

AESTHETIC VIOLENCE: THE VICTIMISATION OF WOMEN
IN THE QUEBEC NOVEL

by

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Abstract

The latent (androcentric) eroticism of rape has been exploited in Western culture, from mythology through to a contemporary entertainment industry founded on a cultural predilection for the representation of violence against women. In literature the figure of Woman as Victim has evolved according to shifting fashions and (male) desires until, in contemporary avant-garde writings, themes of sexual violence perform an intrinsic role in sophisticated textual praxis, Woman's body becoming the playground for male artistic expression and textual experimentation. These themes are encoded in particular ways in Québec literature, where for many years the saintly Mother-figure served as both valorising icon and sacrificial victim of the conservative, messianic refuge values adopted following colonisation. The tacit matricide of the ideological literature is replaced, however, in the textually and linguistically subversive novels of the "quiet revolutionary" period by more explicit patterns of violence. Here, in place of quietly fading Mothers, female characters die screaming, victims of overt, sexual abuse at the hands of their male counterparts. Now frequently presented as voracious, oppressive and castrating, Woman must be destroyed if the "emasculated", colonised male is to be liberated and become a "Man" once again.

The relationship between colonisation and (sexual) violence is explicitly addressed in three novels of the period. Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's Un rêve québécois offers a model for the study of this connection, as the "shattering" of the text is reflected in the frenzy of

frustration and sadistic (fantasised) violence directed at the unsympathetic, provocative wife of a colonised protagonist. Hubert Aquin's L'Antiphonaire expands on the textual/sexual parallel, eroding the distinction between the body of the female protagonist/narrator and "her" text, as both are subject to repeated "violations". Both novels subvert "realist" conceptualisations of time, identity, order etc., but rely on the continued and graphic victimisation of Woman to convey both a political and an aesthetic message. Marie-Claire Blais's Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel, subverts the *roman de la terre*, exposing its ideology as the perpetuation of a cycle of implicit violence and victimisation, in which the ostensibly powerful and valorising Mother is the primary victim.

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Acknowledgement

The choice of violence against women and misogyny in the literature of Québec as a topic for a doctoral thesis by someone originally from England, studying in British Columbia, might appear out of place, "invasive", even hostile. This was certainly not my intention. Québec literature and culture have fascinated me since, while working in Québec City in 1985-86, I read Jean-Charles Harvey's Les Demi-Civilisés, Louis Hémon's Maria Chapdelaine and Gabrielle Roy's Bonheur d'Occasion. The contrasts and contradictions within these three texts convinced me of a rich and complex culture and history of which I wanted to know more. Since that time, my research in this particular field has gone hand in hand with a growing feminist consciousness. The phenomenon of repeated sexual violence against women, evident in so many of the more recent novels from Québec could therefore not pass unremarked. This phenomenon is not however unique to Québec, although there are particular characteristics and "causes" (not extenuating circumstances); I have taken pains to draw the reader's attention to this fact.

I have been extremely fortunate in my committee. I would like to thank Dr. Réjean Beaudoin for sharing his considerable knowledge and insight, and for the encouragement offered over the years. Dr. André Lamontagne and Dr. Valerie Raoul have also provided invaluable contributions, both academic and personal, to this study, for which I am very grateful.

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Angela and Mark and to my grandfather, Eric Middleton.

Introduction

Novels written in Québec in the 1960's and 70's are strewn with the corpses, mutilations and abuse of female characters, most often at the hands of their male counterparts. Agaguk beats his wife as she gives birth, and Milien (one of Les Grands-pères) kicks his dying wife. Jos Connaissant breaks his lover's nose, while François Galarneau jokes about having his girlfriend stuffed, and the narrator of La Corde au cou murders his mistress because she has been unfaithful. In Le Nez qui voque, Chateaugué kills herself, once her male friend has no further use for her, as does Christine Forestier of L'Antiphonaire, having suffered multiple rapes and mental abuse at the hands of every man she meets.

This pattern builds on an earlier system of violence which Patricia Smart has identified as a "foundation" of matricide, upon which the edifice of French-Canadian literature is constructed¹. There is a marked difference, however, between this almost tacit matricide and the later phase of violence². The deaths of women in earlier texts are primarily the result of natural causes, brought about by the harshness of their lives. These women, the highly prized and idealised Mothers of the ideological *roman de la*

¹ Patricia Smart, Ecrire dans la maison du père: l'émergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec (Montréal, Québec/Amérique, 1990).

² This development is noted in Smart, Ecrire dans la maison du père, and in Lori Saint-Martin's article "Mise à mort de la femme et "libération" de l'homme: Godbout, Aquin, Beaulieu", Voix et Images 10.1 (automne 1984) 107-117 and also in Valerie Raoul's study, Distinctly Narcissistic: Diary Fiction in Québec, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993).

terre, are either dead before the story begins or disappear into silence, their memory hanging like a shadow over the text. The deliberate and often graphic brutality of the later novels is unheard of, unimaginable in the promised land of snow, agriculture and Roman Catholicism.

The increased violence of the literature of the 1960's corresponds with an assertive "prise de parole" by the Québécois, tired of the colonial rule under which they had been suffocated for two centuries, deprived of the power of self-determination, alienated from their origins and rendered ineffective. Under such conditions, the frustrations of men - denied their "birthright" of power and a superior status within patriarchal society - turn into a misogynous and often violent resentment and envy of women who appear relatively more powerful under colonial rule³. Although colonised themselves, Québec women's situation (like that of any colonised women) may not be as radically different from their expected or prescribed stereotypical social role as that of colonised men. Women have always been "colonised", in as much as they have been deprived of the right to an identity of their own. Defined in relation to men (their fathers or husbands and in either case their "proprietors"), women have traditionally been treated as objects of exchange - "le bien par excellence" or "le suprême cadeau"⁴ - in the "hommo-sexual economy"⁵ that is patriarchy. Functioning as Man's other, the object

³ Raoul, 37.

⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté (Paris, Mouton-Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1967) 73 and 76 respectively.

⁵ Irigaray, "Des Marchandises entre elles", Spéculum de l'autre femme (Paris, Minuit, 1977) 189-193.

which guarantees his status as full subject, the mirror which reflects the image he wishes to see of himself, Woman is what Man desires her to be, an unstable, cultural and social construct, fashioned from certain (obviously essential) anatomical characteristics, according to man's need⁶. Indeed, according to the various discourses which uphold the Law of the Father and are fundamental to male-dominated culture⁷, women are weak, prone to madness, inherently evil and sexually insatiable, and at the same time, vulnerable, ideally delicate, graceful and preferably silent - conflicting "facts" which have served as justification precisely for the (often violent) control or "protection" exerted over women.

It seems "natural" in some way then, that the frustrations of the colonised male (or perhaps any male who considers himself deprived of his rightful privilege) should be taken out on the bodies of women, for within Western culture Woman is perceived as the "consummate victim". Based, perhaps, on a certain timeless perception of the female body and femininity (as Aristotle so succinctly put it, "the female is female by virtue of a certain *lack* of qualities"⁸) the "second sex" is an apparently mutilated creature, her

⁶ Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London and New York, Methuen, 1985), 28. Diana Fuss considers the essentialist/constructionist dichotomy in her study Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York and London, Routledge, 1989). See also Simone de Beauvoir, Le Deuxième Sexe (Paris, Gallimard, 1949). The capitalisation throughout this study of the word Woman serves to indicate her status as an aesthetic, political, stylised and gendered construct, as distinct from any flesh and blood woman or women.

⁷ As Simone de Beauvoir wrote in Le Deuxième Sexe: "Pour prouver l'infériorité de la femme, les antiféministes ont alors mis à contribution non seulement comme naguère la religion, la philosophie, la théologie mais aussi la science: biologie, psychologie expérimentale etc" (1.24).

⁸ Aristotle, quoted in Beauvoir, 1.xxii.

inferior social status justified precisely by the perceived "lack" (or "ce rien à voir", as Luce Irigaray describes it⁹) which makes woman essentially and inherently "less than a man". In addition, however, Angela Carter suggests that:

Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitudes to women and our attitude to ourselves, that transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed¹⁰.

The concept of female castration therefore appears to normalise woman's status as victim, her "bleeding" indeed a natural and continuous state, merely reiterated or exaggerated by sexual violence. This belief in the appropriateness of women's victimisation has in turn led to a "myth of female masochism", which suggests that women are inherently masochistic, and that they seek out and enjoy the violence inflicted upon them: this myth is further used to justify male violence against women¹¹.

The possession of the penis meanwhile guarantees a position of privilege within the post-Oedipal and masculine system of the Symbolic order of law and language, entry into which is signified in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory by the Phallus¹²; while this is a

⁹ Irigaray, Spéculum de l'autre femme (Paris, Minuit, 1974) 25. Quoted in Toril Moi, 135.

¹⁰ Carter, The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography (New York, Pantheon, 1978) 23.

¹¹ Paula J. Caplan refutes this myth (identified by Freud) in her study The Myth of Women's Masochism (New York, New American Library-Signet, 1987). See also Juliet Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women (New York, Vintage-Random House, 1975).

¹² Luce Irigaray considers the possibility of a feminine Symbolic signified by the vulva or lips in her text Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un (Paris, Minuit, 1977). See also Margaret Whitford, Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine (London and New York, Routledge, 1991).

symbol, distinct from the physical penis, it is a symbol which, nonetheless, in its inherent masculinity, serves to ensure both a (hyper-) valorisation of the organ, and the reinforcement of the female's status as marginalised or as "margin"¹³. Indeed, it seems women's exclusion is necessary to the validation of a binary system of dominator and dominated, such as phallocentrism - the dominator after all, can only so call himself as long as his "subordinate" exists - while the same dichotomy applies in the parallel binary system of coloniser and colonised, as Valerie Raoul has indicated in Distinctly Narcissistic¹⁴.

In addition, however, it seems that Woman's specific and negative status is encoded in the evolution and definition of masculinity itself. According to Elisabeth Badinter, the male child claims his identity in the acknowledgement of his separation and difference from his mother - an acknowledgement which takes the form of the triple protest: "Je ne suis pas elle. Je ne suis pas comme elle. Je suis contre elle"¹⁵, while Robert Stoller adds that "le premier devoir pour un homme est: ne pas être une femme"¹⁶. Masculinity would therefore seem to depend on the negation (or the

¹³ Female "penis envy" can thus be seen in terms of the desire to possess not the penis itself, but the position of privilege which generally accompanies its possession. Arthur Brittan, Masculinity and Power (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989) 72, quoted in Badinter, XY: de l'identité masculine (Paris, Editions Odile Jacob, 1992), 207. William Beers also comments on this point in Women and Sacrifice: Male Narcissism and the Psychology of Religion (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1992), 76. I will discuss the concept of woman as "margin" in Derridean terms in chapter 1.

¹⁴ Raoul, 38.

¹⁵ Badinter, XY, 92.

¹⁶ Stoller, Masculin ou féminin (Paris, PUF, 1989) 310-311. Quoted in Badinter, XY, 72.

"abjection", to use Julia Kristeva's term) first of the mother and later of women in general, or the mother substitute¹⁷. Biological femaleness and femininity¹⁸ (which, in the child's limited experience are embodied in the mother) are tainted by their association with castration and victimisation, and, as such, are something man must constantly reject in order to *be*, to attain and retain his full subjectivity and privilege.

Violence (whether physical or mental), is both a material manifestation of that process of negation and control, and a means of narcissistic self-affirmation and self-validation. As Simone de Beauvoir states: "la violence est l'épreuve authentique de l'adhésion de chacun à lui-même"¹⁹. Paradoxically, however, the very use of violence would seem to suggest that the potency (sexual, physical or other) it purports to express or reinforce is threatened in some way; Hannah Arendt suggests as much when she says "force is only used when power is in jeopardy"²⁰, while Beauvoir comments that "nul n'est plus arrogant à l'égard des femmes, agressif ou dédaigneux, qu'un homme inquiet

¹⁷ Kristeva discusses this concept in Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection, (Paris, Seuil, 1980). The supreme significance of the Mother in the literature of Québec will be considered in chapter 2 and onwards.

¹⁸ The two concepts are not synonymous: femaleness is generally considered biological or innate, femininity a construct. See, among others, Susan Brownmiller, Femininity (New York, Linden Press/Simon and Schuster, 1984), Naomi Wolf The Beauty Myth (Toronto, Vintage, 1990) and Beauvoir. However, this distinction and the biological definition of gender on which it rests have also been questioned. See Thomas W. Laqueur, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 1990) for a study of the historical evolution of the definition of gender.

¹⁹ Beauvoir, 2.83.

²⁰ Quoted in Rosalind Miles, Love, Sex, Death and the Making of the Male (New York and London: Summit Books, 1991) 231.

de sa virilité²¹. It is in order to assert that virility and simultaneously to disassociate himself from any taint of femininity, that man victimises woman, because to be female (or feminine) is to be "less than a man" and therefore a legitimate or an inherent and a supposedly willing victim.

The gender-specificity of the Victim and the power-balance it underlines are reiterated in the many representations of violence against women in Western art and culture. From the many tales of rape and mutilation of early mythology, to a contemporary mass-entertainment industry effectively founded on the exploitation of images of violence and rape, the ghostly, martyred figure of "Woman as Victim" has reigned omnipresent - a menacing reminder of women's precarious reality within the patriarchal order. The repeated portrayal of women as victims of violence serves as a form of indoctrination to perpetuate this balance, so that the myth of women's status as inherent victims, as well as the justice of that status, become somehow "appropriate". It also desensitises the spectator to the impact of horror and renders it less abnormal, if not less repellent²²; Brian de Palma sums up the way in which sexual violence has become almost banal when he comments: "using women in situations where they are killed or sexually attacked" is simply a "genre convention...like using violins when people

²¹ Beauvoir, Le Deuxième Sexe, 1,26.

²² Studying the reactions of male and female viewers of violence, Tania Modleski argues that women are more likely than men to look away on witnessing violent scenes in film because they are so accustomed to identifying with the (usually female or feminised) victim. She suggests that women have just cause to feel fear because the situation could realistically happen to them. "Rape versus Mans/laughter: Hitchcock's Blackmail and Feminist Interpretation," PMLA 102-3 (May 1987): 304-315.

look at each other"²³. Evidently this touches on the wide debates surrounding pornography and whether indeed Art shapes Reality or vice versa - both of which have already received much attention, and remain highly controversial. Suffice it to say at this point, that as long as Art (high and low) continues to reflect the patriarchal order of the Western world, to stereotype, belittle and victimize women, or eliminate those who do not meet the high male-defined standards of perfection, reality will be slow to escape its representation. As Simone de Beauvoir writes,

quand un individu ou un groupe d'individus est maintenu en situation d'infériorité, le fait est qu'il *est* inférieur; mais c'est sur la portée du mot *être* qu'il faudrait s'entendre; la mauvaise foi consiste à lui donner une valeur substantielle alors qu'il a le sens dynamique hégélien; *être* c'est être devenu, c'est avoir été fait tel qu'on se manifeste²⁴.

The present study is concerned with the representation of violence and, specifically, the representation of the victimisation of women in literature. My interest lies in the way violence against women has become not only "run-of-the-mill", in as much as it is ubiquitous, but also the way in which such violence is so frequently eroticised; indeed, Anne-Marie Dardigna has stated that "la représentation érotique...est représentation douloureuse et violente de la soumission des femmes..."²⁵, indicating an

²³ Quoted by Marcia Pally, in "Double Trouble", Film Comment 20.5 (Oct. 1984) 12-17, 17. Cited also in Jane Caputi, The Age of Sex Crime (Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987) 160.

²⁴ Beauvoir, 1.25 (original emphasis), citing George Bernard Shaw. Defined by those who wield power, it would seem that Woman *is* inferior to man and she *requires*, *deserves* and *desires* violent masculine control and abuse. This recalls the myth of women's masochism cited earlier.

²⁵ Dardigna, Les Châteaux d'Eros ou les infortunes du sexe des femmes (Paris, Maspéro, 1980) 314.

apparently inherent parallel between the two. I will attempt to show how Woman has become an aestheticised image within literature, as in other representations; her reality evacuated, her victimisation is naturalised and encoded or even "absorbed" into an androcentric cultural discourse in which there is an apparent synonymity between the signifiers Woman and Victim, becoming finally a strategic element particularly of avant-garde writings. It is in this sense that I have taken the term "aesthetics", with reference to the way in which Woman has been recreated as the fictionalised and fetichised symbol of a (necessarily political) system²⁶.

The focus of this study will be on the systemic violence portrayed in the literature of Québec, which incorporates many of the typical characteristics of the political and aesthetic discourse of violence and so serves as a microcosm of a broader cultural phenomenon. In addition, however, it has the added dimension of being a culture undergoing the painful process of "decolonisation". It is therefore necessary to consider first the representation of violence in a "normative", that is to say an uncolonised culture, to serve as a form of "control"; for, while the gender-balance within a colonised society may be "disfunctional" in many ways, the phenomenon of (and fascination with) violence against women is in no way restricted to colonised societies or to periods of political unrest such as took place in the 1960's and 70's in Québec (although it is of course an intrinsically political issue). In other words, decolonisation alone (while a highly significant factor in the shaping and frequency of violence in the Québec novel) is not

²⁶ As John J. Clayton has stated: "Aestheticization involves the imposition of totalitarian order on the world". "Alain Robbe-Grillet: The Aesthetics of Sado-Masochism", Massachusetts Review 18 (1977) 106-119, 119.

sufficient to explain the choice of *Woman* as victim and scapegoat, nor does it explain why that choice appears so natural as to have passed unremarked, critics focussing rather on the nationalist debate for which Woman's death is a mere symbol or premise.

While there have been recent, notable studies of the violence in the Québec novel, they have tended to consider it almost as an isolated phenomenon, culturally specific, rather than an "idiosyncratic" variant of a broader, inter-cultural theme. This is in spite of Patricia Smart's observation of the Oedipal triangle in many novels of the time (in *Ecrire dans la maison du père*), and Lori Saint-Martin's adoption of Anne-Marie Dardigna's schema of the French erotic novel; the question *why* the latter system should fit so perfectly within the Québec context does not seem to have been addressed. The exception is Valerie Raoul's study, which does consider violence as a trans-cultural phenomenon, but which focusses on (post-)colonial systems.

My first chapter serves as a reference point and broader cultural context for the ensuing study of the Québec novel, considering first the representation of Woman in European (i.e. French and English) literature, being the dominant cultural context and heritage of the Québécois; although the French Canadians were officially denied access to much contemporary European literature by Church censorship, such texts were in fact available illegally, and certainly by the time of the Québécois authors whom I shall be discussing, they were both readily available and highly influential²⁷. This chapter traces

²⁷ The relationship between the French Surrealists and the automatist artists and writers of *Refus Global*, for instance, is well documented. Both Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Hubert Aquin were admirers of Sade, while the wealth and variety of intertextual references in the works of both writers demonstrate a knowledge of an extremely broad range of literature. Intertextual references in Marie-Claire Blais's novel meanwhile

the establishment and development of Woman's pre-definition and construction as Victim throughout certain key periods in the evolution of the novel, focussing on the experience of rape, an act of specifically sexual and gendered violence. It attempts to show how that portrayal has been adapted or "re-coded" according to contemporary ideologies. Ultimately, it considers how Woman, as a social and cultural construct, has become synonymous with text; her body appropriated, she has become an intellectual playground, and the representation of eroticised violence against her, a mark of textual and artistic sophistication.

Chapter 2 considers the parallel, although perhaps more accelerated, development of the portrayal of Woman in the novel from Québec. It traces the reign of the Mother from her "coronation" in the early days of the *roman de la terre* through to her repeated "assassination" in the 1960's and 70's - a period which corresponds with both the political violence of the *Révolution tranquille* and the literary revolution associated with the Québec Modernist period, itself necessarily effected by the linguistic debate of the time. It thereby charts the development of the female character in Québec literature in conjunction with the evolution of the novel in Québec.

Within this context, the following chapters offer close readings of the violence - both textual and physical - effected in three novels by contemporary writers in Québec. Chapter 3 considers Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's Un rêve québécois which, while not considered his most successful novel, shares a number of elements common to his

indicate a familiarity with French Romantic poetry, Rimbaud, in particular, (and through him, Lautréamont and ultimately Sade), among other sources.

oeuvre: the seemingly impotent hero, the sexual obsessions and the importance of tradition, as well as the challenge to traditional narrative strategy and form. It also, significantly, associates itself with the violent events of the "crise d'octobre". The study of this text will establish the relationship between the violence of the revolutionary time and the violence within the text, in many ways exemplary of a trend in Québécois literature at this time; Un rêve québécois could well serve as a model for the patterns of gender disfunctionality and violence evident in so many texts. It will focus on the function of violence directed at its heroine, Jeanne D'Arc - victim of dismemberment and necrophilia - considering, specifically, the eroticisation of this violence, a trend as common to this period as it was to writers of the *nouveau roman* in France and the Modernists in England, influenced by the works of Bataille and Sade.

Chapter 4 will examine Hubert Aquin's L'Antiphonaire which exploits fully the parallel between textual and sexual violence, again, typical both of Aquin's writing and of this period of change. Existing studies have tended to focus on textual strategies and to ignore the sexual violence so essential to them. I will consider the relationship between the two modes of violence, as well as the implications of the eroticisation of physical violence, while attempting to gauge to what extent this combination of narrative strategies offered a release from the (post-)colonial status of the Québécois and paved the way for a cultural specificity. I will also consider the deliberate ambiguity of the text which teeters on a dichotomy of misogyny and feminism, as the female narrator-protagonist is seen as complicitous in her own victimisation.

My final chapter examines Marie-Claire Blais's Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel. Although it is not my intention to attempt generalisations regarding male and female representations of violence, Blais's novel offers an interesting contrast to the other texts discussed, in its choice of victims and their sufferings and its choice of textual strategy; it refuses the graphic sexual abuse of the other two novels, and yet is still considered one of the darkest novels written at the time in Québec. Presenting an alternative perspective of Québec reality, the novel subverts the textual and cultural standard of the *roman de la terre*, sets up its own reincarnation of the Mother and exposes a vicious circle of hereditary (ideological) violence.

I have drawn from diverse critical approaches - feminist and other - including Susan Rubin Suleiman's Subversive Intent²⁸, for its feminist insights into French avant-garde writings, and Nancy K. Miller's The Heroine's Text²⁹, for her comments on the representation of the eighteenth-century fictional heroine. For the Québec corpus, Valerie Raoul's psychoanalytical study of gender and ethnicity within diary fiction of the period, with its focus on the effects of colonisation (Distinctly Narcissistic) and Patricia Smart's study Ecrire dans la maison du père, along with her various articles, have proved invaluable. Feminist studies on violence, including Susan Brownmiller's Against Our

²⁸ Suleiman, Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde (Cambridge, MA. and London, Harvard University Press, 1990).

²⁹ Miller, The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel 1722-1782 (New York, Columbia University Press, 1980).

Will³⁰, Andrea Dworkin's Pornography³¹ and Jane Caputi's The Age of Sex Crime were critical preparatory reading for this project.

³⁰ Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape (New York, Bantam Books, 1976).

³¹ Dworkin, Pornography: Men Possessing Women (New York, Putnam, 1981).

Chapter One

The Aesthetics of Rape: Literature and Violence

Rape has been an important theme or motif throughout Western culture. Perhaps since the moment when man first celebrated his superior physical strength over an unwilling female, the act of rape has caught the imagination of artists and writers and has been equally readily received by the consumers of their art, becoming a "major box-office seller". Perception of the act of rape has shifted throughout the years; it has been seen variously as an act which precipitates love and offers mutual satisfaction, or as an act of love in itself. It has also been seen as an expression of hatred and has often been treated with hilarity - conflicting attitudes which are still apparent today. Increasingly, however, rape is more commonly seen as an act of aggression committed primarily by men against women, as an act of domination rather than of sexual desire, an expression of underlying frustration and powerlessness and an attempt to "regain" or re-establish man's supposedly inherent or justified superiority over women through a violently degrading act. With this in mind, the status or role of rape in art is becoming increasingly controversial, as the reality of rape collides with its aesthetic representations as glamorized or romanticized. It has been fictionalized - one could even say, divorced from reality - through a constant reworking and rewriting of the codes and discourses which make up a society and its culture and which govern the creation and interpretation of literature and art. The theme or motif of rape has been worked into our cultural codes in such a way that it has become one of the many related discourses which

constitute language and culture¹. It is a highly charged discourse, sometimes extremely subtle - even seductive - and sometimes brutal in its enunciation, and yet it remains a fundamentally masculine discourse, in which the feminine plays the essential, eternal and external role of object, before an ever masculine subject².

This examination of the representation of violence against women in literature will necessarily focus largely on rape. I will begin by considering the literary uses of rape as a theme and cautionary device and, in what is perhaps a more recent development, as a structural element, in the literature of Europe, in order to provide a background and context for the ensuing study of violence in the literature of Québec. I will take into account the transformation of rape, a violent physical and sexual act, into a literary discourse often used as a metonymic or symbolic device; this shift in levels takes place through the fictional narrative and produces certain effects on the reader. For the moment I will concentrate on examples of works of literature involving violence written by male authors, leaving comments on the representation of violence in women's writing until a later stage in the discussion. By first examining a wider cultural tradition, based on the dominant French and English cultural heritage and influence of Québécois writers, it will be possible to situate the depiction of violence against women in the Québec novel in its context. The idiosyncrasies or specificities of those novels written in

¹ Sherrill Grace has referred to the cultural discourse of violence as a discourse of "Bodily Harm", after Margaret Atwood's novel of the same name.

² As I mentioned elsewhere, in this study the terms masculine and feminine may be seen as generally convergent with the terms male and female, but the set of characteristics traditionally seen as "male" and "female" or "masculine" and "feminine" are gender *constructs* rather than inherent qualities biologically determined by sex.

a period of (de)colonisation, will become apparent. Given the multiplicity of incidences and re-writings of the act of rape in literature, an extensive diachronic study of the subject would certainly go beyond the confines of this research project: I will focus instead on a few specific examples - coinciding with significant stages in the development of the novel as a genre - in order to illustrate some of the variety of patterns woven into literature by the discourse of rape and its parent, violence. I have tried to choose examples which illustrate both the universality of the theme and also the subtle (or not so subtle) shifts in the coding of rape, as well as its relation to the portrayal of the female victim, on the narrative, thematic and structural levels.

The Evolution of the Novel and the Representation of Rape:

i. Chivalry and the Mythical Virgin.

The courtly tradition played a significant role in the culture and literature of Europe from the twelfth century through to the appearance of Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* - known as France's first novel - at the beginning of the 17th century; it was therefore fundamental to the shaping of early European literature. The courtly literary tradition promoted "esthetic and social refinement", as well as a code of conduct based on honour, chivalry and selflessness³, in which the aristocratic woman was idolised and idealised (lower-class women received a somewhat different treatment at the hands of Medieval

³ Kathryn Gradval, "Camouflaging Rape: the Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in the Medieval Pastourelle", *Romanic Review*, 76.4 (Nov. 1985) 361-373, 363.

writers⁴). Identified with the Virgin Mary - the image of perfect, self-sacrificing motherhood - the role of "Woman" within the discourse of courtly love is primarily symbolic. She is the representative figure of all that is valued through the discourse and codes of the courtly aesthetic, the centre around which the system rotates and which valorises and sustains the essence and ethics of that society. However, like the flag or standard which serves as a patriotic symbol to an army in wartime, the value of Woman in this discourse is purely metonymic: she has no intrinsic or inherent value, but is endowed with meaning as a figurehead.

It is perhaps paradoxical that the incidence of (attempted) rape in the tales of the courtly tradition is very high. Dietmar Rieger talks of Lancelot en prose, for example, where "viols et tentatives de viol sont presque à l'ordre du jour"⁵. Medieval literature is filled with tales of chivalric knights killing fantastic enemies in order to "save damsels

⁴ Class prejudice is described in André le Chapelain's work "De amore rusticorum", in which he assumes that the only relations possible between peasants are sexual. He advises: "si tu trouves une occasion propice, n'hésite pas à accomplir tes désirs et à les posséder par force". André le Chapelain, translated by Claude Buridant, André le Chapelain. Traité de l'amour courtois, (Paris, 1974), quoted in Dietmar Rieger, "Le motif du viol dans la littérature de la France médiévale entre norme courtoise et réalité courtoise," Cahiers de civilisation médiévale, 31.2 (1988) 241-167, 260. Rieger adds that there are parallels according to courtly lore, as the popular belief held that: "il ne peut y avoir de dialogue courtois avec une "vilaine" - il n'y a que la communication sexuelle". Given this attitude, it is perhaps not surprising that Marie-Thérèse Lorcin claims that 25% of the "fabliaux", a less "aristocratic" literature, are concerned with some kind of "viol déguisé": Façons de sentir et de penser: les fabliaux français (Paris, Honoré Champion, 1979).

⁵ Rieger, 257.

from a fate worse than death"⁶. And yet, admirable as this stereotypical storyline may seem, it has little to do with the well-being of womankind, or with the reality of women's lives in the Middle Ages (except in that the incidence of rape was indeed high during this period⁷). According to courtly lore, the saving of a virgin was considered first, among the highest achievements of chivalry and the ultimate proof of a knight's "courtliness"; secondly, as Rieger points out, it represents the triumph of the courtly world over the brutish world outside the court⁸:

le motif du viol...est propre à servir d'épreuve potentielle importante pour le chevalier du dernier secours, épreuve dont le but ne serait pas seulement la perfection courtoise pour le chevalier, mais pour toute la société courtoise ou voulant le devenir⁹.

The act of rape was therefore appropriated and "(re)written" within or by the courtly aesthetic, into a fictionalized and symbolic narrative which serves in turn to valorize that aesthetic. The attack against the symbolic figurehead meanwhile has little to do with the

⁶ This expression, with its implicit value judgement, dates from at least as far back as 1653, according to the Oxford English Dictionary; it is a euphemism for rape, now used primarily with irony.

⁷ See, for example, Susan Brownmiller's Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape (New York, Bantam Books, 1976) and John Marshall Carter, Rape in Medieval England: An Historical and Sociological Study, (Lanham, New York and London, University Press of America, 1985), also Barbara Hanawalt's study, Crime and Conflict in English Communities, (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1979). There is less detailed information on rape before the twelfth or thirteenth century which predate the keeping of written records.

⁸ It is not surprising then, that so many of these attempted rapes take place in the forests, far away from the civilization and the domesticity of the court.

⁹ Rieger, 260.

figurehead herself, but is an attack, rather, on all that she stands for. The figurehead could therefore, theoretically, be anything. Or could it?

To take a glance further back in time for a moment, ancient myths are also filled with stories of rape and violence, as well as beautiful women: the myths of Helen of Troy, carried off by Paris and blamed for the Trojan War, of Philomena, whose tongue was cut out, of Lucrece, of Callisto, of Iphigenia - all of whom were victims of some form of violence at the hands of male gods or kings - are all well known¹⁰. Aside from being (fictionalized) narratives, successful on a narratological level, these stories have been considered worth passing down for generations; they have caught the imagination of many painters and writers and have become the subjects of art and literature. The story of the rape of the Sabine women, for example, who were carried off by Romulus as wives for his men and who later fell in love with their captors, thus becoming complicitous in their own abduction, is well-known and has been celebrated in art. It was also the perfect vehicle for the popular Hollywood musical Seven Brides for Seven Brothers. Based on a short story by Stephen Vincent Benet, called, tellingly enough, "The Sobbin' Women", it is interesting to note that the film makes reference to its two primary sources in a song which takes the title of the short story and tells the tale of the original incident - seen, of course, in the light of the more modern short story: the intertextual levels and "re-coding" of the story are thus made apparent, and offer a useful model for

¹⁰ Of the numerous available works of reference on Greek Mythology, on this occasion I consulted Edith Hamilton's Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes, 1940 (New York, New American Library, 1977).

the process of re-coding¹¹. Meanwhile, Rubens' painting "Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus" celebrates the attack by Castor and Pollux on two women whose own names are (apparently) unimportant, as their identity is indicated solely by their relationship to a man; Titian painted the "Rape of Europa", picturing the fate of the woman who was carried off by Zeus in the shape of a bull, while Shakespeare retold the story of the rape of Lucrece¹². It is, of course, highly improbable that the violence recounted in these myths took place in the way described, while the characters themselves may well be fictional; it is possible, however - even probable - that the stories were based at some point on a real attack, however romanticised or fantastic it may have become¹³. Again,

¹¹ Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1954. More recently this softening of the captive towards her captor has been exploited in Pedro Almodóvar's rather predictable "comedy", Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down, (¡Atame!, Spain, 1989) in which a woman (a former porn star) is held captive in her own apartment by an apparent stranger (it later turns out that they had had a "one night stand" at some point in the past), who claims to be in love with her and has planned a romantic and domestic future for the two of them. The woman finally falls in love with him, despite the fact that he has beaten her up and kept her tied up for days. The film ends with the couple (and the woman's sister) on their way to meet the parents, singing happily together. Parody? Subversion? Or simply a reinforcing and perpetuation of old myths? In any case, the film plays on an ancient theme and contributes to the re-coding or re-writing and an "absorption" of the myth within contemporary culture.

¹² The stories of Uliva and Crescenzia, Genoveffa and Santa Gugliema, daughter of the King of Dacia and the Queen of Poland could also be mentioned here. Mario Praz refers to these stories as varieties and precursors of the "persecuted maiden", a figure who "comes into her own" in the nineteenth century and whom I shall consider shortly. See The Romantic Agony, translated by Angus Davidson, second edition, (London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1970) 167.

¹³ René Girard suggests, in the myths of scapegoating, for example, where the sufferings of a community are blamed on the "crimes" of an individual or on an easily identifiable minority in order to "purge" those sufferings, that while the crimes of these people may well have been imaginary and their persecutors guilty of racial, sexual or some other prejudice, the violence itself towards the victim or the victimized group was in all likelihood real - as in the case of the witch trials, where the fantasies and fears of

the reality of the (in this case) historical act of rape has been evacuated: it is the *representation* of the event - "fictionalized" or "written" into the cultural discourse - which is significant and which is retained as a text.

These "mythical" rapes and violations have paved the way for many more recent stories; they are, after all, among the founding myths of Western civilisation, and they shape and limit our perception of the world in which we live. The structures of mythical stories have been constantly reworked and reintegrated into the Western cultural discourse¹⁴; Freud, for example, chose to adopt the structures of myth to illustrate and name the various complexes of the human psyche, suggesting a certain universality; Jung likewise chose them to illustrate his theories of archetypes, figures which he saw as

the Inquisitors were transferred on to the innocent women whom they raped and tortured in the name of goodness and religion. Girard also suggests that these stories have been softened or "embroidered" over the years by the descendants of the persecutors (murderers) to justify their ancestors and to lessen their guilt (and, by association, their own): thus the victim becomes a mythical figure whose death was preordained and from whose death comes renewed life. See "Generative Scapegoating", in Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, Johnathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation, Robert G. Hammerton-Kelly (ed.) (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1987) and also Girard's seminal work, Le Bouc émissaire, (Paris, Grasset, 1982). This view is also held by Elizabeth Judd in her discussion of myths of the "Golden Age": she challenges the idea that myths are necessarily fictitious by offering evidence of their historical accuracy in certain areas. "The Myths of the Golden Age and the Fall", in Frances Richardson Keller (ed), Views of Women's Lives in Western Tradition, (Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 1990) 15-82.

¹⁴ In her book, The Callisto Myth from Ovid to Atwood: Initiation and Rape in Literature, (Montréal, McGill-Queens, 1988), Kathleen Wall traces the recurrences of the myth of Callisto, for example, showing how the story of the rape victim, cast out and blamed for her attack, has been recycled and reworked. The concept of "blaming the victim" is fairly common in cases of rape: survivors are often accused of having provoked their attacker, through their behaviour or their dress, or simply by being "in the wrong place", as was Callisto: Wall suggests that the myth has become a common story line or structure, an archetype and that it was, perhaps, itself based on an original incident.

having universal and perhaps eternal validity within human experience and consciousness. Mythical structures also serve as the basis of René Girard's theories of the origins of violence. The themes which they treat - pertaining to love, war, life, death and power - are fundamental to human experience and also, therefore, to art and literature throughout the centuries, forming an integral part of Western culture. These stories appear to be symptomatic of a predominantly masculine cultural structure in which Woman is the traditional victim. The acts of violence against female characters appear representative of an archetypal structure of the imaginary, assumed to be fundamental to human behaviour and to the (collective) unconscious. This essentialising aspect is a central issue to which I shall return throughout this study.

Throughout the history of literature in the West, it would seem that Woman has been the victim of choice in a discourse built around or upon a certain collection of desires, perceptions or assumptions which insist upon women's inferior status within patriarchy and Western religion. Within this dominant masculine discourse, Woman is "spoken", but rarely speaks for herself - even within her own stories. Woman is written as the Object and Victim, dual functions whose grammatical equivalence is apparent as each is defined in a logical relation of subordination to a dominant One, and each is the passive recipient of action or will, or of the "Subject". Woman is, in this context, a sign which can mean whatever her male enunciators choose or desire her to mean as long as it designates what they are *not*, in a process of "other-ing".

To return to the literature of the courtly period, it is clearly not arbitrary but necessary that the figurehead should be female, because of her pre-definition as passive

object or "cypher", waiting to be endowed with meaning or "re-coded" according to the aesthetic of the time. However, in the courtly code, Woman ("la dame") is not just any woman: a convenient potential victim, her maidenhead a prized jewel, an object to be saved and fought over in a man's battle, Woman is the heart or "treasury" of the values of courtly lore. Her identity and "self" may be relatively unimportant, but her "nobility", youth, beauty and virginity are significant, partly because of her idealization within the courtly and romantic tradition and partly because they evoke the eroticism inherent in the narrative of the ravishing of a virgin - a theme that is common in Western literature and culture throughout the ages. The victim's virginity is particularly important, as according to medieval English law, "to *defile a virgin* and to lie with *one defiled* are different deeds"¹⁵; the rape of a non-virgin was evidently considered a less severe crime, at that time, than the rape of a virgin, the non-virgin having lost her *value* within the "hommo-sexual" economy, in which woman's virginity was hypervalorised¹⁶. The intrinsic

¹⁵ Henry de Bracton, De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae, quoted in John Marshall Carter, 38 (my emphasis) - the uses of the word "defile" are, in themselves, significant. Carter also considers the difference in the legal definition of "forced intercourse" in thirteenth-century England, depending on the status of the victim - i.e. virgin or non-virgin, etc. He also points out the belief at this time that a child could only be conceived if the two parties were consenting: therefore the rape victim made pregnant was no true victim in the eyes of the law (47).

¹⁶ Luce Irigaray discusses this in her article "Des Marchandises entre elles", in Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un (Paris: Minuit, 1977). In addition, it is interesting to note that in medieval English law, at least, the notion of rape was not seen as applicable to married women who, having been "defiled", had also lost their *value*. The attempted rape of a married woman was often treated as adultery, as if a woman who had once given her consent to her husband must be consenting to any man (there being now no impediment to her "naturally voracious" sexual appetite). See also Rieger, 244 and Carter, esp. chapter 4, 35-45.

characteristics of the courtly lady are also significant, meanwhile, in that they are related to the body and to sexuality, but in abstract or spiritual terms: it is perhaps here that the identification of the "sacred" courtly lady with the Virgin Mary becomes most apparent. Woman's sexuality is referred to only in its "negative" or inverse form, that of (passive) virginity - she is in effect "desexualized"¹⁷ - while Woman becomes an idealized representation of herself within the text. Finally, the fact that Woman is used as a sign or symbol to be endowed with meaning, suggests, immediately, a power structure in which the masculine is in the position of control: thus, while the symbolic rapes in courtly literature may well signify an attack on the edifice of courtliness, they are also highly indicative of the inferiority of women (despite their "pedestal") within that power structure or "economy" and within the cultural discourse.

ii. The Rise and Fall of the Heroine: from the 18th to the 19th Century.

From the eighteenth century on the novel form came into its own. At this time the production of novels burgeoned, including a host of supposedly realist novels focussing on women or told from a woman's point of view. In France, for example, there are Prévost's Manon Lescaut, Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse, Diderot's La Religieuse, La Vie de Mariane by Marivaux and, of course, Les Liaisons dangereuses, the epistolary

¹⁷ Much of the recent feminist writing and theory focusses on the Female Body, in terms of motherhood, nurturing, and female orgasm or "jouissance", in an attempt to reappropriate and "re-sexualize" woman's sexuality - traditionally and paradoxically a prerogative and favoured topic of male writers.

novel by Choderlos de Laclos which includes letters "written by" at least three women. In England the trend is similar, with novels such as Defoe's fictional autobiographies Moll Flanders and Roxanne and Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa, among others.

As a literary genre, the novel has traditionally been closely associated with women or considered in some way "effeminate". Indeed, as Michael Danahy writes, in comparing the novel to poetry, theatre and epic - "[les] genres littéraires authentiques et classiques" (or *masculine*),

Lukács fait tout pour nous amener à penser que le roman est issu de la déchéance du récit épique, non seulement à travers l'évolution ou la reproduction, mais par une détérioration et une dégradation, comme une femme est une réincarnation dégénérée de l'homme, créée à partir des côtes d'un antécédent masculin, mais manquant de membre viril¹⁸.

A similar attitude was evident in the eighteenth century, as the novel was then regarded as a literary form of lesser prestige, read largely by women, and so written with a female audience in mind¹⁹ - hence the number of novels written, ostensibly, for women and with an ostensibly female S/subject, both in terms of content and enunciation. It was after all at this time that the epistolary novel and (perhaps a little later) the fictional autobiography, based on the letter and "mémoires" respectively - the two forms of

¹⁸ Michael Danahy, "Le Roman est-il chose femelle?", Poétique, 7.25 (1976) 85-106, 97 and 99. Danahy is referring to Georg Lukács' The Theory of the Novel, trans. A. Bostock (Cambridge, Massachusetts, M.I.T., 1971) and Studies in European Realism (New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1964).

¹⁹ From this bias Danahy suggests come the descriptions of the novel as "une étoffe finement tissée, au points serrés ou tricotés, une tapisserie à texture complexe, un tissu de *fils* et de *ficelles* " (92), which play on gender specific activities. Reading novels meanwhile "demeurait une occupation reléguée à un monde clos d'activité non-économique" (96) ie. feminine.

"private" writing which women were actually encouraged to practice - were particularly popular²⁰.

The rise of Woman as a central focus is traced in Tracy Rizzo's article, "Sexual Violence in the Enlightenment"²¹. Following Michel Foucault's argument in Histoire de la sexualité²², Rizzo considers the role of women during the period which corresponds with the rise of the bourgeoisie, suggesting that a certain class of women were "liberated" from the fairly overt misogyny of the previous century, by the rising middle-class's valorisation of women, again, as an ideal (and highly vulnerable) symbol - this time of the values of the bourgeoisie. It is, however, probable that the trend began somewhat earlier than Rizzo implies, since what Nancy Miller refers to as "the Heroine's Text" had already established itself as a sub-genre by the time of the 1789 revolution²³. Nevertheless, in either case, as in the courtly literature, this valorisation builds on a perception of women's sexuality, or, rather the negation of that sexuality, through the emphasis placed on chastity and maternity. And yet the status of the female symbol has shifted, so that she is now valued chiefly for her capacity to be a victim and in that status of victim. Rizzo refers to this preference as "the cult of the victimised woman", where the

²⁰ Women also wrote poetry and novels, but this was not approved of. A number of women therefore wrote under male pseudonyms in order to be published, Georges Sand, for example, in France, and, in England, George Eliot and the Brontë sisters.

²¹ Tracy Rizzo, "Sexual Violence in the Enlightenment: The State, the Bourgeoisie and the Cult of the Victimized Woman", Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History 15 (1988) 122-129.

²² Histoire de la sexualité, 1, "La Volonté de savoir", (Paris, Gallimard, 1976).

²³ Miller, The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel 1722-1782, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1980).

victim status of, for example, a rape survivor, is exaggerated so that the woman is the very picture of abjection and wronged "virtue" - a "feminine" quality defined by a masculine discourse²⁴: she is the figure of abused and passive "femininity", again, as defined by the masculine system of codes in which and by which she is constructed.

Given the hypervalorisation of woman's chastity and the emphasis on its vulnerability, it is not surprising that woman's virtue and, in particular, its defence against a male attacker should become one of the most engrossing and popular themes of literature at this time²⁵; virtue can, after all, only be seen or evaluated in relation to a negative image of itself or if challenged. This suggests an implicit relationship between virtue and violence, as Diderot suggests in his essay "Eloge de Richardson", where he defines virtue in terms of a masochistic tendency; virtue is

sous quelque face qu'on la considère, un sacrifice de soi-même. Le sacrifice que l'on fait de soi-même en idée est une disposition préconçue à s'immoler en réalité²⁶.

Nor is it surprising that some of the stories end with the death or downfall of their heroine following a sexual "faux pas" or its discovery. Thus, Manon Lescaut is finally deported along with the "filles publiques", while in Les Liaisons dangereuses Madame de

²⁴ See, for example, Susan Brownmiller's Femininity (New York, Linden Press/Simon and Schuster, 1984) and Naomi Wolf, The Beauty Myth (Toronto: Vintage, 1990) for a discussion of the way male fantasy has dictated this supposedly intrinsically "female" essence.

²⁵ Nancy Miller also makes this observation in her article "The Exquisite Cadavers: Women in Eighteenth Century Fiction", Diacritics 5.4 (winter 1975) 37-43, 39. Miller's article is a review (and rejection) of Pierre Fauchery's romanticised view of the pattern in his study, La Destinée féminine dans le roman européen du dix-huitième siècle:1713-1807. Essai de gynécomythie romanesque (Paris, Armand Colin, 1972).

²⁶ Denis Diderot, Oeuvres (Paris, Pléiade-Gallimard, 1951), 1058-1074, 1061.

