

TWO GENERATIONS OF MODERN FRENCH CANADIAN POETS

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

by

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I have attempted to show the differences in themes, attitudes, subjects, and poetic techniques that exist between two succeeding generations of modern French Canadian poets.

Alain Grandbois and Anne Hébert (born in 1900 and 1916), respectively) constitute, in my study, the elder generation, while Gatien Lapointe, Fernand Ouellette, and Paul Chamberland (born in 1931, 1930, and 1939, respectively) are the more youthful poets.

I have divided my thesis into chapters corresponding to the areas of comparison that were mentioned above and within every chapter I consider, as much as possible, each one of the five poets. I have found that, with regard to "subject," the older poets are especially concerned, in their poetry, with the "je" and its rare pleasures and its more frequent woes while the younger poets move away from this restricted concern with the "self" and its private and difficultly penetrated world towards a wider involvement in the affairs of all men. Seeing and experiencing reality with the eyes and the sensibilities of all men, of whom they consider themselves to be the brothers, they speak less of "me" and more of "us" and "you." Their subject is no longer the private and highly personal "je" but is instead, the more universal and objective "we" or "them." Attitude evolves between the two generations as well. The

classical despair and the defeatism of the elder writers stiffens into optimism and challenge among the more recent poets. The two themes considered, love and nature, are treated in dramatically varied fashion by the two sets of writers. Alain Grandbois and Anne Hébert see nature as antagonistic and menacing and love as either impossible or deceiving while Gatien Lapointe, Fernand Ouellette, and Paul Chamberland glory in the solace and comfort of a peaceful natural order and sing praises of the marvels and the promises of love and the loving and loved woman. Technical practices also change considerably from one generation to the next, ranging from the conservatism of the elder poets to the creative daring of the more recent poets.

The poetic works examined in this thesis are Grandbois' Les Îles de la Nuit (1944), Rivages de l'Homme (1948), and L'Etoile Pourpre (1957), all of which are collected together in the compound edition Poèmes of 1963, Les Songes en Equilibre (1942), Le Tombeau des Rois (1953), and Poèmes (1960)* of Anne Hébert, Le Temps Premier (1962), Ode au Saint-Laurent (1963), and Le Premier Mot (1967) of Gatien Lapointe, Ces Anges de Sang (1955), Séquences de l'Aile (1958), and Le Soleil Sous la Mort (1965) of Fernand Ouellette and Paul Chamberland's Terre Québec (1964) and L'Afficheur Hurle

*Poèmes contains a re-edition of Le Tombeau des Rois (1953) as well as the most recent collection of Anne Hébert's poetry, Mystère de la Parole (1960).

(1964). I do not study Lapointe's Jour Malaisé (1953) nor his Otages de la Joie (1955) because in them the poet expresses with much less skill the same general ideas that he voices in his later volumes. Genèses (1962) of Paul Chamberland could not be examined because its predominately religious bent keeps it outside of the thematic area that I have restricted myself to.

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INTRODUCTION

In the pages that follow, I will attempt to show by a careful consideration of subjects, attitudes, themes, and poetic techniques, how two generations of modern French Canadian poets--the one including Alain Grandbois and Anne Hébert and the other including Gatien Lapointe, Fernand Ouellette and Paul Chamberland--differ, in spite of a few similarities, rather radically the one from the other. I will discuss the shift in the subject from the first person singular, the "je," of Hébert and Grandbois, to the "you," the "us" and the "everyman" of the younger poets. I will trace the evolution in attitude from the resignation and deepest melancholy of the elder writers to the spirited cheerfulness, firm determination and the unflinching confidence of Lapointe, Ouellette and Chamberland. I will illustrate two distinctive and opposing treatments of the nature theme and the love theme. Finally, I intend to consider briefly some basic technical variations.

CHAPTER I

SUBJECTS

The verse of Alain Grandbois has been described as universal and committed. Some critics see it not as an unhappy inventory of an individual soul closed in upon itself and feeding on its own distress. Instead they consider it as being involved with the drama of all men inhibited by the rigorous restrictions imposed upon them by time and by their own mortality. Of his poetry, Michèle Lalonde has said:

Elle a quitté l'univers étranglé du moi en rompant le cercle vicieux de l'expérience individuelle, pour projeter le drame humain dans une perspective cosmique et le reporter sur l'échelle des infinis avec une dimension effrayante de fatalité.¹

According to these critics, Grandbois recognizes that he is not alone in his suffering and he associates his anguish with that of all men. When he speaks of his conscience and his feelings, he is speaking of the conscience and feelings of all men. The poem "Parmi les Heures" of Les Îles de la Nuit records a fraternal elan. The poet, united with all men, appeals and protests to the gods of fate who have doomed everyone to instability within the ephemeral instant:

Nous tous avec des coeurs nus comme des
chambres vides
Dans un même élan fraternel

.

Nous lèverons nos bras dans des appels durs
 comme les astres
 Cherchant en vain au bout de nos doigts
 crispés
 Ce mortel instant d'une fuyante éternité²

In other instances as well Grandbois appears to be fully engaged in all men's despair. "Je tremble de l'inépuisable angoisse/Du rivage de l'homme."³

However, to establish Grandbois' poetry as primarily universal and participatory would be to misinterpret it. The majority of his poems are actually highly subjective. They relate his private experiences and prominent in them is the heart and the sensibility of the poet.

Grandbois is not, in fact, an "engaged" and communicating poet and he has not made himself a spokesman for humanity. Why should he speak for and to men when he has discovered to his great bitterness that people will not listen. In the poem "Ah Toutes Ces Rues," the poet is ignored by and terribly alienated from other men. He has found that there is no such thing as human "fraternity."

Ah je cherchais les hommes dans l'ombre
 pour l'appui d'une égale fraternité

.

Mais ils ne me répondaient pas
 Ils fuyaient sous la pluie dans la nuit

.

Oh je sais j'ai tenté de leur parler ils me
 répondaient dans une langue étrangère

Ils me regardaient avec un étrange étonnement
 Ils riaient parfois et j'étais le fou de la nuit⁴

Disillusioned, he states that his "inner door," which might have provided him with an opening on the world, is closed forever, and he retreats deeper into himself to write primarily of his own misfortune. Grandbois' poems seem sometimes fraternal only because the readers identify so closely with the poet's personal dilemma which, in its despair before death and fleeting time, is everyman's dilemma. But even though a statement of universal realities, the poems are still the expression of the reactions and sentiments of the individual Grandbois before these realities and as such must always be read in a purely Grandboisien context. Pierre de Grandpré has attempted to define the point of view in our poet's work:

Tout cela s'entend et concerne chacun. Mais il est évident que les clefs véritables de cette poésie seraient à chercher dans la psychologie profonde de l'auteur, qu'elles ne nous sont livrées qu'indirectement, par des agrégats d'images ou de rythmes auxquels préside l'inconscient, fermé à toute indiscrete exploration rationnelle.⁵

Grandbois' poetry is full of intimate memories, dreams, hopes, and despairs which concern him only and which therefore have a deeper significance for the poet than for his reader. It is his own reaction before all the tragedy of his situation as a man that the poet records in his poetry. Grandbois, stranded and alone in his personal desert, grasps for the day and for liberation from his mortal bonds. He cries:

et moi sous mes seuls cheveux

.

et moi moi mes morts dans mon dos
 et leurs doigts lourds

et ce nombre fatal
 et leur bruit dans mon silence
 et leur effrayant silence dans mon désert

Et moi cherchant la clarté comme un homme
 de faim
 moi cherchant parmi la chevelure des larmes
 mon propre jour
 moi criant mes cris glacés dans ce vide
 inhumain
 et moi ne trouvant dans mes cris que la
 nuit décédée

et ce grand rire de pierre inattaquable⁶

He looks longingly back to what once was and to all the things
 and people that he has known and loved:

Ô mes beaux Visages avec un sourire triste

.

Ô Vous tous sur ce chemin perdu de mon
 passé⁷

He remembers a beautiful mother now dead. He evokes her gentleness and the tender glow of the flesh on her knees where, as a child, he once used to sit. He remembers her delicate fingers brushing, in a sign of affection, across his forehead. There are childish impressions which still remain of an infant epoch, memories of green parks and flowerbeds still fresh with dew at ten o'clock, of shadowy elms in the alley and of milk like the sweet sap of a crushed heart. These personal visions of a pleasant past are only applicable to and translatable by other men in that most sensitive men, at the coming to severe adulthood, yearn for an alternative to their

new condition. They often find that alternative in a dream-return to their childhood's innocence. Otherwise, because of the personal detail and the uniqueness of the individual vision, the reader is unable to make these Grandboisien memories truly his. They are the private property of the poet.

In a slim collection of publicly conscious poems, Mystère de la Parole, Anne Hébert denounces reverie and solitude. There is a seizing upon life and reality and a warm union with the world and with other human beings. In the introduction, "Poésie Solitude Rompue," she speaks of the day in all its truth and fact which vibrates anxiously and promisingly at the horizon and of the call which comes to her from all the things and people which exist so intensely about her. She is urged to sing, in her poet's voice, of men and realities. She understands that the poet has a role to play within life, not outside of it. He is to interpret the day by day pattern of human existence. He is to name, define, justify and inspire men in general as well as the men of his Quebec. He is to express man's dreams and translate his revolt and his search for dignity.

La poésie n'est pas le repos du septième jour. Elle agit au coeur des six premiers jours du monde, dans le tumulte de la terre et de l'eau confondus, dans l'effort de la vie qui cherche sa nourriture et son nom. Elle est soif et faim, pain et vin.⁸

But Mystère de la Parole (the last collection of her poems to date and the indication of a completely new concept of the world and of herself as related to it) and its attitude of belonging and participating is not representative, by any means, of the dominant tone of Anne Hébert's poetry. Actually, the greater part of her work, contained in Le Tombeau des Rois and Les Songes en Equilibre, is, like that of her cousin Saint-Denys Garneau by whom she was greatly influenced, of an intensely individual tone. It is an internal poetry of dreams and recalling, a subjective poetry where private dramas are recorded. "Par sa résonance la poésie d'Anne Hébert se situe toujours à l'étage de son coeur et de sa conscience."⁹

It is the poet's own experience before the passage of time, light and life which is described. She cries out the tragic discovery of all her missed opportunities to her mother:

Ils sont trente jours de juin,
Et moi, Maman, je veux celui-ci!
Ils sont trente jours de juin,
Mais ce ne sera plus jamais le même...
Ils sont trente jours de juin;
Peut-être pour moi était marqué
Cet aujourd'hui que j'ai manqué!¹⁰

It is her drama of succumbing to a despairing spiritual darkness which she recalls in her verse. It is her childhood joy which has been swept downstream and away forever. Those are her memories of youthful delights now gone--wild playtimes in fields, the simple friendship for her dog, a moment's silence beside her parents, the taste of strawberries and ripe apples.

It is an incommunicable fantasy world she creates, comprehensible to no one but herself:

.....mon songe
Renfermé!¹¹

This tendency to dream and to meditate upon personal demons was developed by a long childhood sickness which condemned the poet to extended sequesterations within her room. Indeed Paul Wyczynski sees Hébert's entire poetic experience as a continuation of that childhood seclusion in that it appears to take place entirely within a closed room (such as the sick chamber described in the poem "Jardin de Fièvre") which bars any expansion beyond to reality and people.

J'étouffe dans un jardin;
Des bouquets
Lâchement faits
Et noués de rubans
M'écoeurent et m'enfièvrent.

Jardin clos,
Sans vrai ciel, ni horizon;
Ciel de papier,
Mur de papier.
O fleurs des rideaux
Et de la tapisserie,
Laissez-moi donc dormir!¹²

This constant concern with the self is due also to the fact that the poet has discovered that even if she strives to bridge the gap there is no communion with others and therefore no reason to write about or for them. The poet, like all men, is very much alone.

She is caught behind but a token of a wall in

"Un Mur à Peine" and yet she is unable to progress beyond it. She has been assigned by some cruel fatality to a little space of existence and any gestures which might extend beyond her to reach others and the world have been limited severely.

Petit espace
Et mesure exacte
Des gestes futurs.¹³

In "Une Petite Morte," she speaks of each individual forced to live within his own tight interior, leading a narrow and minute existence, having to be content with arranging his own little troubles and leaving his gestures to swing alone and unconnected, ending always with himself.

In "Eveil au Seuil d'Une Fontaine," the first poem of Le Tombeau des Rois, it seems that there might be a successful movement towards a communion with other men. Gilles Marcotte says that the gesture which is created within the poet is a "générosité des mains,"¹⁴ a double action of embracing and giving, and that, at the beginning of the new day, it appears that the walls about the poet have been shattered and that there will be an accord of her soul with the souls of others and a reaching towards and a holding of others and a being held and being loved in return.

But this hope is dashed in a later poem of the same collection, "Les Mains," where a woman (the poet) sits quietly,

fascinated by her continually outstretched hands which want to give of themselves but can offer nothing but a desire of friendship and love for they are cramped by a strange fatality and can seize upon nothing. She remains there, with the offering of all of herself, but nothing she offers is accepted and the rich and generous human warmth which lies latent in her cannot be liberated and may never be exchanged with other people. Defeated, the poet withdraws deeper into herself and resolves, as does the character François of her novel Le Torrent, not to try to escape her prison of solitude, but to make it her adventure and her only wealth.

Je me penche tant que je peux. Je veux voir le gouffre, le plus près possible. Je veux me perdre en mon aventure, ma seule et épouvantable richesse.¹⁵

In his poetry, Gatien Lapointe does talk of himself, of his determination and happy anticipations, of his gloominess, and of his death. However, although he is concerned with it, the self certainly does not hold the same importance for him as it does for the poets of the older generation and he wishes to make his verse principally an involvement with other men. In "Le Pari de ne pas Mourir," his introduction to Le Premier Mot, Lapointe stresses the importance of a social poetry, the aim of which, in the most limpid language and style possible, is to communicate with others and he advocates that the poet

portray man and his destiny as well as his everyday life and tasks. Lapointe says that, as a bard, he cares for the very ordinary and very beautiful real world and that his only rightful place is at the level of common man:

Il n'est de beauté que le sillage des humains
Il n'est de vérité que le battement du coeur.¹⁶

He affirms that whenever in his verse he says "je," he speaks for all men and that the names of others mingle constantly with his. He opts for man in all his earthly reality and for the world in all its violence and splendor:

Je dis l'homme arrivant sur terre
Accueillant dans ses mains le terrestre plaisir
Je dis l'homme ployant sous le fardeau
Et construisant son nom jour après jour
Je dis l'homme découvrant la première peine
Et traçant sur le sol la première aventure
Toute la saveur du monde éclaire sa bouche
Toute l'angoisse du monde assombrit ses yeux¹⁷

Lapointe believes that, as a poet of men, he has a mission to exhort them to a transcendence of their rather grim human situation. His is a poetry of persuasion which urges man to a sort of spiritual rebirth, to a proud possession of his earth and to a bold affirmation of his presence in time and space. In many an imperative verse, he incites and even orders men to mould and build themselves, to accomplish their most obscure desires, and to tear off all the temporal shackles which bind them:

Modèle dans tes mains l'obscur désir
 Cherche au-delà de l'horizon
 Cherche au plus près de ton visage
 Souffrir devient espoir¹⁸

Creuse la saison de parfait feuillage
 Apprends sur la terre le nom de l'homme¹⁹

Construis ton coeur avec ton propre mal
 Tu n'es plus libre de mourir.²⁰

As well as beckoning him onwards, the poet can alleviate man's suffering and ease his life's load. He challenges the "laws" which restrict his fellows and he fights and defies for them. His magic powers can restore man's dignity, recreate and return to him all the candor and optimism of his childhood, and bring him the "temps premier," the new and virgin era of eternal things and limitless possibilities.

