

TELLERS AND THEIR TALES IN THE STUDHORSE MAN  
AND PROCHAIN EPISODE

by

CLAIRE ANNE WRIGHT

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Department of Comparative Literature

The University of British Columbia  
2075 Wesbrook Place  
Vancouver, Canada  
V6T 1W5

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## INTRODUCTION

Until very recently, comparative Canadian literature had been a field which was relatively ignored by both French and English Canadian critics. A number of articles and books had been published dealing with such topics as the literature of French Canada, the literature of English Canada, prairie literature or even western Canadian literature, but until the last decade, there was a dearth of studies about "Canadian" literature. Beginning in the late sixties, there appeared a flurry of book length comparative studies of Canadian literature by such critics as Ronald Sutherland (1971<sup>1\*</sup> and 1977<sup>2</sup>), D.G. Jones (1970<sup>3</sup>), Northrop Frye (1971<sup>4</sup>), and Margaret Atwood (1972<sup>5</sup>). These comparative studies, which represent the first attempts to examine Canadian writing in English and French, posit a number of different approaches to Canadian literature: descriptive, thematic, political, sociological, generic or structural, and address readerships which range from the initiate to the scholar.

\* Although Second Image was published in 1971, a number of chapters appeared as articles and addresses in the sixties.

The two novels Prochain Episode by Hubert Aquin and The Studhorse Man by Robert Kroetsch may be compared in terms of some of the theories proposed by these critics. The novels might be seen for instance, as products of specifically Canadian environments - either frontier or colonial - which shape and determine their content; both novels may be regarded as chronicles of new eras in Canadian history. The prairie novel, among other things, is a testimony of the transistion from a rural agrarian society to an urban industrial west. Kroetsch illustrates this transition when he replaces the virile studhorseman, trailing his free spirited blue-black mustang, who represents the fertilizing spirit, with that impotent and unfruitful man, Demeter, (who is named, ironically enough, after the corn goddess of fertility) and who eventually succeeds in putting the studhorse in the anomalous position of serving infertility and the sterile commercial world. The French Canadian novel can be seen as reflecting the emergence of a new era in Quebec: a time of heightened political consciousness, a period of violence and ebullient unrest. Prochain Episode can be, indeed-often has been read as a violent manifesto of the young Quebec revolutionary, who, passionately dissatisfied with the state of affairs in his province, advocates terrorism and violence as the best means to change the political situation:

Le temps sera venu de tuer et celui, plus impérieux encore, d'organiser la destruction selon les doctrines antiques et les canons de la guérilla sans nom! Il faudra remplacer les buttes parlementaires par la guerre à mort. Après deux siècles d'agonie, nous ferons éclater la violence déréglée...<sup>6</sup>

Another prevalent theme in Canadian literature frequently analyzed by the country's literary critics in one format or another, is the much discussed question of the French/English conflict - the two solitudes, that pervasive "body odour of race"<sup>7</sup>. Although the French/English conflict is not a central issue in The Studhorse Man, there is much evidence of it in the novel. The hero of the novel is named Hazard Lepage, and, we are told, is descended from a Rimouski family whose seigneurie was established on the shores of the St. Lawrence in 1660. Hazard's biographer, Demeter, states: "All indications are that the Lepages of Rimouski were great dreamers about the future: cette mauvaise habitude qui separe les Francais des Anglais."<sup>8</sup> Hazard is frequently subject to insult from the prairie people and is variously reviled as a "pea-soup loafer" and a "damned coward frog"; even Demeter, when extremely overwrought, resorts to calling him a "superstitious frog" (p.139).

While Kroetsch includes such suggestive details as the walls of Hazard's house were "patterned white and blue and gold, with alternating lions and fleur de lis" (p.10), the French/English conflict is not developed in The Studhorse Man into anything stronger than a minor tension which furthers the sense of alienation of the hero from those around him. The French/English conflict in Prochain Episode, on the other hand, is developed and explored to a much larger extent, and does in fact constitute one of the major issues of the novel. In the preface to the English translation of the novel, Ronald Sutherland suggests that Prochain Episode may be read allegorically: with K representing Quebec; the narrator representing the young Quebecker; and H.de Heutz, his enemy, representing English Canada. The two men's battle to possess K

is seen as symbolic of the current struggle between the two forces for control of the province, while the narrator's problems of "identity, of self-confidence and incapacity to act are all related to collective problems of French Canada which sociologists and others have been commenting on for years."<sup>9</sup> Sutherland goes on to suggest that K's double-cross of the narrator is possibly an allusion to the general failure of the Quebec populace to support the Liberation Front and that the complex nature of the relationship that exists between H. de Heutz and the narrator of the novel is indicative of the kind of relationship that exists between Quebeckers and the people in authority over them.

While the French/English conflict plays a part in both The Studhorse Man and Prochain Episode (and certainly a much larger part in the latter), it is by no means the most important area of comparison between the two novels. It has been observed that the two novels are regional novels, very much products of their particular environments. As regional novels, they share certain qualities with other novels from these regions. Prochain Episode contains elements of the lyricism of Anne Hebert, the brutal violence of Marie-Claire Blais or Roch Carrier, the political "engagement" of Claude Jasmin or the black despairing sickness of Rene Ducharme. The Studhorse Man shares some of the bleak, tragic undercurrents of the fictions of Frederick Grove or Sinclair Ross, the adventure and romance of the Canadian formula westerns and the elegiac strain of certain novels by Margaret Laurence or

Rudy Wiebe. Although The Studhorse Man and Prochain Episode are distinctly regional novels and do share common features with other novels from and about the same geographic location, thematically and structurally, the novels have more in common with each other and with certain trends in European fiction than they do with their regional counterparts. Both Kroetsch and Aquin write novels related by narrator-madmen\* who are imprisoned in mental institutions as a result of past criminal actions. In a vain effort to alleviate the oppressive tedium of their environments, the narrators allegedly record, but perhaps invent, stories about heroes of mythic dimension, with whom they enjoy a curious love-hate relationship. Both Kroetsch and Aquin make use of a double narrative technique (a constant shifting from teller to tale) which functions in two ways: it exposes the paradoxical relationship between hero and narrator and serves as a paradigm for the process of narrative composition itself.

Perhaps what most distinguishes Kroetsch and Aquin from the majority of contemporary Canadian writers is that they situate their local stories, their regional tales, in the much wider context of western literature. As a result, their work more closely resembles that of other artificers - Borges, Nabokov, Robbe-Grillet or Butor - whose writing is characterized not only by its awareness of and concern with

\* For other "eccentric" narrators in recent Canadian literature, see the narrator of Beautiful Losers, Ramsay in Fifth Business, Pauline in Manuscrits de Pauline Archange, Berenice in L'Avalee des avalees, Galarneau in Salut Galarneau.



the forms and conventions of literary tradition, but also by the fact that it is a highly self-conscious literature, calling attention to itself, and to the forms and conventions which govern its creation.

In a recent talk at the University of British Columbia, Philip Stratford spoke to students and faculty about comparing Canadian literature. He stressed the need for making accurate distinctions as well as careful comparisons between Canadian fictions. Despite many remarkable thematic and structural similarities which exist between Prochain Episode and The Studhorse Man, the novels differ in two respects. First, there is a very apparent difference in the voice of the two novels. There is a vein of hilarity that runs through Kroetsch's novel, a comic playfulness which Kroetsch compares to the "clowning" of Mark Twain<sup>10</sup>. Although the clowning is "meant to convey something quite serious", Kroetsch uses humour "to pull the readers in", so that then the "other things that are going on underneath will make themselves apparent" (p.49). Aquin's novel on the other hand, is much more sober, melancholy, and solipsistic than Kroetsch's. His playfulness is not made evident through the use of comic situations or through a sense of the absurd or the ridiculous which pervades Kroetsch's novel. Rather, his humour is intellectual, usually linguistic. Although the novel is parodic, puns and sophisticated verbal gymnastics are the only elements which serve to lighten its predominantly sombre atmosphere of despair and frustration.

Aquin, too, is perhaps a more subtle technician than Kroetsch: his writing is much more complex and richly textured than the prairie writer's, and while both Canadian writers are vitally concerned with new techniques of writing, Aquin's writing seems to more nearly resemble the baroque and tortuous style of some of the nouveau romanciers, while Kroetsch's seems to emulate the more relaxed and accessible, less concentrated style of the popular contemporary novelist.

Despite these apparent dissimilarities in tone and style, the number of structural and thematic comparisons between Prochain Episode and The Studhorse Man far outweigh their differences. At one time, Kroetsch stated that he considered it the task of the Canadian writer to "give names to his experience, to be the namer".<sup>11</sup> At a later point, he changed his mind and said that he believed to the contrary - that it was the writer's job to un-name. Through their parodic fictions, Kroetsch and Aquin attempt just this - a radical process of "demythologizing" the systems that threaten to define them. To borrow Kroetsch's words, they "uninvent the world".

Footnotes:

1. Ronald Sutherland, Second Image (Toronto: New Press, 1971).
2. Ronald Sutherland, The New Hero (Toronto: MacMillan, 1977).
3. D.G. Jones, Butterfly on Rock (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).
4. Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971).
5. Margaret Atwood, Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1972).
6. Hubert Aquin, Prochain Episode (Ottawa: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1965), p.172. Hereafter, all further references to this novel will be to this edition and will be documented by page numbers in parentheses.
7. A.M. Klein, "Political Meeting", as quoted by Ronald Sutherland, Second Image, p.32.
8. Robert Kroetsch, The Studhorse Man (Toronto: MacMillan, 1969), p.120. Hereafter all further references to this novel will be to this edition and will be documented by page numbers in parentheses.
9. Ronald Sutherland, introduction to Hubert Aquin, Prochain Episode, trans. Penny Williams, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), p.vii.
10. Donald Cameron, "Robert Kroetsch: The American Experience and The Canadian Voice", Journal of Canadian Fiction, I (Summer 1972), p.49.
11. Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden: Recent Canadian Fiction", Journal of Canadian Fiction, III (1974), p.43.