Tourvel dies, broken-hearted and shamed, Cécile is returned to the convent from which she has not long been released and Madame de Merteuil, permanently disfigured by smallpox, is publicly humiliated, thanks to the revelation of her letters by the dying Valmont, who is himself somehow absolved of his own role in the affair, by this, his final and "heroic" act²⁷.

Samuel Richardson's two epistolary novels, Clarissa and Pamela, were the precursors of a trend which caught the imagination of writers on both sides of the Channel, prompting various imitations (including the parodic Shamela, by Henry Fielding). Both novels focus on their young, beautiful and extremely virtuous heroine (who therefore shares qualities essential to the courtly heroine), who is the victim of some form of sexual violence and repeated harassment at the hands of her non-too-scrupulous suitor, over the course of the several hundred pages of their narrative²⁸.

²⁷ Much has been written on Les Liaisons dangereuses as a feminist text, in that it gives a central role to a strong female character and permits all the female characters to be sexual beings: however, the fate of the women, along with the fact that Madame de Merteuil's much acclaimed power is both sexual and covert, and that she appears to have taken the characteristics of the male libertine (and is therefore playing a masculine game by masculine rules), would appear to undermine this interpretation. See, for example, Geoffry Wagner, Five for Freedom: A Study of Feminism in Fiction, (Rutherford, N.J., Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), for the "proto-feminist" argument and Suellen Diaconoff, "Resistance and Retreat: A Laclosian Primer for Women," University of Toronto Quarterly 58.3 (Spring 1981) 391-408 and Jean-Marie Goulemot, "Le Lecteur-voyeur et la mise en scène de l'imaginaire viril," Laclos et le libertinage, 1782-1982, (Paris, Presses Universitaires, 1983) 163-175, for the opposing view.

²⁸ Pamela finally marries her persistent master: the scenario played out is the regenerative power of love. Clarissa, meanwhile, is drugged and raped by Lovelace and later dies of grief over her defilement. The dual acts of drugging and raping are also evident in other novels - Sade's works, for instance, as well as having parallels in Hubert Aquin's Trou de mémoire and L'Antiphonaire.

Following Richardson, however, there seems to have been a shift or a re-coding in the representation of rape and the idealization of the female character. As Mario Praz suggests, the French imitators of Richardson "sought in the subject of the persecuted woman chiefly an excuse for situations of heightened sensuality"²⁹. The latent eroticism attached to the portrayal of rape in literature, therefore, gradually became a more overt preoccupation from the eighteenth century onwards, in both English and French novels.

There are a number of issues which arise at this point, as the various narratives of rape operate on several levels. First, on a practical level, Rizzo suggests that the increasing renewed and apparently sympathetic interest in women on the part of the late eighteenth-century middle-class was entirely political. The misogyny evident in pre-revolutionary France was inverted by the attitudes of the bourgeoisie at the turn of the century and replaced by a new sentimentalised image of woman. However, it would seem that this image of Woman is also "constructed", appropriated and manipulated as a "standard" - as was the "courtly lady" - this time for the purposes of the middle-class.

Secondly, the educational function of art and literature - in particular, that of the novel, seen as a second-rate and somewhat vulgar literary form - had already been under discussion among the Philosophes, as well as in religious circles. Indeed, Diderot had observed:

Par un roman, on a entendu jusqu'à ce jour un tissu d'événements chimériques et frivoles, dont la lecture était dangereuse pour le goût et pour les mœurs³⁰

²⁹ Praz, 97.

³⁰ Diderot, 1059.

Rousseau, meanwhile, saw the role of literature as a potential means of moral education:

Les romans sont peut-être la dernière instruction qu'il reste à donner à un peuple assez corrompu pour que tout autre lui soit inutile³¹.

However, given that, as previously mentioned, the primary readers of novels were women, it would seem that the moral instruction offered directed itself largely towards women readers. Offering stories culminating in the quasi-annihilation of the many female characters showing signs of sexual promiscuity or liberation, the novels could serve, on one level, as "cautionary tales" to women who might think of stepping outside their prescribed social and sexual role³². This scenario is in no way restricted to the eighteenth or nineteenth century, as Cynthia Sutherland Matlack points out:

Female heteroclitcs [are] inevitably sacrificed to purge threatening symptoms of disease and pollution from society³³.

Nancy Miller adds that "the disruptive potential of female sexuality is neutralized, removed from general circulation"³⁴. It would seem, therefore, that some of these novels, despite their apparent focus on a central female character and their appearance of "giving women a voice" through their presentation of women as speaking and writing subjects, actually re-enact or ratify the male order, in which woman plays a subservient

³¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, La Nouvelle Héloïse, 2, lettre 21.

³² Thereby reiterating the concept of "indoctrination" I touched on in the introduction.

³³ Cynthia Sutherland Matlack, "Spectatress of the Mischief which she made: Tragic Women Perceived and Perceiver", Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture 6 (1977) 319-332. Also quoted in Miller, "The Exquisite Cadavers", 43. A male reader would of course receive the same message, so perpetuating the structure of inequality between the sexes.

³⁴ Miller, "The Exquisite Cadavers", 40.

and symbolic role³⁵. Meanwhile, the epistolary novels, which appear to give their women characters a certain "subjectivity", have encoded within them a sense of intimacy, a need for secrecy, and - as an inevitable consequence of that secrecy - the threat of exposure and ruin, a *dénouement* often exploited by male authors, as we have seen. The genre itself, at this time, can thus be seen to reflect the subordination of women as potential victims, on an extra-diegetic level. The status of woman as "subject", therefore, would appear to be a façade - at least in terms of the literature written by male authors.

On another level, however, given the increasing focus and detail applied to the description of the suffering and the victimisation of the "heroine", it seems that the discourse of the "cautionary tale" is, to a certain extent, being subverted. While the "warning" is still evident in the terrible fate which so often befalls the female character, it is the suffering or the anticipation of the suffering that retains the interest of the reader.

As Mario Praz writes:

The manner in which Diderot proclaims incessantly the virtue of his heroine, gives the impression, every now and then, of being only meant to add spice to the cruelty of her persecution. It is an anticipation of Justine³⁶.

Nancy Miller also indicates this development:

Richardson set in place what Sade will exploit reiteratively; the esthetic power (bourgeois or anti-bourgeois) of rape³⁷.

³⁵ Nancy Miller states: "The plots of these feminocentric fictions are...neither female in impulse or origin, nor feminist in spirit. In the final analysis...despite their titles and their feminine "I", it is not altogether clear to me that these novels are about or for women at all." The Heroine's Text, 149.

³⁶ Praz, 99.

³⁷ Miller, "Exquisite Cadavers", 39.

Thus, it would seem that the interest in the downfall of the female figure is no longer (or perhaps never was) entirely "benevolent" or cautionary, indeed, there appears to be a degree of "relish" in her humiliation. The interest in the victim as "victim", as Praz and Miller suggest, becomes more overt from the late eighteenth century onwards, being exploited to the full in the writings of the Marquis de Sade and his followers. The official discourse of morality, familiar to writers in Royalist and Catholic (pre-revolutionary) France is appropriated and subverted in these texts: the moral codes are stressed in the constant references to virtue, only to be rejected or even defiled.

This inversion of values and the interest in the victim as "victim" reaches its zenith in the works of the "Romantic Agonists", in their treatment of perversity and "la grande synthèse" - the inseparability of pleasure and pain³⁸. The "persecuted maiden", re-coded under another new guise - now diseased, impoverished and moribund - becomes, once again, the ideal of pathos for some writers of the nineteenth century, convinced, like Edgar Allen Poe, that "the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world"³⁹. The stereotype of the young and beautiful heroine is inverted by the Romantic fascination with the horrible and the cruel, the "dark" side of human life, and the increased popularity of the Gothic and of Vampirism, fuelled by the writings of the Marquis de Sade and later, the poetry of Lord Byron, among others. The disease-carrying prostitute became one of the primary heroines of the *fin de siècle* with its fears of degeneration. Indeed, Charles Bernheimer suggests that the "putrefying

³⁸ The expression is Flaubert's, quoted in Praz, 28.

³⁹ Poe, Philosophy of Composition, quoted in Praz, 27.

corpse" of Zola's *Nana* "became the symbol of the disintegration of an entire age and its fantasmatic obsession"⁴⁰. The idea that novels are written for a *female* audience becomes increasingly difficult to accept, as the interest in women's suffering is, at this point, taken to a logical and somewhat grisly extreme. The heroine's death - now inevitable in terms of the narrative structure of the novel - is protracted through illness, while her descent towards that death is often a process of decay. The deaths "off-stage" or hidden by the walls of convents, often favoured by earlier writers, along with the power of death to "wipe clean" the reputation of "fallen women", are replaced by the supremacy of the suffering process, as the heroine is desired and desirable, despite, or perhaps because of, the horror and ugliness of her misfortunes, as deformity and corruption become the erotic prerequisites to beauty and femininity.

iii. The Sadian Heroine.

The subversion of authority and exposure of "idées reçues" evident in the literature from the eighteenth century and after, is exploited most mercilessly in the works of the Divine Marquis, where moral, ethical and religious codes are constantly violated. Angela Carter describes, for instance, the obsessive sacrilege of Sade's

⁴⁰ Bernheimer, in Denis Hollier (ed.), A New History of French Literature (Cambridge, MA. and London, Harvard University Press, 1989) 780-85, 784.

characters, for whom "jouissance" often involves the violation or defilement of religious objects and taboos⁴¹. Robert Richard points out that:

dans l'ordre romanesque sadien...la loi...se résum[e] au dénouement de tous les liens, y inclus les plus précieux, unissant la mère à sa fille⁴².

Sade's novel, Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu, tells the story of the archetypal or stereotypical "persecuted maiden", as the young and beautiful Justine, orphaned and exceedingly virtuous, is constantly disappointed in her belief in the goodness of others and meets with abuse wherever she seeks solace, frequently at the hands of the clergy. The physical and moral qualities of Justine are, of course, recognisable as those of the "Heroine as Victim". Of those qualities, Robert Richard suggests that "il ne s'agit que d'une esthétique utilitaire, qui est, par ailleurs, purement rhétorique et répétitive"⁴³. Rhetorical and repetitive it may be - there are, after all, only so many faces the perfect woman can wear, according to our narrow cultural standards - it is, however, evidently important that the victim should be described as and believed to be physically - and morally - perfect: a factor adding to the eroticism of the narrative of violence and serving to "make the sacrifice more piquant"⁴⁴.

⁴¹ Angela Carter, The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography (New York, Pantheon Books, 1978) 105. This preference was also later displayed by Bataille's characters in L'Histoire de l'oeil, for instance, where a priest is raped and murdered. Oeuvres complètes, 3 (Paris, Gallimard, 1970).

⁴² Robert Richard, "Entrevue: Sade ou l'enfer du référent", Thelema (1992) 125-144. 131. The abomination of the mother-daughter relationship is presented in La Philosophie dans le boudoir, for example, as we shall see.

⁴³ Richard, "Entrevue", 139.

⁴⁴ Carol de Dobay Rifelj, "Cendrillon and the Ogre: Women in Fairy Tales and Sade" Romanic Review 81.1 (Jan 1990) 11-24, 13.

The story of Justine's sister is the mirror image: Juliette, thrown into the same sad circumstances by the presumed death of her parents, takes every opportunity and profits from the situations in which she finds herself, becoming the perfect sadian heroine. In terms of content, therefore, these two novels can, perhaps, be said to offer little that is "new", but build, rather, on a long line of texts and traditions⁴⁵: the sisters reiterate (in an exaggerated form) the two classic faces of Woman - the Virgin and the Whore - while the novels evidently borrow much from the cultural ideal of the female protagonist - here most interesting when "in a position of the greatest possible humiliation or "objectification" vis-à-vis the aggressor"⁴⁶. As Barthes later writes:

la femme est abîmée: on l'empaquette, on l'entortille, on l'embéguine, on la déguise, de façon à effacer toute trace de ses attraits antérieurs...on produit une sorte de poupée chirurgicale et fonctionnelle... une chose⁴⁷.

Sade's heroines are reduced from social beings to isolated creatures, obliged to fend for themselves in whatever way they can, in a game of power, according to the apparently limited choices available to women in a Sadian society. Juliette becomes extremely powerful by choosing the path of crime rather than that of virtue and by feigning virtue and misfortune in order to exploit and to excite⁴⁸ - thereby both appropriating the

⁴⁵ Rifelj has examined the relationship between the works of Sade and the fairy tales of Charles Perrault: Rifelj notes that the "immorality" of Sade is the "antithesis of those [lessons] implied by the plots and made explicit in the "moralités" of Perrault" (12).

⁴⁶ Susan Rubin Suleiman, Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde (Cambridge, MA. and London, Harvard University Press, 1990), 65.

⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, Sade/Fourier/Loyola (Paris, Seuil, 1973), 127.

⁴⁸ Juliette plays the role of the innocent victim in Madame Duvergier's brothel: her virginity is sold to numerous customers. Angela Carter points out the similarity between the role Juliette plays and the "innate" character of Justine (Sadeian Woman, 84).

moral codes of the time and recognizing the (apparent) eroticism of female misfortune or victimization (something which Justine never seems to learn). She is able to indulge her every fantasy and is even accepted into the elite society, "les Amis de la Sodali  ". However, while women have the right to become president of that society, its fundamental philosophy remains that women are created for the pleasure of men - any power a woman may hold, therefore, is subject to a masculine veto, so that any appearance of sexual equality is superficial. Juliette's freedom and power would, therefore, appear to be patriarchally "ordained" (with the inherent possibility of that freedom being withdrawn at any point), just as Eug  nie's "libertine" actions in La Philosophie dans le boudoir are endorsed by her father, and the Chevalier's speech in that same novel, advocating democracy and equality, proclaims the same illusion of controlled or "imposed" freedom:

Si nous admettons, comme nous venons de le faire, que *toutes les femmes doivent   tre soumises    nos d  sirs*, assur  ment nous pouvons leur permettre de m  me de satisfaire amplement tous les leurs. (...) Sexe charmant, vous serez libre; vous jouirez comme les hommes de tous les plaisirs dont la nature vous fait un devoir... Vous   tes libres comme nous...⁴⁹.

Citizen Sade's declaration of the rights of women - while revolutionary (even today) in that it advocates the sexual freedom of women (albeit in terms of male sexuality) - remains fundamentally patriarchal: it withholds the very freedom it purports to proclaim, in its opening acceptance of the universal truth of women's subjectivity to men and in offering women the freedom to emulate male behaviour. It would seem, therefore, that Sade's vision of "freedom" for women was not the most disinterested and that the

⁴⁹ Sade, Philosophie, 504-6 (my emphasis).

sexuality of his own creations - Juliette, Clairwil and Eugénie and women like them - was, above all, satisfying to his own erotic appetites. As we have seen in other cases of the eroticism of violence, the female characters in Sade's writing serve a fundamentally masculine purpose and this declaration, while seemingly addressed to women readers, has another audience and another motive in mind.

The most vicious or "sadistic" treatment in Sade's texts meanwhile is reserved for married women, and mothers in particular. In this perverted and essentially masculine world, the mother is seen as the one who would actively control and repress the sexual development of the young. She is considered in terms of the mother-castrator who must be destroyed if the child is to achieve his or her full potential⁵⁰. She has no power against the forces of the Sadian hero or heroine: set up as an enemy, her total defeat is a source of cruel pleasure. This is exemplified in Sade's La Philosophie dans le boudoir, where a young girl, Eugénie, is initiated both sexually and morally by a select group of sadian libertines, resulting in the torture, rape and genital mutilation of her mother, Madame de Mistival⁵¹ (who came to fetch her daughter out of seemingly *protective*

⁵⁰ Recent psychoanalytic theory suggests that *male* sexual development is founded on the negation of the mother (a response to the perceived threat of castration). See Elisabeth Badinter, XY: de l'identité masculine (Paris, Odile Jacob, 1992) 92 and Stoller, Masculin ou féminin (Paris, PUF, 1989) 310-311, cited in my introduction. "Normal" *female* sexual development also requires a rejection of the mother - but rather in her capacity as the girl-child's primary object of desire - and the substitution of a male object; the destruction (real or fantasised) of the mother by a female child is a less common occurrence in psychological development and a less frequent theme in literature. In Sade it seems the heroine is encouraged to remain open to all possible objects of desire - with the obvious exception of the mother.

⁵¹ All of this is performed by Eugénie herself, with the apparent approval of the girl's (absent) father - the patriarch and true law-maker - himself responsible for the

motives). The sewing up of her genitals amounts to the destruction of her sex, and specifically the annihilation of any further potential maternity; it is an (indirect) attack on the womb, which is itself - paradoxically - associated with death⁵². The violent rejection or "abjection" of the mother appears necessary to the "liberation" or fulfilment of her daughter's sexual identity; not only does it free Eugénie from her mother's so-called "repressive" or castrating influence, it ensures her access to libertine society and serves as a proof of initiation. However, while the majority of the violence in Sade's novels appears to serve primarily to excite or arouse sexually (equating violence with eroticism), matricidal violence appears to be fuelled by a real hatred⁵³, illustrating what

whipmarks on his wife's body.

⁵² Valerie Raoul talks of the relationship between the womb and the "tomb" in Distinctly Narcissistic: Diary Fiction in Québec (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993) 17.

⁵³ As mentioned, Sade has been credited with a certain "proto-feminism", in that he allows Juliette and her female friends a powerful and voracious sexuality and a strong sense of self, as well as for his refusal to see female sexuality purely in terms of the reproductive function, which provides a means of escape from the essentialist view of women as childbearers; his women characters are in control of their reproductive systems (Angela Carter, 1 and 36). However, his devaluation of the mothering function appears far from benevolent or feminist both in the highly "sadistic" treatment of Madame de Mistival and in the comments of Dolmancé: "Je ne suis pas encore consolé de la mort de mon père, et lorsque je perdis ma mère je fis un feu de joie...Uniquement formés du sang de nos pères, nous ne devons absolument rien à nos mères; elles n'ont fait d'ailleurs que se prêter dans l'acte, au lieu que le père l'a sollicité; le père a donc voulu notre naissance, pendant que la mère n'a fait qu'y consentir" (La Philosophie dans le boudoir, in Oeuvres complètes, Paris, Cercle du livre précieux, 1966), 391. This (due to a biological misinformation,) apparently contradicts Sade's recognition of women's choice to abort or keep a child, denying the possibility of the mother's own sexual volition, while also ignoring the possibility that the father may have been more interested in the act of procreation than its incidental (by)product.

Gilles Deleuze identifies as "the active negation of the mother"⁵⁴. The role of the mother - albeit negative in these texts - is to become increasingly significant in the work of later authors, especially those influenced by Sade.

The Legacy of Sadé and the Avant-garde.

Censored for obscenity for many years, Sade's writings have been reappraised, more recently, not for their pornographic content, but rather for their rejection of the concept of "natural laws", related to bourgeois hypocrisy and morality, as well as for their "unconstrained nature"⁵⁵. Sade's writings, in their challenge to order, authority and the concept of "normality" - especially with regard to sexuality - as well as in their excess, were a major influence on the writers and artists of the "avant-garde", in early twentieth-century France in particular. The *content* of Sade's novels was, therefore, ostensibly, put to one side, with the emphasis falling on the narrative style and use of language, as well as on the challenge to cultural codes. Robert Richard, for example, states that the importance of Sade:

en dehors des flagellations et des souffrances...[est] un ébranlement plus essentiel, plus déterminant...le silence du signifiant...où l'on n'entend jamais le son de cloche du signifié (...) Les oeuvres du Marquis de Sade représentent autant de façons de disqualifier la réalité...de ruiner les certitudes...d'introduire dans les représentations du monde une puissance d'ironisation⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Gilles Deleuze, Présentation de Sacher-Masoch (Paris, 10/18, 1967), 58-59, also quoted in Suleiman, 68.

⁵⁵ Rifelj, 20.

⁵⁶ Richard, "Entrevue", 125.

Roland Barthes, meanwhile, also sets aside (or glosses over?) the physical violence in Sade's work, saying that "le sadisme ne serait que le contenu grossier (vulgaire) du texte sadien"⁵⁷, choosing to read Sade's work according to a "principe de délicatesse" rather than as a "projet de violence"⁵⁸. However, the concept of violence is not totally dismissed, but is transformed, transferred to a different narrative level. As Barthes says:

Sade pratique couramment ce que l'on pourrait appeler la violence métonymique: il juxtapose...des fragments hétérogènes, appartenant à des sphères de langage ordinairement séparées par le tabou socio-moral⁵⁹.

This "metonymic violence" would also be practised by Barthes himself, in his own critical writings, such as S/Z⁶⁰, where he talks of doing violence to the text (using such expressions as "briser", "étoiler" "malmener" and "pulvériser"). Elsewhere, the fictions of Alain Robbe-Grillet - Le Voyeur, La Maison de rendez-vous and Projet pour une révolution à New York, for example - use explicit and brutal sexual violence as allegory, to illuminate a textual strategy. A similar treatment of violence is also evident in certain novels written in Québec; in Neige noire by Hubert Aquin, for instance, the text - which culminates in a brutal and highly sexual murder - is "raped", as is the reader⁶¹. The process of aberrant juxtaposition and its relationship to violence, meanwhile, which Barthes attributes to Sade, was also the foundation of surrealist writing and art, based on

⁵⁷ Barthes, Sade/Fourier/Loyola, 173.

⁵⁸ Barthes, Sade/Fourier/Loyola, 173.

⁵⁹ Barthes, Sade/Fourier/Loyola, 38.

⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, S/Z (Paris, Seuil, 1970).

⁶¹ Neige noire, (Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre, 1974). Both text and reader, as victims of "rape", seem to take on an implicit femininity.

the concept of *collage*. By juxtaposing disparate objects, the Surrealists also undermined the accepted moral, social and cultural codes surrounding any given concept or object and opened up new fields of reference, created out of the "conflict" caused by the bringing together or the recontextualization of heterogeneous elements⁶². However, while the overt and "vulgar" *physical* violence - the subject matter - of Sade's writing was ostensibly set aside by the artists of this period in order to focus on the textual form, the practice of juxtaposition, which involved tearing something from its original context, was, according to Robert Belton, "metaphorically realized as brutal sexual defloration"⁶³.

This represents an important shift or *glissement* in levels, and an equally important adjustment of focus and reading praxis, which became increasingly significant from the works of the English Modernists and the French *nouveaux romanciers* onwards. This shift entails an inversion of "traditional" narrative values, as the process of narration takes

⁶² This is apparent in the "proto-surrealist" Isidore Ducasse's famous simile: "as beautiful as the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissection table". According to Robert J. Belton, this phrase was interpreted in Freudian terms: "the coincidence of a man's phallic accessory and an unthinking domestic instrument on a "bed" designed for bloodletting was simply too potently, aggressively and violently sexual to be avoided". "Speaking with Forked Tongues: "Male Discourse in "Female" Surrealism" *Dada/Surrealism*, 18 (1990), 50-62, 51.

⁶³ Belton, 52. It is also interesting to note that much of the surrealist experimentation was performed on the bodies of women, or on representations of the female body (the photographs of Man Ray and the works of André Masson, for example) while Susan Suleiman mentions the headless figure of a woman, hung from the ceiling of the "Centre des Recherches Surréalistes" to inspire the "hommes inquiets, porteurs de secrets lourds" who came there. (Louis Aragon, quoted in Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme* (Paris, Seuil, 1964), 61-62 and in Suleiman, 20). Despite the revolutionary or liberating potential of the philosophy behind Surrealism, the group was almost exclusively masculine: some women were included in their role as "Muses" or catalysts but very few women were ever considered serious artists in their own right until much later in the movement's history.

precedence over what is narrated - or as the process of *énonciation* becomes more significant than the *énoncé* - and while fiction, according to Jean Ricardou, becomes "une métaphore de sa narration"⁶⁴. The pornographic content of Sade's work, for instance, is therefore seen as a metaphor for the subversion of language and of the reading process, while language, following the linguistic theories of Saussure, is no longer seen as the simple "disinterested" or "transparent" means of representation of "realist" fiction, but as a deceptively labyrinthine web of *signifiants*⁶⁵. The same has been said of the pornographic content of the works of Georges Bataille, himself greatly influenced by Sade and a major proponent of the "aesthetics of transgression", espoused by both the French Modernists and the Surrealists. However, while the sexual content of the works of both Sade and Bataille is ostensibly relegated to the "background", or is considered a vehicle for the signifier and the signifying process, there does appear to be an inevitable relationship between this conception of language (or of the writing process) and violence.

The challenge to language and to the coding or naming system which governs the structures serving as the basis for social coding and order, can be seen as an act of "literary terrorism" or in terms of an aesthetics of rupture. The question which must arise at this point, however, is why this revolutionary style of writing should so often entail what Ricardou refers to as "une thématique privilégiée"⁶⁶ of explicitly *sexual* violence

⁶⁴ Ricardou, Pour une théorie du nouveau roman (Paris, Seuil, 1971), 221.

⁶⁵ I do not mean to imply that Sade was the founder of this concept of language, rather that his work was re-evaluated by the forerunners of the avant-garde, whose work adopted this focus.

⁶⁶ Ricardou, 221.

and why the "textual" or "metonymic" violence and experimentation should (still) take place so often on the bodies of women. This observation is also made by Anne-Marie Dardigna in her study of the erotic French novel:

sous prétexte de recherche et de méthode de recherche, le viol du personnage féminin est devenu un simple avatar de fonctionnement du raisonnement et de l'écriture masculins⁶⁷.

The relationship between eroticism and textual or metonymic violence is considered by Julia Kristeva in an article on Antonin Artaud, where she says:

Toucher aux taboos de la grammaire - et peut-être aussi de l'arithmétique - c'est toucher à la recommandation sourde de la sexualité identificatoire: la révolution de langage est une traversée de la sexualité et de toutes les coagulations sociales (famille, sectes etc.) qui s'y collent⁶⁸.

Tampering with language, therefore, that "prison house" which controls our conceptualization of the world through its capacity to name, identify (and therefore constitute) "reality", is an overt challenge to that same naming, limiting process by which our world and its various (perceived) "Truths" - order, authority, gender and sexuality, for example - are defined and upheld. It is, in itself, a "transgression". Roland Barthes extrapolates on this idea in his essay on Bataille's pornographic novel L'Histoire de l'oeil:

Ainsi, à la transgression des valeurs, principe déclaré de l'érotisme - si elle ne le fonde - une transgression technique des formes du langage, car la métonymie n'est rien d'autre qu'un syntagme *forcé*, la violation d'une limite de l'espace signifiant; elle permet au niveau même du discours, une contre-

⁶⁷ Anne-Marie Dardigna, Les Châteaux d'Eros ou les infortunes du sexe des femmes, (Paris, Maspéro, 1982), 44.

⁶⁸ Julia Kristeva, "Le Sujet en procès, suite", Tel Quel 53 (1973) 17-38, 24.

division des objets, des usages, des sens, des espaces et des propriétés, qui est l'érotisme même...⁶⁹.

The eroticism inherent in the transgression of language becomes clearer if we consider Barthes' conceptualisation of the avant-garde text or "texte scriptible" and its treatment of language. In Le Plaisir du texte, for example, he points to a difference between *langage* - associated with the traditional realist novel, and *langue* - associated with the modern "writerly" text: the latter is a source of ludic "jouissance" which, when considered in its habitual context of "langue maternelle" evokes an apparently intrinsic relationship between language and the maternal body. Indeed, Barthes writes:

l'écrivain est quelqu'un qui joue avec le corps de sa mère ... pour le glorifier, l'embellir, ou pour le *dépecer*, le porter à la limite de ce qui du corps peut être reconnu⁷⁰.

In a resurrection of the Oedipal drama, modern writing becomes transgressive activity due to the incestuous - and so erotic - relationship of language/text with the mother's body. Once again, however, the female body is the object of male experimentation and perhaps violent manipulation. While the relationship between writer and language may have shifted, the status of "Woman" has not changed; with the feminisation of the text, the concept of gender-specific violence has simply transmogrified to a different (i.e. textual or perhaps meta-textual) context⁷¹.

⁶⁹ Roland Barthes, "La Métaphore de l'oeil", Essais Critiques (Paris, Seuil, 1964) 238-245, 244 (my emphasis).

⁷⁰ Roland Barthes, Le Plaisir du texte (Paris, Seuil, 1973) 60 (my emphasis).

⁷¹ As Susan Suleiman comments: "there will be no genuine renewal either in a theory of the avant-garde or in its practices, as long as every drama, whether textual or sexual, continues to be envisaged...in terms of a confrontation between an all-powerful father and a traumatised son, a confrontation staged across and over the body of the mother"

Elsewhere, in his consideration of the "texte de jouissance", Barthes talks of the eroticism of "fragmentation" - of text, of language and of meaning⁷². The relationship between this metaphoric concept and that of surrealist and Sadian juxtaposition and violence is clear, as the object "torn" from its context is brought into contact with other "fragments". The place where the edges meet, meanwhile, the place of "conflict", "les marges", is discussed by Jacques Derrida, in Eperons, where he considers "Woman" as the site of unknowable truth⁷³. Here Derrida focusses on the concept of "l'entre" or the "space between", full of secret promise and hidden truth: in a constant state of flux and indeterminacy, through its position of "mitoyenneté" and of being, simultaneously, both the sum of the two fragments together and yet neither, this shifting "space", through the obvious sexual connotation, is seen as "feminine"⁷⁴. Once again, then, there has been a major *glissement* which allows a metaphoric (or imaginary) female sexuality to become metonymically and unavoidably associated with textual violence, while "Woman" becomes, once more, the privileged site of textual experimentation and theory.

(87).

⁷² Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes (Paris, Seuil, 1975) and also in Le Plaisir du texte.

⁷³ Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/ Eperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche, bilingual edition, translated by Barbara Harlow (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁷⁴ Derrida uses the hymen, that elusive proof of female virginity, as a symbol or sign of the "in between" and of "truth": the hymen becomes a veil behind which lies "The Truth" which can only exist as long as it is veiled. The hymen is also seen as the "space between", in being the veil that separates inside and out and which is itself, at the same time, both internal and external, both restricting and allowing passage, the two states at one time.

This strategy offers few surprises. As I have attempted to show, the figure of "Woman as victim" is inscribed in Western culture and discourse, with women's bodies seen as the "ideal site for the crime"⁷⁵. This pattern has been endorsed by hundreds of years of art and literature, of social and cultural practices, and has more recently been rationalized to an extent by theories of psychology and psychoanalysis explaining patterns of violence perpetrated by men against women in terms of a reaction against the threat of castration, apparently represented by or incarnated in woman. Nevertheless, despite the sophistication of recent textual strategy, and the apparent challenge it offers to logocentric order, its actual subversion of the status quo with regard to the representation of women in literature is questionable. As Anne-Marie Dardigna concludes, despite the total freedom of the twentieth century writing subject to express desires, fantasies and perversions:

Quelles voix entend-on alors? Toujours celles des hommes. Et que disent-elles? Rien de nouveau: que les femmes sont dangereuses, qu'il faut les dominer et triompher de leur "chair" en les assimilant ou en les mettant à mort...en tout cas les supprimer.

Etranges fantasmes, étranges archaïsmes. Il se dit là sans doute une angoisse libérée qui s'exprime dans ce délire de pouvoir sur le corps de l'autre?

Il y a à travers lui une autre voix qui parle et qui, du fond des âges, crée ses liens; celle du vieil ordre moral du patriarcat, jamais encore déstabilisé⁷⁶.

⁷⁵ Alain Robbe-Grillet made this comment about the suitability of women's bodies as objects of violence in an interview for "Le Monde des lettres", Le Monde (22 septembre 1978), cited in Dardigna, 21.

⁷⁶ Dardigna, 312-13.

Indeed, male avant-garde writing, so closely linked to the transgression implicit in eroticism, seems to walk a very fine line between the transgression of social order and the reinforcement of that same (androcentric) order, because the very nature of that eroticism - which almost inevitably involves the violation of the female body - is itself dependent on Woman's position within androcentrism. As Suzanne Guerlac states, referring to Georges Bataille's work on the subject, "woman is at the centre of eroticism... because of her status as object of exchange"⁷⁷, thereby recalling the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss regarding the status of woman within patriarchal society⁷⁸. As an object in a male economy, as man's "thing", she can be fashioned in the very image of man's desire.

At this time, however, the victimisation of women in literature - by which I mean the portrayal of women as victims - and, inevitably, the interpretation of that portrayal - has once again undergone a facelift or a re-coding. Now, in addition to being the victim in terms of "plot", Woman becomes the site or the apparent victim of the "metonymic" violence done to the text. Woman is, at this point, a simple, objectified vehicle for male artistic experimentation and expression, or as Julia Kristeva writes:

Lieu d'occultation, ou de valorisation, la femme sera un pseudo-centre, un centre latent ou explicite, celui qu'on expose ostensiblement ou qu'on camoufle avec précaution pudique, le centre présent ou absent du discours

⁷⁷ Suzanne Guerlac, "Recognition by a Woman!: A Reading of Bataille's L'Erotisme", Yale French Studies 78 (1990) 90-105, 100.

⁷⁸ Lévi-Strauss, Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté (Paris, Mouton - Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1967) 73 and 76 respectively. Quoted in my introduction.

romanesque (psychologique) moderne, dans lequel l'homme cherche l'homme et s'y divinise, ou bien la femme veut se faire homme⁷⁹.

The representation or image of "Woman" in man-made art and literature, then, would seem often to have little to do with women, but is rather a metaphor frequently employed by the artists in their attempts to recreate the world and the object of their desires. "Woman", in art and writing from ancient mythology to (post)modern works, can be seen as an imaginary or idealized concept. Her flesh-and-blood "reality" evacuated, "Woman" has become a mere pretext or catalyst for representations in which she was and is implicated. She is a highly fetichised symbol which can be manipulated according to artistic and political practice and design and which has been coded or normalized within a masculine "grammar" as the "symbolic victim", defined in a discourse of violence. The physical and sexual violence and dismemberment done to the female body in much of Western art, therefore, takes place on the "metonymic level" described by Barthes, as that body is appropriated as a symbol, a *colonised* space in and on which artists could experiment and express themselves, a canvas on which they could paint their own image or a page on which to write their own fundamentally narcissistic and masculine discourse.

⁷⁹ Kristeva, Le Texte du roman: Approche sémiologique d'une structure discursive transformationnelle, (The Hague, Mouton, 1970), 160. (See also Miller, The Heroine's Text, 136).

Chapter Two

The Reign of the Mother: Violence in the Québec Novel

The literature produced over the last two centuries in Québec shows many similarities with the European tradition and also many divergencies: neither of these facts is surprising if we consider both the dominant heritage of the Québécois and their subsequent history of oppression and colonization. In terms of the theme of violence in Québec literature, again, there are several shared tendencies, as well as a number of subtle - and not so subtle - idiosyncratic variants. Within the Québec corpus, patterns of violence are certainly very common and also extremely evident. Many of the novels emanating from Québec, from the earliest days of writing through to the present, are littered with the corpses of female characters. There are various shifts in the types of violence depicted as inflicted on women, with some particularly striking developments taking place in the novels of the 1960's - a time which also marks a turning point in Québec's history. In order to differentiate between the European and Québec traditions of literary violence, this chapter will consider the social and historical background of Québec (focussing on the position of women), in relation to the evolution of French Canadian literature and of the novel in particular. To this end, the chapter is divided into three sections corresponding roughly to the three principal periods in the evolution of French-Canadian and Québécois literature, again, with regard to the fate of women. Section one, "The Birthing" attempts to establish a socio-historical context for the emergence of the protracted and somewhat painful beginnings of a literature from which

women, as writers and as characters, are initially largely absent¹. The second, "The Mother" considers the unsullied and revered figure which dominated the literary scene for many years. Finally, "The Change" discusses the period during which the Mother's usefulness came under scrutiny, her character undergoing a transformation, while the respect and dignity she had always held is trampled underfoot, and Woman is reincarnated as the element to be subdued during a time of intense social and literary revolution.

The Birthing: the beginnings to 1916.

Literary production was slow to begin in Québec. Out of an oral tradition of legends and storytelling of the feats of the first settlers, of explorers, the clearing of the land, backwoodsmen and fur-trappers and dealings with the Native peoples, a rather unlikely first novel, Le Chercheur de trésors ou L'Influence d'un livre was written by Philippe Aubert de Gaspé (*fils*) in 1837, already over two hundred years after the establishment of the French colony². Between this date and 1860, which marks a significant "point de repère" in the literature of French Canada, publications were several and various, including written collections of traditional "contes", such as those by Louis

¹ There were women writing at this time, however - chroniclers and letter-writers such as Marie Guyart (de l'Incarnation), Marie Morin and Elisabeth Bégon - but their texts are not widely read today.

² Aubert de Gaspé's novel tells the story of a man obsessed with the promise of wealth through alchemy and magic. The novel was the first of a number of stories imitating French romantic literature and literature of the imaginary - far from the idealistic, didactic literature which would soon be promoted by the Abbé Casgrain.

Fréchette and Honoré Beaugrand, as well as stories of colonisation, most of which were closely relevant or familiar to the lives of the *habitants* - and today are considered unreadable, their language and style flawed and heavy, their content parochial.

The evolution of the French Canadian novel remained arduous, hampered by a number of factors. First and perhaps most significantly, literary production was closely surveyed and controlled by the Roman Catholic Church; even after the British conquest, the Church maintained control over the spiritual and moral education and well-being of the French-Canadian people, claiming to protect them against the assimilating forces of the Protestant British, while collaborating with the English in order to maintain the power and presence of Catholicism in the "New World". The potential subject matter was thus limited, as was the freedom of expression of any would-be novelist. At the same time, there was in Québec, as there had been in Europe, a general suspicion of the novel as a genre, still seen as a potential threat to the moral well-being of its readers. As a result, many of the few early novels are preceded with excuses and denials of their own form and fiction in which the authors belittle their own project³, so that, as Gilles Marcotte comments: "le roman naît, au Canada français, dans sa propre négation"⁴ - a

³ See for example Les Anciens Canadiens, (1863) by Philippe Aubert de Gaspé (*père*) - a retelling of many of the traditional stories, written into a "novel" (the term is used loosely) about the friendship between a young Scot and the family of the Seigneur d'Haberville before and after the battle of the Plains of Abraham (Montréal, Fides, 1985). The novel combines the two literary trends of realism and the adventure story occurring in Québec at the time (realist fiction would later triumph over the "littérature d'imagination").

⁴ Gilles Marcotte, Une littérature qui se fait: essais critiques sur la littérature canadienne-française, 1962 (Montréal, HMH, 1968) 12.

practice which must, necessarily, have had a somewhat restrictive, even negative effect on the potential reader, as on the apologetic authors. Moreover, there was a certain consciousness of an inferiority or a poverty in the written language of what was now called French (or Lower) Canada, as well as an awareness of unfavourable comparisons with the well-established and mature body of literature from France, from which French authors could draw and on which they could build. As Réjean Beaudoin notes in Le Roman québécois: "Arthur Buies parlait d'un peuple "sans classe instruite" et Octave Crémazie d'une "société d'épiciers""⁵, while the Durham Report of 1839 described the French-Canadian people in an extremely pejorative fashion:

There can hardly be conceived a nationality more destitute of all that can invigorate and elevate a people, than that which is exhibited by the descendants of the French in Lower Canada, owing to their retaining their peculiar language and manners. They are a people with no history and no literature⁶.

Evidently, a body of national literature could serve to prove such critics wrong⁷. This national literature would reflect the cultural difference of Québec from that of its now-separated parent, France, so that French-Canadian writers would not simply be seen as

⁵ Réjean Beaudoin, Le Roman québécois (Montréal, Boréal, 1991), 25.

⁶ Lord Durham's Report on the Affairs of British North America, 1912, Sir Charles Lucas (ed), 2 (New York, Augustus M. Kelly, 1970) 294.

⁷ Published before the famous Report, the first novel by Aubert de Gaspé (*filz*), was apparently written in the belief that his country could be served by such a contribution to the beginnings of a national literature, which would, in turn, give a sense of identity and of culture to a (by now) colonised people. The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, edited by William Toye (Toronto, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1983) 594.

"des écrivains français égarés sur les bords du Saint-Laurent"⁸, but as members of a distinct and literate culture. It would serve to strengthen that culture, while helping to define the specificity of the French Canadian identity.

One of the chief promoters of such a national literature was the Abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, who was among the founders of the first Canadian literary review, Les Soirées canadiennes (1860). Under Casgrain's influence, however, literary production was, increasingly, taken over by the Catholic Church and judged according to its religious or moral quality rather than according to any intrinsic artistic or literary value⁹. Also under his agency and that of the clergy as a whole, Québec was dominated by the Catholic ideology of "messianism", a vision of "une utopie cléricalo-nationaliste"¹⁰, which already had a hold in French Canada and would mark French-Canadian culture and literature for about a century. As the sense of identity of the "Canadiens" was threatened, making them *Canayens*, inferiorised by the process of colonisation, any degree of control or power was taken from them; a desire to return to the traditional or "refuge" values (agricultural and Catholic) of La Nouvelle France prior to the arrival of the British,

⁸ Camille Roy, Essais sur la littérature canadienne (Québec, Librairie Garneau, 1907), 352, cited in Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires du Québec, 2, 1900-1939, dir. Maurice Lemire (Montréal, Fides, 1980) xvii.

⁹ See Maurice Lemire, "L'Instance critique", in L'Histoire littéraire. Théories, méthodes, pratiques, dir. Clément Moisan (Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1989) 249-270, 254.

¹⁰ Serge Gagnon, "L'Histoire de Mère Marie de L'Incarnation", Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires du Québec, 1, 320, quoted in Réjean Beaudoin, Naissance d'une littérature: Essai sur le messianisme et les débuts de la littérature canadienne-française (1850-1890) (Montréal, Boréal, 1989) 34.

offered a certain sense of security and belonging¹¹. It was a reactionary ideology, as ideologue Philippe Masson's comment "rétrograder c'est avancer" suggests¹² and as Réjean Beaudoin explains:

Le programme social du règne chrétien consiste donc à lire la réalité contemporaine sur le modèle d'un passé transmis par la tradition. La visée historique de l'ancien empire colonial de la France en Amérique fait intégralement partie du projet national canadien-français¹³.

The people themselves, meanwhile, were seen as a martyred race with a sacred mission.

According to this thesis:

le peuple vaincu en 1760 était invité à croire à sa survivance miraculeuse et à sa vocation providentielle¹⁴.

Under the influence of messianism, the people of French Canada were encouraged to see themselves as a "chosen race" whose day of glory and freedom would come, as long as they suffered in silence and did God's will according to Church doctrine. As Pierre Maheu describes it:

Dieu avait de grands desseins pour ce petit peuple; nous allions porter en Amérique-du-Nord-protestante-et-pécheresse, en France-pays-de-mission, et dans l'univers entier...notre message civilisateur et convertisseur, français

¹¹ This process of a collective "regression" to a mythical utopic state prior to the destruction brought about by colonisation is typical to colonised societies as Albert Memmi demonstrated in his essay, Portrait du colonisé suivi de Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés? (Montréal, Hurtubise HMH, 1972).

¹² Le Canada-français et la Providence (Québec, 1875) 16, quoted in Beaudoin, Naissance d'une littérature, 40.

¹³ Beaudoin, Naissance d'une littérature, 45.

¹⁴ Beaudoin, Le Roman québécois, 28.

et chrétien. Ce monde paternaliste avait des ambitions messianiques démesurées¹⁵.

This ideology and the hope that it offered served effectively as a compensation for the narcissistic injury inflicted on a colonised and dispossessed people, giving their lives and their faith legitimacy and their history a mythical grandeur¹⁶.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that literary production in French Canada, for many years did (and could do) little other than reflect and conform to Catholic doctrine and promote a nostalgic vision of a mythical "Golden Age" of the *habitant* origins of the colony, prior to the Conquest: hence the number of novels which glorified the family and the simple, moral, rural life, presenting townlife as suspect, if not downright evil, and rendering the sufferings of the first colonist-martyrs a virtue¹⁷. As early as 1846 Patrice Lacombe's novel La Terre paternelle had evoked the sacred relationship between the *habitants* and their lands. Known as the first of many *romans de la terre*, Lacombe's novel traced the fate of a farmer who passed his land on prematurely to his eldest son, thus betraying his relationship with the land - the disastrous consequences serve as a moral lesson. The land itself, while being the source of life to those that worked it and who were dependent on its continued fertile productivity for

¹⁵ Pierre Maheu, "L'Oedipe colonial", Parti pris 1.9-11 (été 1964) 19-29, reprinted in Un parti pris révolutionnaire (Montréal, Parti pris, 1983) 27-39, 29.

¹⁶ François-Xavier Garneau's Histoire du Canada (1845-8) was intended for precisely this purpose. As Valerie Raoul comments, it "transform[ed] the pre-conquest period of La Nouvelle France into a lost golden age of imaginary independence and exemplary heroic exploits. Defeat was turned into victory". Distinctly Narcissistic: Diary Fiction in Québec (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 29.

¹⁷ Réjean Beaudoin identifies the significant theme of "la souffrance" in Le Roman québécois, 30-34.

their survival, came to represent the *habitants* themselves, in all that gave them their specific identity - their language, their religion, their cultural background, as well as the traditional and ideological values that went hand in hand with that background; a betrayal of the land was thus a betrayal of the French-Canadian "essence". Antoine Gérin-Lajoie's novel, Jean Rivard, le défricheur (1862), reinforced that lesson through the example of its tireless hero, who succeeds in clearing an area of land for settlement and farming, thereby showing the rewards of the hard labour, struggle and suffering that were the lot of the *habitant* farmer and his family¹⁸. As much as sixty years later, several collections of nostalgic essays were written, still portraying the "good old days". Propos canadiens (1912) by Camille Roy, for example, as well as the two works by Frère Marie-Victorin, Récits laurentiens (1919) and Croquis laurentiens (1920), still represented Québec as a conservative, primarily rural, exclusively Catholic and highly devout society. Functioning as much as reactions against modern literary practice and thought as against the threat of the increasing urbanisation and modernisation of Québec¹⁹, these texts, like almost all others written during this period, attempted to preserve, or rather resuscitate, a traditional way of life from the onslaught of progress.

