difficult to classify in terms. The Lalonde volume is in any case an anthology, collecting prose essays, poems, quasi-dramas (radio scripts?) and fictional fragments from the period 1970-1978; much of it is now of rather marginal interest, being "littérature de combat" very much tied to its time. This is particularly true of the dramas:

> les poètes étaient en prison
> et la liberté d'expression
> était gardée dans l'autre langue

are the most neatly turned lines to be found in them; they catch the theme of language as politics which (along with more straightforwardly separatist arguments) holds the volume together. There are also some sub-Nerudan coca-cola poems, some slender, snowy apolitical verses, some "concrete" prose poems in the shape of fleur-de-lys banners, and a number of discursive essays saying all the right things, but with no lightness of touch. The pastiche of du Bellay's classic essay, "Défense et illustration de la langue française," is the most substantial and entertaining of the prose pieces, though other essays on the language problem, especially those treating its historical as well as its socio-political contexts are of considerable interest. Lalonde argues, for instance, the connection between joual and machismo: women and priests speak *French.*

A subsidiary theme, as this last example suggests, is feminism. While evidently feminist in her sympathies, Lalonde is likelier to use the oppression of women as a subsidiary case of political oppression, or even as a metaphor for it: Quebec can be seen as "une entretenue qu'on viole assidûment et qu'on paie pour se taire."

Bersianik reverses this pattern: her subject is the oppression of women through the agencies of, inter alia, male language, stories and myths; the oppression of political entities is a metaphor, or a subsidiary case, of this major oppression. Though Bersianik stresses the implication of "story" and Lalonde that of "history," either of them could summarize the link they see between language and power in these terms: "histoire[est]écrite, au fond, par l'Autre."

Bersianik's *Pique-nique sur l'Acropole,* while mixing together at least as many genres as Lalonde's book, crafts them into a more unified work — a "satire," not without its root sense of "hash" or "medley." Her starting-point is a formal one; she proposes a subversive pastiche of Plato's *Symposium,* but a "pique-nique" is of course the only banquet her ladies can afford. Plato proves a much springier spring-board than du Bellay, doubtless because subversion is more complex and interesting than the mere building up of argument or even jest. Plato sets up a pseudo-woman, Diotima, and then effectively silences even her by allowing Socrates to report her words to help him assert the transcendent superiority of the spiritual engendering possible to the male over the physical engendering to which the female is limited. This is not the least of Plato's sins against the nature and identity of woman, rendered mute and silent in Plato as in almost all of male-authored fiction and history. The Plato-like Authority Figure of our own times is a certain St.-Jacques Linquant, who can adapt Freud, if not Socrates, to much the same purpose.

Bersianik, anti-Platonist, allows Xantippe and her other (invented) female characters to speak. There is action as well as dialogue, but the bulk of the book is made up of the tales, parables and anecdotes with which the women confirm from different angles and accord-

ing to their different temperaments their views of the female (chiefly sexual) experience in all its physicality (Bersianik perhaps leans too heavily on quotes from the Hite report for evidence of female sexual responses). These views are continually counter-pointed against evidence of a male oppression which destroys (politically) or denies (linguistically) that experience. Such myths as that of Iphigenia, sacrificed by her father, or of Prosperpina, snatched away from her mother, and such images as that of the Caryatides, mute statues supporting the marble edifice which takes no account of them and has no "use" for them, give resonance to the more historical or argumentative accounts, which are saved from stridency by style. The characters speak of atrocity in their own voices. The central historical example is again, like the Caryatides, a synecdoche: it is not only atrocious in itself, but stands for all the other atrocities of maiming, silencing and denial of pleasure, where pleasure is equated with independence and identity. This is female circumcision, a cause much more familiar among French feminists and general public (and therefore, I assume to Quebec feminists) than, up to now, among Anglophone ones. The case is made by a most winning little African girl — not quite yet a victim of it — who has made her way up the Acropolis to talk the matter over with the women at the picnic, and to ask them what such mutiliation portends for her prospects of a "heavenly" carnal happiness.

The book as a whole seems to me a logically coherent, stylish and vivid polemic, funnier (though the comedy is often dark) as well as more poetically intelligent than most feminist treatises; its chief competitor in Quebec literature is of course Bersianik's own earlier work, *L'Euguélionne*. Both should be translated as soon as possible; I hope an English edition can preserve the handsome typography and illustrations of this volume ("eaux-fortes et tailles-douces de Jean Letarte").

* * *

The ten essays in Larry Shouldice's selection of contemporary Quebec criticism tend, not surprisingly, to confirm the generalizations of his preface: Quebec critics are likely to be didactic and argumentative rather than analytical, and are, on the whole, more concerned with content than with form. Of course what is to be taught changes with the shifting tides of history and culture, but the didactic disposition remains constant. Neither the introduction nor the selections quite catch the sense of an intellectually lively Quebec, seething with theoretical controversy, of which we occasionally hear rumours. Surely there was a chance to confirm or refute the proposition that Montreal is to Paris as Toronto (say) is to New Haven, even though the regrettable temporal barriers of the publishing process limit "contemporary" to 1976 and before?

Shouldice chose essays "general enough to be accessible," apparently feeling that "practical" criticism of particular texts or of "one particular writer" would inevitably be too specific to be accessible. The premise behind this decision seems to me to be faulty; indeed the two most interesting essays in the book luckily work to subvert it. Paul Chamberland's essay, "Founding the Territory" (on the Hexagone poets), and Louis Francoeur's "Quebec Theatre: Stimulation or Communication?" deal closely with quite specific texts; they strongly suggest a tilt towards the formal and analytical, at least in very recent criticism. To be sure, the elaborate methodologies of structural linguistics and semiotics, respectively, almost crush the fragile texts under discussion. Lengthy diagrams of speech-sequences and character-exchanges yield

conclusions about Marcel Dubé's plays remarkably consonant with those of common-sense observation. The most cogent of Francoeur's views is the least-diagrammed: the "extradiegetical Receiver," perhaps more familiar to you extradiegetical receivers out there as the fictitious spectator, is fascinatingly analyzed in terms of Dubé's and Michel Tremblay's stage practice.

Chamberland's essay seems an elaboration into the language of structural linguistics of simple and relatively familiar propositions in Gilles Marcotte's very brief meditative essay, "The Poetry of Exile," which immediately, and no doubt deliberately, precedes it in this anthology. Chamberland's "poetry of foundings and origins" corresponds closely to Marcotte's "poetry of first steps," and his approach is as fundamentally thematic as Marcotte's, despite his disclaimers. His analyses depend largely on the archetypes of psychic topography and on familiar mythic patterns (again he disclaims "mythic" intentions) which hardly require the apparatus of structural linguistics. Chamberland gives analytic paraphrases, of considerable interest, for extensive selections, all quoted solely, alas, in their English translations. The regrettable decision not to include the original French texts renders some of Chamberland's comments virtually meaningless — for instance, the allegation that Beaulieu, in "A glaise fendre," is "intolerably concise." Neither Chamberland's interests nor Shouldice's brief permits what these poems (as excerpted) clearly cry out for: a comparatist's study, juxtaposing them with the vast corpus of "foundings and origins" in Anglophone poetry: — Margaret Atwood's alone would lend great resonance to the analysis of Hébert and others.

But, despite all these qualifications, I am happy that Shouldice has alerted us to the presence of these methodologies and even happier that he has gone beyond his self-imposed limits to show them in analytic action on particular texts.

Would that he had done the same for psycho-criticism and sociological criticism. That Gérard Bessette is acquainted with the basic postulates of psychocriticism and can outline them satisfactorily seems to correspond to none of the somewhat diffuse intentions of this anthology, and to be of the most marginal interest compared to what Bessette, as a Quebec critic, thinks can be done with psychocriticism, preferably as demonstrated in the analysis of specific texts, or what he thinks other Quebec critics have done or could do with those assumptions. The latter approach would fit in with the more historical essays of Shouldice's "Backgrounds" group. Jean-Charles Falardeau's essay, "The Evolution of the Hero in the Quebec Novel," while teasing us with the prospect of a clearly focussed "sociological" criticism, lapses almost at once into a patchy, unsystematic survey, one which could only have benefited by some critical presuppositions.

Two essays in the book justify their inclusion on "form" alone; their "content" is slightly off-centre to the book as a whole, as they are the least literary and the most polemically cultural in their concerns, but they are by far the most readable. One is Hubert Aquin's essay on "The Cultural Fatigue of French Canada," which is largely an elegant and cogent jousting with Trudeau on the question of nationalism, but partly a discussion of Quebec's cultural fatigue as, one senses, a sort of extrapolation of his own. Perhaps another Aquin essay, closer in topic to Jacques Brault's, might have been a more useful choice. Brault's "Notes on a False Dilemma" seems to be arguing (his extended marginal commentary on his own text complicates the reading process considerably) the importance of *not* being a committed writer, while con-

tinuing to be a committed citizen; his prose carries one along, twice. But cultural critics *can* be just as stodgy as literary critics, as we see upon sinking into Michèle Lalonde's well-intentioned views on Quebec cultural history.

This book, though not equally lively in all its parts, will be an essential resource for Anglophone readers. If the selection seems somewhat burdened by obligations to introduce culture, literary history, and the history of criticism all at once, all the more reason for Shouldice, having now admirably and usefully discharged these obligations, to give us a sequel, with fewer sweeping glances over so wide a field and more essays (like Chamberland's and Francoeur's) showing contemporary Quebec critics in critical operation.

PATRICIA MERIVALE

A DOGMA OF DIVISION

SHERRILL GRACE, *Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood*. Véhicule Press, $14.95; pa. $5.95.

THE TITLE OF *Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood*, by Sherrill Grace, suggests that Canadian criticism is rapidly developing a tradition of brutal partition. Dennis Lee set the stage with his cosmology of "world" and "earth" in *Savage Fields*, a stimulating essay which presents a vigorous portrait of the divided sensibility in Ondaatje and Cohen. The name of Grace's book seems to propose carrying the study on to Margaret Atwood. Instead, there is not even a reference to *Savage Fields*, although it has been around for a few years now and Lee expressly suggests that *Surfacing* and *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* display his "fields." In fact, *Violent Duality* proves to be very much in an earlier mode. The phrase refers to an impression of Atwood's work as the representation of conflicts between various, rather traditional, pairs.

Still, there is at least one central point of comparison. A major difficulty with Lee's work, as noted by many reviews, is that his claim that his fields are something more than our old favourite, "Nature vs. Civilization," is often unconvincing. His insights and style of presentation are illuminating and at times fascinating but his attempt to overcome the old "simple-minded dualism" seems only to restate the problem observed in the Renaissance and before: somehow nature and civilization keep overlapping. This quandary is found as well in Grace and, I think, is common to all critics who create a dogma of division.

And yet that lapping of the edges cannot deny the existence of the division. But is it much more than a universal presence of oppositions? Whether it is a product of the bicameral mind, of an innate recognition of the split between the noumenal and the phenomenal, or of anything else, man seems to find conflicts. The law of three so often noted in folklore is superseded by the law of two. Nature-and-Civilization is part of this. Good-and-Evil is as well. And we should not forget Man-and-Woman.

Agreed, some writers make more of the possibilities of dualism than do others. The case might be made, through a series of comparisons, that Atwood is on this "more" side. But Grace chooses simply to state that Atwood "explores the concept of duplicity thematically and formally, always with an ironic eye to its common meaning of deceit." So do Robertson Davies, and Margaret Laurence, and James Reaney, and D. C. Scott, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Shakespeare.

So much for duality. Regardless of one's reaction to Lee's assertion that he

has identified a new cosmology his critical methods are innovative and productive. Grace takes a similar preoccupation with the twos but she adds to it a method which is traditional and uninspired. She goes through the Atwood canon chronologically book by book. The first half of the study covers the poetry and the second, the novels.

It is difficult to argue with such a system, simply because it is so straightforward. As well, Grace argues, there is a development in Atwood's work which can be traced. The split by genre might be justified by Atwood's assertion of the difference between her poetry, "something you hear," and her novels, "something you see." But Grace herself asserts the similarities between the two, what Woodcock calls "the capillary links." The question is thus raised whether an overall chronological scheme might not be of more value, in which *The Edible Woman* is followed not by *Surfacing* but by *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. From this, a variety of interesting juxtapositions might be seen, such as the 1972 publication of *Power Politics*, *Surfacing*, and *Survival*.

As it is, each work is viewed primarily as an individual. Even from novel to novel and poem to poem the comparisons are of a general and superficial nature. The result is a collection of parts, a series of studies rather than a single integrated one.

Given this diffusion, there is still potential for more than Grace achieves. A glance at one section of the book might provide a few suggestions. Grace says of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* that "It is a compelling articulation of a Canadian myth and a dramatic incarnation of our past." This is only one of the many times that Grace uses the term "myth" in an unspecified way. Later she compares Atwood to Reaney:

> Atwood's use of myth here bears striking resemblance to James Reaney's theory of myth in *Alphabet* and in his poetry. Because classical myth informs historical Canadian subjects, Reaney insists upon incarnating myth in the local present. For Reaney "metaphor is reality" and poetry is myth plus documentary — Job lives again in the Donnellys. In *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Atwood employs a similar method, illustrating classical myth embodied in a living reality, drawn from the facts of native tradition. She shares Reaney's belief that "the native tradition [is] ancestral, important, and haunting."

What does Grace mean by "Reaney's theory of myth"? Is it that "classical myth informs historical Canadian subjects?" Or is this simply a statement of fact by Grace? What does "classical myth" mean? Job, as a rule, would not be seen as part of a "classical myth" tradition. Is "living reality" a term for historical fact? How does Grace see "native tradition"? In Reaney's view, in the quoted passage, it is something combining Indian lore and Canadian literary history. Is this Atwood's view in *The Journals*?

The historical context of the origins of *The Journals* is not much better served. Grace states, "The Moodies, of course, helped to suppress the rebellion. To them it was just that, an insurrection supported by 'Yankee' Republicans, and aimed at overthrowing British government. As Atwood points out in her 'Afterword,' Moodie later came to feel that the 1837 Rebellion was good for Canada. Certainly it encouraged solidarity and an awareness of common goals."

It is unfair to expect a detailed historical analysis of the situation but this is assuredly much too simplistic. Moodie states in her "Canada: A Contrast" (1871), published in the later editions of *Roughing It in the Bush*, that she had come to recognize that "those who had settled down in the woods were happily unconscious," until they were called to demonstrate their loyalty in battle. This

gap between the bush-life and any understanding of the political questions of the day is relevant to much of *Roughing It*, directly or indirectly. As Grace notes, by 1871 Moodie perceived the benefits of the Rebellion, but primarily in economic progress and democratic reforms. Something more subtle than "solidarity" and "common goals" but also more precise.

Grace refers in a footnote to Atwood's play, "The Servant Girl," which is an adaptation of a Moodie story. I think a bit more could be made of this in connection to *The Journals*. Atwood's interest in Moodie in "Servant Girl" is simply as a genteel prison visitor, while the concentration is on the girl, Grace Marks, and her eventual madness. This impression of Moodie, while limited, would seem to be much closer to historical fact than the figure in *The Journals*, who is, in many ways, more like Grace Marks, being driven mad by a horrible imprisonment, in Moodie's case, in the bush.

Thus we have a number of possible approaches to *The Journals*, all not pursued. The question of what is myth, in a more precise sense, particularly as explored by Northrop Frye, is left to wander while Grace drifts from Persephone to Job to Moodie. The possible connections between *The Journals* and the historical setting are similarly neglected. Then the difference between the real Mrs. Moodie and Atwood's is passed over in a few lines, although it is a variation which would seem to be at the core of a fictionalized biography of an historical figure.

A like complaint could be applied to almost every section of the book. In each, there are hints of possible critical excursions which invariably are not taken. A two line reference to James Dickey's poetry is made but none to his novel, *Deliverance*. If a comparison is required with the former, surely *Surfacing* deserves one with the latter. Numerous other names are mentioned, without development. The possible connections to Frye, Reaney and Macpherson are well worthy of pursuit. Others, to Virginia Woolf and Samuel Beckett, I found surprising and potentially fascinating, although Grace doesn't bring them to that point.

It seems that I have mainly rehearsed what the book is not. But in her preface Grace points out that the study is only "explorative" and has no pretense of being "definitive." She states that "This book is intended, however, as an interpretive guide to form and theme in Atwood's work for readers and students." It fills part of this role quite adequately but it is much more concerned with theme than form, except in the broadest sense. Grace looks at the arrangements of poems and sections of novels but she avoids linguistic or other study of the microcosmic structure of Atwood's work, something which could repay substantial attention, particularly in the poetry.

Yet it is in the poetry that Grace presents the most satisfying general interpretations. In much of the fiction she leaves questions for which answers might be suggested, albeit tentative ones. Here that microcosmic approach might again be of value, particularly in explaining the problems with point of view in *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman*. It might also remove Grace's tendency for generalizations like the following: "By the end of *Surfacing*, the narrator has succeeded in her quest; she has found what she needs to begin a new, complete and free life. Whether or not she will create this new life is entirely open, but at least possible, in the closing lines of the text."

The final words of Atwood's narrator are "The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing." But life in the trees has been proven impossible for a human, which she must accept herself to be. A few lines before, she thinks of the inevitable conversation with Joe:

> For us, it's necessary, the intercession of words; and we will probably fail, sooner or later, more or less painfully. That's normal, it's the way it happens now and I don't know whether it's worth it or even if I can depend on him, he may have been sent as a trick. But he isn't an American, I can see that now; he isn't anything, he is only half-formed, and for that reason I can trust him.
>
> To trust is to let go. I tense forward, towards the demands and questions, though my feet do not move yet.

The "free life," with nature "asking and giving nothing," is impossible. The possible life, with man, is not free, but full of "demands and questions," not "complete," but "half-formed." The sentences are a series of ambivalent wavers.

At the Learned Societies, in Montreal, 1980, Professor Grace gave a simply excellent paper on the Bluebeard tale as used by Bartok, Fowles and Atwood. As a result I expected *Violent Duality* to be, if not a sequel to Dennis Lee, at least a major improvement over the usual "writer and his work" series, and something really worth buying. It is not and it is not.

TERRY GOLDIE

CANADIAN GOTHIC

HELEN WEINZWEIG, *Basic Black With Pearls.* Anansi, $7.95.

W. D. VALGARDSON, *Gentle Sinners.* Oberon, $17.50; pa. $7.95.

THE AUTHORS OF THESE two recent novels both look beyond the resources of realism for a form capable of embodying their respective visions. Helen Weinzweig uses surreal fantasy to chart the flight of her middle-aged heroine from an unhappy marriage, while W. D. Valgardson attempts to create a contemporary myth out of his young protagonist's efforts to transcend a bleak physical and emotional environment.