CHAPTER ONE  
THE NARRATORS AND THEIR HEROES

"There is a pleasure sure  
In being mad, which none but madmen know". - Dryden

Both The Studhorse Man and Prochain Episode are novels related by underground narrators, confined to psychiatric cells for committing acts of violence. The narrators shape, while seeming to record, stories of larger than life heroes - ostensibly to escape the unbearable reality of their clinical imprisonment. The theme of each book is mirrored in its narrative structure; both novels are tales told by "idiots", full of sound and fury, signifying much - not only about the alleged heroes but especially about the narrators who vicariously project their own identities and quests on to their mythic story subjects. The paradoxical relationship which exists between the narrators and their heroes can be determined through implicit comparisons and contrasts between the principal characters, whose similarities and differences range along a sliding scale from the very gross to the very delicate.

The narrators of The Studhorse Man and Prochain Episode are both descendants of a common but complex ancestor, Dostoevsky's Underground Man. They cohabit his miserable cell of anxiety, timidity and frustration. Like the Underground Man, they are hyperconscious individuals - highly aware of their own inadequacies and private failures: they admit them, explore them, but ultimately rationalize them. The Underground Man writing from his wretched corner in the underworld, admits that he is a sick man, a spiteful man, even an unpleasant man. He justifies this by taunting himself with the "spiteful" and "useless" consolation that an intelligent man "cannot seriously become anything else".<sup>1</sup> An intelligent man of the nineteenth century "must and morally ought to be pre-eminently a characterless creature" (p.5). His constant justifications are directed to a jury of gentlemen who constitute a representative selection of the "straightforward men of action" whom he insists lack both his insight and his experience in suffering. The narrators of The Studhorse Man and Prochain Episode both write for an audience as well: the narrator of Prochain Episode claims to write for a public which is nothing but a "multiplication of his mistress' eyes", but seems also to include the condemning eyes of his revolutionary brothers, while the narrator of The Studhorse Man, Demeter Proudfoot, speaks to a company of despicable, insensitive people with a "passion for dull blinding labour and hollow success" (p.61). At one point he insultingly identifies his readership:

You who stare blankly in your musty basement flats, in your rented upstairs apartments, in your so-called "living" rooms full of TV and offspring, in your king-sized beds; you hot-pants secretaries skulking behind your typewriters, you matrons sweating in the illusory stink of the beauty parlour (forgive me if I smile), you executives hunched bony-kneed and hairy and straining in the john, you schoolboys in the library, using my precious knowledge to conceal your furtive lusting after the girl who doesn't know her skirt is up and her legs spread ... all of you who think you do not live in a madhouse (p.142).

The presence of a readership which the narrators claim to be of nominal or no importance, in fact provides many clues about their insatiable need to justify their lives and actions to others and to themselves. The narrators both fear and scorn the disapproval of their judging readers. The Underground Man describes this anomalous tendency within himself and the others:

... How tiresome, how impudent your outbursts are, and at the same time, how scared you are! You talk nonsense and are pleased with it; you say impudent things and are constantly afraid of them and apologizing for them. You declare you are afraid of nothing and at the same time you try to ingratiate yourself with us ... You undoubtedly mean to say something, but hide your real meaning for fear, because you lack the resolution to say it and only have cowardly impudence (p.34).

The cloak of scornful superiority disguises deep feelings of inferiority and a fear of rejection. "Tu me détestas si tu apprends ma faiblesse", confesses the narrator of Prochain Episode (p.139) in a frenzy of despair. Demeter declares he is indifferent to the opinions and judgements of others, but like the lady, he doth protest too much. His petulant self-righteous tone belies his words:

I do not wish for a moment that my own martyrdom should enshrine me in the hearts of a grateful population. I have pursued the naked truth and let fate fling what naked darts it will, truth is its own reward. I need no bronze statues as a sop to the recurring mud. And no one expects to be loved (p.172).

His choice of the word "martyrdom" in connection with Hazard's death indicates that he is busy trying to convince himself and his jury, whoever they be, that his actions in the critical episode of his life were admirable, even heroic. His fractious assertions, however, are testimonials to the uncertainty and anxiety in his own mind.

One of the most striking similarities between the narrators is their terrible loneliness, their sense of otherness. "I am alone and they are everyone", says the Underground Man, and the two Canadian narrators echo his cry. "J'ai peur parce que je suis seul et abandonné. Personne ne vient à moi, personne ne peut me rejoindre" (p.137) states the narrator of Prochain Episode: "Est-il visible qu'ici je vieillis seul et que ni le soleil ni la volupté ne redorent ma peau?" (p.71). Demeter Proudfoot is more close-lipped about his personal agonies; perhaps as his name suggests, he is too proud to admit them freely. On occasion however, his loneliness surfaces and he speaks about "sleepless nights" and "lonely afternoons" (p.10) and lets slip that the graveyard was one of the favourite haunts of his youth: on the gravestones he studied his alphabet. As an adolescent, he has no friends and as an adult, his only visitor at the institution is crazy old Lady Eshpeter, another inmate.

The narrators are all tormented by a sense of the ignominy of their existence. Dostoevsky's anti-hero confesses to feeling "like a fly in the eyes of the world - a nasty, disgusting fly, insulted and humiliated by everyone" (p.46). Like their Russian counterpart, the Canadian narrators experience feelings of humiliation and ridicule in the presence of their peers. The narrator of Prochain Episode feels insignificant in the light of the enemy agent's grace and savoir faire: "Je suis aux prises avec un homme qui me dépasse" (p.129). Demeter, however much he tries to conceal it, is regarded as a non-entity by the community he lives in, and even worse, by his hero Hazard, with whom he identifies and whom he wishes desperately to impress.

The narrators' sense of ignominy is accompanied by wild fluctuations of mood - which range from elation to depression, from timorous behaviour to psychopathic violence. The narrator of Prochain Episode recognizes his contradictory impulses and describes them as an "alternance maniaque de noyade et de remontée" (p.94). The periods of happiness, while intense, are brief and much less frequent than periods of sadness or morbidity. "Ma tristesse court secrète dans mes veines" (p.89), writes the French-Canadian narrator and again, "La tristesse me salit: je la pompe, je l'avale par tous les pores, j'en suis plein comme un noyé" (p.71). He is obsessed with the idea of suicide: "Combien de secondes d'angoisse et de siècles de désespèment faudra-t-il que je vive pour mériter l'étreinte finale du drap blanc?" (p.27). "Me suicider partout et sans relâche, c'est là ma mission" (p.25). Demeter too, is fascinated by death - not only does he describe the cemetery as one of



the favourite haunts of his youth, but frequent nightmare visions of death are interspersed throughout his narrative. The ghastly vision of the hero's death is an infernal memory which haunts his entire narrative.

Sometimes the power of the narrators' emotions or their insight into their inadequacies is too great for them to face and on these occasions the narrators retreat from the truth. Each time the narrator of Prochain Episode starts to contemplate the possible infidelity of his mistress, he stops himself and reroutes his thoughts:

Plutôt que de céder à la démoralisation comme je le fais en ce moment, je préfère surseoir à l'analyse ... D'ici là je n'ai pas le droit de me questionner à propos de tout et de rien ... (p.171).

When Demeter finds himself straying into a dangerous area of discussion, as he does when he describes his sexual activity (or lack of it) with his adored Martha, he quickly pulls himself short and returns to the main narrative line: "But I was describing Hazard's predicament" (p.66). Not only do the narrators escape the intolerable with a simple refusal to deal with a painful situation, they also find refuge in dreams, "the sublime and the beautiful", as the Underground Man terms it. They all embark on romantic flights of fancy à la Walter Mitty. The Underground Man fancies himself, "riding a white horse and crowned with laurel" (p.50), while the narrator of Prochain Episode imagines himself either leading a revolution or comfortably established with his mistress in their own castle in Switzerland. Demeter Proudfoot, pictures himself as D. Proudfoot, Studhorse Man.

The Canadian narrators' chief outlet from dangerous introspection however, is the narrative they recall, or perhaps invent, chronicling the adventures of other men. Both narrators enjoy a curious relationship of identity and enmity with their story subjects. Although they are professed enemies of these men, they are "secretly enthralled" with their heroes - they admire them, envy them and live vicariously through them. In fact Demeter's choice of the word "enthralled" indicates the paradoxical nature of the narrators' affinity to their heroes - they are enslaved, psychologically bonded to the men who fascinate them. Part of the heroes' fascination for the narrators lies in the fact that they are adventurers, men of action, larger-than-life figures whose characters and actions place them outside the boundaries of conventional realism and situate them in the realm of the heroic tradition. H. de Heutz, the "hero" of Prochain Episode, is a hero fashioned in the twentieth century mold of spy heroes, while Hazard Lepage, "hero" of The Studhorse Man, fills the bill as the western hero, in both senses of the word. He is a roving hero in the long-established tradition of Odysseus the wanderer, and he is the frontiersman in the more recent tradition of the wild and woolly west.

H. de Heutz, the enemy our narrator-cum-revolutionary is meant to kill, inhabits the glamorous thriller world of the secret agent - complete with car chases, weapons, codes, aliases and a mysterious blonde. "Il vit dans un univers second qui ne m'a jamais été accessible" (p.128), and it is precisely this inaccessibility which makes H. de Heutz so attractive to the narrator. He is as suave and self-assured as

James Bond; he drives an iron-grey Mercedes 300 SL and lives in a luxurious chateau, a huge mansion filled with fine objets d'art, overlooking Lake Geneva and the Alps. The man has impeccable taste in furniture and his choice of paintings and art pieces reflects a connoisseur's unfailing eye: "H. de Heutz est un de ces êtres incroyables, millionnaire ou connoisseur qui ne se trompe jamais" (p.128). As well as being an expert in the fine arts, H. de Heutz makes himself out to be a specialist working on an historical treatise of a little known period of Roman history, giving himself a cover which is as difficult as disguising himself as "un nonce apostolique et d'aller jusqu' à dire une messe pontificale avec diacre et sous-diacre" (p.39). The man is not only a wealthy sophisticate but "un homme incroyable d'astuce, et carrément dangereux" (p.40). He clearly qualifies for the role of cult hero which twentieth-century fiction has established for the secret agent. Yet the urbane gentleman with his multifarious and specialized learning, his accomplished grace and charming ease, is only one of the three faces of de Heutz. His other covers include a German banker named Carl von Ryndt and a Belgian named Francois-Marc de Saugy, who claims to be the victim of a severe nervous depression brought on by bankruptcy. The latter has the audacity to repeat to the narrator a melodramatic tale of financial ruin and marital distress which the narrator had offered him that very morning.

