GODBOUT: THE JOURNEY FROM L'AQUARIUM TO SALUT GALARNEAU
GODEHOUT: THE JOURNEY FROM L'AQUARIUM TO SALUT GALARNEAU

By

DIANE ELIZABETH CLOUTIER, HONS. B.A.

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University
November 1977
MASTER OF ARTS (1977)  McMaster University
(French) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Godbout: The Journey from L'Aquarium to 
Salut Galarneau:

AUTHOR: Diane Elizabeth Cloutier, Hons. B.A.  (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor M. Ahmed

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 150
The thesis deals with the three novels written by Jacques Godbout in the 1960's. The major focus of the discussion emphasizes the journey made through the three novels from the international ambiguity of *L'Aquarium* to the solidly-Quebec identity of *Salut Galarneau* and links this movement to the socio-political context of each novel. Within the novel, the narrator's situation, his progress towards a sense of identity, and the change in imagery and syntax are analysed in light of this context.

The thesis examines the relevant aspects of Quebec society by reference to recognized authorities on the subject and through articles written by Godbout in the period. The analysis of the novels includes references to critics and contemporaries of Godbout as well as specific references to authorities on the interpretation of imagery and symbolism.

The sociological approach used in the novel relates the work of Godbout to his society and, beyond that, more generally to literature in any society experiencing economic, political, or social upheaval.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express her appreciation to family and friends who have offered great moral support during the writing of the thesis. A special note of thanks to the friends who typed drafts, to her aunt who typed the final version, and to her supervisor, Maroussia Ahmed, for her invaluable comments and encouragement.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DESCRIPTIVE NOTE</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. L'AQUARIUM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Political Background</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Narrative Journey</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Metaphorical Journey</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LE COUTEAU SUR LA TABLE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Political Background</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Narrative Journey</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Metaphorical Journey</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. SALUT GALARNEAU!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Political Background</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Narrative Journey</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Metaphorical Journey</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The decade of the 1960's in Quebec will undoubtedly stand as one of the most important in its history for it witnessed a transition from the paternalistic, Church-dominated province of the pre-1960's to the modern society of today. The changeover was not without its problems - some of them violent - which deeply affected all those who lived through this period:

To use the year 1960 as a starting point is not as arbitrary as it may appear for it marks the death of Maurice Duplessis and with that "...la fin d'un temps où parler c'était mourir, la fin d'une longue poudrerie où la grandiloquence soufflait partout le silence, la patience et la survivance". The socio-political upheaval which followed affected the lives of all Quebecers.

There is little doubt that this upheaval and the burgeoning

---

1 P. Maheu, "Le poète et le permanent", Parti Pris, II, no. 5 (jan. 1965), 3.

literary production in the same period are related: "Tout ce réveil culturel est l'une des meilleures preuves, s'il en fallait, de la prise de conscience collective, nationale, des Canadiens français". Nor is it an unusual phenomenon: "...quand tout éclate dans une société, il est peut-être prévisible et même normal que la littérature éclate en même temps et se libère de toute contrainte formelle ou sociale." Prior to 1960, French-Canadian literature had largely presented a traditional, conservative approach to the novel. It now joined the mainstream of French literature by showing the influence of the 'nouveau roman' in a Quebec context and the transition from a "regionalist" literature to a "French literature from a Quebec point of view" was achieved in the course of a few short years.

One of the new young writers of the period to take part in this movement was Jacques Godbout whose first three novels appeared between 1962 and 1968. In addition to this, he was involved in all major aspects of Quebec cultural life both before and after that period: films, art reviews, poetry, and articles in Liberté, Cité Libre, and Parti Pris which were opinion forums for the questions of the day. He was in a

---


position to enjoy an overview of Quebec cultural life and be able to comment on it in an articulate manner.