Weinzweig's first novel, *Passing Ceremony* (1973), portrays a wedding reception as a gothic nightmare, with her narrator hovering like a grim spectre over her characters, pausing here and there to record their obsessions and anxieties. Now, in *Basic Black With Pearls*, Weinzweig has added a zany sense of humour to her considerable talents for surrealism. Thus, what might have been yet another "bored housewife" novel takes on a new and striking dimension as her heroine confuses hopes with facts, and then projects her fantasies on to her surroundings. When the novel begins she is travelling in Mexico under the assumed name of Lola Montez, waiting for a coded message from her (alleged) lover, Coenraad, an agent for the sinister Agency. Believing that "it goes against the grain of romantic love to bring it the trappings of marriage," she is content (she claims) to follow her lover around the world, a lonely journey redeemed only by their infrequent, wild nights together. Suddenly, she receives a command: Return to Toronto. "Toronto?" she exclaims in dismay, "But that's where I live."

Lola has no choice but obedience, and as she wanders through Toronto in search of Coenraad, we learn that (Surprise!) her real name is Shirley Kaszenbowski, that she has abandoned her husband and children, and that she just may be more than slightly mad. She finds that the city is mined, for her, "with the explosive devices of memory"; she journeys back into her past, attempting to comprehend the mysterious necessity which compelled her flight. Frequently in doubt but never in despair, Lola/Shirley relies on her wits to resolve her many problems. When, for example, she is confronted by a hostile guard at Immigration, she knows exactly what to do: "Now that I am middleaged I have a slight advantage in these situations. I try to give off that mixture of confusion and unhappiness that will

make him reluctant to detain me, for in that state I remind him of his mother." As passing allusions to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Bartok's *Bluebeard* suggest, like Nora she is seeking a more meaningful identity, and like Bluebeard's wives is paying a terrible price for her curiosity and courage. Loneliness is her greatest enemy, but from the lovers in her favourite movie, "Children of Paradise," she gains an important insight: "You have no right to be sad, you are one of the happy ones in spite of everything, because someone really loved you."

Weinzweig's main strength is her ability to make us feel deeply for her character in spite of the bizarre convolutions of her plot. As Lola/Shirley is inexorably drawn towards her final confrontation with her family, real suspense is generated: it becomes genuinely important that this funny, passionate and courageous woman find some measure of stability. Hopefully, Weinzweig's two novels will one day be published in inexpensive paperback editions, so that they can be enjoyed by the wide audience they deserve.

Gentle Sinners is Valgardson's first novel, following his three very successful collections of short stories. Once again his prose reveals his intense love for the harsh northern Manitoba landscape, the setting of all his work. His efforts to evoke that landscape for his reader often result in descriptions capturing the austere purity of a world that almost seems to exist apart from the twentieth century: "The town was so still it might have been embedded in the clear glass of the sky." Unfortunately, however, the subtle approach which served Valgardson well in his short fiction is too often abandoned in his novel, to be replaced by a heavy hand, an explicit theme, and an irritating obsession with mythologizing every rock and every tree in Manitoba. *Gentle Sinners* is very much a "thesis novel": the author's chief concern is to convince us of the truth of his Message.

The novel portrays the struggle of the seventeen-year-old Eric to survive after running away from his parents in the city to live with his uncle in the wretched little town of Eddyville. Here he finds life dominated by fear and greed: frustration will be his destiny if he cannot learn to outwit his opponents. The meaning of his quest is made clear in numerous passages. "If God wanted us to be good," he asks his wise old uncle, "why'd he make it necessary to make money?" Ah, Uncle Sigfus replies, "That's what makes it so hard. To get what you want without losing your integrity."

Valgardson has remarked in an article that his intention in his fiction is not to recreate the external world, but rather, to make conscious the internal landscape of his mind. As he tends to think in mythic patterns, his worthy goal is the creation of a new myth. He appears to forget, however, that the enduring appeal of a myth is a function of its elusiveness. Would we still be fascinated by *The Odyssey*, for example, if Homer had explained to his audience that it was *really* about the integration of the ego and the id? Valgardson is guilty of such overkill: a forest is "like some vast unconscious mind"; a mind is like "an endless maze of dark tunnels"; a bull is "like some great mythical beast." Eric is given no room to breathe as a character independent of the theme he embodies. He is simply shuffled about from one Mythic Encounter to the next — "like a defeated king who has sought and gained sanctuary, he began planning his return."

The characters who inhabit this aggressively mythic setting are either very good (Eric, his uncles, his girlfriend), or very bad (everyone else). Eric's parents, both rabid religious fanatics, belong in the latter category. The father's specialty is harassing ice cream parlours; the mother

is more concerned with her diet and six daily enemas. There is never even a remote possibility of a complex conflict developing between Eric and these human gargoyles. His adversaries, the Forces of Evil, are always ludicrously melodramatic. Thus, his final battle against the town villains (a dwarf and a giant) is curiously flat — we know in advance that, as in any fairy tale, the Hero will triumph. The novel's conclusion is further weakened by the shifts in perspective from Eric to Larry, who is all too obviously Eric's Double or Shadow. While Eric defeats the baddies and rescues his fair damsel, Larry engages in a comic sexual encounter with the voluptuous Widow Rosalind. The whole bizarre episode is strangely out of place in relation to the very serious mood of the novel as a whole, although this momentary lapse is rectified when Larry simultaneously sets himself on fire and hangs himself.

Larry's death is to be taken (it appears) as a suitable punishment for a would-be capitalist. A bit extreme, one might object, but then, this episode is typical of the novel. Ironically, in his preaching against the excesses of materialism and conventional religion, Valgardson is equally excessive.

PETER KLOVAN

TAKING ON TRADITION

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *Landscape With Rain*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, $8.95.

ROBIN SKELTON, *Landmarks*. Sono Nis Press, Oolichan Books, $5.95.

DAVID SOLWAY, *Mephistopheles and the Astronaut*. Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, n.p.

POETRY, LIKE OTHER ARTS, thrives on difficulty. The alliance of print and the Canada Council, some public outcry to the contrary, has not made poetry the easiest of literary vocations. There remains, for example, the difficulty of reconciling a poetic tradition that is fundamentally anti-democratic with the need to be accessible in an age when democracy is the official faith, unless one adopts Graves's solution of deciding that democracy is, poetically speaking, an aberation. There is an ancient conflict between those who hold that poetry must preserve its esoteric core, or degenerate into mere rhymed prose, and those who are blasphemously devoted to making the esoteric exoteric.

The three poets here reviewed all wrestle with this demon, and win, at least on points. Skelton strives to make the tradition speak a language really used by men. Solway puts his considerable mastery of the tradition's more difficult forms at the service of an intelligent, exoteric realism. Gustafson, inimitably, makes the conflict seem irrelevant: he recasts the tradition.

Skelton writes with Robert Graves perpetually looking over his shoulder. Loyal to The Theme, he strives to tell us, in translucent language, what it's about. In *Timelight* (1974), the continuity of the poetic tradition is resolutely asserted:

> We change
> little but names
> and accidents.
> We fall
> upon one earth
> and with one mouth applaud
> one harvest . . .
> ("Burning Sticks, Mallorca")

Skelton's "Virgin of Torcello" is the White Goddess in her maiden phase, but the poet's willing-unwilling worship is tainted by too many mental reservations: "I find I almost kneel." The poem ends weakly on the unhappy, self-conscious, rhythmically uncertain phrase "of our disquietude." Such closures invite the

reader's sympathy, not assent; they seem trapped in the esoteric, but wanting out.

In his new volume, Skelton escapes more successfully. The poems of *Landmarks*, unusually expressive of the haunted glooms of Vancouver Island, have no embarrassing man-observes-himself-observing gentility; they are clean-lined, pared, sometimes chilling in their open-eyed submission to the *genius loci*. Skelton's *genius* is not the mossy, life-spawning one of Roethke, nor the atavistic, blood-rhythmic one of Susan Musgrave, though it occasionally touches both, but a shamanistic, *unheimlich* genius, caressing the invader's mind as Conrad's Kurtz was caressed by Africa. Roethke wrote in the forties of "The feeling that one is on the edge of many things: that there are many worlds from which we are separated by only a film" (*Straw for the Fire*, 1972). At his best, Skelton voices this feeling:

> Up from the earth
> a voice that is not mine
> because encountering me,
> and yet is mine
> because possessing me,
> is making words
> within the quiet . . .
> and the quiet,
> like a sea-shell, holds
> the hush and roar
> of other tidal voices
> from within or from without,
> from far
> dark history or
> from hesitant tomorrows,
> as I listen. . . . ("The Visitant")

As a "private" language, aimed at public utterance, such shamanism works in this poem and some others — notably "Invocation" and "Waiting" — but more satisfying is a longer poem that evokes the "dark history" of the West through the dramatic treatment of an actual event, "The Emissaries." Based on the meeting of Juan Perez and the crew of the *Santiago* with the Haida of the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1774, it achieves a compassionate simplicity that, avoiding propaganda and bitterness, leaves the ironies of our dark history to speak for themselves. "Landmarks," the last poem in the collection, records a more personal search for remembrance of things past that attempts, however, to be emblematic in the manner of Frost's "Directive." Its gestures towards the "worlds from which we are separated by only a film" are hesitant, frustrated once more by that peculiarly Anglo-Saxon inability to love, worship or even act without some mental holding-back. If rapture is out of place before the Virgin of Torcello, how can it not be out of place on Vancouver Island?

> I tell myself that these
> are the nineteen seventies
> and there are no mysteries left.

The poem is too honest for its own good, the admissions of incompleteness too disarmingly literal, the measured dimeters and trimeters colourless rather than pellucid.

David Solway's collection, with less thematic unity than Skelton's, has a richer variety both of form and tone. If *The Egyptian Airforce* was sometimes harshly demotic, *Anacrusis* occasionally precious, *Mephistopheles and the Astronaut* has a technical virtuosity and imaginative range that wholly lay the ghosts of these earlier selves. A kind of *ottava rima* in "Penelope" and "The Crucifix," blank verse in "Cressida's Letter to Troilus," villanelle in "Corinthians," rhyming couplet in "Scholar and Gardener" and "Erlebnis" — each is used with a deftness that never becomes merely slick.

"Penelope" revisits the topos of Odysseus' return (the basis of a poem-sequence in *Paximalia*) with a new twist on marital fidelity. The Cressida poem, working forward from Shakespeare's insights, mercilessly dissects Troilus's insupportable courtly loving, which Cressida is made to see is a kind of violence against her:

> . . . in the rigid innocence and rule
> of a utopian imagination
> I saw the mortal enemy of our kind.

A neo-Elizabethan wit distinguishes "Love's Particulars," "Statues," and the poem beginning "I said, there's no privation in her sight"; and Solway the clear-eyed realist, it's good to see, is still around, in "Manuel" and the devastatingly accurate "Empire's End." The title sequence, which ends the volume, is showier; as *recherché* at times as *Anacrusis*, but with compensating flashes of the satiric scalpel, probing our ersatz nirvanas:

> Smug as alpaca, and not to be trifled with,
> Sri Sanskrit of the Orient Welkin glides . . .
>
> O metaphysician of tea, freak of
> sandalwood, mayor of Katmandu,
> pale seminarian, limp catamite of bodiless
> gods,
>
> Celestial Sahib of Interior Kitsch,
> Nabob of Chic,
> nibbling his verses of empyrean blue . . .
>
> ("As Buddhist Poet")

Solway's is an intelligent, articulate voice.

Gustafson possesses an astonishing command of allusion and of unfamiliar thought forms. He turns the earth upwards for our inspection, with a self-effacement and ironic grace no romantic could achieve. Unromantically, he will not avert his eyes from civilization's vulgarities and atrocities to botanize in the woods, and he admits — heretical confession — that for all human nature's grandeur, people, as people, are too often flawed and unlovable. But he avoids a monkish *contemptus mundi*. "People aren't worth the world," as he contemplates the Parthenon — but the world we don't deserve is still a world made by our own better impulses, very much a human world, its cathedrals and symphonies harmonizing *nobilmente*, not dumb nature's holy plan. Humanity is the architect, humanity also the vandal:

> The Parthenon. Men with their damned
> Wars blew it up. What wigs
> And willows man bequeaths and bungles!
>
> (*Fire on Stone*, 1974)

Atrabilious as Swift when there is need, Gustafson engages us with a metaphysical pleasure in the unexpected but exact word. (How else describe the Parthenon at evening, elevated in its own sphere above Athens, but as "acronychal"? So Shelley, describing his Greek Temple: "upaithric.") Only the learned in metaphysics know how felicitous the material world really is: so, in *Gradations of Grandeur* (1979), the categorical "Unheard music isn't sweeter," and the constant delight in words, those sensuous entities which leap the gap between the tangible and the noetic.

Only the irredeemably romantic (or blinkered pious) could refuse to enjoy *Landscape With Rain*. With less instant profundity than *Soviet Poems*, less matey vernacular than *Fire on Stone*, it excels them in economical allusiveness and mature, dense-packed metaphysical wit. The God-hunger is there in the title sequence, and still more critically regarded by the pagan — or the *advocatus diaboli* — in Gustafson. God? — We can't make do with one who is before all worlds, the philosopher's First Cause; we must have one we can smell and taste.

> Distance is for the birds. What
> We want's someone close to nail
> To a cross, Orpheus out of Hell
> No looking back, or Moses soaking
> His feet following a hard pull
> Up and down Sinai, not pulsars
> Pulsing in space.
>
> ("Ramble, On Intimacy")

Jesus? — The hubristic desire for our own immortality has caricatured him into a God-figurehead.

> Enough that there he hung . . .
> . . . The rest, the god
> Business, is human need. To defeat
> Death. That got, we can get on
> With cruelty . . . ("Good Friday")

Heaven? — Who would want one that

wasn't subcelestial, recognizably a product of human, not divine, aesthetics?

> What
> Shall I plump for? Abstract premises
> Or interruptive stardom, buttresses
> Butting roofs whose inside glooms
> Hold fragilities of colour?
> ("Heaven Is Difficult")

— lines demonstrating several times over Gustafson's mastery of the heuristic pun. (They reveal too, though one would have to quote the whole poem to show it, highly skilled rhyming: wishes-edifices-premises, vacuums-conundrums-glooms.) One never feels, as occasionally with Skelton and Solway, that a verbal mountain is being made out of a conceptual molehill.

"Country Matters," the fourth sequence in the volume, takes us to Frost's country rather than Roethke's. There is something of Frost in the ironic-retrospective "Of Indelible Water-Barrels," and in "Dirge for Gardens" and "Objections," nature turns an impertinent question back upon the speaker. "Lamp-Bulb for the Corner" exquisitely senses its way around love's duality — love's self-sufficient glow, that thrives on darkness. The poem has a mock-innocent scepticism that is characteristic of Gustafson's fond and mischievous way with myth:

> That myths about can have light,
> The man in the Hydro's hoist bucket
> Replaces the burnt-out bulb
> In the bracket on the telephone pole
> At the top of the hill beside the lake,
> The bulb dead for weeks so that Venus
> Up over the winter equinox
> Like a dazzling chip of diamond never
> Shone so brazenly, Helen
> On her fur rug waiting for Paris
> Never as dazzling to the boob.

Venus's acolytes are deprived of their handy dark corner, now lit by the bulb's "Jaundiced / Search-beam," a less than rosy dawn for that "world well lost." Multiple ironies are expertly handled, images fused.

In "Brief Colloquy the Day After Midsummer" the mischief gives way to the perennial problem of the mythically-literate poet, what to make of a diminished thing.

> Empties
> in the groves goatfoot-trod . . .

But pollution is merely the symptom, not the cause, which goes deep in human nature: a self-poisoning self-hatred, of which myth itself is disconcertingly prescient. Our failure is already defined by Adonis's:

> He refused to fuck
> Aphrodite. Could we lament for that?

The fifth and last sequence will be the one many readers turn to first, the traveller-Gustafson, casting a cold eye on magnificence and (again) on pollution:

> Yesterday's soaked news floating
> Where Byron swam and Browning loved.
> ("At the Ca'Pesaro")

The Shelleyan ruins-of-empire theme is well exploited in six "Persian Poems," but Greece is still the real focus of his "Pound-like journey through the past" (Wendy Keitner, "Gustafson's Double Hook," *Canadian Literature*, no. 79). Greece calls out more of Gustafson's powers, its gods being of flesh, not marble, its sensuous world prolific of paradigms. The southern tip of Attica is still sacred to turbulent Poseidon, rather than to pragmatic Athene: Gustafson's prayer there is of a Yeatsian virility, and a classical pungency:

> May
> Mariners of worth, simplicity and silence
> Pass by promontories difficult with trouble
> And sadness gracefully. This suppliance
> O Earth Shaker, Poseidon, from one
> Who hates people, loves humanity.
> ("Sunday at Sounion")

Determinedly provincial minds will miss the "Canadian" Gustafson of *Corners in the Glass*, but those who have

followed his physical and metaphysical voyages with increasing excitement will not be disappointed in this collection. An exact contemporary of Klein and Livesay, Gustafson now surely joins them in the first rank of Canadian poets.

ANTHONY J. HARDING

WRITING AS TRANSLATION

FRED CANDELARIA, *Foraging.* Intermedia, $3.95.

STEVE MCCAFFERY, *Intimate Distortions: A Displacement of Sappho.* Porcupine's Quill, $5.95.

JILL ROGERS, *Alternate Endings.* Sono Nis, n.p.

ANDREW SUKNASKI, *East of Myloona.* Thistledown, $14.00; pa. $6.95.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF TRANSLATION have been increasingly noticed by Canadian poets in the last decade, particularly because of the persistent experiments of Steve McCaffery. If poetry is neither mirror nor lamp, but a transforming, a carrying over from one language (or medium) to another, then it may be more demonstrably dependent on its sources, and more mechanically generated; poets will show more awareness of the limitations of their own personal language, and of the continually changing nature of language itself. In an eloquently personal discussion of translation in *Ellipse* Number 21, Doug Jones reminds us, through paraphrasing George Steiner's *After Babel*, that "translation ... is part and parcel of all discourse, that between languages being in no way essentially different or more problematical than that which takes place within a language.... Every speech act moves away from the conventional norm towards a particular dialect, slang, jargon or ideolect."