Books deemed contrary to Catholic values, and therefore subversive and immoral, were liable to condemnation or suppression. Albert Laberge's text La Scouine (1918), for example, inverts the idealistic presentation of the rural lifestyle of the *roman de la terre*

¹⁸ At the same time, Jean Rivard succeeds in stemming the tide of emigration - seen as desertion and the draining of the colony - from French Canada to the States.

¹⁹ Toye, 597.

and describes, in naturalistic terms, the senseless, thankless and sterile existence of a rural community, resigned to its fate. Needless to say, owing to its subversion of the messianic ideals promoted by the acceptable voice of French Canada, Laberge's text was not well received: the first extract was condemned and La Scouine was finally published privately for the author's friends. Those books which were found to be particularly insurgent and openly treated "dangerous" issues (including challenging the Catholic faith or discussing sexuality and individual freedom), along with "seditious" texts from other countries, were placed on the Roman Catholic "Index librorum prohibitorum", with readers and suppliers under threat of excommunication²⁰. Jean-Charles Harvey's polemical novel, Les Demi-Civilisés, received such a fate on its publication in 1934, in response to its open challenge to the hold of the ultramontanists over the French-Canadian people²¹; it was condemned by Cardinal Jean-Marie-Rodrigue Villeneuve who forbade the publication, reading, selling, possession, translation and even discussion of the book²². A similar reception was reserved for Rodolphe Girard's Marie Calumet

²⁰ This situation is satirized in Gérard Bessette's novel Le Libraire, in which the bookseller passes on forbidden books with a certain lack of "discretion". (Montréal, Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1960). The Index was finally discontinued in 1966.

²¹ Jean-Charles Harvey, Les Demi-Civilisés, 1934, coll. 10/10 (Montréal, Quinze, 1982). The narrator of Les Demi-Civilisés, Max Hubert, protests: "On vous dit parfois qu'il vous est défendu de penser librement. Les auteurs d'un décret aussi infâme sont grandement coupables. On ne saurait mieux s'y prendre pour tuer la valeur individuelle au nom d'on ne sait quelle médiocrité collective qu'on encourage au seul bénéfice d'une caste, sous le faux semblant de l'ordre, de la tradition et de l'autorité". Quoted in Beaudoin, Le Roman québécois, 36.

²² See the section on Les Demi-Civilisés in Lemire (ed.), Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires du Québec, 2, 347.

(1904), which made the - apparently blasphemous - mistake of interspersing passages from the Bible with its otherwise inoffensive tale of life in a country presbytery²³.

The literary institution in Québec, led by the clerics, therefore served as a censor, while the literature itself was restricted to a form of propaganda, promoting and valorising a nostalgic and nationalistic vision of the French-Canadian lifestyle and religion. As one newspaper succinctly stated:

Les bons livres nous ramènent aux vertus simples et naïves du passé; nous consolent des vicissitudes du présent et consolident le grand principe de la famille, cette pierre du foyer domestique, base de la société tout entière²⁴.

The effect of such an attitude and ideology on the quality of literature produced and on the creativity of the writers or potential writers in Québec could and should, perhaps, have been foreseen. However, as Maurice Lemire states:

C'est ainsi que, par plus d'un demi-siècle d'efforts, les censeurs ont pu asceptiser le milieu littéraire et culturel au point de le rendre presque stérile²⁵.

Réjean Beaudoin says of the early writings from Québec:

C'est une écriture pauvre, censurée, placée sous la haute surveillance d'une instance idéologique qui veille à l'orthodoxie du patriotisme comme

²³ Girard's novel was finally reissued in 1946. The offending biblical passages were from Le Cantique des cantiques, a text which Hubert Aquin would cite at length in his novel, L'Antiphonaire (1969), discussed in my chapter 4.

²⁴ Figaro, "Le Petit Courrier de Montréal" Album littéraire et musical de la Revue canadienne, 3, 1843, 364. Quoted in Lemire, 263.

²⁵ Maurice Lemire, dir, "Introduction", Dictionnaire des Oeuvres littéraires du Québec, t2, xiii.

au plus précieux des biens, quand il ne reste justement aucun autre bien²⁶.

This inevitable consequence of a restrictive censoring practice would be rectified after a slow and troubled start, by the appearance of texts such as Un Homme et son péché by Claude-Henri Grignon, Trente arpents by Ringuet, Le Survenant by Germaine Guèvremont, Gabrielle Roy's Bonheur d'Occasion, and André Langevin's Poussière sur la ville, along with the novels of the modernist period which occurred in Québec in the 1960's at the time of the "Révolution tranquille"²⁷.

The Mother: Laura Chapdelaine to Rose-Anna Lacasse.

One of the constants of the traditional, nationalistic culture and context until the 1960's was an idealisation of Woman as Mother - a tendency well documented in both literary and socio-historical studies. Woman's sacred duty under messianism began with the much lauded (and required) act of childbirth, by which the colony of La Nouvelle France would be peopled and the Catholic Church would have an ever-increasing flock of followers: the only acceptable alternative to this for women was the religious seclusion of the convents²⁸. To this end, pressure was - successfully - exerted on men and women

²⁶ Le Roman québécois, 25.

²⁷ These later novels, which include works by Hubert Aquin, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Marie-Claire Blais, among others, will be the focus of the following chapters.

²⁸ Laure Conan's novel, Angéline de Montbrun (1881), tells the story of one young woman who refuses the role of wife and mother after the death of her too-well-loved father, and an accident which leaves her disfigured and her fiancé less in love; Angéline's ostensibly devout seclusion links her to the figure of the Woman-martyr. Her friend Mina chooses the convent, thereby also refusing motherhood. Marta Danylewycz states that religious life offered women "a viable and esteemed alternative to

alike, largely through the influence of the Catholic Church, to marry and reproduce. As Marie Lavigne and Yolande Pinard observe:

le taux de fécondité est un des plus élevés qui ait jamais été mesuré: entre 1700 et 1730, les femmes ont en moyenne 8.4 enfants *vivants*²⁹.

Procreation was for many years considered both a sacred and patriotic duty, with families of upwards of 10 children by no means uncommon, despite periods of extreme poverty and high infant mortality.

Woman's traditional domain was the household, providing and preparing food and caring for her husband and the many children - except when she was needed to assist the menfolk in clearing and cultivating the land. As Jean Le Moyne describes her:

la mère canadienne-française se dresse en calicot, sur son "prélart", devant un poêle et une marmite, un petit sur la hanche gauche, une grande cuiller à la main droite, une grappe de petits aux jambes et un autre petit dans le ber de la revanche, là, à côté de la boîte à bois³⁰.

She was hard-working and skilled, devout, infinitely fertile, wise, self-sacrificing and an endless source of nurturing strength: a reincarnation of sorts, a distinctly French-Canadian re-coding of Mary, the Virgin Mother. However, just as the image of the Virgin served as a political and religious symbol in Europe, but had little correlation to the reality of women's life there, the importance of the figure of the mythical Mother in

motherhood in a society that seemed to value lay women solely as procreative beings" (Taking the Veil: an Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Québec, 1840-1920, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1987, 106). Danylewycz adds that the Sisters often had career opportunities denied lay women.

²⁹ Marie Lavigne and Yolande Pinard, Les Femmes dans la société québécoise: aspects historiques (Montréal, Boréal Express, 1977) 10, (my emphasis).

³⁰ Jean Le Moyne, "La Femme dans la civilisation canadienne-française", in Convergences (Montréal, HMH, 1961), 69-100, 71.

Québec lies not so much in its accuracy of representation³¹, as in its power over the imagination and its ability to control women's behaviour. Indeed, after her death the Mother became a saintly and mythified figure whose exaggerated qualities made of her a model to be emulated and a powerful, daunting and unattainable example to those who would succeed her. This idealised, mythical and timeless figure dominated the imagination of the population of French Canada and served as the symbol of a primarily Catholic ideal. Her identity is intrinsically related to the (Mother) earth, on which the *habitant* tradition and messianic refuge values were founded. Like the earth, she was "constante, éternellement virgine et chaque année maternelle"³², pure, yet life-giving and, like Nature, she was seen to wield considerable power - an aspect of her persona which would become more apparent, and more troubling, in later novels.

Earlier literature from Québec, in particular the *roman de la terre*, is filled with the spirit and images of the mythical Mother³³. Louis Hémon's novel of 1916, Maria

³¹ Indeed, as early as 1881, there were already considerable numbers of women among the factory workforce, for example (their number would increase drastically after the Second World War), a fact which questions the validity of the Mother stereotype. (Lavigne and Pinard, 18). There were also a number of women in La Nouvelle France renowned for various exploits or for social and political responsibilities: educated women such as Marie de l'Incarnation, Marguerite Bourgeoys and Jeanne Mance, among others, were instrumental in the direction and development of the country, particularly in educational and medical matters. Again, the validity and accuracy of the stereotype is questionable, as is its foundation.

³² Ringuet, Trente arpents, 1938 (Montréal: Fides, 1966), 165-66.

³³ There are many studies of the role of the mother in French-Canadian literature: Soeur Saint-Marie-Éléuthère's text, La Mère dans le roman canadien-français (Ottawa, Université d'Ottawa, 1964), which praises the figure of the Mother, is among the better known. See also Janine Boynard-Frot, Un matriarcat en progrès: Analyse sémiotique de romans canadiens-français, 1860-1960 (Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1982) and Le Collectif Clio, L'Histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles

Chapdelaine³⁴ (generally considered to be the first "classic" of French-Canadian literature, albeit written by a Frenchman), became a "measuring stick" for much of the literature which followed. The novel presents the portrait of the life of a model *habitant* family, and reinforces the destiny of the French-Canadian people through its heroine's ultimately conservative choice of husband and future: Maria chooses between her two remaining suitors (the third, and perhaps her favourite, being dead) the one with whom she may best emulate the role of the pioneering wife (and procreator), thereby following in the footsteps of her own long-suffering mother, whom the hardships of this life have effectively killed. She is seen to be doing her duty according to the ideological values of her community and thereby ensuring the survival of her people: the rewards will apparently come in the "next world". Conversely, the daughter-in-law in Le Survenant³⁵, Phonsine, is patronised and belittled because she is childless, unskilled in the kitchen and does not measure up to the memory of her (also dead) mother-in-law, who is described and remembered in terms of the "Mother" stereotype. The ever-determined Rose-Anna, meanwhile, shines out in Bonheur d'occasion as the quintessential mother-martyr, ready to sacrifice herself for the sake of her children and husband³⁶.

(Montréal, Quinze, 1982) for information on the "real women" of Québec.

³⁴ Louis Hémon, Maria Chapdelaine, 1924 (Montréal, Fides, 1946).

³⁵ Germaine Guèvremont, Le Survenant, 1945 (Montréal, Fides, 1974).

³⁶ Gabrielle Roy, Bonheur d'occasion, 1945 (Montréal, Beauchemin, 1970).

Un Homme et son péché, by Claude-Henri Grignon³⁷ and Trente arpents, by Ringuet (Philippe Panneton) offer two of the most prototypical images of the Ideal Woman, yet they each adopt her for different ends: they are both also, on one level at least, typical *romans de la terre* and faithful representations of the *habitant* community. The first, Un homme et son péché, focusses on the miser, Séraphin Poudrier, whose character owes much to Balzac's miser Gobseck. The novel follows the way in which Séraphin's avarice affects those around him, serving as a condemnation of capitalism³⁸. His long-suffering and badly used wife, Donalda, meanwhile, is the model of Christian virtue and conjugal obedience (starving herself while waiting for the man who uses her as an unpaid servant) and as such she is also the consummate Victim. Séraphin's sadistic mistreatment of her in life - depriving her of food and also of the children who would, in this context, give value to her life by making of her the formidable Mother, working her to death and refusing to send for a doctor until it is too late to save her life - is reiterated after her death, when her corpse is forced into a coffin too short for her, breaking her legs in the process, all in the name of economy. As the "Ideal Woman",

³⁷ Claude-Henri Grignon, Un Homme et son péché, 1933, (Montréal: Stanké, 1984).

³⁸ Although he may appear parodic, his sinful passion so obsessive that he dies trying to save his beloved gold from a fire, Séraphin personifies the parsimoniousness which was traditionally held as a virtue among the *habitants*: the harshness of the lives of the colonizing families - battling short growing seasons and long unforgiving winters - made frugality an essential and cherished virtue. As Grignon himself explains: "La misère, de la viande sauvage à manger, et le premier blé qu'on récolte paraît plus précieux que l'or. On le cache dans le grenier en prévision de l'avenir. L'économie est devenue non pas seulement une qualité, mais une vertu (...) De l'économie à l'avarice, le pas est vite franchi" (Grignon, "Préface", Un Homme et son péché, i-xxvii, xvi). Here, indeed, his frugality taken to an extreme, Séraphin lives a dry, bitter and thankless life in which saving and profit have become ends in themselves.

Donalda is the victim of Séraphin's vice, her fate serving to condemn his obsession, while she herself becomes a saint, a martyred example and a warning of the perils of avarice - a warning obviously wasted on Séraphin and which, as a result, is all the more poignant³⁹.

Trente arpents, meanwhile, challenges the preeminence of messianism and, by extension the supremacy of the Catholic Church; thanks to a certain subtlety and sophistication, however, it was able to avoid the wrath of the censors. Here, the discourse and philosophy of the *roman de la terre* are manipulated: the rural setting, the *habitant* community, characters and dialect so well-loved of the regionalists and the moralists alike are present - as is the Ideal Woman - all of which lends an appearance of conservatism. However, written during the economic crisis of the 1930's, at a time when the glorious days of the messianic vision were beginning to seem somewhat incongruous next to the day-to-day reality of the majority of French Canadians⁴⁰, Trente arpents adopts the codes of the *roman de la terre* in order to offer, in place of the reassurance

³⁹ Looking today at Donalda's function in the text, however, it seems that, in addition to being the victim of Séraphin's avarice, she is also the victim of a religion and tradition which see her a prisoner of her marriage vows and allow her no escape. Donalda becomes a saintly figure through her martyrdom and her adherence to a faith-imposed duty and is thus rewarded for her suffering by a "promotion" to a status above humankind. Yet the sacrifice of this young, strong woman, well-loved by all but her husband, to the strictures of a demanding faith and tradition today appears senseless, cruel and, in a context where frugality is of the essence, all the more shockingly wasteful.

⁴⁰ As Pierre Maheu comments: "Entre la réalité quotidienne du Montréalais baignant dans le français, traversant dans la misère et la colère la Crise économique des années 30, et le mythe du retour à la terre et de la mission civilisatrice, la distance était trop grande" (31).

and reassertion of the values of Maria Chapdelaine, a realist picture of dispossession and decay.

The Moisan family, the "ideal family unit" of Trente arpents, crumbles progressively throughout the novel, as the world around them becomes increasingly modern. The first-born son, Oguinase becomes a priest and dies a young man, while the prettiest of the daughters, Lucinda, moves to the town and earns her living through questionable means, and the third son, Ephrem, leaves for the States, seeing no future for himself in Québec. Meanwhile, Euchariste, the patriarch, whose life is the very model of that of the *habitant* farmer, ends his days as a night-watchman at a garage in the States, having been forced to leave the remains of his beloved "trente arpents" in the hands of his oldest remaining son and heir, in a continuation of the merciless and unsparing cycle which had earlier made him a landowner himself.

Euchariste's wife, Alphonsine, is the epitome of Jean Le Moyne's description of the "Mother". In her, Euchariste recognizes the versatility and tirelessness of the ideal Woman, as described earlier. In considering his marital prospects,

il savait fort bien ce qu'elle pourrait lui donner: forte et râblée, pas regardante à l'ouvrage, elle saurait à la fois conduire la maison et l'aider aux champs à l'époque de la moisson. De visage avenant, bien tournée de sa personne, elle lui donnerait des gars solides...(17).

Meanwhile, once Alphonsine has "given" her husband "his" first son and thus proved her worth, Euchariste calls her "sa mère", an honourable title referring to her relationship to their children:

comme les paysans de nos campagnes dénomment leur épouse féconde sans jamais lui donner d'autre titre que celui-là qui rappelle leur rôle suprême (48).

It is this "supreme role" which is, finally, the death of her: Alphonsine succumbs about halfway through the novel (and, therefore halfway through the life of her husband, and of her own "expected" life), during her thirteenth childbirth.

Like Donalda, Alphonsine appears to be the very template from which the image of the Mother was created - a soul-sister to Maria Chapdelaine - and yet the fate of the family in Ringuet's novel casts doubt on the sincerity of the text as a *roman de la terre*, undermining the reassurance of the genre, and with it the Mother figure herself. Trente arpents plays on the constructs of the ideological text, and is written from a critical distance which enables it to depict and explore the more pragmatic and immediate consequences of the traditional and anachronistic lifestyle, as well as the future of the French-Canadian people, still promised by messianism.

While the two novels were written from different ideological perspectives (Grignon's novel is fundamentally conservative, while Ringuet's is radical), in each case the values and the ideology of the text are represented in no small way by the heroine - carefully depicted as an Ideal, in terms of an esteemed cultural stereotype - and her fate. Each woman dies as a logical consequence of the role she dutifully plays, as do the majority of "Mothers" in similar literature from Québec. This phenomenon, which amounts to an immolation of women, is underlined by Patricia Smart in Ecrire dans la maison du père, where she speaks of:

Toutes les mères mortes du roman de la terre - la mère d'Angéline de Montbrun, Laura Chapdelaine, l'épouse de Menaud, Alphonsine Moisan, Mathilde Beauchemin et bien d'autres...leurs voix tues faisant irruption dans le texte culturel québécois à travers le cri délirant proféré par

l'épouse parfaite, Donalda Poudrier, au moment de sa mort: "J'ai soif! Je brûle...On m'a tuée...M'man! M'man!"⁴¹.

Donalda dies childless, the victim of her sadistic husband's obsession (victim also of her domestic obedience, as well as of the system which requires that obedience), while Alphonsine dies through the exhaustion of repeated pregnancies, both the emblem of her success as a Woman and the cause of her death.

Literature in Québec prior to 1945, saturated with messianic discourse, presented women with this idealised, mythical stereotype, which served in turn to shape their own image of themselves, as well as their ambitions or desires, moulding them into a mental straightjacket of culture, tradition and societal expectation. Not restricted to literature, this figure served, in part, as a means of controlling women, keeping them in the place assigned them by a male-dominated society, led by a male-dominated religion. Condemnation often followed for those who failed to meet the stringent demands of such a system. Such control is hinted at in Trente arpents, on the occasion of a visit by Oguinase, the priest, when

la maison tout entière prenait quelque chose de sacerdotal, un peu de cette atmosphère des presbytères où les femmes se sentent diminuées, comme le veut l'Eglise (166).

Thanks to the tenacity of this particular representation of Woman - which reigned for around a hundred years in Québec - the social position or status of women in Québec changed little until at least the middle of this century. Women in Québec were denied the right to vote provincially until 1940 - 22 years after the rest of Canadian

⁴¹ Patricia Smart, Ecrire dans la maison du père: l'émergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec (Montréal, Québec/Amérique, 1988) 21.

women - and first voted in the elections of 1944⁴². Women's suffrage was won in Québec, as in Europe, amid accusations of its being "unnatural" and warnings of the dangers of women's liberation, as ostensibly demonstrated in other countries which, as a "direct result" of feminism, were troubled by "des ivrognesses, des filles-mères, des divorcées et des faiseuses d'anges"⁴³. Henri Bourassa, for example, warned that with the evolution of feminism, Woman would become

la femme-électeur, qui engendra bientôt la femme- *cabaleur*, la femme-*télégraphe*, la femme-*souteneur* d'élections, puis la femme-député, la femme-sénateur, la femme-avocat, enfin pour tout dire en un mot, la femme-homme, ce monstre-hybride et répugnant qui tuera la femme-mère et la femme-*femme*⁴⁴.

Bourassa, among others, wrote a number of articles on the role of women and why they should be denied the "right" to vote. Basing his arguments largely on biological essentialism, Bourassa claimed that a woman's place was as childbearer:

La principale fonction de la femme est et restera - quoi que disent et quoi que fassent, ou ne fassent pas, les suffragettes - la maternité, la sainte et féconde maternité, qui fait véritablement de la femme l'égale de l'homme et, à maintes égards, sa supérieure⁴⁵.

⁴² Michèle Jean, ed., Québécoises du 20^e siècle: les étapes de la libération féminine au Québec, 1900-1974 (Montréal, Quinze, 1977), 38-41.

⁴³ Henri Bourassa, quoted in Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, "Henri Bourassa et la question des femmes" (in Lavigne and Pinard, 109-124) - to which Trofimenkoff replies, not without a hint of irony: "Bien sûr, aucune de ces viles créatures n'existait au Québec!" 111.

⁴⁴ Henri Bourassa, "Le Désarroi des cerveaux - Triomphe de la démocratie", Le Devoir, 28 mars 1918, 1. Quoted in Jean, 195 (original emphasis).

⁴⁵ Henri Bourassa, "Le "Droit" de voter - La Lutte des sexes - Laisserons-nous avilir nos femmes?", Le Devoir, 30 mars 1918, 1. Quoted in Jean, 197.

However, this superiority was restricted to specific qualities in women, as Sénateur Laurent-Olivier David pointed out:

Supérieure à l'homme par la délicatesse du coeur et de l'esprit, elle lui est inférieure pour toutes choses qui exigent de la vigueur corporelle et intellectuelle⁴⁶.

David continued that Woman, as "reine et gardienne du foyer...devait demeurer dans les limites imposées par la Providence" and that if she attempted to surpass those limits, she would become "un astre sorti de son orbite, une plante, une fleur arrachée à son milieu naturel; un être déclassé"⁴⁷ - thereby apparently ignoring the fact that many women had left the kitchen and the nursery long before⁴⁸.

Woman's place was therefore seen to be dictated by biologically essentialist as well as divine forces, and, while well enough able to bring up and educate her sons, she was not considered competent to deal with those same sons once grown men in their own world. Finally, J-J Denis stated categorically that:

Les Saintes Ecritures, la théologie, la philosophie chrétienne, l'histoire, l'anatomie, la physiologie, l'économie politique et la psychologie féminine

⁴⁶ Laurent-Olivier David, "Le Féminisme", Mélanges historiques et littéraires (Montréal, Beauchemin, 1917) 329, quoted in Jean, 25.

⁴⁷ David, 328, quoted in Jean, 13.

⁴⁸ This was in spite of the "Ecoles Ménagères" promoted by Duplessis in order to perpetuate woman's domesticity. These schools taught "domestic science" or "home economics" to girls only in single sex schools; the level of *academic* education and achievement was considerably lower than in regular schools. Lavigne and Pinard, 390-394.

s'accordent à reconnaître que la place de la femme est non pas l'arène politique mais le foyer⁴⁹.

Evidently, many of the arguments against women's suffrage were imbued with the values of messianism which would - had such a thing been possible - have returned the society to what it had been one hundred years before, to an order which bore little relation to contemporary reality. The reasons given for opposing women's liberation were nostalgic and reactionary, attempting through upholding and preserving the glorious ensign of the Mother to hold on to, or re-establish, the traditional values and lifestyle of Catholic ideology.

While the type of attitude displayed above and the subsequent control its effects are in no way restricted to women in Québec (there are perhaps universal pressures on women to conform to cultural models) the cult-like valorisation of the Mother is striking and specific to Québec at a certain period. Furthermore, while women in general have been seen as a powerful force in Québec's history (social as well as literary) largely through the valorisation of the Mother, and while they may perhaps have been "queens of the household and guardians of the home", the power which they purportedly held appears to have been assigned to them⁵⁰. It seems that the only way women could hold

⁴⁹ J-J. Denis, Débats de la Chambre des communes, 1918, t.1, 677-678, quoted by Trofimenkoff, 117. Simone de Beauvoir's observation regarding the voices of authority called into service to "legitimise" women's subjugation and "prove" her inferiority lend an aura of irony to Denis's dogmatism. See Le Deuxième Sexe, (Paris, Gallimard, 1949) 1.24, also cited in my introduction.

⁵⁰ There are echoes of the power structure of Sade's fictional society "Les Amis de Sodalité" and the Chevalier's "liberating" speech in Philosophie dans le boudoir, as discussed in the last chapter.

any power was by reaching towards the ideological standard. In this way they were given value in a masculine system, which held the province as the model of virtue, morality and faith, and which, in turn, required the presence and strength of that same standard in order to appear "legitimate" and "authentic". As Susan Mann Trofimenkoff points out:

Cette "idéologie officielle" avait fait du Québec un havre de culture dans une océan matérialiste, un modèle des plus hautes vertus religieuses, morales, éducatives et familiales. Et la gardienne de tout ceci était la femme. Que la femme change, et...tout l'édifice s'écroulerait⁵¹.

Again, Woman is forced into the role of ideological mainstay⁵², as the concept of "Woman" is moulded into a figure serving to hold the fabric of the entire (masculine) system and discourse together. It could be said, then, that those "powerful" women, those "Mothers", are constructed and valorised according to a masculine aesthetic and are therefore subject to (or objectified by) that aesthetic⁵³. And yet Québec was nonetheless seen as a matriarchal society, ruled by a powerful mother-figure, next to whom the father seemed insignificant or ineffective, as the effects of colonisation, which provoked this hypervalorisation of the Mother, disrupt traditional gender relations⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Trofimenkoff, 111.

⁵² The similarities with the courtly lady or virgin, the pivot of chivalric culture and literature, are apparent. See my chapter 1.

⁵³ This façade of power was also apparent in nineteenth-century North America where a similar "cult of motherhood" made of Woman the representative of the most sentimental of Victorian Christian values. See Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York, Knopf, 1977).

⁵⁴ There are (almost) as many "pères défaits" in the literature of Québec as there are powerful mothers: Euchariste Moisan ends in ruin without his wife, Azarius Lacasse is unable to feed his family, while the weak-willed Maurice Darville would have been no match for Angéline de Montbrun. (See also Patricia Smart, Ecrire dans la maison du père, 209-210.) I will consider the implications of this pattern in more detail in the

Here, Woman's individuality and sexuality are sacrificed in the name of the reproduction of the race: she is reduced to her childbearing function and all "feminine" values are appropriated by a male-dominated religion, which is nevertheless seen as the "Mother Church". The earlier literature, as we have seen, reflects this, as female characters are continually portrayed - either positively or negatively - in terms of this ideal: those who compare favourably with the model and are therefore considered "successful" women often die as a result, attaining a sort of mythical status, and so serving as an example to young women, who might possibly be wavering or struggling in their duty. It is the same process which we have already seen in action in French and English literature, where Woman was set up as a symbol for the political ends of a male dominated society. It is not surprising, then, that so many of the Mothers in this literary tradition either die at some point in the story, or are already dead prior to its beginning, victims of a harsh but "blessed" lifestyle, dutifully fulfilling their sacred destiny, rewarded at the last by immortality through a mythical, saintly status. Nor is it surprising that the virtues of the Mother are so extolled and valorized, as if to make her loss the more deeply felt, just as the exaggerated "virtue" and beauty of the eighteenth-century heroine made her misfortune the more affecting and "poetic".

following chapters. Valerie Raoul also discusses the effect of colonisation on gender relations in her study; see especially her chapter 3, 26-41.

The Change: 1945 and onwards.

The modernisation of Québec increasingly weakened the hold of the clergy and of the all-encompassing myth of messianism; that ideology became progressively irrelevant to a society less readily impressed by the doctrines of a "backward-looking" religion, which could do little to compensate for the daily reality of suffering and poverty, except to give what appeared increasingly to be a false hope. The horrors of the Second World War, in which French Canadians fought as subjects of the British crown, also cast a dim light on the golden salvation promised by messianism, but which required a return to a now irrevocable past. Meanwhile, 1948 saw the publication of the highly controversial and influential manifesto, Refus global, by a group including several women led by the automatist artist Paul-Emile Borduas. Heavily influenced by the surrealist movement in France, the group openly denounced messianism and all that it entailed, adopting the rallying cry of "Au diable le goupillon et la tuque"⁵⁵. In 1950, in the depths of Duplessis's reign, the political review Cité libre, also highly critical of messianism, was founded by Pierre-Elliott Trudeau and Gérard Pelletier. It was a time of change and of increasing discontent: the beginnings of the shift in power and political sentiment in Québec which would culminate in the violence of the 1960's. As a result of this progression, literature from Québec began to shake off the ghost of the *roman de la terre*, with novels such as Gabrielle Roy's Bonheur d'occasion, written in 1945. Set in the depressed city of Montréal, this "roman de la ville" acknowledged the altered reality of

⁵⁵ Paul-Emile Borduas, Refus Global, 1948, in Borduas et les Automatistes, Montréal, 1942-1955 (Montréal, Editeur officiel du Québec, 1971) 95-151.

Québec and of the many people living in urban areas - as did Roger Lemelin's Au pied de la pente douce (1944), set in Québec City (picking up where Les Demi-Civilisés had left off in 1934), while André Langevin's novel, Poussière sur la ville (1953) considered life in a small mining town.

With the rejection of messianism and its accoutrements, the portrayal of the Mother also began to change. The representative or symbol of a long period of cultural darkness, she became an increasingly threatening figure, as the reactionary and repressive nature of her power was recognised. Her "raison d'être", after all, was to reinforce the conservative refuge values promoted by the Catholic Church, and so to compensate the Québécois for their sense of loss and powerlessness under colonisation. As such, through a shift, or rather a reversal, of association, this visible symbol or "symptom" of colonisation was also seen as the cause. The Mother became a figure capable of instilling terror in the hearts of men and boys, who next to her seemed and felt impotent, and so came to hold her responsible for their own inadequacy. From the saintly, nurturing Ideal of the *roman de la terre*, she had become once again the phallic and castrating mother, her omnipotence and omnipresence blamed for the ineffectiveness and the virtual absence (the fading out) of Québécois fathers and sons. At this time, the likes of Laura Chapdelaine, Alphonsine Moisan and Rose-Anna Lacasse are replaced by Eugénie, the possessive and suffocating mother of Jean Filiault's novel Chaînes⁵⁶, by "la gigantesque Claudine Perrault" (who habitually and sadistically brutalises her son

⁵⁶ Filiault, Chaînes (Montréal, le Cercle du Livre de France, 1955). The text is actually divided into two novellas, "La Chaîne de feu" and "La Chaîne de sang"; in the latter story, the son, Bastien, has actually killed his mother.

François, and finally deafens him by beating him around the head)⁵⁷, by Lucienne Normand, the bitter, angry mother of Mathieu⁵⁸, and by Louise, the vain and idolising mother of Patrice, "la belle bête" of Marie-Claire Blais' novel of that name⁵⁹. The fact that three of these "monstrous mothers" are from texts written by women would seem to suggest that the Mother's influence was equally suffocating to young women, forced to live in her shadow and grow in her image⁶⁰. The repercussions of this shift in the perception and representation of the Mother (and its effects on all female characters) will be considered in more detail in the following chapters.

However, although the Mother's supremacy has changed and female characterisation in novels from Québec over the last forty years has indeed opened up - characters being ostensibly freed of the uniformity of the maternal role although its legacy is still felt - the well-established status of Woman as preferred victim, has not changed. At this time, however, there is the beginning of a transformation of that status which was to become more apparent and more frequent in the novels of the 1960's.

In post-war literature it seems that the female character, often one-dimensional and of secondary importance to the plot, exists primarily to be destroyed - not through

⁵⁷ Anne Hébert, Le Torrent (Montréal, HMH, 1963).

⁵⁸ Françoise Loranger, Mathieu (Montréal, Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1949).

⁵⁹ Blais, La Belle Bête, 1959 (Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre, 1968). I shall be commenting on this novel in chapter 5.

⁶⁰ See Mary Jean Green's article, "Redefining the Maternal: Women's Relationships in the Fiction of Marie-Claire Blais" for a discussion of this. In Traditionalism, Nationalism and Feminism: Women Writers of Québec, Paula Gilbert Lewis, ed. (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1985) 125-139.

"natural causes" as in the case of the idealised Mother, but with the full intent of the text. Gigi, the prostitute in André Major's L'Epouvantail⁶¹, for instance, is murdered: her true killers are never discovered (a deliberate and essential twist of the plot) and, while the rest of the trilogy escapes the clichéd structure of the "roman policier" by refusing to follow up on the mystery, Gigi and her death are forgotten. The sacrifice of Gigi, her role as murder victim, sets up the main interest of the novel and serves as a premise for the wrongful arrest, flight and subsequent sequestration of Momo Boulanger with Marie-Rose.

André Giroux's novel Au dela des visages⁶², first published in 1948, is also centred around the murder of a female, supposedly a prostitute, although there are no references to the woman except in her capacity as slain victim. Again, the woman's death appears to be primarily the premise for the novel which focusses on the supposed murderer, seen through the eyes of his family and friends, most of whom seek to justify, excuse and explain the crime, while many try to "blame the victim". The actual crime is absent, so that the text revolves around a "silence" - as does Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel Le Voyeur (1955), which includes a blank page where the murder (if indeed it took place,) might have been described - thus leaving the reader with a multiple, "second-hand" perspective, but no authoritative version of the story. Again, the text escapes the tightly conclusive structure of the detective novel, where criminal and motive are revealed in a satisfying dénouement. In Giroux's text, as in Le Voyeur, the crime and the

⁶¹ Major, L'Epouvantail, 1974 (Montréal, Stanké, 1980).

⁶² Giroux, Au dela des visages, 1948 (Montréal, Fides, 1979).

victim are primarily important in that they serve as a catalyst or a "point de départ" for the text, in terms of plot as well as structure. As in much twentieth-century European literature, experimental narrative strategies appear to be taking place on the bodies of the female characters and at their expense⁶³.

The fact that the women in both these novels are prostitutes is significant for two reasons. First, the murder of a Maria Chapdelaine or an Alphonsine, for example, could never have been treated so casually or left unresolved - in fact, it is unthinkable that either of them could meet a violent, unnatural fate of any kind. Within a conservative and moral context, the death of a prostitute is of less significance and always of less concern to society than the death of a "good girl"⁶⁴. The prostitute is the "professional victim"⁶⁵; she has stepped outside the moral codes of a hypocritical society, thus placing herself outside its protection (and outside the protection of those same males who pay for her services). In the context of the two novels mentioned here, the female characters

⁶³ See chapter 1.

⁶⁴ In the real life case of the Yorkshire Ripper, for example, as in a number of similar cases, it was not until the killer attacked his first non-prostitute that the police began to treat the situation with the attention it demanded: it then became clear that it was not only a marginalized group of women of "lesser worth" (and whose existence was, after all, somewhat troubling to society) who were in danger, but "daughters and wives". For more information on this case and on other serial killers of women, see Jane Caputi, The Age of Sex Crime (Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987) and Susan Brownmiller, Against our will: Men, Women and Rape (New York, Bantam Books, 1976).

⁶⁵ Caputi, 124.

are expendable⁶⁶, suggesting that although the novels challenge traditional narrative structures and practice, a fundamentally conservative attitude with regard to women remains - again a tendency of even the most formally innovative of recent European literature.

Secondly, the "femme facile" (often portrayed as a waitress⁶⁷ and by no means necessarily a prostitute) becomes a significant figure in Québec literature from about this time. Indeed, prior to this period the concept of sex "out of wedlock" is all but unrepresented - despite the high frequency of illegitimate births in the province⁶⁸. Jovette Bernier's La Chair décevante (1931)⁶⁹ is the exception, telling the story of an unwed mother who lives with the emotionally paralysing stigma of her "fault", ending her life alone and insane. Despite the radical subject matter, therefore, the novel seems ultimately to reinforce Catholic sexual mores. Following the War, however, there is a definite sexualisation of female characters in Québec literature. Madeleine, in André Langevin's Poussière sur la ville, for example, refuses the conservative role expected of her as the doctor's wife, spending much of her time alone in the local restaurant and eventually taking a lover. Madeleine finally kills herself as the town, representative of the

⁶⁶ In addition to the "professional" strike against her, Gigi had also formerly betrayed her lover (Momo himself), which appears to make her a particularly easy, one could even say deserving, target.

⁶⁷ Victor-Lévy Beaulieu comments on the figure of the waitress or "ouétrice" - often "exploited" in his own novels due to her "forte valeur érotique". See "Victor-Lévy Beaulieu et l'érotisme", propos recueillis par Claude Beausoleil, Cul Q, 1 (automne 1973) 35-39.

⁶⁸ See Danylewycz, 74-75.

⁶⁹ Bernier, La Chair décevante, 1931 (Montréal, Fides, 1982).

oppressive conservative tradition, drives her lover from her and breaks her spirit. As a maverick figure, disrupting the order of the town and rejecting the path paved for her according to her sex and rank, it seems Madeleine must either be brought into line by the community or destroyed. In Bonheur d'occasion, meanwhile, the young girl, Florentine, realizes the limits of the future offered her if she follows in her mother's footsteps; in order to escape the seemingly endless circle of poverty which Rose-Anna has battled constantly and which otherwise awaits her, Florentine marries one man, although already pregnant by another. In rejecting what would normally be her fate, she also rejects the part her own mother has played in such an exemplary fashion. The "femme facile", then, while so very different from the Mother figure, appears to act or to be judged in relation to that standard, as a kind of inverse form of the traditional heroine. Rather than liberating the female characters from the stereotype which has been their only lot so far, the "femme facile" appears to be a re-coding of the Mother, destined to be considered perpetually in relation to her⁷⁰.

In either case, there is a certain sexual promiscuity or forwardness about the heroine. Cast as a sexual being, Woman as "femme facile" introduces what is possibly a new element to the Québec novel, which, despite its preoccupation with motherhood and reproduction, very rarely made explicit reference to the act of copulation itself, sex being described, rather, in terms of euphemism, while the Mother herself was sexual only in

⁷⁰ The development of this character will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

terms of her ability to reproduce. Again, the similarities with Mary, the Virgin Mother, are apparent.

The novels of the 1960's and 70's, have, as a body, a certain quality of their own. At this time the social, political and economic dissatisfactions of the francophone population finally came to a head. After two centuries of oppression by an anglophone minority in Québec and majority in Canada, after the economic hardships of the thirties, the Second World War in which French Canadians fought alongside the British (their traditional oppressors) and after the long reign of fundamentalism and conservatism under Maurice Duplessis known as "la grande noirceur", the rumbling discontent became a violent explosion of anger and frustration. This resulted in many demonstrations, some notable kidnappings and the terrorist activity of the FLQ (Front de libération du Québec). This violence was directed, in part, towards the anglophones in Québec, seen as representative of the greater, anglophone power of North America, which surrounded the francophone province of Québec and, of course, still does. The "Révolution tranquille" was thus a nationalist movement towards independence. However, in place of the conservative, right-wing ideology which governed until the end of the Duplessis era, the nationalism of the sixties was socialist and, as André Major discusses in his essay of 1962⁷¹, aimed to establish a new liberated and autonomous society. It was a movement which endeavoured to shake off a heritage of subjection and, imitating other colonies, reached towards "décolonisation". However, despite the high socialist ideals of the

⁷¹ André Major, "Les Damnés de la terre et nous", *Revue socialiste*, 6 (automne 1962) 45-47, based on Les Damnés de la terre, by Franz Fanon (Paris, Maspéro, 1976).

Revolution, the struggle for independence was defeated by the neo-liberalism of federalists such as Trudeau and Bourassa⁷².

The effect of the revolutionary sentiment and activity of the 1960's on the literature of the time was of course considerable. On a pragmatic level, for example, Jacques Godbout changed the ending of his novel Le Couteau sur la table, after news of the first bombing by the FLQ⁷³. The period saw renewed attempts to establish a distinctly Québécois culture and literature, seeking once again to liberate the province from the heritage of French culture, while at the same time trying to fend off the ever-encroaching, assimilative forces of anglophone Canada and the United States. In fact, Maurice Arguin's study of the evolution of the novel in Québec from 1944 to 1965⁷⁴ traces a movement from a state of colonisation toward liberation. Valerie Raoul's more recent psychoanalytical analysis of the diary novel in Québec (Distinctly Narcissistic) also considers these novels as the product of a colonized or post-colonized society, as does Patricia Smart's study, Ecrire dans la maison du père.

⁷² See Jean Larose La Petite noirceur (Montréal, Boréal, 1989) and Michael D. Behiels, "Quebec: Social Transformation and Ideological Renewal, 1940-1976", in Quebec Since 1945: Selected Readings, Michael D. Behiels, ed. (Toronto, Copp Clark Pitman, 1987) 21-45.

⁷³ Jacques Godbout, Le Couteau sur la table (Paris, Seuil, 1965).

⁷⁴ Maurice Arguin, Le Roman québécois de 1944-1965: symptômes de colonisation et signes de libération (Québec, Université Laval: CRELIQ, 1985).

In the quest for a distinct cultural identity, much of the literature of the 1960's and 70's - now known as *québécoise*⁷⁵ - tends to be experimental, in terms of its form and structure, and particularly its use of language: it is as much this tendency towards experimentation that led to such works being labelled "revolutionary", as the content of the writings. Paul Chamberland talks of having to "mal écrire, parce qu'il s'agit de réfléchir le mal vivre"⁷⁶, thereby describing a need for a new form of writing, or "un nouveau réalisme"⁷⁷, to express the cultural and political alienation of the Québécois "colonisés", the ambivalence and incoherence of their reality rendering "inappropriate" the cultural traditions of France.

This "anti-writing" was realised, in part, by the introduction of "joual" as a written language, during a fairly short-lived and highly controversial period of popularity or notoriety in the early sixties. An urban dialect punctuated with anglicisms and "sacres", joual is the language of the working-class home and the tavern, far from the standard French expected in business and politics. It is an impoverished language, well-suited to the expression of anger and frustration, as Jacques Grand'Maison observes:

Comme la sacure, cette parlure tout au plus permettait au porteur d'eau de crier ses rages et ses impuissances. Contrairement au vieux patois, elle

⁷⁵ The term French-Canadian employed up until the 60's designated a colonised and marginalised people, defined as other in a negative relation to a dominant One; i.e. they were not fully "French" nor fully "Canadian".

⁷⁶ Chamberland, quoted in Lise Gauvin, *"Parti pris" littéraire* (Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1975), 47.

⁷⁷ Gauvin, 50.

ne savait même pas dire la nature, l'amour, l'amitié, la paternité, bref la vie familière⁷⁸.

Its adoption as a written language of literature served to subvert the tradition of writing in "standard" French, which is so different from the spoken language of Québec and thus had the aura of elitism. Writers such as Michel Tremblay, Jacques Renaud, Claude Jasmin, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, and André Major employed phonetic transcription of the spoken dialect and syntax of the Montréalais, considering joul to be a language completely distinct from French, as Hubert Aquin notes: "selon Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, les oeuvres écrites en joul devront être traduites pour être distribuées sur le marché français"⁷⁹. Writing in joul was viewed variously as an act of "literary terrorism"⁸⁰ and "une entreprise contre le langage"⁸¹, while the violent treatment of language and text often mirrors the content: the behaviour of Ti-Jean, the uneducated, unemployed anti-hero of Le Cassé⁸², for example, is echoed in the violence of the joul he speaks and in

⁷⁸ Jacques Grand'Maison, "Du Joul quotidien au Québec français ou un rôle politique méconnu", Maintenant (mars 1974) 26-30, 27.

⁷⁹ Hubert Aquin, "Le Joul-refuge", Maintenant (mars 1974) 18-21, 19.

⁸⁰ Gérald Godin, quoted by Jack Warwick, "Two Joul Novels and a Dialectic of Violence", in Terry Goldie and Virginia Harger-Grinling, Violence dans le roman canadien depuis 1960/ Violence in the Canadian Novel since 1960, Actes du Colloque sur la violence/ Papers from the Conference on Violence (St. John's, Newfoundland, Memorial University, 1982), 45-58, 47.

⁸¹ André Brochu, quoted in Warwick, 47.

⁸² Jacques Renaud, Le Cassé (Ottawa, Parti pris, 1964).

which the text is written - the same can be said of Un rêve québécois by Victor-Lévy Beaulieu⁸³.

However, this act of aggression, which the adoption of joul constituted, was not without contradictions and difficulties. In its poverty as a language and its inability to communicate subtleties, written joul did indeed present a reflection of the profound alienation of the Québécois of this period. However, while its use may have given a sense of identity, this identity was necessarily that of a colonised people, as

Grand'maison claims:

le joul n'avait aucun contenu parce qu'on lui avait retiré tout ce qu'il (sic) aurait pu le désaliéner: la culture, la politique, l'économie. Celles-ci se déployaient à ce deuxième étage inaccessible de l'aire publique colonisée où les pouvoirs étrangers et autochtones négociaient leurs propres intérêts⁸⁴.

Elsewhere he adds: "Une vie privée qui n'a pas de langue ne peut déboucher sur une politique démocratique". While aiming to liberate, the use of joul in writing therefore served rather to reflect the frustrations of a situation, from which it apparently offered no real escape. Hubert Aquin, considering other societies whose native language had become poorer and less efficient as a result of colonisation, also had misgivings over the adoption of joul as a representative language of the Québécois, seeing it as having an atrophying potential:

je considère le joul comme une anémie pernicieuse: ce n'est pas seulement notre langue qui s'en trouve frappée, mais la pensée dans la

⁸³ Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Un rêve québécois (Montréal, Editions du jour, 1972). This text will be considered in detail in the next chapter.

⁸⁴ Grand'maison, 27.

mesure où la pensée ne peut accéder à l'existence que par la médiation d'une formulation verbale ou écrite. Quand la formulation devient défectueuse, la pensée se trouve disloquée, larvaire, impuissante⁸⁵.

While joual was not employed extensively in the novel for very long in Québec, and has known far more success in the theatre (in the plays of Michel Tremblay for example), the challenge to the traditional use of language and narrative form in the novel, in which it played a part, was extremely significant and has had a lasting impact on novels published since the sixties. Many of these novels have fought off the constraints of traditional or realist writing, while striving to establish an effective, Québécois written language in which to represent themselves and their culture.