The three identities of H. de Heutz correspond roughly to three aspects of the narrator's complex personality: he is an artist, and as such recognizes and appreciates the wealth and good taste of de Heutz;

he is a revolutionary (albeit a revolutionary manqué) and admires the stealth and technique of the counter revolutionary, Von Ryndt; and he is a victim of a severe mental disorder and relates to and empathizes with F.M. de Saugy. The tri-faceted personality of de Heutz presents the narrator with his alter ego, a double who exercises a terrifying yet mesmerizing power over him. He has to constantly assure himself that the man is in fact his enemy, and that he is meant to kill him:

Cet homme est un imposteur: F.M. de Saugy, Von Ryndt ou H. de Heutz ne font qu'une seule même personne. H. de Heutz est un ennemi, et je l'ai emmené ici dans le seul but de l'abattre froidement. Rien au monde ne doit me faire déroger de mon projet. Rien! surtout pas cette parade d'émotions qu'exécute ce cher africaniste. En toute sincérité, je reconnais que H. de Heutz fait preuve d'un art consommé. Cet homme possède un don diabolique pour falsifier la vraisemblance; si je n'étais pas sur mes gardes, il m'aurait à coup sûr et pourrait me convaincre qu'il est mon frère que nous étions nés pour nous rencontrer et pour nous comprendre. J'ai vraiment affaire au diable (p.85).

Like the "enthralling" power which Hazard exerts over Demeter, the power of H. de Heutz over the revolutionary is imbued with magical or supernatural overtones. Against his will, against his reason, he is fascinated by him and drawn toward him:

Ce qui me mystifie le plus c'est son autobiographie incroyable qu'il n'a pas inventée dans le but de me duper, mais dans un but plus pervers: pour m'envoûter, me faire douter de la raison d'état qui nous confronte ici dans cet étroit enclos ... A vrai dire la puissance de H. de Heutz m'envoûte encore plus qu'elle me terrifie. A qui ai-je affaire au juste? A l'ombre metempsychée de Ferragus? Cet inconnu que je regarde m'attire à l'instant même ou je m'apprête à le tuer. Son mystère déconcerte ma pré-méditation et je reste pantelant devant lui.

... L'agilité supersonique de mon esprit s'affaisse soudainement sous le charme maléfique de H. de Heutz. Je m'immobilise, metamorphosé en statue de sel et ne puis m'empêcher de me percevoir comme foudroyé. Un événement souverain est en train de se produire ... dans un bois charmeur qui surplombe Coppet ... et je semble chercher encore, devant un homme impossible à identifier, la raison pure qui m'a fait le poursuivre désespérément et devrait dès lors, m'incliner à presser la gâchette de Mauser et à faire feu sur lui pour rompre enfin la relation inquiétante qui s'est établie entre nous ... une sorte de mystère me frappe d'une indécision sacrée. Un événement que j'ai cessé de contrôler s'accomplit solennellement en moi et me plonge dans une transe profonde (p.88 My underlining).

The preponderance of magical and supernatural terms in the passage confirms that de Heutz' power over the narrator is more than "une attirance morbide" for this "trinité noire". His inability to kill his rival when given a perfect opportunity to do so, destroys his chances to meet his blonde fairy princess at the appointed hour and live happily ever after with her. The narrator's failure to act in this crucial situation testifies to an extraordinary relationship which is beyond his control, a relationship which nullifies all the familiar and comfortable laws which govern and order his existence, and places him in a terrifying realm of uncertainty and self-doubt", une existence démantlée" (p.138).

The strange combination of enmity and complicity, of identity and distance which exists between the narrator and H. de Heutz is echoed in the relationship which exists between Demeter Proudfoot and his hero. But Hazard Lepage, Studhorse Man, is quite a different breed of hero from H. de Heutz. He is not a worldly sophisticate, nor does he participate in the fast-paced dramatic life of the Belgian spy. He is a zany

eccentric who lives just outside Small Town, Alberta in a multi-roomed mansion - a house filled not with fine furniture and rare art work, but with horses and stud books. To Demeter Proudfoot however, the heroism of the man "knew no bounds": he was the man on whom "a breed of greatness depended" (p.14). Hazard Lepage, as his name indicates, is descended from a French Canadian line, a Rimouski family, who were great dreamers about the future and who had as their motto: "Nothing in Moderation". His first name suggests much about him: he ventures, he chances, he risks accident, danger or peril in bold but always haphazard manner.

In many ways, Hazard is the antithesis of his anile admirer. Eugene Utter, Hazard's travelling companion, describes Demeter as a "lanky, moon-faced kid" who "moons" around:

If you looked at him hard, Utter said, I believe he'd fall flat on his ass. Gawky sort of kid. Hardly throws a shadow. All head - big brooding eyes set too close together, a hatchet nose and his hair down over ... (p.88).

While Demeter resembles the before picture for a Charles Atlas course, Hazard is a lady-killer of Herculean proportions and Adonic visage. He has black, curly hair, a coarse black beard, a sensuous mouth and dark-penetrating eyes which apparently compel women to speak (p.81) - and usually more. Demeter suffers paroxysms of shyness in front of women, and is awkward and completely unsuccessful with them: Hazard suffers from satyriasis and is a prodigious success with the opposite sex.

The two men differ in other respects. Hazard is a crapulous man (nothing in moderation) and when he is not implanting, he is imbibing. Demeter works in a beer parlour but does not touch alcohol, because it "blurs the perception". Hazard, we are told "practically grew up in the water"; Demeter tells us he has never been fond of the water. Demeter claims to find all scabrous talk "offensive"; Hazard revels in it (See for example, the bawdy exchange between himself and a thesitical truck driver on a bridge outside Edmonton).

Where is the affinity between two men of such different styles and interests? With beguiling verbal legerdemain, Demeter minimizes differences between himself and his hero and even creates rapprochements between them where none seem to exist. Although Martha's love for Hazard is incontestable, Demeter speaks of Hazard and himself as "rivals" in love. He describes Hazard's nose as "a great hatchet nose, not unlike my own" (p.100). He makes broad generalizations and fallacious assumptions in order to project his own needs and obsessions on to the hero:

Romance will somehow find a way into our lives. Surely Hazard, and I were alike in strenuously resisting that distortion of facts by which men delude themselves (p.79).

His observation is highly ironic - perhaps the largest ground for comparison between the men lies in the fact that both of them do live in a world

of delusion. Demeter's frequent misreading of Hazard's character in order to mold him to his own ideal of a hero is perhaps the greatest delusion of them all.

For Demeter, Hazard's main claim to his sequacious devotion is that he is a man with a mission - and in Demeter's eyes, a sacrosanct mission: he is the Studhorse Man, on whom a breed of greatness depends. Demeter envisages him as an Odysseus figure, journeying relentlessly over the lonely Albertan roads, fighting the rage of the elements in quest of the perfect mare for his magnificent stallion:

... he had travelled bent and freezing against the snows of spring ... rain squalls came with thunder to drive him across a treeless prairie ... hail storms knocked at his eyes and set the cannonballs of ice to leaping on the sun-packed roads; mud spattered him brown and gritty black; the wind drove dust into his flesh (p.59).

As a man with a vision, Demeter's hero transcends the common man and enters into a higher order of men. It is the lonely, singular nature of Hazard's quest that Demeter cherishes and most identifies with:

He drove all afternoon and sometimes into the night, then rounded up likely mares out of a pasture. He was the man from whom each farm must have its visits; yet he must eat alone, travel alone, work alone, suffer alone, laugh alone, bitch alone, bleed alone, piss alone, sing alone, dream alone ... (p.59).



But in order that his hero seem not too perfect, too inaccessible, Demeter's description is as much a chronicle of Hazard's weaknesses as it is of his heroics. Citing Sir John A. Macdonald's biography as a precedent, Demeter justifies the inclusion of his hero's "faiblesses" in his own biography: "Sir John A. Macdonald tippled, let his biographers quibble as they will; Hazard Lepage was a man of inordinate lust" (p.31). Hazard's biographer lets no opportune occasion pass without some comment on his hero's "sordid" behaviour, his crudeness, or his "repulsive bravado". In this way, Demeter places himself in a superior position to his hero, portraying himself as "priest to his long confession and priest also to his erring ways" (p.36). The confessor becomes the priest in an ironic about face that brings Demeter, like the narrator of Prochain Episode, 180 degrees from his starting point. In trying on their hero's personality and relegating their own cast-off one to their story subject, the narrators create personalities, which if not altogether credible, are brilliantly inventive.

One of the key patterns developed in each of the novels is the opposition, both structural and thematic of dialectical tendencies: thought/action, flesh/spirit, freedom/imprisonment, and stasis/motion. The ambulatory hero races around the highways of Switzerland at break-neck speed, or moseys along the backroads of Alberta at his own leisurely pace. The highly mobile free agents are juxtaposed with narrators confined to cells of psychiatric wards - "wizened" "Euclidean" spaces.

But the physical environment, the seemingly stifling enclosure which each man is locked into, is in fact a sanctuary, a haven, a "sinecure," as Demeter explains. Real contact with the outside is terrifying. The "confrontation with mere space is so appalling", say Demeter. "I prefer my studies and my privacy" (p.61).

The narrators' true cell is the cell of their minds - "cet enclos irrespirable peuplé de phan<sup>o</sup>mes", "cet espace rétréci" (p.47). While their heros embark on quests in search of the enemy agent or the perfect mare, the narrators find themselves forced to participate in hellish, painful journeys of self-exploration. Both men see their journeys in terms of a sea voyage of some sort. Demeter stations himself in his bathtub which he never gets out of:

Sometimes of a morning I fold a three-by-five card with a little triangular hat and set it square on my perky fellow's noggin and pirates we sail together here in my bathtub, our cargo the leatherbound books and the yellowing scribblers, the crumbling newspaper clippings and the envelopes with their cancelled stamps and the packs of note-cards that make up the booty of our daring (p.39).