Only in this very broad sense does "translation" describe three of these slim books of poetry. Nevertheless, to discuss them in this framework does help to indicate the degree to which McCaffery's *Intimate Distortions* stands out for me among some dozen new books of poetry I've just finished reading. Jill Rogers' first book, for example, transforms her thoughts into the most familiar dialect of contemporary poetry: simple vocabulary in short, staggered lines. *Alternate Endings* might be translations of Atwood; many of the poems concern relationships between men and women, and the politics of power in them:

> when I get to my favourite place
> I find you already there
> this is upsetting
> you are evading my rules
> soon I may be forced
> to turn you back
> into a myth

This opening stanza of "Playing with Fire" is representative enough: it is neither anecdotal nor dramatic, yet its laconic coolness works to suggest the texture of a complex relationship. The third line is sufficiently understated and isolated to startle the reader with the implied "set-up" in "upsetting." The subdued voice, clearly in control of language, threatening to turn the partner from flesh to illusion, makes this a worthwhile first book. If Rogers can add to her control of the familiar more of a disorienting perspective revealing the unfamiliar, she could emerge as a poet of memorable resonance.

Fred Candelaria's poetry is more given to translating objects in the physical world, than emotional abstracts and sexual politics. Ideas are found in things; therefore, "inventory," as one poem is titled, better describes his poetry than "translation":

> There's a clean desk, an empty chair,
> one scoured wastebasket, a bare bulb,
> and always
> the dirt under my fingernails.

This form of poetry can, of course, be every bit as conventional and tyrannical as the Petrarchan sonnet. And it may demand more invention than the sonnet to make it new.

In three earlier books of poetry Candelaria showed his interest, more explicitly than in *Foraging,* in translations from symbolic language to aural language. *Liturgies* (Sono Nis, 1975) uses many musical forms as models, and *Passages* (Intermedia, 1975) includes four of Candelaria's original musical compositions. While the new collection does not show any significant advance on the earlier volumes, it does find its strongest, tensest poems where the itemizing of the poet's world is extended and deepened by the sound of the words themselves. As he writes in "ars longa":

> sometimes it seems
> language knows
> what's best for rhymes
> poems or dreams
>
> *chimes* tolling *time*
> as *fears* ring *years* —

The poems which follow this advice — and I don't think "inventory," or several like it, do — resound with "Stone Sounds," which let the "sounds ... around the mind" reveal the difference between brick and stone. The opening section of "Surf-Ice" (the title itself a revealing play on sound) shows the care with which Candelaria can develop short-line, epigrammatic poems by listening to what the "language knows":

> uncertain fogs
> unlike our dark
> drifts
> snows or
> desert dunes
> the winds move
> that were here
> (that were her)
> now are gone.

Andrew Suknaski is another poet for whom sound is of special importance, although not because he is likely, as Candelaria is, to let sound patterns determine what is appropriate. Suknaski, as I noted reviewing *The Ghosts Call You Poor* here recently, is very sensitive to the nuances of speech which reveal personality, and especially skilled at transforming his recognition into the printed word. Suknaski has already made an impressive and influential contribution to Canadian culture. Suknaski — to borrow again from Jones' essay on the subject — translates voices so that the forgotten people who share this land "may exist," and also may provide "a heightened and more articulate sense of our own identity — of one's self and the other."

East of Myloona began with the Berger Report: "I read it twice. Fell in love with the voices: people speaking about the meaning of home, land, kinships, and so many aboriginal things." After travelling to the North to meet these people Suknaski made these recordings, these translations, of their voices. In his Foreword he apologizes for the "vague and brief knowledge of a few Northern friends" from which the poems grew. Unfortunately, the entire book is affected by the poet's own sense of the relatively hurried and superficial nature of his encounters. There's a touch of moralizing grimness in most of these poems — "OLIVER POWDER / against urban lifelessness / diffusing from the south" — which originates in the visitor's viewpoint. The aggressive and nearly random capitalization reinforces, typographically, the sternness of the book. Suknaski has had little time to see the joys and humour which provide such effective counterpoint in *Ghosts* and *Wood Mountain Poems.* Suknaski's ear for voice and anecdote has not disappeared, but his sense of poetic potential is missing. *East of Myloona* continues his contribution to cultural understanding, but too often

these poems are less translations than transcriptions.

Translation, Jones argues, is not communication, or clarification, or imitation of an existing structure or text; on the contrary, like literature itself, it is "in revolt against any claim that the truth has been spelled out, once and for all, that everything's been said." Thus, Jones concludes, "it is precisely through translation, that is, inevitably, the mis-translation, the mis-reading, that the poet, the writer, all of us who share an articulate culture, manage to find nourishment, manage to avoid being locked in 'the prison house of language'." Translation is free and playful; it must, often, reverse or transform what has been said in order to recreate the truth of its source. This spirit is missing in the three volumes, each in its own way worth reading, which I have been discussing. The spirit of mis-translation is what makes McCaffery's *Intimate Distortions* special among these volumes.

McCaffery has been experimenting with translation for years. In *Ow's Waif and other poems* (Coach House, 1975) and *Dr Sadhu's Muffins* (Porcépic, 1974) he manipulated various "supply-texts" so he might ignore content and concentrate "on the invention of the poems' forms as verbal fields free of presupposed or prerequisite rule structures of grammar and syntax." *Intimate Distortions* is less boring than the earlier volumes because McCaffery does not deliberately ignore content, but "translates," or "displaces" Sappho by a system he calls "allusive referential."

Using the Mary Barnard translation of Sappho (1958), McCaffery recreates the sixth-century B.C. poet at a tangent. Barnard's translation of Number 9 reads:

> Although they are
>
> Only breath, words
> which I command
> are immortal

Attentive to the echoes of these words, and following his own associations, McCaffery produces this interpretation:

> the passing breath
> from a comment
>
> in a comma
>
> steams the mirror of
> eternity.
>
> infinite
>
> in finite.

Here, adding a playful image, and toying with the self-reflexiveness of language, McCaffery creates a delicate poem, and a striking insight into the self-consciousness of Sappho's piece. Sappho, particularly Barnard's plain-style Sappho, is an ideal base text for McCaffery. His translations can be intimate because Sappho is such a directly personal poet, because of the sexual scandals associated with her name, especially because of our image of the poet with a cluster of young women about her studying and practising "the composition of poetry and music." Yet distortions are especially likely both because almost all of Sappho is available to us only in fragments, and because even the earliest texts extant date from about 300 years after Sappho's death.

Since the fragments of Sappho are so spare, McCaffery is able to follow his sense of allusion and reference without becoming tedious, or unrecognizably remote from his initial text. McCaffery's book is bright with discovery, but its greatest delights lie in the interplay between Barnard's translations and the displacements. Indeed, in many cases, McCaffery's poems stand uneasily on their own. The appealing intimacy of this book depends on a sense of the *trans-*, of the path from the originals. The one serious omission from an otherwise handsomely produced book is its failure to direct us to Barnard's book, and the source translations — in themselves very fine.

Doug Jones suggests that the "communion" of translation may be a particularly deeply felt need in a country where two cultures share "the acute problems of how to live and write when you do not appear to exist." McCaffery's *Intimate Distortions* finds existence in a Greek poet of 2500 years ago, distorted and translated and then displaced. Inspiring the process is a reverent wonder about words, about poetry, about humanity. A predilection for writing as translation is obviously dictated, at least in part, by its necessarily carrying us beyond the local and beyond the nation.

LAURIE RICOU

FORECLOSURE

KEN NORRIS, *The Book of Fall.* Maker Press, n.p.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR, *shore lines.* Turnstone Press, $5.00.

VICTOR ENNS, *Jimmy Bang Poems.* Turnstone Press, $2.50.

ROBERT FOSTER, *Across the White Lawn.* Turnstone Press, n.p.

LES SIEMIENIUK, *Almost a Ritual.* Turnstone Press, n.p.

ENDRE FARKAS, ARTIE GOLD, TOM KONYVES, CLAUDIA LAPP, JOHN MCAULEY, STEPHEN MORRISSEY, KEN NORRIS, *The Vehicule Poets.* Maker Press, $4.00.

ARTIE GOLD, *Some of the Cat Poems.* Crosscountry Press, $2.00.

FROM WINNIPEG'S TURNSTONE PRESS come books by Douglas Barbour, Victor Enns, Les Siemieniuk and Robert Foster. From Montreal come books by a community of poets: Ken Norris and Artie Gold in individual volumes and collected with Endre Farkas, Tom Konyves, Claudia Lapp, John McAuley and Stephen Morrissey.

The Book of Fall is the second installment of Ken Norris' "on-going" *Report on the Second Half of the Twentieth Century.* But on-goingness is not a prominent quality here, for in this volume the poet often comes up against the cognitive limits of his art. Concerned with fall's clean sweep, he contemplates this blank season, working it over and over: "I hear myself say / 'how long can I continue / to think about / one action, / of trees, the transformation / in the color of leaves, / their ripping from the bough & / falling to the ground . . . ?' " He does continue to think about these signs of loss and change, often sparsely, waiting to seize an abstraction before his topic forecloses. Near the end of the book, however, he writes fluently from his December room, isolated by snows and by his poem-making, but also affiliated with other worlds by his "touch-tone phone." His pen (a Bic) and his telephone connect in an intricate and rewarding sylleptic scheme, keeping open the "lines of communication."

Many of the poems in this group of books are less intricate, yet most of their authors can pun and play with words skillfully. Douglas Barbour begins and ends his *shore lines* with a phonological tuning-up, drawing the sounds of ocean and shore into phonetic relations to generate a sacred sound: "i see ising icing cold ice sail . . . is ice is / Isis is Isis. . . ." Between these soundings lie more conventional verses. In "moonwalks" a frigid ellipsis cuts close to vital parts:

> here tonight: cold
> i feel cold feel closer to
> moon than usual

Barbour's "maligne canyon poems" are philosophically speculative and interesting. Yet his "walking long beach" series seems to have been stopped in its tracks by littoral detail not concrete enough to stand autonomously, and unincorporated into any conception of what the series is about.

Like most of these poets, Barbour arranges the sound patterns of his poetry

at the phonemic level. Larger ordering of intonation and stress are less pronounced. One exception to this rule is Victor Enns' *Jimmy Bang Poems* — even Jimmy's name lets us in for some thudding rhythms. But these ups and downs turn out to be pathological, for Jimmy is sick, driven by his congenital nastiness to brutish filth and violence:

I'll kick dogs,
I'll kick you.
I'll not stop
'til you're black and blue.
I'm fat and I'm ugly
I'm dirty and I'm mean
no one can stop me
I'm a hate machine

Enns mines the same vein of crude that produces the *National Lampoon*'s satire: Jimmy Bang is a social atrocity, his crimes spewing out over his fellows. Here, where end-rhymes and metric regularity are obscene vehicles of disgust, poetic form has a moral aspect.

Turnstone Press presents *Jimmy Bang Poems* as Chapbook No. 6. With Chapbook No. 7 we enter a world far removed from Jimmy Bang's hate machinery: Robert Foster's *Across the White Lawn*, a book full of humane and self-deprecating sensitivity. Foster's speaker goes to exercise class, facing up to his physical unfitness: "When I jump / my feet splay like a rabbit." But mainly Foster wants to get at the past, and introduces childhood sequences into the present. Moving as the incidents are — illness, death, trouble — the introduction is not entirely successful, for in "Past Present: Four Poems" the past is only superficially hinged to now.

Many of these poets want to mention their childhood — a desire incidental to their thirtyishness, perhaps. Of all the attempts to retrieve persistent memories, the title poem of Les Siemieniuk's *Almost a Ritual* (Chapbook No. 5) is the most impressive. Siemieniuk describes day's end, when the speaker, then a grave child, would extract plywood slivers ("bristles") from his father's hands:

once in a while
he'd wince
start to pull his hand
away
I would firmly
pull it back
into the light
and continue
silently

Unlike Foster and others, Siemieniuk makes no attempt to attach the past to the present tense of poem-making; such marked recursiveness is unnecessary because the formal features of the poem — its telling title, its locative details, its strict tense — are enough to give the child healer a memorable context. However intimate this archaic scene, it acquires universality and public dimension in its expression.

Less public are the writings of the "Vehicule Poets." In his introduction to *The Vehicule Poets*, Artie Gold warns that we shouldn't make too much of these seven writers appearing together: "Not as one," he says, "do we present ourselves, but, AT ONCE." Indeed, there may be no unifying doctrine under which these writers combine. Nevertheless, the collectivity of the production, showing up in some cross-referencing, may give these writers a (false) rhetorical security, for they are less intent than, say, Siemieniuk on creating the contexts and coherence that would make their utterances a less private enterprise. Some declare frankly that they work for themselves, that they are *self*-employed. Stephen Morrissey, for instance, maintains that his poems are useful — useful for "emancipating" himself. His recapitulation of childhood events in "Divisions" produces a participial past tugging like a nuisance on a reflexive present where the mind grows "passively aware / of its movements":

still, the reader might look for some active intervention. John McAuley writes: "i am a chain of lower cases," and he appears in other typographical guises, but there is little sense of address or intent in these disclosures. Claudia Lapp, too, writes about "this rage to dig self/ to dig up self," yet some of her poetry — "Horses" and "Cobra" — does get off the ground in telling of fantastical animal transport. Endre Farkas acknowledges the interdependence of coterie and utterance: he dedicates a poem about his "dry spell" to Ken Norris, and in "Shop Talk" he writes that "Ken is on the phone ... to say hello / & talk phone poems." He adds that Ken is "a friend; a friend is / the perfect end rhyme," suggesting that the sympathetic alliances among these writers may stand in for the formal features which would make their poems more valuable to readers outside their circle of mutual interest and respect.

When Tom Konyves writes his long poem "No Parking," cataloguing endlessly the grammatical and lexical possibilities spawned by the infinitive "to die" ("To die in a forest fire, in city hall, in the / evening ..." and so on, and on), he shows the idiomatic virtuosity of English. Yet this interesting demonstration is unsettling in its suggestion that there may be no priorities in selecting one phrase rather than another, that a text can do without an ordered hierarchy of meaning.

It doesn't take much to satisfy the reader's need for ordered, selective thought. Artie Gold has published *Some of the Cat Poems*, a tidy little book of poems which are either about cats or about things which cats can be signs of. As a superstructural principle, the feline idea not only anchors the poems within a set of experiences but also provides formal purchase on the book's content. And some of Gold's poems show a fine, flippant unity of shape and topic:

puddy/
comes in
I patch his ear
he's off again/
pit-stop!

JANET GILTROW

CHECKLIST

ROBERT LECKER and JACK DAVID, eds., *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors* [*ABCMA*]. Volume One. *ECW* Press, $19.95; pa. $12.95.

THIS IS THE FIRST VOLUME of an ambitious project in Canadian bibliography. The completed series will consist of ten volumes, five devoted to prose writers and five to poets, each volume containing five bibliographies of works by and about Canada's forty-nine major authors. (Margaret Atwood will receive separate treatment as poet and as novelist, bringing the total up to the intended fifty.) Each bibliography, the editors state, will provide "full listings of all works" by the authors selected, "a complete, annotated list of works on the author," together with selected book reviews of the author's works. The information regarding primary and secondary material is stated to be "complete" up to December 31, 1978, and updates are to be issued periodically to provide supplementary entries and to list new materials published after 1978.

What the *ABCMA* project proposes is badly needed by Canadian scholars and students, who are obliged to work much of the time with inadequate or inaccurate or outdated bibliographical information. Unfortunaely, this first volume doesn't live up to the claims made for it. There are, first, more errors of detail than can be excused in what the editors claim is a "dependable" work. Secondly, there are far too many omissions of secondary materials to justify the editors' use of the term "complete" with reference to this category. And, finally, the choice of per-

sons defined as Canada's "major" authors will seem to most informed readers either arbitrary or iodiosyncratic.

Alan J. Horne's bibliography of Margaret Atwood as a prose writer cannot be faulted for minor errors, and his listing of primary sources is as complete and reliable as one could reasonably expect. Secondary materials are another matter, however. He offers the disclaimer that, because of the amount of international attention given to Atwood, "some articles published in the last year [1978] may have evaded my attention." Some, in this case, equals at least six items, and, of this total, those appearing in the *Journal of Canadian Fiction* (by Francis Mansbridge), *Studies in Canadian Literature* (by Arnold and Cathy Davidson), and *Atlantis* (by Catherine Ross), would hardly seem too obscurely placed to have escaped notice. Horne's disclaimer does not excuse his omission of materials published before 1978: articles by Isobel McKenna (*Canadian Literature*, 1972), Paula Anderson (*White Pelican*, 1974), David Savage (*Dalhousie Review*, 1975), and Dell Texmo (*Atlantis*, 1977) are among the more than seven missing earlier items.

Susan J. Warwick's bibliography of Margaret Laurence is marred by errors both minor and serious. In listing the contents of the New Canadian Library edition of *The Tomorrow-Tamer and other Stories* she unaccountably leaves out "A Fetish for Love"; and there are two errors and one omission in her table of contents for the NCL edition of *A Bird in the House*. Errors are made as well in the citation of titles and sources of secondary materials. Once again the obvious problem here is the omission of critical articles: Philip Stratford (*Review of National Literatures*, 1976), Zailig Pollock (*English Studies in Canada*, 1976), John Baxter (*The Compass*, 1977), Peter Baltensperger (*English Quarterly*, 1977), and Clara Thomas (*Atlantis*, 1978) are among the missing. The serious researcher would, one hopes, have more interest in these materials than in some of the snippets from *Quill & Quire*, *Weekend Magazine*, and *Maclean's* that Warwick has conscientiously tracked down and included.

The bibliography of Hugh MacLennan compiled by Elspeth Cameron is both inaccurate and puzzling. There are at least sixteen errors and omissions evident in the citation of titles, of volumes and page numbers, of dates of publication, and of the subsequent reprinting of secondary materials in other collections. And once more the listing of secondary materials is far from "complete." Ten items, from the period 1968-78, seem to have escaped her notice: Kathleen O'Donnell (*University of Windsor Review*, 1968), Tom Marshall (*Quarry*, 1968), Ronald Sutherland (*Canadian Literature*, 1969), J. Clark Wilson (*Literature and Ideology*, 1972), Gillian Duran (*Literature and Ideology*, 1973), Isobel Bassett (*Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1973), Catherine Kelly (*Ariel*, 1975), Robin Mathews (*Studies in Canadian Literature*, 1976), David Staines (*Mosaic*, 1978), and Ted Blodgett (*Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 1978). By this point the editors' claims for the *ABCMA* are starting to sound rather hollow. Yet in Cameron's case none of the omitted titles is unknown to her: all of them appear in "A MacLennan Log," which she published in the *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 14 (Winter 1979-80). There she stated that a "fuller version" of her bibliography would appear in the first volume of *ABCMA*; but the version appearing there is obviously not fuller. Furthermore, Cameron's listing of secondary sources in this volume stops in 1977, *not* 1978, a fact which raises questions about yet another of the general editors' claims.