Although it is largely for their narrative strategies that the texts written during this period are considered revolutionary (few openly discuss the political situation) and their aggression is channelled largely towards the text itself, recalling the "metonymic violence" adopted by many modern European writers, there is a marked increase in the depiction of physical violence and a change in the sort of violence they include. The frequency and types of aggression with which women are treated, especially, intensify in the literature of the 1960's and early 70's. Woman's roles are more varied, but her primary function as "sacrificial victim" becomes all the more evident, as she is, increasingly, the recipient of a more overt, physical and often sadistic violence⁸⁶.

⁸⁵ Hubert Aquin, "Le Joual-refuge", 19.

⁸⁶ The pattern is therefore parallel to the progression apparent in the European literature considered in the last chapter.

The majority of the female characters who die or are already dead in earlier literature (such as Laura Chapdelaine, the wife of Menaud (the *maître draveur*), Mme de Montbrun and Alphonsine Moisan, among others) are, as we have seen, victims of illness, childbirth or simply of the natural harshness of their daily lives. They are all also victims of the suffocating pressures of being a female within a masculinist culture, their lives dictated and restricted by the monolithic patriarchy of Québec prior to 1960. The sufferings and deaths of these characters, however, are, for the most part, brought about by the latent and tacit violence of that culture and that system; necessarily hostile to women, it nevertheless requires a certain "co-option" of women in order to survive. Open and deliberate violence directed towards female characters was rare and seems to be a more recent development - the obvious exception being Donalda Poudrier, whose body is callously mutilated after her death.

Many of the novelists of the sixties, however, seem to have opted for rape and brutality in place of the subtle, institutionalised violence of the "traditional" novel, with strongly individualised male agents inflicting violence on individual female characters. Un rêve québécois by Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, for example, traces the mental disorder of its hero through his fantasies of torturing his wife. Jacques Godbout's novel, Le Couteau sur la table, closes with a threat against the life of the narrator's English-Canadian girlfriend. Elsewhere, in Trou de mémoire by Hubert Aquin, a woman is raped and later murdered, while in his next novel, L'Antiphonaire, (which will be discussed in detail in chapter 4) a number of rapes occur, of which at least two take place while the victim has first been

incapacitated by her attacker through drugs⁸⁷. The rape of a semi-conscious or unconscious woman meanwhile is itself a repeating occurrence in the literature of this period; it also takes place in Robert Elie's La Fin des songes, for example (1968) where the hero's bid for freedom through an act of adultery with his wife's sister takes place once the woman is partially drunk, and also more recently in Michèle Mailhot's Le Passé composé, where the woman loses consciousness and is violated by her (unfaithful) lover⁸⁸. This pattern suggests a combination of factors, including the sexual deficiency of many of the male protagonists and the "backlash" against Woman, blamed for that deficiency; at the same time it recalls the apparently non-complicitous or passive role played in sexual relations by the (Virgin) Mother.

It is paradoxical to note that, at a time which apparently espoused socialist change and a movement for liberation (in which many of the writers of this period were personally engaged) and which also, significantly, saw the development of a powerful feminist movement, Woman's function as victim, particularly in male literature, is all the more pronounced, the violent acts of male abusers becoming frequent, graphic, sexual and exquisitely cruel; however, given the fact that Woman's position within colonised society is generally perceived as being "unnaturally elevated", the feminist movement could well have been seen as an additional threat to man's already damaged masculinity.

⁸⁷ Hubert Aquin, Trou de mémoire (Montréal, Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1968) and L'Antiphonaire (Montréal, Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1969). Aquin's protagonists thus show a degree of foresight or, certainly, opportunism.

⁸⁸ Elie, La Fin des songes, Oeuvres (Lassalle, Québec, Hurtubise HMH, 1979), and Mailhot, Le Passé composé (Montréal, Boréal, 1990). These two texts are studied in more detail by Raoul.

The following chapters will attempt to address these issues; they will consider the specificity of the violence in Québec fiction (as the product of a subordinated society going through the process of decolonisation), while bearing in mind the significant influence of the works of modern French and English writings, which, with their aesthetics of rupture and textual innovation, are also scored through by an intrinsic discourse of sexual violence. For while the increased violence may be political, and time and place specific, its representation appears to be connected also to a literary progression, which, at this time, sees Québec entering its Modernist period (heavily influenced by both the French and English Modernists and the Romantic Agonists⁸⁹, as well as the Surrealists and their interpretation of Sade), which suggests perhaps a wider field of reference, as Woman is here also seen as the privileged site of textual experimentation.

The following chapters will consider these issues in novels by Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Hubert Aquin, while the final chapter will examine the work of Marie-Claire Blais, whose work is also infused with violence, in order to explore any difference in its representation in the writings of a contemporary female novelist. Finally, in considering the authors' use of language and narrative experimentation in conjunction with their exploitation of sexual violence, these chapters will examine the function of this

⁸⁹ Patricia Merivale's articles, "Hubert Aquin and Highbrow Pornography: The Aesthetics of Perversion," Essays on Canadian Writing 26 (Summer 1983) 1-12 and to a lesser extent "Chiaroscuro: Neige noire/Hamlet's Twin", Dalhousie Review 60.2 (1980) 318-33 consider the influence of the Romantic Agonists on Aquin's Neige noire.

thematic violence in its relation to any potential or proffered revolutionary "message" of the text.

Chapter Three

Un rêve québécois: the Eroticisation of Violence

Victor-Lévy Beaulieu is among Québec's most prolific writers. Since the publication in 1968 of his first novel, Mémoires d'Outre-tombe, he has succeeded in producing roughly one major work every year, bringing the total to around eighteen novels (and there are always others "en préparation"), as well as several plays, essays and articles, while maintaining a successful relationship with radio and television production, and founding his own publishing company. Within the body of novels entitled La Vraie Saga des Beauchemin, Beaulieu documents the lives of three generations of a large, sprawling and quarrelsome Québec family, in which his own experience is clearly reflected. The Saga encapsulates his ambition to write the equivalent of Balzac's "Comédie humaine", centred on the culture and history of Québec. Modelling himself on writers such as Victor Hugo, James Joyce, Balzac, Cervantes and Herman Melville¹, who all attained a certain status as "poète national" in their respective countries, Beaulieu identifies a need for a national literature. As François Chaput writes:

[son] projet d'écriture consiste à produire un grand récit épique qui fonderait la littérature nationale et révélerait le peuple québécois à lui-même².

¹ Beaulieu refers constantly to the works of these writers throughout his fictions, at times almost to the point of plagiarism, although this tendency is less evident in Un rêve québécois which will be the focus of this chapter.

² François Chaput, "Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, héritier d'un désir", Tangence, 41 (oct. 1993), 43-53, 43.

Such an *oeuvre*, essential to the identity of a nation and to national pride in Beaulieu's opinion, would serve as a "Bible" or "founding text"³. Admittedly, Québec has perhaps a rather higher than average share of "epic" literature, from the Golden Age of heroism portrayed in François-Xavier Garneau's Histoire du Canada to the many *romans de la terre*, which told of the *habitant* origins in epic or, certainly, a highly romanticised and nostalgic fashion; however, this literature had little to do with the reality of the early French Canadians' existence, serving instead to perpetuate the ideological values of a Roman Catholic elite, and has even less relevance to the contemporary, daily reality in Québec. As a result, Beaulieu sees himself and his people as the dispossessed and powerless heirs of an inaccessible past and a problematic present⁴.

Beaulieu's writings therefore attempt to reclaim a past through the return to, and revision of, the origins of the Québécois (frequently associated as much with childhood as with the myths of the past) in order to understand the present and so to progress. This same present is troubling, with its perplexing origins and consequences. For Beaulieu,

être Québécois, c'est n'avoir ni temps ni espace, c'est vivre dans le creux d'une béance historique, c'est n'être pas au monde sinon en se colletant avec son absurde⁵.

³ Chaput, 43.

⁴ As he writes in his Manuel de la petite littérature du Québec: "je ne savais pas dans quel passé mes ancêtres se situaient, je ne connaissais à peu près rien de leur monde" (Montréal, L'Aurore, 1974). Quoted by François Chaput, 49.

⁵ Beaulieu, Entre la sainteté et le terrorisme: essais (Montréal, VLB Editeur, 1984) 463, quoted in Jean Morency, "Américanité et anthropophagie littéraire dans Monsieur Melville," Tangence 41 (oct. 1993) 54-68, 67.

The crisis in identity which this expresses, caused by a distorted relationship with and vision of history, is typical of a colonised society and culture, deprived of the means of self-government and self-definition, and placed "hors l'histoire et hors la cité"⁶. Since Beaulieu is only too aware of the contemporary reality of the Québécois, of their secondary status as a colonised people and as a francophone minority in an increasingly anglophone-dominated continent, and of their struggle for autonomy and independence from at least the 1960's and 70's to the present day, any hope of singing of glory begins to fade, so that "à défaut de pouvoir chanter la grandeur de la nation, on chante sa déchéance"⁷. Consequently, Beaulieu's writing is among the darkest, most gloomy, problematic and violent expressions of alienation a nation could call its own, as he writes the founding texts of a culture experiencing a painful "rebirth" or metamorphosis - from French-Canadian into *Québécois*.

Revolutionary Violence and Narrative Subversion.

Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's fourth novel, *Un rêve québécois* (1972)⁸, is typical of his writing in that the plot or action is minimal, following the "symbolic murder"⁹ of the heroine, Jeanne-D'Arc. The interest of the text resides rather in the actual telling of the

⁶ Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé suivi de Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés?* (Montréal, L'Étincelle, 1972) 92.

⁷ Chaput, 45.

⁸ Beaulieu, *Un rêve québécois* (Montréal, Éditions du jour, 1972). All page references given in the text are to this edition.

⁹ Jacques Pelletier, *Le Roman national* (Montréal, VLB Éditeur, 1991) 120.

story and in the musings and reminiscences of the protagonist, relayed through the interventions of a satirical and occasionally provocative narrator-commentator. For the purposes of the present study, this text is particularly interesting for its experimental form and use of language, its relationship with events current at the time of writing, and both its portrayal of a female character and its extreme violence, in many ways typical - even exemplary - of a trend which runs through much of the literature of the period.

Dedicated to Madame Rosa Rose, the mother of Paul Rose, a key figure in the 1970 assassination of Pierre Laporte, this is the only novel to date by Victor-Lévy Beaulieu to be associated clearly with actual events and with a specific time in Québec. The text announces its association with the "October Crisis" - the least tranquil moment of the so-called Quiet Revolution - when the War Measures Act was enforced in Québec. The temporal and referential context can be recognised in the many allusions to police and military surveillance and harassment, allusions to dynamite, to a plan hatched by Barthélémy (the protagonist) and his friends, to "des cadavres déposés dans les coffres arrières de vieilles voitures" (as was Laporte's) and the fact that the action takes place on the rue des Récollets in Montréal, associated with the kidnapping of James Cross. However, while the paratext suggests that the novel should be read in terms of a revolutionary discourse, the "revolutionary" aspect or subplot of the text remains ambiguous.

The political aspect of the novel is reiterated by the use of language, as the dialogue and the internal monologues and memories of Barthélémy and Jeanne-D'Arc, his wife, and their acquaintances, are parenthetically reported in "joual", as "phonetic

transcriptions" of the spoken language of the working class in Québec: the controversial linguistic and literary debate of the day is thus recalled, as is the author's own commitment to the use of jòal in literature as a means of representing the uniqueness of the Québécois¹⁰. At one point, for example, Lémy exclaims, "Hé, j'agousse-tu les popailles à ton goût, mon grand sacraman! Pis y en a-t-y d'la fesse à Matin!" (13), while Jeanne-D'Arc later threatens, "Si t'avances encore, j'te câlisse ma bouteille s'a tête" (148), and finally one of the police comments, "Ça pue en ostie dans Cabane" (110). The grammatical norms of standard French are transgressed as syllables are "swallowed" and syntax is disrupted.

The rest of the text, meanwhile, as Francine Couture Lebel and Michelle Provost observe in their marxist critique of the novel¹¹, is split between two narrative levels of language. The framework of the narrative is written in polished, literary French prose, while the direct interventions of the narrator adopt a form of "Québécoised" French, corrupted or punctuated with expressions or words specific to Québec. Phrases such as "on voulait le tuer au centre de la laideur et de l'épouvante" (42) and "Object d'affection trouble figé dans l'iris, javeline creusant les orbites, obscurcissant le regard" (34), for example, contrast with the "anormative" French of "les scountches de cigarettes dans ce qui restait d'eau gazeuse", "les miettes de tchippes..." (32) and "il bréquait violemment

¹⁰ At the time, as we have seen, linguistic subversion was considered by certain writers one of the first steps towards liberation, a means of shaking off the traditions of the "beau parler français" and adopting what was seen to be a different language - not "just a dialect" - specific to Québec.

¹¹ Couture Lebel and Provost, "Exercice de tir (sur Un rêve québécois)", Stratégie: pratiques signifiantes, 5-6 (automne 1973) 89-110.

aux feux rouges et les moffleurs hollywoodiens faisaient un beau vacarme au débrayage" (13). In this way, a clash of different levels of language is created, illustrating the "conflit des codes" which André Belleau identified in much of the contemporary literature of Québec¹², as the referential world of standard, literary French is juxtaposed with the linguistic world of Montréal. Interweaving these different levels of language, the text recreates the audio-social world of Québec, along with its social inequality, which would place people such as Jeanne-D'Arc and Lémy - uneducated and limited precisely by the poverty of their language - at the bottom of the pile. Indeed, the narrator deems it necessary to intervene, to punctuate or "fill in the gaps" left by their dialogue. Jeanne-D'Arc's thoughts, for example, are elaborated on by the narrator, as he says:

Elle aurait voulu ajouter.....mais elle ne pouvait pas dire ces paroles qui ne lui appartenaient pas. Seul le désir confus de les exprimer monta en elle en même temps que ses larmes (66)¹³.

The text thus conveys a theatrical effect, with the narrator playing the prompter or chorus in what frequently takes on the air of a tragedy¹⁴.

The "metonymic violence" which Barthes referred to in Sade's writings, and which I considered earlier in relation to the practices of certain modern writers, such as the

¹² Belleau, "Le Conflit des codes dans l'institution littéraire québécoise", in Surprendre les Voix (Montréal, Boréal, 1986) 167-174: I will be referring to this concept intermittently.

¹³ In their analysis of the levels of language in Un rêve québécois, Couture Lebel and Provost suggest that the obviously educated narrator adopts the language of the working class with the critical distance of one who is "slumming", or appropriating the language of the oppressed for his own political ends, going as far as to accuse Beaulieu of petit-bourgeois "imposture" (107).

¹⁴ I will consider the significance of the theatricality of the novel shortly.

process of juxtaposition and fragmentation, is highly visible in this text. It appears first, as we have seen, as the different spheres of language are brought together. The same "conflict" is also evident in the occasional intertextual references which the text self-consciously incorporates. The world of consumerism appears, for instance, in the reference to a "Bébé chinois content content" (141), taken from a jello advertisement¹⁵, while elsewhere, Lémy finds himself "réduit à s'écarter dans Morial Mort, à creuser le faux monde des Steinberg, des Laura Secord, des Coins du Fumeur..." (19), thus incorporating a world of images and associations. On a different plane entirely, meanwhile, there are casual references to the "Pequod" (34) - the ship which sailed after the great white whale in Melville's epic novel - and to windmills, evoking the elusive crusade of Don Quixote, which was to become a central reference in Beaulieu's own novel Don Quichotte de la démanche (1974). Although the practice of intertextuality is more marked and more iconoclastic in Beaulieu's other novels¹⁶, the appropriation and incorporation of such references is in keeping with Beaulieu's ambition to create a "littérature nationale". It serves as a means of legitimising the Québec text by an association with other significant works of literature¹⁷, in an attempt to force open the

¹⁵ Identified in Couture Lebel and Provost, 95.

¹⁶ Beaulieu's Don Quichotte de la démanche is obviously one such example. He has also borrowed heavily from Herman Melville and Victor Hugo in texts addressed to these two authors; later in Un rêve québécois, meanwhile, there are images evocative of Réjean Ducharme's Le Nez qui voque, as we shall see. I will consider the concept of intertextuality more thoroughly in the chapter on Aquin's L'Antiphonaire, as it is a more significant praxis in that novel.

¹⁷ André Lamontagne, "Entre le récit de fondation et le récit de l'autre: l'intertextualité dans Don Quichotte de la démanche," Tangence 41 (oct. 1983) 32-42, 35.

closed boundaries of canonisation. It also serves as an indication of the cultural reality of the Québécois, or a representation of the problematic nature of self-definition, as the sometimes oppressive cultural influences of North America and Europe are made apparent. As Jacques Pelletier states:

La pratique intertextuelle fait vraiment sens lorsque replacée dans le cadre du projet que porte Beaulieu depuis les origines, lorsqu'envisagée à la lumière du mythe fondateur qui l'anime: celui d'exprimer la réalité, la vérité de la condition québécoise à travers une symbolisation, une figuration s'offrant comme un miroir dans lequel ce peuple pourrait se reconnaître et éventuellement se transformer et accéder à la pleine existence historique¹⁸.

The physical violence reported is reflected on the structural level in the constant ellipses and lacunae around which the text develops (in a reflection of the drunken, semi-crazed mind of the protagonist), almost as if the text had indeed been "shattered" and the shards (some lost) rejoined, somewhat erratically. Opening with Lémy's return to the rue des Récollets, for instance, the text passes to the level of fantasy as Lémy sees himself driving home, then flashes back as he thinks of his relationship with Jeanne-D'Arc, and finally projects forward (again, fantasy) as he pictures their reunion. Elsewhere, the text leaps between memories of the nightmare world of the asylum, to the brutality of the police and to his own brutality directed at Jeanne-D'Arc. Furthermore, the novel is divided into seven "Coupes" or chapters - larger fragments or "limbs" - as if the handsaw that Barthélémy finally takes to the supposed body of Jeanne-D'Arc had also been applied to the text. The cross-dressing scene, for example, is split between

¹⁸ Jacques Pelletier, "Victor-Lévy Beaulieu: l'intertextualité généralisée," Tangence 41 (oct. 1993) 7-31, 30.

coupes 3 and 5, interrupted by Jeanne-D'Arc's "confession" which constitutes *coupe* 4. As the reader winds his or her way through the ever-shifting texture of narrative, created by the tangle of diegetic threads and the shifting linguistic levels, his/her attention is drawn to the text, to its writing, occasionally getting lost as one "voice" fades without warning or introduction into the next. The text challenges the traditions of literary style, not only because of the different levels of language, but also in terms of the structural norms of standard prose, as it refuses to allow the narrative to be a simple instrument of communication, or to allow the reader to be a passive "consumer". While the novel retains some elements of "traditional" fiction, the latter's logical and reassuring chronological representation of reality is undermined, the problematic relationship between colonised culture and history rendering it inappropriate. Here, history is perceived and presented rather as:

un catalogue d'événements arbitraires que, par après, on rend logiques, les enchaînant les uns aux autres, pour donner l'illusion d'une homogénéité qui n'a jamais existé¹⁹.

The reader is thus forced to play an active role in the unravelling and ordering of the fragments or "épiphanies"²⁰, trying to "make sense" of the repetitions and the analepses through which the story is told, as the apparently "omniscient" narrator, traditionally the guide through the twisted paths of a novel, is less than reliable and certainly not impartial.

¹⁹ Jacques Michon, talking about another of Beaulieu's novels in "Les Avatars de l'histoire: Les Grands-pères de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu", Voix et Images 5.2 (1980) 307-317, 307.

²⁰ Jacques Pelletier uses the term in his article "L'Intertextualité généralisée", 28.

Indeed, far from being a neutral voice telling a story, the narrator underlines his privileged relationship with the author and his status as "go-between" for author and reader. In a manner reminiscent of eighteenth-century novels such as Sterne's Tristram Shandy and Diderot's Jacques le fataliste, Beaulieu's narrator draws attention to the process of writing itself, saying of Lémy: "il bâilla, le temps de laisser voir au romancier ses dents jaunies par la nicotine..."(14). The narrator is thus established as witness both to the act of writing and to the actions of the text. He (and he is most definitely a male narrator) is also, to a certain extent, in control of the characters, who are seen increasingly as actors playing the roles written for them. The narrator toys with their lives like one of the mythological Fates, as if waiting to "cut the strings" at whim. At one point, obviously enjoying the proceedings, he shares a "joke" with the reader:

Encore chanceuse la Jeanne-D'Arc que ton Barthélémy y sait pas encore l'histoire du gérant d'caisse populaire pis du gros char s'arrêtant dans un nuage de poussière. Y sait pas encore, c'te pauvre Barthélémy, qu'y étaient couchés, le gérant pis la Jeanne-D'Arc, sus l'siège, pis qu'y s'mangeaient joliment du cul. J'ai hâte d'le voir pis d'voir la Jeanne-D'Arc quand y va apprendre ça le Barthélémy! (128).

Elsewhere, the narrator is clearly identified as a member of the cast, while another narrative voice takes over the telling of the story:

Il riait, satisfait de son propre rôle qui était de jeter le soupçon dans l'esprit de Barthélémy afin de décupler sa mauvaise foi et le dégoût qu'il avait pour la Jeanne-D'Arc (127-8).

The effect of this narrative strategy and the theatricality it suggests is multiple: in the first instance, it serves to place the reader in the role of "spectator" or even - given the frequently sexual and violent content of the text - of "voyeur". At the same time it undermines the notion of "suspension of disbelief", associated with traditional theatre but

equally applicable to the reading of a "traditional" or realist novel; just as the "alienation techniques" of the Brechtian theatre tradition aimed to force the audience into the role of critical observer, so here the reader is asked, "Pis, vous aimez-tu ça le livre?" (34). Constantly faced with the deliberate artifice of the text, the reader is encouraged to proceed with a certain distance, to observe the functions or workings of the "text as text" and to join in and enjoy the game. The reader is thus reminded that this is not just a tale of marital infidelity and revenge, but one with a broader context and significance, and as such the text takes on an almost allegorical dimension.

Jeanne-D'Arc and Barthélémy, far from being free agents in their own drama, are puppets restricted in their movements and powerless to reclaim control over their own existence. They are very much aware of this condition, which is reflected on the textual level as they are seen acting out rituals or games, sometimes even criticising each other's "performance". During the much cited scene of transvestism, for example, Jeanne-D'Arc forgets her new persona only to be upbraided by Lémy:

Maudit qu't'es pas bonne acteuse! Comprends don une fois pour toute que c'est toi Barthélémy pis qu'moi j'sus Jeanne-D'Arc. R'garde-moi, j'ai le soutien-gorge pis les rembourrures pis la robe. Que c'est que tu veux d'pluse? Pis toi, t'as la culotte (69).

The restrictions on their freedom are embodied on a pragmatic level by the police and military presence and on a metaphorical level by "le monde des hippopotames" and "les gardes blancs", the apparently sadistic nurses at Dorémi, who haunt and pursue Lémy. The insistence on the adherence to rules or "scripts" and the repeated "répétitions" which see Lémy turning in circles, and finally the presentation of the characters as pawns in someone else's game, lend a feeling of constraint or oppression. Given the overt

referentiality of the novel, the sense of frustration, alienation, impotence and even fatalism²¹ of a colonised people which this suggests - embodied in and brought to life by Lémy - becomes almost suffocating.

Nostalgic Past vs Nightmare Reality.

The novel traces the movements, nightmares and hallucinations of Joseph-David-Barthélémy Dupuis (Lémy) as he returns from "Dorémi", the asylum where he was interned following his bouts of alcohol-induced violence and delirium. Constant interruptions in the flow of the narrative, along with the protagonist's apparent inability to separate the reality of the present from that of the past and from his own hallucinations and fantasies (past and present) render the unravelling of events difficult, if not impossible, although some key events become apparent. It seems, for instance, that at one point in the marriage of Lémy and Jeanne-D'Arc, there was a time of tranquility and stability. Living in the old family house, they slept in the bed which had belonged to Lémy's parents and were surrounded by an aura of tradition linking them to several generations of Québécois; they were thus an intrinsic part of the heritage and the culture with which the house and its contents were imbued. The cultural referentiality which the title suggests becomes apparent²²; the life of Lémy and Jeanne-D'Arc in the

²¹ Couture Lebel and Provost also comment on this fatalism, 97.

²² The "universality" which the title implies has been questioned: in his article "De quelques avatars de Dieu", François Hébert asks: "Comment me reconnaîtrais-je, Québécois, dans cette interminable débauche de sadisme bête et bestial?" Études françaises 9.4 (nov 1973) 352.

old house serves as a microcosm of Québec society, through the representative quality of the characters and their environment, marked by a number of objects traditionally associated with Québec. Jeanne-D'Arc describes this collective past to her lover, Fred:

Cave. Clous. Harmonica. Vieux tchommes. Baptiste. Citrouilles. Grand chien jaune. Sans ces choses, comment la vie pouvait-elle être possible et possédée? (88).

The quasi-utopic past which these objects evoke has some similarities with that of the traditional *roman de la terre*²³, and so must be placed at an indeterminate time prior to the disillusionment and violence of the revolutionary period of the diegetic present.

This time of peace comes to an end and is replaced by the turmoil of the diegetic present which, as we have seen, corresponds to the unrest of the 1960's and 70's in Québec. A number of reasons are given for this change, but no definitive answer or assignation of blame emerges²⁴, forcing the reader to become part of the debate. There is the suggestion, for example, that the marriage of Jeanne-D'Arc and Barthélémy broke up because of Lémy's drinking: as he asks himself, "une bouteille de bière en trop avait-elle pu modifier leur espace?" (148), while elsewhere he wonders if she would have left him "just" because he hit her (20, 31). Jeanne-D'Arc, meanwhile, sets the time of the change at the death of their child, remembering "le bon Barthélémy, celui d'avant le

²³ I do not mean to imply that Beaulieu is in any way "taken in" by the promise of those earlier novels, merely that the "idyllic" period evoked here would be free of the knowledge of oppression. References to a peaceful past or earlier life in Beaulieu's novels are frequently evocative of the "pre-oedipal" period of early childhood.

²⁴ The question of blame and punishment is central in the novel, however, the accusations which Barthélémy levels at Jeanne-D'Arc are particularly significant, as will become apparent.

froid bébé, celui d'avant le premier coup dans le ventre mou...Y a pus rien qui est resté de c'qu'était" (78). In Lémy's mind, however, the breaking up of their marriage was Jeanne-D'Arc's doing, through what he maintains was her deliberate killing of their child and, perhaps more importantly, through her obscene comment and adultery with Baptiste, one of Lémy's "brothers" in a blackmarket business (or perhaps a terrorist "cell") set up in the cellar of the old house; the ensuing bitter fight destroys their equilibrium, Lémy assuming that Jeanne-D'Arc "never loved him as he deserved to be loved" (100), and so begins his downward spiral into alcoholism, madness, impotence and despair.

Lémy attempts to evade this perception of reality, first through a combination of alcohol and pills, from which he draws an illusory sense of strength and worth and a temporary escape, becoming increasingly confident the more he drinks:

Il allait plutôt ne plus penser qu'à lui-même...qu'à tout ce qu'il allait boire, qu'aux blagues qu'il inventerait, qu'aux histoires cochonnes qu'il raconterait à ses vieux amis. (...) Il lui arrivait de songer qu'il était quelqu'un et que si sa vie était si tumultueuse, il devait bien avoir à cela une raison. J'vas leur montrer ce que j'peux faire. (...) On ne pouvait rien contre lui, contre son indignation et contre son mépris. On ne pouvait rien contre sa beauté et sa puissance (46-47).

Elsewhere, after a bout of drinking, Lémy sees himself as a horse, a frequent symbol of virility in Beaulieu's writing (20)²⁵. Secondly, the acting out and repetition of scenes or "mysteries" allow him to take control over some aspect of the chaos. Retreating into a world of hallucinatory fantasy, Lémy becomes the "director" and designer of certain

²⁵ The figure of the horse plays a significant role in Jos Connaissant (Montréal, VLB Editeur, 1978) and Les Grand-pères (Montréal, Editions du jour, 1971), for example.

rituals full of complex symbolism, assigning parts to each player and tailoring the procedure²⁶. Acting before a generally admiring and imaginary audience, the control and acclamation that Lémy teases from his performances restores his sense of power and significance. The approval of the "audience" not only gives him the strength and courage to do what he would otherwise be unable to do - as "un bon acteur, c'est justement çui qui fait c'qui est pas capable de faire dans le privé" (57) - it also endorses or validates his actions, flattering his broken ego, again restoring to him a sense of his lost virility, often expressed in terms of violence. Cheered on by the audience,

Il s'employait à toutes sortes de sparages, inventait des combinaisons du gauche et du droit tandis que des spectateurs innombrables, tout autour de l'arène, applaudissaient les excellents jabs qui frappaient avec précision le visage, le cou, la poitrine et le bas-ventre de la Jeanne-D'Arc (49).

Perhaps not surprisingly, his virility and refound potency are usually in direct proportion to the (imaginary) violence perpetrated on the body of the unfortunate Jeanne-D'Arc, as the female body becomes the ideal site on which to work out male frustration, artistic endeavours and experimentation; the text thus revolves around what Jean Ricardou

²⁶ Conceived amidst the confusion of his madness, the decor is set up precisely (in his mind, at least) according to a plan nailed to the door, the props checked off against a list and the furniture lined up with chalk marks on the floor (59). In fact, when the arrival of the police interrupts the play and brings him back to reality, Lémy realises: "La chambre était maintenant sens dessus dessous. Il avait renversé tous les meubles, éventré tous les tiroirs, déchiré avec ses dents le linge de la Jeanne-D'Arc, cassé les lampes, écharogné le matelas" (55), indicating both the violence which must have taken place and also the totality of Lémy's withdrawal from reality during the performance.

terms "une thématique privilégiée"²⁷ of sexual violence, which operates on a number of levels.

The Quintessential (Québec) Heroine: Virgin, Mother and Whore.

Seen primarily through the eyes of Barthélémy, her broken, resentful and perhaps schizophrenic husband, as well as through the unreliable narrator, Jeanne-D'Arc is an ambiguous character, rarely permitted to speak for herself. While a number of incidents suggest that she was no angel, the reliability or the honesty of Lémy's version of events is questionable. The accusation of child-killing, for instance, may be unjust, due to a memory twisted by anger, despair and possibly guilt²⁸, and typical of the inconsistency which calls into question many of Barthélémy's descriptions and memories of Jeanne-D'Arc. Rightly or wrongly, however, the responsibility for his condition is placed on her shoulders and she is seen as "menteuse...et fourbe, et mesquine, et rusée" (151), in a classic (and highly traditional) assignation of wife blame.

²⁷ Ricardou, Pour une théorie de nouveau roman (Paris, Seuil, 1971) 221, also cited in chapter 1.

²⁸ Reluctant mother she may have been, but far from being the child-killer Barthélémy describes Jeanne-D'Arc may have miscarried in an incident in which Barthélémy himself was involved. Jeanne-D'Arc remembers: "La mort était sortie d'entre ses cuisses tandis qu'elle hurlait, la mort avait pissé d'elle, dans la honte et la peur...Jeter dans le froid *cette mort venue d'elle lorsqu'écrasée sous le corps de Barthélémy* sa tête s'était remplie d'étoiles et de feu. Et pleurer parce que rien n'avait jamais eu lieu et qu'à cause du bébé sans jambes et sans bras tout se bloquait pour l'avenir" (78, my emphasis). Lémy offers two alternative versions of the baby's death (see also 160 and 41-2).

The choice of the character Jeanne-D'Arc as "scapegoat" evokes centuries of European tradition, involving the sacrifice of a non-conformist woman, (the European witchcraze, the treatment of female hysterics in the 19th century, and so on). Here the character's archetypal status as victim is sanctioned in the text by a number of cross-references to the various traditional guises of Woman, as she becomes a sort of "Everywoman", adding multi-dimensionality to her character. Her name rich in semantic connotations, Jeanne-D'Arc's connection with the French national heroine is underlined from the beginning, in the epigraph to the novel. Responsible for the awakening of French national consciousness and for liberating the besieged town of Orléans, the memory of the "real" Jeanne D'Arc still has the ability to unite the French people at a time of crisis. Remembered for her courage and her "divine voices", for fighting for God and the king of France, for saving her people and, significantly, for her cherished virginity (hence her nickname, La Pucelle), Sainte-Jeanne-D'Arc was nevertheless betrayed and burned as a heretic. By giving his character the same name as a significant historical figure, Beaulieu draws together the two women in the "melting-pot" that is Québec, where the French heritage of the Québécois has been inextricably moulded within a North American context²⁹. Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc - virgin warrior - is juxtaposed with *la* Jeanne-D'Arc - collaborator (because of her relationship with Fred,

²⁹ The same can be said of the choice of the hero's name with its evocation of the Saint Bartholomew's Night Massacre in Paris in August 1572, a night of (similar) barbarism and bloodshed, and of violence against Protestant non-conformists.

representative of one of the forces of oppression) and whore³⁰. In that "rapprochement" the differences between the two women and their two worlds become starkly apparent: their antithetical relationship is exposed, showing with ironic or paradoxical contrast the alienated state of the national consciousness of the Québécois, as the role of "national heroine" or "national martyr" is transferred to the shoulders of "la Jeanne-D'Arc impure", unable to save herself, let alone a whole nation.

By the same token, Jeanne-D'Arc is held responsible for the shattering of their conjugal peace and a life similar to the past vaunted in the nostalgic literature produced prior to the "prise de parole" of the late 1950's and onwards, validated by the idealised figure of the "Mother" - the essential symbol and guarantor of national consciousness. That role of "valorising figurehead" is taken on here by Jeanne-D'Arc. Recalling the time of the brotherhood in the cellar, Lémy remembers that, "du seul fait de sa présence elle leur donnait à tous une importance qu'ils étaient bien conscients de ne pas avoir encore" (147). Here, however, the powerful and socially-constructed Ideal of the virtuous Mother is replaced by the slatternly, childless and "child-killing" wife of a wronged man. The concept of "Motherhood" itself also becomes perverted, transferred to the sexual relations between the two protagonists. At one point Jeanne-D'Arc attempts to entice Lémy into the bedroom, calling "Viens-t-en mon beau Lémy. Viens voir Moman. A va donner du beau lailait à son Lémy" (45). She also carries Lémy around the house -

³⁰ The fact that Sainte-Jeanne-D'Arc's much vaunted virginity is also a source of humour, might well be an added factor in the choice of the name and the association of the "saint" with the "sinner". The "Maid of Orléans" thus possesses a duality similar to la Jeanne-D'Arc.

under duress - singing to him "Oh Oh gros bébé bleu dans les bras de sa Moman" (93), as if he were a too-large child, refusing to accept his age. This suggests a certain incestuous infantilism in their relationship, recalling Jean Filiatrault's comment that when Québec women sought a man in their bed, they found a child³¹. The maternal role in the literary, cultural and religious traditions of Québec is thus subverted, as the highly-prized role of the Mother is put into the Oedipal context and the "childless" woman becomes the substitute mother for the man who has never grown up³².

By giving his distinctly Québécois novel a heroine who is the antithesis of the traditional and stylised pattern, Beaulieu undermines the image of the "Mother" (from whom, it seems, no fictional Québec heroine can be totally free) and questions, by association, the appropriateness of that figure as a cultural icon. Beaulieu thus unravels the fabric of the nostalgic tradition and places Jeanne-D'Arc as the true and "re-coded" face of the "Mother" in the context of the Québec of the 1970's: "une société mesquine, sans avenir, sans grandeur, engagée dans un processus de rapetissement irréversible et inéluctable"³³.

³¹ Filiatrault, "Quelques manifestations de la révolte dans notre littérature romanesque récente", *Recherches sociographiques*, 5. 1-2 (août 1964) 177-90, cited in Valerie Raoul, *Distinctly Narcissistic: Diary Fiction in Québec* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993) 37.

³² Patricia Smart indicates the Oedipal nature of many of the relationships portrayed in the québécois novels of the revolutionary period in her article "Un cadavre sous les fondations de l'édifice: la violence faite à la femme dans le roman québécois contemporain", in Terry Goldie and Virginia Harger-Grinling, eds. *Violence dans le roman canadien depuis 1960/Violence in the Canadian Novel since 1960*, Actes du Colloque sur la violence/Papers from the Conference on Violence (St. John's, Newfoundland, Memorial University, 1982) 25-32.

³³ Pelletier, "L'Intertextualité généralisée", 16.

Nevertheless, however far removed his portrayal of Jeanne-D'Arc may be from the traditional Québec heroine, she does not escape the same fate and she will, like her forebears, be sacrificed for the greater good of Mankind. As Lémy realises the "true" nature of Jeanne-D'Arc (on witnessing her flirtation with Baptiste), his world, "son château de cartes" (151), crumbles. As the corruption of the symbol suggests the corruption of the symbolised, so Jeanne-D'Arc, like Eve, the Mother of All and scapegoat "par excellence" within the Judeo-Christian tradition, will take the blame for the expulsion of Man from this illusory place of refuge and for all his ensuing woes; the pedestal on which she had been placed will be used now as a stake at which to burn her.

Violence as Catharsis: Provocation as Exoneration.

The violence directed towards Jeanne-D'Arc operates as an expiation in a number of ways. The traditional bearer of a society's ills, the scapegoat was chosen from among the group for some salient characteristic which marginalises the victim, such as race, religion, physical deformity, mysticism, or even (again, as in the witchcraze), in the case of women, for their sex. This victim, as René Girard explains:

through a non-conscious process of mimetic suggestion...obviously appears as the all-powerful cause of all trouble in a community that is itself nothing but trouble³⁴.

³⁴ Girard, "Generative Scapegoating" in Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, ed. Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1987) 91. As we saw in chapter 1, Girard points out that the crimes of sacrificial victims may well be imaginary, the violence perpetrated against them probably is not.

The sacrifice of the scapegoat is therefore seen as a purging, cathartic process by which the wrongs of a society and its sufferings are expelled and through which a new and purified era may be entered. The "guilt" of this collective murder is displaced at the moment of "mimetic suggestion":

The roles are reversed. The victimisers see themselves as the passive victims of their own victim, and they see their victim as supremely active, eminently capable of destroying them³⁵.

Having fixed the blame on Jeanne-D'Arc for all of his woes, Lémy makes her the focus of his hate and violent revenge - not just for whatever wrongs she may (or may not) have committed, but for all the perceived wrongs and abuse suffered by Barthélémy in his capacity as the "archetypal" Québécois. As he claims,

Moi, j'ai jamais rien eu dans ma vie, câline, rien ne m'a appartenu, on m'a toujours toute enlevé, bon toi tu vas payer pour toute c't'engeance (122).

Lémy's revenge on the mind and body of Jeanne-D'Arc illustrates what René Girard calls the generative scapegoating process³⁶ (the two characters both being representatives of the collectivity); referring to Jeanne-D'Arc, the narrator tells us that Lémy

[Il] en avait fait une chienne qu'il battrait à mort et sur le dos de laquelle il se vengerait de trop d'humiliations et de honte (122).

³⁵ Girard, "Generative Scapegoating", 91.

³⁶ See Girard, Le Bouc émissaire (Paris, Grasset, 1982) as well as his essay "Generative Scapegoating", quoted above.

The rites he attempts to perform, therefore, become the preparations for (or perhaps the re-enactments of) the ritual murder of the expiatory sacrifice, the supposedly laudatory and liberating act prefigured at the beginning of the text:

bientôt il allait commencer quelque chose de noble, il ne savait pas quoi encore mais il était sûr qu'il passerait à l'Histoire (16).

This suggests that Lémy may, through this act, break the cycle of oppression and retake his "rightful" place, in an act of violence set up as a literary rendition or retelling or as a parallel of the events of the October Crisis, in which Jeanne-D'Arc becomes the scapegoat for the collectivity.

The reversal of victim-aggressor roles which Girard discusses is apparent here, as Lémy is first seen as the victim of police brutality and derision, directed at him through Jeanne-D'Arc's association with Fred (whether Jeanne-D'Arc prompted this attention herself, or Fred requested it of his own initiative is not made clear); secondly, as the target of the sadistic nurses at Dorémi, where he was sent, also apparently at the instigation of Jeanne-D'Arc. Once again, however, the order of events and the assignation of blame is (deliberately) confused, as it seems in fact that Jeanne-D'Arc had him interned as a result of his drunken abuse of her. This reversal or confusion of the roles of aggressor and victim is an essential and expansive function of Beaulieu's textual strategy; it becomes the foundation and justification, even an exoneration, for Lémy's brutality.

Barthélémy is powerless to perform what he sees as the "sublime" and definitive act of liberatory violence, wishing

...que le meurtre de Jeanne-D'Arc fût sa chose, sortît entièrement de son cerveau, sans artifice et sans provocation, dans la pureté de sa haine et du milieu même de sa démente (119).

Elsewhere he states:

La Jeanne-D'Arc ne pourrait-elle que se modifier sous ses yeux et se transformer en une bête pourrissante, dont tôt ou tard, il faudrait songer à se délivrer entièrement (130).

However, rather than doing the deed, in an illustration of his impotence Lémy needs the constant motivation of provocation. This becomes apparent at a point where the narrative appears at first glance to be sympathetic to Jeanne-D'Arc, in allowing her an instant of apparent honesty. And yet the recalling of her "peaceful" moments with Fred is framed by Barthélémy's threats:

Maudite vache! Baptême de poudrée! Continue, parle encore, sinon j'te mets mon poing s'a gueule! (...) Envoie, parle mon ostie! Mais j't'ai toute dit, Lémy. Pardonne-moi. Jamais! J'vas t'enfermer dans garde-robe plutôt! Pas ça, Lémy. Non, non, non! J'vas faire toute c'que tu veux (89).

The flashback to a somewhat happier moment (which provides a breathing space for both Jeanne-D'Arc and the reader), becomes a parody of the confessional process, as Barthélémy takes on the role of interrogator, with all its cruelty and violence; like the Inquisitors during the witchcraze, driven by hatred of Woman - the root of all evil - and the desire to punish her for all of their own ills, so Lémy forces Jeanne-D'Arc, over and over again, to tell him of her activities with Fred.

Jeanne-D'Arc's "confession" serves a number of purposes: first, the act of confessing to Lémy turns her moment of respite and comparative happiness with Fred into a "sin", while some of the more intimate and "risqué" acts performed with her lover become sordid and shameful once related within this context, spoiling and blackening her

memories and reducing her, in her own mind, to little better than a whore. Forcing a woman to speak of what she would rather keep hidden (and the selective hearing of which Lémy and the narrator both seem guilty) is an abuse of power - a form of mental rape³⁷. The woman's language is co-opted and (re)possessed by a man, leaving her with no defence. In this way, her spirit is ground down and Lémy, her brutal, drunken and seemingly worthless husband, sets himself up as the one wronged, the "innocent victim". Lémy thus becomes morally superior and able to hand out the now "justified" punishment. Thanks to the "breaking-off" of the text at this point, the reader can only guess at the violence which may follow or the sexual "favours" that might be extorted from the terrified woman.

In addition, Barthélémy's need to hear of Jeanne-D'Arc's "crimes" before being able to act recalls the second epigraph, by Paul Valéry: "Offense-moi pour me donner la force de te tuer", which encapsulates the impotence of an aggressor, unable to act unless supremely provoked by his victim. It also questions the guilt of the selected victim and, by extension, the appropriateness of the choice of victim. Unwilling or unable to take on his real oppressors, in a society dominated now not only by anglophones but also by

³⁷ The same pattern is present in another of Beaulieu's novels, Blanche forcée, where Job J. extorts information from Blanche about her past, including the incestuous abuse at the hands of her father, and then refuses to believe her, in a similar abuse of power and the confessional process (which also recalls the treatment of hysterics during the nineteenth century). This finally results in Blanche's suicide (Montréal, VLB éditeur, 1976). It also occurs in Hubert Aquin's L'Antiphonaire, as Christine is forced to tell of a past affair and is left feeling (deliberately) belittled and shamed by both the confession and the "confessor", the man who claims to love her. Aquin's Trou de mémoire includes a similar incident as a drugged R.R. must repeatedly recount her rape to Olympe Ghezze-Quénum.

francophones and allophones of a higher social status, Lémy turns to an easier target: Woman, ever the symbolic victim and scapegoat of man's frustrations³⁸. Of a similar act, Jacques Pelletier says:

Geste de colère absurde, acte de vengeance et de libération parodique, puisqu'il détruit une victime plutôt qu'un véritable ennemi, mais qui exprime de manière tragique toute la profondeur d'une aliénation³⁹.

In order that Lémy (and the narrative) might justify this victimisation, Jeanne-D'Arc's character, in the role that she is seen to play for the majority of the text (and the role Lémy sees her play), appears to be precisely one of "offensiveness", a characteristic which is exploited to the full - that is to say that for much of the novel her behaviour is unpleasant, even obnoxious. However, Jeanne-D'Arc speaks almost exclusively at another's command; her words subservient to and dependent on another's will, the woman's voice in this text is heard and her presence felt, primarily, as they are channelled through a man's "voice". Jeanne-D'Arc is part of a wider textual strategy of violence - an imaginary and textual construct - the "perfect", deserving victim who may be more easily sacrificed in order that man's story may be told. Once again, Woman does

³⁸ Several of Beaulieu's heroes succumb to the same "temptation" of taking out their anger on someone weaker or more miserable than they: Malcomm Hudd drives Rikki to suicide, as Blanche is driven by Job J., while Jos Connaissant twice beats his girlfriend Marie and Milien beats his dying wife, later dreaming of her mutilation and dismemberment. As we have seen, this pattern is evident throughout much of the literature of the period, as the troubles of the male characters are worked out on the bodies of their female counterparts.

³⁹ Pelletier, Le Roman national, 118. Pelletier is in fact referring to the beating of an unconscious and dying Milienne by her husband in Beaulieu's Les Grands-pères.

not "exist" as much as she is "represented", and in that representation she becomes the "ideal target" for male violence.