J'étouffe l'animale angoisse de mourir²¹

J'éveille d'un souffle chaque enfance
 J'allume un phare au pied de chaque route²²

Je mets des nids dans chaque main
 Dans chaque pas je plante un mot d'espoir²³

J'ouvre à la chair un jour nouveau.²⁴

Je lâcherai un printemps dans le monde²⁵

J'ouvre le seuil d'une pure saison
Chaque pas est un rendez-vous d'amour²⁶

Dedicated to mankind in general, Lapointe's poetry is also devoted, more particularly and to a slightly lesser degree, to the people of Quebec. His verse is a praise of Quebec's seasons, wilderness and people as well as an indirect and non-ideological translation of the political discontent of its inhabitants and a glorious vision of its tomorrow.

Ici le printemps est un bref éclat de rire
Et l'automne un grand fruit qui joint les rives²⁷

Mon pays a franchi ses frontières de mort
Mon pays sort debout sur le seuil du printemps
Là-bas à l'Est un fleuve se mêle à la mer

La mer a pris mon pays par la main
Pour la douceur et les tourments du monde . . .²⁸

Fernand Ouellette, especially in the volume, Le Soleil Sous la Mort, sees both his verse and his life as acts of solidarity with humanity.

His poetry is concerned with modern man relentlessly tracked by his own hellish creation, the atomic bomb. It urges men to escape from the approaching nuclear peril before it is too late. It also envisions a destroyed humanity:

Cours ô funambule sur ta corde en givre!

Le soleil se tait.

L'atome se suicide.

L'éternité
se détache
de l'homme.²⁹

The poet sympathizes with those who have suffered and died in the wars of our epoch. In "Mémoire" he strains to bring back, somehow, those whom he considers his brothers, those whom he calls "our dead," the victims of concentration camps and bomb attacks. He identifies with their deaths and even sees himself as partially, although very distantly, responsible for their extermination.

Morts de Varsovie
Buchenwald
Oradour
Hiroshima

sortez du soleil!

Revenez pour les ruisseaux,
pour les roses et rossignols.³⁰

His poetry, in its involvement with others, is not all

sympathy. It criticizes man as well, but in denouncing, the poet does not stand apart and, recognizing himself as one with all men, he acknowledges his own guilty complicity.

There are occasional angry outbursts throughout Ouellette's verse against man and his capacity to be blind and insensitive. He paints a picture of man, himself included, who refuses to see and appreciate all the fine and delicate natural things which exist about him.

On déposait la lune dans un passé de décence.³¹

O l'huile de l'automne, terreuse et forte,
que nul homme ne veut boire. . .³²

En nous,
les insensibles au jour,³³

He is disappointed in soulless and emotionless man who cannot make the effort to love sincerely and whose "affections" are often warped by mercenary physical desire. He speaks of the gaping abyss which has usurped the place of the heart within man's breast. He describes, in "Stèle," a spiritually sterile man who wastes his life in machinal gestures and sentiments. Obscurity is his natural habitat and he is uneasy in the light and truth of the day. His death is as pathetic and ignoble as his life and his terrified cry is a dagger which strikes at and condemns too late his worthless existence.

He condemns modern men, responsible for the presence of

deathly nuclear war machines.

Il donnait l'amour solaire,
l'homme
qui maintenant amorce la mort.³⁴

Contemporary reality in all its harsh, chrome-plated ugliness does not escape the poet's indignation. In this mathematical, mechanical and cold time, chemistry and other technical philosophies are all-embracing and omnipresent, cities suffocate in their own gasoline fumes, love becomes a business transaction and childhood and fairy-tales are scientifically regulated.

Dans les régions du rachat, profondes cités
en filigrane dans l'éther, les pleins désirs émergent d'un plasma de pétrole.

.

Café moka! La Presse! Rue Sainte-Catherine!
L'odeur des banques se mêle aux brises de l'enfance. Au long des devantures, les passants surchauffent un ciel éteint.

Ils s'enfoncent dans la brume de chlorophylle. Nul souvenir de neige ne vient filtrer l'éclairage d'une saison de néons.³⁵

Sur des berceuses d'atomes, l'enfant balance ses fées blondes, et l'amant aligne ses amours aux cadences d'un journal de Bourse.³⁶

The personal and self-reflecting element is not absent from the poetry of Paul Chamberland. In "Le Poème sans image," the poet encounters himself during a night of fleeting streets and strange, unfriendly rain and, dismal and confused, he perceives his life's passage from childhood to adulthood. He recognizes the years now faded and dispersed which will never return.

je me regardais fuir pour toujours l'allée des anciennes années³⁷

But the subjective aspect is a very minor one in the whole of the work of Paul Chamberland. Indeed, his conception of poetry is that it be a portrayal of the actuality and the human circumstance. He is proud to have rejected, for the most part, the narcissistic verse of personal reflection and he says that he has cracked the looking-glass poem, in which the poet does nothing but contemplate himself.

Non, je n'attends rien de la poésie. Je coupe court à tous ces mythes de cabinet: poésie-exercice-spirituel, poésie-aventure-intérieure, poésie-transmutation-des-mots, poésie-poésie-PO-HE-ZZiiie. Tout ça, ce sont des excuses, des défenses, des écrans pour masquer ce que est à DIRE: les Forces majeures et enchevêtrées de la Terre et de l'Homme, l'Histoire en son tuf et ses geysers.³⁸

Chamberland has a universal conscience. He laments "everyman" whose route on earth is treacherous and plagued by siren song and whose every step forward is the possibility of a

fall. Man is obscure, dissolvable and very expendable:

l'on s'évanouit sur la rive obscure frêle figure translucide
une espèce de pellicule soluble illusoire agitation de la figure
désertée³⁹

The poet is concerned with modern man in the contemporary world as well as with mortal man in the universal poetic sense. He speaks of those who are hurtled to their deaths on the highways. In the second poem of Trois "Durées" Inédites, Chamberland trembles to see the thin strand of blood on the neck of the little girl crushed by a car and he barely contains his rage at the rains which disperse the green perfume of her body scarcely formed in this world. He writes of children destroyed in wars. He identifies, in "Hauts-Fournaux," with a continent's down-trodden poor. The poet and the worker are associated and bound together by the same angry dream of revolt which will liberate them of their masters. His concern is great for men who are tortured and maimed and everyday afflicted by the terrible nuclear threat.

les corps sont beaux à l'heure du désastre
et cette heure est à chaque minute ici ou là dans
le monde
lorsque le monde n'est plus que menace nuit piquée
de rasoirs hurlements sirènes fumées fumées horri-
bles fumées de bombardements d'incendies mons-
tres de fer plaquées sur le fugitif
l'homme petit insecte traqué terrassé éclabousse le
monde d'un clair filet de sang d'une pâle détresse
de peau qui est contestation de la solidité nucléaire⁴⁰

But Chamberland is associated almost entirely with a specific region of men--with the "pays," with Quebec and its

inhabitants sunk into a political, moral and social impasse. In the tradition of the poets Pablo Neruda, Antonio Machado and Vladimir Mayakovsky whom he admires for their "engagement" in the matters of their people and their countries, Paul Chamberland is foremost a patriot. Terre Quebec is dedicated "au pays" while l'Afficheur Hurle is devoted "à mes compatriotes."

Homme de cette terre QUEBEC, de ce "pays incertain,"
je veux nommer le pays, l'arracher aux serres du froid et
de la nuit, le délivrer, dans mon poème, de cette obscure
parole qui gémit encore aux limbes de sa préhistoire.⁴¹

In his verse, he identifies with the revolutionary cause of the FLQ and he supports them in opposing the English "overlords."

nous restons camarades nous restons
vos raisons sont les nôtres et qu'importe
qu'au pilori de l'anglais aujourd'hui
vous tourniez que nous tournions demain⁴²

The poet is tightly linked to the Quebec drama and nothing, he says, will ever save him from the bitter torment of the men of his land. His suffering, expressed so often throughout his verse, is a participatory and a fraternal suffering for he cannot separate himself from their anguish.

je vis je meurs d'un pays poignardé dans le plein coeur
de ses moissons de ses passions
et ma douleur est laide je ne sais la nommer⁴³

His fellow Quebecers are so closely integrated to his very physical being that he feels within his own flesh a decay and a

rot corresponding to theirs.

mais je sentais
dans mes chairs la décomposition de mille visages
parents⁴⁴

In his poems he enumerates Quebec's grievances and condemns its oppressors. He lashes out at the masters of Quebec--the sweetly-smiling, pot-bellied, patronizing and condescending "speak-white" English. He laments his people's social, political and economic servitude and talks of their ignominious disintegration as a race in a land which is theirs but occupied. These prostituted people are sinking into anonymity and when finally vanished from the planet's surface will not even possess the curt epitaph of beheaded people or starvation victims. Their legacy will be a shameful white unwritten page in a history book.

en la ruelle Saint-Christophe s'achève un peuple jamais
né une histoire à dormir debout un conte qui finit
par le début⁴⁵

Chamberland sees his poetry as an instrument of political action. The poem is politically active and it is fired, like a volley, at the oppressors of the French Canadians.

. . . le poème-salve s'arme jusqu'aux dents

.

la poésie s'emmanche et vibre au même bois que le
couteau⁴⁶

In order to hurl it as a challenge, Chamberland risks
disfiguring the poem so that it is no longer poetically and
stylistically correct or even readable.

que le poème se défigure que le poème s'appopulace
qu'il se fasse boue et crachat au front des étoiles trop
pures qui minaudent par-delà les barbelés des villes⁴⁷

CHAPTER I. FOOTNOTES

1. Michèle Lalonde, "Témoignages," Liberté, II (January-February, 1960), p. 185.
2. Alain Grandbois, "Parmi les Heures...", Poèmes, Editions de l'Hexagone, Montreal, 1963, pp. 24-25.
3. "Ah Terre Rongeuse," Ibid., p. 122.
4. "Ah Toutes Ces Rues...", Ibid., pp. 79-80.
5. Pierre de Grandpré, Dix Ans de Vie Littéraire au Canada Français, Beauchemin, Montreal, 1966, p. 35.
6. "Ces Murs Protecteurs...", Poèmes, pp. 57-58.
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CHAPTER II

ATTITUDES

Alain Grandbois' poetry has been said to express a vigorous liberty and the poet, in spite of the fateful forces which repress him, has been said to stand up to defy his destiny and even wager to win against it. Several of his poems are characterized by optimism and challenge. In "Le Prix de Don" for example, there is glad freedom and victorious cheerfulness. In it, Grandbois has surmounted his human condition and has climbed up into the clear, open sky above the forbidden glaciers where he at last breathes deeply and without restraint. The desired "delivery of the day" and the time of the perfect absolute are imminent. There will be no more night and all the days, forever after, will be united into one unending and joyous day of light and sun.

Je respire
L'allégresse s'empare de moi
J'habite aux sommets
Des glaciers interdits

.

Et l'aube fraîche
C'est le matin prochain
Tous les jours seront réunis¹

Grandbois does not withdraw but, part of the pulsating reality about him, he is perceptive and responsive to life. He associates himself with the rustle and the vitality of the leaves in the poplars and with the steamer, its siren shrieking

proudly as it departs for new coasts and the freedom of the open sea. He is sure of himself. He brims with a tough confidence and proudly affirms that he is very much alive ("Je suis vivant.")² The last stanza of the poem records a different attitude however. Jolted back to the reality of death and the passing of all things, the poet explains his recent optimism as temporary. His is and will remain a "shipwrecked" heart, tragically enlightened in the ways of life.

Ah belles feuilles mortes
 Allées solitaires bois dépouillés
 Les coeurs naufragés
 Parfois remontent à la surface³

In "Amour," the poet is tensely defiant and in a triple dare he challenges a bullet to reach his heart, spill all his blood and destroy both himself and his loved one. But in the very next stanza, the defiance becomes a fearful hesitancy and a doubt in his own strength as Grandbois envisions an approaching storm which will sweep the two lovers away, like so many fragments of dust, to their deaths. The poet is, in his own eyes, already moribund.

Mais sous l'arbre frémissant
 De l'approche des noirs cyclones
 Devant ces durs océans
 Battant leurs vagues follement folles
 Nos péchés mêlés à nos doigts humiliés
 Prisonnier des mensonges perdus
 L'ombre nous avalant comme une poussière
 Avais-je la force
 De te garder dans mes bras
 Comme un avare moribond son trésor⁴

The optimism is occasional and short-lived as the two preceding examples have illustrated and it is despair and resignation, not hope and struggle, which are the dominant tones of Grandboisien poetry. Grandbois is tragically aware of and reconciled to the utter hopelessness of the human condition.

He has desired a true possession of time and a real assertion of himself in each glad moment of his life. He has strived to capture the pleasurable seconds. He has wanted to make them eternal and himself eternal within them. But he knows that the instant cannot be retained and that it moves quickly away and so does each succeeding to be cherished moment until there is nothing left of them but memories and life is gone and one is old and soon to die.

For Grandbois, childhood and its naive outlook on the world is lost forever. Gone is the child's faith in wonders, gone is his comfortable "oneness" with a kindly universe and his marvelous infant-knowledge of the secrets of the stars. The poet requests a return to this time of spiritual buoyancy and innocence and he asks for the child's wonderstruck and candid attitude towards life, ("Je veux un oeil émerveillé,")⁵ but all along he is aware that he may never go back to that glorious epoch when all was possible and the deadly truths of the world were not known to him.