He felt that his total work was coherent and inter-related and expressed in a literary manner the reality which surrounded him. He also saw his work and his life in terms of a trip "...que je ne reconnus comme tel que bien après l'avoir terminé", a trip which was geographical, personal and political:

Tout s'est passé comme si, au niveau des romans, j'avais involontairement fait deux cheminements; l'un (géographique) qui m'amena de l'étranger au pays, l'autre qui me ramena du moi emprunté, étranger aussi, cultivé, classiqué, galvanisé au moi simple de l'enfance. A mesure que mes romans se situaient plus près du pays, c'est-à-dire de la Côte des Neiges, je me rapprochais des valeurs québécoises de mon enfance petite bourgeoise.

Ce cheminement émotif (et littéraire) fut aussi un cheminement politique. Opposé à Duplessis en 58, appuyant la révolution tranquille en 60, je me découvris très tot en faveur d'un Québec laïque, socialiste et indépendant.

In the course of the thesis we shall attempt to determine whether this personal and political journey by Godbout has influenced his novels.

---


8 J. Godbout, "Ecrire", Liberté, XIII, nos. 4-5 (nov. 1971), 142.

9 Ibid., 142-3.
The methodology we shall use to analyse the novels is the socio-logical approach which treats the novel as "...the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space answering to a community of which he is an important, because articulate, part". Jacques Berque also stated that in Quebec "...il n'est aucun problème...qui puisse, je ne dis pas se résoudre, mais seulement se poser abstraction faite de la vicissitude nationale". This does not imply any strict chronological relation between the political situation and the novel nor should it imply that the novel will be a simple reflection of the society. Rather it is a transposition of that reality, giving it meaning, direction and orientation in which real situations may be expressed in metaphorical terms. Nor should a novel be too closely linked with the events in the author's own life or it will become mere biography:

12 R. Bourneuf, op. cit., p. 268
13 Ibid., p. 265.
Une œuvre est beaucoup plus que la vie d'un auteur: car étant l'acte le plus libre qui soit, elle implique avant tout un arrachement à sa condition présente et une restructuration de la réalité selon une fonction propre qui est celle de l'œuvre, et qui est irréductible à aucune biographie.\footnote{A. Brochu, "L'œuvre littéraire et la critique", \textit{Parti Pris}, no. 2 (nov. 1963), 26.}

In addition to a study of the content of the novels we must also analyse the form - imagery and syntax - for if the former is influenced by the society in which it is written so the latter will be similarly affected:

Si en effet la cohérence d'une vision du monde peut être dégagée à partir d'une insertion de l'œuvre dans un ensemble plus vaste, de caractère sociologique, n'en va-t-il pas de même pour l'élaboration de la signification au niveau sémantique...\footnote{J. Leenhardt, "Sémantique et sociologie de la littérature", in \textit{Sociologie de la littérature} (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Institut de Sociologie, 1970), p. 99.}

How the characters within the novel react to their situation and deal with it will determine the imagery associated with them: those who are able to find a solution to their problems or, at least, reject a situation which is harmful to them will be associated with positive life imagery while those who remain static will be identified with death imagery. Further discussion of the imagery will refer to Gaston Bachelard and to Gilbert Durand's "Régime Diurne" and "Régime Nocturne" as well as to any further meaning on the socio-political level which may be discovered. The syntax and language used will also be analysed for their relationship to the
content of the novel and the socio-political structure: "Le 'langage' d'un individu sera strictement déterminé par les différents groupes auxquels il appartient à l'intérieur de la société..." 17

The thesis will be organized into three chapters, one for each novel, which will contain: a section on the socio-political background of the period as described by sociologists and political observers as well as Godbout's major concerns as detailed in his other writings; a descriptive analysis of the narrative in terms of the characters' awareness of their situation and ability to deal with it; and a section on the imagery and structure of the novel as it relates to the first two sections. In a short summary at the end of each chapter we shall discover what influence, if any, the surrounding society has had on the novel. There is a lack of identity or "manque" in L'Aquarium which launches the narrator on a search for his identity. In the Conclusion, we will analyse any possible relation between this search and the personal and political trip of Godbout in the Quebec of the 1960's.