Jeanne-D'Arc, whom we see through Lémy's eyes, is ignorant, vulgar in the extreme, "cheap", cruel and promiscuous, and while she occasionally appears sympathetic (when talking to Fred, for example), when her fear, weariness and vulnerability are revealed, she is generally portrayed as having few, if any, saving graces. In the cellar, the earth-shattering words she speaks to Baptiste, whom alcohol has made bold, are these: "Hé là, tu l'ôtes-tu ta sacrée main ou ben si tu veux que j'pisse dessus elle?" (149) - a threat which she duly carries out, Baptiste apparently refusing to move his hand. Lémy's violent reaction to this, which involves beating Baptiste to a pulp, brings the police, who in turn brutalise Lémy, smashing his ankle (reiterating the Oedipal thematic of the text) and causing the injury that will trouble him henceforth, taking away much of his mobility and strength. At this point:

Tout devint toupie vertigineuse, escarboucles de feu trouant la noirceur, longues coulées de sperme blanc jaillissant des cuisses de Baptiste qui cherchait la passe dans le minou noir, mouillé et battant au centre de la Jeanne-D'Arc...Et tandis qu'on le poussait dans l'escalier, la Jeanne-D'Arc écartait les jambes. Du bout des doigts elle tenait grand ouvert le long minou pour que Baptiste puisse s'y jeter avec fureur. Alors elle se mettrait à crier et labourerait de ses ongles le dos nu (163-4).

This act of (fantasised?) adulterous copulation, an open and callous sexual betrayal by the man's one valued possession, immediately follows his frenzy of violence aimed precisely at defending or retaining that same possession. Perhaps not surprisingly, this episode defeats Barthélémy, at least momentarily. It is "unreal" in its outrageousness, its cruelty - a larger-than-life nightmare. The exaggerated proportions of the horror of this

incident and of Jeanne-D'Arc's "contemptible" character are underlined as, shortly afterwards, bruised, tear-stained and bleeding, she is seen having intercourse with Fred in the kitchen, while Lémy is unconscious and recuperating from the attentions of the police⁴⁰. Later, the memory of this same incident is deliberately - and necessarily⁴¹ - recalled in order to fuel Lémy's anger and violence as he prepares for the final and supreme ritual: the killing and dismemberment of Jeanne-D'Arc. The enormity of her crimes, her promiscuity and her lack of regard for Lémy or her inability to love him, are necessary elements of the textual strategy and "aesthetic" which, in order to illustrate Lémy's impotence, wretchedness, cowardice and inertia, places Jeanne-D'Arc in the role of an aggressor, the better to abuse her with an appearance of legitimacy. Jeanne-D'Arc becomes a catalyst, a device or a medium which allows the focus of the text, the degradation and sufferings of Lémy, to be communicated.

Colonisation and Gender Inversion.

As the drama of Lémy's frustration is transferred to the personal stage of the rue des Récollets, the victimisation of Jeanne-D'Arc and the violence directed towards her provide the metaphor for the revolutionary and liberatory violence suggested by the scapegoating model. The (former) representative of Lémy's self-esteem, the mirror which

⁴⁰ This is reminiscent of a scene from Hubert Aquin's L'Antiphonaire, where Christine, the protagonist, is drugged and raped while in a similar physical state, following the assault on her by her husband. While Jeanne-D'Arc is an apparently willing participant in this case, the choice of the shared image of the sexualisation of a physically brutalised woman is troubling.

⁴¹ Twice we are told, "il fallait absolument qu'il se souvienne de cette scène" (149).

reflected the perhaps distorted and flattering image he wished to see of himself⁴², Jeanne-D'Arc initially served as a substitute for the phallic mother figure whose gaze "enables the subject to form a self-representation"⁴³. With Jeanne-D'Arc (and preferably in the dark), Lémy could forget the poverty and oppression of his life and his own dereliction: "Ça s'voit pas que j'sus laitte quand y fait noir. Y a pus d'cicatrices, y a pus de bobos sus l'pied. J'sus présentable" (29). Jeanne-D'Arc's assumed love had given his life meaning, value and security and, most importantly, had made him "feel like a man": she was the "proof" of his virility, which made of her his most - and perhaps his only - prized possession. Without Jeanne-D'Arc, the life they had shared together crumbles, becoming invalid, as does the proof or valorisation of Lémy's self-image and his somewhat questionable virility. Now: "il se vit tel qu'il était, plissé et ridé, plein de points noirs sur le nez, la peau vineuse, les dents jaunes et sans femme pour s'oublier" (103). A shadow of his former self, Lémy considers himself emasculated:

Vieux lion perdu dans la jungle, blessé à mort, sans Tarzan pour les quartiers de viande. Vieux lion *édenté, privé de son rugissement*, et le ventre trop gonflé...Il laissa les larmes couler sur ses joues et ferma les yeux (37, my emphasis).

A pitiful figure, Lémy thus takes his place among the likes of P.-X. Magnant, François Galarneau and the unnamed narrators of Prochain épisode and Le Couteau sur la table, as he is finally left with the knowledge of his own impotence, to become the embodiment

⁴² As Virginia Woolf commented in A Room of One's Own, women's duty is to "reflect men at twice their natural size" (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967). Also cited by Raoul, 23.

⁴³ Raoul, 117.

of the alienation, dispossession and powerlessness of the colonised Québec male, his own "victimisation" most apparent in the police brutality which serves as the overt manifestation of his oppression. Having been found (or assumed) false, Jeanne-D'Arc, the now out-of-reach object of his desire, becomes the focus of his "narcissistic rage"⁴⁴, as, through a shift or "glissement" the sometime image of his manhood now mirrors only his impotence. Lémy resorts to violence in a specific attempt to re-establish the sense of potency which he can no longer achieve sexually, thus demonstrating Patricia Smart's comment regarding the male Québécois protagonist of this period: "[qui] rêve à la fois de s'abolir dans la femme et de se donner l'illusion de la puissance en la foulant à ses pieds"⁴⁵. The inherent ambivalence of this dilemma is apparent in the sexual nature of the violence, as Lémy's anger directs itself towards the site of both his desire and his failure, namely, the body, or more specifically and significantly, the genitals of Jeanne-D'Arc.

Lémy's response to the discovery of the apparent "true nature" of Jeanne-D'Arc - his recognition of her sexuality - is reminiscent of the Oedipal crisis - the moment when a (male) child realises that his mother is not, in fact, "phallic". Following this parallel discovery, the representation of Jeanne-D'Arc changes from the reliable, pure and yet maternal, undivided and uncastrated phallic mother who dominates the sometime utopic *roman de la terre* - evoked here as we have seen in the references to an idyllic (and pre-oedipal) state, prior to this discovery - to the threatening, impure, voraciously sexual

⁴⁴ Raoul, 20.

⁴⁵ Smart, "Un cadavre sous les fondations de l'édifice", 29.

figure of the "castrated" and "castrating" or "abject" mother common to novels of this period⁴⁶. Through the shift in blame which Girard describes (and which I discussed in the last chapter in the more specific context of Québec gender-relations), the Mother is once again deemed responsible for the impotence of the male protagonist; she must therefore be destroyed if he is to attain (or perhaps regain) his rightful place as a Subject within the Symbolic order. On a wider scale, then, the novel offers a representation of the ideological shift which took place in Québec, illustrated in the fictions of the *révolution littéraire* precisely through a re-coding of the Mother; the symbol of the feminine refuge values associated with the colonised culture is thus inverted and rejected.

The impotence of the protagonist, meanwhile, is underlined, first, in the scene of transvestism which illustrates, in a concrete fashion, the apparent inversion of stereotypical active/passive (masculine/feminine) gender positions produced in Québec under colonialism⁴⁷ - the powerful and phallic mother taking precedence over the (temporarily) impotent and "feminised" father. At the same time, this powerlessness is

⁴⁶ Valerie Raoul discusses this concept in relation to diary fiction in Québec in Distinctly Narcissistic, eg. 229. The term "abject mother" is from Julia Kristeva's Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection (Paris, Seuil, 1980). It is interesting to note that another strong mother, Catherine de Médici, was instrumental - even the "villain" - in the massacres for which Barthélémy is named. See for example, Robert M. Kingdon, Myths about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres 1572-1576 (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1988) and Arthur Tilley, The French Wars of Religion (London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1979).

⁴⁷ In his section on Beaulieu in Trois Romanciers québécois, Gérard Bessette identifies a latent homosexuality in Lémy (Montréal, Editions du jour, 1975) 100-101. This is typical of many male protagonists of the period. Jean Larose, (cited in Raoul) claims that this is indicative of the fact that the Québécois have been "blocked in the imaginary stage, associated with anal eroticism, because of the power of the mother from whom they cannot separate" (Distinctly Narcissistic, 36).

evoked by the contrast with Jeanne-D'Arc, whose namesake, the "Warrior Maiden", is indeed the "femme phallique" or "virile", dressed in men's clothing. This is echoed, again, in the scene of transvestism, as Lémy, the character who "hears voices" and who has been released from Dorémi (Domrémi), attempts to "become" Jeanne-D'Arc, in an effort, perhaps, to liberate his people⁴⁸.

Lémy's impotence is also indicated - paradoxically - in the violence he directs towards Jeanne-D'Arc. Much of the more "straight-forward" domestic violence is real enough, as is shown by Jeanne-D'Arc's fear of reprimand for her failures in the acting out of the mysteries and in her desperate pleas and promises as Lémy extorts her confession. Many of the more outrageous acts of aggression, however, take place only in his mind. Lémy's distress and anger are expressed in terms of sado-erotic violence which serves both to reassert control and, in his hallucinations, to endow him with an almost superhuman virility, expressed in terms of a phallocentric obsession. As Lémy, drunk, follows Jeanne-D'Arc into the bedroom, we are told: "Plus il s'approchait d'elle plus il se raidissait dans sa sourde colère", to the point where he claims: "J'a queue comme un clou d'giroffe" (48). At another moment, he talks of "la palle majestueuse" (141), while

⁴⁸ This role reversal recalls Jean Larose's argument that some male intellectuals in Québec became "feminist" in a paradoxical attempt to regain some sense of potency by an association with the perceived power of the "phallic" Woman and so become "men" once again. Referring specifically to the focus of the journal La (Nouvelle) Barre du jour and the avidity with which male critics adopted the feminist theoretical approach of Nicole Brossard, (itself modelled on the Parisian French feminist movement), Larose comments; "c'est le dernier mimétisme, le plus québécois, de la mère par le fils", in "Une modernité bien de chez nous", La Petite Noireur (Montréal, Boréal, 1987) 141-171, 171. See also "Le Féminisme masculin", 179-190.

elsewhere, that focalisation on the phallus becomes a total metonymic identification as "Il était un membre..." (48).

The Eroticisation of Violence.

The regenerative effect that violence offers Lémy depends greatly on the style and extent of abuse inflicted on Jeanne-D'Arc, itself designed to belittle or humiliate, so that by her reduction Lémy may feel elevated. Much of the violence is intentionally extremely degrading, and its explicit focus on the woman's sexual organs (the site of her difference) suggests an extreme misogyny, especially if we consider the sadistic pleasure with which both Lémy and the narrator (and perhaps by implication, the author?) watch Jeanne-D'Arc's suffering. I mentioned earlier the narrator laughing over what Lémy does not yet know: at that point in the proceedings Lémy is involved in one of the more extended and brutal bouts of violence (albeit imaginary, as he admits he was actually sitting on the fridge all the while). Jeanne-D'Arc has threatened to leave Lémy, whose reaction is to get out the leather strap and test it, his actions very deliberate. There is a degree of anticipation and relish as he gloatingly informs her: "quand j'vas avoir fini avec toi, tu s'ras pus qu'un p'tit tas d'guenille sus t'tapis[sic] (122)", and he prepares to beat her:

Il se leva, écarta les jambes, bomba la poitrine. Il était nu, le vent soufflait dehors, il avait la queue raidie comme une barre de fer..(122).

At this moment, in Lémy's mind, he is proud, stands tall, exudes power and virility and, while the storm rages outside, the scene takes on an epic and heroic quality as, "quelque chose trop longtemps attendu allait enfin arriver". As he grows in stature and strength, Jeanne-D'Arc, inversely, is:

figée dans sa peur, *abrutie*...son corps était une peur bleue de la mort qu'elle voyait entre les jambes écartées de Barthélémy...(122-3, my emphasis).

The phallus becomes a weapon, a symbol of his power and of her death, in an instance of overtly Freudian significance. Finally, Barthélémy decides that "Pisser sur le corps de la Jeanne-D'Arc lui parut être ce qu'il avait de mieux à faire pour commencer sa vengeance" (123). The next few pages describe, step-by-step, the sado-erotic atrocities committed (in Lémy's mind) on Jeanne-D'Arc's body, as he pursues her, beating her with the strap - now seen as "la continuation de son corps, haineuse, terriblement haineuse" and concentrating his efforts on her breasts, backside and vagina, those parts of her body becoming increasingly grotesque. The passage is too long to be quoted in its entirety, but the violence becomes highly sexual as Jeanne-D'Arc's screams of "Oh, Lémy, oh Lémy, oh Lémy" become cries of sexual pleasure. The scene culminates in her orgasm and declarations of undying love, as Lémy beats and kicks her until she is "une tumeur galopante...déchir[ée] en lambeaux" (126), recalling Barthes' comments on the Sadeian woman: "la femme est abîmée...on produit...une chose"⁴⁹. However, Beaulieu adds another layer to the Sadeian intertext, illustrating what Susan Suleiman says of Robbe-Grillet's Projet pour une révolution à New York: "to the fantasy of total domination is added the fantasy that if it's done right, she'll enjoy it"⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, Sade/Fourier/Loyola (Paris, Seuil, 1973) 127, also cited in chapter 1.

⁵⁰ Susan Rubin Suleiman, Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde (Cambridge, MA. and London, Harvard University Press, 1990) 66.

The pleasure that both Barthélémy and the voyeuristic narrator get from this scene is obviously intensified by Jeanne-D'Arc's helplessness⁵¹, as the narrative shifts gleefully back and forth from the scene of violence to the police station, where Jeanne-D'Arc's potential saviours are playing cards in their shirtsleeves and making too much noise to hear either her cries or the telephone (which Lémy had disconnected anyway). The "erotic" quality of the violence, or of its results, becomes apparent elsewhere when Fred and Jeanne-D'Arc meet for the first time. Fred recalls his first sight of her, the very picture of humiliation, bleeding and grovelling in the dust, blood and urine in the cellar along with Lémy and Baptiste:

Le faisceau de la lampe de poche s'était arrêté sur le cul nu et souillé de sang et pourquoi diable avait-il fallu qu'il l'aimât dans cette première imposture, dans cette rondeur blanche, sauf pour les poils qui lui sortaient entre les fesses (86-7).

A relationship is thus established between female victimisation and eroticism, and shortly afterwards, in spite of - or perhaps because of - the bruises, the blood and the general vulnerability of Jeanne-D'Arc (who, incidentally, is never allowed any dignity), the two begin a sexual affair.

The pleasure that Jeanne-D'Arc is supposed to experience during the bouts of violence has a number of connotations: first, of course, her submission - of which she is supposedly proud - shows Lémy's regained control and superior power and woman's happy restoration to her rightful place. Her sexual pleasure, meanwhile, is indicative of Lémy's virility, while at the same time, in suggesting that a woman could enjoy the

⁵¹ This recalls a number of scenes from L'Antiphonaire which I will consider in the next chapter.

experience of being brutalised, the text plays on the old myth of "women's masochism" - perhaps ironically, perhaps not. However, while the treatment of Jeanne-D'Arc is obviously phantasmagoric, given the apparent enjoyment and approval of the protagonist and his spectators (the narrator and author), it certainly does not seem that Beaulieu is trying to deconstruct the myth, nor is he trying to make any particularly positive, revolutionary statement about women's sexuality.

In fact, the treatment of Jeanne-D'Arc throughout the novel suggests an intense dislike for women and women's bodies, evident as the narrator "fans the flames" and rubs his hands together in anticipation of the next indignity to be inflicted on Jeanne-D'Arc. At the very beginning of the novel, meanwhile, Lémy returns home and observes "que ça puait, dans l'air. Trop de femmes devaient avoir leurs règles" (14). As Jeanne-D'Arc's "castrating" vagina becomes the focus of his hatred in its capacity as the symbolic site of his impotence and anger, Lémy considers "son minou devenu une forçure puante" (126) and elsewhere, "son minou comme une gueule de poisson, s'ouvrant et se fermant et éructant" (128), as the female genital is seen as a menacing (and perhaps "voracious") mouth⁵². Later, Lémy is finally able to fantasise the performance of the (too) long awaited and ultimate act of violence, the murder of Jeanne-D'Arc, involving the total and methodical destruction of her body, the breaking of all her bones, her dismemberment and her decapitation, accomplished by twisting the chain she wore

⁵² The image recalls, among others, Jean-Paul Sartre's comment from his essay "The Hole", reprinted in Existentialism and Human Emotions, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York, Citadel-Philosophical Library, 1985) 84-90, cited in English in Jane Caputi, The Age of Sex Crime (Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987) 144.

around her neck. At the same time, not content with these considerable acts of violence, Lémy feels it necessary to tear out her pubic hair, break wind on her breasts and, of course, commit the final indignity, the ultimate act of violence, the necrophilic rape of which he asks himself, "Peut-être avait-il tué la Jeanne-D'Arc seulement pour lui faire cette offense?" (168)⁵³. This act is significant in terms of Lémy's sexual capability, as it seems to be the only incidence of coitus between the two of them (if Jeanne-D'Arc can really be said to be "involved" in this act). The fact that Lémy is able to penetrate Jeanne-D'Arc only once she is in this state offers little hope for the recovery of his potency or for the success of the liberatory violence which this act purports to incarnate. At the same time, the hatred it appears to express towards the woman and her body is extreme, as she is reduced to a pure sexual function.

This degradation of the female body continues as, at one point, the "heartless" Jeanne-D'Arc taunts Lémy, now invalided following the brutality of the police; shouting at him, she tries to force him to eat:

Il pleurait parce qu'elle le méprisait depuis que sa jambe l'obligeait à rester assis toute la journée: elle ne comprenait pas qu'il pouvait être aussi malheureux dans son infirmité ni ne voyait dans ses gestes qu'elle posait cette subtile provocation à laquelle elle se livrait devant lui (161).

It is this "subtle provocation" which drives Lémy to punch Jeanne-D'Arc, once again, knocking her unconscious and then attempting, unsuccessfully, to insert one of the sausages that he had refused to eat into her vagina, in a rather heavy-handed image of his own impotency, as "la saucisse se défais[ait], la graisse pissant de l'une des

⁵³ Incidentally, Jos Connaissant, another of Beaulieu's heros, fantasises committing a similar offence (Jos Connaissant, 177).

extrémités"(162)⁵⁴, thus foiling his efforts. Elsewhere, the image is reiterated in the course of a violent fantasy, as Lémy imagines her, "une carotte dans le cul et la tige d'un énorme poireau dans le minou"(130), thereby reducing her body to a piece of meat - she had, after all, first been strung up by the ankles along with some animal carcasses. Finally Lémy worries: "Aurait-il le temps d'achever l'oeuvre, ou allait-on le surprendre alors qu'il lui remplirait le minou de chiffons imbibés d'essence?"(126), in a Robbe-Grilletien act of sadistic violence⁵⁵. The act of forcing objects into a woman's vagina is common enough among rapists (who are not necessarily impotent males), serving primarily to humiliate. It entails the total degradation and despoilment of a woman's body, an extravagant defilement and expression of hatred and perceived power⁵⁶. It also serves as an act of revenge against the "abject" mother or her substitute, the vagina being seen as both the place of origin and the site of potential emasculation, and so a source of horror⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ The choice of image recalls the "Roi du Hot Dog" in Jacques Godbout's novel Salut Galarneau! (Paris, Seuil, 1967).

⁵⁵ Alain Robbe-Grillet uses similar acts of sadistic violence performed on women's bodies in his novels Projet pour une révolution à New York (Paris, Minuit, 1970) and La Maison de rendez-vous (Paris, Minuit, 1965).

⁵⁶ Susan Brownmiller identifies this type of act elsewhere, in the film Last Exit to Brooklyn and also in William Faulkner's Sanctuary, considering it a "novelist's rendition of the traditional Freudian view of sexual violence", according to which only an impotent male would perform such an act with a phallic substitute: Brownmiller maintains, rather, that the act is, in fact, the "coup de grâce" often inflicted after a real, physical rape. Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape (New York, Bantam Books, 1976) 195.

⁵⁷ Kristeva, Pouvoirs de l'horreur.

Jeanne-D'Arc's body thus becomes the focus of sadistic and highly misogynistic fantasy games, the site of a frenzy of almost cartoon violence, as she "refuses" to die and Lémy imagines her: "son corps une tire s'allongeant indéfiniment sous le pneu d'une automobile dans la Catherine" (130), or roasting on a spit while a chorus sings sacred songs around her in what is, perhaps, a parody of the burning of the "real" Jeanne-D'Arc (or of any one of the millions of other women burned by women-hating priests), again reiterating the sacrificial nature of the violence against a female scapegoat. Elsewhere, Lémy imagines that "elle n'entendrait jamais une aussi belle musique que celle de la scie lui sciant la cage thoracique"(129) and finally, in an image close to the violent portrayal of women's bodies in Surrealist art, Jeanne-D'Arc is seen with four bottles of beer cooling inside her frozen carcass, her mutilated body transformed into a serviceable object (130). In this way, Jeanne-D'Arc is dehumanised, her image here far from the woman herself, divorced from the reality of flesh and blood.

Thinking of her in these terms - either as a cartoon character who can survive any amount of brutality, or as an object deserving of such treatment - makes the real violence against her easier for Lémy to perform and also, to a certain extent, renders the violence more acceptable to the reader because it is more "unreal". This distancing is also brought about by the bathos with which much of the violence is related. Indeed, the reader is invited (and expected) to enjoy the bloodfest, as much of the horror is undercut by the incongruity of Lémy's behaviour. The assumption of the police that the precious shoe box contains a gift for Jeanne-D'Arc, when all the while it supposedly contains one of her bones, first carefully soaked in caustic soda to remove all of the flesh, has a

twisted and macabre humour about it, as does the reader's realisation that the dismembered mannequin covered in red paint that falls out of the wardrobe is Barthélémy's "Jeanne-D'Arc"⁵⁸. The fact that the status of so much of this violence is questionable, the boundaries between reality and fantasy being blurred, also adds to the "guilt-free" enjoyment of the text. Elsewhere, the narrative adopts a different strategy, as at one point we are told that Lémy's imaginary audience is not always totally approving of his performances:

Barthélémy avait l'impression de jouer devant *un public de province* qui, lorsque la pièce atteindrait à la violence, se lèverait en bloc pour protester" (55, my emphasis).

The implied audience is of course the reader, who is thus manipulated through his or her *amour-propre* into accepting the violence (as artifice) in order not to be considered "parochial" and unsophisticated.

The de-realising effects of bathos or parody, theatricality and the constant rupture or "coupure" which the text practices, therefore serve as a means of defence, as Susan Suleiman writes:

by exposing the scene[s] as only play they enable the reader...to experience the excitement as *pleasure*, devoid of the anxiety that would accompany such scenes enacted in real life⁵⁹.

⁵⁸ The image of the painted and damaged mannequin recalls "la Mariée" in Réjean Ducharme's *Le Nez qui voque* (Paris, Gallimard, 1967). In this text, the stolen (and somewhat battered) mannequin, wearing a wedding dress, is daubed with ink (95-99).

⁵⁹ Suleiman, 63. Again, Suleiman is talking about Robbe-Grillet's novel, *Projet pour une révolution à New York*.

Once the reader has "clued in" to the fact that this violence is fantasised, after the initial shock of seeing Jeanne-D'Arc, "le cou cassé, la tête et la flamme des longs cheveux blonds entre ciel et terre, mouillée de sang chaud" (29), as Barthélémy walks in through the door, the murder of Jeanne-D'Arc and the visits by the police become a kind of game, in which the reader is complicitous.

However, it is a game in which Jeanne-D'Arc is nevertheless the victim, albeit symbolic. And yet not so, as Jeanne-D'Arc is in fact dead, or so the police kindly remind Lémy. How she died we are not told, we can only assume that it was not at the hands of her loving husband. In any case, having provided the narrator, Lémy, Fred, and apparently the reader, with so much sport, having been the victim of Lémy's frustrated violence and anger and the battleground on which the symbolic "liberation" of the Québécois is fought within the novel, Jeanne-D'Arc is disposed of. Her role within the text is to serve as victim for as long as her victimisation is necessary to the development of Lémy's story, at which point she can be "killed off" unceremoniously by the text (or, rather, by the author), another expendable character who could only be female⁶⁰.

Sexual Violence and (Counter)revolution.

The effectiveness of this violence, on all levels, is questioned within the novel itself, as it closes on what Patricia Smart describes as "une note de fausse libération,

⁶⁰ In addition to the texts considered in the last two chapters, in Claude Jasmin's Pleure pas, Germaine (1965), a young girl's suicide brings two men (her father and former lover) together, while in Le Nez qui vogue, Chateaugué must die if Mille Milles is to become a man; she kills herself once he apparently has no further use for her.

dont l'ironie est apparente"⁶¹. Indeed, having "finally" dealt with Jeanne-D'Arc, the text ends in a somewhat flippant manner as Lémy wipes his hands, throwing her legs to the dog and her head in the cellar:

Une fois le plancher lavé à l'eau de Javel, il pourrait enfin changer ses vêtements, retirer de la petite boîte de velours l'harmonica du Père, détacher le chien et marcher dans Morial Mort en direction des hélicoptères remplis de soldats et qui tournoyaient au dessus de la rue Monselet (172).

While the violence initially appears to offer the promise of liberation, or certainly of renewal⁶², the fact that Barthélémy has already "killed" Jeanne-D'Arc on a number of occasions suggests that the cathartic power of violence is at best temporary and incomplete and that, like the ghost of Joan Ruskin which haunts her murderer, P.X. Magnant, in Aquin's Trou de mémoire, the memory of Jeanne-D'Arc and all that she represents will remain with him. The fact that these "murders" take place in the realm of fantasy, meanwhile, suggests that Barthélémy has as yet failed in his attempts to take control of his destiny and to move from the level of "acteur" to "actant". While violence is presented as a natural reaction, engrained within the very landscape (41), Lémy realises that the way out is far more complex and that the violence has come too late; he remembers "le disque usé de la rébellion deux fois centenaire" (154) and "l'imagerie ancienne, c'est-à-dire les cent mille Joseph-David-Barthélémy Dupuis de son rêve,...qui

⁶¹ Patricia Smart, "Un rêve québécois de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu", Livres et auteurs québécois (1972) 46-49, 48.

⁶² The harmonica which Lémy retrieves serves as both a reference to the past (in terms of traditional music etc.) and a phallic substitute in Beaulieu's writing. See also Don Quichotte.

marchaient vers le futur" (152). Finally, it seems as if his action was too long awaited, the moment for violence has passed or is now uncontrollable and indiscriminate, as though Barthélémy "était un membre qui avait été trop longtemps bandé" (48), ejaculating explosively and without control. The solution is, therefore, more complex, as he finally realises:

tuer la Jeanne-D'Arc ne suffisait peut-être pas, la mutiler et l'outrager ne constituaient sûrement pas une fin ni une délivrance souhaitable. Tout était plus subtil, moins facilement identifiable, tout ne relevait sans doute pas de la Jeanne-D'Arc ni de lui-même d'ailleurs ni de la grosse main de Baptiste posée comme un défi dans le califourchon secret (170).

Beaulieu's examination of the events of October 1970 ends in pessimism and the darkness of failure, the acts of violence against his chosen scapegoat are seen ultimately as futile, as in his other novels where similar patterns of abuse are apparent. And yet it would appear that even had the violence been successful in terms of its liberatory and cathartic aspects, there would be no place for Jeanne-D'Arc or for the women she represents. The text may be "revolutionary" in its use of language and structure, and the representation of Jeanne-D'Arc is radical in its challenge to the concept of the "Heroine" of the traditional French-Canadian novel, yet her role, and indeed the text, remain fundamentally unsubversive, even reactionary, since her status as Victim is unquestioned, and is moreover essential to the functioning of the text. Jeanne-D'Arc, her body the playground of misogynistic fantasy, the site of intense, graphic and repetitive violence, is excluded from male plans for a new world order, which must, in Patricia Smart's words,

be built on her corpse⁶³. The female body therefore remains "le lieu privilégié pour l'attentat"⁶⁴ - the ideal site for violent crime - and a barrier to be destroyed for the benefit of the disaffected male, who still assumes that to become a Man he must ab-ject his mother or her substitute. While the colonised and "feminised" male may hope ultimately to achieve full subjecthood and full masculinity following the completion of the decolonising process (so rejecting an artificially and temporarily imposed state of effeminacy), woman can never be other than herself and as a result must remain the eternal Object to a male Subject, both the means and barrier to male self-sufficiency.

⁶³ Smart, Ecrire dans la maison du père: L'émergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec (Montréal, Québec/Amérique, 1988), see especially her chapter 6 and also her article "Un cadavre sous les fondations de l'édifice".

⁶⁴ Alain Robbe-Grillet, Le Monde, 22 septembre 1978, interview pour "Le Monde des lettres", quoted in Dardigna, 21.

Chapter Four

L'Antiphonaire: a Literary/Literal Striptease.

Hubert Aquin is considered among Québec's most challenging authors. The four novels for which he is primarily renowned - Prochain épisode¹, Trou de mémoire², L'Antiphonaire³ and Neige noire⁴ - have been the subject of diverse studies since their publication and have recently been reissued as part of a critical edition of Aquin's *oeuvre*: a significant recognition of his importance and influence, unusual for a writer so recent. The texts of this colourful, even legendary figure, are considered radical in their treatment of traditional writing styles, their intertextual borrowings from many sources and their deliberately misleading or "playful" and carnivalesque quality. Aquin was a revolutionary spirit⁵, not only with regard to his writings but also to the nationalist crisis in Québec during the 1960's and 70's, involved in the separatist movement until his death at his own hands in 1977. The first two novels are infused with the crisis, as the protagonists are implicated in revolutionary activities, yet caught in the same frustrations,

¹ Hubert Aquin, Prochain épisode (Montréal, Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1965).

² Aquin, Trou de mémoire (Montréal, Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1968).

³ Aquin, L'Antiphonaire (Montréal, Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1969). All page references given in the text will be to this edition unless otherwise specified.

⁴ Aquin, Neige noire (Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre, 1974). In addition to these four principle texts, there are also Aquin's first novel, Les Rédempteurs, written in 1952 and published in 1959 in Ecrits du Canada français (volume 5, 45-114) as well as L'Invention de la mort, written in 1959, which has only recently been published (Ottawa, Leméac, 1991): neither has received the critical attention accorded the other works.

⁵ In his article "Euphorias of Substitution: Hubert Aquin and the Political Novel in Québec", Fredric Jameson comments that Aquin was known as a "revolutionary dandy". Yale French Studies 65 (1983) 214-223, 214.

madness and impotence as Barthélémy Dupuis; the later novels have absorbed the cultural malaise of the period and transferred it to another narrative level. Increasingly, however, this malaise is taken out on the bodies of women: Trou de mémoire sees the murder of Joan Ruskin and the rape of her sister, known as RR, while in L'Antiphonaire, the protagonist, a woman, documents numerous rapes, most of which she endures herself; finally (in a development which Françoise Maccabée Iqbal describes as a move from "quantity to quality"⁶) the multiple abuse of L'Antiphonaire is fine-honed into an "exquisite" Sadeian (or Robbe-Grilletien) murder, as Nicolas, the protagonist of Neige noire, performs the ritualised and sadistic torture, excision, manducation and murder of his wife, Sylvie, while on their honeymoon.

This apparently anti-woman stance has received some attention from feminists⁷ such as Lori Saint-Martin and Valerie Raoul, in their analyses of Trou de mémoire⁸,

⁶ Françoise Maccabée Iqbal, "Violence et viol chez Aquin: Don Juan Ensorcelé", Canadian Literature 88 (Spring 1981) 52-60, 52. While I appreciate the "sentiment", I find the word "quality" somewhat troubling: it suggests, of course, a value system in keeping with Sadeian philosophy and perhaps a "removed" subject position on the part of the reader, not surprising in itself, given the extreme formalism of Aquin's writings, but symptomatic of the way in which violence may be presented so as to evacuate the pain and horror (and the political implications) of its reality.

⁷ Indeed, Robert Richard, a prominent scholar of Aquin, suggests that the mistreatment of women in Aquin's novels has received sufficient attention: he talks of a round table at which everyone bemoaned the fate of the "aquinien" women, "pour ensuite passer à autre chose" - presumably more important (Le Corps logique de la fiction: le code romanesque chez Hubert Aquin Montréal, L'Hexagone, 1990, 121). It seems strange then, if the subject is so well worn, that so few published articles seem to address the issue.

⁸ Lori Saint-Martin, "Mise à mort de la femme et "libération" de l'homme: Godbout, Aquin, Beaulieu". Voix et Images, 10.1 (automne 1984) 107-117 and Valerie Raoul, Distinctly Narcissistic: Diary Fiction in Québec (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993).

while Neige noire has been studied by Patricia Smart⁹. L'Antiphonaire, meanwhile, an ambitious, troubling and often baffling text, does not appear to have received quite the attention - feminist or otherwise - given to Aquin's other novels. On publication, reviews were mixed, although it was criticised chiefly for its "gratuitous" erudition and for a number of inconsistencies¹⁰, to which I will return. L'Antiphonaire does lend itself, however, to an analysis of the use of violence in literature and of the role of Woman as Victim, as well as a discussion of the "feminism" of Aquin's writing (since certain comments by and the identity of the protagonist raise the question); this is an elusive topic, particularly in this novel, whose extreme and perhaps deliberate ambiguity is summed up by Patricia Smart when she says:

L'Antiphonaire peut se lire à la fois comme un roman féministe et comme un des romans les plus misogynes de l'époque¹¹.

While my intention in this chapter is not, of course, "to determine once and for all whether or not "Hubert Aquin, writer", was a misogynist", the dichotomy expressed by Patricia Smart is crucial to an analysis of the violence within the novel, and at the same time, illustrates the ambiguity of the text and the multiple readings it propagates.

⁹ Patricia Smart, Ecrire dans la maison du père: l'émergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec, 1988 (Montréal, Québec/Amérique, 1990) 265-291.

¹⁰ Gilles Thérien reports on this in "Présentation", L'Antiphonaire, Edition critique, tome 3, vol 5 de l'édition critique de l'oeuvre d'Hubert Aquin (Montréal, Bibliothèque québécoise, 1993) XXXIX-XLIV.

¹¹ Smart, "Les Romans d'Hubert Aquin: une lecture au féminin", Le Roman québécois depuis 1960: méthodes et analyses, sous la direction de Louise Milot et Jaap Lintvelt (Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, CRELIQ, 1992) 215-227, 220.

L'Antiphonaire: A Treatise on Women?

The fact that the protagonist is an intelligent, educated woman has often been read as a significant feminist element in L'Antiphonaire. In her book, Hubert Aquin, romancier¹², Françoise Iqbal rightly suggests that Christine, a female doctor, working on her PhD thesis and "sexually liberated", would seem to be the very model of the "modern woman": such a choice of heroine would also seem to indicate a degree of overt woman-positiveness, hitherto unseen in male writing in Québec, a breaking away from the suffocating Wife/Mother roles so favoured up until this point. And yet the "mise en scène" of a "positive" female figure is not, in itself, necessarily a feminist act. Indeed, despite her impressive achievements, Christine's adult life even prior to the beginning of the novel appears to be a catalogue of disappointments, failure and abuse, primarily with regard to or at the hands of men, as is revealed when Robert Bernatchez, her lover, forces the information from her in an interrogation or violation similar to that suffered by Jeanne-D'Arc in Un rêve québécois (although at this point Christine is not threatened with physical violence). From her initial triumph as a medical doctor, at a time when such a profession would have only just been opening its doors if not its hearts to women, Christine is forced to resign, following an abortion performed by a "collègue complaisant" who then demanded sexual favours in return for his silence¹³. While such

¹² Iqbal, Hubert Aquin, romancier (Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1978): see especially her section "Féminisme", 195-199.

¹³ Many women have found themselves in similar situations due to the often illegal nature of abortion. See The New Our Bodies Ourselves: A Book By and For Women, by The Boston Women's Health Collective (New York, Touchstone-Simon and Schuster, 1992) 372.

a situation would be troubling in itself, Christine was, at the time, not only married, but having an affair with Robert himself, while the pregnancy was the result of a casual encounter with a visiting doctor. From this dilemma (for which she was, of course, largely responsible) onwards, L'Antiphonaire, a fictional autobiography, charts the gradual but incessant decline of Christine - her painful disintegration from potential MD.PhD to suicidal whore. Given her demise, and the humiliation she endures before killing both herself and the baby inside her, could it not also be assumed that Christine, the protagonist and narrator, is deliberately created as an "elevated" (and so a marginal) figure, the better to "knock her down"? - a practice which, after all, as we have seen, has been common in Western literature for several centuries (the eighteenth-century heroine springs to mind)¹⁴. The fate of Christine would thus be a form of "cautionary tale" or "backlash", so often encountered by women and female characters who succeed in "stepping out of line" or "rising above their station".

Such an apparently negative portrayal of the fate of modern woman could well be seen as reactionary, especially given the advances made by feminism during the revolutionary period in Québec history when the novel was written. In his book Le Corps logique de la fiction, Robert Richard talks of the spirit of "Contre-Réforme" which is a significant part both of Aquin's writing and of post-modernism as Richard sees it¹⁵; according to this logic, Aquin, the revolutionary, would invert the "popular" political reforms of the time - not so much to question the reforms *per se*, but in order to call into

¹⁴ See chapter 1.

¹⁵ Richard, Le Corps logique de la fiction, 98.

question the means by which they were being achieved and the "runaway" or perhaps naïve optimism which so often accompanies new advances. Such a strategy could certainly explain the apparent undermining of the feminist advances of the time - a calling into question in order to strengthen, an adoption of reactionary attitudes precisely in order to expose them for what they are. The repeated rapes of Christine and Renata, seen in the light of this spirit of "contre-réforme", could therefore be interpreted as a subtle reminder - unconscious, perhaps, benignly or otherwise intended - that, for all her intellect and professional qualifications, despite years of progress and liberation, Christine (Modern Woman) is still vulnerable to the one power that man will always hold over woman - namely, the act of rape. Her fate could be seen as a reminder to those caught up in the superficial improvements to women's lot, of the deeper and more fundamental inequalities between the sexes. Assuming this is so and that the abuse of women in the novel is intended indirectly as a "feminist" statement or agenda - and there may be no way of knowing for sure - how effective or valuable a strategy is this with regard to feminism, and how much, in its game of "Devil's Advocate", does it serve to normalise or perpetuate a belief in the acceptability of violent degradation of women?

The "pro-feminist" argument would seem perhaps a little more overt elsewhere in the text. The fact that Christine comments on "la secondarité substantielle et éternelle de la femme depuis le XVIème siècle jusqu'à nos jours" (57), thus underlining the similarities between her situation and that of Renata Belmissieri, despite the four hundred years of "progress" which separate them, has often been called upon as an explanation of the dual narratives of Aquin's text and a response to any accusation of

misogyny¹⁶: L'Antiphonaire is thereby deemed to reveal and criticise the apparently perpetual mistreatment of women. However, this argument, although proffered to a certain extent by the text and borne out by the parallels between the lives of both Renata and Christine, would seem to place the exposure of continued gender inequality as a central focus of the text and a fundamental criterion for the structure of L'Antiphonaire. Given that Christine is, however, a qualified doctor working on a doctoral dissertation, accomplishments of which Renata could only dream (and for which she would probably have been burned), such an explanation appears perhaps a little over-simplistic¹⁷. This is especially apparent in the author's own somewhat ambivalent response, during an interview, to a question regarding his portrayal of Christine, and whether it might perhaps suggest a misogynist tendency: Aquin replied that,

il y a quelqu'un qui a répondu qu'au contraire cela prouvait que je n'étais pas misogyne: parce que me mettant dans la peau de la femme je me faisais battre, humilier etc., donc c'est dire que j'épouse, assez intensément dans le cas de L'Antiphonaire, la position de la femme¹⁸.

The fact that Aquin had to rely on someone else's explanation of and interpretation of his own text and his own narrative strategy, would certainly seem to belie the notion that feminism was a primary motive in the structure of the text and in the representation or treatment of women in the text, as "Aquin's" explanation of his "adoption of Woman's

¹⁶ Iqbal, Hubert Aquin, romancier, 195.

¹⁷ André Lamontagne also notes this in his study Les Mots des autres: la poétique intertextuelle des oeuvres romanesques de Hubert Aquin (Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1992) 172.

¹⁸ Yvon Boucher, "Aquin par Aquin. Entrevue", Québec littéraire 2 (1976) 129-149, 140, quoted in Patricia Smart, "Les Romans d'Hubert Aquin", 223 (my emphasis).

plight" appears to be an afterthought. This ambivalence would also, finally, appear to cast doubt on any particularly feminist agenda within the notion of counter-reform.

Meanwhile, Christine's occasional comments regarding the feminisation of language - with reference to her own profession, for example: "tout le monde sait...que le mot médecine n'a pas cours quand il s'agit de désigner une femme-médecin" (45), and elsewhere, "j'étais née pour cette carrière superbement interrompue...de philosophe des sciences... ou de penseur (j'adore les mots sans équivalent féminin)" (131) - also seem to suggest a "feminist" consciousness or awareness, on the part of the narrator and so on the part of the author. The same can be said for her comments regarding the status of women and the freedom of modern woman - such as when she writes:

J'ose croire que le temps est passé - depuis belle lurette - où il fallait chanter les charmes de la vie au foyer et les mérites de l'épouse qui attend comme Pénélope que son marin de mari revienne de ses hosties de petits chants homériques. Le temps homérique est fini...(44).

While this statement is, of course, extremely valid and pertinent - both with regard to the changing status of women in Québec at the time and as a comment on the changing role of the female character in Québec literature - once again, the fate endured by Christine would seem to contradict or undermine the positive sentiment it expresses. Furthermore, given Aquin's reputation as an expert and consummate plagiarist, adopting and adapting another person's words for his own ends, could not this awareness of feminism equally be seen as an appropriation, conscious or unconscious, of the feminist discourse, just as the discourses of medicine and philosophy are assimilated within the text...?

The complexity and ambiguity identified by Patricia Smart with regard to the "feminism" or "misogyny" of the text must already be apparent. Aquin's novel typically

refuses to be pinned down, inviting or inciting the reader to create his or her own version of the text: the reader's identity, therefore, must necessarily have some effect on his or her particular version, created out of the act of reading, itself a central theme in the novel. My intention, as I have indicated elsewhere, is to examine the criteria in the text which allow or even produce such ambiguity and prompt the diametrically and dramatically opposed readings suggested by Patricia Smart. The focus, once again, will be the presentation and reading of violence - textual and physical - which takes place throughout the novel.

Violence as Catalyst: the Writing Process.

L'Antiphonaire traces the fate of Christine Forestier, a qualified doctor no longer practising medicine, who has been working on a doctoral thesis on sixteenth century medicine¹⁹ - a project she claims is a consolation for giving up medical practice having met and married Jean-William, although she does not explain fully the reason for her resignation until it is forced out of her by Robert Bernatchez, and even then her account is inconsistent (128)²⁰. Christine is seen working on her thesis research prior to the

¹⁹ André Lamontagne suggests that Christine's thesis has already been abandoned prior to the beginning of the novel (Les Mots des autres, 150); this may be so, but Christine does refer to it repeatedly as if it is still an ongoing (albeit an increasingly unfeasible or impossible) project.

²⁰ Christine claims first to have given up medicine for Jean-William; she then blames the doctor who performed her abortion and who consequently attempted to blackmail her (81). The opening section of the text, meanwhile, suggests a different course of events, as the unidentified narrator (presumably Suzanne, as she is the only remaining

ninth epileptic seizure suffered by her husband: her writing is interrupted when, during this crisis, as on at least one previous occasion, Jean-William becomes extremely violent towards her. Christine escapes, narrowly avoiding being hit by the glass ashtray hurled by Jean-William, drives off in their rented car and eventually stops at a pharmacy where she hopes to find the wherewithal to dress her wounds and to buy Demarol for Jean-William. Instead, she is given morphine by the pharmacist, and is raped and imprisoned overnight. When on a second attempt she reaches Jean-William by phone, she finds that he had traced her previous call and that he believes her "coupling" with the pharmacist was "amorous" - a misconception she does little to dispel, incidentally. Jean-William also admits that he has been suspicious of her for some time, has had her followed, is aware of her affair with a certain Robert Bernatchez and, finally, does not love her (98-100). Shortly after this conversation, Christine sees Jean-William enter the pharmacy where he shoots the pharmacist. In fear for her own life, Christine then flees, without reporting her husband to the police. Isolated while the damage to her face and body heal, Christine begins to write. Her already confused and doomed thesis project becomes increasingly embroiled with the events of her own life until, by her suicide, she ends both her text

character capable of writing) reports, "C'était en juillet; en mai elle avait déjà quitté la médecine et, peu de jours après, elle avait fait la connaissance de Jean-William" (16). The difficulty in establishing the "real" story is typical of many of the novels written at this time, as we have seen (as well as of the *nouveau roman* in France, for example), history being seen as a false and/or subjective construct (over which the Québécois-as-colonised have limited control).

and her life, in a literal dramatisation of "la mort de l'écrivain" - the original working title of the novel²¹.