The poet has even lost faith in his anticipated "absolute." He realizes that the ardently wished for "tomorrows of gold" are but supreme illusion and he damns his quest for

them. He terminates his search, fully aware that on the bright other side of the sun, in the dream absolute he sought so long, there will be no release of the mortal captives of this existence. All the promises have proved deceit.

He is remarkably resigned to the fact of his death and he almost welcomes its impending approach. There is an alarming tone of passive and stoic acceptance in the statement,

Il y aura demain mon éternelle nuit
 La dure et seule nudité de mes os
 Ma surdité mes yeux aveugles
 Les fles de mes archipels
 Seront profondément englouties⁶

"En vain" is a frequent leitmotive in Grandbois' poetry. He realizes that all struggle is futile and that he can never win against his inevitable future eternal silence and death. He is all too ready to accept defeat. He will not make the necessary movements of self-liberation but, unbudging and accepting the failure of everything he attempts, he will remain passive and quiet. "Je demeurerai muet et paralysé."⁷ He withdraws into a shadowy self, reveling with an almost masochistic pleasure in his own anguish to which he willingly succumbs.

Qu'une nuit sans fin déroule sur moi ses
 voiles de plomb

.

Je ne veux plus qu'enfoncer ma nuque
 et mes doigts dans ce délire
 Où veille le froid brûlant de la dernière
 solitude⁸

He is devoted faithfully and religiously to his distressed
 solitude and he discovers, in the night of his discouragement,
 a strange sweetness and comfort.

Et j'égrenais ma solitude comme la dévote
 son rosaire⁹

Et la pluie m'enveloppait comme un doux
 manteau
 La nuit et la pluie me couvraient comme
 de tendres vêtements¹⁰

Demoralized, he flounders in self-pity. The little he wished
 for in life is denied him.

Je ne demandais pourtant qu'un peu de
 jour et de quiétude
 Je ne demandais qu'un oeil et qu'un reflet
 d'épaule
 Je ne demandais que ma part d'homme
 assoiffé de lambeaux¹¹

Before he has lived at all, he is overcome by old age and
 death.

Je n'ai rien vu
 Je n'ai rien goûté
 Je n'ai rien souffert
 Et soudain l'âge bondit sur moi comme
 une panthère noire¹²

In the slender volume Mystère de la Parole are found the only elements of optimism and spiritual vivaciousness in the whole of the poetic work of Anne Hébert. In its poems there is strength and the assurance and authority of one who has finally dominated all things. The world the poet describes in "Naissance du Pain," where all is maturing, bubbling, moving, rich, sparkling and boisterous, mirrors her own enthusiasms and the overflowing of life and vigor that is within her.

Le chaume cru crève la campagne, la vie souterraine
laisse percer sa chevelure verte. Le ventre de la terre
découvre ses fleurs et ses fruits au grand soleil de
midi.

L'azur poudroie comme une poussière d'eau; nos
mains peintes au ras du champ deviennent pareilles
à de grands pavots clairs.

Toute forme et couleur provoquées montent de la
terre telles une respiration visible et rythmée.

Le champ palpite et moutonne, toison blanchissante
sous l'éclat strident de l'été aux cigales acides.¹³

In "Survienne la Rose des Vents" there is a call to action and to victory over miserable solitude and self-pity. When all seems beyond hope and when deceptions and depressions have handicapped the soul, the wind with its wild and stimulating flavor of high seas and adventurous freedoms comes like a vehement prophet to scold, to whip, and to invite the poet away from her closed room.

The cheerfulness of Mystère de la Parole might mark the final and definitive stage in a mental evolution from sad melancholy to optimism but generally speaking most of the poetry of Anne Hébert, as found in Le Tombeau des Rois and Les Songes en Equilibre, reflects the same disillusion and defeat as regards the human predicament as the poetry of Alain Grandbois.

She understands, like Grandbois, that time takes all the beauty with it, leaving poets and men with nothing. The summer day in "Jour de Juin," with its precious full minutes of flowers, wind, light and azur, does not stay long enough in her room for her to hold and caress it. Gracious realities are ephemeral and the poet is forever denied possession of them.

Dans la chambre, le jour,
Comme ce chat,
Jamais ne dure assez
Pour qu'on puisse le caresser.¹⁴

In "Instant," by means of the abrupt lines and the shortness of the poem itself, the poet shows that pleasing experiences, such as the joy engendered in the observer by the sight of a tree in the morning and a child beneath it, singing, are momentary and that all that composes such splendid visions is in constant danger of disruption and dispersion. The grace of it all is poised precariously

within the moment.

La rue paisible,
 Le vert transparent
 Des feuilles,
 L'inflexion
 Des bouleaux
 Et l'élanement
 Des branches;
 Un enfant
 Qui chante,
 Un homme qui passe;
 Tout le tendre
 Et doux matin:
 Cet air tranquille
 Et arrêté,
 Cette grâce
 Posée
 Dans l'instant.¹⁵

The little nymphs which represent the poet's childhood in "Oh Mes Joies Infantines" danced too near the river's edge and disappeared and all that is left of them are rings on the water's surface. Their very existence is discredited by the grey and dry old professor who explains the lingering circles as geometry.

The poet is obsessed with suffocating death:

Ces menuets effacés
 Ces mains perdues,
 Ces pas qu'on cherche. . .¹⁶

Hoping to establish something that will remain, Anne Hébert builds a dream world. But this world of reverie exists in a precarious equilibrium. The dreams are unstable and quick to vanish. "Une force irrépressible empêche le songe de se fixer, de se figer, de se cristalliser."¹⁷

In the poem "Jour de Juin," all the fairy-tale--of cats, little girls in brightly checked dresses, and yellow sheafs of wheat--is apparition and quickly melted.

Et le songe en équilibre
Est tout désarticulé . . .
De tout cet artifice
Patiemment édifié,
Il n'est plus que des débris . . .18

The poet is depressed, considering these disappointments of time, childhood, death and make-believe. However, she does not wish to overcome this melancholy but adopts a very complaisant attitude towards it. So well acquainted with and faithful to her sadness, which has been with her so long, she makes no attempt to eradicate it. Speaking of her "douleur," she says

Que ne puis-je la faire sortir!
Mais qui remplirait
Alors le vide de sa présence
Dedans moi?
Le plaisir y serait mal à l'aise,
Et moi aussi avec lui,
Depuis le temps qu'on se connaît
Ma douleur et moi . . .19

Lost and defeated, she flounders about in her despair in "Sous la Pluie." Her soul-weariness and her inability to escape the dull sequence of her days is reflected in the thudding and monotonous repetition of certain words and phrases in the poem, such as "sous la pluie/sous la brume" and "perdu."²⁰ Her heart, faithless and listless and without

fire and spirit, is one and the same with the foggy and vacant rainfilled landscape about her. Her personal emptiness and her spiritual grayness and indecisiveness match the mist-covered and indistinguishable environment in which she stumbles:

En vain dans mon coeur
Je guette.
Il ne passe rien,
Rien que la pluie,
Que la brume.²¹

In "Un Mur à Peine," the poet's fingers, like the uppermost branches of the birch tree, seem to be extended, apparently grasping for a piece of sky and a way out of their humble and restricted terrestrial state. But this act of grabbing is purely mechanical and without any desire and, not really wanting to find her liberation, the poet is prepared to remain fixed in her inertia. Life flows, in "Mort," from her weary and passive arms but there is no attempt made to retain it. The sun and life flow from between powerless, tired and unmotivated fingers, spread apart to facilitate the passage.

La vie coule
De mes bras
Las;
Le soleil s'écoule
On ne sait où,
Entre mes doigts écartés,
Il luit
Et fuit
Par ces petites portes ouvertes
Que font mes doigts las.²²

Hébert is linked in unbreakable and devoted wedlock to a future death.

Seule ma fidélité me lie.
O liens durs
Que j'ai noués
En je ne sais quelle nuit secrète
Avec la mort!²³

Very resigned to her mortality, she sees herself as already dead in a verse of "La Chambre de Bois" where she is like a dead root or a clump of earth. "Je suis nue et toute noire sous un arbre amer."²⁴ In "La Fille Maigre," the proud attention that she lavishes upon her bones, preparing them so that they will be attractive in their final resting place, just as one would polish up medals for an exhibit, betrays an attitude of calm acceptance of the grave and death. She is peacefully reconciled and, in a direct and straightforward manner untinged even with sentiments of regret, she affirms that under her flesh she is a skeleton and very mortal.

Je suis une fille maigre
Et j'ai de beaux os.

J'ai pour eux des soins attentifs
Et d'étranges pitiés

Je les polis sans cesse
Comme de vieux métaux.²⁵

There is a strange submission in the poem "Le Tombeau des Rois," as the poet, like a sacrificial victim, yields to death.

Et ma chair qui tremble:
Offrande rituelle et soumise.²⁶

Gatien Lapointe's verse is defiantly optimistic and the expression of a fighting philosophy in spite of occasional spiritual blacknesses and the frights he feels for fragile men. Evident in it is his own determined hope as well as a profound faith in all men's ability to surmount their human situation. "La poésie c'est d'abord pour moi un homme condamné à mourir et qui dit NON."²⁷

Lapointe is confident that, if man only acts, if he opposes to the forces of his destiny which plague him a work or a created thing, if he struggles against all odds as if he will gain everything, he will one day transcend all that constricts him. There are images throughout Lapointe's poetry of a glorious people triumphing and establishing on this earth a dignity of men. And these human renaissances are generally associated with combustion, crackling flames, and glowing yellow, red, and orange lights.

Et l'homme est un soleil qui grandit dans la terre²⁸

Je vois l'homme jetant sur la nuit sa rouge aurore²⁹

L'homme,
Cette flamme debout
Dans le vent,³⁰

There is a vision of man liberated from death, time, and mortal mediocrity and anonymity, present in a day of victory and in a miraculous world of an eternal present, a world of

white and yellow brilliance, of sun and of an enveloping and fraternal nature with its birds, rivers and abundant greenness. And this "premier jour," or "temps premier," is not just a dream but a possibility. Sometimes it is very close at hand:

Et confiant le soleil marche tout près des hommes,
Presque parmi eux;

Rêve avec eux d'un jour fraternel.³¹

Sometimes it is beginning:

Un monde nouveau commence à ma droite³²

In other verses, it has already come true:

C'était un pur matin dans l'oeil des bêtes
Et parler ouvrait à l'homme une éternité.³³

With regard to the poet himself, he is at times anguished and even resigned to his own private destiny of mortal man.

Je suis sous terre
Et le chanvre de l'air pèse sur mon visage
Qui fendra mes yeux qui fendra ma bouche
Pour que monte l'arbre de printemps pur

Les racines étouffent mon visage
Je suis sous terre
J'emprunte aux saisons le nom de ma douleur.³⁴

But the tendency to fight and challenge, to create himself and his own destiny, in defiance to the gods, is much greater than

the tendency to flounder. With Lapointe there is no weakness and no crumbling of the self, but instead determination, strength, and rigidity of spirit. Optimism and hope are the major sentiments of his poetry.

He affronts and refuses the destiny which is being prepared for him.

Ma chair se rassemble comme un défi!³⁵

J'abolirai la mort je vivrai à tout prix.³⁶

He moulds himself, orders and constructs his world, and affirms and situates himself in time and space.

Et j'ai dessein d'organiser
Ordonner afin de ne pas mourir³⁷

J'affirme un grand besoin d'être et d'aimer³⁸

The poet is born again from his wounds and his misfortunes rather than destroyed by them and he is strengthened by all that chains and binds him. "Je nais de mes propres blessures."³⁹ By writing, he can cry "no" to his fate. By means of words he can construct a new and finer reality and establish himself within it.

A chaque instant mot à mot
Je construis mon univers
Je prends racine dans une présence⁴⁰

There is no futile obsession with the past but rather a

concern with all the possibilities of the present and the future. He does not withdraw from reality but, accepting the risks, plunges into life and all its danger because each day and each moment bring opportunities and the promise of his salvation. "J'ai choisi de vivre dans l'instant--avec danger, avec passion;"⁴¹ As opposed to the earlier poets for whom life was often a frustrating and cruel condemnation, for Lapointe, just to be alive, in spite of the occasional hurt and unhappiness, is a joy and a victory. He fervently accepts all the bitterness and all the marvel of life and he speaks of the "Douce déchirante merveille d'être."⁴²

His optimism is irrepressible and he sees that all is before him and yet to be accomplished. Ignoring the rest--the sorrows and the restrictions of men--all he knows is that which he imagines and hopes for.

Vivre c'est aller vers plus de lumière
Et je ne sais que ce que j'imagine.⁴³

Je ne peux pas m'empêcher d'espérer⁴⁴

At times it appears that he has discovered the eternal present (much sought but never found by Alain Grandbois and Anne Hébert) in all its green and luscious perfection, uncontaminated by time and death.

On me nomme en un présent infini⁴⁵

He still retains the candor and the magic of childhood,

lost forever to the elder generation poets, and its positive and hopeful attitude has never left him.

Je garderai les yeux de mon enfance⁴⁶

Je reconnais ma parole d'enfant⁴⁷

Chaque aube me réveille au bord de mon enfance
Un air de printemps me met sur la route
Et la montagne monte au rythme de mon pied⁴⁸

Childhood is a weapon, a lamp and refuge in his adulthood.

Enfance ô lampe souveraine⁴⁹

Mon enfance est une épée vive⁵⁰

Enfance, ô falaise où je m'agrippe!⁵¹

Death is a major consideration in the poetry of Fernand Ouellette. The poet describes the terrified quaking of the human body when life, too "blonde" and too carefree, stumbles inevitably against the hardness and the somberness of death. He refers to the "night dust," the seeds of black death which seep into men's eyes, covering and choking all the life glitter within them.

But Ouellette sees that suffering and mortality can be overcome. Indeed, Ouellette is almost constantly optimistic and he never ceases to see "le soleil sous la mort." In the

poem, "Audience au Plein de l'Espace," death hangs over the poet like a heavy black umbrella and yet, in spite of its menace, he continues to listen to the thrush and its song of life and birth.

Sous la mort en parasol, j'écoute le rite
pénétrant de la grive.

Le frais dessin d'un rythme de naissance
qui m'allège.⁵²

Ouellette cannot contain his own happy hope. He is positive that the death which grips him can be cast off and he exclaims:

Force du soleil
me brûle de sève!
Et depuis les chevilles
brise ma mort!⁵³

He talks of personal conquest:

Et lorsque de l'arbre surgit ma parole de
conquête, la fonte fraîche du soleil gran-
dissait le blé.⁵⁴

His poetry speaks of men, who, like conquering heroes, transcend their humble earthliness and advance continuously and unhesitatingly in a triumphant walk towards the sun, liberty, and life. Self-pity, frustration and spiritual collapse, brought on by a sad realization of the human condition, are unknown to them and they affirm a stubborn will to live.