CHAPTER I

L'AQUARIUM

Socio-Political Background

In the years preceding the publication of L'Aquarium in 1962, Quebec passed through an intense period of transition from the paternalistic dominance of Maurice Duplessis into the Lesage era of "Il faut que ça change"—the Liberal slogan in the 1960 election campaign. Gérard Bergeron has referred to this period as the "déblocage" in Quebec politics, the opening of Quebec's doors to the world after a long history of looking inward. The mistrust of the outsider, the "survenant", had traditionally been a theme in French-Canadian literature. In the same year, a major separatist party (the R.I.N.) was founded as well as the "Mouvement laïc de langue française" (M.L.F.) to promote lay education, a movement and principle to which Godbout was deeply committed throughout the 1960's. The pressure for educational reform was so great that the newly-elected Lesage government set up the Parent Commission to review the issue.

Les Insolences du Frère Untel, by educator Jean-Paul Desbiens, became a milestone in outspoken criticism of Quebec in the early 1960's.

---


He criticized the French-Canadian in general for his servile attitude ("Nous sommes une race servile. Nous avons eu les reins cassés, il y a deux siècles, et ça paraît."\(^3\)) and the Roman Catholic clergy in particular for their fear to speak out and adherence to tradition at all costs:

La peur diffuse dans laquelle nous vivons stérilise toutes nos démarches. Si nous écrivons, il faut que toutes nos propositions soient justifiables devant de potentiels inquisiteurs; si nous agissons, il faut que tous nos actes soient mesurés à l'étalon traditionnel, i.e. qu'ils soient des répétitions. Nous choisissons le plus sûr: ne rien dire, ne rien penser, maintenir. Je me souviens.\(^4\)

Politics and the exercise of authority were ruled by "sorciers" who depended on fear and an atmosphere of mystery for their strength.\(^5\) This paternalistic attitude did nothing to encourage the development of a sense of freedom among French-Canadians but rather engendered, in some opinions, a form of slavery.\(^6\) Any hint of change in the status quo was harshly criticised by the Church and the intellectual elite, who might have had some influence, were not visible: "Une certaine élite, chez nous, est une élite déracinée. Cultivée, raffinée, tout ce que vous

---


voudrez, mais absente; des exilés de l'intérieur.\textsuperscript{7}

For Desbiens, this pre-1960 situation accounted for the abysmal state of the French language in Quebec:

Cette absence de langue qu'est le joual est un cas de notre inexistence, à nous, les Canadiens français... Notre inaptitude à nous affirmer, notre refus de l'avenir, notre obsession du passé, tout cela se reflète dans le joual, qui est vraiment notre langue.\textsuperscript{8}

Other writers, when dealing with the formation of the French-Canadian character, have focused on the inability of French-Canadians to deal with the present and their consequent emphasis on the past:

A défaut d'être nous-mêmes effectivement, nous étions nos ancêtres... nous donnant en quelque sorte la compensation d'une grandeur mythique qui rayonnait magiquement jusque dans notre présent.\textsuperscript{9}

One reason for this fascination with the past may be found in the account by the noted anthropologist, Margaret Mead, on the effect of isolation on a people such as the French-Canadian who was in a "foreign land" after the conquest:

People who were once part of complex societies may forget—in foreign lands—the kinds of dynamic responses to realized change that caused them to emigrate, and in the new place they

\textsuperscript{7}Ibid., p. 85.

\textsuperscript{8}Ibid., pp. 24-25.

\textsuperscript{9}P. Chamberland, "De la damnation à la liberté", in Les Québécois (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1967), p. 95.
may huddle together again asserting their unchanging identity with their forebears. 10

While this would help to foster the maintenance of a national identity, it would be an identity based on the past and old values - in the case of French-Canada the defensive and not necessarily positive valuation of endurance and survival. The influence of the French-Canadian middle class ceased for all intents and purposes after the Conquest, "...leaving Quebec an 'abnormal society' suffering from 'social decapitation' "11 and the Church as sole guarantor of French-Canadian rights:

Il faut très sérieusement se demander si le clergé, régent jaloux de la vie individuelle et collective et maître d'école exclusif, n'est pas devenu de fait l'un des grands désorganiseurs du Québec, l'un des principaux agents de la désagrégation coloniale... 12

The Church, however, was not alone responsible for this situation. A variety of factors contributed to the "stilted development" in Quebec: lack of confidence in the future; the quasi-stagnation of the economy; colonial and feudal repression aided by the strict hierarchical


structure of the society; and the inadequate development of an educational system. These factors combined to place Quebec behind the rest of North America in industrialization and threaten the French-Canadian with inferiority and "dépersonnalisation"; this was further aggravated by the cultural threat associated with industrialization - no equivalent French terms for the new English terminology. The original concern for survival and endurance after the Conquest had now been supplanted by the fear of domination by the "...alibi confédéral, piège du prétendu bilinguisme, pression de l'économie et de la technique, envahissement financier, menace démographique". The "menace démographique" had fostered the "revanche des berceaux" phenomenon in earlier years (which seemed to die with the Church's influence which Desbiens dates at 1960) but the threat of assimilation still lingered and, combined with economic disadvantages, seemed to closely parallel the plight of other nations - Cuba and Algeria - which were in the process of throwing off the yoke of


colonialism.

Albert Memmi in *Portrait du colonisé* defined the colonial situation as it is found in the modern world. In his analysis of the situation in Algeria, Memmi defined certain patterns of behaviour which, if not universal, seemed applicable to the Quebec situation in some minds: the survival of the family as a "valeur-refuge" for the individual as well as the group; the progressive loss of memory of the "colonisé" for his own history and heroes; the lack of dignity and worth of his own language in a country where, to earn a living and exist on a daily basis, the language of the coloniser must be used; the absence of industrial development which crushes the "colonisé"; and the inability to see a future in the passive torpor of the present. He more closely defined the Quebec situation as, if not a classic example of colonialism, a definite case of economic, political and cultural domination:

Il est hors de doute que l'on trouve chez les Québécois des traits économiques, politiques et culturels de gens dominés. Nul doute aussi que des différences considérables se trouvent entre le Québec et la colonie classique, ne serait-ce que pour le niveau de vie. Mais... l'oppression est relative; et l'extrême gravité d'une domination ne légitime pas de plus légères, ou plus exactement, celles d'une autre nature. 

Jacques Berque agreed that the Quebec example was different and more subtle but felt, nevertheless, that it was a form of colonisation:


Certes, ces étranges colonisés,apparemment maîtres dans leur province, adossés à une grande culture internationale, dotés d'un enviable niveau de vie et menacés d'un bonheur à l'américaine, diffèrent par bien des côtés de ceux qui, ailleurs dans le monde, et, par exemple, en Amérique latine, assurent la révolte des maigres, des bronzés, des humiliés. L'aliénation est au Canada plus doucereuse. Elle provoque des ressentiments plus complexes. Le Québec, qui livre à l'historien le cas spécial d'une colonisation sur 'great whites', n'en offre pas moins, sous des formes plus délicates, cela même que la décolonisation révèle partout ailleurs. 19

The colonial situation has often been described in terms of suffocation or smothering, illness, and stagnation in order to emphasize the effect on the "colonisé":

Etrange sorte de colonisés! On ne leur a pas pris leur terre: on les y a enlisés. 20

La sclérose de la société colonisée est donc...un enkystement né de l'intérieur, un corset imposé de l'extérieur. 21

Les marécages avaient toujours le dernier mot. Oui, le Québec était une maladie des marais. C'était une malaria. L'eczémateux, le sclérosé, le tuberculeux était aussi un paludéen. 22

It was to this situation that Godbout returned (after living abroad) with the attitude "Salut bande de caves!" 23 He deplored the narrow provincialism which he found on his return and which affected all


21 A. Memmi, op. cit., p. 99.

22 M. Van Schendel, op. cit., p. 23.

23 J. Godbout, "Ecrire", Liberté, XIII, nos. 4-5 (nov. 1971), 141.
levels of life in Quebec. He felt that French-Canadians may be North Americans but must also look beyond their boundaries and realize that they are part of Europe as well.²⁴