Although Christine's "story" does not begin with the first page of L'Antiphonaire, as becomes progressively apparent throughout the elliptical course of the novel, the assault on Christine by Jean-William - the first in a series of acts of physical violence - has several functions. On the diegetic level, it precipitates Christine into a number of dangerous and violent situations, setting the tone for the novel, in which rape, murder, attempted murder, druggings, betrayal and suicide are almost *de rigueur*. On another level, as Christine comments, her story would not have been told, her "novel" would never have been written, had it not been for the blows she received from her husband:

si je n'avais pas reçu sur la paroi temporale gauche un certain coup de poing de Jean-William, je ne serais pas ici en train de me forger des phrases pour mieux dégraffer mon soutien-gorge et exposer, à la vue des maniaques, la peau légèrement décolorée de mes deux seins...(45)²².

A pattern begins to emerge at this point. In Trou de mémoire, the so-called RR begins to write, taking over the editorship of the "novel", having been raped by P.-X. Magnant (by whom she believes she is pregnant - although it is equally possible that Olympe is the father - and with whom she claims to be in love); rape is here seen as a metaphor "for the metamorphosis from "acted upon" to "actor""²³ and so implemental in the "regeneration" of RR. Neige noire, meanwhile, sees the project for the creation of a film

²¹ The various plans for L'Antiphonaire are included in the Edition critique, presented by Gilles Thérien, 341-396.

²² I will return to this choice of image later.

²³ Valerie Raoul, 237, citing Lori Saint-Martin.

whose subject and inspiration is to be Sylvie, the victim of a brutal sexual murder at the hands of her own husband, who would (according to Jacques Pelletier) thereby achieve passage from "reality" into the world of fiction²⁴, and therefore attain immortality, making Sylvie's death a "creative act"²⁵. What this seems to suggest is that Aquin's strong female characters have to suffer brutal abuse at the hands of men, in order to realise their "creative potential": an alarming and intensely problematic concept, to say the least, which seems to suggest, by extension, that these women should also be grateful for their mistreatment. For Christine, however, the "benefits" of violence or "compensation" for violence received (the creativity or immortality attained) are less clear. At the beginning of the text, she is already in the process of writing, working on her thesis-cum-medical history, a text which would have gained her access as a Subject to the masculine, even patriarchal world of academia and of the Symbolic. The assault by Jean-William, which begins the "deterioration" of Christine's life and text, forces Christine from such a path and redirects her to the traditionally feminine realm of letters occupied by autobiography. Christine may still enter the hallowed halls of academia, but now only as the Object of voyeuristic literary and psychological study.

²⁴ Jacques Pelletier, "Sur Neige noire, l'oeuvre ouverte d'Hubert Aquin", Voix et Images 1.1 (sept. 1975) 19-25, 23. Patricia Smart, meanwhile, suggests that Sylvie, as the "symbolic", the idealised woman under the male gaze, must be eliminated in order that Eva and Linda might achieve their status as real Subjects: fair enough, but the graphic and sadistic means of her elimination raises many questions. See Smart, "Woman as Object, Women as Subjects, and the Consequences for Narrative: Hubert Aquin's Neige noire, and the impasse of post-modernism" Canadian Literature, 113-4 (Summer/Fall 1987) 168-178, 176.

²⁵ This is also intimated in Iqbal, Hubert Aquin, romancier and in Smart, Ecrire dans la maison du père.

On the textual level, finally, the violent act inflicted on the writer-narrator of the text is transposed directly into "violence" perpetrated on the text itself, as linearity and continuity are dislocated and academic treatise becomes autobiography. The repercussions suffered by the writer, aside from the chronic physical consequences of the attack²⁶, ensure the continued discontinuity of the text and a gradual erosion of the distinction between text and reality, as Christine's document is "infected" by the violent events in her life and so becomes an ever more impossible task. Recording the attack, she comments that "les savantes théories me sont passées d'un seul coup de poing" (45), and adds elsewhere: "j'ai perdu mon sujet de thèse quelque part dans les dunes de Santa Barbara et de San Diego" (18) - a sense of loss or pessimism which becomes increasingly intense as the novel develops:

le temps manque toujours...pour écrire une thèse qui - à jamais -
demeurera une hypothèse à propos de la "science médicale" du 16ème
siècle: jamais je ne finaliserai cette thèse (131).

In fact, it is not so much the subject of her thesis that Christine has lost, but the ability to focus on it and to maintain her objectivity with regard to the subject, as she admits: "à force de me mettre le nez dans ce manuscrit, j'ai peut-être perdu la distance favorable à une perception plus juste, plus équitable" (159). The writing of this text becomes a self-conscious means of escape or place of refuge from "[sa] propre vie ratée" (19). Christine's research on medical history becomes concentrated on the fate of a particular manuscript, the Traité des maladies nouvelles by Jules-César Beausang and so

²⁶ Established in Montréal with Robert, Christine complains of a residual but severe pain in her left temporal vein, giving her cause to fear a brain haemorrhage (127).

intertwined with an account of the lives of the major players in the drama that she begins to write "au hasard de Chigi et de Beausang" (176), thus playing the roles of historian, detective and literary critic. Enmeshed within this already complex text are not only the autobiographical details of Christine's own life and her growing disenchantment, but also a narcissistic, auto-reflexive critique of her own writing - a critical "meta-text" common in the post-modern novel²⁷ - as Christine struggles with the various battles in her life, including the continued writing of her gordian knot of a text, which she describes as:

Sans titre, sans logique interne, sans contenu, sans autre charme que celui de la vérité désordonnée, ...composé en forme d'aura épileptique...(17)²⁸.

Writing as Performance: the (De)construction of Self and the "Etre pour autrui".

L'Antiphonaire combines the story of its own creation with the story of the creation of Christine as, in writing her text, Christine also writes herself in a process of self-parturition: she exists only through her text, as text, evolving with her writing. Rather than being a "readerly" construct, the novel charts the process of construction - or, perhaps more appropriately, a dual process of construction and deconstruction - as the

²⁷ Of the post-modern text, Valerie Raoul comments: "narrative becomes the explicit theme as well as the necessary form and means of its message" (14). This praxis is also, appropriately enough, common to the fictional journal, especially those produced in Québec in the 1960's, when its specific emphasis on historicity and subjectivity made it "a singularly appropriate medium for the textualization of the Québec political situation at that time"(10).

²⁸ The similarities between this description of Christine's own text and the novel L'Antiphonaire are striking, adding another layer of auto-referentiality, even serving as a *mise en abyme* for the text as a whole.

text and the novel itself (as a genre) are exposed and disassembled in conjunction with the exposure and deterioration or fragmentation of its narrator, the one apparently fuelling the other. The text thus functions around a process of fragmentation on both the diegetic and extra-diegetic levels, as Christine's comment on her physical state: "les diverses parties de mon pauvre corps sont disloquées, détachées l'une de l'autre et ne forment plus un organisme vivant et fonctionnel" (58) is later applied to her text, "dont la forme insensiblement se désintègre et m'échappe" (185). Her "expérience de désintégration psychique" (121), meanwhile, exacerbated by the disintegration of her text, is eventually adopted as or translated into an aesthetic, as she writes: "Je suis fragmentaliste... Pour moi, l'existence n'est qu'une série de séquences brisées, auto-suffisantes, dont l'addition n'égale jamais la totalité" (218), another comment which serves as a mise-en-abyme for the textual strategy.

The choice of autobiography would seem to be highly appropriate, with its (idealised) property of revelation or unveiling, a function which the text exploits overtly, as Christine writes early in her text: "ce livre que je commence doit, partiellement au moins, révéler celle qui le compose" (22). Indeed, as she writes about the events of her life, the secrets of her past and the hidden depths of her personality gradually become uncovered, the "journal" becomes the place to expose her soul, as well as a reflection of her "self", and the gradual deterioration experienced by that "self". This exposure is described in terms of a literal physical disrobing:

La pauvre folle que je suis s'y étale en pleine lumière, corsage nu, topless, seins à l'air et l'âme en déconfiture. Après tout, qui refuserait à l'auteur de ce livre (moi) de s'exhiber...(44).

The direct relationship between Christine's text and her body which this suggests is also evident in the earlier quotation, in which she blames the violence against her for her writing process; if Jean-William had not attacked her, she writes:

...je ne serais pas ici en train de forger des phrases pour mieux dégrader mon soutien-gorge et exposer, à la vue des maniaques, la peau légèrement décolorée de mes deux seins...(45).

The writing of this autobiography is seen in effect in terms of a figurative striptease, performed by the narrator-writer, and paralleled by the actual removal of clothing which takes place throughout the text, as Christine is seen in various stages of undress: teasingly semi-nude in the motel at Drummondville, naked in the office of Dr. Franconi, and, shortly before her suicide, "pantelante, nue, déconfite" (220).

The image of the strip-tease functions on a number of levels; on the diegetic level, first, for the idea of "performance" which it encapsulates. Christine's text is written in a journalesque fashion; it is written from day-to-day, serving the role of confidant(e) or refuge and relating the events of her life, her feelings, her thoughts. However, contrary to the expectations of a true journal, which would be written solely for the eyes of the narrator/writer, Christine's text is addressed to an audience - one, moreover, to whom she refers as "les maniaques" - the voyeuristic viewers of her semi-naked body. Christine's relationship with her readers is developed through a series of interpellations, which draw the reader in as a participant in the production of the text. Her awareness of writing for a narratee is reflected in the commentary she makes on her own writing and her ever more apparent fear of displeasing her audience, both by her writing and by her behaviour - her "self". The reader-audience is quickly cast in the role of judge, from

whom Christine seems to be seeking understanding or even absolution through her confessional (and somewhat "self-flagellating") autobiography²⁹.

The authenticity and accuracy of an autobiography written for the approval of a reader (set up as critic and judge) is dubious, despite the narrator's assurances that "je n'ai rien truqué, rien déformé, rien gonflé" and later claim to recount "autant d'épisodes qui se sont réellement déroulés tels que je les ai décrits" (213). Following the assault by Jean-William, a decidedly pessimistic Christine considers her options in a dialogic style:

Vous me direz: à 37 ans, on n'abandonne pas encore tout espoir de plénitude féminine, on ne renonce pas à la vie pleine et satisfaisante à laquelle les femmes ont maintenant droit... D'accord! Mais vous n'avez pas vécu, *chères lectrices incompréhensives*, la moitié de ma pauvre existence, vous n'avez pas fait le tour de mon jardin, ni accumulé à ce point de surprises et d'orgasmes que les futures joies ne puissent m'exciter encore et me redonner une jeunesse que j'ai vertement gaspillée à sonder les insondables théories de Simon Stévin [etc.]...(45, my emphasis).

This comment appears to be addressed specifically to those female readers with a feminist consciousness or awareness, hinting at their intolerance - again perhaps recalling the "counter-reformist" argument of Robert Richard. Later, having commented on the lack of improvement in women's lives and rights over the four hundred years covered by the text, Christine adds, "Comme le féminisme se porte mal, je sens que je perds de plus en plus de lectrices. C'est bien dommage, mais que voulez-vous?" (57) - a rather off-hand dismissal of any (again, specifically) female readers she presumes to have turned off. It seems ironic that the female narratee should be considered so unimportant, considering the apparently revolutionary pride of place assigned to a woman within the text (but then

²⁹ Iqbal comments: "Inversons un dicton: qui s'accuse s'excuse", Hubert Aquin, romancier, 214.

perhaps my feelings are hurt!). Christine's reader changes, however, as much later, addressing herself to her "unique et sombre lecteur" (210)³⁰, she assumes she has alienated the majority of her readers: her solitary (and presumably more tolerant or forgiving) reader is now referred to in the singular masculine form and, while the noun may also be used in a non-gendered sense, this shift in gender-specificity is interesting, given Christine's defensive attitude with regard to her female audience. It seems possible that Christine has progressively given up on her "lectrices" and could be said to be writing, performing or *peeling* for the masculine reader-spectator.

Her writing or being "for" others, her need to meet with approval or to please, also results in the repeated auto-criticism of Christine's text and her acknowledgement of her shortcomings as a writer, when she disparages her text,

Je reconnais que ce livre (le mien) peut provoquer une certaine irritation....
Je sais, d'ailleurs, que ma prose détraquée ne contient aucun ingrédient de plaisir pour le lecteur (207).

This assumption of her reader's impatience increases to the point where she writes finally:

Une goutte encore, et je vais déplaire: voilà, c'est fait, oui, je déplais, je suis irritante, je fais mal (telle une douleur à la tête).. (213).

However, the distinction between Christine and her text is so far eroded that the two are inseparable. The criticisms of her writing are thus equally directed towards her self: her comment - "si cela devient irritant (à la lecture), aussi bien me laisser tomber, car - vous

³⁰ Iqbal suggests that the direct address to the reader is a further means of demythifying the writing process and also serves to "create" the reader, Hubert Aquin, romancier, 214.

devez me croire - je n'ai pas fini de vous décevoir" (207), for example, initially appears to address the issue of her "unreadable" text and yet finishes on the note of self-disparagement and despair which will ultimately end the text.

As a performer, Christine sees herself increasingly through the eyes of her projected spectator, passing judgement on herself and her text as she imagines another's appraisal. Her vision of herself is thus exteriorized, objectified to the point where various incidents are described in cinematographic terms, as she refers to herself as "la vedette féminine" and "la chère Christine" (210)³¹. Her self-image thus becomes increasingly dependent on her spectator's gaze - that other being almost exclusively male, be it Jean-William, Robert or Franconi (or even the "unique et sombre lecteur"?). Having argued with Robert in Drummondville, she writes: "il me révélait mon point vulnérable...Je n'avais jamais mesuré que j'étais physiquement si dépendante du plaisir que j'éprouvais avec un partenaire" (76). However, the dependence which according to her applies only to the physical nature of her relations with a partner, in fact applies equally to her dependence on male evaluation of her person. This pattern is evident throughout the text, as she adopts distorted and fragmented male reflections of herself, taking on that gaze and moulding her "être pour autrui" to fit the images it projects, to the point where she cries: "Je ne me connais plus; je ne me reconnais plus...Je suis devenue une autre" (237). Those reflections being predominantly negative, Christine's self-image deteriorates throughout the text. The pharmacist in San Diego assumes that she came to him for

³¹ Aquin exploited the form of the film scenario to a much greater extent in Neige noire.

drugs and indeed, later, Christine embarks on a pattern of substance abuse either to help her sleep or to keep her awake long enough to write (118, 131). In terms of her relationship with Robert, after the argument at Drummondville Robert ignores her, reading through his speech:

C'était comme si j'avais soudain disparu ou que j'avais été absorbée par un gouffre: je n'avais plus de poids, ni d'intérêt, ni même un semblant de séduction féminine aux yeux de Robert. Il venait de me condamner à l'inexistence la plus intolérable: *je n'étais rien, rien, une pauvre fille désolée, indigne, incapable d'être à la hauteur de la vie...*(75, my emphasis).

Her despair increases, however, as Robert does finally turn his attention to her, ready for his humiliating and sadistic interrogation. Describing herself as she assumes he must see her, she writes:

je n'étais plus celle qu'il aimait, mais une femme indécente qui forçait son désir sans réussir à le provoquer vraiment (76).

Following their conversation, she finally adds:

Je me voyais à travers les yeux de celui que j'aimais, que j'avais aimé et qui m'aimait encore; et j'étais laide, je ne me supportais plus (80)

This conclusion after all, must have been Robert's intention, given, as she says, that "cette conversation aberrante... ne portait...que sur des détails propres à m'humilier" (77). Robert, meanwhile, leaves the motel ready to give a speech, as if in draining her of any self-respect he has gained in stature and composure - just as Barthélémy is satisfied by the humiliation of Jeanne-D'Arc in Un rêve québécois. Following another argument, this time with regard to Christine's fascination with Antonella and Robert's insinuation about the similarities between the sexual behaviour of both women, Christine writes:

Dans un monde masculin, les femmes libres sont vite traitées de putain: elles n'ont pas droit au bénéfice du doute, ni même à une sentence

suspendue! Rien à faire, l'homme ne juge pas...il condamne...C'est tellement plus facile, tellement plus commode, tellement plus sécurisant! (162).

The anger and pessimistic hopelessness which Christine's comment encapsulates is based on an awareness that the belief in Woman's inherent "uncleanliness" is necessary to Man's justification of his continued subjugation of women, his potency derived from retaining her in the position of "Other" to his "One", his "stature" inversely proportional to hers³². Christine's self-image is progressively eroded during her relationship with Robert - primarily because of the latent threat of a reopening of the conversation at Drummondville, which Robert wields like a concealed weapon. On the day following this same argument (during which Christine's "sordid" past is indeed slyly alluded to) when Robert asks her to return to medicine, Christine appears to have lost any will of her own, cowed by the tacit violence integral to their relationship, replying meekly: "Si tu me le demandes, je m'y remettrai volontiers...Mais vraiment, il faut que tu me jures que cela ne te déplairait en aucune façon" (168).

Christine's ready assimilation of the face affixed to her by another's gaze may well be connected to the longevity and endurance of the traditional "balance" of power and the conviction of the impossibility of proving her self-worth in a world where "le mal et la souillure sont immanquablement portés au compte des femmes..." (162). Indeed this doctrine seems to be taken to its logical extreme in this text, as it is primarily through contact with Christine that the men she encounters (willingly or unwillingly) suffer, either

³² I have noted Aquin's apparent awareness of "women's issues" earlier in this chapter: again, the focus is on the use that the text makes of this awareness.

dying or becoming impotent, as Woman is once again represented as a spirit of destruction and death or even as a castrator. This may well explain, for example, her acceptance of Jean-William's accusation that she "slept with" the pharmacist. Her memory of the incident shifts, meanwhile, to allow the intrusion of the possibility of her own "complicity" in the affair, as she adopts the causative expression "je me suis laissé droguer" (139) to describe the situation and elsewhere, "Je suis la chère et nulle Christine...qui s'est laissé violer à San Diego par un boucanier hispanisant" (196). The causative mode has an integral sense of complicity, suggesting that "she allowed herself to be raped" or "she got herself raped". Her acceptance of responsibility intensifies until she says: "j'ai probablement tout gâché et à jamais" (224), a confession which would seem to encompass all that has happened to her, despite her status as victim in many of the incidences.

Meanwhile, having been enlightened as to her husband's feelings towards her, Christine writes:

Jean-William me soupçonne...de toutes les convoitises imaginables et d'une capacité incommensurable d'intentions lubriques qui ne s'adressent pas à lui (40).

At this point, Christine denies the charges of promiscuity, claiming that her "intentions lubriques ou hédoniques" are directed solely at Jean-William himself³³. Later, however, she assimilates this view of herself, labelling herself a whore and commenting that:

³³ Given the alacrity with which Christine and Robert renew their past relationship, however, this claim would appear a little suspect - unless, of course, she is again reacting to Jean-William's image of her.

Je n'ai plus de morale dans mon comportement avec les autres hommes. Plus ça va, plus je me dis que Jean-William m'a frappée avec violence parce qu'il me méprisait sans mesure soudain... A ses yeux, j'étais *déjà* une putain, une chienne, un être indigne de respect. *Depuis - paradoxalement - je semble me conformer à cette image de moi*: mon comportement me fait horreur. Et j'ai honte (237, my emphasis).

At the lowest point of this downward spiral, Christine describes herself as "bestial" (207), the only positive thing remaining to her being sex:

Au diable l'altimétrie, la planimétrie, la cosimétrie et la profundimétrie, si la jouissance obtenue (en vitesse et sans morale) avec un inconnu me rend circulaire (...). *J'aime jouir*, affreux, me direz-vous! Mais quelques instants de plaisir irrésistible prévaudront infailliblement et toujours contre les théories débilantes d'Adam de Fulda et d'Ugolin d'Orviato...(208, my emphasis).

The existential crisis which Christine experiences throughout the text, although the result of some fairly obvious factors, is exacerbated by the fundamental contradiction which haunts her and all women, namely the dual portrayal of Woman as both evil corruption and pure beauty³⁴. She reads the condemnation, (as we have seen) in the eyes of the (predominantly male) readers or spectators for whose benefit she seems to be writing, and who bring with them - to the "performance" - a wealth of cultural knowledge or "baggage", even prejudice. Christine's observation that evil is invariably deemed a feminine characteristic, meanwhile, is based on a structure which has been in existence for centuries, as Carl Jung observes in Psychology and Alchemy: the feminine principle is seen to represent "the earth, the regions under the earth, and evil itself", as opposed to

³⁴ This crisis is elsewhere described in language reminiscent of the malaise described in Sartre's La Nausée, for example, as she cries: "ma tristesse est visqueuse et douce...à mon image" (147), and "je me sens prise dans le sable mouvant et visqueux qui me tient lieu de sol" (148).

the higher, spiritual qualities of the masculine principle³⁵. The mirror image of this "earthly" feminine principle, meanwhile - the pure and virginal beauty of Mary, for instance - is represented in the frequent citations from the "Cantique des cantiques", as well as from various medieval treatises on beauty, in which women's physical and spiritual beauty is evaluated according to a standardised set of supposedly objective aesthetic criteria and is lauded as "le symbole de la beauté de tout l'univers" (83)³⁶ and "une sorte d'évanouissement dans la passivité" (149)³⁷. These quotations are representative of the obsessive attention which has been paid to women's beauty - internal and external - throughout the centuries, and which has caused the "fixation" with appearance now considered a "feminine" narcissistic trait and resulting also in the contemporary multi-million dollar beauty industry. As Daniela Di Cecco has suggested, caught up in the snare which is the "Beauty Myth" (the means by which Man has kept Woman so preoccupied with her appearance and by the insistence on its supreme importance, that she is permanently insecure with regard to it, and unable to muster the time and courage efficiently to challenge his dominion over her), Christine's repeated citation of these texts both illuminates and exacerbates her own resultant obsession with

³⁵ C. G. Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, trans R.F.C. Hull (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953) 23.

³⁶ Attributed to Jean Scot Erigène, taken from Bruyne, 3.367 (Thérien, Edition critique, 282, note 92).

³⁷ Christine is quoting from Thomas Gallo de Verceil (see Thérien).

beauty, as she submits to or is victim of the tacit violence which this dominating myth effects³⁸.

The passages from these texts serve as a form of yardstick for Christine who, again, measures her self-worth according to external factors: as she deteriorates, she imagines herself ever further from the stereotype of the "ideal woman" described in the text. The importance traditionally attached to women's beauty, externally prescribed and imposed, is thus instrumental in Christine's deterioration. The beginning of the downward slide can once again be laid at Jean-William's door. Following her escape from the motel room, it is not until Christine sees her "laideur répugnante" in the rear view mirror that the despair of her predicament hits her and she breaks down:

J'étais blessée dans mon visage et dans mon corps...Le désespoir...m'écrasait: j'avais perdu tout espoir de vivre sainement, de recouvrer l'intégrité de mon visage et de mon corps. Salie, monstrueuse, je pleurais... incapable de fuir San Diego. Je n'en avais plus l'énergie, ni le désir (47).

She adds: "le monde s'était écroulé avec mes charmes faciaux de jeune épouse" (48).

The importance attached to her external appearance, which seems to take precedence over any importance attached to her professional qualifications, is to a certain extent the result of conditioning, its pride of place encoded within Western women's psyche over the two thousand years between the writing of the "Cantique des cantiques" and Christine's text. Later she quotes from Thomas Gallo de Verceil:

³⁸ Daniela Di Cecco (PHD programme, Department of French, UBC) pointed out the relationship between the theme of beauty in L'Antiphonaire and Naomi Wolf's text The Beauty Myth (Toronto, Vintage, 1991) in an unpublished paper, December 1992.

Tu es belle dans les oeuvres et belle dans la simplicité, belle par les actes et belle par la vie, belle par la connaissance, belle dans le corps en domptant la volupté de la chair et belle dans l'âme en extirpant jusqu'à la racine des désirs du monde, belle dans la chair par la chasteté, belle dans l'esprit par l'amour, belle en secret et en public, belle dans la douceur et belle dans le combat (147)³⁹.

Her response to this text plays on the structures and concepts of the original; it illustrates her despondency as she fails on all points, as, having been made pregnant by the pharmacist and having lied about the incident to Robert in an attempt to save him grief, Christine takes on the projected image of complicity and corruption of which she now considers herself guilty:

Moi, je ne suis ni belle dans la chair, ni belle en secret, ni belle dans le corps, ni belle par la chasteté: toutes ces connotations cisterciennes de la beauté de la femme me sont refusées...(148).

Elsewhere, having quoted at length from a text she attributes to Rupert de Deutz, Christine responds:

Quel éloge éblouissant de la femme que je ne suis pas, que je ne serai plus jamais...J'ai fini d'être belle (147)⁴⁰,

once again unable to "live up to" the standard of physical and spiritual Beauty so acclaimed by the texts.

Caught up in the game of conflicting and distorted reflections, as Christine attempts to adapt the better to suit her own image, the layers of attributes which clothe her figuratively and which give her "value" within the social system - her profession, her

³⁹ According to Gilles Thérien the biblical passage has been shortened, Edition critique, 286, note 133.

⁴⁰ Thérien comments that the quotation attributed to Deutz is in fact from Bruyne, 3.34-35. Edition critique, 285, note 130.

thesis, her marriage, her morals and her beauty - are peeled away along with her clothes and left lying on the beach, in the pharmacy in San Diego, in the motel in Drummondville, in Franconi's office and so on, leaving her bereft, alone and vulnerable, physically and spiritually naked.

The Poetics of Violence: Auto-reflexivity, Textuality and Intertextuality.

As we have already seen in part, the concepts of unveiling and performance can equally be applied to the creation of the novel itself. As it evolves, the text progressively reveals its own textuality, as well as laying bare - and laying to waste - the structuring processes of the "traditional" novel in a stratagem of spoliation and demythification, as the layers of artifice are forcibly peeled back and exposed.

L'Antiphonaire is the product of repeated layerings of reading and writing, which take place within two textual spaces. On the narrative level, the process is split between two time-frames, that of Christine in the twentieth century and that of the "sub-plot" in the sixteenth. Jules-César Beausang's "original" manuscripts are appropriated by the priest Leonico Chigi who, in addition, takes on Beausang's identity, in order to give himself credibility and to escape persecution in the reign of suspicion and fear under the Inquisition. Having read the manuscripts, Chigi begins to write, weaving his own story into and around Beausang's text - "qu'il enrichit de toute évidence de plusieurs morceaux qui étaient de son cru (Chigi)" (217). According to Christine, Chigi

nourrissait en lui-même l'ambition de produire un écrit entièrement apocryphe où Chigi se raconterait lui-même, intégrant à ce récit l'existence fictive (ou imaginée) de Jules-César Beausang (175).

This project is reiterated as Christine, the 20th century reader, also begins to intertwine her autobiography with that of Chigi-Beausang or Beausang-Chigi⁴¹, adding her own commentary, filling in the blanks in "their" text, either with information from different sources or with her own assumptions and imaginings. In effect, Christine re-writes "their" text in a style very similar to that of Chigi, of whom she says:

La lecture de son bréviaire (soit: un chapitre par jour) ressemblait à une technique de fragmentation; ainsi, Chigi composait son récit autobiographique en plusieurs fragments (ou tableaux) mal reliés les uns aux autres, disloqués, disjoints. L'ensemble donne une forte impression de discontinuité, de *découpage brutal* (217, my emphasis).

This observation could equally be applied to her own text, as well as to her reading habits, as she reviews each day a section of Chigi-Beausang's text.

The novel thus brings to life the idea of the palimpsest, as one text is written over another, although here the previous text is woven into the current document, rather than being "erased". As each new layer is added and each "version" becomes ever further removed from the "truth" or original text, the events and characters of the stories are re-interpreted and re-evaluated through the eyes and words of the latest author, a process which - as we have seen - Christine encounters to her cost when, on reading Chigi's text to her lover, Robert, she is forced to confront his "reading" of both Antonella and herself. The layering process continues as, after Christine's suicide, her manuscript is found and read by Suzanne B[ernatchez]-Franconi (Robert's ex-wife and the wife/lover

⁴¹ On another level, Aquin's taking on of Christine's identity, in order to write "her" autobiography, parallels Christine's brief attempt to write as Renata (28). We can assume that this text is not Renata's as, at one point, Christine comments on the latter's illiteracy.

of Docteur Albert Franconi, with whom Christine has also had sexual encounters), who is also prompted to write - presumably in her diary - of what she intends to do with the knowledge she has acquired. The novel ends with a suicide note from Franconi, who realises that Suzanne has discovered (and read) the manuscript and "cannot live with the shame", prompted once again to write by another's act of reading. In each case, reading serves as a catalyst, converting readers into writers in what might serve as a textbook illustration of Roland Barthes' theories of the "texte scriptible"⁴², as the reader is enlisted in the process of the production of the text which is itself renewed or rewritten by each reading, refusing to allow him/her to be a passive consumer. The act of reading is therefore literalised, as the process of "re-creation", intrinsic to both reading and writing is brought into play by the text as a central and fundamental interest or structuring device⁴³. The layering of texts and readings, meanwhile, along with the open exploitation or appropriation of a text by later writers, serves to dramatise and expose the inevitability of the influence of earlier texts, thereby demythifying the "sacred" concepts of Originality and Authorship, through an unveiling of the true nature of "creative writing" as a process of "selective recycling".

⁴² Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1976).

⁴³ Robert Richard goes further, stating that: "L'histoire (au sens des événements qu'un récit raconte) du roman aquinien, n'est autre que celle des lectures qui sont et qui seront faites de ce roman...*L'unique objet du récit aquinien n'est autre que celui de ses paradigmes lectoraux*" (*Le Corps logique de la fiction*, 84). This emphasis, however, evacuates the intense physical violence which both parallels these reading paradigms and of which Christine is a victim.

On another level, the patterns of reading and re-writing also dramatise the writing strategies of the author. Aquin's text is replete with intertextual borrowings - "des références historiques invérifiables" (207), from diverse sources, their content pillaged, appropriated and rewritten by Aquin himself in a stratagem of plagiarism which parallels the plagiarism of both Christine and Chigi within the text⁴⁴. The fictitious Jules-César Beausang himself, on whose "imaginary" text both Chigi and Christine build, is actually modelled closely on the sixteenth-century physician and alchemical adept, Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim or Paracelsus, of whom Beausang is said to be a disciple, while some of the quotations attributed to Beausang are in fact from Paracelsus' own writings⁴⁵. Much of the medieval philosophy, including the texts on beauty, meanwhile, is taken unattributed from Edgar de Bruyne's text, Etudes d'esthétique médiévale⁴⁶.

By its excessive accumulation of elements from the worlds of philosophy, religious doctrine and history, medical and social history, autobiography or confessional, the novel becomes a neo-baroque patchwork à la Borgès - a true "Bibliothèque de Babel". The introduction or penetration of the novel by these different discourses has a number of implications. On the diegetic level, as writing becomes an increasingly unsatisfactory means of expression (or escape) for Christine, the intertextual references multiply, at times, to the point where the erudition of the text seems to become a form of

⁴⁴ André Lamontagne discusses the different facets of the intertextual process in L'Antiphonaire. See chapter 5 of Les Mots des Autres, 147-195.

⁴⁵ See Thérien, "Présentation", XXVII and Lamontagne, Les Mots des autres, 147-95.

⁴⁶ Edgar de Bruyne, Etudes d'esthétique médiévale, 3 tomes (Bruges, de Tempel, 1946). Noted in Lamontagne, Les Mots des autres, 188 and Thérien, "Présentation", XXVI.

"substitute", or "consolation", the citations rattling around in their own empty discursive space, becoming an end in themselves. In the chapter that follows her "interrogation" by Robert, for instance, Christine writes:

Je ne sais pas si je m'extasie sans raison sur ce passage d'un des "averroïstes intégraux" comme on a coutume de désigner Scot Erigène, Cassiodore, Boèce, Abbon de Saint-Germain, Osborn de Gloucester, Hraban Maur et le fameux Rémi d'Auxerre. Tous ces penseurs - et bien d'autres - me sont familiers, parce que, au cours de ma recherche pour la rédaction de ma thèse, j'ai cru bon de parcourir les auteurs qui, pour un Jules-César Beausang ou un Pomponazi, étaient les grands philosophes "modernes", les "anciens" étant Aristote, Platon, Plotin, Héraclite, Zénon d'Elée... Dieu sait que ma délectation fut longue et bénéfique, comme dut l'être celle d'un Jules-César Beausang qui, à plusieurs endroits dans ses oeuvres, fait de longues citations des grands auteurs comme Honorius d'Autun, Williram d'Ebenberg, Jean Scot Erigène, saint Bonaventure, Orderic Vital, Rupert de Deutz, sans compter Guillaume d'Auvergne et l'Aquinate qui l'ont particulièrement marqué. Et j'en oublie d'aussi importants que Gérard d'Abbeville, Alexandre de Halles et le fameux Adam de Belledonna...(83-4).

Here, as André Lamontagne points out, "l'esprit critique cède toutefois le pas à une érudition qui tient plutôt de la compilation"⁴⁷, as Christine's reaction to the memory of the trauma of Robert's questioning is to fill the white page before her with words. Just as P.X. Magnant fills the pages of Trou de mémoire with his verbal "bave" in order to keep hidden the secret of Joan's death⁴⁸, so Christine writes, in order perhaps to weave a veil of words to conceal the truth exposed so brutally by Robert - a phenomenon she refers to when she admits: "ce nombre incalculable de mots s'agglutinent en une poudrerie qui fait écran" (185). This overflowing of words and names, meanwhile, serves to clothe her

⁴⁷ Lamontagne, Les Mots des autres, 175.

⁴⁸ Aquin, Trou de mémoire, 21.

nakedness following the "violation" she has just relived through her text. The spewing out of her immense knowledge could well be an attempt to revive her self-esteem, to restore her from her state as humiliated and degraded object to intellectual speaking, writing subject, and so heal the "narcissistic injury" inflicted on her by her so-called lover. In either case, the communicative and critical value of language is evacuated, along with the didactic power of the intertext, as her writing here serves as a refuge and words become an end in themselves.

On another level, the profusion of names and titles within a text is typical of treatises of alchemy (many of which are cited here). This has been considered a significant structuring and thematic element of L'Antiphonaire⁴⁹, from the quotation of the axiom of Marie la Prophétesse ("L'un devient deux, le deux devient trois et le trois retrouve l'unité dans le quatre") at the beginning of the novel onwards. Jean Bélanger adds that the proliferation of names and titles, taken largely from the sixteenth century world of the sub-plot, evokes an image of the Renaissance, a time when "les découvertes, la soif des connaissances, la pluralité des religions, la ferveur des croyances se multiplient dans un chevauchement infini et suggestif"⁵⁰, while Iqbal comments that "cette époque se caractérise par un éclatement qui provoque une révolution des mentalités...Une attitude nouvelle envers la vie se fait jour"⁵¹. These are characteristics of a period of change which could equally apply to the twentieth century and, in

⁴⁹ See, for example, Albert Chesneau, "Déchiffrons L'Antiphonaire", Voix et Images, 1.1 (sept 1975) 26-34 and Iqbal, Hubert Aquin, romancier, 201 etc.

⁵⁰ Jean Bélanger, "L'Antiphonaire", Etudes françaises, 6.2 (mai 1970) 214-219, 215.

⁵¹ Iqbal, Hubert Aquin, romancier, 198.

particular, to the opening of minds which occurred in revolutionary Québec, itself a melting-pot of cultures, languages and change. By the inclusion of such a wealth of references in a twentieth-century text, the world of the Renaissance evoked here is drawn into the world of North America and Québec of the 1960's. The breaking down of temporal boundaries which this subversion of the "traditional" representation of time and historicity in the novel perpetrates is typical of the novels produced in Québec at this time, which are marked by a new awareness of historicity⁵².

This bringing together of disparate yet somehow related elements is emphasised on another level by an escalating system of "dédoublement" which operates between the "twin" narratives, as figures and events in the sixteenth century, European subplot are echoed four hundred years later in Christine's North American "diary" - explaining her almost obsessive fascination with the stories. The "antiphonic" quality of the text thus becomes apparent, the two timeframes and continents set up like choirs performing the "Call and Response" characteristic of the musical form, as an incident such as the rape of Renata Belmissieri by a printer in Chivasso is followed by the account of Christine's own rape by a pharmacist in San Diego, under somewhat similar circumstances. Christine is thus set up at this point as the mirror image of or the "response to" Renata, to whom she refers as her "double" and elsewhere as "[sa] lointaine soeur" (29, 61). The reflection is not constant, however, as the characters evolve and interact, their identities shifting from victim to victimiser, through the multiple perspectives offered by the text and its reader-

⁵² Raoul, 10. See also my chapter 3, regarding the presentation of history in Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's Un rêve québécois.

characters, as the stories twist and turn in the labyrinthine style at which Aquin is an adept. At different times, then, Christine reflects both Renata, in her position as rape victim, as well as - in her interpretation of Robert's gaze - Antonella, the woman who betrays Renata⁵³. There follows also Leonico Chigi, whose writing practice is similar to Christine's own and who shares her interest in Beausang's manuscripts and, finally, Jules-César Beausang himself, for their common profession and for the fact that they are both assaulted, Beausang by brigands and Christine by her own husband, among others. While Christine may be said to "seek out" (un)consciously those doubles who provide her with some validation of her own existence as her own identity progressively fragments⁵⁴, (another facet of the process of projection which we saw earlier), the same multiple parallels may be drawn throughout, among the other characters: both the rapists, L.J. "Bob" Gordon and Carlo Zimara, are murdered (the details of their own respective crimes are remarkably similar); both Robert Bernatchez and Leonico Chigi become sexually impotent, and both Renata Belmissieri and Jean-William Forestier suffer from

⁵³ Albert Chesneau suggests that the novel functions around a principle of "réincarnation expiatoire": according to this "schéma", Christine would be the reincarnation of Antonella Zimara, reborn in order to "revivre à son tour le calvaire jadis infligé à sa victime". "Déchiffrons L'Antiphonaire", 32. However, this binary system ignores the fact that Christine can be linked, at different stages of the text, to every character in the subplot.

⁵⁴ Lamontagne, Les Mots des autres, 171. Marie-Odile Liu meanwhile suggests that "le procès d'identification ne saurait aboutir puisqu'il n'y a proprement *rien* à identifier". ("Petite incursion du côté du baroque et du transdiscursif ou L'Antiphonaire: un baroque à vide." Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa 58 (avril/juin 1987) 69-77, 76.) Again, while Liu's observation may be a logical extension of the structural element of reflection, it negates the highly significant element of sexual violence.

epilepsy - and so on, in a seemingly unending oscillation of reflections. As Jean Bélanger writes:

le lecteur est plongé dans une multiplicité de perceptions concentriques, lesquelles entourent les personnages et les révèlent comme au travers d'un prisme⁵⁵.

This doubling or reflecting process causes an equalisation between characters, their existence "extended" over four hundred years. It also undermines the temporal distance between the two "plots", creating a "quasi-equilibrium" or a simultaneity between the two worlds, woven together by the movements of the text back and forth, while Time itself becomes both multiple and divided or "clivé"⁵⁶. The coming together of the two periods emphasises both their difference and similarities, thus destroying the uniformity of temporality and chronological sequence of the "traditional" novel.

For the reader, meanwhile, the confrontation of elements perhaps "alien", and certainly "unexpected" or marginal in relation to the novel form, causes a series of interruptions or obstacles in the reading process, some more significant or jarring than others. While every reading of every novel is bound to be different, owing to the "cultural baggage" that the reader - as text - brings to his or her reading, one of the properties of intertextuality is to exaggerate this aspect. The reading process of L'Antiphonaire, scattered with proper names and obscure allusions, becomes one of "rupture", the linearity of the narrative constantly checked by a process of

⁵⁵ Bélanger, 216.

⁵⁶ Richard adds the concept of "le clivage du temps" to Guy Scarpetta's list of the four principle characteristics of the postmodern novel (Le Corps logique de la fiction, 108), referring to L'Impureté, by Scarpetta (Paris, Bernard Grasset, 1985).

(non)recognition. Aquin plays on this aspect, challenging his readers, toying with them, certainly, as they fight their way through the text, faced with the desire to understand some of the more obscure references, or even to verify. Indeed, there are a number of studies of the erudition and intertextuality in L'Antiphonaire which have shown the inaccuracy - even "dishonesty" - of many of these references: according to Gilles Thérien, the text De Natura fossilium, for instance, attributed to Beausang, was actually written in 1546 by Georg Bauer, known as Agricola⁵⁷, while as Françoise Iqbal points out, it would have been hard for Beausang to be a "gomariste ardent" when he died before Gomar was born⁵⁸. Many of the quotations, meanwhile, such as those from the Cantique des cantiques, for instance, are altered slightly to emphasise different aspects of "Christine's" text and obsessions - namely the sensual or erotic aspect⁵⁹ - although no indication of any changes is given within the text. Aquin's representation of epilepsy, finally, is decidedly misleading; there is no strain of the condition which causes the violent and vindictive "madness" suffered by Jean-William⁶⁰.

Although the inaccuracies of Aquin's text could, of course, be due in part to the speed with which he completed the manuscript, it seems more likely to be a continuation

⁵⁷ Thérien, "Présentation", XXVII.

⁵⁸ Hubert Aquin, romancier, 183, commenting on page 129 of L'Antiphonaire. See also Thérien, "Présentation", XXXIII and Lamontagne, Les Mots des autres, for more details on the anachronisms and inconsistencies of the text.

⁵⁹ See Lamontagne, Les Mots des autres, and Thérien, "Présentation" for details.

⁶⁰ Gilles Thérien remarks on this ("Présentation"). See also Donald Scott, About Epilepsy, revised edition (New York, International Universities Press, 1973) and M.R. Trimble and E.H. Reynolds, eds., What is Epilepsy? The Clinical and Scientific Basis of Epilepsy (Edinburgh, Churchill Livingstone, 1986).

of the process already in use in neo-baroque style in Trou de mémoire, where "interpretive" footnotes serve primarily to mislead and confuse. The deliberate incorporation of false information and references amongst the genuine erudition of the text becomes a game played by Aquin, at the expense of his readers, or at the expense of the bond of trust which the reader of the "traditional" novel expects from the Author and "divine creator" of the world of the text. The effect is two-fold: first, the authority of the "Author as God" is undermined, thus recalling the concept of the "death of the Author". At the same time, meanwhile, the reader is manipulated throughout the text in what could be seen as either a "breach of the contract" between reader and writer - traditionally a paternalistic relationship of omniscient guide/god and spectator/disciple, or an exaggeration of the domination on which that relationship is founded: in either case, this manipulation was to become yet more pronounced and more aggressive in Aquin's next novel, Neige noire, where such intervention on the part of the author is somewhat cynically and distressingly seen in terms of the actual physical rape of the reader⁶¹.

⁶¹ Patricia Smart sees this image in terms of a more "woman-positive" interpretation, underlining "cette conscience de la profondeur des enjeux et des fantasmes qui sont à l'oeuvre dans le processus même de la représentation. Conscience désespérante de la part de l'auteur, qui dévoile les origines de cette violence dans des concepts de l'identité et de la connaissance fondés dans la réification de la femme, et apparemment inextricables des procédés de la narration" (Ecrire dans la maison du père, 275). While I agree that women's subjugation and objectification appear to be inherent and integral characteristics of (Western) discourse and narrative, once again, I have serious concerns about the method employed in its subversion, if indeed subversion it is. The rather eager adoption of a fundamentally anti-woman image (that of rape), along with the type of fate which awaits Sylvie (Neige noire), supposedly in order to critique the subjugation of women and pave the way for a "new era", calls to mind that old adage written on bathroom walls that "Fighting for Peace is like F***ing for Virginity" - i.e. liable to destroy irrevocably the very thing one sets out to achieve.

The implicit violence with regard to the narrative, as well as to the stereotypical positions of Author and Reader, is also reflected on the generic level. "Traditional" generic boundaries are broken down as different discourses are "recycled" and interwoven, interacting to create disturbance or "impureté" - to use Guy Scarpetta's terms⁶². Thus, Christine's historical account of the lives of the sixteenth-century figures is pre-empted by her own autobiography, for instance, while the two narratives become intrinsically spliced together or entwined, along with the highly technical medical discourse of Christine and Franconi in discussing Robert's critical condition. As the discourses are set side by side, a process of communication or "dialogism" is established between them⁶³; this could even be considered a type of contagion, as one discourse is inevitably "infected" by its proximity to the other, provoking a re-evaluation of each discourse in its new habitat or surroundings. As we have seen, the recontextualisation of elements, discourses and genres entails inflicting a certain violence on both the narrative of L'Antiphonaire - in terms of rupture and infiltration - and on the source material. First, in terms of what Belleau has called "le conflit des codes"⁶⁴, the relocation of a concept within a new textual space causes the confrontation of the specific systems or codes on which the transplanted material and its "host" are respectively founded. Within the context of the literature of Québec, seen at this time as a "literature of

⁶² The expression "recyclage" is from Scarpetta, Impureté. Also quoted in Richard, Le Corps logique de la fiction, 105.

⁶³ The term "dialogism" is from Bakhtin's The Dialogic Imagination, cited in Lamontagne, Les Mots des autres.

⁶⁴ André Belleau, "Le Conflit des codes dans l'institution littéraire québécoise", Surprendre les voix (Montréal, Boréal, 1986) 167-174.

decolonisation"⁶⁵, the inclusion of intertextual borrowings can also be seen as an appropriation of the network of culture represented by the reference, a questioning or a confusion of cultural boundaries and validity, as L'Antiphonaire offers an image of "l'espace littéraire" of Québec⁶⁶. The process of aquinien intertextuality, meanwhile, so close in many ways to the "Collage", practised by the Surrealists, can also be seen as an inherently violent - even sexual - practice⁶⁷, as part of a text or image is torn from its original context and forced into a new "virgin" space. This image of sexual violence is reiterated on the diegetic level as Christine's hold on her written text weakens, along with any control over her self, and elements external to the original writing project force their way into the textual space. As she says: "*la vie s'est insérée de force dans mon pauvre récit; et, du coup, celui-ci s'est transformé en une autobiographie*" (44, my emphasis).