In contrast to the three bibliographies already discussed, Michael Darling's section on Mordecai Richler stands as an example of accuracy and completeness. The number of minor errors is negligible, and there are no obvious omissions from his list of secondary sources. One good bibliography out of five cannot, however, redeem the entire volume. With Paul Socken's treatment of Gabrielle Roy we find once again an unsatisfactory level of achievement. Socken's bibliography cannot be faulted for minor errors, and his listing of the many articles by francophone critics should prove useful to those who need their horizons widened. But, as is the case with Horne, Warwick, and Cameron, his listing of secondary sources is more selective than complete. Articles by Jeannette Urbas (*Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1972), J. Clark Wilson (*Literature and Ideology*, 1972), Marguerite Primeau (*Writers of the Prairies*, 1973), Allison Mitcham (*Humanities Association Review*, 1973), Linda Shohet (*Canadian Children's Literature*, 1975), and Paula Lewis (*Modern Fiction Studies*, 1976) are not to be found here. In addition, Socken has omitted one of his own articles.

In addition to the omission of more than thirty-five critical articles from what was intended to be a "complete" listing, this first volume is open to several other negative comments: the general format described by the editors is not applied with the same consistency by each of the five compilers; the lists of theses are not complete in all cases; and the record of the various authors' contributions to anthologies is selective and sometimes arbitrary — Cameron notes that work by MacLennan appears in A. J. M. Smith's *Book of Canadian Prose* and in Klinck and Watters' *Canadian Anthology*; Warwick does not mention that work by Laurence appears in the same two anthologies.

If this series is to continue, and if it is to live up to the editors' claims of accuracy and completeness, subsequent volumes will have to be prepared with much greater care. We do not need a ten-volume set of bibliographies unless they are to be in fact what Lecker and David state them to be in intention. As well, a project such as this, supported — as the editors say it is — by the Ontario Arts Council, the Canadian Federation for the Humanities, the Association for [*sic*] Canadian Community Colleges, and the Association of Canadian and Quebec Literatures, ought to be definitive. If it is not to be, then the financial and moral support of these organizations should be channelled in more useful directions.

Researchers and critics will find that this proposed series, even if the quality of individual volumes improves, presents them with one additional problem. The editors have selected Canada's forty-nine "major French and English authors" without explaining the basis for their selection. The result is a list that appears at best idiosyncratic. Bliss Carman and Charles Roberts are included; Isabella Valancy Crawford and Duncan Campbell Scott are omitted. Dennis Lee is in; James Reaney is out. William Kirby deserves a bibliography; John Richardson and Thomas Chandler Haliburton do not. John Metcalf is included as a major writer, while Rudy Wiebe and Ethel Wilson are defined, on the basis of omission, as minor. Sheila Watson, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Hugh Garner, Yves Thériault and Emile Nelligan are also excluded. Since it would seem unlikely that the editors could produce a definition of the term "major" that would justify their choices and no others, they would be well-advised to either change their title or extend the series. As the list now stands, it is a covert and unconvincing judgment passed on the whole of Canadian writing — likely to mislead those

who do not know better, and annoy those who do.

DAVID JACKEL

SIGHTINGS OF THE ENEMY

JEFFREY MEYERS, ed., *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation.* McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, $33.95.

PREJUDICE AGAINST WYNDHAM LEWIS, which he did everything to invite, dies hard in Canada. I remember a bibliographer refusing, while I was editing *Canadian Literature*, to include in an annual checklist of Canadian writing even the essays in the special issue of that very magazine which I had devoted to Wyndham Lewis' period in the country. Her attitude is still shared by many for whom the title of *Self Condemned* literally describes what they feel Lewis did in that novel, which T. S. Eliot described as "a book of almost unbearable spiritual agony," but which many Canadians regarded — and still regard — merely as an act of gratuitous churlishness.

Nevertheless, the links between Lewis and Canada, which began with his birth in Canadian waters, are still clearly alive, as they were in his days of service as a Canadian war artist in the Great War and his years of poverty in Toronto during the early 1940's. Jeffery Meyers' staggeringly expensive new collection of essays, *Wyndham Lewis: a Revaluation*, includes no less than four Canadians among its writers (Hugh Kenner, Marshall McLuhan, C. J. Fox, and Rowland Smith), though such astute Canadian Lewisites as Sheila Watson and Linda Sandler are unfortunately missing. One of the essays deals specifically with *Self Condemned*, and another discusses the long-lost Lewis pot-boiler, *Mrs Dukes' Million*, which was first published in Canada a lifetime after it was written.

But Lewis, more than most writers, cannot be localized; he has to be regarded as *sui generis*, the purest example of the cosmopolitanism of the modernist movement to which he belonged as painter and writer alike. He had no defined affiliations, for he considered the play of the intellect as oblivious to the boundaries of regions or nations. Indeed, in an age that tended to produce great enemies of the intellectual life, from Bergson to Lawrence, Lewis was, as Pound accurately remarked: "The man who was wrong about everything except the superiority of live mind over dead mind, for which basic verity God bless his holy name." So the fact that Canadians have written a quarter of *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation* does not license us to make claims for Lewis as a Canadian writer even temporarily, in spite of the many accidental links between him and us; it does show how broad — even if selective — Lewis' appeal has been, for English, American, and French writers also contribute to the book.

Lewis, whom Marshall McLuhan in his sadly brief note on "Lewis' Prose Style" justly described as "an *avant garde* by himself," was in the classic sense a man of parts: a superb draughtsman, a fine prose writer, an iconoclastic thinker of Nietzschean vigour and eccentricity, the best English satirist since Swift, an idiosyncratic travel writer, a swashbuckling autobiographer, a vigorous poet outside the fashion of his times, and in the end, when fate had stricken him hard, a novelist who tempered his scorn with a strange oblique compassion. But one can punningly use the phrase in a different way, and consider Lewis's parts as the facets of his genius which were as distinct within their general pattern as the pieces of a mosaic, so that any study of him frustrates a method based on the concept of progression from work to work. Each work demands to be considered only in

its own right, and the changes one detects tend to show themselves not in any increase of quality or vigour, for *Tarr* in 1918 was no more and no less forceful than *The Revenge for Love* in 1937 or *Self Condemned* in 1954, but rather in shifting methods. "Lewis went blind in his last years," as McLuhan remarks, "with the result that his prose was much changed in the direction of colloquial, conversational narrative." Before that it had been strongly and rather abstractly visual, so that characters were described in the broken planes of Vorticist painting.

This aspect of Lewis was summed up in his own exhortation: "Contradict yourself. You must remain broken up." And it means that the collection by various hands, each dealing in isolation with a separate work, or a fairly narrow aspect of Lewis' achievement, can have its advantages. From the present collection, which on the whole is astutely and clearly written, readers of Lewis are likely to gain a great deal of various enlightenment.

The two main failings of *Wyndham Lewis: A Revaluation* are of omission: the absence of any direct comparison between Lewis the writer and Lewis the painter, though John Holloway establishes the relationship obliquely in his "Machine and Puppet," and the lack of a thorough discussion of his magazines, *Blast*, *The Tyro*, and *The Enemy*, and their role in the literary-artistic world of their time. Among the essays on individual books the most interesting in opening new light are those by Bernard Lafourcade on the origins of *The Wild Body*, Alistair Davies on *Tarr* as a Nietzschean novel with German analogues, C. J. Fox on Lewis' almost forgotten travel book, *Filibusters in Barbary*, and Rowland Smith on *Snooty Baronet* as an example of Lewis' fatal compulsion to make enemies. Though one of the other contributors remarks on the fact that Lewis was so masculine a writer in his attitudes and prejudices that women have rarely studied him, there are in fact very perceptive esays by Wendy Flory on *Enemy of the Stars* and by Valerie Parker on "Lewis, Art and Woman." (Nor should it be forgotten that, despite her absence from this volume, Sheila Watson has written some of the most perceptive of Lewis criticism.)

Valerie Parker's is one of a number of essays unattached to any particular work, which serve to link the more specific pieces. The most useful and original of these are Timothy Materer's "Lewis and the Patriarchs," discussing the young Lewis's fruitful relationships with Augustus John, W. B. Yeats, and T. Sturge Moore, and William H. Chace's "The Polemics Polemically Answered," which is perhaps the best study to date of Lewis' political attitudes during the Hitler period, so surprisingly naive for a man who prided himself on intellectual clarity. This aberrant interlude produced the series of books like *Left Wings over Europe* and *Count Your Dead; They Are Alive!* (so similar to Céline's idiocies of the same period), which Lewis' admirers tend understandably to ignore and which he himself later described, with his usual honesty, as "ill-judged, redundant, harmful of course to me personally, and of no value to anyone else."

So the Enemy appears as he should, a source of problems, a pattern of contradictions, a man of potentialities that were never quite fulfilled, perhaps because he reached too far. For E. W. F. Tomlin is surely right when he thinks of Lewis in association with his friends and contemporaries, Eliot, Pound and Joyce, and concludes: "But Lewis remained the odd man out, and his intellectual interests differed somewhat from those of the rest, and were perhaps wider."

GEORGE WOODCOCK

FIDDLEHEAD TALES

Fiddlehead Greens: Stories from the Fiddlehead, eds. Roger Ploude and Michael Taylor. Oberon Press, $15.00; pa. $6.95.

FIDDLEHEAD GREENS offers fifteen stories selected from Fredericton's *The Fiddlehead* (founded in the late forties as an outlet for the members of the Bliss Carman Society). In 1959 it accepted its first short story, Alden Nowlan's "A Friend for Margaret." Appropriately two Nowlan stories lead off this anthology; other established CanLit names are Hugh Hood, John Metcalf, and (inevitably) Margaret Atwood. George Bowering, W. D. Valgardson and Joan Finnigan are also familiar names; less well known are William Bauer, Fred Bonnie, Alistair MacLeod, Cyril Dabydeen, David Waltner-Toews, and Patience Wheatley — all recent contributors to the periodical. The editors draw attention to the regional grouping of their writers: four represent the Maritimes, six are central Canadians, and three are from the West.

Nowlan's "Hainesville Is Not the World," four pages of terse, precise narrative, is a perfect cameo presentation of a classic situation: a travelled, smooth-talking, "foreign looking" boy, manning a booth at a travelling fair, meets a pretty, naive country girl and picks her up. It is a story-teller's story, a rare exemplar of how to do it; its opening paragraph and later details are wonderfully evocative of the time and situation. "Life and Times" is basic, vintage Nowlan in style and content: a grim yet nostalgic account of a writer's visit to his aged, eccentric father — and to his own childhood — in a small Nova Scotia mill town. Solidly, artfully done, it proved for this reader a happy revisit to the world of Nowlan's only novel.

Alistair MacLeod's "The Closing Down of Summer" presents a team of expert miners with worldwide experience, lazing away the last of summer drinking home brew on a Cape Breton beach, before leaving for a dangerous assignment in South Africa from which some may not return. It is not merely a "lament for the passing of summer," as the editors say, but a convincing evocation of the whole lives of these men and their forebears, a tribute to their accident-killed friends and relatives, and a moving expression of regret about a lifestyle which makes them almost unknown to their wives and children. A long, plotless sketch rather than a story, it is beautifully, hauntingly rendered; its deliberate, almost solemn prose strongly suggests that MacLeod wanted to capture the tone and cadences of the old-time Scotch story-tellers of his native Cape Breton.

William Bauer's "What Is Interred With Their Bones," concerning the puzzling deaths of two octogenarian sisters-in-law in a home for the aged, is an uncommon narrative indeed. It is done as a report in nine numbered sections, the first of which is addressed to four categories of those possibly interested: "responsible officialdom," relatives, the writer, and "you, the casual reader." Its pretense of being an investigation into the deaths, prompted by human curiosity about one's kin, is actually a lead-in to larger questions of life and death. Its most unusual quality, however, is a mock serious, philosophic, often ironic tone, well sustained throughout the longish narrative. Only lengthy quotation would adequately exemplify it, but here is a brief example:

> The true shape of history is to be comprehended best as running from the thickness of experienced, present event, which may be grasped with assurance and mental tranquility and officially recorded, through ever thinning gradations of deduction, inference, guesswork, until, as was said before, the string runs out.... Such residua as the following may be regarded, if you will, as visible knots in the now invisible thread.

This is not ordinary narrative, but exemplary writing of a particular sort, an enticing *tour-de-force* in which writing outweighs story, tone and craft replace plot — an experiment in eloquent prose too rarely attempted today.

Other offerings in *Fiddlehead Greens* are more predictable: brittle short pieces of modern narrative, such as Margaret Atwood's widely familiar "Rape Fantasies," which could have been omitted in favour of work by a less established writer. George Bowering's "Flycatcher" may well exemplify "comic *insouciance*," as the editors claim, but Cyril Dabydeen's "sprightly exercise in West Indian *argot*" is no more sprightly than its title, "Bitter Blood"; both are finger exercises in short fiction. The good potential of Fred Bonnie's "Roland Fogg" is undermined by a weak ending and an inadequately justified character change in its protagonist. The effectiveness of Joan Finnigan's "A Flight to Montreal" is lessened by the role of a wealthy and eccentric old alcoholic who so dominates the story that he upstages the presence and problems of the young woman narrator-protagonist.

"The Practice of the Craft" eptomizes John Metcalf's sophisticated narrative touch as he reveals the private worries of a middle-aged Toronto actor on tour in Fredericton. The play he acts in counterpoints his own nagging doubts about his wife at home. Efficiently, dryly related, realistic in its apt details of an actor's personal life, this moody tale left me unmoved. Patience Wheatley's "Mr MacKenzie King" is another well-told but bloodless sketch, an interlude of black comedy at a CWAC barracks whose inmates' problems, it is inferred, are traceable to King's crystalball communications with his dead mother: a wry tale it is.

The remaining stories are variously competent and grimly effective, and with the others, make the anthology on the whole worth reading.

A. A. MACKINNON

IN LOVE & HELL

IRVING LAYTON, *The Love Poems of Irving Layton*. McClelland & Stewart, $100.00; pa. $8.95.

IRVING LAYTON, *For My Neighbours In Hell*. Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, $12.95; pa. $6.95.

AT AN IMPORTANT LEVEL, all of Irving Layton's poems, even his bitterest satires, are love poems. A moral visionary, he writes from an overweening concern for the way the world turns, increasingly, out of grace towards heartless self interest and sadistic cruelty. Sexual instinct and creative imagination have always, in Layton's work, been the means to power, the way of transcendence and overcoming and making new. His best love poems, then, ring out their notes of exultation with the fearless touch of one who has loved both wisely and too well. Though they are often about desire in the widest sense, and can be playful or rueful or furious and, often enough, slight, they reveal this writer to be a grateful and most astute afficionado of sexual pleasure. What more delightful content for a book!

While *The Love Poems of Irving Layton* may not contain all of his erotic writing, or even, consistently, the best of it, this volume is a fair sampling, and a particular treat for those who prefer to read Layton as the satyric, ironic, and exuberant cartographer of love's labyrinthine landscape. There are familiar lyrics, the early, eager, breathless ones — "Sacrament By the Water," "For Musia's Grandchildren," "For Louise, Age 17." They hurt with an exquisite pain that is to be reverenced not rejected. "In La Minerve," nature and woman conspire to

strike down a willing victim who lays his gifts "With a hot involuntary look," on her white table, and whose ribs "most unpaganlike ache / With foolstruck Adam in his first wonder." Sacramental love, touched with frost, like leaves curled at the edges, is the subject of other lovely poems.

"I Would For Your Sake Be Gentle" expresses the tension between artistic rage and blessed harmony, a tension that hurls the poet "Sundays against your Sunday calm." It ends with a brilliant image that juxtaposes the blinding glare of egotistical necessity with a selfless love which asks only to be made use of:

> It is what I hold onto when madness comes.
> It is the soft night against which I flare
> Rocketwise, and when I fall
> See my way back by my own embers.

Similarly, in "Berry-Picking," the red juices staining his wife's lips seem more succulent to her than poet-husband can ever hope to be. The bright fruits comprise her "unoffending world." It's a poem of delicate gestures, enriched by genuinely ambivalent emotion.

Customary Layton postures are taken up with customary force — woman as emasculating witch, white goddess and fat, fatal spider whose irresistible love devours its mate. Lust makes and breaks in the same honeyed breath. Undoubtedly the best of these acrid poems is "I Know the Dark and Hovering Moth." It is also the most complex, juggling in a vision of surrealistic proportions, the impossible instincts of man for ecstasy, power and murder in a materialistic world teased by "the vanishing heel" of individual nobility. "Mahogany Red" is a more cynical version of Layton's ebullient "The Day Aviva Came To Paris." The former is full of true, bold strokes. It is a troubador's triumph:

> See how shapely small her adorable ass is;
> Of what an incredible pink rotundity each cheek.
> A bas Merovingian and Valois!
> A bas Charlemagne and Henri Quatre!

The later poem merely reminds us of a jubilant past when it was possible to stuff religion and history, all "tombs and tears" up her "golden rectum." With an air of resignation, it fixes us in the middle-aged present of tinted hair, discoloured teeth and "this bitter, inaccurate poem."

Yet, sour disappointment is easily defeated in the more recent lyric "Hidden Worlds" that reveals, through the subtly filmic merging of images, a technical facility perfectly obedient to the over-riding feeling. We are taken from the spare architecture of November to oblivion's very edge. The loved one is far away: "A spider's filament connects our hidden worlds," a tenuous thread to Artemis dancing and white lilac petals. The poem's wistful melancholia remains intact, while deftly sustaining the revelling deities of Layton's more jubilant vision. The craftsmanship and novelty in Layton's work produce a diversity of reading experiences. His account of love can tie you up in the knots of metaphysical imagery, or swing you (when it's not just an aimless ramble) through lines as sure as Lawrence's best free verse. He may be lovestruck, but he knows what he's doing. If the pupil is willing, ecstasy teaches well.

Heaven and hell are not undiluted blessing and curse in Layton's work. He's no fanatical purist, but a realist acknowledging many shades of grey while he damns and praises, and, like the Romantics, often adding a dash of glitter to hell. *For My Neighbours In Hell* either attacks bluntly and brutally, or conjures with cosmic images of evil that have left all argument to concentrate on eleventh hour shock tactics. "Apocalypse," with its landscape of despair, is a poem of the latter type:

> The black solitary trunk
> with its manifold arms and torsos

twisting into the light
squats like a postcard Hindu deity.

After total destruction, there is still no relief, for "someone is staring at the window / with my amazed and deathless eyes." Unlike Ted Hughes with his apocalyptic "crow" figure, Layton does not render up his poetic consciousness. When he writes "black," then he is as anguished, though not as devastating, as the British writer. Other poems of stringent, direct warning are "The Lyric," parts of "Dracula," "Male Chauvinist," and "Dirty Old Man," which turn the anodynes of love and religion on their falsifying heads. These are not weeping poems, but, hard as onyx, they admit that pity has not the power of plain talk, in perilous times.

PATRICIA KEENEY SMITH

QUIET VOICES

DAVID HELWIG, *A Book Of The Hours*. Oberon, cloth $12.95, paper $5.95.