On rare occasion, Demeter admits that he allows old Lady Eshpeter to "take a turn at the wheel", but in the main, his is a solitary voyage. On one level, Demeter's sea "voyage", a punishment levied on him by an angry Poseidon, may seem merely a subconscious yet bathetic attempt to emulate his Odyssean hero; on another level, his voyage is an exploration of his past actions and failures. He is travelling equipped with the

artifacts to aid him to relive and to relieve that past. The crumbling newspapers no doubt chronicle the gruesome details of Hazard's sensational death; the leather-bound books are Hazard's precious stud books, while the note cards record events from Hazard's and Demeter's lives.

The narrator of Prochain Episode undertakes his sea voyage not in a bathtub, but in a bathyscaph. His is an underwater descent, a much more graphic yet complex voyage than his Albertan counterpart undergoes. His underwater vessel is variously called "sous-marin" (p.10), "cabine hermétique et vitrée" (p.14), "barque funéraire" (p.22), "vaisseau d'obsidienne" (p.69), and "submersible fermé" (p.71). Each of the images conveys a sense of clausturation, of the narrator's entrapment in his own consciousness.

The dominant image pattern of diving and surfacing which the narrator associates with his journey works structurally as well as thematically. His "noyades" and "remontées" parallel the movement between past and present, between narrative and confessional which structures his novel. He dives to the depths of Lake Léman, "plongé dans sa mouvance fluide qui (l)e tient lieu de subconscient, mêlant (s)a dépression à la dépression alanguie du Rhône" (p.11). The narrator's diving in the lake - "inlassablement à la recherche de (s)on cadavre" (p.10), represents his descent into the murky depths "du moi obscur":

Dérouté, je descends en moi-même mais je suis incapable de m'orienter ... Emprisonné dans un sous-marin clinique, je m'engloutis sans heurt dans l'incertitude mortuaire (p.10).

Prisoners of their journeys, the narrators are also prisoners of their obsessions. Both men are beset with recurring nightmare visions. The nightmares Demeter details are ascribed to Hazard, but are obviously his own, or so like his own that he is able to record them and amplify them:

Hazard of course was not as articulate as I might have wished in recalling the particulars of his particular dream. I begged him to be more specific. He could only grunt and shake his head. Fortunately my own experience enabled me to flesh out the bones of his nearly dead memory ... (p.109).

When Demeter describes Hazard's nightmare journey locked in a boxcar full of bones, he is beyond the pale of empathetic storyteller. His narration of the dream indicates not a transcription of it, but, a terrifying participation in it:

The box cars rocked him down, down towards submission. Drowning in darkness in the wind's wail and the infinite clatter of night ...

Oh, how I understand poor Hazard. How I understand. There is no need for interpretation. The bones rattled. There in the darkness the bones chattered and talked. Hazard lay on a winter of bones: skulls and hoofs and hipbones, vertebrae and scapulae, ribs and pelvises and stray jaws ... The very beast dismantled: bones beat white by the sun, polished by dust on dust, scoured by the slow drift of wind and rain. Bones blasted, dying into the cold earth; bones plowed from the earth, raised out of the

dark by the night's frost. The lost bones of time, cracked and broken, the ache all rotted back into oblivion; only the stark form left, reminding him that pain too is brief and maybe to be treasured. Oh how I understand. Bones sprouting and growing from the very dark itself (p.21-22).

Demeter's (and incidentally Kroetsch's) obsession with bones is not limited to his dream; they haunt him throughout the course of the narrative. His emphatic repetition of "How I understand", indicates his own sense of sheer horror and panic before such an infernal vision and also suggests how much he is still disturbed by Hazard's grisly death. Henri Bergson once remarked on the release of repressed memories during sleep in a comment which aptly describes the Hazard-Demeter dreams:

Suppose I fall asleep. Then these repressed memories, feeling that I have set aside the obstacles, raise the trap door which held them back below the floor of consciousness and begin to stir. They rise and spread and perform in the night of the unconscious a wild 'danse macabre'. They rush together to the door which has been left ajar.<sup>2</sup>

While Demeter drowns in a sea of bones, the narrator of Prochain Episode drowns in a liquid grave of memories. His drowning is not the wild, desperate panic of suffocation, amid the wail and clatter of the night, but rather a slow, melancholic sinking into the depths of an endless, immobile night: "mon cerceuil plombé coule au fond d'un lac inhabité" (p.97):

J'agonise drogué dans un lac à double fond, tandis que par des hublots translucides, je n'aperçois qu'une masse protozoaire et gélatineuse qui m'épuise et me ressemble (p.69).

However trapped the narrators' feel in the confines of their inner quests and nightmarish obsessions, their confinement also gives them certain liberties. It allows them the freedom to change or invent stories about characters who are themselves imprisoned by the narrators' records of them. At the same time it allows the narrators the freedom to change themselves. While their heroes must remain changeless, permanently defined by their descriptions, the narrators are free to oscillate boldly from one extreme character pole to another, to situate themselves finally in a nether region, in an ill-charted territory where the signs are lost or impossible to read, where actuality and invention merge.

Footnotes:

1. Fyodor Dostoevsky, Notes from the Underground and The Grand Inquisitor, trans. Ralph Matlaw (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1960), p. 5.
2. Henri Bergson, "L'energie spirituelle", Deuvres Complètes, edited by Andre Robinet and Henri Croutier (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p.886.

CHAPTER TWO  
THE POET: LOVER AND MADMAN

One of the major differences between the narrators and their heroes in Prochain Episode and The Studhorse Man is that the narrators are writers, while their story subjects are actors in both senses of the word. The heroes participate fully in life; the narrators can only participate vicariously - theirs is a second-hand experience, a game played almost exclusively on the sidelines of life. Although they usually manage to control their fears and anxieties, one of the torments which constantly plagues the narrators and which they find increasingly difficult to handle is their sexual frustration which, they imply, is due largely to their imprisonment, but which more likely stems from past failures and even rejection by other women. To relieve their frustrations, the narrators turn to their writing to excite and stimulate them. In this respect, they resemble Nabokov's genius-maniac Humbert Humbert, also confined in jail, who writes a first-person account of his love story, while awaiting trial for the murder of his rival-in-love. In a



lyrical cry which eloquently prefigures our narrators' distress, Humbert exclaims; "O my Lolita, I have only words to play with now".<sup>1</sup> Like their mad friend, the Canadian artists use words to conjure up love scenes, but love scenes which differ radically from each other; the narrator of Prochain Episode recalls scenes in which he is a passionate participant, while Demeter Proudfoot, because he never is a participant (except for the final abortive episode of his life as a free citizen) describes the love scenes of others.

Demeter's writing is highly voyeuristic: he achieves sexual satisfaction only at a remove from his sexual objects or scenes. His choice of sexual scenes is eclectic - he describes watching Martha swim nude, watching Hazard make love, even watching Hazard's horse Poseidon mate. In one scene, he recalls as an adolescent furtively watching Martha dry her naked wet body in the twilight by the lake:

I lay in the shadows of a large spruce. She pretended not to see me as she touched her own soft body with curious hands; she cupped a tipped breast as if to taunt the broken circle of the moon; she brushed the clinging drops of water from the round perfection of her belly; she bent and scooped in her soft white palm a sweep of water and gushed it into the private shadows of her naked body. Surely she knew I was watching - and in the assurance of her beauty she put down her bathing suit on her beach sandals, picked up a huge blue towel and there in the last red glow of my long vespers she rubbed her taut skin warm; she towelled and smoothly massaged the mold of her long and creamy thighs, her swelling hips and buttocks and the nest of hair - (p.65).

Demeter's writing gains momentum as he lovingly recalls each detail of the scene and the rhythm of the passage imitates the frenzied haste of

the voyeur whose body "responded rudely to hers" (p.65). The satisfaction he attains from this description is at a double remove: the pleasure he enjoys here is derived from remembering the pleasure he experienced watching Martha as a boy. Demeter jokes weakly about the old adage - "one might go crazy", but clearly he uses his writing for onanistic purposes when he feels the urge.

Certainly Demeter writes of sexual experiences partly because, as he puts it, sometimes he feels "wildly horny". Hazard's numerous "sexploits" with a bevy of bustluscious women (P. Cockburn, Marie Eshpeter, the Widow Lank and Mrs. Laporte) are recorded faithfully by Demeter, one suspects, less in the interests of veracious biography, than in the interests of titillative distraction for the biographer. It is apparent from Demeter's own description of his one and only love scene with Martha, that not only is he incapable with her, but he is so overcome that he bursts into tears and behaves toward her less as lover to mistress than as son to mother:

I had somehow got halfway onto the couch. She pressed me to the comfort of her nipples and I took one, then the other, into my kissing and greedy mouth. "Don't cry", was all she said to my hunger. And after what seemed an endless time, I heard her saying, "Don't cry Demeter, it will be all right." (p.169).

In the light of his inadequacies, Demeter's name seems a gross misnomer: his sexual life belies the images of fertility and plenty that his name conjures up. In fact, Demeter is inadvertently responsible for the discovery and distribution of a hormone which would "prevent the

further multiplication of man upon the face of the earth" (p.172). But the novel plays with the notion of two kinds of creativity - in art, as well as in life. Demeter's "creation", is his tale of procreation - of the mythic, prolific powers of a horse and his master. And his creation depends on the fact that his is a lonely life of solitary pleasure: the path that would appear to lead to madness, is in fact Demeter's high road to art. Martha, through Hazard, gives birth to a daughter whom she names Demeter; Demeter, through Hazard, gives birth to a book, to the story of the birth of Demeter.\*

For the most part, the French-Canadian narrator's written recollections of his mysterious mistress K., vary greatly from Demeter's Peeping Tom accounts of various scenes. His account more strikingly resembles the memoirs of Humbert Humbert who passionately invokes his mistress in the beginning lines of his novel: "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins, my sin, my soul, Lo-lee-ta..."<sup>2</sup> and lovingly eulogizes her in the end of the novel:

I insist the world know how much I loved my Lolita, this Lolita, pale and polluted, and big with another's child, but still grey-eyed, still sooty-lashed, still auburn and almond, still carmencita, still mine.<sup>3</sup>

\* (In this context, the leatherbound collection of The General Stud Book in Hazard's library could be considered a miniature of Demeter's Studhorse Man, since it too, is a record of both creation and procreation. For Hazard, The General Stud Book is a catalogue which details the particulars of horse mating, but for Demeter the book is a monument to the history of "equine glory". For him it is a work of art and as such will long outlast the subjects it records).