Provinciaux. Le resterons-nous jusqu'à la fin des temps c'est-à-dire jusqu'à la bombe? C'est un état malsain qui fait que nous devrions jouer à la pétanque plutôt qu'à la littérature, au théâtre, à la politique, au cinéma...²⁵

In this period he wrote numerous articles for Liberté which afforded ample opportunity to remark on the international influences available (especially in the arts)²⁶ and how modern communication had enabled barriers to be broken down.²⁷

He also noticed a common theme in French-Canadian literature was "étouffement"²⁸ and suggested that this problem began with the French-Canadians themselves in their system of education.²⁹

²⁵ J. Godbout, "Pour se déniaiser", Cité Libre, XXII (nov. '61), 22.
²⁷ J. Godbout, "Quelques questions sans réponses", Liberté '59, III (mai-juin 1959), 204.
²⁸ J. Godbout, "Le gibet et les grands départs", Liberté '59, I (jan.-fév. 1959), 49.
²⁹ J. Godbout, "Joyeux anniversaire", 594.
La grande misère de notre pensée nationale y naît tous les jours à l'école. Dans ce que nous n'y enseignons pas, par démission, par peur, par pauvreté d'esprit... Notre pays est pauvre parce que nos instituteurs n'ont aucune pensée politique, ne sont pas engagés dans le social... Or ce n'est que lorsque les instituteurs du pays seront responsables à la nation et non à Rome que nous commencerons de vivre la démocratie.30

He was one of the most vocal supporters of lay schools and pushed for the establishment of a Minister of Education and lay education, a campaign he would continue until its successful completion. For him, laicity meant democracy, respect and quality of life—and must happen soon.32

Beyond concerns with Church-dominated education was the problem of over-emphasis on tradition and the past which Adrien Thério, writing in 1961, described very well:

Cette jeune génération ressent comme une brûlure le poids du passé. Elle s'en prend à l'éducation reçue, aux préjugés de classe, de religion, à l'hypocrisie des gestes rituels, à notre milieu janséniste où l'amour véritable n'a jamais tenu de place... 33

30 Ibid., 592.


32 J. Godbout, "Joyeux anniversaire", 594.

Godbout also observed that memories were an encumbrance which modern youth were rejecting "...parce qu'ils ont déjà mal à la mémoire."\textsuperscript{34} One could either try escaping from "ici"\textsuperscript{35} and "l'enorme dissolution dans laquelle nous sommes depuis si longtemps engagés"\textsuperscript{36} as did many artists (such as Borduas) or one could stay and deal with the situation as Godbout decided to do: "Je commençais de reconnaître que la marde, ça doit s'assumer...".\textsuperscript{37} The conditions for revolution "se précisent"\textsuperscript{38} but given the French-Canadian situation the solution, he felt, would not be violent:

Le Canadien français est un latin perdu en pays nordique sous tutelle d'un État et d'une Église tous deux très paternels... mais il fait trop froid au Canada pour même rêver d'une révolte sanglante. Et d'ailleurs on ne se révolte pas avec un estomac plein... Ce besoin de communiquer comme des latins doivent le faire, cette impossibilité de communiquer dans un pays à la fois glacial et anglo-saxon. Ce besoin d'empêcher l'intelligence de pourrir sans pour cela la mettre au réfrigérateur.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{34} J. Godbout, "La peinture", Liberté, III (mai-août 1961), 671.
\textsuperscript{35} J. Godbout, "Le gibet et les grands départs", 52.
\textsuperscript{36} J. Godbout, "La conversion préalable", Liberté, IV (mars 1962), 124.
\textsuperscript{37} J. Godbout, "Ecrire", 141.
\textsuperscript{38} J. Godbout, "Un certain silence", Cité Libre, nos. 42 (déc. 1961), 16.
\textsuperscript{39} J. Godbout, "Le gibet et les grands départs", 49-50.
This "impossibilité de communiquer" will be a major theme in L'Aquarium and we shall discover to what extent the other issues of the period—Church dominance, political stagnation, the emphasis on tradition, the "colonial" situation in Québec—are dealt with in the themes and structure of the novel.