FRANCIS SPARSHOTT, *The Naming Of The Beasts*. Black Moss, n.p.

R. A. D. FORD, *Holes In Space*. Hounslow, n.p.

HERE ARE THREE QUIET VOICES outside the fashionable stream of expression of the violence of the mad artist, dangerous domesticities or the mystics of the breath. Yet each has his own voice.

Helwig is gently persuasive, using language sparely and often conversationally. There is a certain sameness to his structures and sometimes the rhythms and figurative phrasing are flabby. Yet at his best Helwig presents a lucid world, a vision that tries to penetrate the everyday surfaces of life to reveal through his sensitive perceptions a larger meaning which is rarely imposed on the poems, for they almost always reveal themselves through their precise details and neat turns of phrase.

The poet retains a melancholy view of the world: "Dead fish and birds / come to rest in the sand. This is dying; / this is the only omen we have." But this is often subsumed in poems which try to mediate between the inherent stasis we move to and our process of moving there. The constant onward process of change is the human condition, so that many of his lyrics, while they have a kind of tonal sadness, express an acceptance in tranquilly positive terms of the mortal world around the poet, for he takes delight in ordinary detail, in domestic life, in the flashes of insight that break through the surface. That makes the opening poem, "The Boy Inventor," a strong beginning, for through this sequence, based on the relationship between Thomas Bullfinch and his protégé, the boy inventor of the title, Helwig sets off the voice of Bullfinch in its intellectual if somewhat ponderous strength against the naive yet insightful vision of the boy's inventive mind. The boy dies young, so melancholy pervades the account, yet the poem closes with an acceptance of human mortality with the belief in what it can achieve: "I work and live faithfully as I can. / It is my duty. / I am apprenticed here."

Helwig closes the book with some other narratives based on children's tales but these, in comparison with that opening poem, seem forced and finally alien to the poet's contemplative awareness.

In the same way, Francis Sparshott approaches the minutiae of life with open eyes and mind, seeing sudden meanings in the everyday routines of life, discovering witty and sometimes self-deprecatory ideas within the ordinary dullnesses of academic life.

Sometimes his insights are represented as simple, brief lyrics or haiku; at others he depicts small incidents in his life that emerge as off-beat, off-hand but strangely evocative details summarizing the poet's stance in facing the world, as in "Reflex," which concentrates on the poet's way (or

lack of skill) with a camera. This poem is indeed a camera I, perhaps the poet's credo, for he proclaims that he relies on simple, straightforward skills, not lenses which "cost the earth." But the poet says he has "never felt ready / to give up the earth." So his poetry retains a direct focus without artificial stimulation or exposure: "Fiddling with chemicals / was never my style."

When Sparshott tries his hand at allegory and philosophical enquiry in his verse, the poetry loses its life and his attempts at more metrically controlled stanzas are stodgy with limping cadences.

Like Helwig, Sparshott has a longish poem about the life of a young man, "The Lewis Catechist." Although it has pretensions towards Christian allegory, the poem's strength lies in its direct phrasing, its straight drive to present detail in accurate and economical terms.

The poems in R. A. D. Ford's *Holes In Space* are disappointingly flat. The poet seems to have wanted to reduce his view of the world to an unpretentious exactness and brief directness. But in the process he has removed most of the reverberations of language, and his figurative phrasing is unexceptional.

In spite of his admirable concern for reduction to essentials, some poems become repetitive, and the figures seem unconnected to any meaningful pattern. For instance, in "Hating Poetry" the image of a carapace changes to one of snow flakes, the idea of being drugged is repeated, and the opening "blind with poetry" somehow becomes "a right note from the past" by the end of the poem. All of this could undoubtedly work in a poem about the inherent use of all senses, their inadequacies, the inability of the all-too-human poet to make use of sensuous perception, but the poem is presented in rather placidly prosaic lines.

Only in his translations, particularly those by Voznesensky, does Ford's sense of language come alive on the page. Otherwise, this volume is the weakest of the three under review, for it is sadly dull in a way that the other two rarely sink to, even though the ordinariness of existence in its mundane particularity is at the centre of the poetry.

PETER STEVENS

REPRINTS

Recent paperback reprints include: Ian Adams' *Endgame in Paris* ($2.75) and Jack MacLeod's *Zinger and Me* ($2.95), a thriller and a comic romp, both from PaperJacks; four contemporary Quebec fictions: Claude Jasmin's *Délivrez-nous du mal*, André Major's *L'épouvantail*, Jacques Benoit's *Jos Carbone* (all fables of suppression, from La Collection Québec 10/10), and Adrienne Choquette's *Laure Clouet*, from Les Presses Laurentiennes; James Reaney's children's novel about W. L. Mackenzie, *The Boy with an R in his Hand* (Porcupine's Quill, $5.95); and (under the title *The Lure of the Wild*, ed. John Coldwell Adams) C. G. D. Roberts' last three magazine stories, never before printed in book form (Borealis). In translation — a bilingual edition sensitively prepared by Marc Lebel — appeared Dennis Lee's *Elégies civiles* (L'Hexagone), with critical notes; Lee's poetry, Lebel writes, "avant tout littérale, ... semble dédaigner la métaphore mais, à l'occasion, la pousse subitement jusqu'à la parabole."

W.N.

opinions and notes

MAILLET & THE PRIX GONCOURT

THE YEAR 1979 WILL GO DOWN in history as a turning point for the Acadians, for it offers beyond any doubt the most convincing examples of their cultural richness and vitality. It was in 1979 that Acadians from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, the Gaspé, the Magdalen Islands, as well as their distant Cajun cousins from Louisiana, celebrated the three hundred and seventieth anniversary of the founding of Acadia by Champlain and de Monts. It was in 1979 that their troubadours ("chansonniers") flourished, prophesying, like Léveillée, Vigneault, and Leclerc in Québec, the coming of a new time for their people. Also in 1979, "Les aboiteaux," sung and written by Calixte Duguay, became an unofficial national anthem. It was the "aboiteaux" (dikes) that allowed the first Acadians to survive in an arid land, and now in song they have become the dikes of a cultural and political revival, irrigating the "forces vitales" of the Acadian people. In 1979, Edith Butler sang about her "Acadie en dérive" (Acadia adrift), the groups Beausoleil-Broussard and "1755" played their Acadian rock in memory of the astute pirate Beausoleil-Broussard who legend says helped hundreds of Acadians escape from the notorious deportation of 1755 carried out by Charles Lawrence. In 1979, France bestowed two honours on Acadian artists when Giscard D'Estaing personally gave the Louisianian singer Zachary Richard the "Grand Prix de la chanson française" and when the "Académie Goncourt" awarded the most prestigious French literary prize to Antonine Maillet. The most remarkable sign of the 1979 Acadian revival came in fact from its writers, for there appeared an impressive anthology of Acadian literature (*Anthologie de textes littéraires acadiens: 1606-1975*, by M. Maillet, G. LeBlanc, and B. Emont).

Antonine Maillet has fast become one of the most popular French-speaking Canadian writers. Her unforgettable monologues in *La Sagouine* have had the longest run of any play in French-speaking Canada and her latest novel, *Pélagie-la-Charrette* (literally translated, "Pélagie-the-Cart"), will no doubt sell more copies in one year than any other French-Canadian work of fiction. *Pélagie* will also soon become both a television programme and a full-length feature. The movie will be the most ambitious film adventure ever undertaken in Canada. It will be produced by René Bonnière for the Toronto firm Nielson and Ferns with a budget of ten million dollars.

Antonine Maillet has met with astounding success since she left her childhood town of Bouctouche, New Brunswick. She wrote an excellent M.A. thesis on the works of Gabrielle Roy: "La femme et l'enfant dans l'oeuvre de Gabrielle Roy." Her Ph.D. thesis, *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie*, is a brilliant study of the linguistic and cultural similarities between the Acadia of today and the French Middle Ages and Renaissance. Antonine Maillet has worked as an announcer for Radio-Canada and she has also taught literature at the Universities of Moncton and Montreal, and at l'Université Laval. But above all, she has written sixteen books — plays, short stories, novels and critical studies. In 1960, she was awarded the Québec government's Prix Champlain for her first novel, *Point-aux-Coques*. Since then, she has received seven other literary awards. With one exception (*Le bour-*

geois gentleman, a social satire of a Montrealer who dreams of becoming an English Canadian), all her works involve Acadian themes. The most predominant theme is that of the family storyteller. Various recurrent characters have a unique gift. They are amateur genealogists or "défricheteux de parenté" ("family land-clearers"). For such "conteux" and "radoteux," childhood acquires a collective meaning. Personal childhood turns into national childhood as one traces one's history back to the common ancestor from Touraine or Poitou, the birthplaces of the first Acadians.

History is yet another fascinating theme. Antonine Maillet treats history in such a way that traditional heroes are replaced by new ones. She takes great pleasure in replacing some of the main figures of Québec history, who in fact dominated history books used in New Brunswick, by Acadian personalities such as Poutrincourt, founder of Port-Royal. History thus becomes a literary device of decolonization and demythification. Perhaps the most striking example is the attack on Evangeline as the symbolic heroine of Acadia. Longfellow's character represents passivity and austerity, while the real Evangelines of New Brunswick, such as Antonine Maillet's aunt or "Evangeline the second" in *Evangeline Deusse*, are strong, joyous, and positive-thinking women.

Antonine Maillet has done for Acadia precisely what Jacques Ferron accomplished in Québec. She has transcribed, reconstructed, and transformed history and legends. Ferron often refers to folklore from the Gaspé and the Beauce. He too is a master of demythification. In his writings, the Catholic soldier and renowned Indian fighter, Dollard des Ormeaux, is replaced by the Patriot and humanist doctor, Jean-Olivier Chénier. Antonine Maillet readily admits that Ferron is the author with whom she is the most at ease, to whom she feels the closest.

One of the most impressive characteristics of Antonine Maillet is her talent as a superb storyteller ("radoteuse"), both as a writer and as a person. When I interviewed her recently (*Lettres québécoises*, Fall 1980), she made it quite clear that Acadia exists because of its stories and tales:

> I would like to state something that is no doubt a little daring but I will say it anyway: Acadie exists because of its storytellers. Let's take *Pélagie-la-Charrette* as an example. The most important character is the storyteller Bélonie. He is the one who persuades the other exiled Acadians to go back home. And to go home means to never forget. Tales ("les contes") are linked to our collective memory, they are our culture. And we always go back home because of our culture. One of the key sentences in *Pélagie* is the following: "And he dared tell me that a people that cannot read has no history."

The folklore of ancestral Acadia (fiddles, mouthorgans, Jew's harps, a unique way of humming a tune called "turlatage") comes alive in Antonine Maillet's works. The rich legends of Acadia (the cart of death — "la charrette de la mort"; Captain Beausoleil-Broussard and his ship; the devil and his numerous manifestations — the Northern Lights, werewolves, giant turtles, fireflies) are ingeniously integrated into her writings.

Acadia's most prolific author is what one might call a "literary mapmaker." She has mapped out in stunning detail, in realistic and poetic beauty, the landscapes of New Brunswick, centring her creative eyes on the immediate area surrounding the Bays of Bouctouche and Cocagne. Those who have read her works will never forget the dunes, the small natural harbours (the "barachois") and the long white beaches of Acadia. In the land of the dikes, of smelt cabins, oyster barrels ("pontchines d'huitres"), crooked rail-fences and piles of corded wood, in the primitive and ancient land that proudly

hides the remains of Viking explorers, Antonine Maillet remains faithful to the oral tradition from which she evolved. The story-tellers, troubadours and "chroniqueurs" descended from Rabelais and his spirited Gargantua are living in Acadia and very much alive. Antonine Maillet has given them new and unique forms, and in so doing, has risen to the highest reaches of literary achievement. The themes and symbols of her works entertain while at the same time forcing one to reflect on a common ideological concern: the struggle of the underprivileged. In this sense, the Acadians represent all subjugated groups.

The admirer of French writing in Canada cannot help but be struck by the newness of the symbolism used by Antonine Maillet. Her figurative world evolved from different influences than those of Quebec writers. The ocean is the dominant symbol, not the land nor the forest. In her very first novel, Antonine Maillet tells us that since the first crossing of the Atlantic by Poutrincourt and his settlers in 1604 (Madame Maillet likes to remind us that Acadia is older than Quebec by four years!), history has continually "put water in the veins of Acadians": "Les Acadians avaient connu de quoi, à travers leur histoire, se rentrer la mer dans les veines" (*Pointe-aux-Coques*). The Sagouine claims that her sunken blue eyes come from staring at the ocean, that watching out for fish in shallow water gave her high cheek-bones and close-set eyebrows, that sea salt is the cause of her hoarse voice. In an interview, Antonine Maillet further noted that the ocean and Acadia are both feminine symbols:

> Acadia is feminine, just like the ocean. It is feminine by its symbolic temperament, by its inherent symbolic qualities. Some nations are feminine, others masculine. A tree is a masculine symbol, and the Québécois are much more a people of the forest than a people of the sea.

The "feminity" of Antonine Maillet's work is reinforced by the fact that her major characters are women. The majority of other Acadian writers also tend to give women the major role. It is interesting to note that in contrast men often play the dominant role in the imaginative minds of Québec writers.

Pélagie-la-Charrette superbly illustrates the cohesive and representative nature of the writing of Antonine Maillet. The historian in the novelist created a plot founded on historical fact: around 1780, between 140 and 150 Acadian families scattered throughout the Eastern Seaboard states, made their way back to their homeland only to discover that "la Nouvelle-Ecosse" had quickly become "la Nova-Scotia." Approximately half of the former exiles decided to remain in Nova Scotia and the rest settled in New Brunswick, which was then a land of trading posts inhabited primarily by Indians.

The plot of *Pélagie-la-Charrette* has a double focus: the return to Acadia of Pélagie, Bélonie, and their friends in 1780; the narration of Pélagie and Bélonie the third, who tell the story of their illustrious ancestors. The two perspectives intermingle and provide an appropriate mixture of live action and commentary. And now exactly three hundred years after the repatriation of Pélagie LeBlanc commonly called La Charrette, Acadia is in a state of celebration. The cart has started to move again, but it is now moving in the new "Acadies," the Acadias of hope and survival and not those of exile located in Louisiana and Georgia.

Pélagie LeBlanc was born in the village of Grand-Pré. Her last name is one of the most common Acadian names, and it was in Grand Pré that Lawrence organized the Deportation. Pélagie's husband was in fact killed during the battle with the English. Antonine Maillet transforms her character into the "héroïne du retour des aieux au pays." Pélagie reminds us

that Acadia has been able to survive because of its women: "Si l'Acadie n'avait pas péri corps et biens dans le Grand Dérangement, c'était grâce aux femmes." Pélagie is a new Evangeline, a courageous, joyous and committed leader. She is a realistic and believable character, but she is also a legend, a storybook character, a woman who tells us that "le conte," that imagination and story-telling, are essential for the survival of her people. For what is an Acadian tale if it is not an expression of hope and a way of living that transcends the real world? Pélagie is an active woman fighting for dignity and survival. She is also a fairy-tale character, the lover of the legendary hero *capitain* Beausoleil-Broussard. Pélagie and Beausoleil love each other tenderly, but because of their commitment to their people, they are destined to be alone.

Antonine Maillet immortalizes Pélagie and Beausoleil. In the imagination of the reader, they will continue indefinitely to pick up the dispersed Acadians, by cart and by boat. And because we are in the realm of legend, they are in fact "picking up" the Acadians of today who live a passive "Evangeline" life and who have given up hope of survival. The centennial friend and *compagnon* of Pélagie, Bélonie, makes it quite clear that *Pélagie-la-Charrette* addresses itself to all men and women, to all nations involved in the struggle for happiness and recognition. Antonine Maillet is concerned with "toutes les balances pesant les droits des hommes et des peuples depuis toujours." The underlying theme of *Pélagie* is justice for the "petits peuples" and the "petits gens." This is why "le nègre" becomes a brother for the Acadians, and this is why Pélagie's son proudly marries the Indian princess Katarina, or why Pélagie sympathizes with the Americans fighting for their independence.

But *Pélagie-la-Charrette* is not a "livre à thèse" nor a political tract. The ideology conveyed by its characters is expressed allegorically and symbolically. Antonine Maillet plays with the imagination of her readers. One is continually intrigued for example by the numerous meanings given to "la charrette." The author uses in her own way the myth of "la charrette de la mort" (the devil's cart of death). "La charrette" would normally evoke death, but in the context of *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, it does not mean that the Acadians are moving towards extinction. There is no doubt that Antonine Maillet's cart is the symbol of the Acadians, "un peuple en charrettes." And it does represent, at the very least, the pushing about of a people. Yet somehow, the cart is a sign of hope. It is not going around in circles. Slowly, surely, "la charrette" is moving ahead: "L'Acadie avançait au pas des boeufs. Qu' importe si elle arrivait en retard, on avait tout l'avenir pour se rattraper." The original Acadians used to give a cart as a dowry, as a symbol of continuity: "C'était coutume en Acadie d'apporter en dot une charrette à son homme, signe de pérennité." "La charrette" is therefore an authentic Acadian symbol of continuation.

"La charrette" created by Antonine Maillet mysteriously resembles a boat. It pitches ("elle tangue"), ballasts, hauls upon the wind. Pélagie "casts off" in her cart. Two of her helping-hands are called ship boys ("mousses"). So, underneath it all, "la charrette" is really a boat, "le vaisseau du capitaine Beausoleil-Broussard." And captain Broussard's ship is really Pélagie's cart. Both means of locomotion are indestructible. One can always replace a wheel or a sail.

Pélagie-la-Charrette is an epic tale of rebirth, a tale in praise of water. The name Pélagie comes from the Greek word "pelagos" that means "high sea." There will be no shipwreck for Acadia. Not if "Pélagie LeBlanc dite La Charrette" has anything to do with it! The

Acadian revival is at high tide. And on the mainland, the salmon are finally going up stream:

> Pélagie pouvait dormir tranquille. Son peuple se souvenait de sa frayère comme les saumons; et comme les saumons, il entreprit de remonter le courant.

DONALD SMITH

ROY'S WEST

FOR MANY YEARS Gabrielle Roy's fame has rested chiefly on her two powerful novels of Montreal life, *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945) and *Alexandre Chenevert* (1954) — and, because of these books, Roy has generally been regarded, both in Canada and abroad, as a prominent *Quebec* writer. The fact that the greatest bulk of her work, before 1945 and after 1954, has as its focus her native Manitoba has tended to be overlooked. However, particularly since the publication of *Un Jardin au bout du monde* (1975) and *Ces Enfants de ma vie* (1977) the significance of Roy's "western" writing has been increasingly difficult to ignore.