Like Humbert, whose passionate love for Lolita is unrequited, the narrator of Prochain Episode looks back on scenes with a woman who probably did not love him and possibly betrayed him. Nevertheless, he revels in the description of his union with her:

Tu étais belle, mon amour. Comme je suis fier de ta beauté. Comme elle me récompense! ... nos deux corps nus, flambants unis dans leur démente rythmée. Ce soir encore, je garde sur mes lèvres le goût humecté de tes baisers éperdus. Sur ton lit de sables calcaires et sur tes muqueuses alpestres, je descends à toute allure, je m'étends comme une nappe phréatique, j'occupe tout; je pénètre, terroriste absolu, dans tous les pores de ton lac parlé: je l'inonde d'un seul jet, je déborde déjà au-dessus de la ligne des lèvres et je fuis, oh comme je fuis soudain rapide comme la foudre marine, je fuis à toutes vagues, secoué par l'onde impulsive (p.72).

Like the passages in Lolita, this passage is lyrical and highly evocative. The incandescent fervour of the lines recreates the erotic tempo of the supercharged evening of June 24th. More than a passionate recollection of love however, the narrator's writing seems to be an invocation - a desperate summoning of the woman he has lost:

Que fais-tu en ce moment, mon amour? Où circules-tu au-delà des murs? Passes-tu parfois dans l'aire érogène de notre fête nationale? ... Retrouves-tu le goût de ma bouche comme je retrouve obsédants, notre baiser? ... Penses-tu à moi? Sais-tu encore mon nom? M'entends-tu dans ton ventre quand l'évocation onirique de nos caresses vient secouer ton corps endormi? Me cherches-tu sous les draps ... Regarde je suis pleinement couché sur toi et je cours comme le fleuve puissant dans ta grande vallée. Je m'approche de toi infiniment...(p.73).

The narrator affirms the magical power of writing which can conjure up his beloved: "A force de t'écrire je vais te toucher ombre noir, noire magie, amour" (p.20). At one point he takes his assertion one step farther and compares the act of writing to the act of making love: "Ecrire est un grand amour" (p.70). His writing he claims, is nothing more than the cryptic continuation of a night of love:

L'amour est le cycle de la parole. Je t'écris infiniment et j'invente sans cesse le cantique que j'ai lu dans tes yeux; par mes mots je pose mes lèvres sur la chair brûlante de mon pays et je t'aime désespérément comme au jour de notre première communion (p.70).

By writing, the narrator not only recreates but captures his elusive mistress, imprisoning her to the page, making her accessible in the only way that remains possible for him.

While the narrators write as a means of intensifying their experience and use words as surrogates for their dreadfully vacant lives, they also write to defeat the effects of time. As a biographer, "one who assembles fragments" (p.34), Demeter claims that he longs for a "whole" image of the vanished past:

We seekers after truth, what do we find? A fingerprint on the corner of a page. A worn step at the turn of the stairway. A square of faded paint on the faded wall. Someone was here, we know. But who? When? (p.34).

He vaunts himself as a seeker after truth, whose mission is to fill the "insufferable blank pages of time" (p.11), contrasting himself with Hazard, "dear ninny", whom he claims was "terrified of history", and "denied the past". Like many of his other remarks, Demeter's criticism of Hazard's fear of time is highly ironic, since Demeter uses his writing as a weapon to defy and defeat the fatal, fateful aspect of time - the irreversibility of the past. He is using his novel to alter the events of the past which are too painful for him to acknowledge. Although he claims that he is seeking a whole image of the past (in particular the life and death of Hazard Lepage), what he really seems to be seeking is a means to absolve himself of any blame in the death of his hero. Demeter tampers with the facts in the climactic scene of his novel. Brutally attacked by Poseidon, Hazard lies motionless on the floor as Demeter and Martha arrive. Demeter takes one look at Hazard, bloodied and still, and raises his gun to shoot the stallion:

And over the sight I saw the last and only surviving stallion of the Lepage breed of horse.

I looked away and Hazard's eyes were open and looking nowhere and yet watching the horse's head.

"Kill him," Martha whispered, "kill him."

"No," I answered.

"Kill him now, Hazard is still breathing."

"He's all that Hazard lived for," I said.

"No," Martha said.

And I thought of firing the gun; in my mind's eye the neck twisted and the head went sideways and up. The stallion fell and rolled over, kicking at the air ...

"No," I said, "Martha -"

And Hazard stirred then, trying once more to move across the floor. I swear he shook his head at the raised gun (p. 171).

Demeter's last sentence indicts him. All the other evidence of the passage indicates that he cannot shoot Poseidon because he sees him as the last surviving stallion of a breed of greatness. Hazard has lost sight of this, as he is either temporarily or permanently blinded by his love for Martha, but Demeter cannot countenance Hazard's swerve from his sacrosanct mission. Whether or not Hazard shook his head at the gun is immaterial; Demeter had already decided that he could not, would not, shoot the horse.

While Demeter writes in the hopes of defeating time, in the classical sense of the word, that is, in order to overcome the ineluctability of the past, the narrator of Prochain Episode writes in order to recall or recapture lost time, in the Proustian sense of the word. He plays consciously with Proustian phrases: "Je me souviens de ce temps perdu retrouvé" (p.32); "le temps passé repasse encore plus vite" (p.33);

and "J'avais vraiment envie de posséder une montre de poche pour mesurer le temps perdu" (p.162). Initially the narrator claims that "(il) écrit les minutes du temps vécu" in an effort to counteract the lost time of his imprisonment. In his book, Le Temps Humain, Georges Poulet points out that by remembering, man "escapes the purely momentary"; he escapes "the nothingness that lies in wait for him between moments of existence".<sup>4</sup>

The narrator of Prochain Episode would concur:

J'écris pour tromper le temps que je perds ici et qui me perd,  
laissant sur mon visage les traces ravinées de son interminable  
alluvion et la preuve indélébile de mon abolition (p.72-73).

In fact, the narrator's writing is not just an attempt to distract himself, to combat the boredom and isolation of prison. His writing is also an attempt to recall the happy, triumphant times of his past. "Ce soir-là je me souviens, quel triomphe en nous!" (p.72); but like his predecessor sequestered in a cork-lined room, he is discontent with the mere memory of past experience and seeks to recapture the sensations of "le temps passé". "J'écris pour tromper la tristesse et pour la ressentir" (p.73). Through recollection, he tries desperately to re-experience the freshness of emotion which accompanies anything experienced for the first time.

At the same time that he is writing to remember or recapture lost time, the narrator of Prochain Episode is vitally interested in writing as a means of altering the past. Like Demeter, he cannot



tolerate the last incomplete, unsuccessful episode of his free life. "A ma vie, c'est la violence armée qui me manque et notre triomphe éperdu" (p.164). So he writes a "prochain episode", a new, improved version of the most painful event of his life:

Voilà comment j'arriverai à ma conclusion. Oui, je sortirai vainqueur de mon intrigue, tuant H de Heutz avec placidité pour me précipiter vers toi, mon amour, et clore mon récit par apothéose. Tout finira dans la splendeur secrète de ton ventre peuplé d'Alpes muqueuses et de neiges éternelles. Oui, voilà le dénouement de l'histoire: puisque tout à une fin, j'irai retrouver la femme qui m'attend toujours à la terrasse de l'hôtel d'Angleterre. C'est ce que je dirai dans la dernière phrase du roman. Et, quelques lignes plus bas, j'inscrirai en lettres majuscules le mot:

FIN. (p.173-4)

All the bunglings and unresolved complications of the narrator's final episode are amended in one happy-ever-after conclusion. The narrator pretends finally, that he is able to resolve his past life as easily as he can "resolve" his novel. He cannot bear the indeterminate quality of his present situation and so invents a conclusion which finishes his suffering definitively, which concludes his open-ended novel life: "Je brûle d'en finir et de mettre un point final à mon passé indéfini" (p.167).

There is another major reason why the narrators write: they write in order to shape or control the wild, raw world of experience which they secretly find so fascinating, yet so terrifying. In a famous discussion on the novel between Walter Besant and Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson eloquently pointed out some of the distinctions between life and art:

Life is monstrous, abrupt, infinite, illogical and poignant; a work of art in comparison is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate. Life imposes by brute energy, like inarticulate thunder; art catches the ear, among the far louder noises of experience, like the air artificially made by a discreet musician. The novel which is a work of art exists not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, as a shoe must still consist of leather, but by its immeasurable differences from life which is designed and significant and is both the method and the meaning of the work.

It is precisely these "monstrous" "abrupt", "infinite" and "illogical" qualities of life which Stevenson so vividly describes, that the narrators shy away from. Both men abhor chaos and disorder. Demeter writes: "I myself prefer an ordered world (even if I must order it through a posture of madness)" (p.59). Their chief means of ordering life is through their novels. Like the puppet master manipulating the words and actions of his wooden dolls, the narrator of Prochain Episode is fascinated by the feeling of control he exercises over his characters:

(Je suis) fasciné par l'aire de disponibilité dans laquelle (les personnages) se meuvent comme à l'intérieur d'une préhistoire qu'il ne tient qu'à moi de faire cesser en écrivant ce qu'ils n'ont pas encore fait et qu'ils feront dans l'exacte proportion où mon invention sans élan les actualise (p.97).

Both narrators allude to the terror they feel in the face of the infinite combinations and permutations, the numberless possibilities of the real world. "Je refuse toute systématisation qui m'enfoncerait plus encore dans la détresse de l'incrée" (p.91), states the narrator of Prochain Episode. He is so intent on guarding himself from the "désespoir

incisif qu'(il) ressen(t) devant le nombre de variables qui peuvent entrer dans la composition" (p.91) that he invents a system which protects him from them:

Condamné à une certaine incohérence ontologique, j'en prends mon parti. J'en fais même un système dont je décrète l'application immédiate. Infini, je le serai à ma façon et au sens propre. Je ne sortirai plus d'un système que je crée dans le seul but de n'en jamais sortir (p. 14).