This concept of the violence of the writing process in L'Antiphonaire - the rupture, the contamination, the fragmentation and the forcing of text - is employed equally on the structural level, as the novel is shattered into a series of textual fragments, some mere paragraphs, some covering the space of several pages. The cohesion of the novel is thus dissolved and any residual linearity destroyed, as the narrative thread jumps

⁶⁵ See, among others, Lise Gauvin, "Parti pris" littéraire (Montréal, Les Presses de l'université de Montréal, 1975); Maurice Arguin, Le roman québécois de 1944-1965: symptômes de colonisation et signes de libération (Québec, Université Laval, CRELIQ, 1985) and Raoul, Distinctly Narcissistic.

⁶⁶ Lamontagne, Les Mots des autres, 148.

⁶⁷ See my chapter 1 and also Robert J. Belton, "Speaking with Forked Tongues: Male Discourse in "Female" Surrealism" Dada/Surrealism, 18 (1990), 50-62, 52. Collage was described in terms of "defloration" or rape.

from one temporal space to another and from one narrative to the next. The spaces between the fragments parallel the process of ellipse and analepse by which information is withheld; Jean-William's return journey and the phone calls made to Suzanne, for instance, are related long after the event, but the circumstances of Christine hearing about it are not revealed. It is as if the pieces of the "casse-tête géant" (18) that Christine is creating are arranged, perhaps arbitrarily, perhaps forced into place, while some have gone missing only to be discovered later, and some will never be found. The text is fragmented, not with the brute violence with which *Un rêve québécois* (the text) and Jeanne-D'Arc (the character/fantasy) are dissected or carved up, but with repeated layers of methodic and "sophisticated" violence played out on the diegetic level and specifically on the body and psyche of Christine.

The Eroticisation of Violence and the Spirit of "Contre-Réforme".

Initially, it would seem as if the text functions around a poetics of indiscriminate or non-gender-specific victimisation and violence, as the violence done to the Text, to the traditional novel form and genre, is reflected in the catalogue of misfortunes which *L'Antiphonaire* could be seen to be, and which seems to "favour" neither sex. The balance of unpleasant, painful and violent deaths is shared fairly equally between male and female characters as, one by one, they are raped, brutalised and suffer due to various natural and unnatural causes⁶⁸. In terms of characterisation, also, Aquin offers a

⁶⁸ Carlo Zimara is caught in the act of raping Renata Belmissieri and is killed by his wife, Antonella; Renata is later hanged, betrayed by Antonella who is, herself, caught with a lover and stabbed by her "partner", Leonico Chigi; Chigi, meanwhile, visits the

selection of the "lowest of the low" in both narratives, and of both sexes: the self-centred Chigi, for instance, is a walking illustration of Christine's comment about "ces chers prêtres d'époque, tous plus monstrueux les uns que les autres, tous plus impies et plus hérétiques les uns que les autres" (57), as well as a vehicle for Aquin's anti-clericalism. The two opportunistic rapists, Zimara and Gordon, along with the cynical and exploitative Franconi and the blackmailing doctor who performed Christine's abortion can hardly be said to represent Man at his best⁶⁹. Christine and Antonella, meanwhile, are by no means free from shortcomings. The violence and trauma inflicted on all the characters could therefore almost be said to be their "just desserts", with L'Antiphonaire taking on a moral aspect, as punishment is handed out to fit the crime - although as an interpretation, this hardly seems appropriate or sufficient.

As we saw in Un rêve québécois, where the chief victim of physical violence is the almost habitually obnoxious Jeanne-D'Arc⁷⁰, the lack of any redeeming qualities in the

"bohémiennes" and dies of the "pox". In the twentieth-century story, Jean-William Forestier shoots and kills the pharmacist who raped Christine and twice attempts to murder Robert Bernatchez, whom he leaves paralysed; Jean-William later kills himself in a car crash; Dr. Franconi, whose relations with Christine are highly suspect, announces his intention to kill himself and, given that the text ends with his suicide note, we can only assume that he does so; Christine, finally, having suffered - among other abuses - beatings, rapes and involuntarily administered narcotics, kills herself, leaving only Suzanne, "la seule et vivante image" (245) of all that has happened, physically unscathed - although she has the dubious privilege of knowing that both men with whom she has been involved have been unfaithful to her and have abused Christine sexually and mentally.

⁶⁹ As Françoise Iqbal comments - with heavy irony - on the male characters in L'Antiphonaire, "il en ressort sans conteste l'image d'un être supérieur!" Hubert Aquin, romancier, 196.

⁷⁰ See chapter 3.

majority of the characters does allow the text to exploit an excess of violence without great fear of alienating the reader - as his or her sympathies are not fully engaged and "moral outrage" is unlikely⁷¹. At the same time, it would seem that, except in as much as their suffering affects or reflects the (anti-) development of Christine, the violence inflicted on or endured by the minor characters is (relatively) incidental, with certain characters, such as Gordon and Zimara, existing only in their somewhat one-dimensional capacities as rapists, in order to commit violence and so change the course of the story, before being eliminated themselves. The nature of the violence being so extreme - one could even say sensational(ised) - while being so profuse, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the violence operates as a device, a stratagem of excess, itself a quality of the postmodern novel⁷². The intense layering of acts of violence serves to undermine its reality, to derealise the violence and shift the focus from the *énoncé* to include the process of *énonciation*.

It is in part this aspect which distinguishes the violence against Christine. As we have seen, the writing of the text goes hand-in-hand with the painful and incessant disintegration and degradation of Christine, which itself serves as an integral part of the structuring or destructuring of the text. It is perhaps this focus - the rather too obvious parallel between female protagonist as victim and "Text as Victim" - as well as the graphic nature of the causes of the fragmentation of Christine which make this text so

⁷¹ By the same token, it is interesting that Christine becomes increasingly irritating as the novel progresses.

⁷² Richard, Le Corps logique de la fiction, 105-112.

ambiguous and so troubling for the female or feminist reader (and calls into question the feminism of Aquin's text). Once again, Woman is used and abused as a device in a textual strategy or as the joker in a game of textual violence. Once again, the choice of female protagonist, the selection of abuses suffered and the way in which those abuses are both administered and described are highly significant. For Christine is abused or misused by every man she meets, from her own father - "cette histoire de tentative de viol" (76) - to the acquaintance who made her pregnant, and from the pharmacist to the doctor and the two men who supposedly love her, Jean-William and Robert⁷³. It is surely no coincidence that "*Christine*" is so-called, the female "double" or reincarnation of the quintessential sacrificial victim, himself betrayed by father and friends.

Within the textual space, the violence serves no cathartic purpose, but simply infects and destroys. On a different level, however, it appears designed to provide erotic satisfaction. The gradual disintegration Christine experiences throughout the text is accelerated by a number of contrived incidents and inconsistencies which serve only to increase her degradation or dig her deeper into her own grave. The logistics of Christine being locked *in* the pharmacy all night, for example, free to wander around the store, to find the drugs and make-up she needs and yet apparently incapable of turning a deadbolt or calling the police, is questionable: had she been locked in the small office where the rape took place, the situation would perhaps be a little more credible. The fact that she

⁷³ We could include among those Aquin himself, for it is after all he, who, in creating Christine, determined her gender, the events which would take place, the people whom she would meet, the violence which would be inflicted on her - and on her sisters - as well as the ways in which it would come about and be portrayed.

is made pregnant by the pharmacist, meanwhile, the last in this particular series of indignities heaped upon her, is also questionable. Leaving Jean-William she comments:

J'ai eu une pensée - une dernière - pour Jean-William, pauvre épileptique que j'avais aimé et de qui j'aurais voulu un enfant (*heureusement que demain ou ce soir j'allais avoir mes règles*)... fini l'espoir d'avoir un enfant d'un homme capable de me tuer dans une de ses crises épileptiques (48, my emphasis).

If her period is indeed so imminent - and she/Aquin makes a point of telling us later of the regularity of her cycle and the close record that she keeps - it is extremely unlikely, first of all, that Christine would be made pregnant by the rape⁷⁴. It is, however, very possible that the trauma (both of the rape and of the attack by Jean-William) would have interrupted her cycle somewhat, although neither she nor Robert seem to consider checking at any point⁷⁵. The chronological reliability of the text is admittedly suspect - the period expected at this point is seen to be just three days late when Christine looks at her diary following Robert's enquiry, although considerably more time must have elapsed to allow for her return to Montréal and her moving in with Robert. Yet even if Christine's calculations were off, given that she has just had forced and unprotected intercourse with a stranger and that she is after all a doctor, is it not surprising, first, that she does not notice the lateness of her period before being asked by Robert (and once

⁷⁴ There is of course the possibility of error in her calculations - or that she is already pregnant by Jean-William. A similar situation arises in *Trou de mémoire* where RR believes her suspected pregnancy is the result of her rape by P.X. Magnant, although Olympe may well be the father.

⁷⁵ Again there are echoes of *Trou de mémoire*, when Olympe reassures R.R. that she cannot be pregnant as a result of the rape because of the point in her cycle at which it took place.

he has "burned all his bridges" on her account) and, secondly, that, the possibility either of sexually transmitted disease or, indeed, of being pregnant, did not occur to her earlier? While she could be forgiven for being confused and disoriented by what has happened to her, or, of course, for being in denial, the total overlooking of such obvious possibilities by a victim of rape seems very dubious. Again, however, the text appears more concerned with placing Christine in ever more hopeless situations than with its internal consistency. The surprise discovery of her pregnancy in Robert's presence and the necessity of her lie to cover the truth and so protect herself from Robert's disbelief with regard to the nature of the incident, is far more effective in propelling her downwards and far more damaging to her self-image, as she finds herself pregnant by a rapist and having lied to the man who accepts to be a father to the child.

The portrayal of the violence of which both Christine and Renata are victims requires closer examination. The rape of Renata by Zimara and that of Christine by the pharmacist are very similar. In each case, the crime is opportunistic and the woman is first made totally vulnerable: Renata is at first asleep and then undergoing an epileptic seizure and therefore totally at the mercy of her attacker, while Christine, on arriving beaten and bruised at the pharmacy is first drugged and then raped. In each case, also, the violation is eroticised and once again, it is this eroticisation of sexual violence - the relish with which it is described - as much as, if not more than, the violence itself (the reality of sexual violence and its occurrence in erotic fantasy being, after all, a "fact of life"), which is troubling to the feminist reader.

Renata arrives exhausted at Zimara's house, delivers the manuscript and falls asleep while he examines it. Turning his attention from the text to his young, beautiful and apparently virginal visitor (who is thus in effect the classic Sadian heroine) Zimara "procéda à quelques dévêtements qui la rendirent plus proche, plus belle encore à ses yeux". The style is anecdotal and, at this point, almost humorous, as Christine imagines the scene. Later,

quand il l'eut partiellement dévêtue, celle-ci sortit de sa torpeur, et tenta par tous les moyens possibles de repousser cet inconnu (l'imprimeur), mais trop tard, Carlo Zimara n'entendait plus raison et il était lancé dans sa course vers une jouissance prochaine. Plus fort, l'imprimeur tint sa proie dans ses bras et il arriva à son orgasme très rapidement, la violant ainsi *dans son existence et son secret de jeune fille* (60-61, my emphasis).

Again, the language has echoes of the "salacious story" told to entertain or even stimulate, with its rather "precious" use of parentheses and the euphemistic and old-fashioned terminology of the final line.

As the incident progresses, Renata is prey not only to Zimara's violations, but also to a seizure. Her convulsions arouse Zimara, who continues his "caresses", until "la pauvre Renata...hurlait non pas de plaisir mais sous l'effet des secousses régulières, implacables, intolérables" (61). There is a clear parallel drawn here between epileptic spasm and orgasm - partly through the text's denial of Renata's possible pleasure which only serves to underline the similarity: the rape is thus presented as a parody or distorted vision of an act of mutual consent and pleasure, lending a twisted or perverse eroticism to the scene, described at one point as an attempted "seduction".

The scene is reiterated later when, having suffered the beginnings of another seizure during her confession to the priest, Leonico Chigi, Renata is taken to the sacristy

and laid on an altar - with obvious connotations of the "virgin sacrifice" or (again) a Sadian scenario. Chigi reads to her, perhaps in an attempt to exorcise her demons - his choice of texts, however, is surely unusual for such purposes. Reading from both the "Cantique des cantiques" (deliberately modified once again in order to emphasise the *carnal* aspect of the text⁷⁶) and the "Commentaire d'Origène" of the "Cantique", Chigi succeeds in arousing both himself and Renata to a point of mystical and sexual climax, as Renata "eut des étranges secousses rythmées dans le bas-ventre, tandis que l'abbé Chigi râlait comme un désespéré en émettant un liquide blanc et riche qui jaillissait de lui avec une sorte de spontanéité totale! (90)". The rather coy use of the exclamation mark suggests, again, perhaps the oral delivery of the story for the pleasure of an audience (recalling the performance aspect of Christine's text), while the excess of the scene - Renata is described as "couverte de sperme" - has echoes of Rabelais. Again, the parallels between orgasm and the seizure are drawn, more specifically this time, as "Renata Belmissieri se contorsionnait...en émettant des cris informes, des râles rauques - comme si son appétit amoureux n'était nullement apaisé" (90). Any physical distress the young woman may be experiencing and the fact that Chigi took advantage of her state are evacuated by the eroticisation of her illness.

The account of Renata's rape by Zimara appears directly before Christine tells of her own rape by the pharmacist - also referred to at one point as "une entreprise de séduction". Having fled from Jean-William's violence, Christine describes herself as "tumifiée, abominablement massacrée...médecin atrocement défiguré, désespéré, battu"

⁷⁶ Lamontagne, Les Mots des autres, 156, note 5.

(67), looking as if she has just walked away from a car crash. It is in this physical state, visibly in pain, extremely distressed and highly vulnerable, that she goes to the pharmacy seeking help. In view of this, the reception which awaits her might perhaps be illustrative of the fact that rape has little to do with "sexual attractiveness" and much to do with power - although again there are echoes of a Sadian intertext, the female protagonist being here "in a position of the greatest possible humiliation or "objectification" vis-à-vis the aggressor"⁷⁷. The description of the rape undermines any potentially didactic or "positive" aspects of its representation, however. The drug given to Christine by the pharmacist serves both to immobilise her and to alter her perception of the incident; it is also, perhaps, responsible for the enhanced physiological sensations she experiences, as she writes:

une drogue hallucinogène sous forme de capsule et voilà que j'étais partie pour le septième ciel, enivrée, emplie de ce petit pharmacien modeste dont la lame en acier traité au tungstène me transperçait comme les flèches des cupidons transpercent le coeur extatique de la Sainte-Thérèse du Bernin (68).

Once again, the language used to recall the incident is troubling, as the pharmacist's invading penis becomes

une douce épée, comme une dague médiévale...longue, interminable, coupante, rapide et lente, surtout, pondérée par la tendresse que le pharmacien inculquait à ses caresses et la régularité de ses mouvements de retrait et de reprise...(68)

⁷⁷ Susan Rubin Suleiman, Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde (Cambridge, MA. and London, Harvard University Press, 1990) 65. Also cited in my chapter 1.

and elsewhere: "indemne et durci comme une branche de noisetier au printemps" (67). The "romantic" poetry of her language turns an act of sexual violence into an act of gentle sensuousness which, in turn, becomes a mutually satisfying and "gratifying" experience. The distinction between "sex" and "rape" is thus eroded, as the act takes on the characteristics (or the "signs") of consensual sex.

The blurring of the two sexual acts is systematic throughout the text. Describing Robert's reaction after discovering her pregnancy, she writes:

il se jeta sur moi, affolé, passionné comme jamais je ne l'avais vu...Il était tout en sueur, déchaîné, presque violent tellement son désir le portait follement vers moi (144, my emphasis).

The terms she uses here, the image she evokes, is indeed one of force, and while she attributes the incident to "passion", given the preceding revelation of her pregnancy, it seems more likely that this is indeed an expression of Robert's power, an attempt to "put his mark" on Christine, to reclaim her or repossess her and to forget or deny that she has already "belonged" to someone else. His sexual "magnificence" later that night appears to be an attempt to prove his own potency - something which, given the power games we have seen him play with Christine, seems to be a favourite preoccupation - thus making it all the more ironic that he should become impotent following Jean-William's attack. Robert's behaviour afterwards, meanwhile, is hardly typical of a man passionately in love - he drags her naked from the bed, tossing money at her for the room service he has ordered, saying "Rhabille-toi, beauté". The gestures, his words and the passing of money - albeit as payment for the gin and tonics ordered - are all too reminiscent of the dismissal of a whore.

The erosion of the distinction between rape and sex, and Christine's "déchéance", are at their most extreme during her "relationship" with the highly manipulative Franconi. Their first encounter takes place when the doctor surprises Christine in his office where she has been sleeping naked - her nudity, under the circumstances, would seem in "poor taste" and given the ensuing events, seems to be another detail contrived to precipitate Christine into further sexual violence. Christine takes entire responsibility for what follows, with her comment "il aurait suffi que je me taise. Mais j'ai parlé. Et, en cela réside le facteur (inutilement) déclenchant..." (198). While she is dressing, the doctor forces her back to the bed and she adds: "Je dois peut-être rajouter que je devinais ce mouvement de sa part: j'avais même trouvé particulièrement indécente ma façon de prendre du temps..." (198). Throughout the scene, Christine's "objections" become increasingly transparent, while her refusal to understand the doctor's intentions - her "naïveté" - becomes progressively both irritating and insincere, until her final "Non, non, non..." is transformed into the "annonce paradoxale - d'une jouissance frissonnante, inoubliable, parfaite" (201)⁷⁸. This "humorous" little detail is the culmination in the portrayal of Christine as a willing and eager victim. As Patricia Smart comments: "Elle se conforme exactement au stéréotype de la "femme qui a provoqué le viol", encore invoqué par certains juges dans les procès pour viol ou inceste"⁷⁹. The entire sequence,

⁷⁸ This recalls the similar scene in Beaulieu's Un rêve québécois described in my chapter 3.

⁷⁹ Smart, "Les Romans d'Hubert Aquin", 222.

meanwhile, is described in the "teasing" terms of pornographic confession, as Christine plays the innocent. Her comment,

dois-je nécessairement tout raconter, décrire par le menu les caresses et l'entreprise impudique du médecin ainsi que la surprise que j'ai simulée afin (j'imagine) de rendre moins monstrueux ce qui s'est passé dans ce laps de temps qui a suivi mon lever et précédé notre orgasme commun (198-9),

is a purely rhetorical construct. Hinting at what happened, it gives just enough detail to pique the attention of the reader/listener, before continuing to give the promised reward. And reward it is, for the reader as for Christine, as once again the sexual encounter is the "best it has ever been".

The sense of her complicity which, as we have seen, is instrumental in the deterioration of Christine's self-image and her increasing disgust with her behaviour, has further repercussions, as Patricia Smart suggests when she says:

Toute la violence sexuelle étalée au cours du roman se trouve justifiée par l'assurance que nous donne Christine elle-même qu'elle "ne mérit[e] rien de mieux"⁸⁰.

The novel clearly revolves around the concept of blaming the victim, who, in this case, becomes one of her own most vindictive accusers and, finally, her own executioner.

Aquin's third novel challenges the structures of the European novel, undermining the very foundations of patriarchal language and presenting the reader with multiple possibilities of readings through the layering of texts. The "revolutionary" character which this would imply, however, has certain blind spots. For beneath this textual, generic and linguistic challenge there lies, once again, a female protagonist on whose body the

⁸⁰ Smart, "Les Romans d'Hubert Aquin", 222.

revolution takes place. Beneath all the layers of potential readings and texts, the erudition and plagiaristic intertextuality, in his portrayal of Christine and her fate, Aquin exploits a wealth of clichés about rape and women's sexuality. The difficulty for the feminist reader lies in the fact that where textual clichés and truisms have been clearly subverted, the sexual clichés with regard to women seem to be very much alive and perhaps even more healthy as a result of Aquin's representation of a woman as an inherent and deserving victim. As Patricia Smart comments, it seems that "L'Antiphonaire est un exemple dramatique de cette volonté de dégradation de la femme dont Christine elle-même accuse tous les hommes"⁸¹. However, while the possibility remains that Aquin's "counter-reformist" intentions may have aimed to expose and subvert such a fantasy through the presentation of an "excess" of rape and sexual violence, the novel does not succeed in deconstructing it (thus calling into question the validity of the approach - if indeed such it was): rather, in its eroticisation of violence, the reader is encouraged once again to enjoy the spectacle of rape, while the fantasy of rape as both sought by women and sexually satisfying to women is fuelled and perpetuated. Seen within the context of the "prise de parole" and the literary revolution in Québec, one possible "message" is that the violence directed at women so common to literature of this time, with all it implies to the colonised writer and public, may not be a means to liberation (ending as it does in total destruction), raising the question as to whether the repression of one group is ever liberatory for another. It may, however, serve a different (ie. an erotic) function. The question that arises at this point, is whether

⁸¹ Smart, "Les Romans d'Hubert Aquin", 221.

it is possible to present violence, particularly graphic sexual violence, in a non-eroticised fashion: that is, whether it is possible to escape the system by which sexual violence is encoded as both "acceptable" and pleasurable for the spectator. The next chapter will attempt to address this question in a study of Marie-Claire Blais's Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel.

Chapter Five

Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel: Hereditary Victimization.

Since the appearance of her first novel in 1959, Marie-Claire Blais has published many novels and several volumes of poetry, as well as a number of plays. While her *oeuvre* has been considered uneven, some of the novels being all but dismissed, La Belle Bête (1959)¹, Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel (1965)², Les Manuscrits de Pauline Archange (1966)³, Le Sourd dans la ville (1979)⁴ and Visions d'Anna (1982)⁵, have received considerable critical and popular acclaim internationally, each receiving prestigious literary awards.

Rooted in Québec and the province's fundamentally Catholic culture, Blais's texts are infused with a dark and sinister violence which, as we have seen, pervades much Québec writing. Yet this violence, while often extreme, differs greatly from the violence discussed in the novels by Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Hubert Aquin, having none of the contrived quality nor the narrative "eagerness" of these texts. In addition, Blais's texts present many and varied victims and perpetrators, rather than offering a particular (usually female) target as the focus of male rage. In the phantasmagoric and destructive fairy-tale world of La Belle Bête (an anti-"Cinderella" story), for example, the violence is

¹ Marie-Claire Blais, La Belle Bête, 1959 (Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre, 1968).

² Blais, Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel, 1965 (Montréal, Québec dix sur dix-Stanké, 1980).

³ Blais, Les Manuscrits de Pauline Archange (Montréal, Editions du jour, 1968).

⁴ Blais, Le Sourd dans la ville, (Montréal, Stanké, 1979).

⁵ Blais, Visions d'Anna, (Montréal and Paris, Stanké, 1982).

committed (either directly or indirectly) by a young woman, rejected for her "ugliness" by her physically beautiful, yet emotionally empty mother whose narcissistic adoration of her beautiful idiot son causes hatred and jealousy, homicide (to which the young woman, Isabelle-Marie, incites her brother) as well as matricide, a violent disfiguring and, finally, a double suicide. Elsewhere, the violence is more measured and "realistic", its presence serving as social commentary and critique. In Les Manuscrits de Pauline Archange, a catalogue of almost overwhelming misery, the narrator recounts endless incidences of child abuse, including the constant physical violence inflicted on her cousin Jacob by his sadistic father during "les soirs de grands fouets" (55), and the sexual abuse Pauline herself endures at the hands of the young Franciscan who attends on her sick and long-suffering mother, and the spiritual and mental abuse inflicted on generations of girls attending the convent school, taught - often brutally - to be ashamed of their naturally changing bodies and emotions.

The presentation of violence, although frequent, is often almost understated. Again, in Les Manuscrits de Pauline Archange, Pauline describes the various violent incidents concisely or allusively, as if she were trying to explain her often painful childhood (and, through it herself) to a listening friend, with both the distance of hindsight and the intimacy of personal experience. There is nothing "erotic", for instance, about the rape of Pauline by the young Franciscan whose "faiblesses malheureuses" and "étrange conduite" (45-6) are evoked rather than narrated: the tell-tale "signs" - the blood on her legs and her clothes - interwoven with, or told "through" a description of her mother's suffering. Her own suffering, meanwhile, is apparent through the tears and cries

that her mother was too sick to notice. Nor is there anything eroticised about the potential union of Lucia, a fourteen-year-old street kid in Le Sourd dans la ville, with "un homme gras et court...son cou nauséabond" (109). The incident itself is not described, but "set up" with a minimum of detail: Lucia is seen getting into the man's car, and the repeated, unsavoury description of her "companion" is enough to evoke physical repulsion and an appropriate aura of sordidness. This approach is very unlike the blow-by-blow account of the abusive treatment of Christine in L'Antiphonaire or of Jeanne-D'Arc in Un rêve québécois.

The violent incidents presented differ greatly, as do the justifications for their inclusion; in each case, however, violence serves as a representation or an indication of a certain social reality during the period of political unrest in Québec. As Gilles Marcotte comments:

lire [les] romanciers...c'est lire avec eux, par ce qu'ils font, par les formes qu'ils mettent en jeu, le monde dans lequel nous vivons⁶.

This chapter will consider Marie-Claire Blais's treatment and use of violence and her vision of a changing Québec reality conveyed through this. Although later texts such as Le Sourd dans la ville and Visions d'Anna are more daring and experimental in form, I have chosen to focus on Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel, written at the height of the *Révolution tranquille*, which is contemporary (and so more justly comparable) to the novels already discussed. Although there are several different victims, the similarities between them are clearly drawn, while the novel's focus on a "model" family sets up a

⁶ Gilles Marcotte, Le Roman à l'imparfait: La "Révolution tranquille" du roman québécois, 1976 (Montréal, L'Hexagone, 1989) 23.

microcosm of Québec society at a certain time, ostensibly ruled by the matriarch⁷. It also demonstrates a pattern of what appears to be *hereditary* violence and unavoidable victimisation, at the centre of which is the Mother-figure herself.

The "Anti-Roman de la terre".

Set in rural Québec, Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel opens with the eyes of Emmanuel, born that same morning, the sixteenth addition to an ever growing family. As his mother has already returned to work in the fields, Emmanuel is watched over by Grand-Mère Antoinette, the eldest member of the household, who shares her thoughts and complaints with the baby. The gulf of many years between them is filled, gradually, as the others return from work or school and the novel is able to expose three generations or three phases in the evolution - or deterioration - of the "classic" Québec family: rural, Catholic, hard-working, numerous and very poor.

At first sight, the novel sets up a context similar to that of texts such as Maria Chapdelaine, La Scouine and Trente arpents, drawing on the textual tradition of the *roman de la terre*. However, the picture Marie-Claire Blais paints is far from the rosy, idealised world of the ideological texts which serve as its intertext. Here, in place of the devoutly dutiful Maria Chapdelaine and the young Bertine of Un homme et son péché, or even Guèvremont's Phonsine and Angéline, is a swarm of flea-ridden, malnourished and neglected delinquents, reeking of poverty and grovelling in the dirt, in a world where sickness is both ubiquitous and seasonal:

⁷ See chapter 2.

tout le monde toussait dans la maison: on entendait siffler la toux comme une brise sèche par les fentes des lits et des portes. "Cela passe avec l'hiver", disait mon père, et il avait raison. Car au printemps, chacun de nous bourgeonnait, fleurissait sous la vermine et la rougeole (70).

The salient features of the *roman de la terre* are therefore present, but the traditional characteristics and values, which were already becoming corrupted in the novels of the naturalist period in Québec, have been further twisted. Taken to a logical extreme, the characters, preoccupations and philosophy of the *roman de la terre* have become caricatures or parodies of the original models. Laura Chapdelaine and Alphonsine Moisan, the very templates for the "Mother-as-Saint" of the traditional and ideological texts, have been replaced by Emmanuel's nameless mother, identifiable by "son visage triste, ses épaules courbées" (12), "toujours épuisée et sans regard. Son visage...la couleur de la terre" (27) - the life all but sucked out of her after years of nurturing. As he is the sixteenth child, Emmanuel's birth is no cause for celebration and no excuse to rest. Children are the inevitable, troublesome and draining consequence of that nightly union which she anticipates with a weary "Comme la nuit sera longue"(17). Her attitude to Emmanuel is vague, verging on automation: he is merely the latest in such a long line of offspring that she can no longer keep track of all those who have not survived their harsh lives, even mourning a child to whom she cannot remember giving birth. She incarnates the concept of the fertile and dutiful wife and mother and, while her image is perhaps exaggerated, in acknowledging the strain and weariness of her body after so many labours, it is far more "real" than the ideal she reflects.

The eternal sameness offered as the ultimate aspiration of Maria Chapdelaine⁸ and the patterns of inheritance which the *littérature terrienne* sought to promote, are represented here by the herd of daughters, set to follow in their mother's footsteps, in what would seem to be a cycle as inevitable as death itself:

les Roberta-Anna-Anita avancèrent comme un lent troupeau de vaches, chacune entourant de ses larges bras une espiègle petite fille aux cheveux tressés, qui, dans quelques années, leur ressemblerait, et qui, comme elles, soumises au labeur, rebelle à l'amour, aurait la beauté familière, la fierté obscure d'un bétail apprivoisé (45).

The very possibility of change, or even of finding happiness in the apparently unavoidable institution of marriage, seems unlikely. Having described the typical courting scene - similar in many ways to that of Euchariste and Alphonsine⁹ - the narrator comments: "elles n'avaient rien à espérer auprès de ces boutonneux jeunes gens qui les fréquentaient sans même oser les regarder" (135). There are also echoes of the fate of Maria Chapdelaine who will marry Eutrope Gagnon, her *habitant* neighbour, for the sake of the further preservation and propagation of the French-Canadian people, her sense of "duty" precluding any other choice in that novel - an impasse which is reiterated and exaggerated in Blais's text in the perpetual "inevitability" suggested through the lack of any other available choice.

Their father, meanwhile, apparently a hardworking *habitant* farmer, is also a brutish, ignorant man - far from the model of Menaud or Jean Rivard - who demands his

⁸ The "voice of Québec" which Maria hears at the end of the novel and which influences her choice of husband and future tells her that "au pays du Québec....rien ne doit changer". Louis Hémon, 187.

⁹ Ringuet, Trente arpents, 17-20.

nightly "dues" and whom his wife addresses as "vous", even in those supposedly "intimate moments", which are also the only times they exchange words (albeit simply the woman's fruitless protests). Once again, the desired sameness of the *roman de la terre* shows in the reflection of the father's image in his older sons: equally uneducated, they have the same "appétit brutal" (26-7) and are screened behind the same cloud of blue smoke at the end of the day. The only contact this father has with his younger children takes the form of threats and violent punishment, including a weekly beating¹⁰: indeed he scarcely acknowledges his newborn son, who is too young as yet to warrant such violent correction. Powerless through poverty and ignorance, caught within what is seen to be the vicious circle of the *habitant* farmer's existence, he exerts his virility in the only way remaining to him, taking out his anger on those weaker than himself (in itself an indication of impotence). He is a bully, towards his wife and children, and yet in the presence of Grand-Mère Antoinette, "la voix d'homme n'est qu'un murmure. Elle se perd, disparaît"(13).

For, at the top of the pecking order is Grand-Mère Antoinette, the quintessential matriarch and in many ways the epitome of the Mother-figure so honoured by the *roman de la terre*. She rules the household, oversees the distribution of food and makes the majority of decisions regarding the upbringing of her grandchildren; she also provides

¹⁰ He is even responsible for the death of one child, Olive, crushing her head under his plough (71).

them with their sole source of attention and affection¹¹, since their mother is too exhausted to care for them, their father all but absent. Both the upholder of Law and primary care-giver, Grand-Mère Antoinette fills the void created by the harshness of the reality of the birth-mother's existence and the impotence of the father. In effect, like Rose-Anna Lacasse and so many other mothers in novels from Québec, she takes on the roles of both mother and father, and so can be seen in terms of the phallic mother, combining her maternal qualities with the paternal and "masculine" characteristics her son-in-law lacks. In her, Blais highlights the intrinsic mirror-image of the saintly Mother, bringing together an Alphonsine Moisan with a (perhaps somewhat kindlier) version of Claudine Perrault, making of her a possible representative of both the Imaginary and Symbolic realms.

Grand-Mère Antoinette is thus inevitably possessed of a certain duality. A severe disciplinarian, feared and respected by the family, she is also the mother sought out for her warmth and kindness, and although she saves her grandchildren from the ignorant brutality of their father, she is seen applauding in sadistic appreciation as le Septième is beaten for some misdoing. Her own authoritarian ways - her insistence on education, on the evening prayer and on obedience - are reinforced by the occasional swipe at the

¹¹ Her all-encompassing, "limitless" Motherliness is portrayed in the exaggerated image of her bed, filled with various grandchildren, while sundry cats and dogs and even a sheep, rescued from the cold, sleep on the warm floor (135). She would therefore appear to be far from the picture painted by Paul Gay, who writes: "Grand-Mère Antoinette qui paraît détestable dans les premières pages, se montre ensuite plus vide que méchante, espèce d'automate d'un creux noir inouï, qui ne réfléchit que de la réflexion des bêtes qui ont charge d'autres bêtes". "Les Prix Medicis: Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel", Le Droit (le 17 déc. 1966) 12.

children with her cane, but are tempered with generosity as she hands out sugar and candy to open mouths, like a mother bird feeding her starving young: she is both the "Witch" and the "Fairy Godmother" of folk tales. Her duality extends beyond this however, first when as her kind treatment of the dying and putrefying Horace is undermined by her impatience and tacit cruelty(?) as she dresses him in a clean, but still damp shirt which may well "speed him on his way". Simultaneously an "Angel of Mercy" and the "Death Crone", her "altruism" is further tempered by the morbid desire to be present at his death and a degree of disappointment whenever she finds him (and Jean Le Maigre) still living¹². Finally, while she is mother to an unspecified number of children (and grandchildren), she also encapsulates the "opposing" pole of the idealised woman of the *littérature terrienne*, retaining a degree of purity (even "virginity"), due to the fact that her husband never saw her naked.

The meeting place of countless antithetical values, the character of Grand-Mère Antoinette is a key to a system of binary opposites around which the text is structured, and which Gilles Marcotte has identified as a process of "carnavalisation"¹³. The traditional Carnival, as discussed in Mikhail Bakhtin's studies of Rabelais and

¹² While this fascination with death is rooted, in part, in practicality - bereavement is cause for a good meal, courtesy of the Curé and also means one less body to feed and clothe - it is also a logical (and ironic) reflection of Church teachings regarding death, parodying the Curé's bland optimism and supposedly comforting clichés on the death of Pivoine: "un ange de plus dans le ciel...Dieu vous aime pour vous punir comme ça!...Ah! Comme Dieu vous récompense" (67).

¹³ Marcotte, Le Roman à l'imparfait, 168.

Dostoïevski¹⁴, involves the calling into question of "official" convention through the subversive power of humour, principally parody. During the temporary misrule of Carnival, a re-structuring of traditional hierarchies took place, the fool becoming king for the day and so on. Old values collided with new, and although order was restored the following day, through the rejuvenating power of laughter a process of cathartic change would take place, so that that order would necessarily be different or in some way "renewed".

The carnivalised text, as André Belleau suggests in his essay "Carnavalesque pas mort?"¹⁵, involves a similar process of renewal through the revaluation of the old system and the violation or inversion of existing hierarchies and binary poles. Marie-Claire Blais's novel is not a text that one would immediately consider "carnavalesque": it does not echo with the riotous laughter that would normally be associated with such a festival and has even been criticised for sinking to "le fond de notre abjection"¹⁶. And yet, twisted throughout its darkness and its violence, there is a thread of fierce but

¹⁴ Marcotte cites from Mikhail Bakhtin, L'Oeuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Age et sous la Renaissance, trans. Andrée Robel (Paris, Gallimard, 1970). The issue of carnival is considered in more detail in Problèmes de la poétique de Dostoïevski, trans. Guy Verret (Lausanne, Editions de l'homme-Slavica, 1970), especially chapter 4, 119-210.

¹⁵ Belleau suggests a "schéma" of three aspects inherent to literary carnivalisation: "1. Dans la culture populaire, un système interne d'oppositions et de permutations de type binaire; le cul et la tête, la mort et la vie, l'injure et la louange etc. 2. Le discours ambivalent de la culture carnavalesque populaire versus le discours unilatéral de la culture dite officielle. 3. La transposition textuelle des deux premiers systèmes par la carnavalisation." "Carnavalesque pas mort?" in Surprendre les voix: essais (Montréal, Boréal, 1986) 193-202, 196.

¹⁶ Jean O'Neill, "L'Univers hideux de Marie-Claire Blais: Emmanuel et la misère des minables", La Presse, (le 3 juillet 1965) 5.

understated humour, as the *roman de la terre* along with the institutions it represented and valorised, as well as the beliefs it sought to perpetuate, are subjected to parody. Operating here on both the structural and the discursive levels, parody seeks to deconstruct the existing system, not with the savagery of satire but, as Marthe Robert writes, through

la pitié *et* l'ironie, le respect *et* l'humour, l'admiration *et* la critique, l'attendrissement *et* la rigueur; qui substituent donc au *ou* bien catégorique de la satire un *et* déchirant, maintenu jusqu'aux limites de l'absurde¹⁷.

The interplay of binary opposites and the duality or ambivalence which this definition suggests (an echo of André Belleau's concept of textual carnivalisation) are very much in evidence in Une saison de la vie d'Emmanuel. The resultant equivocal and paradoxical quality, the constant inversion of values and systems, the violation of boundaries, contribute to making the novel both a classic "texte carnavalisé" and an effectively revolutionary text.

The text is indeed structured around a series of binary opposites, the distinctions between them unsettled, often with comic effect. The two fundamental antipoles of birth and death, for instance, are brought together in Jean Le Maigre's autobiography, where he describes the "fortuitous" death of his elder brother Pivoine (Joseph-Aimé) on the same day he was born, so that the funereal feast could also serve as a "celebration"¹⁸.

¹⁷ Marthe Robert, L'Ancien et le Nouveau, de Don Quichotte à Franz Kafka (Paris, Grasset, 1963) 32, quoted in Marcotte, Le Roman à l'imparfait, 176 (original emphasis).

¹⁸ The description of Jean Le Maigre's birth is also, through its excess of noise and bodily fluids overflowing their limits, typical of the carnivalesque tradition: "non seulement je criais, mais ma mère criait elle aussi de douleur, et pour recouvrir nos cris, mon père égorgeait joyeusement un cochon dans l'étable! Quelle journée! Le sang

The alterity of life and death, or of alive and dead, meanwhile is undermined as Jean Le Maigre, physically dead, is infinitely more "alive", thanks to his grandmother's reading of his writings, than the majority of his family who, like his nameless father and mother, are little more than automatons. These one-dimensional characters, along with the elder brothers, the Curé, the Directeur - even the "Grandes A" and the "Petites A", whose "generic" names merely serve to emphasise a lack of individuality - are known by a strictly functional "title", rather than a proper name, having no psychological depth¹⁹. Their lives are restricted to the "role" that they play - a role taken directly from the tradition of the *roman de la terre* which, through this inversion, is shown to be in the process of "deterioration".

Elsewhere, the opposing values of celibacy and promiscuity or prostitution are reconciled, as Héloïse, the eldest daughter, has been sent home from the convent because of her solitary sexual activity and her fantasies about several of her "sisters". During a recurrent dream, Héloïse's beloved convent is described as:

cette hotellerie joyeuse que fréquentaient des hommes gras et barbus, des joues roses, à qui Héloïse offrait l'hospitalité pour la nuit. Elle les recevait dans sa cellule, et les religieuses faisaient brûler de l'encens à la cuisine pour les visiteurs. Héloïse était aimée (119).

coulait en abondance" (66). Marcotte compares the birth of Jean Le Maigre to that of Pantagruel, in *Le Roman à l'imparfait*, 177.

¹⁹ Maroussia Ahmed suggests that the lesser characters belong to "un monde zoomorphe", often likened to insects or animals. "La Technique de l'inversion dans les romans de Marie-Claire Blais", *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 31.5 (May 1975) 380-386, 381.

The parallels between the worlds of the convent and what is obviously a brothel are drawn more clearly, once this dream has become Héloïse's reality - a reality into which she throws herself, moreover, with a zeal equal to what had previously verged on religious fanaticism, switching "du culte de la Vierge au culte de la chair dans la même foi et avec la même ardeur"²⁰. These parallels are set up through comparisons between Mère Supérieure and Madame Octavie Embonpoint, the brothel owner and a Mother-figure to Héloïse, described as:

si économe, certes aussi économe que la Supérieure... Madame Octavie aime trop le vin, elle mange trop de fromage. Mère Supérieure aimait bien le fromage elle aussi. Mais elle n'en mangeait jamais pendant le carême. Peut-être que Madame Octavie devrait jeûner elle aussi, faire pénitence comme la Supérieure (144).

The comparison reveals both Héloïse's naïveté and her inability to distinguish between the two worlds or "levels", whilst creating a wonderful image of crossed boundaries and codes and displaying the ironic twist of humour which pervades the text. Here, the elevated world of Catholic doctrine, nicety, self-control and spirituality is brought close to the "low" world of sexuality (specifically prostitution), demonstrating the carnivalised - even iconoclastic - aspect of the novel.

This "rapprochement" is reiterated as Madame Octavie defends her business to the local priest, himself apparently tempted by the "provocations" offered by the Auberge, and by Madame Octavie herself²¹. Madame Octavie claims that:

²⁰ Ahmed, 384.

²¹ L'abbé Moisan describes Madame Octavie as "provocante...au point de précipiter un saint homme en enfer, juste à lever le petit doigt" (157).

Des orphelines, des bâtardes, des infirmes, je les ai sorties des poubelles, monsieur l'Abbé, ma charge est aussi grande que la vôtre (155).

She thus adopts nothing less than a fundamental principle of Christian charity by inverting the categories of "le Bien et le Mal". Although one can well imagine the priest spluttering into his cassock at this comment, the socially encoded gulf between the institutions is reduced by the comparison - perhaps "ingenuous" from the point of view of Madame Octavie, but definitely "tongue in cheek" within the play of the carnivalised narrative. The call for tolerance and the subversion of moral hypocrisy which it expresses are repeated, finally, as Héloïse is "visited" by Monsieur Le Notaire before he meets with both the Mayor and the Priest - each the representative of a different facet of the patriarchal "Establishment". The Auberge is thus "elevated" by being placed in the same context as the other "legitimate" institutions, while they, in turn, have been "demystified", their hypocrisy exposed, so that the pedestals upon which they sit are brought tumbling down. The re-hierarchisation which this effects, allows for the coexistence of the Auberge and the "moral majority", representing both the spiritual and sexual needs of the community.

The exchange of levels which is effected here is integral to the spirit of Carnival which, as Marcotte indicates, "rabaisse le sublime et ennoblit ce qui est en bas, ce qui est bas"²², not in order to eradicate the difference between them, but to challenge the codes which hierarchise and valorise them: in effect, the process is very close to the fundamental principle of Deconstruction, as well as the concept of "mitoyenneté",

²² Marcotte, Le Roman à l'imparfait, 174.

discussed by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, by which a new discursive space, or even a new world, is created in a position "between" two opposites, thereby allowing the simultaneous existence of both and neither pole. This concept is represented on the walls of Héloïse's room at the Auberge; decorated both with lascivious photos and the crucifix from her convent cell, it serves as a "mise en abyme" for the coexistence of the two worlds of religion and sexuality, each regenerated by its proximity with the other, its boundaries or codes "violated" to create a "new" space.

The eroticisation and "popularisation" of Christian mysticism, is reiterated elsewhere, as Héloïse prepares for a "spiritual marriage" with the "Celestial Bridegroom". The picture is highly reminiscent of the statue of the ecstasy of Saint Theresa by Bernini, in that the sensual associations of mysticism, of being "touched by the hand of God", are taken literally: however, the incident is "deflated" by the fact that Héloïse is awaiting the visitation of God wearing nothing but black stockings, a classic token of pornography. A similar incident occurs at the beginning of the novel, as Jean Le Maigre and le Septième, his "partner in vice", are narrating "[des] histoires vicieuses" under the guise of the confessional process, as a means to arouse themselves and each other. Jean Le Maigre imagines himself during a genuine confession "jouissant de se trahir, remuant de bas secrets, dans une délectation fantasque" (29) and later, he has "l'eau à la bouche à l'idée de dire ses fautes au curé" (50). Both boys finally look forward to their nightly, reciprocal masturbation, as much for the pleasure of being able to confess, as for the physical pleasure - the act of confessing serving as a secondary sexual activity. The carnivalesque nature of the image, meanwhile, is completed by the fact that upstairs, the

rest of the family is enduring the evening prayer under the command of Grand-Mère Antoinette: above, there is the image of pious religion (if a little forced), while downstairs, that same religion is "undermined" and appropriated for erotic purposes, the spatial references exploiting the traditional structures of "high" and "low", "heaven" and "hell", "le Bien et le Mal".

Regeneration: Carnivalisation and Catharsis.

In each of the incidents above, certain rituals of Catholicism have been appropriated and recontextualised in a process parallel to that of Intertextuality and/or Collage, seen in operation elsewhere²³. The opposing poles of religion (encoded within a Catholic cultural discourse as "moral rectitude") and sexuality (encoded as "moral corruption") are brought together, their distinction eroded through a process of "glissement", as one "becomes" the other while also retaining its own qualities. The challenge to the coding of such values, meanwhile, as we saw in chapter one, is also, in Bataillan terms, the fundamental precept of eroticism, inherent to the concept of "transgression". In Marie-Claire Blais's novel (in contrast to the works of Aquin and Beaulieu in which similar techniques are often employed) the "violence" which this textual strategy implies, and which has elsewhere been interpreted as an inherently

²³ Chapter 1, for instance, looked at Surrealist Collage and its implications, while chapters 3 and 4 have considered intertextuality in the works of Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Hubert Aquin, respectively.

sexual violence or "textual rape"²⁴, is not seen here as a parallel to (nor is it reflected in) the sadistic sexual violence endured by a female character, as the frustrations of the colonised male author and/or protagonist are worked out on her body. Here, those frustrations are directed primarily towards the patriarchal establishment which has forced both men and women into fixed gender roles and structures, through the novel's intrinsic and revolutionary restructuring of hierarchies. The implementation of humour, meanwhile, makes the iconoclastic nature of the text a little more "palatable", but no less effective - perhaps more so, given the seductive nature of humour and particularly of parody. "Teasing" but not "victimising", anarchistic but not vindictive, focussed and ironic but not exclusive (hence its relationship to the carnivalesque, which, Bakhtin tells us, has no spectators, only participants) in Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel, "[la] parodie...n'a pas le sens d'un rejet; elle implique, plutôt une revitalisation, une remise en mouvement...de thèmes et de personnages figés par la répétition"²⁵.