Roy herself has acknowledged the West as the dominant source of her creativity. In an essay entitled "Mon heritage du Manitoba"[1] Roy discusses the shaping role which her native province has played in providing her with the essentials of her life and art — a deep sympathy for the natural landscape and for all human beings. Of the landscape she says: "de tout ce que m'a donné le Manitoba, rien sans doute ne persiste avec autant de force en moi que ses paysages"[2]; and then, elaborating on the "marvelous gift" which Manitoba has given her: "y avoir entrevu, toute jeune encore, la disparité de l'espèce humaine ... et que pourtant nous sommes tous en fin de compte des êtres ressemblants.... Toutes ces choses, je les ai dites et redites et ne peux faire autrement que de recommencer chaque fois qu'il est question du Manitoba, car pour moi ce spectacle des dépaysés qu'il m'a offert toute jeune est devenue inséparable de mon sentiment de la vie."[3]

The nature of this vast and difficult land, together with its extraordinary inhabitants, clearly enthrall Roy. The harsh environment becomes her, like the desert for Saint-Exupéry, a testing ground where the individual may, if he has sufficient inner strength, acquire wisdom and self-knowledge. In any case, whether he succeeds or fails in his material endeavours, each person engaged in the struggle becomes intensely individualistic, and, Roy shows, exceedingly vulnerable as well.

Invariably Roy shows her characters embarked on enterprises which are ill-fated and frustrating, and only made bearable by transitory and usually illusory dreams of escape to hills and water.[4] The overwhelming question, though it is often unspoken in Roy's western writing, is the question asked by the immigrant woman in *Un Jardin au bout du monde* — "Comment s'attaquer à pareille solitude?"[5]

Roy's passion for harsh landscapes and for charting their impact on the human spirit is everywhere apparent in her western as well as her northern work. Like Rilke and Saint-Exupéry, Roy feels that, paradoxically, the survivors of such harshness achieve greater health, greater vigour, and even greater understanding of self — "Apparemment ce qui ne meurt pas de la dureté de sa vie atteint mieux que dans la douceur robustesse et santé."[6] Roy's sympathy for the inhabitants of harsh environments is, however, not limited to human beings only, for Roy is very much the ecologist in her concern for all forms of life and their inter-relationships. For instance, in *Cet Eté qui chantait* (1972) she remarks: "Mais les plantes sont comme les humains."[7]

There are several important implications to be drawn from this last phrase.

First of all, it leads to the insight so basic to Roy's work that rootless people are essentially as vulnerable as rootless plants — and indeed the majority of her most touching characters are rootless:[8] immigrants like Martha in the title story of *Un Jardin au bout du monde*, or the families of all the children, except Médéric, in *Ces Enfants de ma vie*, Sam Lee Wong in "Où ira tu Sam Lee Wong?" (*Un Jardin au bout du monde*); the Doukhobours in "La Vallée Houdoo" (*Un Jardin au bout du monde*); French-speaking settlers uprooted from the hills of their native Quebec and struggling to cope with the vast physical and social differences of the prairie, as is shown so often in *La Route d'Altamont* and through the parents in "Un Vagabond frappe à notre porte" (*Un Jardin au bout du monde*); and vagabonds like "cousin Gustave" in "Un Vagabond frappe à notre porte."

Secondly, it is the simple and touching quality of such phrases, scattered profusely as they are throughout Roy's work, which links her most closely to Saint-Exupéry — in *Le Petit Prince*, particularly — and most distinguishes her writing, stylistically, from that of her contemporaries such as Frederick Philip Grove and Sinclair Ross, from whom, thematically, she is frequently not separated by any great barriers. Grove and Ross, masters as they are at charting the steps in the struggle for survival, both physical and spiritual, on the prairies, tend to lack the tenderness, gentleness and humour which are so apparent in Roy's treatment of all her characters, whether they are survivors or not. This indeed, it seems to me, is Roy's essential difference from all other Canadian prairie writers — with the exception of W. O. Mitchell in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, a book in which the same qualities of tenderness and humour are present. The vulnerability and sensitivity of Brian's reactions to life, for instance, are very like those of Roy's children in *Ces Enfants de ma vie*; and the voices of the wind for Brian, and even at times for his grandmother, are the same voices which move Martha in *Un Jardin au bout du monde*: "Elle écouta plutôt le vent. Qu'il se souvienne parfois d'elle qui l'avait tant aimé, qu'en parcourant le pays, en remuant les herbes, il dise quelque chose de sa vie, cela suffirait, elle n'en demandait pas davantage; que le vent dans son ennui se console encore en elle et elle en cet esprit errant.... Tout à coup, des voix, les unes graves, d'autres haussées jusqu'à l'aigu, éclatèrent en choeur, comme si, au dehors, un peuple d'âmes chantait dans la nuit."[9]

Indeed, it is this very story which shows most clearly the difference between Roy and the others. Although the situation of Roy's immigrant woman, Martha, is essentially even more bleak and soul-destroying than that of Mrs. Eliot in Grove's *Our Daily Bread* or Ruth Spalding in *Fruits of the Earth*, Roy's protagonist is not invaded by the bitterness which destroys these characters. In fact, it is, surprisingly, Martha's failure to become bitter in adversity that turns her husband against her. So, despite the fact that Martha is dying of cancer in a lonely prairie shack, bullied and ignored by turns by a harsh and brutal husband who takes out on her his own failure to cope with their alien environment, she retains to the end a faith in life. She is indeed lonely and deeply puzzled about life and her role in it, but the essential positiveness of her nature is symbolized by the way in which she toils unflaggingly to preserve the delicate flowers which she has nurtured year after year, despite the hostile environment and her husband's mockery. Yet Martha's flowers, unlike Mrs. Bentley's in Sinclair Ross's classic, *As For Me and My House*, not only survive the droughts and winds, but reappear year

after year in greater number and with renewed beauty and vigour.

So lifelike are Roy's portraits, so accurate her impressions of the land itself that the reader is not surprised to learn of her continuing concern with the authenticity of her "reporting," her desire to make sure that she has not somehow warped the truth. Indeed, Roy admits to her preoccupation with accuracy in her essay, "Le Manitoba," when she mentions going back to review the scene of *La Petite Poule d'eau* "as a criminal returns to the scene of his crimes!"[10]

Gabrielle Roy's literary and imaginative return in the late sixties and the seventies to the West — the setting of her first published works[11] has not been a mistake. Indeed, these more recent stories and reminiscences of the West, set during the time of the author's youth, are by and large even better than the earlier ones. Her first reports on immigrant people and her early story, *La Petite Poule d'eau*, though delightful, lack the continuous control and the frequency of delicate and original insights to be found in *La Route d'Altamont, Un Jardin au bout du monde*, and above all, in *Ces Enfants de ma vie*.

All Roy's writing about the West, in contrast even to her two northern and her two Montreal novels, is most noticeably lacking in dramatic occurrences, with the possible exception of "De la truite dans l'eau glacée" (*Ces Enfants de ma vie*). Yet although really in terms of action and plot nothing much happens in Roy's stories of the West, these stories are none the less difficult to put down. The characters are so alive and the impression of truth is so strong that these fictional accounts seem more true to life than actual reports. But then we must recall Roy's contention in her last book, *Fragiles lumières de la terre*, that, paradoxically, fiction can usually bring out the multiple aspects of truth better than a straightforward recital of the actual facts as they occurred: "Car si l'on fabrique dans le métier, c'est ordinairement pour mieux rendre compte des aspects multiples de la vérité."[12]

NOTES

1 "Mon Heritage du Manitoba," *Fragiles lumières de la terre* (Montréal: Les Editions Quinze, 1978). (This essay was first published in *Mosaic*, 3, no. 3 printemps, 1970).

2 Ibid., p. 156.

3 Ibid., p. 154.

4 One recalls the disappearing and magical hills in *La Route d'Altamont* and "Où iras-tu Sam Lee Wong?" (*Un Jardin au bout du monde*); the magical river in "De la truite dans l'eau glacée" (*Ces Enfants de ma vie*); the mountain which rules Pierre's quests in *La Montagne secrète*; the haunting river in *La Rivière sans repos*; the lake which is the goal of the old man and the child in "Le Vieillard et l'enfant" (*La Route d'Altamont*); the illusory river in "La Vallée Houdou" (*Un Jardin au bout du monde*).

5 *Un Jardin au bout du monde* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1975), p. 176.

6 *Cet été qui chantait* (Québec: Les Editions Françaises, 1972), p. 18.

7 Ibid., p. 30.

8 This is true not only of Roy's western books, but of her northern and Montreal novels too. In *La Rivière sans repos* Elsa and her family, removed from old Fort Chimo and the old ways, are rootless, "dépaysés," as is Pierre, the artist-wanderer in *La Montagne secrète*. Similarly, the Lacasse family in *Bonheur d'occasion*, wrenched away from the country, cannot put down roots in the city any more than can Alexandre Chenevert, in the novel which bears his name.

9 *Un Jardin au bout du monde*, p. 217.

10 Also in her Royal Society acceptance speech, "Retour à Saint-Henri," Roy imagines returning to visit the characters she created in *Bonheur d'occasion*.

11 Sketches entitled *Peuples du Canada*, written between 1942 and 1944 and published in *Le Bulletin des agriculteurs*.

12 *Fragiles lumières de la vie*, p. 113.

ALLISON MITCHAM

THE ORIGINS OF "THE HIDDEN MOUNTAIN"

A PROPER APPRECIATION of Gabrielle Roy's fifth novel, *The Hidden Mountain*, with its romance structure, sketchy exposition, and heavy-handed symbolism, continues to elude critics of *The Tin Flute*. Even those readers who do not come to *The Hidden Mountain* expecting social realism leave it with a vague sense of dissatisfaction, especially after the scene has shifted from the Canadian North to Paris. It is generally assumed that this dissatisfaction is due to Mme Roy's dubious attempt to employ a North-woods trapper/painter as spokesman for her personal aesthetic: the parable is not a genre which readily evokes willing suspension of disbelief.

In noting the novel's dedication to "R. R." and in identifying the painter, René Richard, Gérard Bessette has come closest to accounting both for the novel's defects and for its more powerful moments: "Même si nous savons que le peintre René Richard — comme le suggère la dédicace de la Montagne — a servi de 'modèle' au personnage de Pierre Cadorai, il n'est pas difficile de montrer que ce dernier est aussi Gabrielle Roy."[1] Bessette goes on to offer us a more or less satisfactory interpretation of the novel as an allegorical quest for the lost mother-figure who recurs throughout Roy's work, the mountain and the caribou both symbolizing Mélina Roy, about whose death the author suffers guilt feelings.

I would like to reverse the emphasis of Bessette's statement, and to suggest that while Pierre undoubtedly is meant to represent the author, the allegory functions on yet another literal level, and in a most intriguing manner. The "improbable" adventures of Pierre Cadorai in fact mirror the real-life story of the painter René Richard down to the very last detail but one. The difference lies in the altered ending to the story, that is to say in the interpretation of this life's quest. The novel's difficulty thus resides in the attempt to merge the two real-life figures, René Richard and Gabrielle Roy, as well as in the moralizing of the former's life-story.

Born in Switzerland in 1895, René Richard followed his family to Cold Lake, Alberta, at the age of eleven. Like Tom Thomson, the painter whose work he admires, Richard felt the call of the wilderness, with its free and solitary life, at an early age. At seventeen he ran away from his father's fur-trading post to begin life as a trapper. These early years constitute an incredible story of hardship and will-power: perilous voyages, back-breaking portages, scurvy, poverty. Richard feels that this harsh life did much to shape and determine his talents as an artist — as late as 1939, too poor to purchase oils, he began to experiment with coloured crayons; often his charcoal sketches were made on brown wrapping paper for lack of a better medium. These rough sketches remain the heart of Richard's output, and are more highly esteemed than the later oil paintings of which they form the basis.

By 1920 Richard had made his way to the Mackenzie delta, where the trapping was good. The painter abounds with stories of these early years in the North, stories which made a strong impression on his friend Gabrielle Roy. On "one occasion as youth ... he shot with his last remaining bullet a large cow moose. Food rations had run out and extra provender was imperative. He merely wounded the animal.... Then, chasing after the moose through the blizzard, he attacked it continually with his axe until he killed it."[2] Such incidents suggest a possible conflict of interests between the trapper and the painter; once while purchasing provisions for a trip North his eyes were

dazzled by a set of paints, which he promptly substituted in his gear for a few "expendable" sacks of flour. "Je quitte Edmonton pour les bois, ... et j'apporte avec moi ce précieux butin. Durant trois longues années j'en caresse les tubes, les ouvrant fréquemment pour mieux contempler la divine couleur, mais je n'ose encore m'en servir: j'attends de me sentir en mesure de le faire. Car je voulais peindre, bien sûr, mais je voulais surtout devenir un jour, si possible, satisfait d'avoir fait quelque chose qui fût digne de moi-même." The trapper did not touch his oils until his thirtieth birthday.[3]

At first Richard worked hard as a trapper during the winter so that he could spend his summers painting. Often he would spend up to six months completely alone with his sketch-book. Eventually his desire to paint became even stronger than his love of life in the woods, and in 1927 he left for Paris with $3,000 saved from the past three years' work as a trapper. Frustrated with the restrictive climate of Parisian academies, Richard was on the verge of returning to Canada when he met Clarence Gagnon, who was to become his teacher and lifelong friend. However, he continued to suffer from homesickness and ill-health: a self-portrait from this period reveals "un jeune homme au visage et aux yeux empreints d'une intolérable nostalgie."[4]

Here ceases the resemblance between the lives of René Richard and Pierre Cadorai: three years later, in 1930, Richard was back in Cold Lake joyously preparing for another fruitful expedition into the North Woods. This time he slowly made his way down the Churchill to Hudson Bay and eventually to the Ungava, a region with which he immediately fell in love and to which he would return many times. While we have no single painting of any "hidden mountain," there exist vigorous sketches and oils of the Chubb crater, and one superb painting simply entitled "Ungava."

Gabrielle Roy has hinted at the difference between Richard and the protagonist of *The Hidden Mountain* in her 1967 preface to a catalogue of the painter's work on exhibition at the Musée du Québec. Discussing Richard's decision to settle down in Baie-St.-Paul, she notes:

> A présent, dans sa belle vieille maison ancienne, entre campagne et ville, René Richard est parvenu au troisième acte en quelque sorte d'une vie riche en péripéties, qui s'achève, comme pour Prospero, dans *The Tempest*, dans la sérénité et la douceur, dans l'amitié et la tendresse.[5]

This shift from a life of hardship and isolation to one of community and communication contrasts sharply with Pierre's continued isolation at home and abroad. In contrast to the Prospero of Shakespeare's romance, Pierre Cadorai suffers the obsession and the tragical helplessness of the more sensitive Hamlet:

> Pierre felt that now and forever his heart was knit in friendship to this prince — so out of the common mold and yet so like us all. Courage, a certain noble indecision of the soul — he understood that these things could go together; he did not see how they could be wholly separate.[6]

Such an explicit and self-conscious transformation of the contented, older painter into a more anxious and ultimately self-immolating artist clearly indicates a desire on Gabrielle Roy's part to investigate what she considers the real story behind Richard's success. In her attempt to record the discrepancy between the surface facts and the reality behind them, Gabrielle Roy seems, however, to reveal a great deal more about herself than about the painter René Richard.

The novelist's darkly romantic concept of the artist's quest is evident in her tribute to Richard as well as in her fiction. In contrast to the pleasantly crusty image of Richard which emerges from numerous interviews, Roy's pamphlet for

the Québec museum gives the impression of a more dramatic kind of stoicism. In her discussion of his sketches and paintings she tends to focus on "les images de la création sous son aspect souvent le plus dénué et le plus hostile: pauvres arbres effilés comme des roseaux, chiens de traîne quasi morts d'épuisement, misérables cabanes à demi enterrées sous la neige,"[7] rather than on those which reveal "close to abstract fire and fervour"[8] or the more bucolic influence of Clarence Gagnon.

In the novel the author has even greater freedom to present the painter as she views him, and Pierre Cadorai resembles Gabrielle Roy in temperament and sensibility much more than he resembles René Richard. Thus Richard's natural preference for the friendship of trappers to life in the city is transformed in the novel into a real need for total solitude. Perhaps the one example which best illustrates the direction taken by the fiction is the caribou episode: whereas Richard recounts the incident almost with gusto, concluding "Does that story make you squeamish?"[9] Gabrielle Roy transforms it into a powerfully pathetic scene where pursuer and pursued become one.

Such close correspondences to the life of René Richard may help account both for the novel's strengths and for its weaknesses. At its best *The Hidden Mountain* transcends its origins to take its place beside another great Canadian kunstler-roman, *The Mountain and the Valley*, as for example when Gabrielle Roy describes Pierre's epiphanic rediscovery of light and colour in the spring, or his attempt to capture in paint the movement of water. Nor should we forget or discount the author's desire, however qualified in the process, simply to record René Richard's story:

> He lifted his head, repeated to himself: "To tell my story . . ." Yes, such was the deep desire of every life, the longing of every soul: that someone should care enough to recall it to mind and to tell others a little of what it had been, how hard it had strived. So much commotion, so many secrets and evasions, all to finish with this soft cry: "to tell my story!"[10]

NOTES

1 Gérard Bessette, *Trois Romanciers Québécois* (Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1973), p. 188.

2 Dorothy Pfeiffer, "A Visit with René Richard," *Montreal Gazette*, 18 April 1962.

3 Rolland Boulanger, "René Richard," *Arts et Pensée*, 10 (August 1952), p. 103.

4 Gabrielle Roy, "Préface," *René Richard* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1967), n.p. For a more complete sampling of Richard's work see *René Richard* (Québec: Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, 1978), with a preface by Michel Champagne.

5 Gabrielle Roy, preface to *René Richard*.

6 Gabrielle Roy, *The Hidden Mountain*, trans. Harry Binsse (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), p. 123. See *La Montagne Secrète* (Paris: Flammarion, 1962), p. 144.