Demeter, too, panics in the face of the infinite unknown possibilities proffered by the real world. When he does not know for absolute certain the outcome or details of a given episode or conversation, (what really happened during Hazard's encounter with Mrs. Laporte, for instance), he despairs: "Once again I find myself in a corner. Art would find a neat way out; life is not so obliging" (p. 142). To a greater degree than the French-Canadian narrator, Demeter manages to keep the spectre of chaos or disorder at bay, by reshaping it, whenever he can, into Art. When Hazard describes the spring wind as "that raw bitch of a wind full of crocuses and snatch" (p. 12), Demeter refines that flamboyant description into his own more controlled version: "the scent of Spring was in that yeasty wind, the high raw odour of mares and spring" (p. 12).

Demeter's penchant for ordering may be seen in the numbers of lists, catalogues and genealogies which he intersperses throughout his narrative. He seems driven by a need to classify things: he lists the contents of Hazard's bookshelves, for instance - perhaps in the hope that through naming his hero's possessions he can control him better:

...currycombs, a broken hamstrap, a spoon wired to a stick for dropping poisoned wheat into the holes of offending gophers, saltpetre, gentian root, a scattering of copper rivets, black antimony, a schoolboy's ruler, three mousetraps in a matchbox, two chisels for trimming hoofs, cornucrescine (for making horn grow), ginger, horse liniment and liniment for his back, Elliman's Royal Embrocation, blue vitriol, an electuary, nux vomica, saddle soap in a spode (a simple blue and white) saucer. Spanish fly... (p.9-10).

The ceremony of naming continues with other catalogues: of the Lepage family, of the Proudfoots (Martha, Thatcher, Toreador, Tennyson and Titmarsh), of the hockey players of Canada, the food and drink at a Ukrainian wedding, and the diseases of the horse.

But in addition to his obsessive list-making, to ordering Hazard and his adventures, Demeter tries to order that other major life-force that defies his control: Hazard's fabulous blue stallion. Poseidon represents, among other things, the crude power and beauty of the flesh, the unleashed, irrational power of the unconscious, the creative vitality of the spirit. Demeter cannot and will not describe Poseidon; he claims that he can best describe the horse by referring the reader to the "superlative grace and beauty" of Chinese art:

I hardly know where to suggest you begin. Those old Chinese artists, they drew their horses true to life, true to the rhythm of life. They dreamed their horses and made the horse too. They had their living dream of horses...Ah, where to begin? Why is the truth never where it should be? Is the truth of the man in the man or in his biography? Is the truth of the beast in the flesh and confusion or in the few skillfully arranged lines...

You might see the bronze horses of the Late Chou Dynasty. Or the "Five Horses" of Li-Lung-mien, that lovely ink drawing or, if I recall correctly, a hand scroll. Or by all means spend an hour contemplating the horses of Chao-Meng-Fu as they go to their watering... (p. 134).

Demeter chooses to negate or subordinate "the flesh and confusion" in favour of the shaping power of the imagination, the "few skillfully arranged lines" which comprise not only the Chinese artist's drawing, but obviously his own story as well. In so doing, he imitates the man whom he writes about earlier in the novel, who views Poseidon standing beside a poised and perfect bronze statue of a horse on the lawn in front of the Edmonton Legislative Building. The man compares the two horses, finds the real one lacking, and intones in ministerial voice, "The artist has done it in bronze forever." (p. 30). The man's colleagues, also watching, applaud briefly and repeat solemnly: "Forever, in bronze". (p. 30).

Like the sculptor of the bronze statue who captures a moment of the horse's life and freezes it forever, Demeter hopes to capture his subject and through art, control and arrest it. In this sense, as in so many others, Demeter's aesthetic belief presents itself as the polar extreme to his hero Hazard's credo. In his book, Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature, W.H. New points out how both Hazard and Demeter are prisoners of their visions:

...for neither the man of the flesh nor the man of the word will absolute freedom be possible. If Hazard cannot recognize the artifice of poetry, Demeter cannot accommodate himself to Hazard's unabashed sexuality. The one, shouting "stop", "no", "wait", and "never" throughout his life, rejects all order and is therefore constantly upset by social and artistic conventions; the other, seeking order before life, cannot rest in the ordinary world with which he strives to communicate.<sup>6</sup>

The narrators' obvious machinations and manipulations, their willingness to do violence to their subject matter for the sake of art seem on the one hand to undercut their "noble" purpose. On the other hand, despite the unselfconscious irony, the narrators have the final say, not only about their subjects, but about themselves. It is the narrators, who are able, through their words, to make the writer the hero and to raise his task to the level of the ultimate quest:

The biographer is a person afflicted with sanity. He is a man who must first of all be of sound mind, and in the clarity of his own vision he must ride out the dark night, ride on while all about him falls into chaos. The man of the cold eye and the steady hand, he faces for all of humanity the ravishments and the terrors of existence (p. 152).

Footnotes:

1. Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita (New York: Berkley Medallion Press, 1955), p. 32.
2. Ibid., p. 11.
3. Ibid., p. 253.
4. Georges Poulet, Etudes sur le temps humain (Paris: Librarie Plon, 1952), p. 78.
5. Robert Louis Stevenson, as quoted by Leon Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1955), p. 23.
6. W.H. New, "The Studhorse Quests", Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature (Toronto: New Press, 1972), p. 184.  
(In his article, the "quests" New writes about refer to those of Demeter and Hazard, not those of Demeter and the narrator of Prochain Episode.)

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE DOUBLE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

It has been pointed out that The Studhorse Man and Prochain Episode each have two distinct story lines - that of the narrator and that of the hero. What remains to be examined is how and why the narrative tales are told in such different ways. When the narrators are telling the stories of their heroes, the narratives are related in very closely contained forms, structured largely on certain formula patterns of literature. In The Studhorse Man, Demeter's tale of Hazard and his adventures contains elements of the picaresque pattern, but for the most part follows the pattern of the Homeric odyssey. In Prochain Episode, the narrator states that he is attempting to model his narrative on the tradition of the espionage story, the spy-thriller genre that has been popularized in the twentieth century. The autobiographical story line in



each of the novels however, is structured (or rather unstructured), very differently. The narrators' own stories follow no particular formula or pattern but are related in a loosely constructed "open" form.

In the interests of clarity, it seems appropriate to examine the terms "open" and "closed" form. In her book, Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End, Barbara Herrnstein Smith investigates the concept of closure in literature and although her study is primarily a discussion of closure in poetry, she suggests that many of her comments are pertinent to narrative fiction as well. Initially Smith points out the difference between conclusion and mere cessation: while a ringing telephone and a crying child can only stop, generally speaking, a poem or a piece of music concludes. Conclusions, she postulates, are characterized by a sequence of events exhibiting a relatively high degree of structure. The events are related to one another by some principle of organization or design that implies the existence of a definite termination point:

Under these circumstances the occurrence of the terminal event is a confirmation of expectations that have been established by the structure of the sequence and is usually distinctly gratifying. The sense of stable conclusiveness, finality or "clinch" which we experience at that point is what is referred to here as closure.<sup>1</sup>

Smith points out that closure need not always be temporal, but may also be spatially perceived. But whether spatially or temporally perceived, a structure appears closed, when it is experienced as "integral: coherent,

complete and stable" (p.2). Because so much of common experience is fragmentary, interrupted, fortuitously connected or determined by causes beyond our agency or comprehension, Smith points out that "we create or seek out enclosures: structures that are highly organized, separated as if by an implicit frame from a background of relative disorder or randomness - structures which are integral or complete" (p.2). She justifies our common satisfaction in closure by stating that since varying degrees or states of tension seem to be present in all our experiences, the most gratifying ones are those in which "whatever tensions are created are also released" (p.3).

The narrator's choice of and adherence to closed narrative forms to relate their heroes' tales seem understandable in the light of Smith's remarks on closure. Both Demeter and the narrator of Prochain Episode deliberately seek out or create a structural framework for the "story-line" of their novels which is distinctly separate from the background of random disorder and confused chaos which distinguishes their own narratives. It is as if the forms they choose function as a retreat for the storytellers - a refuge from those other unbearable personal narratives which threaten to gain precedence at every turn. In this sense, the highly organized, tightly constructed narratives which Demeter and the narrator of Prochain Episode develop, parallel the protective enclosure of the prisons which they inhabit. The story patterns which they are "locked into" function as the cells do: they offer the two men safety, a haven from their own emotional and narrative chaos.

While some of the structural similarities between Hazard's narrative and Homer's Odyssey are blatant, others are as subtle as some which Joyce establishes between his Ulysses and the original. Hazard Lepage is modelled on a pattern distinctly reminiscent of his forefather. Like Odysseus, he might be chiefly characterized by his wiliness; adept in chicanery, he is "far outstanding in all kinds of devices".<sup>2</sup> His cunning and resourcefulness are apparent both in his elaborate stories and in his ingenious use of disguise: Hazard is equally convincing as Mountie or Minister. At the same time, he is a man of great endurance, able to survive where lesser men might perish (as with the test of endurance with the Widow Lank, his death-defying trial on the icy rivers with Utter, his rescue of the Indian and the pony from the cold lake, or his return from near death in the icehouse). Like Odysseus, he is not just a man's man, but highly attractive to women. Rugged and virile, he is appreciated also by them for his kindness and gentleness. "He was always clever and yet so considerate. What a rare combination...nothing but kind words. Yet there wasn't a thing in the world he feared", remarks old Lady Eshpeter (p.135), while Mrs. Laporte notes that he was "a sincere man whose heart was in the right place" (p.154).

Like Odysseus, Hazard is a lonely quester, condemned to a life of solitary travel from place to place, and like Odysseus, he leaves behind his faithful Penelope (Martha) who loyally waits at home fending

off eager suitors. His Cassandra is an old woman on the battlefields of France - not Troy, but nevertheless she prophesies to him that, "La mer sera votre meutrière". And in fact, Hazard is killed by Poseidon, in this novel not a sea-god, but his horse.

Hazard undergoes a descent into the underworld, albeit on a boxcar loaded with bones travelling to Edmonton, and once in Edmonton must struggle with the Cyclopean embrace of P. Cockburn in her "Polyphemusian cave-bed."<sup>3</sup> In another episode, Hazard encounters his Circe in the form of sister Raphael who commands him to "come" and almost persuades him to stay amidst her fascinating collection of incurables. Hazard's unpleasant choice between the Widow Lank and jail is a representation of Odysseus' Scylla-Charybdis dilemma while Odysseus' dalliance with the nymph Calypso is paralleled by Hazard's stay with the winsome Marie Eshpeter, who receives him with loving kindness and tends him like a god. Even Marie-Calypso's ministrations however, do not kill Hazard's desire for his Penelope and in spite of one more tempting detainment with a slightly lascivious Nausicaa, Mrs. Laporte, Hazard succeeds in driving the unwanted suitor from Martha's door and in being re-united (however briefly), with her at last.