In "Et Nous Aimions," there is a resplendent image of

mankind with all the madness and fury of fiery spirit in its flesh, ascending into a rich, bright, and glowing white space. Man is speaking, crying, commanding and ordering and there is talk of "borning" and of living joyfully and fully.

Ainsi nous parlions avec une voix en
naissance qui hurle.
Ainsi le délire des feux
dans la chair.

.

Et nous avançons dans le blanc,
et nous vivions de vie,
et nous aimions.⁵⁵

In "Géologie" man rises so high above the world of mortal men that he soon finds himself beyond the sun itself. In a glorious line, the poet describes the victory of ascended man.

Le soleil se hissait à l'homme.⁵⁶

In "Epopées" there is a vision, which, because of its surrealist and ethereal qualities, brings to mind the paintings of Marc Chagall. Human forms float high in space in a dizzying and happy whirl of soaring birds and beating wings, flashes of brilliant light and color, and clusters of stars.

Quand les poitrines bolides de par l'espace
relient cent villes d'étoile.

Car du granit tranché par feu, les dynas-
ties d'oiseaux comme une foire d'éclairs
abondante retrouvent le monde.

Epopées de haut vertige!

.

Et se prolonge d'espoir en espoir la pure
chronique de l'aile.⁵⁷

"Hors du Soleil" portrays man, very much alive, marching determinedly across a landscape and pulling from it the bones of death in order to let the vital green show through again. He removes the traces of the grave from his environment and both he and the earth are renewed, rewarmed, rekindled and re-inspired with life, light and warmth.

Les vivants se mettent en marche
arrachant les os des paysages.

Et le Nord apaise sa violence vive.

La chaleur glisse lente
comme une femme glisse
hors du soleil.⁵⁸

The possibility of the miracle is always present in Ouellette's poetic vision. There is a thwarting of death and even a resurrection in "Etincelle." There is the spectacle of human bodies, like tight petals which swell and finally explode into blossom, breaking open and blooming in fantastic countries where the sun never sets.

Eclosion de corps-pétales
et de pays solaires.
Invasion de l'oeil sur le monde.

Qu'ils respirent
les vieux ensevelis
qui reviennent parmi les naissants.⁵⁹

"Langue de l'Aile" reports "la forte in/vasion de l'air sur la mort,"⁶⁰ and describes a race of giant men who are strong, proud, confident and free:

Car l'atterrissage d'un ciel à nos lèvres se
prépare.

Et sur terre, par un air de guitare, nos ar-
tères prolongent les gratte-ciel,

Nos alphabets mûrissent sur des toits qui
montent.⁶¹

"Vers Nous" indicates a violent and determined urgency. The poet is certain that men are close to reinventing themselves and that, with stars in their hands like grenades, they may crush the memory of all that they were before (death-bound) and accomplish and arrive at their desired image of themselves. There is also a vision of a new and eternal world--all greenness, vegetable wealth, flowering and love.

Vers nous venons
avec des étoiles aux mains comme des grenades.
Terrassons notre mémoire!

Et se lèvent des images grandes ouvertes,
jusqu'à l'herbe et l'amour!⁶²

Paul Chamberland's poetry is characterized by optimistic visions of a revolting and defiant Quebec and by the determined hope of the revolutionary poet himself who realizes that he must rise above his personal melancholies because, as spokesman for

the rights of his fellow French Canadians as well as for all men, he has a role to play and a job to accomplish.

There are times when Chamberland does not seem to envision anything for Quebec. He exclaims that his "pays" is dying and that never will the foundations be laid for the much desired "living space" and the sovereign state. All his people's projects are aborted in their beginnings.

au temps nul de naître jamais de mourir toujours
-- tout lieu se dérobe à fonder le pays l'espace de vivre--
quelles mains viennent palper nos fronts barrés⁶³

But generally his verse is visionary and promises much.

Throughout, the lines are crowded with images of a revolt which will produce an independent and proud Quebec. Certainly, there are images of night, blackness, padlocks, cold, and suffocation. But with them are the liberation images of daylight, fire and blood. Indeed, the frequent symbol of free-flowing blood is an important one in Chamberland's poetry and represents the angry and frenzied revolt of Quebecers shut up too long in the night of their submission. The poet mentions, for example, "le jour humain du sang."⁶⁴

Chamberland talks of an undaunted people who struggle and protest. He explains their first "strides" in the reconquest of their dignity. He describes the "visage du feu"⁶⁵ which will break open the barricaded doors of their nights and bite into and melt the mooring ropes of repression. He imagines the splashing of blood, padlocked too long, on the pavement. In "Les Nuits Armées," the time of the "matins

soldats"⁶⁶ has arrived and the poet's brothers, their cries reverberating in his nerve cells and their footsteps drumming over his vertebrae, are marching, armed, hot-tempered and militant in quest of their day and their release from bondage. They are confident that they can wrench from the "hundred nights" their "TERRE QUEBEC." The ferocity of a people is depicted in "Deuil 4 Juin 1963." There is the violent sound of insurrection--throbbing, hammering, smashing, heaving, thundering, exploding and blasting as well as a description of the tools of destruction and rebuilding--anvils, powder, canons, bombs, clashing metals and forges. In "Poème de l'Antérévolution I," Chamberland's countrymen, endowed with a fiery and superhuman power, direct and participate in a world-wide upheaval which springs from theirs.

nous serons de nos armes de ce temps des christ rouges
qui vendangent les rois et tirent des prisons des nations bla-
sonnées aux couleurs de l'enclume⁶⁷

At one point in Terre Québec, Chamberland is so transported by his optimism that he speaks as though the political and social metamorphosis has already been wrought. He describes an entire people, finally liberated and radiant, who have abolished death, cold, and oppression and who now possess their land. Secure within their reacquired state, they are surrounded by wheat and warmth, laden tables, and black, rich soils. Summer rings loudly and gleefully in their very marrow.

il nous fallait ces cris d'avril tous ces miroirs en feu
 aux lèvres du ciel émigré sur nos toits
 pour forcer l'hiver et la mort jusqu'au plus obscur de
 nos os
 pour y raviver l'étincelle aux reins de tout un peuple
 enfin radiant l'espace de chemins guerriers

ah blé chaleur et table épaisse rituel
 des sols noirs et gras tout le ciel
 d'un jet dans nos labours
 ah la danseuse incendiaire au long du fleuve
 artériel notre corps notre été retenti
 jusque dans la moelle l'espace
 notre patrimoine sous les quatre épées du vent
 et les forêts les banquises les gulf-stream
 cinglant l'horizon de nos semailles⁶⁸

Concerned also with all of mankind, Chamberland fears that it might erase itself in the sweat of meaningless and futile labor and in the fury of war. But doubt becomes hope and the poet visualizes man, fresh, free, and cleansed of the memory of all he was before, recommencing his story on the white page of morning. He reaffirms his presence in the world and in life.

il avait inventé contre sa mort les paysages de la force
 il cimentait de salive l'ossature des montagnes
 il imposait aux eaux la forme innombrable de son corps
 la lune remontait le cours de ses artères
 fleur cadencée du plaisir
 il avait femme dans l'espace à toutes défaillances de la nuit
 et l'hirondelle perpétuait le long cri acéré de ses bras
 jusqu'au seuil du feu⁶⁹

Because of the distress he feels so strongly for his Quebec, the poet often sinks helplessly into a state of profound unhappiness, spiritual blackout, and even, at times,

self-pity because he belongs to the wretched subject race of French Canadians. He cries out that, poor in both his name and his life, he knows no longer what to do or where to go on this earth. He is guilty, like Grandbois, of resigning himself too readily to his melancholy and of glorying in his victim's role. Motionless, apathetic, and strangely content, he confesses:

immobile j'adore l'Interdiction⁷⁰

But, unlike Alain Grandbois and Anne Hébert, this weakness is only a temporary condition and it does not characterize Chamberland's general attitude. The desire to transcend his misery is much stronger. When he is at his lowest he will suddenly scream out that what he is--a human being and a French Canadian--he will defend and protect, at all costs. He realizes that he cannot remain entangled forever in his frustrations since, as a poet of Quebec, he has a role to indicate the way (he calls himself a "lampe"), provoke "L'Événement" and "La Chose,"⁷¹ and bring the day and the light to his people.

aux nuits fermées la césure du jour⁷² j'intente

He is very much alive, active, and energetic for his Quebec.

je vis je suis sobre et vivant j'ai tout mon sang pour
mon pays et ma vigueur pour l'y ensourcer libre et dru⁷³

He becomes giant-like, fearfully avenging and even slightly rabid in his determination to fight the oppressors of

all men. His challenges are bold. He says that in speaking, he "tears," and that his words and his glances have the strength of claws. So big is his appetite for the tormenters of others, that he would not hesitate to guzzle greedily all the established and crowned people, all the murderers of children, and all the extinguishers of sky and sun. He will crucify, he says, all the violators of the temple of life. In a section of l'Afficheur Hurle, he erupts in a feverish condemnation of the callous masters of the humble.

aux acquéreurs
 aux financiers
 aux putassiers
 aux cabotins
 aux mangeurs d'hommes
 aux honnêtes hommes
 aux croâ croâ
 aux pilleurs d'âmes
 aux négrophages
 aux négriers de peuples
 aux lanceurs de missiles
 aux monnayeurs de sueurs humaines
 aux gardes-chiourme de la vie

je dis:
 vous ne l'emporterez pas en paradis
 nous aurons votre peau

je dis: MERDE⁷⁴

CHAPTER II. FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER III

NATURE

In Alain Grandbois' poetry the nature in which men and the poet live is immense and infinite. One cannot define its extremities for it has none and its elements of skies, atmospheres, deserts, plains, galaxies, and seas are boundless. "La mer baigne tout mon horizon/La mer est illimitée."¹ This cosmic spaciousness is troubled and angry. It is in an almost constant state of upheaval and terrifying turmoil. Its components are unstable and the "eternal" natural laws which once governed them have been revoked. Mammoth rivers overflow their banks, red-hot hells are unleashed and blaze from above, planets are toppled out of their orbits and volcanoes jump and roar. Inhumanly vast and empty spaces are shrouded in perpetual blackness and great winds, originating at the poles, whirl across them.

Les lois éternelles
Galopaient comme des chevaux fous
Les nuits tombaient l'une sur l'autre
Nous avons les yeux brûlés²

Ce feu qui brûle d'en haut
Crachant sa flamme pour une plus pure
destruction

.

Ces fleuves débordant de volcans en sursaut
Ces typhons tournoyant avec une vitesse
foudroyante³

Des écumes ténébreuses refoulaient un fleuve
démessuré vers des espaces grouillant
de mondes descellés⁴

Man has no place within this disrupted universe. His fragility, his defenselessness, and the utter futility of all his attempts to create for himself something finer and sweeter are illustrated by contrasting him with the terrible vastness and destruction which are all around him. What chances have the poet and men, among all these cyclones of misfortune and these unhinged hells, of establishing and maintaining anything of value?

Ah si nos faibles doigts
Parmi ces cyclones de malheur
Parmi ces enfers déchainés et ces astres
perdus
Parmi cette ombre suspendue aux
profondeurs de la mer
Cherchent avec une véritable humilité
Des tendresses pareilles à des lampes
voilées⁵

The weakness, nakedness, and solitude of man and the poet are continually emphasized.

et moi sous mes seuls cheveux⁶

. . . nos tendres doigts. . . .⁷

Ô faiblesse des doigts⁸

Nos mains tremblantes . . .⁹

. . . brouillards de mes mains¹⁰

Je suis seul et nu
 Je suis seul et sel
 Je flotte à la dérive sur la mer¹¹

In this rampaging world man is but an appearance and a rapidly passing phenomenon.

Ô tourments plus forts de n'être qu'une
 seule apparence¹²

Nature scorns, tricks, and menaces man. As an alien and as a superfluous and unwelcome element in the scheme of things, man is victimized by a capricious and calculating environment which does all it can to reject and eliminate him. The nature within which he moves, assuming human attributes, can be cruelly cold and unfeeling and insensitive like granite. Disdainful, it almost appears to laugh at his cries and at his quest for a way out of his hell of mortal man.

et ce grand rire de pierre inattaquable¹³

Uninvolved in the poet's suffering, it seems to ignore the murmur of his spilled blood.

Le ciel de ma blessure
 Repousse le murmure
 De la durée de mon sang¹⁴

Grandbois' universe is subversive and treacherous and not to be trusted. It deludes men with occasional false appearances of security and comfort. In the poem

"Pris et Protégé . . . ," the poet tells of his attraction to the sea, and how, seduced by the sleek swelling of its surface, he is taken, embraced, and protected by it. But the protection is deceit, the innocent waves hide untold dangers and may at any moment be whipped into frenzied storm. The poet, believing himself safe, is all the time condemned.

Pris et protégé et condamné par la mer
Je flotte au creux des houles¹⁵

Grandbois has discovered that the shelter his surroundings offer is but illusion and that all is a trap which has been carefully prepared for him.

Ces murs protecteurs
et ce plafond fraternel
et ces trous d'ombre et cette grande ombre
et ce plancher de fer¹⁶

Man is hemmed in and weighed down upon by nature. Breathing heavily about him, it threatens to engulf him.

Les colonnes du ciel pressent mes épaules

.

Les poids des profondeurs frissonnent
sous moi¹⁷

There was a time, however, when the world was less awesome and much more green and friendly. It was closer and more familiar and the poet then was in harmony with it. He blended into its peaceful freshness. He could smell the green odor of the wind, hear the delicate "brushing" of summer days

in the trees, and watch each morning rise from the sea to fall again into the soft blueness of new mountains.

Verte odeur du vent
Frôlement des jours
Chaque matin montait de la mer
Plongeant aux douceurs
Des plus neuves montagnes

Nous vivions mille fois
D'adorables naissances
Nous entendions mille fois
Ce gémissement musical
Tombant tout droit
Des astres dormant¹⁸

C'était les jours bienheureux
Les jours de claire verdure¹⁹

But now, as an adult, he has come to believe that this past communion with nature was a myth or a tender fairy-tale and that this angry universe in which he now finds himself is the only reality. He fully realizes that the "feuillage d'or"²⁰ never existed.