7 Gabrielle Roy, preface to *René Richard*.

8 Dorothy Pfeiffer, "Strong Color and Love of Nature," *Montreal Gazette*, 17 May 1958.

9 Dorothy Pfeiffer, "A Visit with René Richard."

10 Gabrielle Roy, *The Hidden Mountain*, p. 123.

MICHELE LACOMBE

L'HOMME-ARBRE DE "LA MONTAGNE SECRETE"

LA MONTAGNE SECRETE n'est pas, à première vue, le plus imposant des romans de Gabrielle Roy. Dans une étude récente portant sur la totalité de l'oeuvre, François Ricard ne consacre à ce roman que quelques lignes sur une vingtaine de pages:

> *La Montagne secrète*, en effet, se présente comme une tentative de traduire sur le mode

> allégorique le sens que Gabrielle Roy attribue à la recherche artistique: celui d'une longue marche vers un idéal inaccessible, mais dont l'artiste ne saurait abandonner la poursuite sans renoncer du même coup à tout ce qui fonde la valeur de son entreprise. C'est pourquoi toute la vie de Pierre Cadorai, et tous ses voyages, sont l'histoire d'une interminable fascination qui le pousse en avant, toujours plus loin, vers un terme sans cesse lui échappant. Ainsi l'écrivain est-il lui aussi conduit par un rêve qui le possède, qu'il ne rejoindra jamais, mais qui lui commande perpétuellement de partir.[1]

Nous croyons que le monde allégorique de *La Montagne secrète* est fondé sur l'image de l'arbre et de ses ramifications. C'est ainsi un aspect de l'univers imaginaire du roman que nous nous proposons d'étudier. Il va donc sans dire que notre étude est diamétralement opposée à d'autres, comme celle de Gérard Bessette qui qualifie *La Montagne secrète* de "demi-échec."[2] Il est donc clair que nous nous soucions ici d'univers imaginaire et que nous ne sommes pas préoccupés par les insuffisances psychologiques du roman, insuffisances que personne n'a encore vraiment démontrées à notre connaissance. D'ailleurs de nouvelles études commencent enfin à révéler la richesse mythique de *La Montagne secrète*.[3]

* * *

Il y a déjà un certain temps que Gaston Bachelard a signalé une carence que la critique littéraire n'a pas encore comblée:

> La vie imaginaire vécue en sympathie avec le végétal réclamerait tout un livre. . . . Tant qu'une étude systématique de ces images fondamentales n'aura pas été entreprise, la psychologie de l'imagination littéraire manquera des éléments pour se constituer en doctrine.[4]

C'est aussi au niveau de ces constations que Bachelard aborde l'étude des rapports esthétiques entre peinture et écriture: "croyant que la tâche de l'écrivain est de décrire ce que le peintre peindrait."[5] Ce n'est donc pas une coïncidence que *La Montagne secrète*, si riche en images végétales, décrit l'évolution d'un peintre que l'on finit par considérer "véritablement" comme un "homme-arbre" qui a "poussé en hauteur" et "dont l'épiderme usé, fendillé, asséché" ressemble à "de l'écorce."[6]

En général la rêverie stimulée par le monde végétal n'est pas, dans *La Montagne secrète*, une source de bonheur. En effet, une fois seulement le peintre Pierre Cadorai se laisse aller à la nostalgie du jardin heureux. Ainsi, l'artiste qui ne cesse "de monter vers le cercle polaire" regrette la végétation et la compagnie humaine qu'il a laissées deux semaines auparavant un peu plus au sud: "Oh, le beau jardin de Gédéon dans la clairière, sous la lune, c'est alors qu'il eut tout son prix dans le souvenir de Pierre!"

Mais l'image végétale privilégiée, pour ne pas dire unique, du roman de Gabrielle Roy c'est l'arbre. A lui seul il représente souvent toute la réalité de la douloureuse condition humaine: "On sentait que la vie de cet arbre était une folie comme apparaissent folie tant de nos entreprises." Ainsi le travail du vrai peintre n'est pas de reproduire mais de lire, traduire et écrire l'âme de l'arbre puisque: "La détresse de l'arbre vivant était angoissante, mais plus angoissante encore celle de l'arbre fixé sur le papier."

Des exemples comme ceux choisis plus haut ne sont pas rares. En effet, ce roman de 222 pages contient plus de 250 allusions directes ou indirectes à l'image de l'arbre que l'on peut bien considérer comme une métaphore obsédante. D'ailleurs les figures basées sur la répétition constituent un procédé générateur du roman dont les structures peuvent être clairement analysées.[7] Mais "la description des formes est plus facile que la description des mouvements"[8]: ce que nous tâchons d'analyser c'est une expérience vécue en sympathie avec l'image de l'ar-

bre, ou du moins la transcription des mouvements de son *imaginaire*.

La notion que l'on considère généralement comme centrale dans la dynamique des images végétales c'est la verticalité.[9] Le pin est d'ailleurs considéré comme l'arbre privilégié pour la représenter. Cette *image verticalisante*, nous rappelle Bachelard, a été mise en relief par les mythes populaires ainsi que par certains auteurs modernes comme Nietzsche, Claudel et Francis James.[10] Mais chez Gabrielle Roy ce n'est que paradoxalement que l'énergie verticalisante du pin se développe.

C'est, par exemple, "sur des branches de sapin" qu'un soir Pierre "déploya sa couverture," ainsi l'arbre devint un symbole d'horizontalité invitant aux rêveries du repos. Mais le même soir Pierre "se retourna sur sa couche de branches, plein d'une attente extrême." Puis, poussé par une force mystérieuse, "il devint" pour lui "impossible de rester en place." C'est ainsi que pour la première fois le peintre décide de monter dans son canot et d'aller vers le nord: "Sans nulle part s'arrêter, tout cette nuit Pierre voyagea." On peut considérer que la substance du pin donne à l'homme qui se couche sur elle la force verticalisante. Ainsi, c'est un aspect particulier, relevant de la substance (et non de la forme ou la position habituelle) qui nous renvoie à l'image première du pin: le courage de l'élan vertical. Gabrielle Roy fait ici preuve d'une subtile originalité. En effet, Bachelard nous dit que le pin offre à l'homme un exemple, une "leçon dynamique."[11] L'arbre suggère "au rêveur affaissé": "Allons, soit droit comme moi ... redresse-toi." C'est donc l'énergie potentielle du pin qui est communiquée à Pierre.

D'autres exemples illustrent le fait que l'homme reprend courage en présence du pin. C'est ainsi que Pierre, après avoir risqué sa vie dans les rapides d'une rivière située au nord du Churchill et qui ne figure "sur aucune des cartes qu'il avait pu avoir des Terres et Forêts," découvre "au sommet de la berge" un paysage des plus décourageants; mais la "stérile forêt de petites épinettes inanimées" lui redonne son courage puisque le chapitre finit avec ces mots: "Mais il se redressa. Vers ce côté où il y avait encore quelque clarté, il se mit en marche." Ce courage et cette pureté du pin s'appliquent tout naturellement aux valeurs morales. C'est ainsi que Pierre raconte à Stanislas, un jeune peintre parisien qui deviendra son ami, que c'est dans une forêt de "petites épinettes" qu'il retrouva "le petit Bill" à qui il devait de l'argent et que le règlement de cette dette mit sa conscience en paix.

* * *

Mais le grand mouvement fondamental dans l'univers imaginaire de *La Montagne secrète* est de nature oscillatoire: le pôle humain et le pôle végétal en constituent les deux limites. Puisque l'homme et l'arbre partagent la triste condition d'un tronc isolé et l'expression d'une souffrance séculaire, ils peuvent à tout moment être considérés comme symboles l'un de l'autre, surtout dans leur difficile approche d'un Nord qui reste toujours à découvrir, à conquérir.[12] C'est donc un rapprochement, une force d'attraction réciproque, enfin un effet métonymique global qu'il s'agit d'étudier.

C'est ainsi que la personnification de l'arbre se présente dans *La Montagne secrète* comme une véritable obsession. Le langage qui décrit habituellement les formes, les substances ou les activités humaines est souvent appliqué au paysage. On nous parle en effet de "montagnes chauves," de "la voix des forêts" et même du "nez d'un canot." Parfois la présence végétale domine par une agressivité et un goût de conquérir typiquement humains: "les buissons empiétant et dévorant."

Ailleurs l'humanisation du paysage se fait d'une manière féminine, délicate: "une ceinture de petits bouleaux fragiles."

Au-delà brèves et d'accidentelles allusions, semblables à celles que nous venons de citer, il y a des passages où le parallèle entre l'homme et l'arbre est amplement développé. C'est d'ailleurs dans les périodes d'intense et de longue solitude que la méditation "arborescente" de Pierre s'érige en théorie esthétique puis en leçon de vie. Suivons ses pensées après sa courte visite chez Gédéon:

> A présent, les arbres des climats tempérés jusqu'ici aventurés paraissaient avoir enduré une épreuve assez proche de la misère humaine. Sans plus d'élan, sans plus de vigueur, ils montraient des corps débiles et souffreteux. . . .
>
> Enfin, un jour, il parut à Pierre qu'en ce petit corps grêle à moitié arraché de la berge et cependant tenace encore avec ses racines gonflées comme des veines, il contemplait le dernier peuplier-tremble à vivre sous ces latitudes. Ensuite ne subsisteraient plus, mais allant encore loin ensemble, jusqu'au delta du Mackenzie, l'un et l'autre presque toujours côte à côte, que l'épinette et le petit bouleau blanc. Les arbres aussi semblaient fraterniser, se groupant selon des traits communs ou par quelque étrange solidarité.
>
> . . . [L]e frêle peuplier-tremble. Très penché audessus de l'eau, l'arbre avait l'air de considérer comment pour lui tout allait bientôt finir.
>
> . . . Les feuilles de l'arbre tremblaient. Il s'en échappait un faible son pareil à une voix de tendresse. Pierre écouta un long moment. Il eût aimé à travers son dessin faire entendre aussi quelque chose de cette voix.

L'appel du Nord se présente ici un peu comme le chant des sirènes. Comme le peuplier-tremble, l'homme a accepté le défi, sachant pourtant qu'au bout de ce voyage il ne peut y avoir que la mort. Toute force, à la fois mystérieuse et irrésistible, finit par créer un mythe. Le rêve impossible de Pierre serait sans doute de capturer la voix dans son dessin: il ne s'agit plus de peindre mais d'écrire sans mots. Capturer la voix d'un paysage est aussi dangereux qu'écouter le chant des sirènes. Ainsi, en se penchant sur l'eau, c'est aussi la réflexion de Pierre qui apprait. L'au-delà mythique s'établit donc à un premier niveau. Une étape irréversible semble être franchie puisque le peintre s'aventure plus au nord qu'il n'est permis aux peupliers-trembles. Plus tard l'héroïsme végétal deviendra l'expression généralisée de la volonté humaine: "Par places, tentent malgré tout de s'implanter ça et là, réduits à la taille d'arbrisseaux, des arbres du Sud, comme les hommes acharnés à gagner sur le Nord, à en défier l'absurde dureté."

Pour Pierre, la leçon stoïque du petit peuplier-tremble resistera même au dépaysement qui sera crée par sa vie parisienne ultérieure:

> Les arbres le hantaient. Souvent, depuis qu'il était à Paris, il se souvenait du tremble-peuplier qu'il avait vu, seul, au bord de l'eau, alors qu'il faisait route vers Fort-Renonciation. A propos de tout, à propos de rien, le petit arbre du Nord venait se placer en son esprit. . . . [A] son regard intérieur apparaissait l'arbre éprouvé. Le chant si lointain de son feuillage revenait en son souvenir. Il s'identifiait presque à cet arbre.

Il y a donc une géographie intérieure et symbolique qui s'établit: la vie artistique a ainsi son Nord indépendant de la latitude géographique. Il faut s'aventurer au-delà du dernier peuplier-tremble pour faire face à la solitude et au froid intérieurs qu'éxige le procédé créateur. L'étude des limites de la vie éloigne l'artiste de la facilité et de la chaleur qui abritent la fertilité anonyme du sud. Cette notion se retrouve dans l'expression de Stanislas, le jeune artiste français, qui confesse à Pierre: "Nous devons être trois ou quatre mille peintres dans Paris à chercher à nous distinguer les uns des autres; tout comme vos petits arbres du

Mackenzie à pousser hors de la forêt anonyme."

La deuxième étape de ce voyage vers les froides sirènes se fait avec "l'épinette" et "le petit bouleau blanc." Mais en montant on découvre que ces arbres aussi sont prêts à payer le prix douloureux qui, hors de la forêt, les mènera vers l'individualité, vers l'originalité:

> Cependant, même les épinettes et les bouleaux se firent rares. Ils n'apparaissaient plus qu'en petites touffes isolées, presque noires sur le sol rocailleux et formaient là comme des groupes de personnages rassemblés au hasard dans le grand désert.

Le désir de se distinguer est pourtant annulé par la souffrance qui ramène tous les arbres, et donc tous les hommes à un commun dénominateur: "une forêt infinie de maigres arbres qui du premier au dernier se penchent de détresse."

* * *

A la personnification de l'arbre correspond la fonction inverse, c'est-à-dire 'l'arborification' de l'homme. On arrive tout naturellement à cette symétrie symbolique par un procédé d'identification:

> Autour d'eux rien ne se détachait clairement en cette lueur de songe, hommes et arbres y prenant la même allure; par moments, on aurait pu croire les hommes arrêtés et que c'étaient les arbres qui précautionneux avançaient.

Mais c'est au niveau de l'individu que se manifeste la fonction 'arborificatrice.' Nous l'avons signé dès le début: Pierre est l'exemple typique de l'homme-arbre. L'auteur revient, en effet, sur cette notion à plusieurs reprises:

> Malgré l'épaisseur des vêtements, Pierre en vint à ressembler à ces hautes épinettes malades qu'il avait si patiemment et tant de fois étudiées; pauvres arbres, sur eux ont passé des feux de forêt; presque toutes leurs branches leur ont été arrachées; si longtemps a soufflé sur eux le même vent, qu'à présent, comme vieilles gens sous l'effet de l'âge, jamais ils ne parviendront à se relever. Pourtant, ce sont des arbres jeunes, et c'est toute leur vie qu'ils auront à vivre courbés. Comme les arbres, Pierre devra payer le prix que demande le nord. C'est ainsi qu'encore une fois 'arborisé' le peintre, comme ses frères du royaume végétal, révèlera par son aspect une vieillesse prématurée: "Devenus très longs en forêt, ses cheveux déjà blanchissants s'agitaient sur les côtés de son visage. Il rêvait debout, comme un arbre qu'une lumière étrange dans la forêt isole."

Dans ce procédé la voix de l'arbre devient réflexive et le chant des sirènes se referme sur une sphère engendrée par un narcissisme acoustique: "Lui, tel un arbre malmené par le vent, se tenait penché, tel un arbre qui s'écoute lui-même chanter." Mais cette méditation égocentrique produit l'oeuvre d'art qui, elle aussi, trouve son modèle dans le royaume végétal: "En quelques jours, Pierre abattit plus de croquis que naguère en des mois. Ils tombaient de lui comme les feuilles d'un arbre."

* * *

Ainsi nous avons choisi deux fonctions, parmi tant d'autres, pour illustrer que l'arbre est, dans *La Montagne secrète*, le thème unificateur de la rêverie de Pierre. La construction de cet univers imaginaire est essentielle à l'artiste qui doit vivre ses images. Vers la fin de sa vie le peintre se rend compte en se regardant dans le miroir "qu'il connaissait moins son propre visage que le moindre des arbres."

La Montagne secrète rejoint donc par sa thématique les ouvrages où le héros vit, par l'imagination, sa métamorphose en arbre. Sans vouloir remonter à Torquato Tasso, plus près de nous il y a l'oeuvre de D. H. Lawrence et celle de Jack London, et encore plus près il y a la poésie québécoise parsemée d'images végétales. Mais la grande originalité, hélas passée inaperçue, du roman de Gabrielle Roy réside dans le fait que l'arbre n'est pas pour Pierre un refuge mais un but à atteindre. Le peintre, en effet, au-

delà de sa mort — car l'art ne demande rien moins que la vie — vivra dans l'image de l'arbre: "Du ciel, des rayons de clarté, des arbres ressuscités, tout ce qui est bon à voir provenait des petits crayons déjà presque aux trois-quarts usés."

NOTES

[1] François Ricard, "Le Cercle enfin uni des hommes," *Liberté*, 18, no. 1 (janvier-février 1976), p. 75.

[2] Gérard Bessette, "Gabrielle Roy" en *Trois Romanciers québécois* (Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1973), pp. 179-237.

[3] Marie Grenier-Francoeur, "Etude de la structure anaphorique dans *La Montagne secrète* de Gabrielle Roy," *Voix et Images*, 1, no. 3 (avril 1976), pp. 387-405.

[4] Gaston Bachelard, *L'Air et les songes: Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement* (Paris: José Corti, 1948), p. 231. Bachelard indique d'ailleurs quelles seraient les grandes lignes d'un tel ouvrage: "Les thèmes généraux curieusement dialectiques en seraient la prairie et la forêt, l'herbe et l'arbre, la touffe et le buisson, la verdure et l'épine, la liane et le cep, les fleurs et les fruits — puis l'être même: la racine, la tige et les feuilles — puis le devenir marqué par les saisons fleuries ou dépouillées — enfin les puissances: le blé et l'olive, la rose et le chêne — la vigne."

[5] Ibid., p. 231.

[6] Gabrielle Roy, *La Montagne secrète* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1961).

[7] Marie Grenier-Francoeur, pp. 387-405.

[8] Gaston Bachelard, p. 8.

[9] Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Bordas, 1969), pp. 54, 281, 379, 399.

[10] Gaston Bachelard, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-35 et pp. 146-85.

[11] Ibid., p. 233.

[12] Jack Warwick, *L'Appel du Nord dans la littérature canadienne-française*, traduit par Jean Simard (Montréal: Hurtubise HMH, 1972).

ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ

REFERENCES

Frank Morley's *Literary Britain* (Harper & Row, $25.95) is an extraordinary compilation: a walking tour of the Kingdom, pointing out authorial associations and the haunts of literary characters. Some of the glimpses one as a Canadianist might hope for — of Niven's Scots hills and factory townscapes — are not there, but there are enough other anecdotes — of Buchan, Galt, Ballantyne, and George Vancouver as well as of the greats of English literature — to make this a companionable volume. Among other recent reference volumes, several are noteworthy. Irma McDonough's bibliography, *Canadian Books for Young People 1980* (Univ. Toronto Press, $15.00), describes the contents of each item and classifies it according to age level and genre. *Canada on Stage*, the Canadian Theatre Review Yearbook 1979, ed. Don Rubin (CTR, $19.95), is an illustrated account of theatre production across the country, of enormous interest to theatre historians. *The Brock Bibliography of Published Canadian Plays in English 1786-1978*, ed. Anton Wagner (Playwrights, $14.50; pa. $7.50), is a much expanded, extremely useful version of the 1972 edition, with descriptive commentary and helpful historical data. The *Canada Gazetteer Atlas* (Macmillan, in cooperation with the federal government) is a collection of clear political maps, which provides a kind of bird's eye sense of self and makes a useful companion to the historical and resource atlases lately on the market. Among Gale's various series, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 14 ($54.00), and *Contemporary Authors*, 89-92 and 93-96 ($54.00 each), all include entries on Canadian writers, much of it limited, though in *CA* 89-92, there are longer items on Harry Pollock and Maurice Gibbons and an interview with Joe Rosenblatt. In Gale's *Pseudonyms & Nicknames Dictionary*, ed. Jennifer Mosman ($48.00), I found Ralph Connor but not one of the other dozen Canadian writers I checked for at random.