While Hazard's narrative seems to borrow heavily from a Homeric structuring, in many respects it also conforms to the structures and patterns of the picaresque novel. It is strongly episodic in plot and full of accident. Like the archetypal picaro Lazarillo de Tormes, and

many picares since, Hazard is an individual who finds himself frequently in desperate financial straits and must constantly use his wits to stay alive in an ugly and often cruel world. By becoming a trickster, Hazard makes the only choice other than suicide that the world offers him. "If the world is tricky, peopled by tricksters, the picares must either give up his personality to join the trickery or else perish".<sup>4</sup> Thus Hazard is able to trick his way into a Ukrainian wedding and all the food and festivities and to bluff his way as a "reverend" through a court session, escaping with a relatively light sentence. The picares's actions should more accurately be termed "reactions", since his adventures are usually not self-determined, but a result of accident or fate; he is continually assaulted by events, but seems to be much less concerned with shaping these events than surviving them. Like his picaresque predecessors, Hazard is characterized by a strong will to live. The numerous adventures related in the narrative are coupled with the common picaresque device of piling event on event in strikingly short compass. There is no sense of slow-down or let-down in the narrative pace, and as in other picaresque tales, we are meant to feel a rapid-fire assault by the hero's experiences.

Hazard's storyline, like other picaresque narratives, is punctuated also by journeys into the weird, the improbable and even the absurd. His unlikely adventures range from a wild lovemaking session with a woman named P. Cockburn on a canopied four poster bed in a display

section of the provincial museum to the absurd scene with the Cree and his blue-black colt, both of whom he saves from drowning:

He was wearing only moccasins and a pair of badly soiled tweed dress trousers. He pulled something that looked like an eagle feather from his pocket and stuck it in one of his braids. Then - and Hazard swore to this - he brought out a small pocket mirror and looked at himself. "I saved your colt", he said. (p.69).

Other episodes of his story are also characterized by a sense of the improbable: a brawl in a boneyard, a beer-parlour horse trading session, a Doukhabour - like school burning, a surreal Ukrainian wedding, and a discovery of a use for mare's urine. Kroetsch fully exploits this picaresque trait, by leading the reader toward what he believes is the realm of the familiar and then so distorting it in the novel, that the reader, doubting its validity must re-examine it.

The main narrative line of Hubert Aquin's novel is structured on a more contemporary model than Robert Kroetsch's. In the initial words of the novel, the narrator of Prochain Episode claims he has decided to "insérer le roman qui vient dans le sens majeur de la tradition du roman d'espionage" (p.8). He mentions that he had thought of trying to write something original, but that this might cause problems in a "genre qui comporte un grand nombre de règles et de lois non-écrites" (p.7). His dream of doing anything original however, is complicated by what the narrator claims is his laziness and also by the fact that he confesses

to a feeling of great "security" in "~~S~~el pelotonner mollement dans le creuset d'un genre littéraire aussi bien défini" (p.8). The language which the narrator chooses to explain his choice of genre is indicative of his picture of it. The genre with its "rules", "laws", and definitions is as much a jail as the place where he is imprisoned, but yet he feels a great security in enclosing himself in it.

The narrator invents, (or possibly retells) a story with many of the most obvious elements of thriller fiction. The story is set in Switzerland, a country with as many spies as secret or anonymous bank accounts. The agent's mission, conferred upon him by a mysterious but beautiful blonde colleague, is to track down and kill a slippery but sophisticated counter-revolutionary agent. The agent's pursuit of the enemy naturally includes a period of discreet but clever questioning in which he "uncovers" the enemy agent's cover, followed by a high speed car chase around hairpin corners in the Alps. The agent goes through the ritual stages of capture and inevitable escape and then plots his own ingenious but predictable trap to capture the enemy agent. The plot is stocked with typical elements of the spy story: secret codes ("indéchiffrables"), encounters at gunpoint, racy foreign cars (Mercedes and Opel), not to mention disguise and doublecross.

Thriller literature, points out Ralph Harper in The World of the Thriller,<sup>5</sup> is "crisis literature". The hero is involved in critical situations - ones which concern death, guilt, fate or major choice -

situations which lead him to the "boundaries," "borders," or "frontiers" of his life. Harper states that at these points the elements of the agent's life are reduced to the alternative of a complete stop or a new turning. Certainly the narrator of Prochain Episode includes such dramatic crisis situations in his agent's story: in one instance, asked to explain his suspicious behaviour at gunpoint, the agent, to escape death, invents a fantastic tale of financial distress and nervous breakdown and, at another point, he is poised, trembling with nervous tension for what seems an interminable length of time, ready to shoot and kill the enemy. At both points, the physical and mental pressure on the agent is intense and the suspense is characteristically high.

Like the odyssey and picaresque story patterns, the thriller is structured episodically. The hero moves from one adventure or event to another, but in the process, most of his episodes are resolved or completed. The episodic nature of the narratives greatly reinforces the sense of closure associated with the storylines. Not only do the two stories (of Hazard and the unnamed agent) conclude definitively at the end of the novels,\* but each adventure or episode chronicled by the narrators, while still part of the larger narrative, is characterized by a sense of closure.

\* Hazard's story ends definitively with his death, and while the thriller story ends disappointingly for the agent, (he does not get his man) there is a definite sense of an ending, albeit a frustrating or unsatisfactory one for him.



The narratives written by Demeter and the French-Canadian narrator are further characterized by a strong sense of sequence. Events follow one another in chronological order and are often causally related: Hazard is stuck with the job of pig sticker for the Widow Lank because he chose this as punishment, because he broke the law of no horses allowed on the beach, because on impulse he decided to service free of charge an unattended mare in full heat. In Prochain Episode, the agent finds himself lying in wait in the enemy agent's home, because he wishes to kill him before six o'clock, because he does not want to miss his rendezvous with his beautiful mistress on the terrace of the hotel.

The narrator's own narratives, on the other hand, are characterized by a lack of chronological sequencing; there is a sense of random ordering of events, or at least an apparently random account of the events. The narrator of Prochain Episode relates his autobiography through wild and confusing vacillations between the past and present. At one moment he is recalling the drive through the countryside of Acton Vale in Quebec; in the next breath he is documenting the sights he can see through his penitentiary window. Demeter's own narrative also fluctuates between "now" and "then"; while Hazard's tale is a careful reconstruction of past events, his chronicler's narrative jumps from his relationship to Martha, to the haunts of his youth, to the questions of his "smart-aleck headshrinker". Events in both narrators' lives are

obviously not causally related, but rather subjectively related. "The mind wanders", says Demeter, "what a strange expression." But perhaps it is the most apt description of the movement of the narrators' minds: the events they narrate call up reactions to, associations with and memories of other events. Demeter's description of Utter, lying "naked as a jay bird" (p.98) prompts him to recall his theory of nakedness; Martha's soft whispering of his name initiates his ruminations about why he was called Demeter, which he protests is a feminine name. The narrative of the French Canadian novel proceeds in much the same unstructured manner. The heat in the prisoner's cell, for example, reminds him of the heat of another night: "Il fait aussi chaud en moi que ce soir-là, alors qu'un séisme secret faisait frissonner toute la ville dans nos deux corps convulsés" (p.119).

In addition to a sense of chronological disorder or disjointedness, the narrators' stories are punctuated by frequent interruptions. Those few autobiographical episodes of their lives which they do relate are rarely complete, but are much more likely to be partial or fragmentary accounts. The French Canadian narrator gives no more than one or two sentences description of the time of his important first encounters with K: "La neige éblouie...avait enveloppé notre première étreinte dans l'appartement anonyme de Côte-des-Neiges" (p.10) and then without elaborating on this crucial scene of his life goes on to describe his depression. His description of his disastrous capture by the police in Montreal is also piecemeal and must be gleaned from tantalizing snatches of recollection:

A travers ma vitre pénitentiaire, je vois une camionnette rouge - suspecte ma foi - qui me rappelle une autre camionnette rouge stationnée un matin sur l'avenue des Pins, devant la porte cochère des Fusiliers Mont Royal. Mais voilà que cette tache rouge s'ébranle et disparaît dans la noirceur, me privant ainsi d'un souvenir tonifiant (p.15).

Demeter's tale is also fragmentary. He interrupts crucial accounts of himself, pulling himself up short with comments such as: "But I was explaining Hazard's predicament" (p.66); "I must here intrude a little scientific jargon into an otherwise straightforward account..." (p. 172) or "But I drift into mere speculation" (p. 192).

Just as the episodes which the narrators relate seem unresolved, fragmentary or only partially complete, the "conclusions" of their stories, according to Smith's criteria, are consistently open-ended. Their stories "cease" but do not "end". There is no death, no marriage, nor any other end point which constitutes a typical conclusion of the traditional novel: the narrators are still sitting in their respective cells; still seeing their respective "head-shrinkers"; still trying not to contemplate the horrible failure of their lives; still constructing a "prochain episode" to replace the unsatisfactory episodes of their lives. And there is an obvious refusal on the part of the narrators to make any final comments about themselves or their narratives.

In an article entitled, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones," Ronald Crane points out the synthesizing principles of plots of "character" and plots of "action", which he claims make up most of the

familiar classic plots. According to Crane, a typical plot of action is characterized by a "completed change, gradual or sudden in the situation of the protagonist",<sup>6</sup> while a plot of character is characterized by a "completed process of change in the moral character of the protagonist, precipitated or molded by action and made manifest both in it and in thought and feeling." (p. 620). Using these definitions as a guide, we can judge to what extent the narrator's stories in the two novels differ from their heroes' stories and other traditional plots.