Pierre Chatillon sees Anne Hébert in a sweet and sensuous union with the world about her. According to him, her poetry testifies to a happy love of the universe and to a sense of well-being and ease at belonging rightfully to it. She is one with a warm and friendly nature and her delight at being a legitimate and unthreatened part of it is evident in the lyrical effusions of poems like "Soir," "Le Miroir," and

"Terre," of the collection Les Songes en Equilibre, as well as in several poems of Mystère de la Parole.

The joy of the poet in contact with this far from inhospitable nature in which she moves is expressed in the verses of "Soir" where she describes exuberantly and affectionately the tree in her street. It seems that she cannot think of enough ways to define it. It is a foliage of lace, a cloud of a foliage, a mass of shifting lights, and an arch of green freshness. There is a sense of kinship and communion with all of nature, represented by the tree, as the poet loses herself easily in the welcoming embrace of its branches.

L'on peut se perdre
 Dans une grande forêt;
 Et voilà, moi,
 Je me suis perdue
 Dans le feuillage
 D'un arbre,
 Dans ma rue.

Feuillage
 De grâce irréaliste,
 Lumineux feuillage,
 Forêt
 Où j'habite.²¹

In the poem "Le Miroir," one finds again this idea of a poet-nature fellowship. Her naked feet sink into and mingle with the cold, dew-dampened grass at dawn. Her hair is of one and the same earthly substance with the hay and is warmed, like it, in the fields at noon by the sun.

Je peignais mes cheveux
 Encore chauds de soleil,
 Comme le foin
 Dans le champ,
 A midi.²²

Akin to and in harmony with everything that surrounds her, she has come to believe that she can seize upon, hold close to her, and possess forever, the graces and the natural abundances of this earth--all its suns, stars, wheat fields, warmths, perfumes, green woods and blue waters. She is an integral part of nature and nature, in its entirety, belongs to her.

A l'aube, pieds nus
 Dans l'herbe froide,
 J'ai cru que l'herbe
 Et la rosée étaient à moi.

Le soleil qui se levait,
 Les étoiles qui ne brillaient plus,
 Et le jour d'avant,
 Et le jour d'après,
 J'ai cru que tout était à moi.²³

She is not the victim of a harsh universe, to be mistreated and mishandled by it according to its whims. But like the child with building blocks who can create, in his play, complete worlds after his fancy, she appears to control and organize, even if it be only in her imagination, her own little universe where all to her taste is friendly, warm and filled with radiance. She is excited by her own power for the sun itself is miraculously at her disposal.

J'organisais mon jeu,
 Je disposais du soleil
 Pour mon jeu;
 Et le soleil se disposait
 Pour mon jeu:
 Tout! tout pour mon jeu!²⁴

The poem "Terre" records Hébert's healthy satisfaction with life and her earthly environment and translates the pleasure it is for her to be alive and participating in all the plenitude of nature. This world is an unspoiled, perfect and very comfortable place. It is even a paradise.

Odeurs,
 Rosée sur les fleurs,
 Couleurs,
 Couleurs des eaux;
 Choses qu'on touche,
 Choses qu'on respire
 Et choses qu'on mange.
 O terrestres paradis!²⁵

In Mystère de la Parole, the poet, whose point of view has moved from "je" to "nous" and "vous," sets out to sing of the "wedding" of man with the earth. The poem "Mystère de la Parole" describes the tight union of man and nature. It also describes man who clings to all his earthly properties (his "avoir")--the alders, ferns, leaves, flowers, grasses and soils that he knows belong to him.

Des flèches d'odeur nous atteignirent, nous liant à la
 terre comme des blessures en des noces excessives

O saisons, rivière, aulnes et fougères, feuilles, fleurs,
 bois mouillé, herbes bleues, tout notre avoir saigne
 son parfum, bête odorante à notre flanc²⁶

Still in the same poem, man's heartbeat corresponds to the pulsating of the world in the springtime.

Les trois coups de la création du monde sonnèrent
à nos oreilles, rendus pareils aux battements de notre
sang²⁷

Except for Mystère de la Parole, where a mature poet finally emerges from her sad cocoon of despairing solitude to adopt a radically new but authentic and definitive attitude of happy and confident union with the world of men as well as with that of nature, the phenomenon of a blissful association with a generous and inviting natural order belongs to a very distant point somewhere in the poet's childhood. Actually, the adult poet exists in a world which, in all its Grandboisien desolation and darkness is hostile and unfriendly towards her. Thinking of childhood with great regret and nostalgia, Hébert writes the poems "Soir," "Terre," and "Le Miroir" as if she were once again and for a brief moment that little girl who blended with and belonged so happily to nature. However, even the child of these poems is not untouched by doubt as to whether this fellowship with earth is truly possible and can last.

For example, in the final stanza of "Terre," after all the excitement of thinking she belongs to terrestrial paradises, the child suddenly begins to dread the shadowy emptiness, the cold, and the loneliness of lunar landscapes

where she fears she will soon be trapped and forever dissociated from nature's warmth.

De la terre
Où je vois la lune
Aux bleus cratères,
Je crie:
Délivrez mon âme
Des paysages lunaires
Que le soleil n'atteint plus!²⁸

Transported for a moment by her power, she knows however, before the end of "Terre," that the control she holds over her world is not real but truly the meager "jeu" she feared it was all along. She is returned to the nakedness, impotence and submission of her human condition. She is very alone and without the comfort of nature let alone any possession or control of it.

Pauvre jeu!
Pauvre poème que j'écris,
Clairière où j'avais cru
Convier tant de trésors exotiques
Et d'alentour.
Simple miroir
Où je me retrouve
Entière et seule,
Sans aucun changement.²⁹

In "Jour de Juin," the child realizes that she is divorced from nature. All that she can seize of summer is the sweet and heart-breaking perfume of earth and she is fated to remain always on the outside of its friendly greenness and magic.

La fenêtre est grande ouverte.
De l'été l'on n'éprouve
Que ce navrant parfum de terre.³⁰

Indeed, Anne Hébert has said that her childhood's dream of participating in and possessing the earth was illusion. Insecurity and unhappy alienation best define her position in the natural world.

J'étais un enfant dépossédé du monde. Par le décret d'une volonté antérieure à la mienne, je devais renoncer à toute possession en cette vie.³¹

The poem "Espace" describes a vast and hostile space where the winds sweep all away before them, the seas rumble maliciously and seagulls, their cries grating like pullies, soar above shifting and unstable worlds. At one point in the poem, Hébert is adrift on what appears to be a great ocean. She is insecure and bewildered and unable to discern a shore where she might find shelter, let alone reach. So overcome is she by the vagueness and boundlessness of the expanse on which she floats, she is not even certain whether it be a sky, a wind or a sea.

Rien n'entrave le vent;
Et le bruit de l'eau,
Et le bruit du vent
Creusent d'autres mers,
Avec chacune sa solitude.

Le cri des mouettes,
Qui grince comme des poulies,
Traverse sur des ailes
Ces mondes changeants:

.

Mais pourquoi parler du rivage
Et des espoirs qu'on a eus
Sur la grève de sable?
Puisqu'on est maintenant
En pleine mer,
A ce point exact,

Au milieu de l'Océan,
 Où toutes les rives sont invisibles,
 Et qu'on ne sait plus
 Si l'on vogue sur le ciel,
 Sur la mer ou le vent,³²

"Figure de Proue" depicts a threatening world of gloom and night. Blackness has covered the lights of stars and moons and the most dominant element within it seems to be a harsh wind which scatters the perfumes of invisible leaves. All the sweet things of nature have been overcome by the powers of darkness.

Il vente.
 Le vent
 C'est tout le moment.

Le ciel est terne.
 Il semble
 Vouloir écraser
 La terre.

Pas d'étoile,
 Pas de lune;
 Il n'y a que le vent.

Les feuilles neuves,
 On ne les voit pas
 Dans le noir.
 Il n'y a que le vent,
 Que disperse leurs parfums.³³

The poet and her soul are blind and lost under the cold white fog of an indefinite countryside in "Sous la Pluie." The world is all vacuum and unfriendliness and Hébert is tragically alienated and alone.

Le paysage est long,
 A perte de vue
 Sous la pluie,
 Perdu
 Sous la pluie,
 Sous la brume.

Mon âme sous la brume,
 La brume froide et blanche,
 Dans ce paysage,
 Perdue sous la pluie,
 Sous la pluie,
 Perdue
 Sous la brume.³⁴

In the poetry of Gatien Lapointe, one is far removed from the grudging and unkind universe of the two elder poets, a universe which engulfed man in its immensity and dissolved him in its grayness. Lapointe's world has not the horrible and gigantic geographical features and proportions of the Grandboisien landscape. There are no interstellar wastes, towering volcanoes, upset galaxies, twisting winds and interminable and vague stretches of mist. Instead, nature is closer and more intimate and fashioned to man's size. It is at his level. It is comprised of sun, sky, trees, grass, rainbows, roots, saps, soils, furrows, forests, flowers, animals and birds. There are also seas, rivers, snow, rain and wind but they are neither hostile nor menacing. Lapointe's world is not vicious and there exists a warm bond between it and man which Pierre de Grandpré calls an "amitié tellurique."³⁵

Nature is hospitable rather than disdainful and aloof.

Et le crépuscule m'ouvre ses bras en fleurs³⁶

Sheltering and protective, its soils are a blanket which shield man while its animals warm him.

La terre est ton premier berceau.³⁷

Je fais mon lit dans la chaleur des bêtes³⁸

It nurtures, strengthens, and reanimates man and the poet.

Je reprends souffle dans chaque arbre,
Je bois le sang de chaque bête;³⁹

The clays and the humus of the natural world can close men's wounds. Addressing himself to men, the poet advises,

Remplis ta blessure de terre fraîche⁴⁰

Its friendly beasts accomplish miracles for him and within its happy borders childhood's delights may be grasped once again.

Un oiseau me rend mon enfance⁴¹

Nature adopts human attributes, becoming understanding and something in which man and the poet may confide. Its gentle, soft rains are invested with a strange pulsing and consoling spirit. Its mild winds are "wise" and man, translating their murmurs, follows their counsels and advice.

J'ai planté mon corps dans la terre
J'ai livré mon coeur à la pluie intime

.

Je prends conseil de tous les vents⁴²

Gatien Lapointe's verse abounds with descriptions of a physical blending or fusion of the poet-man and the animal and plant life which surrounds him. Man, his breathing linked to the respiration of the world, his blood flow coinciding with the throbbing of the earth's saps, and his heart beat synchronized with that of each beast, is not an alien element which must be ejected from the scheme of things. His rightful home is on this earth and he is a natural and undeniable piece of everything within it. He belongs to the decay and the decomposition of the world as well as to its flourishing and fruition. A part of the clay and the sand and of the dark seasons of autumn and winter, he is most often associated however with a blossoming, fertile and rich soiled earth, with refreshing and life-bringing rains, with vigorous green winds, and with spring and summer, the seasons of renewal and maturation.

Et dans mon coeur bat celui de chaque bête⁴³

Mon front d'humus et de vents verts⁴⁴

Et toute l'odeur des racines dans sa bouche
 Et toute la sève de l'arbre dans ses veines
 Et toutes les saisons et toutes les forêts
 Marchant à pas de chevaux dans sa chair⁴⁵

Et ma face n'est qu'un bulbe de terre⁴⁶

Je verse l'eau de pluie dans mes mains nues
 Et les oiseaux s'envolent de ma bouche⁴⁷

Because of the accord between man and his world, there is no discontent and therefore no ambition, on the part of the poet, (as there was with Alain Grandbois) to venture beyond his earthly confines in order to discover for himself a better existence or a more agreeable abode. Lapointe is faithful and devoted to this nature, his only real home and shelter. All is here that he needs and will ever need. Here all may be attempted, accomplished and won.

La terre est ma demeure
Je parie pour un jour de terre⁴⁸

Je prends abri au plus près de la terre⁴⁹

Je trouve dans le sol tout ce que j'aime
Je trouve dans le temps ce qui m'est nécessaire⁵⁰

Lapointe's universe is not cruel and to be feared and hated and the poet-man finds unsurpassable wealths and exquisite beauties within it. He is passionately enamored of the flowers and the fields of this world and he praises all that makes up his natural environment.

Je me grise de voir et de toucher
Je m'enflamme de chaque floraison
Et chaque grain dore en moi ses épis⁵¹

An inevitable part of the earth, he participates with sincere dedication in the lives, the sufferings, and the deaths of its elements and its inhabitants.

J'entends la plainte des oiseaux qu'on tue
 Je vois le bond des bêtes qu'on enchaîne
 Je conduis au jour l'arbre aveugle⁵²

In Fernand Ouellette's verse there are a few instances where the poet depicts a disordered universe in which man is the trembling object of cruel cosmic whims.

Contre les seins des filles
 Le ciel penche et se fracasse.
 L'ombre d'un chevreuil traverse une clairière
 de planètes hurlantes.⁵³

la cendre boit la mer
 la cendre pétrifie l'épave
 et sur l'âme plus nue qu'une lande
 couve une chevauchée de vents gelés.⁵⁴

However these instances are rare, and, especially in his last volume, Le Soleil Sous la Mort, Ouellette envisions man who dwells in an ordered, friendly, and sheltering interstellar space as well as within a gentle more immediate nature.

There is no terror of the great empty expanses beyond the sun in Ouellette's poetry. Space is not all cold darkness and dislocated and colliding planets nor does it threaten to imprison and absorb man within its echoing vastness. It is instead a place of escape and refuge and promises salvation and liberation. Man, ascending into it, may lose his mortal bonds. Because it offers freedom from terrestrial restraints,

Ouellette's man is anxious to enter into it and be engulfed by it. He is eager to be bathed in its warm brightness and in its sparkling yellow, blue and white lights. In the verse of Alain Grandbois there was fear of the cosmos. In the verse of Fernand Ouellette there is a passion for the cosmos.

In the poem "Géologie," there is a Biblical image of a Christ-like man who, smashing the walls of rock which encase him, progresses into the sky of morning and even beyond into a friendly and liberating interstellar space where he is "resurrected" and free at last of all his restrictions of earthling.

L'air connu alors
ce cri à naître
qui soudain fulmine
et fend la pierre
comme un ange.

Le sang
doucement
aima la chair.

Et les membres montèrent
en plein matin,
à perte de feuilles et d'oiselles.

Le soleil se hissait à l'homme.⁵⁵

There are other examples of man transcending himself, existing fully and joyfully and forever free from the inhibitions and fears of mortals, in an inviting and radiant upper atmosphere.

Tu t'éveillais avec des comètes dans la gorge.

Et nous avançons dans le blanc,
et nous vivions de vie,
et nous aimions.⁵⁶

On ira brûlé de brillance bleue. . . .⁵⁷

Along with this vision of men freed and sheltered in a hospitable space there is also in Ouellette's poetry the same nature-man rapport that Gatien Lapointe describes so extensively. The vast white vegetable matrix of nature is his true habitat and to it he belongs.