W.N.

ON THE VERGE

***** PIERRE BERTON, *The Invasion of Canada: 1812-13*. McClelland & Stewart, $19.95. Pierre Berton is an astonishing combination of the good amateur scholar and the skilful hack. He has written some of the worst recent Canadian books and some of the best, and neither he nor his publisher seems able to tell which is which. Among the best is certainly his inimitable history of the rush to the Yukon goldfields, *Klondike*, which showed an ability to draw the colour and drama out of

historical facts (and to do it in a vivid but accurate prose) from which most professional historians could have learnt a great deal if they had been willing. His two volumes on the creation of the CPR — *The National Dream* and *The Last Spike* — suffered from a failure to reconcile the Creightonian myth of Canada's westering destiny with the facts of western existence. But in *The Invasion of Canada*, the first volume of a two-part history of the war of 1812-14 and a book well worthy to be compared with *Klondike*, Berton faces head-on the conflict between myth and actuality. He produces an account of the first year of the war that reveals both the gross ineptitude of the American commanders, and also the absurdity of our own national legends concerning the war. He shows very convincingly that, far from Canada having been saved and strengthened by a gallant militia of farmers and lawyers' clerks, the country we know owed its possibility of emergence to a few thousand well-trained British regulars, a smaller number of desperate Indian braves, and two individuals, Brock and Tecumseh, neither of whom had any conception of the future or the land they saved or any liking or respect for Canadians. A fine, realistic contribution to the history of our origins.

G.W.

**** W. J. KEITH, *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $20.00. W. J. Keith has already written two excellent books on writers of the English countryside: *The Rural Tradition*, a study of non-fiction prose, and *Richard Jefferies: A Critical Study*. There is no direct link between these books and *The Poetry of Nature*, but it follows in the same line of interest, dealing entirely with English writers, and concerned less with direct observations of the natural world than with works that consider — as Charles G. D. Roberts put it — "nature in some one of its many relations with humanity." Starting with Wordsworth, Keith keeps him constantly in view, as an inspiration to and an influence on the later poets whom he discusses — Clare and Barnes, Hardy, Robert Frost and Edward Thomas, Edmund Blunden, Andrew Young and R. S. Thomas. But in stressing the durability and adaptability of Wordsworth's insights, he does not attempt to establish a Wordsworthian tradition, and he successfully presents each of the poets he discusses as significant in his own right.

G.W.

**** RICHARD GWYN, *The Northern Magus*. McClelland & Stewart, $17.95. This is an able and ambivalent book. Richard Gwyn, one of our better political journalists and the author of a sound book on Joey Smallwood, has written a new study of Pierre Trudeau whose strongly defined theme is that Trudeau, though an intellectual, is in fact not a political leader of true and consistent vision, and that he owes his power partly to a reliance on the new political techniques associated with opinion polls and the electronic media, and partly to the way he has used his strange and charismatic personality to enchant the people of Canada. It is at this point that the ambivalences of the book become strongest. For to be enchanted is to be bewitched, and clearly there is a strong undercurrent in *The Northern Magus* which suggests that Canadians have become a new kind of Gadarene swine, led by outlandish impulses to hasten down a steep slope towards their own national destruction. Yet one wonders how far Richard Gwyn himself has become subject to the spell of the magician he studies. For though he is honest and factual in his account of Trudeau's career, and not afraid to criticize, by the end of the book he seems to be breathlessly admiring the way the old trickster has done it yet again. I would recommend anyone who reads this book to read also Thomas Mann's chilling novella, *Mario and the Magician*. For there have been other magicians and other enchantments, and if what Mr. Gwyn says is indeed true, we should perhaps be concerned for the mental as well as the economic health of our nation.

G.W.

*** DONALD CREIGHTON, *The Passionate Observer: Selected Writings*. McClelland & Stewart, $19.95. It is the privilege of Homers to nod, for even their least inspired works are for special reasons as interesting as the best that lesser men can do. As our finest mythographer, the inventor of a largely fictional but highly inspiring version of Canadian history, Donald Creighton was perhaps the nearest we have had to a Canadian Homer; certainly his great narratives — and one uses the adjective deliberately — have been epic in both nature and intention. *The Passionate Observer* is something different, a posthumous selection of Creighton's uncollected lectures and essays which appeared originally in places as varied as *Maclean's* and a *festschrift* in honour of his fellow historian, C. P. Stacey. We have Creighton the opinionated Tory, with his open contempt for Liberal politicians and Quebec na-

tionalists, and Creighton the devoted friend, with his amiable anecdotes. There is nothing especially unexpected, for even the considerable knowledge of and zest for English and continental European fiction that emerge from some of the pieces could have been deduced from Creighton's well-cultivated literary style and his almost novelistic sense of the form proper to the histories he wrote. *The Passionate Observer* is not the best book by which to approach Creighton for the first time, but his admirers will find it filled with illuminating sidelights on the major works.

G.W.

**** J. A. KRAULIS, ed., *The Art of Canadian Nature Photography*. Hurtig, $27.50. There are occasional scenic photographs in this book, but they are not the reason to look at it. The finest photographs here are of animals — birds, bears, insects — and of the abstract shapes of nature as the camera can catch and compose them. These glimpses of colour, form, and the wild are coupled with photographers' anecdotes and occasional attempts to evoke in figurative language their visual experience. The anecdotes work well enough; but the verbal similes are stale. The photographers' sense of sight creates better metaphor in the photographs: this is metaphor to see, for which we can be grateful.

W.N.

*** TAKEO UJO NAKANO with LEATRICE NAKANO, *Within the Barbed Wire Fence*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $10.00. The displacement of Japanese-Canadians from the Pacific Coast during World War II is by now a familiar story in outline. Peter Ward's afterword to this volume provides an able historical account of the numbers of people involved and the differences in attitude that developed in various parts of the nation. The main part of the book provides a more unusual perspective. Takeo Nakano, an Issei, was moved from Woodfibre in 1942, first to the interior of B.C. and later to the Angler camp in Ontario, where he found himself out of sympathy with the *gambariya* (pro-Japanese) elements among those interned: though not out of sympathy with the traditional elements of Japanese culture. He recorded his daily life in brief diary entries and a series of *tanka*, later translated, which have been filled out by his Nisei daughter Leatrice into this present text. What emerges is a story of enormous inner resource, an enquiry into the sources of inner peace. Deprived of the emotional support that closeness to family provides, he found in the challenges of the *tanka* form a way to focus his mind; it provided, too, a way of reconciling himself with the tensions and inconsistencies of his chosen country.

W.N.

*** GEOFFREY BILSON, *A Darkened House: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Canada*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $15.00; pa. $5.95. This is a book about disease, rumour, fear, charlatanism, medical trust, quarantine, and public policy, which ought to be more interesting to read than it is. There is a lot of data here, and some interesting quotation from Victorian commentators. And the book does glimpse in its way the *whole* society of which Susanna Moodie, for example, described only a regional part. But the sentences are so uniform in their cadence that the book is curiously tiring to read; the social scientist in the author seems to wrestle with the narrative historian, and to win.

W.N.

*** DEREK PETHICK, *The Nootka Connection*. Douglas & McIntyre, $18.95. The years from 1790 to 1795 were active ones for Europeans on Canada's Pacific Coast. The Russians had been there since the 1740's, Cook had entered Nootka Sound in 1778, John Meares had established a settlement in 1788; but in the century's final decade, Spanish and English ships in large numbers traversed the area, establishing European trade routes, recording local cultures (Maquinna's in particular), and by force and by decree declaring European sovereignty over all. Pethick's book, though cast as a series of narratives, is most useful as a sourcebook. It admirably sorts out what happened when, recording from logbooks and archival records all known data about the ships that entered the region. The final story that emerges is one more about power than glory. But it is for the details, rather than for the drama of the times, that one would consult *The Nootka Connection*.

W.N.

* *Pluralities 1980*. National Gallery of Canada, $19.95. More than an exhibition catalogue, this work contains short essays on nineteen contemporary Canadian artists, useful bibliographies, and occasional photographs. The word "awesome" is used to describe some of these works; "awesome" they are not. Nor, surprisingly, are they particularly "plural." The works show a curious lame sameness: a desire to establish temporary blocks in space, and an apparent belief that life and art are both illusions of space, wrought by mirrors.

W.N.

*** MARY ALICE DOWNIE and MARY HAMILTON, *'And Some brought Flowers': Plants in a New World.* Illustrated by E. J. Revell. Univ. of Toronto Press, $24.95. This is a beautiful book. An anthology of brief botanical observations from a range of early writers — Jameson, Traill, Hearne, Heriot, Jewitt, Lahontan, Bishop Mountain, and many others — it offers a record of those who looked about them when they travelled in a new country. The brief biographies and botanical descriptions that are added are only adequate, but they are not the centre of the book. The 70 watercolours allow the reader to glimpse nature along with the travellers and to look with the kind of eye that the title alludes to. It comes from an account of Frobisher's travels in 1576 off the Labrador Coast: "he commanded his company, if by any possible means they could get ashore, to bring him whatsoever they could first find, whether it were living or dead, stock or stone, in token of Christian possession ... and some brought flowers."

W.N.

*** KENNETH JAMES HUGHES, *The Life and Art of Jackson Beardy.* James Lorimer, $14.95. I wish I could dissuade publishers from printing good books in brown ink; there is too strong a temptation to put them down. But the persistent reader with good eyesight will here be rewarded by an intelligent survey of Beardy's work, and some sharp full-colour prints.

W.N.

*** ROBERT CRAIG BROWN, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography.* Vol. II, 1914-1937. Macmillan, $24.95. A more decent man, in the Orwellian sense, probably never served as Prime Minister of Canada than Robert Borden. He had none of the roguish charm of Sir John A., none of devious slyness that variously characterized Laurier and Mackenzie King, none of the resounding righteousness of Diefenbaker, none of the cold-potato philosophic arrogance of Trudeau. His oratory was wooden but his campaigning was fair. And he took Canada through World War I and in the process turned the country in its own estimation and largely in that of the world from a dominion into something near an independent country. Borden has never stood high in the calendar of saints proclaimed by Canadian nationalists, but they should reconsider. If one can judge from his prose, Robert Craig Brown seems a very Bordenish man, and in this second and final volume of his biography he convinces one, writing as stiltedly as Borden spoke, of the historic importance of his subject. One cannot say that he presents a vibrantly alive portrait of Robert Laird Borden. But was RLB, despite his decency and historic importance, vibrantly alive? He was a good old codger, perhaps in the right place at a time when someone more flamboyant would have been wrong.

G.W.

*** WAYNE FRANKLIN, *Discoverers, Explorers, Settlers: The Diligent Writers of Early America.* Univ. of Chicago Press, $15.00. "By breaking through the enclosures of traditional space," Franklin writes, "the American traveler also was breaking the bonds of received language." He goes on to explore "the iconography of European travel in America" in order to account for the "formulaic quality" of early travel narratives and to weigh their cultural significance. Franklin's observations apply to the shared history of the British American colonies. The distancing observer invests the new landscape with moral perfection; the scientist catalogues it; the explorer acknowledges the rigours of the landscape and accepts the irony of discovery: that the discoverer's act of publicity will allow the world of historical event to intrude into the land of contemplation. When the author goes on in his conclusion to trace "the imagination of American nationhood" to the exploratory and political language of the early narrative, he perhaps exaggerates; but the suggestion prompts one to ask why the shared past should have such different consequences in the north part of the continent.

W.N.

*** *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Essays in Interpretation,* ed. James Hiller and Peter Neary. Univ. of Toronto Press, $20.00; pa. $7.50. Like the western provinces, Newfoundland is likely to be the centre of growing controversy and perhaps of deepening crisis as the debates on constitutional change warm up, and for this reason among others *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,* a volume of essays by various hands, is timely and valuable. It gives us the background to Newfoundland's decision not to enter Confederation in 1867 and to the financial crash of 1934 that led to the country's loss of independence when the City of London put it into receivership. It discusses the politics of railways and fishing, the importance of W. F. Coaker in awakening resistance to the old-style patriciate of the St. John's merchants, and the historical importance of the French Shore. Finally, in chapters

on "Party Politics, 1949-71" and "The Collapse of the Saltfish Trade and Newfoundland's Integration into the North American Economy," it brings us to the eve of the present situation, when Newfoundland is ceasing to be the poorest of Canadian provinces and in shedding the dependence it assumed in 1949 is beginning to remember the days of autonomy with something more than nostalgia.

G.W.

*** PAUL R. REYNOLDS, *Guy Carleton, a Biography*. Gage, n.p. Guy Carleton has been excessively praised and abused in the past, according to the political bias of his biographers. That he was an important shaping influence in the creation of the Canada we know, there is no doubt. If in his role of governor he had not resolutely and compassionately defended the interests of the *canadiens* against the English merchants who came in after the conquest, it is doubtful whether Québec as we know it would have survived, while he held off the first American attempt to take over the country long before Brock repeated the feat and gained heroic stature by dying on the battlefield. Carleton died in his bed, so that a heroic myth did not redeem him in the way it redeemed Brock, who in fact shared many of Carleton's faults and virtues, including his arrogance of manner and his ability to understand and inspire men of many different kinds. If Carleton instead of Burgoyne had commanded the ill-fated British expedition from the north during the War of Independence, it is possible that the disaster of Saratoga would not have taken place. Carleton deserves a good biography, and if Paul Reynolds' book is too slight to meet the need completely, it is at least a balanced, fair and well-written study of an important and insufficiently recognized historical figure.

G.W.

** ROBERT STEWART. *Sam Steele: Lion of the Frontier*. Doubleday Canada, $12.50. Sam Steele is a figure who fits uneasily into Canadian history. His place is in the history of British imperial expansion; he ranks as a defender and expander of colonial frontiers rather than as a significant personality in the development of an autonomous Canada. He was a founding member of the Northwest Mounted Police, but he was also the commander of Lord Strathcona's Horse, raised to defend imperial claims in South Africa, and he pursued the Boer commandos as enthusiastically as a few years before, during the 1885 rebellion, he had hunted Big Bear. Commenting on a dispute in British Columbia, when Steele supported the claims of a certain Colonel Baker against those of the Kootenay Indian chief Isadore, his present biographer Robert Stewart remarks, "he had a weakness for British gentlemen, and it was quite in character that he would automatically take the word of one over that of a native." Steele had more than a sympathy for English gentlemen; he aspired to be one of them, and it was appropriate that he died as an imperial, not a Canadian, general, and was given a British military funeral before he was shipped over for a second round of obsequies, in Winnipeg, organized by the NWMP. Few people in real life have fitted more into the pattern of imperial adventure fictionalized in the English boys' novels of the nineteenth century; Steele lived too late to become a Henty hero, but Robert Stewart writes in the "rattling good tale" tradition, and Steele emerges from his pages a conventional paladin of a past era when the distinction was clear between gentlemen of Anglo-Saxon breed and the "lesser breeds without the law."

G.W.

** STEPHEN ENDICOTT, *James G. Endicott: Rebel out of China*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $18.95. Next to Bethune, the Endicotts — James G. the father and Norman the son — have probably been Canada's most celebrated supporters of the Chinese Community regime. Another son of James G., Stephen Endicott, has now written his father's biography. *James G. Endicott: Rebel out of China*, is interesting for three reasons: it tells us much about the relations between Canadian missionaries and Chinese political leaders during the years before the Communist takeover of the country; it provides some of the background to that takeover; it portrays sympathetically the transformation of a North American Christian into an apologist not only for Mao's kind of Communism, but for Stalin's as well. Like Bethune, Endicott blinded himself to the reality of Russian communism during the Stalinist era, which was why he was unable to understand the despotic nature of the regime Mao established. It seems to have been only when Krushchev officially revealed the atrocities of the Stalin era in 1956 that Endicott took them seriously, and even then he refused to repudiate Stalin. When China and Russia parted company, Endicott rejected Moscow, but this led him only into deeper contradictions. When Russian-supported Viet Nam invaded Chinese-supported Kampuchea in 1978, he protested, yet there is no mention of his protesting the massacre of their own countrymen committed by

the Khmer Rouge regime before the invasion. Even Endicott's peace campaigns were largely negated by his partisanship. It is not on record, for example, that he protested the Chinese invasion of Tibet. Thus it would seem that the sub-title of the book — "rebel out of China" — is somewhat inaccurate; Endicott rebelled against Methodist orthodoxy only to accept uncritically an even more oppressive orthodoxy. The true believer does not change his nature even when he changes his beliefs.

G.W.

** KATINKA MATSON, *Short Lives.* William Morrow, $13.25. Matson's thirty "portraits in creativity and self-destruction" are a prelude to her epilogue on the life and death of a young poet named Tom Bootman; by examining the pressureful lives of public figures from Judy Garland to Sylvia Plath, Poe and Chatterton to Mayakovsky and Marilyn Monroe, she attempts to sort out the destructive impulse of creativity and to separate irrational suicide from a wilful use of the self that somehow constitutes a kind of inevitable exhausting of the possibilities of auto-identification. The short lives follow a seventeenth-century pattern in biography: these are brief essays — including one on Malcolm Lowry — which draw their information secondhand and foreshorten motives. But in the book the effect is cumulative: a tribute and — only perhaps — an explanation.

W.N.

** WAYNE BARRETT and GEORGE MACBETH, *Kings Landing: Country Life in Early Canada.* Oxford, $12.95. The four most recent volumes in Oxford's series of regional photographic studies reveal an interesting counterpoint between Eastern stone and brick and western wood. They also document inferentially the differences in time of settlement. The quality of photographs varies, and I found the most interesting volume to be that on the New Brunswick heritage settlement of Kings Landing. Like Upper Canada Village or Calgary's Heritage Park, it represents reconstructed history, attempting to portray actively the life of an earlier day. But there's always something slightly wrong about such visualizations. The book on Kings Landing certainly documents handily the Maritime Loyalist world of the 1830's, replete with the village store, the woodboat, the jars of preserves, the flintlock muskets, the sunbonnets, the waterwheels, and the quilting looms. All very attractive, made more so by the camera and the comfort of a twentieth-century perspective. Yet the people in the photographs, despite the authenticity of their dress, look very much of our own time, which they are. Hence the book has that curious artificiality of the museum replica, of the artifact designed for the present rather than retrieved from the past.

W.N.

* JAMES HOUSTON, *Eskimo Prints.* Longman Canada, $14.95. Houston's account of the way he introduced colour print-making to Inuit artists in the 1950's footnotes an extraordinary movement in Canadian art history. The 48 examples of prints which he chooses to illustrate his book with are also separately pleasing. But the book design, rendering the pages crowded and the text intrusive, leaves too much to be desired.

W.N.

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