Thus far I have examined the different natures of the two narratives in The Studhorse Man and Prochain Episode, while avoiding mention of the names Kroetsch or Aquin. It is vital however, to recognize that the narrators' novels are not the same as their authors' novels. In The World and the Book, a study of modern fiction, Gabriel Josipovici points out the similar, but rather less difficult, necessity of distinguishing Mann and Aschenbach in Mann's novella Death in Venice:

But what is often forgotten is that Mann is not Aschenbach... the reason is Mann is, whereas Aschenbach isn't able to write the story of Aschenbach's final descent into silence and death. For Mann himself the end is not silence but the articulation of silence. In this he is at one with Proust and Kafka, Nabokov and Golding and Robbe-Grillet: in the course of each of their works we are made to move from the content of the fiction to the maker of the book and to recognize that the final meaning of the work is one which it is itself powerless to say, and this is that it has been made.<sup>7</sup> (author's italics).

In other words, Josipovici is merely pointing out what Robbe-Grillet and various neo-modernist writers and critics have been postulating for a number of years:

Croire que le romancier à "quelque chose à dire", et qu'il cherche ensuite comment le dire, représente le plus grave des contre-sens. Car, c'est précisément ce "comment", cette manière de dire, qui constitue son projet d'écrivain, projet obscur entre tous, et qui sera plus tard le contenu douteux de son livre.<sup>8</sup>

It is precisely this "maniere de dire" which Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute and Butor describe (and advocate), which Kroetsch and Aquin are interested in accentuating. By juxtaposing the two narratives with their intensely different structures and styles, the novelists are calling attention to the whole process of narrative composition, to the infinity of stylistic and structural choices open to the writer. By doing so, they make the subject of their novels not the odyssey or the thriller, but the writing of the odyssey and the thriller, the "play" between the writer and tradition.

In emphasizing process rather than, or as well as, meaning, Aquin and Kroetsch stress the crucial role of the reader in the understanding of the novel. By presenting us with two unreliable narrators who relate one traditional narrative, while also relating their own much less conventional stories, the novelists are deliberately creating a double perspective. The reader is drawn in by what appears to be a conventional novel and then is tricked into the realization that he is reading something quite different. In this sense, we can see how Aquin and Kroetsch's novels seem to go beyond some of the concepts of the "anti-roman." Their novels are not set up merely in direct opposition

to the traditional novel; rather they use the forms and structures of the traditional novel to lull the reader into a false sense of security, and then by contrast, inverting and distorting the traditional, they force the reader to recognize the games played, to become aware of the rules and conventions which govern or control the making of the artifact.

Through the course of their narratives, Demeter and the narrator of Prochain Episode frequently interrupt their stories, interject comments or even address their readers about the problems of writing: "I too would like the preceding chapter to be more explicit", complains Demeter, "But what can I add that is both relevant and accurate?" (p.144). The French Canadian narrator interrupts his narrative to lament:

...j'ignore les noms de mes frères qui seront tués au combat, autant que j'ignore les titres des différents chapitres de mon roman. J'ignore même ce qui adviendra de mes personnages qui m'attendent dans le bois de Coppet. J'en viens à me demander si j'arriverai à temps à l'hôtel d'Angleterre, car cela seul me préoccupe maintenant... (p. 96).

The effect of these interruptions or addresses to the reader is that suddenly we are forced to concentrate not on the stories, but on the framework of the stories. Josipovici points out that the modern novel draws attention to the rules which govern its own creation in order to "force the reader into recognizing that it is not the world". (p.298) While we might argue that Pre-Romantic literature also calls attention to itself, to its genre and to the conventions with which it is working,

Josipovici remarks that the feeling we get from The Aeneid or "Lycidas" is that the author is "confident that he is both writing in and about a world which makes sense, which is itself capable of being apprehended by the human mind". Today's world he continues, is not Dante's world; a universe built on a series of analogies:

In Dante the discovery of analogy serves to make us realize that the universe is meaningful, no longer a series of discrete objects or events...but parts of a well-bound volume, no longer isolated notes but a tune. The "trompe l'oeil" effects of modern art, on the other hand, the playful inversion of the novel form and the parody of language and convention in modern fiction, have the opposite effect, making us realize with a shock that we are dealing not with the world but with one more object in the world, one made by a human being. (p.299).

The effect of this kind of literature on the reader is very different obviously from that of Dante and Milton. Instead of feeling a sense of integration, of belonging to a tradition which is meaningful, because the whole universe is meaningful, we experience a terrific sense of isolation and alienation, of the impossibility of ever getting past the "frontal bone of our own skull" as Kafka puts it. The structure of the two novels emphasizes this: the constant shifting from narrative to autobiography or confession underlines man's essential plight - his inability to absolutely or definitively know or tell of another. While the narrators cannot or do not realize this, their authors make it painfully clear. Josipovici makes an appropriate analogy between the modern works (of artists such as Eliot, Proust, Kafka, Robbe-Grillet,

Golding) and negatives, pictures of "how things are not". He reminds us that at the end of such works, we come to the realization that "if the world of the hero is only his world, then what we had taken to be that world is only a book". (p. 307). His statements on the traditional novelist versus the modern novelist illustrate trenchantly the task which Kroetsch and Aquin attempt and achieve through the dialectic of different structures in their novels:

...the real world is that which the book is not, but since I cannot step outside my world this negative is all that can be expressed. To imagine, like the traditional novelist that one's work is an image of the real world, to imagine that one can communicate directly to the reader what it is that one uniquely feels, that is to fall into the real solipsism, which is, to paraphrase Kierkegaard on despair, not to know that one is in a state of solipsism. The modern novelist, seeing like Wittgenstein that his first task is to wake man to this difficult insight, constructs a book which is a negative of reality and which always asks of us that we move from it to its silent referent. (p.309).



Footnotes:

1. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 2.
2. Nestor's remark to Telemachus, The Odyssey, Book 3, (ll. 121-2.)
3. I am indebted in this section to some suggestions made by W. H. New, in "The Studhorse Quests", Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature, (Toronto: New Press, 1972), p. 182.
4. Stuart Miller, The Picaresque Novel (Cleveland: The Press of Case of Western Reserve University, 1967), p. 56
5. Ralph Harper, The World of the Thriller (Cleveland: The Press of Case of Western Reserve University, 1969), p. 51.
6. Ronald Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones", Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 621.
7. Gabriel Josipovici, The World and The Book (London: MacMillan Press, 1971), p. 288.
8. Alain Robbe-Grillet, Pour un nouveau roman (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 153.

## CONCLUSION

In his conclusion to The Literary History of Canada, first published in 1965, Northrop Frye explained what he felt to be the universal problem in Canadian literature at that time:

There is no Canadian writer of whom we can say what we can say of the world's major writers, that their readers can grow up inside their work without ever becoming aware of a circumference...If no Canadian author pulls us away from the Canadian context toward the centre of literary experience itself, then at every point we remain aware of his social and historical setting. The conception of what is literary has to be greatly broadened for such a literature. The literary, in Canada, is often only an incidental quality of writings, which, like those of many of the early explorers, are as innocent of literary intention as a mating loon.

In a series of critical essays written twelve years later, Eli Mandel comments on what he sees as the growing tendency of Canadian writers to recognize and express their literary forms and traditions:

The writer's task becomes an increasingly sensitive articulation of his literary tradition - not to write up the experience of the country but to articulate the form of its fiction. So ... Canadian fiction may be seen to involve a double process ... one that is conscious as well: on the one hand it involves finding forms appropriate to new sets of experience or, more exactly, the placing of experience in its metaphorical context; on the other hand, it involves integrating or unifying literary experience itself, finding out in other words, whether existing literary tradition, in all its richness and variety, connects with the literary materials at hand.<sup>2</sup>

If this "increasingly sensitive articulation of our literary tradition" represents the movement of the more innovative Canadian writers, as Mandel proposes, then Kroetsch and Aquin are certainly among those at the forefront of this movement. While the novels Prochain Episode and

The Studhorse Man may not be considered as part of the canon of "the genuine classics of literature",<sup>3</sup> in a number of important ways the work signals a coming of age in Canadian fiction.

To begin with, both Kroetsch and Aquin have created highly complex characters as the central figures of their novels. Their narrators descend from a distinguished but eccentric line of confessional anti-heros which includes such unconventional individuals as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Camus' Clemence, Nabokov's Humbert Humbert or Bellow's Herzog (to name only a few). Intelligent, hyperconscious and intense, the narrators are characterized by a variety of anomalous and conflicting tendencies: their moods swing from manic depression to wild elation, from morbid withdrawal to aggression or violence, from lachrymose and sentimental self-pity to cynical introspection. Coupled with the baroque narrator-madmen are the romantic super-heroes, whose flamboyant stories, (either recorded or invented by their admiring storytellers), provide striking ironic contrast to their narrators' own undramatic tales.

The narrators of Prochain Episode and The Studhorse Man are not merely genius madmen; they are also writers. It is noteworthy that Kroetsch and Aquin take pains to emphasize this fact and to make evident the self-reflexiveness of their texts: "Je chavire dans mon recit" (p. 34); "je m'egare dans ce proces verbal" (p. 45). They expose and explore the complex causes and effects of their narrators' fiction-making, and in so doing, the authors invariably raise questions not only

about the nature and problems of their own writing, but also about the nature and problems of all fiction writing. While the self-reflexive text is not an uncommon phenomenon in the neo-modernist literary tradition, The Studhorse Man and Prochain Episode, along with a handful of recent Canadian novels rank as some of the few Canadian examples of this kind of narrative fiction.

Kroetsch and Aquin's shared awareness of, and concern for, literary conventions and traditions is reflected also in their brilliant play with story patterns. In making use of the thriller and the odyssey patterns in their novels, the novelists are not simply reworking old models; rather they are exposing them for what they are - merely patterns, forms for recounting stories. These strict patterns when juxtaposed to the disjointed, confused wanderings of the narrators' tales serve to emphasize narrative composition as process rather than meaning. In underlining the craft of fiction as one of the subjects of their novels, if not the subject of their novels, Aquin and Kroetsch, like Gide and many other self-conscious writers before them, are inviting the reader to participate in their creative act, urging him to make some of the same critical judgements and distinctions that the writer does, forcing him to become aware of the rules and conventions which govern the making of fiction.

With The Studhorse Man and Prochain Episode the Canadian novel seems to be taking giant steps forward in the areas of character, subject and structure. We are moving away from the realistic, socio-

logical novel which has dominated Canadian narrative fiction for so long. A new era of Canadian literature is announcing itself - an era in which the "roman d'aventure" is being displaced by the "aventure du roman".

Footnotes:

1. Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971), p.214. (first published in Literary History of Canada, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965).
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