Aujourd'hui nous sortons nus d'un bain de mémoire
pour habiter blancs la matrice végétale et
vaste.⁵⁸

There is a marriage of man to the natural world in the poem "Eveil" as his body melts into and becomes one with the morning, the sky and the grass.

Lisse de silence
le corps s'ouvre à l'herbe croissante.
Le matin peut crouler sur ses épaules.⁵⁹

There is a strange, almost surrealistic image in the second stanza of "Printemps" which describes the union of man's whole physical and spiritual being, represented by his heart, with the forces of nature, represented by the river and the snow which falls upon it. The life rhythms of man and the universe are co-ordinated.

Mon coeur, vois comme il fuse
 contre le fleuve,
 comme il bat sur son bleu
 avec le feutr   de la neige.⁶⁰

There are numerous images of a disturbed and destructive cosmos throughout Paul Chamberland's verse. There are great tumbled mountains, bolted and blocked horizons, glowering skies, nights which gnaw at the morning light and massive ice sheets which glide forth to cover the world. Shadow invades everything and the sun is trapped in carbon mists. The fine and gentle aspects of nature have been afflicted by a blight and overtaken and thwarted by darkness.

malaise les fleurs malaise les eaux . . .⁶¹

. . . domaines grev  s de chancres mauves et de bitumes
 contagieux. . .⁶²

l'ombre a d  vor   le pays les vents y creusent leurs cou-
 loirs sanglants⁶³

The world is unkind and hostile. There is no place to stand and man and the poet are tossed about and battered by squalls. The poet exclaims:

on avait coupé les étoiles une à une et je n'ai jamais
rejoint le jour

.

je n'ai point voix dans la bourrasque . . .

je suis de la terre sans racine où la foudre sang noir
écrase entre ses dents l'avril au vert enfant de ses bourgeons⁶⁴

. . . au seuil des poignets coupés nous avons vu
l'os de la nuit entamer l'enfant dans l'aurore et le pain dans
l'été⁶⁵

The distorted and menacing universe in Chamberland's poetry is meant to represent the cruel repressive force of alien laws and masters which subdue and stunt a Quebec in search of identity and liberation.

However, the possibility of a return to earth, to the comfort and refuge of an "earth mother" and an earth womb, is also an important theme in Chamberland's poetic vision. Man is not doomed to be juggled about indefinitely in a turbulent cosmos. Just as the French Canadians will be eventually released from the black gloom of their political and social bondage to be returned to a Quebec which is theirs and free so they will return to and repossess a fruitful and sheltering Quebec earth. The poet envisions himself and his fellows married with and re-united to a soil and a nature as well as to a liberated political entity. And in this nature, which is specifically a Quebec nature, they find sanctuary and sustenance.

Chamberland speaks of the "visage du feu"⁶⁶ which will release his compatriots from their tight night seclusion and bring to an end their excommunication from the warmth and the security of natural elements.

je le verrai d'un coup s'abattre contre nos visages et
fouiller à fond nos veines rendre nos corps intacts à la
fougue jumelle du fleuve et de la mine
nous rendre neufs à l'Elément
nous nous reconnaitrons de glaise et de désir⁶⁷

The poet dreams of his own reinstatement in nature which is his mother, his property and his rightful home, and his very essence. He talks of going back to "la vérité du labour de la biche sertie du/sommeil des forêts."⁶⁸ The universe does not plot to erase him but instead provides him with nourishment. From vegetable substances he acquires new life and force.

je mords à l'écorce immédiate ô résine ô parfum primordial⁶⁹

He appeals to nature for an infusion of its healthful saps.

je te rends nu mon corps
crible sa nuit de sèves⁷⁰

The wind does not scheme to carry him off, but strengthens and gives him confidence.

le vent m'érige qui me soit complice et fouet⁷¹

He is a proper portion of the earth and forms, as it were,

one flesh with it.

je sangle pas à pas les anciennes terreurs et les fougères
délivrées m'enserrent nuptial

.....

je crie ce jour de ma naissance au front tatoué de colère
du ciel enfin terrassé qui croule dans mes membres⁷²

CHAPTER III. FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER IV

THE WOMAN AND LOVE

In the Grandboisien poetic vision there does not exist and never will exist such a phenomenon as an absolute and perfect love which can provide a total happiness and an escape from all the distresses and uncertainties of human existence. Love is in fact deceiving, offering but a temporary elation and a provisional drunkenness and although it might appease and comfort for a while, it is not a definitive answer to the anguish of mortal man. The joy proffered by the woman is too sudden, too quickly and passionately burning, and without a future, not because she who inspires this love is insincere and consciously treacherous but because she must obey, like all living things, the laws of death. The experience of love does not bless the poet and men with blissful forgetfulness of their human condition but only makes them more aware of their littleness and their inevitable death. Love is "cette expérience qui rouvre l'inguérissable blessure de l'âme."¹

And,

C'est dans l'expérience de la passion amoureuse que se situe le point de départ, la provocation d'un drame qui finit par impliquer toute la création. C'est par elle que le poète éprouve le poids et la menace du monde.²

Love and the woman loved have tragic limitations. At the lips of the woman, the poet finds no sweet refreshment and no strengthening substance and he discovers there instead

his own basic fragility, the frightfully quick passage of all things of this life, and the black gaping abyss of nothingness wherein he will soon flounder. "Ta bouche je la bois et je bois l'abîme."³ By the warmth of her embrace, the woman is unable to save him from his solitude and his fundamental loneliness and nakedness of man. Even while in her arms he can never quite forget that he carries within his mortal bones a piece of the ghost.

En vain tes bras tièdes
Libérant mon fantôme
Ont-ils englouti la forme de mes solitudes⁴

The lovers are subjected to all the sweeping cruelties of the universe. Unwelcome in the scheme of things, they are the playthings of a dislocated and far from sympathetic nature.

Houles moirées de la mer
Qui nous rouleront plus tard
Au gel des étoiles décédées⁵

Moreover, bewildered by the immensity which threatens to swallow them up and paralyzed by the thought of the death which awaits them, they are humble and very resigned. Powerless and spiritless, they will not fight their fate nor will they struggle to bring back past joys. Rather, they resolve to be quiet, uncomplaining, and continually prepared for what lies in store for them. Referring to their ashes, they speak of themselves as though they are already two dead people:

Taisons-nous rien ne peut recommencer
Il faut oublier les lampes les heures sacrées

.

Taisons-nous oublions tout
Noyons les mots magiques
Préparons nos tendres cendres
Pour le grand silence inexorable⁶

However, at one time, love promised miracles and a finer and more brilliant reality and woman was associated with peace, light, greenness, and eternity. The poet occasionally speaks of her as though she were a goddess and a marvelous creature who brought mercy and comfort. Out of the tumult of the world her outstretched arms seemed to create silence and the calm expression of her pure white face could fix time forever in an ideal dimension far beyond the despairs and the tempests of this existence.

Tes bras étendus font le silence
Ton blanc visage fixe le temps
Au delà les désespoirs
Dévastant le centre des tempêtes
Au delà l'Obscur fuyant comme mille fleuves
Arrache la dernière sagesse

Ta lèvre enchaîne la ceinture de l'aurore⁷

In "Le Feu Gris . . . ," there is an image of the lovers setting out on a fantastic journey. They are glowing with smiles, laden with stars, their happy hands are like quivering birds on the verge of song, and their eyes are riveted on distant regions of peace and joy.

But the poet has been unhappily enlightened and he

realizes the impossibility of love's promises. There is no such thing as an absolute love and the man cannot find a "dépassement" in it. Woman is tragically unattainable and her face and her soul, indeed all of her, are blocked by a partitioning wall which shuts her off and dissociates her forever from the lover. Any charms the poet might wield to reach her will be foiled.

La nuit m'a enseigné la cloison de ton visage
Et je voyais dans ses couloirs choisis
Ton oeil comme un feuillage
Toutes les colombes comme ta bouche

Au delà ma main
Ô mon pressentiment
Au delà mon talisman⁸

Indeed, the woman, seen in a harsh new light, has been stripped of all the fairy glitter.

Fiancée Ô Fiancée ton regard n'avait
plus d'étincelles
Ton front avait chassé les féeries triomphales
Tu étais sans ailes
Tu étais comme le dernier reflux des derniers
océans⁹

Grandbois realizes that the lovers are ruled by death and that his arms, entwined about the woman, are little more than decayed foliage on dead branches. Skeptical, and doubting the reality of even the brief joys they once lived, he cries

Mais nos échelles de joie
Ont-elles jamais été tissées¹⁰

This disappointment in love is responsible for the

evocations, mainly bitter but also at times strangely compassionate, of the woman throughout Grandbois' poetry.

In "Au Delà Ces Grandes Etoiles . . . ," the poet says that he sees in the woman's love all the "frissons" of a turning cold and a rejection and all the "poisons" of infidelity.

In "Le Feu Gris . . . ," there is an angry accusation of the woman as being responsible for the failure of the love relation. The poet reproaches her for lighting a huge blazing fire which seduces him, the lover, and yet which cannot last and will soon die out. Uncaring and insincere, she knew all along that the passion would be short-lived and that he would suffer and he scolds her for having cheated him.

Pourtant tu savais que le feu porterait
 l'immense incendie des volcans
 Tu savais la torche implacable des buissons
 allumés
 Tu savais la nuit vide et l'aurore sans douceur
 Tu savais l'homme nu parmi son désert
 Tu savais sa souffrance comme un prochain
 cadavre¹¹

There is bitterness in the poem "Que Surtout Mes Mains . . . ," as the poet, describing his love's "absent lips" and her "adorable lies," chastises himself for having taken her too seriously.

Vous lèvres absentes
 Je vous ai trop vues trembler dans d'adorables
 mensonges
 J'ai trop cerné le domaine de votre gel
 J'ai trop pleuré pour vous¹²

In "Le Feu Gris . . . ," she is associated with venom
 and serpents, with the hardness and the coldness of knives;
 and with the betrayal of faith and the breaking of pacts.

Et ma souffrance vivait des serpents de ton
 prochain oubli
 Guettant l'heure du couteau de ton absence

.

Guettant les pitoyables sourires de la première
 trahison¹³

In "Avec Ta Robe . . ." however, there is a tender
 pity for the woman's delicacy. The poet speaks of wounds and
 he emphasizes the fact that she is but mortal flesh and very
 vulnerable.

Avec ta robe sur le rocher comme une
 aile blanche
 Des gouttes au creux de ta main comme
 une blessure fraîche

.

Avec tes pieds faibles et nus sur la dure
 force de rocher

.

Ô toi mortel instant de l'éternel fleuve¹⁴

Love is not dealt with too extensively in Anne Hébert's poetry but when she does speak of it, she stresses its unfulfilment. Love and the lovers are endowed with no special charms and, like all else of value in this world, they are transient and subjected to a ruthless destiny. Alluding to herself and to her lover, the poet says:

Nous passerons vite,
Et peut-être
Qu'on ne pourra pas
Être ensemble du tout . . .15

Gatien Lapointe has found the love absolute and, especially in the volume Le Temps Premier, he sees love as an all-powerful and wonderful state which can bring complete happiness as well as provide the escape and the sanctuary that both Alain Grandbois and Anne Hébert failed to find in it. He regards the woman as a sort of super-being or goddess who, concerned, affectionate and understanding, furnishes a shelter for the man away from the disturbances and instabilities of his world, continually strengthening, inspiring, and encouraging him. There are no deceptions or failures inherent in the man-woman relation but only endless promise. The woman is not mistrusted for her treacheries, unconscious or otherwise, nor is she pitied because she is but clay and very mortal. It almost seems that she can never die and that the happy love she brings will last an eternity.

She is admired and worshipped and constantly associated

with the clearness and brightness of water and lights and
with the refreshment and comfort of flowers and plants.

La lumière commence au bord de tes mains
Comme une rivière

.

Rosée éclatante
Ton épaule creuse à même le chemin
D'entières figures¹⁶

Ta hanche garde un feu contre les vagues¹⁷

When the poet looks at her he is not reminded, by the sight of
the drops of water in the palm of her hand, of wounds and her
mortality. Instead, he links her with the eternal sea.

Tu avances en pleine nuit
Tes hanches creusent un berceau
Et c'est la mer qui naît¹⁸

She is pure and has refining and cleansing qualities.

Femme épure mes biens de tes larmes¹⁹

Her body is all growth and freshness and the green brilliance
of nature in its spring.

Ta main fleurit sur mon épaule²⁰

J'accompagnerai ce feuillage
Qui monte à l'assaut de tes tempes²¹

J'ai vu des tiges pousser sur tes doigts
Et des anneaux plus vastes qu'une fleur²²

An "earth-mother," the woman is fertile and the source of a vital substance in which things may grow.

Toute forme vient fleurir sur tes lèvres²³

She animates and gives life.

Et ton souffle anime tout horizon²⁴

The woman is precious and very essential to the poet-man. Without her he is nothing but with her he "is" and he exists. His very life depends upon her presence.

Et je n'existe que si tu me connais²⁵

She is for him the promise of new beginnings and he exclaims that the slightest trembling of her body close to his leads him to believe that all can be accomplished and had and that all his hopes and desires will soon be realized.

Tout naît d'un frisson dans un corps très proche²⁶

Love infuses him with new powers and courage and, warmed and reinforced by the woman's affection, he becomes invulnerable and almost indestructible.

J'espère tout je risque tout je crée tout j'aime²⁷

Si j'aime, je suis indestructible.²⁸

Je ne mourrai pas si je t'aime.²⁹

In love the eternal present is found and the poet lives forever

in a delicious moment.

Tu a mis dans mon coeur un présent immortel.³⁰

Lapointe's verse is not completely clear of suggestions as to the possible succumbing of the woman and the lovers to fate's cruel caprices and, often at the moments of most exuberance and optimism, questions and statements which reveal a deep-seated doubt and despair suddenly jolt the happy tempo of the verse and blacken the mood.

La mort nous rattrapera-t-elle en plein route?³¹

Le hasard nous enchaînera-t-il de nouveau?³²

But these melancholy interludes are temporary. Love is a powerful condition and unlike the Grandboisien lovers, Lapointe's lovers will not patiently bide their time until they are sucked in or brushed away by the forces of their destiny. They are tense, defiant, and extremely strong. They hurl challenges at the heartless gods, they assert their presence in the world, and they talk of reigning and ruling.