The process of re-evaluation is most evident in the ambiguous or contradictory character of Grand-Mère Antoinette, in whom both the traditional ideal of the Saintly Mother and her mirror image meet. Both recognisable and alien, the same and other, Grand-Mère Antoinette is, simultaneously, the cultural icon and her antithesis, thereby undermining the image of the saintly Mother - and with it the institution by which she was empowered and valorised. Here, the world of the (Earth) Mother has indeed changed and those changes are made evident by Grand-Mère Antoinette. Representative

²⁴ See chapter 1.

²⁵ Marcotte, Le Roman à l'imparfait, 178.

of the old world of the *habitant* tradition, Grand-Mère Antoinette claims to be "contre le progrès", and yet, it is she who insists that the children be educated (the sons, at least, the girls are not mentioned), thus contradicting their traditionalist father, to whom "l'essentiel, c'est de pouvoir traire les vaches et couper le bois"(68) and, in effect, paving the way for the future. Ahead of herself and of her time, therefore, it is she also who first learns to read, thereby breaking into the traditionally masculine world of the written word (nonetheless associated with femininity in Québec), and so becoming able to "resurrect" Jean Le Maigre by reading his texts and "breathing life" into his words. It is Grand-Mère Antoinette who will lead her family (at least, those select few who are willing and able to adapt to the changing present) into the future, by learning from and building on the past, while refusing to be suffocated by it; a phallic mother, she will be responsible for the survival of her descendants. The very embodiment of the process of regeneration, in her relationship with the earth of which she is a symbol, opening and closing the novel in the company of the youngest born, she is "le mouvement par lequel l'ancien s'abîme, se transforme, se régénère dans le nouveau"²⁶ and so it is that she is infinite, destined to outlive her children and to die, eventually, as Jean Le Maigre predicts, of immortality (124).

The "revitalisation" which Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel thus provokes is reiterated by the narrative which undermines traditional textual limitation. From the much cited opening page on, the novel distorts the world of the *roman de la terre*. Narrated from the perspective of a new-born baby, so challenging all standards of

²⁶ Marcotte, Le Roman à l'imparfait, 175.

"vraisemblance", the novel opens with an inversion of traditional narrative order and a vertical displacement as, unable to see the whole of his grandmother at any one time, Emmanuel introduces Grand-Mère Antoinette from the floor upwards, endowing her feet - "des pieds nobles et pieux...des pieds vivants...l'image de l'autorité et de la patience" (7) - with metonymical or synecdochical significance, while displacing or inverting the traditional location of the "high" qualities. The ambivalence and regeneration which this image suggests, and which Grand-Mère Antoinette in effect incarnates, is reiterated, first in the use of the binary concept on a discursive level in the form of oxymorons, the linguistic structure which embodies the concept of carnivalisation. Jean Le Maigre is seen by Frère Théodule as being of a "laideur charmante"(127), while the hunting expedition, during which the elder brothers find Léopold hanging from a tree, is described as a "joviale tuerie"(72).

The "unending" quality of the text meanwhile, evident in its circularity (terminating, as it began, with the words of Grand-Mère Antoinette to Emmanuel - now one season old) is also evoked, Gilles Marcotte suggests, by the choice of the "imparfait" as the principal past tense:

L'imparfait...n'implique pas un temps accompli, fermé, mais une durée qui se construit et ne cesse pas de se construire dans le cheminement des consciences...²⁷.

The effect is compounded by the long open-ended sentences, contributing to the "stream-of-consciousness" impression that drifts from one consciousness to the next, as if the

²⁷ Marcotte, Le Roman à l'imparfait, 15.

narrator were able to "tune in" one "frequency" after another - from Emmanuel to his grandmother, from Pomme to his aunt and uncle, to le Septième.

This non-finite quality is maintained further by the constant punctuation of the narrative by the incorporation of texts written by diverse characters, causing a clash of discourses and levels of language similar to that seen in the other works discussed; the intertextual conflict involves, according to André Belleau, "la "réproduction", la "restructuration", et la "transfiguration esthétique" de la multiplicité hétérogène des discours en interaction"²⁸. The letter from le Septième, for instance, reads almost like a nursery rhyme, its repetition of "grand-maman" serving as a refrain:

Et la vache Clémentine, grand-maman,
Et le petit veau grand-maman
Avec des taches ou sans taches
Et le cochon Marthuroulou quelle couleur
Grand-maman (139),

while the (grammatically correct) letter from Héloïse to her grandmother is full of extravagant biblical niceties and sympathy for her brother, Pomme, "pour qui vous me voyez verser des larmes de désolation et de sympathie" (145). The religiosity expressed in Héloïse's letter winds its way in and out of the text, meanwhile, when the Curé visits or when the text focusses on Jean Le Maigre in the novitiate. Elsewhere, finally, the text incorporates the personal advertisements from the out-of-date Saturday newspaper (146-150), as the novel constructs itself out of a variety of intertwined layers, moving from one level of language and culture to another.

²⁸ Belleau, 195. Again, however, the violence which this process entails remains primarily on the textual level.

The major "insert" in the text, however, is Jean Le Maigre's writings, adding another series of dimensions as the text incorporates a character in the process of creating his own autobiography - his own "self as text". This self corresponds clearly to the clichéd figure of "The Romantic Poet" - tubercular and so destined to die young (martyrdom being both an attestation of aesthetic value and the "existential condition necessary for the survival of art"²⁹), with a sickness which he aggrandizes with a play on the Latin, "tuberculos tuberculorum" (66) and "qu'il [aime] comme une soeur" (41), because it adds the necessary "romantic" edge or legitimacy to his art. The character, Jean Le Maigre, incorporates a wealth of intertextual reference and semantic play which involves both a pattern of regression and an opening of the text, as it breaks up the narrative flow. Blais's own text embraces the writings of Jean Le Maigre which, in turn, embraces those of Rimbaud or Nelligan. Jean Le Maigre's poems, such as

Combien funèbre la neige
Sous le vol des oiseaux noirs...(31)

are pastiches of the latter's work. Elsewhere, his language "elevated", the "sensitive poet" recalls Baudelaire's famous poem "L'Albatros", transposed into a totally banalised context:

quand tu auras attaché mes bas avec des ficelles pour ne pas qu'ils
tombent et *traînent derrière moi comme des ailes meurtries*, va au secours de
mes poèmes... (56, my emphasis).

Le Septième's comic yet dreadful attempts at poetry serve as a second level of pastiche, both emphasising the "fraudulent" nature of his brother's efforts, while parodying the

²⁹ Jan B. Gordon, "An Incandescence of Suffering: The Fiction of Marie-Claire Blais", Modern Fiction Studies, 22 (Autumn 1976) 467-484, 479.

seriousness of his intent. The "grandeur" or "royalty" suggested by the capitalised article of Jean Le Maigre's name is undercut by the fact that he was born "le front *couronné* de poux"(65, my emphasis), while the semantic association of his name with characters referred to as "le Brave" or "le Grand" is belied by the rather "puny" adjective used in his case³⁰. Finally, the reference to Jean Le Maigre, "sa tête pleine de poux" (20), is a poor second to Rimbaud's description of "les poètes de sept ans" who had "le front plein d'éminences"³¹, while the novel's title itself echoes the poet's Une saison en enfer³². The process of carnivalisation is once again at work, the parodic characterisation reiterated or enforced on the semantic level. This time the literary institution is targeted, as the concept of "high art" - not the art itself, but the self-importance which associates itself so readily with romantic art and literature in particular³³ - is dismantled, deconstructing the established literary hierarchy as the poet's "Ivory Tower" is razed to the ground.

The Inheritance of Emmanuel.

Carnavalesque, parodic, ironic and humorous, and yet at the same time described as "l'oeuvre la plus forte, la plus violente et la plus noire...de toute la littérature

³⁰ See also Ahmed, 380.

³¹ Ahmed, 384.

³² This last example of intertextuality was pointed out by André Lamontagne, in conversation.

³³ To complete the process, Jean Le Maigre's "great works" are secreted under the floorboards in the latrines to protect them from his father, and later taken to the latrines by his father, to be used "according to their merits", as toilet paper.

canadienne-française"³⁴, Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel weaves tragedy and comedy together throughout the text as two parallel threads - the "two parallel lines that meet in infinity". Cathartic laughter lies beside a very real pathos, and ironic humour is spliced together with darkness and violence, the same atmosphere of corruption, cruelty and perversion we saw in Un rêve québécois and L'Antiphonaire. Here also the characters struggle with the frustrations and the oppressions which the protagonists of so many of the novels of this period live and breathe, their physical and spiritual growth stunted by the suffocating, homogenising and inflexible nature of the dominant ideologies and by the lack of sustenance and choice. It is this eternal repetition which Emmanuel recognises as he inherits the "collective unconsciousness" of his culture, coming to him through his grandmother in terms of "une longue habitude du froid, de la faim, et peut-être même du désespoir", while he realises that "cette misère n'aurait pas de fin" (10-11). How could he turn out other than Grand-Mère Antoinette predicts - ignorant, cruel, bitter and alone, like all the others - when his only options are to tread in his father's footsteps and work the barren land or to follow Jean Le Maigre to the equally "barren" novitiate?

The possibilities open to Emmanuel's generation are presented in the procession of family members who occupy the parade-ground of the novel. First, having given up on education, Pomme and le Septième are sent to try their luck in the city. Following an

³⁴ Michel Pilon, "Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel de Marie-Claire Blais", Aujourd'hui Québec (fév. 1967) 47-48. (Of course, Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel was written prior to L'Antiphonaire and Un rêve québécois, both of which could well be contenders for that particular title.)

accident at the factory where they both work (and where workers' compensation and unions have not yet been heard of), Pomme is left minus three of his fingers and his job for which, thus maimed, he is no longer suitable. Intertwined with other stories over several pages, the description of the accident is tinted with a dark and vicious humour, thick with an anger which targets the self-interested and inhuman attitude of the employers, who represent another face of the forces which keep Pomme and his brothers "in their place": the secretary of the factory, we are told, is not responsible for "des objets perdus" (165) and literally washes his hands of the incident (171). "Ce sont des choses qui arrivent". And yet Pomme will now sell newspapers for a living, and will presumably remain as poor as the family he left to make his fortune.

Meanwhile, despite the parodic nature of his character, Jean Le Maigre exudes pathos: flea-ridden and sick, the "country cousin" of the Romantic poets, the child of a large family, his parents absent (even "dead"), a self-professed orphan to all intents and purposes, with nothing to expect from the future, Jean Le Maigre (like his many siblings) is the heir of a classic dispossessed French-Canadian *habitant* family. Reading offers him temporary solace from the poverty and grime of his reality. He claims: "personne ne me voit quand je lis...je ne suis pas là" (17)³⁵, as books take him to other worlds where life has more rewards (25). Imagination, meanwhile, coupled with the wider field of knowledge offered by education, also allows possibilities of escape otherwise unattainable, as Jean Le Maigre "travels" to warm climates during geography lessons with

³⁵ His comment recalls Bérénice Einberg from Réjean Ducharme's novel L'Avalée des avalés, published that same year.

the Curé (77-78, 86). It is his writing, however, which allows him to "step outside" and to "rewrite the script", as an observer both of himself and his family, romanticising his life and his poetic vocation. The act of writing itself places a gulf between him and the sullen, uneducated men of his family, whose lives revolve around working and eating. Here, as in many Québec novels of the period, writing (particularly introspective writing) is seen as a frivolous and therefore effeminate pastime³⁶. This prejudgment is underlined by the fact that Jean Le Maigre has considerable sexual experience with his brothers, as well as with most of the boys in the novitiate and even with Frère Théodule. His sexual activities are not limited to homosexual encounters however, since he has had experience with Marthe "la petite bossue", among others, again linking him with many other protagonist-writers in novels of the time³⁷. More than this, in (re-)writing his own story, Jean Le Maigre is able to create an identity for himself, to create himself for the reader, through a process of narcissistic "self-parturition"³⁸: a "god", and so of a race superior to the rest of his family and peers. At the same time, the process of writing, of "giving birth" to the text, allows Jean Le Maigre, along with Pauline Archange and the various other adolescent writers of Marie-Claire Blais's world, a means of laying claim to something, of "possessing" - or, as Jan Gordon writes, "a way of saying "mine" in a world

³⁶ Raoul, 148-9.

³⁷ Raoul, 135-140 etc.

³⁸ Jean Le Maigre would therefore seem to exhibit the classic characteristics of the narcissistic bisexual for whom the ultimate dream, according to Valerie Raoul, is "self-engenderment and self-perpetuation: reproduction or resurrection of the self, phoenixlike, without the contribution of an other" (137). See also her discussion of narcissism, 21 and following.

where too many children, too omnipresent a God, and too much suffering creates (sic) an absence of difference"³⁹. (The fact that Jean Le Maigre's work is so derivative of his French ancestors, however, might well seem to call into question the success of his quest for individuality!) Writing his *oeuvre posthume* in order to be read - at least by his grandmother, for whose benefit he includes the occasional "aside" (53) - Jean Le Maigre is also attempting to establish his own "immortality", to ensure his eternal existence, like Pauline Archange, who writes:

Ce qui me désolait le plus, c'était de penser qu'il était si long, si dur pour moi de vivre, et que dans un livre, cela ne prendrait que quelques pages, et que sans ces quelques pages, je risquais de n'avoir existé pour personne⁴⁰.

The destruction of his work by his father thus takes on an almost "homicidal" callousness. The constant threat of discovery and the necessity for secrecy in order to protect his writings from his father, meanwhile, accords the process of writing itself a "transgressive", anarchic edge, as the writer attempts to break through, to have his voice heard above the suffocating silence of the society represented by the paternal figure. He does succeed, of course, in finding a way out - but it is through death.

Héloïse, similar to Jean Le Maigre in many ways, seeks "salvation" through the religion into which she was born. Constantly offering herself to God in an ecstasy of romanticised self-sacrifice and self-mutilation, searching for the "favour" and the immortality of martyrdom, Héloïse looks for escape from the poverty of daily life, as well as acceptance and affirmation through the mysticism of Catholicism. Her desire is to

³⁹ Gordon, 477.

⁴⁰ Blais, Les Manuscrits de Pauline Archange, 127.

be different and - in a family of surplus children - to be given some reason for being. Her search for the most pathetic among the newspaper advertisements as she seeks someone to serve is both a somewhat farcical exaggeration of the Catholic duty of self-sacrifice ("le don de soi"), and an expression of that desperate need to be needed.

It is in the convent, where Héloïse is sent during puberty, that she becomes aware of her sexuality, while at the same time being taught to be ashamed of her body and to repress all sexual impulses. That lesson is reinforced in her dream, during which "Soeur Héloïse des Martyres et du Sang versé" suffers the sadistic humiliation of the public exposure of her private (and never-sent) letters; her writings are thus abused in a similar way to those of her poet brother.

It is here, also, that she discovers the dual affirmation and momentary loss of self in orgasm through masturbation - itself a significant act of rebellion in the repressive eyes of convent law. Taking up residence and employment at the brothel would indeed at first sight appear to be a continuation of that rebellion, as Karen Gould suggests⁴¹, a rejection of the patriarchal law which attempts, through religion, to desexualise and to defeminise women. The fact that she feels more loved in the brothel - where she is ostensibly singled out and chosen - than in the uniformity of a convent where the "la Supérieure...n'aimait pas que l'on dérange l'ordre établi par des élans personnels", is certainly a damning comment on the institution and its ability to provide sustenance to its members. Yet despite her relative contentment in the brothel and her apparent sexual

⁴¹ Karen Gould, "The Censored Word and the Body Politic: Reconsidering the fiction of Marie-Claire Blais", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 15.3 (Winter 1981) 14-27, 16.

fulfilment (153-4), the love and need that she believes she senses for the first time in her life are merely the lusts of men old enough to be her grandfather and boys as young as herself, their "love" and "need" - along with Héloïse herself - forgotten, as soon as their business has been concluded:

Et sans se soucier d'elle, M. le Notaire...emprisonnait la bouche de la jeune fille de ses lèvres moussues de tabac et de sueur...(la jeune fille se plaignait si doucement que le vieillard ne l'entendait pas, aïe, monsieur le Notaire, aïe...) (...) Rejetée sur un rivage stérile par le notaire...[il] se félicitait d'avoir pu terminer les choses sans trop prendre son temps, ainsi frais et dispos du bordel, il pouvait aller visiter le maire, le curé...(160-1, my emphasis).

Sacrificing herself for the benefit of a man "[qui] piétinait sa jeunesse, sans égard pour la misère de son corps et la solitude de son désir" (160), Héloïse is a partner to the stereotypical males of Québec literature, playing both mother and lover in the incestuous type of union present in a number of novels of the time:

elle voyait en l'homme...l'enfant, le gros enfant des premiers appétits, suspendu à son sein, exploitant sous toutes sortes de gestes et d'emportements...la soif, la grande soif du premier jour, malheureusement inassouvie, et qui faisait que l'homme venu pour goûter la caresse d'une amante désirait en même temps celle d'une mère capable de le corrompre (160-1).

In effect, therefore, despite her attempts to avoid her mother's fate and despite her challenge to the "system" through her "reclaiming" of her sexual body, Héloïse is unable to break out of the age-old triptych - Virgin/Mother/Whore -, succeeding only in playing all three roles at once⁴². Finally, while Héloïse, in her somewhat desperate optimism, is perhaps a more willing "participant" in sexual activity than her mother, the

⁴² Héloïse's youth, naïveté and innocence are so clearly and repeatedly drawn as to make the comparison to the "Virgin" legitimate, despite her profession.

objectification, or even the "irrelevance" of the woman in each case, from the male perspective, is remarkably similar.

Her mother is the nightly victim of "legalised" or "institutionalised rape". A married woman and so, at that time, still considered as much her husband's property as the land he farms, she is obliged to succumb to her husband's desires. That obligation is encoded within social structures, as well as in Church teachings which made procreation a religious duty, as Grand-Mère Antoinette comments, "c'était la volonté du Seigneur d'avoir des enfants" (108) and a patriotic obligation, in the form of the "revanche des berceaux", while intercourse itself was considered a husband's right⁴³. Not surprisingly, then, Emmanuel sees his father as "la silhouette brutale...l'étranger, l'ennemi géant qui violait sa mère chaque nuit" (133-4), his mother's quiet protests unheard or simply ignored like those of her daughter Héloïse⁴⁴. Meanwhile, in her time as much a victim of the nightly rapes as her daughter, Grand-Mère Antoinette regained a degree of control by hiding her body from her husband⁴⁵:

⁴³ In his triumphant objection to Marie-Claire Blais's presentation and criticism of religion, "Elle a pourtant cela de bon, la vie religieuse, d'arrêter le déluge des naissances!" ("Les Prix Medicis", 12), Paul Gay, prtre, c.s.sp, seems to have forgotten both that the "production" of children was encouraged, if not required, by the Church and State for many years in Québec, and that birth control is disallowed by the Catholic Church.

⁴⁴ The similarities drawn between Héloïse and her mother may also suggest a parallel between the roles of wife and prostitute - and a damning comment on the institution of marriage: both figures are seen to be "giving up" their sexual bodies to men in return for some compensation, be it direct financial reward or the supposed security and status of marriage.

⁴⁵ One wonders if her daughter, apparently so much weaker than she, will ever acquire the older woman's strength and so be able to take over the role of matriarch.

son mari n'avait jamais vu son corps dans la lumière du jour...lui qui avait cherché à la conquérir dans l'épouvante et la tendresse, à travers l'épaisseur raidie de ses jupons, de ses chemises, de mille prisons subtiles qu'elle avait inventées pour se mettre à l'abri des caresses (108).

Once again, her preservation of integrity and dignity, that "reclaiming of self" is at a cost. Her victory - her "punishment of man's desire" (9)⁴⁶ - is described as "un triomphe secret et *amer*" (108, my emphasis), and it seems that, in order to maintain that distance between herself and her husband, Grand-Mère Antoinette was forced to create a gulf between her self (her mind) and her body, a vital part of herself being repressed in the denial of her own sexual desires and emotions.

That self remains hidden, it seems, to all but Emmanuel (and perhaps Jean Le Maigre), who recognises her vulnerability - suggested in part by her thinness beneath the mountains of clothes still used as a shield: Emmanuel realises that those "noble feet dominating the room" are also "des pieds meurtris par de longues années de travail aux champs", while noticing "la blessure secrète à la jambe...la cheville gonflée sous la prison de lacets et de cuir". Trapped within a refuge which has become a prison, "son corps étouffé" (9), Grand-Mère Antoinette has spent a lifetime behind the barrier raised between herself and the world. Repressing her "self" and her sexuality in order to protect herself, Grand-Mère Antoinette also twists reality, denying those facets of its harshness

⁴⁶ In the light of her somewhat antagonistic relationship with her spouse, I wonder if the fact that Grand-Mère Antoinette was so zealously attentive to her dying husband (108) was not a form of revenge - either a deliberately delayed revelation of her affection for him or, perhaps more likely, a tacit enjoyment of his suffering and of her approaching liberation... At the same time, she may have seen her husband's suffering as an affirmation of God's love, once again recalling the curé's words on the death of one of the grandchildren: "Dieu vous aime pour vous punir comme ça"(67).

which even she is powerless to change. Jean Le Maigre's revelations of corruption in the novitiate, for instance, are passed off as "les créatures de l'imagination" (125), while the true nature of Héloïse's employment is never discussed, although one suspects her grandmother is surely aware of it, if only because of Jean Le Maigre's predictions. She veils the truth in order to escape its sting, just as she shrouded her body to escape her husband and persecutor. Despite the fact that Héloïse is working in a brothel, that Pomme has lost his job along with his three fingers, that Jean Le Maigre is dead, that her daughter is very probably pregnant again by now, and that le Septième has been assaulted by le Frère Théodule (although she is not yet aware of that), Grand-Mère Antoinette is able to close the novel with her questionable optimism, combining peasant wisdom with religious fatalism: "Tout va bien...il ne faut pas perdre courage. L'hiver a été dur, mais le printemps sera mieux" (175).

The Vicious Circle: Hereditary Violence and the Eternal Victim.

The text thus evokes an atmosphere of repression which leaves the majority of its characters either openly abused and physically scarred or spiritually and emotionally stunted and in a perpetual state of denial. This repression, enforced by the religious system and coupled with the injustice of a society ruled by a self-serving (capitalist) elite, is here shown to create unnatural characters surviving in equally unnatural situations, fighting against, or coping with, the poverty in which they are required to live with little or no hope of release. The frustrations of life in such a world and its apparently inescapable patterns of violence are illustrated by le Septième (in many ways Jean Le

Maigre's somewhat less talented "soulmate"), who is thwarted in his attempts to "move up" by working diligently, because of the aloof dismissiveness of his employers, who are interested only in production running smoothly⁴⁷:

Le Septième...arrivait le premier pour mériter les éloges du patron. Mais le patron n'avait pas le temps de le voir, bien sûr. Comme Dieu, dans son catéchisme, il était inaccessible aux petits. Mais heureusement, il y avait le secrétaire. (...) Le Septième collait à la hâte sa 1200^e paire de semelles, le nez et les yeux envahis par les étincelles noires de la poussière. Dommage, M. le secrétaire ne pouvait pas le voir à la tâche, il était myope...(165-166).

Denied the possibility of promotion and yet still hoping to rise above the anonymity of factory life, le Septième turns first to religion, trying through fanatical excess to make up for lost time, and next to education. As elsewhere in the novel, religion offers nothing but the illusion and frustrations of hope, while the motivations of his instructor, the "defrocked" Frère Théodule (or Théo Crapula, as he is now known) soon become apparent. Le Septième's reward for attempting to get his "head above water" is a violent, almost vampiristic assault at the hands of his sado-masochistic, paedophiliac teacher. The exact nature of the assault is not revealed: we know only that, on his attempt to escape, having been propositioned by Crapula:

deux mains violentes s'accrochèrent à lui, le Septième sentit qu'il était perdu. Il se laissa mollement retomber sur le sable.

Le Septième se réveilla à l'aube...Il n'était pas mort, comme il l'avait cru. Ses vêtements étaient à peine déchirés. Mais passant la main à son cou, il sentit une marque qui brûlait encore...(174).

The assault takes place in the time lost between le Septième's passing out and regaining consciousness. While the loss of consciousness and the pain on waking are sufficient to

⁴⁷ And so recall the attitude of the Mother Superior at Héloïse's convent.

suggest the violence of the attack, once again the violence itself is omitted - graphic detail evidently considered superfluous - as there has been enough detail in the foreshadowing of the incident to allow the reader to second-guess the nature of the assault. Enough has been said about Crapula's history, for example, to indicate that the child has been raped. The rape here, however, unlike the attacks in Un rêve québécois and L'Antiphonaire, is restricted to the level of the diegesis, to the incident itself within the narrative. Without forgetting that this is, of course, a fictional character, one could say that le Septième is not subjected to a second degree of rape through the graphic exposure of his humiliation - the text does not "exploit" his victimisation⁴⁸. The focus here, it seems, is not the incident itself, but the fact that it took place at all.

The attack on le Septième is presented almost as an extreme but inevitable consequence of the system in which a lack of possibilities and an apparent dearth of affection and warmth within the family, as elsewhere, create a stark, unforgiving world, where life is propagated but not nurtured. Children are thrown out into a frozen, barren landscape and are expected to conform to the impossible standards set by an ideological elite. Most of those unable or unwilling to conform are casualties, as we have seen. In addition to Jean Le Maigre, le Septième, Héloïse, even Grand-Mère Antoinette, there is also Léopold, the brother who came home from the seminary only to hang himself. This suicide passes unexplained and all but unnoticed, as if such an event were to be

⁴⁸ We saw earlier, during the "confessions" of Jean Le Maigre and le Septième in the cellar, that the text acknowledges the titillating power of the discussion of sexual acts: a conscious choice seems to have been made not to exploit that power.

expected, and his remaining family (save perhaps his ever-mourning mother) have lost the ability to love or to show love.

The sexual and emotional repression embodied in the religious institution which presumably drove Léopold to suicide, and which hangs like a thick winter fog over Blais's landscape, along with the inflexibility of the social class system, is shown to be a form of implicit violence, which, when it fails to create its preferred and docile automatons (like the "Grandes A" and the "Petites A"), creates violent and self-destructive people. Herein lie the similarities between the various victims in this world of suffering. For girls and women, the continued victimisation and repression is, as we have seen, inscribed within cultural and religious dictates. Their self-esteem stifled, their roles are defined according to traditional gender prejudice and in relation to male requirements, women are necessary (and necessarily) victims. Similarly, although there are many male victims in the text, suffering both natural and unnatural ills, and experiencing both physical and mental violence, their status as victims seems to be dependent on certain "feminine" qualities which they all exhibit. First, the majority of male characters are children, and so are in a position of dependence and vulnerability normally associated with femininity. The "effeminacy" of childhood is underlined, as we have already seen in part, by the homosexual tendencies of the four boys, Jean Le Maigre, le Septième, Pomme and Alex⁴⁹, while the violation of le Septième also places

⁴⁹ Freudian theory suggests that male homosexuality may arise from an "over-identification" with the (perhaps dominant) mother, while other theorists suggest the (non)influence of an absent or weak father. See Raoul, 136. Both such parents are involved in this text, as in many other novels of the period.

the boy in a traditionally "feminine" position. This aspect is reiterated as Léopold, the suicide, was a member of the seminary and so a "man in skirts". The loss of Pomme's two fingers could well be seen as a symbolic castration, by which he will be prevented from attaining higher status within the masculine business world, while on another level, finally, their father, rendered ineffective by poverty and his position within the colonised society of Québec, is portrayed as powerless or temporarily "emasculated". In each case, the male victims are feminised, either in terms of characterisation or in terms of the violence they endure: once again it seems that to be a victim is to be feminine or as if there can be no other victim but the feminine. This gendered power-structure is reiterated on the macrocosmic level, as Québec itself is generally seen as feminine. Often referred to as the ungrateful francophone "wife" in the Canadian federal marriage, within the colonial balance the province is seen as the colonised other⁵⁰, again drawing a parallel between the repressive loss of subjectivity and femininity.

The patterns of repression can be traced back to the figure of the Mother, because in the absence or impotence of the father, it is she who (de)forms the children. It is she also who has often borne the blame both for the repression of children and the absence of the father, and has been repeatedly treated as a scapegoat, as we have seen⁵¹. And yet she too is the product of the same system. The object of sexual victimisation in her required function as baby-maker, she is also incarcerated within the

⁵⁰ Raoul, 38-39. Also in Memmi, Portrait du colonisé précédé de Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés? (Montréal: L'Étincelle, 1972).

⁵¹ See chapters 2 and 3, for example.

role of "putative father"⁵², precisely because her mate is unable to fulfil that role himself. While she supposedly wields considerable power within this role, all power is bestowed (or forced) upon her temporarily, until such time as man should deem himself ready to repossess his "rightful" position of authority; at such a time, the Mother would be restored once more to her position of "*other*" within the traditional gender balance. The matriarchy which Québec was seen to be at one time, endorsed by the hypervalorised Mother, would therefore seem to have been a façade behind which hid the temporarily powerless male - "un patriarcat déguisé" - as Patricia Smart describes it in Ecrire dans la maison du père⁵³. Woman is here voiceless unless speaking the "word of the father" and in servitude even when giving commands. Thus restrained within the system represented in the microcosmic world of Marie-Claire Blais, how could the Mother, in the figure of Grand-Mère Antoinette, raise anything other than a new generation of victims and impotents?

Recalling the "nature vs nurture" dichotomy, this pattern of violence (both real and implicit) breeding violence, and victims breeding only victims, is illustrated first by the fact that le Frère Théodule, the paedophiliac abuser and murderer of young boys is shown to be a "product" of this quasi-disfunctional society: motherless, shuttled from orphanage to novitiate, from one institution of uniformity to the next, his only available "distinction" was "la mauvaise image que l'on avait de lui" (130) and his only source of warmth, the other abandoned young boys. Elsewhere, the pattern occurs on a more

⁵² The expression is Valerie Raoul's (37).

⁵³ Smart, Ecrire dans la maison du père, 29.

concrete level, in the experiences of Jean Le Maigre and le Septième in the "Maison de Correction" which exemplify the system of hereditary violence within the text.

Incarcerated for three days, denied even the most basic sustenance by a "Directeur", who claims to believe in rehabilitation rather than punishment, while beating them half to death, the inhabitants quickly become desperate and sadistic, as Jean Le Maigre relates:

La nuit, je l'imaginai [le Directeur] entrant dans le dortoir, une hache à la main...et tranchant une à une ces têtes pouilleuses qui se renversaient déjà dans le vide, par les barreaux du lit. Le jour, je ne quittais pas mon frère. De grands dangers nous guettaient partout, ou bien c'était notre voisin de table qui parlait de nous faire sauter les yeux du bout de sa fourchette, ou bien, le soir, une grappe de pervers qui nous poursuivaient dans les corridors pour nous violer (94).

Transferred from this establishment to another, less frightening institution, Jean Le Maigre and le Septième attempt to put into action the example learned from the Directeur, becoming "des bourreaux d'enfants", intending to perform "de grands massacres" (96), as they establish their superiority over those younger and weaker.

Later, having reached the ceiling as far as social climbing is concerned and left with no other legitimate choice, le Septième turns to crime, a path which he hopes will lead him out of the morass to an almost Genetien "salvation". Uneducated and poor, having barely reached puberty, there is no room for le Septième except at the bottom of the conservative ladder: he "belongs" in the violent world which greets him as he leaves the factory and where he will fight to take control over his life, so as not to be a faceless victim:

Le Septième errait dans les rues...l'oeil polisson, encouragé par la maigreur de ses joues qui lui prêtait cet air dur dont il avait besoin pour affronter les grands de la bande de la terreur, qui le guettaient à sa droite, et les petits de l'armée de la rue des champs, qui l'épiaient à sa sortie de

manufacture, le soir...la paupière marquée par l'étoile de la bataille, le front enivré de piqûres de couteaux...Ah! Oui, il était un homme, déjà (164-165).

Again, as in the earlier example from Les Manuscrits de Pauline Archange, the violence is intimated, the bruises and scars which here serve as trophies or "status symbols", as well as marks of individuality, also function as narrative signs within the text, taking on a metonymical significance and leaving the reader to make the connections, to fill in the space between the gangs and the scars, the pervasive threat of violence being as powerful and menacing as a description of an all-out battle.

Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel is indeed one of the most dark and violent novels to come from Québec. Picking up where Ringuet's Trente arpents left off, Blais's novel paints a picture of a rural Québec in decline. Although a specific date is not given for the narrative, adding an air of timelessness, certain references place it at the beginning of the Second World War, during the last days of the Depression⁵⁴, so making it contemporary to the Montréal of Bonheur d'occasion, for example. Emmanuel and his family are therefore suffering within a colonised society, oppressed by an extreme material poverty which is perpetuated by a reluctance or an inability to "move on"; those who do try to escape or to improve their situation are frustrated at every turn. Dispossessed, they suffer the spiritual poverty of a culture whose roots have been all but destroyed and then "resuscitated" or replaced by a nostalgic facsimile of the original. The token of that facsimile, the *roman de la terre*, imbued with messianism and its promise of salvation through a return to the origins of the *habitant* culture, along with its demands

⁵⁴ See Marcotte, Le Roman à l'imparfait, 165.

of faith and obedience from its Catholic flock, is usurped by Blais's text, its model's preoccupations serving as a skeletal structure. Those preoccupations are dissected, first, by the extreme darkness and pessimism of the novel, which recounts so many deaths and so much abuse. The fate of the more "maverick" characters, meanwhile, along with its "exaggerated realism" - the extreme misery and poverty - serve as an antidote to the romantic nostalgia of the *littérature terrienne*, exposing the implicit violence of an ordered structure required by a dominant and domineering ideology. The world of "les Enfants de Grand-Mère Antoinette"⁵⁵ thus serves as an anti-image, a distorted vision of messianic literature because, as André Major comments, Marie-Claire Blais "a accepté d'affronter la pauvreté, qui est notre marque nationale"⁵⁶. The traditional novel is further distorted by a dark and subversive humour which contrasts with the misery of the diegesis and holds up a mirror to the conventional, conservative literature so that it may see its own image and fallacies. The simultaneous use of both comedy and tragedy provides a disruptive challenge both to traditional narrative technique and to the accepted ideology, as the text vacillates between humour and despair, constantly inverting and questioning the values of the messianic and patriarchal establishment and offering, finally, a sense of renewal and regeneration.

The violence of Blais's text can therefore be read on two levels, as in the work of Aquin and Beaulieu: on the textual level, the carnivalisation or "conflict of codes" is

⁵⁵ From Gilles Marcotte's essay "Les Enfants de Grand-Mère Antoinette", in Le Roman à l'imparfait, 123-183.

⁵⁶ André Major, "Notre Matriarcat", Le Petit Journal, (25 juillet 1965) 30.

equivalent to a violation of boundaries and of genres, a deconstruction and a re-organisation of the novel itself as a genre. The fact that the novel in question is so coded and so valued within a particular system, suggests, at the same time, a "revolutionary" re-organisation of that system itself. On another level, the text relates numerous incidents of physical and sexual violence, but, unlike the anger and violence of the other texts discussed, when violence is directed towards or suffered by members of "Blais's family", it is very much as a clearly established pattern of "cause and effect". Here, there is no single scapegoat, female or otherwise, but rather an entire family (the microcosm of a culture) who, even while they inflict pain on one another, are shown to be victims of another form of violence - the repression of natural development and of liberty represented by and embodied in the "Mother". For here, while life may change with the seasons, it is unable to escape the never-ending (and vicious) circularity, for which the mechanisms in place behind the hypervalorisation of the Mother and the façade of the matriarchy are responsible.

Conclusion

This study has examined the different treatments and functions of violence in literature, focussing on the image of the female victim as she has been incorporated into the literary discourses of Western culture and its narrative of violence. I have tried to show how woman's reality (her self) has been "negated" so that her often idealised body might serve as the symbol or fetich of a masculine order. This role has been assigned to Woman, the shapely and pure white page on which man may sketch or write his desire, his fear, his pain and his self-actualisation. Visible in the European tradition where sexual violence has become an apparently integral aspect of textual sophistication and innovation, this process is also conspicuous in the literature of Québec; here, during the revolutionary 1960's and 70's, however, Woman's traditionally encoded status as scapegoat takes on a new political and cultural specificity as she becomes the target for the frustrations of the colonised (and temporarily emasculated) male, thus building on the earlier, more subtle foundation of matricide. It is not surprising that the literature of this period should incorporate extreme violence, for anger at the injustice of colonialism reached a climax at this time; nor is it surprising that that violence should be directed at Woman, given women's culturally encoded pre-definition and status as victims and their perceived status as both the potential impediment to man's full subjectivity (as castrator) and the guarantor of that subjectivity, as its necessary object.

Within both the modern European and modern Québec literary canons, traditional narrative strategies are subverted, the authoritative discourses of "realist"

fiction are shown to be inauthentic and themselves (castrating) impositions, and the various "truths" or standards of what is perceived to be an objective reality (time, history, order and gender) are exposed as (phal)logocentric constructs. Yet the one construct which is challenged in neither case, it seems, is Woman, the representative emblem of patriarchy. Indeed, as I have attempted to show, her artifice and her *ab-use* are fundamental to the functioning of the masculine-orientated system and its creative productions. We have seen this in terms of the Surrealist movement, where highly experimental art often involves the brutalising objectification of the female body, and in the radical textual experimentation of the new novelists, for instance. In Québec, meanwhile, writers such as Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Hubert Aquin, along with Claude Jasmin, André Giroux and Jacques Godbout, among others, exploited sexual violence in their fictions, both as a parallel to textual experimentation and as a response to the oppressions of colonial rule - as an expression of frustration - despite the socialist (and feminist) pretensions of the revolution in which they were closely and personally implicated. Here, anger at the oppressive influence of colonisation coupled with the repressive response of a messianic ideology is directed at the Mother, the unwitting symbol of both the ideology itself, and of the repression it infers. It is therefore with a "renewed" and culturally specific sense of purpose, that male violence and frustration are directed towards the Québec Mother or her substitute, her status as victim previously established or encoded within a broader cultural context.

Nevertheless, the violence of which so many female figures are victim has been sanitised, in the sense that however graphic the violence, it is "unreal" because Woman has herself been derealised within masculine art and discourse. As Jane Caputi writes:

Ceaseless violence can be directed against female flesh because the reality of women is nowhere felt nor believed in, precisely because women are constructed as the symbolic sex¹.

The eroticisation of that violence meanwhile, adds to the aesthetic "acceptability" of gendered violence as it becomes "sexy", its reality blurred, pain pleasurable, and the screams muted. The act of rape, for instance, is transformed into a mythified seduction (as in L'Antiphonaire) or a game (as in Un rêve québécois). Of the novels discussed here, only Marie-Claire Blais's Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel seems to consider violence "unspeakable" in its horror and pain.

There are, of course, a number of (perhaps unanswerable) questions which arise out of this study, some of which have been raised in previous feminist studies of violence in the Québec novel². First, where does this pattern of textual and eroticised sexual violence leave women, both as readers or spectators and as the implicit victims? Does the innovation evident in so much modern literature and art, which seems to open so many doors, actually open anything to women, or is it - as it would certainly seem to be - just a new dance around their glass cage? In Québec, is there hope that women might

¹ Caputi, The Age of Sex Crime (Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987) 156. Rosalind Krauss also comments that: "Woman, in being a fetish, is nowhere in nature". Quoted in Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "Surrealism and Misogyny", Dada/Surrealism, 18 (1990) 17-26, 21.

² See Saint-Martin, Raoul and Smart (Ecrire dans la maison du père).

one day become "decolonised", as there is for the male, or is his liberation necessarily dependent on her continued subjugation? Or, as Marie-Claire Blais's text could be seen to ask, is liberation dependent on another's repression actually a real liberation at all³?

Secondly, is the increased sexual violence of the revolutionary period in Québec unique to Québec, or is the violent misogyny evident in many of the fictions written during this time and under this specific political situation typical of any similarly subordinated society? A comparative study of Québec and African and Caribbean literatures at comparable stages in the decolonisation process, in conjunction with recent post-colonial literary theory would serve to illuminate this point, as does Valerie Raoul's study in its incorporation of Albert Memmi's essays.

Meanwhile, can men and women be said to "write violence" differently? How far does the fact that women live with the threat of sexual violence affect a woman's representation of that violence? Or are women so indoctrinated and shaped by the representations and structures of violence which play such a significant role in Western culture, that they have adopted male discourses as their own? By the same token, how far does the sex of the *reader* affect the reception of a text? Are women necessarily more sensitive to violence represented in literature and art, or have we learned to read "as men" those many texts apparently encoded for male readers? Under what circumstances, finally, is it possible for a text which exploits sexual violence against women for aesthetic or political effect to be "feminist"? Aquin's three novels Trou de mémoire,

³ See also Anne-Marie Dardigna, Les Châteaux d'Eros ou les infortunes du sexe des femmes (Paris, Maspéro, 1980) 312-313, cited in chapter 1.

L'Antiphonaire and Neige noire, for example, have each been seen as feminist at some point, in spite of their exploitation of sexual violence: such a classification is, as I have shown, problematic. How different would this be if these same texts or at least the violence described in them, had been written by a woman?

Although in this study I considered works by both male and female writers, the texts were chosen as much because they were contemporary to certain political events, as for their parallel acts of violence - although the similarities between events related in each of the novels were essential. While there certainly appear to be differences in the representation of violence in Aquin and Beaulieu's novels compared to Marie-Claire Blais's text, the gender-specificity of the representation of violence was not the initial focus of the study. This does however suggest a logical and fascinating sequel to this research project, based on the representation of violence in texts by women. Marie-Claire Blais's La Belle Bête and Anne Hébert's Le Torrent offer perhaps the first incidences of violent matricide in Québec literature, for instance, bringing into play the added factor of inter-gendered and inter-generational violence in writings by women⁴. Elsewhere, both writers have incorporated the act of rape into their fictions, as has Gabrielle Roy in her novel La Rivière sans repos; a comparative study of the representation of rape in the works of these three very different writers could shed new

⁴ The issue of the relationships between mothers and daughters in Marie-Claire Blais's writing has been addressed by Mary Jean Green, in her article "Redefining the Maternal: Women's Relationships in the Fiction of Marie-Claire Blais", Traditionalism, Nationalism and Feminism: Women Writers of Québec, ed. Paula Gilbert Lewis (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1985) 125-139.

light on the "feminine" writing of violence. In Hébert's Les Fous de Bassan⁵, meanwhile, the author's polyphonic and often very "feminine" text (in the sense of *écriture féminine*) also brings into play the highly misogynist attitudes of Stevens Brown and the murder and rape-murder of two young, beautiful and virginal adolescents, thereby adopting an established, apparently "masculine" scenario and a discourse of eroticised violence. It would be interesting to examine how this "Sadean intertext"⁶ (which seems to have been exploited in Yves Simoneau's film version of the novel), functions both within this novel and in other writings by women. The discourse of rape fantasy has long been exploited in fictions by (and for) women, in particular the extremely popular "romance" industry, while elsewhere writers such as the nineteenth-century French libertine Rachilde and Anaïs Nin would certainly appear to have adopted a "male" erotic discourse for their own purposes. A detailed study of these texts might reveal more on the functionings of these elements, in relation to gendered pre-conceptions.

On another level, there is the question of the relationship of eroticised violence in literary texts such as L'Antiphonaire and Un rêve québécois to pornography (thereby recalling the debates regarding the writings of Sade and Bataille, among others), as well as of the blurred distinction between pornography and erotic literature. Although I would not suggest that this is the case in the novels discussed in this study, at what point does the aesthetic discourse and representation of sexual violence become "simply"

⁵ Hébert, Les Fous de Bassan (Paris, Seuil, 1982).

⁶ The expression is from Susan Rubin Suleiman, Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde (Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 1990) 65.

pornographic? How far does or should the proclaimed aesthetic or political intentionality of the writer affect the reception and categorisation of the text? To what extent is it reliable? Again, as we saw in chapter 4, despite Aquin's claim of the feminism of L'Antiphonaire, the text appears to be fundamentally reactionary, even hostile with regard to women.

While there is obviously much more work to be done in this field, and other questions to consider, I have tried to expose here some of the subtle and not so subtle ways in which the reality of sexual violence against women has been woven into the fabric of literature and culture, so as to become, as de Palma put it, a simple "genre convention"⁷. I hope that this study may provoke further reflection on ways to re-read and re-evaluate violent texts, so that the reader, whether male or female, might see through the glamorisation and banalisation of violence (sexual violence in particular), in order to recognise and deconstruct the myths around which it revolves, so that Woman might finally be released from her trans-culturally encoded status as victim. As Judith Fetterley suggests in her text The Resisting Reader:

We must all, as women and as men, become "resisting readers" so that the cultural ideologies which are so completely and so profoundly integral to our culture and history, and which have been so damaging to that culture, and throughout that history, may be exposed and understood for the dangerous myths that they are⁸.

⁷ In Marcia Pally, "Double Trouble", Film Comment 20.5 (Oct. 1984) 12-17, 17. Also quoted in my introduction.

⁸ Judith Fetterley, The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction (Bloomington, Indiana, University Press, 1978) xix.

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