Il ne faut pas qu'un dieu nous défigure³³

Je dis que nous vivrons
Nous prendrons demeure à jamais³⁴

La chaleur de ton lit nous oblige à régner³⁵

Their love implies a victory, a fruition, and a growth, not failure, decay and death.

J'ai vu l'herbe fleurir au creux de nos anneaux³⁶

Nous franchissons le fleuve le plus sombre
Notre maison fleurit chaque jour de l'année³⁷

In Lapointe's verse, the cosmos does not possess and control the lovers. The world is not unkind to them and they will not be swept away by its mischievous elements. They are not its victims but instead they are in pleasant accord with it. The tides curl themselves in a friendly fashion around their heels, the soil sustains them with its dark richness and all nature flourishes and is plentiful about them.

Le sol nous soutient de son souffle
Les marées s'enroulent à nos chevilles
Nous suivrons l'heure du soleil
Le vent brûle la crinière des chevaux
Et l'arbre se réveille en pleines feuilles
Nous durons d'une lumière naturelle
Un défi extrême nous rend meilleurs
Nous serons le chant de la terre³⁸

Rendered mighty and very confident by their love for each other, they come to believe that they possess and control the world.

Le paysage est dans nos mains³⁹

It is even suggested that, in the enthusiasm of their affection, they can alter and transform nature, bringing the world around them out of its winter and its darkness. They will melt with their warm bodies the ice, they will blow life into the frozen river centers, they will take up in their arms the broken tree and they will compel the spring to come forth on this earth.

Nous étendrons nos corps brûlants sur la neige
 Nous soufflerons dans le coeur gelé des rivières
 Nous prendrons dans nos bras l'arbre tombé
 Nous obligerons le printemps à naître.⁴⁰

So optimistic and strong are the couple in love that they know
 they can put an end to all men's suffering.

Nous avons pansé la douleur des hommes
 Et balisé de flammes leur enfance⁴¹

Described with reference to lush forested undergrowths,
 to mosses, ferns, tender new shoots and the sparkle and glamour
 of stars, woman, in the poetry of Fernand Ouellette, revivifies
 the man with her fires and her vitality. She is "la promise/au
 dur déclin"⁴² and love is assurance of eternity.

Notre corps lourd de fruits
 et d'éclats d'éternité⁴³

Love and the woman are for Paul Chamberland all that
 Alain Grandbois said they could not be.

The woman is, as both Gatien Lapointe and Fernand Ouellette
 conceive her, connected with the life-giving forces of nature
 and its eternal elements of greenness and light.

s'endorme le soleil
 en l'après-midi de ta hanche⁴⁴

le monde en toi s'épouse et corbeille crève en rires⁴⁵

je t'aime et le ciel réfléchit ses miroirs
en ton sourire nuageux⁴⁶

ô parfum de toi dans mon domaine foudroyé tes pas
d'eau vive dans les sentes brûlées de ma soif⁴⁷

In loving the woman, the man enters into the protection and the sustenance of the earth of which she is an integral part. He says that in her he touches the elemental soil and that through her he has access to all the natural abundance of the world.

je touche en toi le sol élémentaire⁴⁸

par toi j'accède à l'abondance de la terre⁴⁹

She refreshes the weary poet just as nature does, bringing him life rather than a reminder of his death. Of earth he asks that it riddle his "night" with its saps and of woman he demands that she place honey on his tongue and bread in his mouth. The poet-man goes to the woman and her sources of nourishment as does the hummingbird to the flower and he loses himself joyfully in her fertile vastness.

un colibris se perd heureux aux franges des abîmes-mères⁵⁰

Woman is a quietness and a refuge away from the rush and the turmoil of the madding world and the poet refers to the silence that she manages to create for him on the margins of the contemporary delirium.

As with Lapointe, the poet-man in the verse of Paul Chamberland takes on new proportions when in love, becoming vigorous and giant-like. He is no longer blind, mute and intimidated, grovelling in the black night of his frustrations and weaknesses but, brave and defiant, he is sure that he is capable of accomplishing anything and everything. He possesses the world and it no longer, as in Alain Grandbois' conception, possesses and dominates him.

par toi l'homme tisonne en plein azur le bûcher des
désirs et prend le monde dans ses mains . . .⁵¹

Chamberland's lovers find an earthly eternity in their embrace and they confound death. Their eternity is their clasping, grasping hands knotting and sealing the union of their two bodies in the warm thickness of summer nights.

Chamberland feels, as does Lapointe, that without the woman he would be nothing and hopelessly adrift.

et si tu n'étais pas je serais pris dans l'engrenage et
la fixe folie du froid⁵²

The woman, gifted with fantastic magical strengths, is able to vanquish man's sorrow and terminate his spiritual depression, provoking the dawn of a fresh and unspoiled day. She is the "femme-aurore."⁵³

ton geste apparissant l'espace aux jardins sème aux cicatrices
des nuits la fleur giratoire du jour⁵⁴

She can even re-invent and make more beautiful and pleasant for the poet the presently sad and distressed world in which he dwells. She offers a new world to him and he drinks it from her lips.

et le coeur violet de la fleur rougit ta chair
embrase ta lèvre
où je bois le monde blessé guéri⁵⁵

In the poem "Ite missa est," the divine and perfect season of childhood is gone, apparently never to be refound. All that remains are bitter memories, dried grass and the whitened bones of youngsters struck down at the very climax of a frantic and boisterous dance. The poet-man flounders in the rust and the clanging tin of the insane daily ritual of adulthood. But that happy time may yet be retrieved. Woman and her sorcery can bring back to the poet those former days of innocence and carefreeness. Chamberland describes his mistress' laughing eyes in which he discovers once again his marvelous childhood animals which tumbled and rolled about so gleefully in the brilliant gold of summer evenings. The unblemished and new "first world" of youthful naiveté and promise belongs to the lovers and can never be wrenched away from them.

le monde premier dans nos bras est un enfant qui s'éveille⁵⁶

CHAPTER IV. FOOTNOTES

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4. Ibid., p. 83.
5. "Le Tribunal," Poèmes, p. 120.
6. "L'Aube Ensevelie," Ibid., pp. 145-146.
7. "Au Delà Ces Grandes Etoiles...", Ibid., pp. 17-18.
8. Ibid., p. 19.
9. "Ô Fiancée...", Poèmes, p. 86.
10. "Au Delà Ces Grandes Etoiles...", Ibid., p. 20.
11. "Le Feu Gris...", Ibid., p. 28.
12. "Que Surtout Mes Mains...", Ibid., p. 89.
13. "Le Feu Gris...", Ibid., p. 28.
14. "Avec Ta Robe...", Ibid., p. 48.
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16. Gatien Lapointe, "Le Pas du Chemin," Le Temps Premier, Jean Grassin Editeur, Paris, 1962, p. 32.
17. "Corps Accordés," Ibid., p. 33.
18. "L'Eau et la Terre," Ibid., p. 38.
19. "Il Suffit d'un Visage," Ibid., p. 18.
20. Ibid., p. 19.
21. "Un Seul Mot Une Seule Maison," Le Temps Premier, p. 31.
22. "J'Animerai Ton Coeur," Ibid., p. 35.

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26. "J'Aime," Ibid., p. 42.
27. Ibid., p. 43.
28. Gatien Lapointe, Le Premier Mot, Les Editions du Jour, Montreal, 1967, p. 79.
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30. "Un Seul Mot Une Seule Maison," Ibid., p. 37.
31. "Corps Accordés," Ibid., p. 34.
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33. "Un Seul Mot Une Seule Maison," Ibid., p. 37.
34. "Corps Accordés," Ibid., p. 33.
35. "Un Seul Mot Une Seule Maison," Ibid., p. 37.
36. "J'Animerai Ton Coeur," Ibid., p. 36.
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38. "J'Aime," Ibid., pp. 42-43.
39. "Corps Accordés," Ibid., p. 33.
40. Gatien Lapointe, "Comme Un Arbre Chantant," Ode au Saint-Laurent, Les Editions du Jour, Montreal, 1963, p. 55.
41. "Nus et Vulnérables," Le Temps Premier, p. 31.
42. Fernand Ouellette, "'Elle,'" Le Soleil Sous la Mort, Editions de l'Hexagone, Montreal, 1965, p. 55.
43. "Femme," Ibid., p. 54.
44. Paul Chamberland, "Anneaux Eclatés I," Terre Québec, Librairie Déom, Montreal, 1964, p. 52.
45. "Chiffre du Seuil," Ibid., p. 48.
46. "Volets Ouverts," Ibid., p. 50.

47. "Femme Quotidienne," Ibid., p. 62.
48. Paul Chamberland, L'Afficheur Hurle, Editions Parti Pris, Montreal, 1964, p. 33.
49. Ibid., p. 39.
50. "Chiffre du Seuil," Terre Québec, p. 48.
51. L'Afficheur Hurle, p. 34.
52. Ibid., p. 40.
53. From the title of the poem, "Lettre à la Femme-Aurore," Terre Québec, p. 58.
54. "Foyer de l'Etreinte," Ibid., p. 57.
55. "Volets Ouverts," Ibid., p. 50.
56. "Chiffre du Seuil," Ibid., p. 48.

CHAPTER V

POETIC TECHNIQUES

In the area of poetic technique, which, in this study, will comprise the form the poem takes as well as its images and its vocabulary, one may draw rather startling contrasts between the two generations. However, of the three younger poets, only Paul Chamberland and Fernand Ouellette are sufficiently distinct in their technical manipulations to merit contrasting them with Anne Hébert and Alain Grandbois. Gatien Lapointe, a poet too conventional in his employment of imagery, words, and poetic structures, has little that truly distinguishes him from the elder writers, thereby rendering any attempt at showing differences between him and them obviously quite unnecessary.

Anne Hébert and Alain Grandbois both write in free verse but generally, in the arrangement of their poetry upon the page, they are characterized by a very conscious conservatism. In the case of Grandbois, for example, the stanzas in any one of his poems are likely to be all roughly the same size, shape and length. The framework of the poem is relatively traditional and there is no erratic, haphazard and jumbled spacing of lines across the page. There seems to be as well an effort to achieve a certain syllabic regularity and there is rarely to be found any great discrepancies in verse lengths within his poems. The

fact that Grandbois is not loath to use rhyme, if only occasionally, could also be considered as evidence of his fundamental technical conservatism.

Devant ces bûchers fraternels
Malgré les cendres inutiles
Et malgré cette fuite d'ailes
Malgré la morte odeur des villes

S'est dressé le seul Arbre d'Or
Avec ses bras verts de prophète
Le miel envahit jusqu'aux bords
Le toit nocturne des tempêtes¹

There is a new freedom in the approach by the younger generation poets, Ouellette and Chamberland, to the structuring of the poem. These latter are much more daring and willing to experiment than their predecessors. Chamberland, for example, states explicitly in L'Afficheur Hurle that he has no intention of writing in the so-called correct forms. Neither his crude "versets"² nor his poetized paragraphs are truly poetic. They resemble more closely prose and a very unconventional prose at that. There is no punctuation and no capitalisation whatsoever and both the "versets" and the paragraphs are almost entirely composed of run-on sentences.

les hommes d'ici devisent posément de choses étran-
gères ils n'entendent pas le bruit que font dans leur cervelle
les lunes crissants couteaux³

je vois s'éteindre dans tes yeux les monstres de ce
temps tu es Demain palpable dans l'aujourd'hui de
nos luttes femme où le monde déjà n'est plus qu'une
page blanche d'écolier⁴

tant pis bonnes âmes on en est au ménage au grand
 saccage de vases sacrés ô l'âme la petite âme l'âme
 de nacre et de lin fin de doux dragée de dieu la
 blanche hostie elle est tombé dans la boue ô la
 pauvre la brebis perdue qui va la ramasser hou hou
 hou⁵

At times, in order to indicate the end of one phrase and the beginning of the next, there is a wider space between two succeeding words. But the poet is very arbitrary in his demarcations and it seems that only when the fancy strikes him does he bother at all to designate a pause.

et l'homme te parla tu ne comprenais pas sa langue
 était celle des chasses et des muscles fendant le froid⁶

The younger poets are very rebellious, eager to manipulate the verse in new ways and anxious to topple the usual poetic set-ups. But they do not do it simply for the anarchistic thrill and the sheer defiance of it. They create new and different technical arrangements deliberately and very self-consciously so that the sense of their poems may be reflected in their form, thereby hopefully facilitating the impact of that message or the meaning upon the reader.

Towards the end of L'AfficheurHurle, Chamberland is filled with disgust at what he has become. He realizes that his world consists of little more than a corner of shattered pavement in a wretched and dismal "quartier" of Montreal and that his life is as degraded and as futile as the life of the young girl made pregnant by her semi-idiot father.

Chamberland's horror of himself is emphasized by the

capitalisation of the words "RIEN" and "C'EST TOI," which shout and glare from the page. Looking at the throbbing neon, he sees himself as being one with the tinsel and garish city squalor it represents. He has come to realize that his life beats with the same monotonous aimlessness as the lights. The association of the poet to the flashing tavern sign and what it symbolizes is cleverly indicated by the placing together of two completely capitalized and rhythmically jerky verses which stand dramatically apart from the verses which come before and after and which are both meant to be read loudly and with stress.

et les petites bineries du coin buvez du coke fumez la
 player's ah le grand craquement du soleil empoussiéré
 de ciment et de pétrole croulant d'un coup sur la
 fille engrossée par son père demi-idiot qui voit
 pourrir la vie à travers la sueur et les cordées de
 lessive
 ah ce grand RIEN dans la course détraquée de tes
 heures
 ce grand trou de la nuit où braillent les néons
 hystériques

TAVERN

TAVERN

TAVERN

C'EST TOI

TOI

TOI

tu n'as rien tu te fais des idées sur le monde sur la
 beauté des jours le monde c'est au-dessus le soleil
 c'est quelque part là-bas hors de la marde
 chômeur voleur putain gibier de potence
 C'EST TOI

ta vérité ce coin de trottoir fracassé⁷

Lively experimental form equivalates poetic sense in Ouellette's poetry as well. The very short juxtaposed verses with great spaces between them of the poem "50 Mégatonnes,"

for example, serve a purpose. So as not to distract from the importance of the message--the horror of a nuclear explosion--the poet eliminates all descriptive frills. The phrases are brief and the ideas are expressed abruptly and tersely. The big spaces and the sudden hush they seem to imply have been put there perhaps to indicate the vast, vast silence of nothingness after the atomic holocaust. The descending or "dropped" phrase arrangement, with each succeeding line containing one less syllable, has an effect of slowing down the reader to stress, possibly, the slowing down and the cessation of all life, altogether. This rallentando also tends to lend an air of a mournful chanted dirge to that part of the poem.⁸ The tense, shortened phrases with their exclamations and questions and their quickly succeeding enumerations of descriptions and sense impressions of the last part of Séquences de l'Aile, convey Ouellette's despair and his gasping for a breath in the calloused machine world of today. He has no energy to utter more than aborted phrases. He is also very angry and his rage stifles his poetic eloquence. The lines, in their jumpy excitement and lack of stability, also imitate the frantic synchronized present.

De l'Orient à l'Occident les climats délirent.
Les totems dévorent. O Verbe! où neige-
t-il de l'air?⁹

Mêmes giclées-soleils dont se grisent les
squares. Même vin de suie à faire déli-
rer le blanc des vergers. Et le chaud
clavier de mollets que les tristes martè-
lent en sourdine.

Café moka! La Presse! Rue Sainte-Cathe-
rine! L'odeur des banques se mêle aux
brises de l'enfance. Au long des devan-
tures, les passants surchauffent un ciel
éteint.¹⁰

Les pas pierreux du pouls battant mes tem-
pes. Mon coeur propage aux veines des
télégrammes de glace. Sons de sève.
Ciel d'horloge. Oxygène!

A l'horizon de l'outil s'engourdit la lumière.
Tempo de bielles. Vibrations de rails.
Sur le dur de l'échine bondissent les
électrons de l'envol.¹¹

The two generations of Quebec poets are also to be distinguished technically, one from the other, by the type of imagery each produces or does not produce. In the verse of Hébert and Grandbois, the images are reserved and, for the most part, lacking in true creative sparkle. Among the younger poets there are two extremes, either an exaggerated and daring employment of images or an almost complete rejection of them. With Ouellette, there is no timidity or restraint, but, instead, a spirited adventurousness and a determination to describe in the most spectacular, spontaneous and untraditional way possible. For Chamberland, poetic

imagery with all its hermetic intricacies means convention and convention must be abolished from verse. The poem must speak directly to the reader and its meaning should not be smothered in descriptive trappings. ("j'ai cassé le miroir du poème et fracturé l'image mur")¹²

Alain Grandbois' imagery betokens poetic inspiration, but definitely not poetic daring. In describing his mistress' grace, he equates her eye to a foliage, her mouth to all the doves and her smile to a departure of white barques. The day is in the sun like a golden head of hair. Our lonely hearts are like empty rooms. The disarranged eternal laws which once governed the universe are galloping distractedly like mad horses.

Anne Hébert too, has a conventional interpretation of the world about her. In the tomb of the kings, footsteps resound like the first drops of rain at the bottom of a well. The wind is a music which carries everything away with it and the leaves are dancers who are docile until their deaths. The poet's heart is a deserted house, with blank staring shutters and an open door. The seagulls' cries grate like squeaking pullies.

Fernand Ouellette's poetry is peppered, especially in Séquences de l'Aile, with involved, audacious and flamboyant images. Some of his descriptive statements, because of their bizarreness and their irrationality, come very close to

surrealism which sanctions strange and fantastic unions of normally unlinkable and unassociable words, ideas and realities. Some examples of his arbitrary handling of imagery are as follows:

Quand les poitrines bolides de par l'espace
relient cent villes d'étoile.¹³

Et lent je fume sous l'oeil comme une cigarette de fable.¹⁴

Et sur son ventre dormant mes doigts fusées
douloureux, de doux sourires de clown
aux coulisses du vertige.

Mais les mains meurent marines et coulent
au grand fleuve noir électrisé de mouettes¹⁵

S'illumine l'épais de notre chair
comme un pays d'oiseaux
le long de l'aube.¹⁶

There is a certain "préciosité" and some vagueness of imagery not common to the verse of the elder generation in the poetry of Paul Chamberland.

je m'enfonce plus sûr qu'un train entre les dents du
malheur¹⁷

(le carrelage hurle ses fours aux fenêtres hallucinées)¹⁸

Yet this tendency to experiment with description is certainly

not as widespread in Chamberland's poetry as it is in the poetry of Fernand Ouellette and he is to be distinguished from the earlier poets more by a rather marked absence, in his verse, of the descriptive element than by its presence. Ouellette differs from Hébert and Grandbois by the exuberance of his images whereas Chamberland's youthfulness and modernity are to be found in the sparseness of his descriptions.

Not only is there a difference in the way words are employed by the two generations, there is also a difference in the type of word that is employed. With Fernand Ouellette and Paul Chamberland there is an almost complete freedom of choice as regards the level of language utilised in their poetry, a freedom that Alain Grandbois and Anne Hébert do not permit themselves. There seems to be an attitude among the younger generation poets that almost any words, whether swear terms or advertising lyrics, may enter the poem whereas the older generation poets, afraid of the uncommon and the unusual, use a rather standard, classical, and poetically "acceptable" vocabulary.

Fernand Ouellette is not afraid to introduce contemporary technical words such as "radar"¹⁹ and "électrifier"²⁰ into the confines of his poetry. Like Chamberland, he enjoys creating new terms such as "fosse à néons"²¹ and "manège à planètes."²² Chamberland's liberated vocabulary includes neologisms, playfully manipulated as well as misused words, quaint anglicisms and contortion of anglicisms, common jargon and slang, medical

and technical expressions, and plain gibberish. Among his neologisms are "apatrier,"²³ "ensourcer,"²⁴ "s'ajouxter,"²⁵ and "s'appopulacer."²⁶ He thoroughly enjoys juggling words:

ils vantent mes dons ma transparente pureté
d'ascète béni-oui-oui²⁷

. . . tant louvoyé
dans le frelaté la vinasse les fricassées de maman-le-
devoir-moral-et-les-dix-commandements oui oui²⁸

. . . je fus le bon enfant le sage enfant l'enfant
blonde que l'on tranchait en jours fériés pour les
tartines du grand Bouffeur de l'éternel Empiffré de
l'une sainte catholique apostolique et romaine
Cuisine²⁹

There are verses of nonsensical babble:

. . . oui oui
ouuuuuuuuuuu ha ha bada bada bada . . .³⁰

Chamberland frequently employs anglicisms or distorted and "Frenchified" anglicisms.

. . . mais il a des amis à
sourire thootpaste o you charming french-canadian
people but do you tell me what so angry iounissons
our both solitioude³¹

. . . nous trostons Dieu . . .³²

He does not hesitate to use familiar expressions as well as slang and jargon. He speaks of "l'universel glou-glou"³³ and the "dégueulants néons."³⁴ He employs terms such as

"mal foutu,"³⁵ "foutre l'camp,"³⁶ "couillon,"³⁷ and "merde."³⁸ Words common to the modern, commercial and everyday world fill his verse. He writes of "bulldozers,"³⁹ "strip-teases,"⁴⁰ "frigos,"⁴¹ "bagnoles,"⁴² and "tévés."⁴³ He parrots advertising jingles--"buvez du coke"⁴⁴ and "fumez la player's."⁴⁵ In his poems he mentions "Mister Nobel-Pearson,"⁴⁶ "Texaco,"⁴⁷ "General Motors,"⁴⁸ and the RCMP.⁴⁹ He employs medical expressions such as "colostrum,"⁵⁰ "paranoias,"⁵¹ and "miasmes."⁵²

CHAPTER V. FOOTNOTES

1. Alain Grandbois, "Devant Ces Bûchers Fraternelles...", Poèmes, Editions de l'Hexagone, Montreal, 1963, p. 62.
2. "Verset" is the term which has been used to describe the unique short "paragraph" divisions which are common to the poetry of Paul Claudel.
3. Paul Chamberland, "Les Nuits Armées," Terre Québec, Librairie Déom, Montreal, 1964, p. 18.
4. Paul Chamberland, L'Afficheur Hurle, Editions Parti Pris, Montreal, 1964, p. 47.
5. Ibid., p. 54.
6. "Ungava Terre de l'Os," Terre Québec, p. 31.
7. L'Afficheur Hurle, pp. 60-61.
8. The reader is referred to quote No. 29, page 13, in Chapter I.
9. Fernand Ouellette, "Radiographie du Jour," Séquences de l'Aile, Les Editions de l'Hexagone, Montreal, 1958, p. 44.
10. "Quatuor Climatisé," Ibid., p. 48.
11. Ibid., p. 53.
12. Paul Chamberland, "Le Temps de la Haine," Terre Québec, p. 35.
13. Fernand Ouellette, "Epopées," Séquences de l'Aile, p. 13.
14. "Cinéma Cosmique," Ibid., p. 22.
15. "Doigts Fusées," Ibid., p. 23.
16. Fernand Ouellette, "Femme," Le Soleil Sous la Mort, Les Editions de l'Hexagone, Montreal, 1965, p. 53.
17. Paul Chamberland, "Les Nuits Armées," Terre Québec, p. 15.
18. Ibid.

19. Fernand Ouellette, "Dégel de l'Homme," Séquences de l'Aile, p. 20.
20. Ibid.
21. "Auberge de la Faim," Séquences de l'Aile, p. 25.
22. Ibid., p. 26.
23. Paul Chamberland, "Les Nuits Armées," Terre Québec, p. 12.
24. "Poème de l'Antérévolution," II, Ibid., p. 41.
25. "Foyer de l'Etreinte," Ibid., p. 57.
26. Paul Chamberland, L'Afficheur Hurle, p. 56.
27. Ibid., p. 58.
28. Ibid., p. 54.
29. Ibid., p. 53.
30. Ibid., p. 54.
31. Ibid., p. 72.
32. Ibid.
33. L'Afficheur Hurle, p. 66.
34. Ibid., p. 53.
35. Ibid., p. 61.
36. Ibid., p. 66.
37. Ibid., p. 70.
38. Ibid., p. 65.
39. Ibid., p. 56.
40. Ibid., p. 57.
41. Ibid., p. 54.
42. Ibid., p. 18.
43. Ibid.
44. L'Afficheur Hurle, p. 60.

45. L'Afficheur Hurle, p. 60.
46. Ibid., p. 13.
47. Ibid., p. 14.
48. Ibid.
49. L'Afficheur Hurle, p. 72.
50. Ibid., p. 54.
51. Ibid., p. 12.
52. Ibid., p. 53.

CONCLUSION

It is evident, that, on the whole, the two generations of modern French Canadian poets considered in this thesis--the older generation comprising Anne Hébert and Alain Grandbois and the younger generation comprising Gatien Lapointe, Fernand Ouellette and Paul Chamberland--differ, in their treatment of certain themes and poetic techniques and in the viewpoints and the attitudes that each adopts, rather definitely and even, at times, rather drastically from each other. Before terminating, I intend to summarize briefly here the differences which have already, in the course of this study, been shown to exist between these two groups of poets.

As regards the "subject," it was found to change considerably between the elder and the younger bards. The poetry of the second generation, leaving the private and highly individual considerations of the first generation far behind, is characterized by more objective and universal concerns, in spite of the inevitable verses where the poets speak of their dreams and their life experiences.

The "je," its anguish, and its infrequent pleasures is the subject in the poetry of Anne Hébert and Alain Grandbois while the subject in the verse of Gatien Lapointe, Fernand Ouellette and Paul Chamberland is no longer "I" or

"me" but primarily "us" and "you." Just as in France in the late 1930's and early 1940's, when poets like Paul Eluard and Aragon, engaged with their fellow countrymen in resisting the Nazi menace, rejected the rather selfish hermetic verse and attempted, in their poetry, to link hands and spirits with all oppressed and suffering men, so a number of Quebec poets of the late 1950's and early 1960's (represented in this study by Lapointe, Ouellette, and Chamberland) opted for an involvement with men. These latter have abandoned subjective lyricism and classical soul-searching and lament to write of the real world and the real men who inhabit it. Fernand Ouellette and Gatien Lapointe are both involved and "engagés." Ouellette is a recorder of the sorrows and the trials of men, a saddened prophet of the nuclear fate which awaits them, and a critic of certain glaring deficiencies in the contemporary world and its citizens. Lapointe even considers it to be a fundamental moral responsibility for the poet to speak of and for men. In verse that is at times little more than vaguely poetized political reporting, Paul Chamberland emulates poets like Pablo Neruda, Antonio Machado, and Vladimir Mayakovsky whose communicable, socially "active" and politically useful poems concern themselves with the struggles of repressed people and down-trodden nations.

The attitudes common to each generation contrast almost as dramatically as black and white. The pessimism, resignation,

and demoralization of Anne Hébert and Alain Grandbois when faced with all the uncertainty and instability of the human lot become, in spite of a few weak and despairing moments, optimism and challenge in the verse of the younger poets. After the elder poets' anguishing experience of the cold and despair, comes Gatien Lapointe with his proud defiance of all obstacles and his fervent and almost fanatic determination to overcome, at all costs, that which restricts his life, growth, and happiness as well as the life, growth, and happiness of all men. Fernand Ouellette's verse is full of joyful and miraculous visions of men who have triumphed over their human condition and even their mortality while a tough and defiant Paul Chamberland is confident that Quebec's dreams of liberation are soon to be realized.

Nature, regarded as ruthless and hostile by both Hébert and Grandbois, is seen by Lapointe as kind, sheltering, and strengthening. Man is an inevitable piece of the natural order, not to be tossed about or abused by it. It reanimates and comforts him and he belongs to it, blending with its seasons, saps, fruits, clays and winds just as naturally and legitimately as might any root, laden branch, or beast. Ouellette's interstellar space is not, as were the Grandboisien skies, cold, dark, chaotic and threatening, but rather a place of warmth and welcome into which man may escape and lose his mortal bonds. The world immediately about Ouellette is described as a vast, white, and friendly vegetable matrix to

which the poet rightfully belongs. The harsh cosmos painted by Paul Chamberland is, as representative of the oppression that weighs upon Quebec and its citizens, a temporary condition and the poet and his people are soon to be released from it to be reinstated in a fruitful, calm, and sheltering terrestrial order.

Anne Hébert writes of love's unfulfilment while Alain Grandbois considers the woman as mortal and very vulnerable and the love that she brings as tragically limited, providing no answer to the unhappiness and the anguish of men. The more recent poets see differently however. Lapointe, Ouellette and Chamberland all write of a love that is an all-powerful and an almost magical state. They have found the love absolute that the two older poets dismissed as a mere fairy-tale and in the loved and loving woman, a goddess and a perfect, divine, and gracious creature (associated in their poetry with all the life and greenness of nature), they seek and discover refreshment, comfort, quiet and even an earthly eternity.

Poetic technique provided another point of comparison in this study of the differences between two generations of modern French-Canadian poets and the daring and imaginative experimentation of the younger poets with regard to the form of the poem, its vocabulary and its imagery, was found to contrast sharply with the unadventurous conservatism of their predecessors.

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