The Narrative Journey

L'Aquarium is set in an unidentified tropical country ("...nulle part, ou alors dans un lieu qui ressemblait à l'Ethiopie, à Haïti, au Mexique, un ailleurs chaud..."41) where a native uprising is in the wind against the government in power. The revolutionaries direct their wrath against the most obvious symbols of colonialism and oppression - the palace, banks, and the Casa Occidentale. The latter is, by its very name, an outpost of Western civilization in the form of "...des experts à la solde du gouvernement..." (A. 87) who were "au service d'une nation ...Quelle nation" (A. 18). A valid question for, in the tradition of most colonialists, the Casa inhabitants were interested in maintaining a status quo - a fading, degenerating version of Western civilization - which was contrary to the best interests of the majority. The future is not a viable option: "...ne pouvant s'imaginer un avenir historique, [la société colonisée] doit se contenter de la torpeur passive de son présent".42

They are an international group who once had a certain diplomatic panache (A. 49) which has faded, with their influence, to mere sham; for, if they once were useful beings, they have now degenerated with the rains into immobility. Not only are they physically isolated from the rest of

41 J. Godbout, "Ecrire", Liberté, XIII, nos. 4-5 (nov. 1971), 142.
42 A. Memmi, op.cit., p. 98.
the world (by the rains which have cut off all newspapers and hindered the replenishing of gas reserves) but they are also mentally and morally alienated. The life and values which they so carefully guard are empty (A. 25) and morally corrupt (A. 53). The Church, which should be above monetary concerns, is shown not to be: Monsignore steals "lui's" money to buy himself a clean conscience (A. 109) and his "Christian" spirit is not often in evidence as he shows contempt for both non-Catholics (A. 68) and those he is supposedly converting (A. 127). Money is the means of escape here for it will buy an exit visa; it thus gains added importance and reveals the worst aspects of the characters - greed, inhumanity, and latent violence. The Casa residents have no altruistic tendencies towards political involvement but want only their money and a way out of the country.

They live a life of "...la solitude en commun" (A. 27) and mistrust any outsiders who might threaten their universe - "ce cercle immobile" (A. 73) or "le cercle fermé" (A. 129). They sought a personal refuge in this country from their former existences and now can no longer escape the country or each other: "nous nous connaissons trop - il n'y a plus de fuite qui nous soit possible" (A. 74). They are as though frozen in this time and place and now can only face living out the present by repeatedly escaping into the past or seeking to obliterate day-to-day life in a series of drunken parties. The one inhabitant of the Casa who actively aided the revolutionaries was also an outspoken critic of the
other Casa residents and was despised for it by them. His death precedes the present time-frame of the novel but his influence is felt by the narrator. Through a series of flashbacks the narrator progressively discovers a sense of shame and responsibility for this death and begins to develop a distance from the others:

En évoquant la présence de celui qui incarnait la conscience parmi les "escargots" et que ses compagnons ont laissé mourir, le narrateur exorcise sa culpabilité et se libère de l'Aquarium en recouvrant sa propre conscience.43

The narrator realizes that he is not able to join the revolutionaries because their struggle is not his but he also knows that he cannot continue to live in the Casa with the others. His decision to leave is prompted by the arrival of "lui's" former lover, Andrée. She quickly realizes that the narrator is the only one in the Casa to whom she can turn and together they escape to begin life anew.

In his personal struggle to discover himself he also criticizes his society - Western civilization - while attempting to define his place in it. The boredom, despair, and lack of responsibility and direction among the Casa inhabitants all relate to a general critique on the malaise of Western society. The casa is a microcosm of this civilization and within its walls the defenders of the status quo are certain of their superiority (A. 76); however, the narrator begins to distinguish between

the aging, corrupt civilization to which he belongs ("Nous sommes déjà des vieillards..." (A. 69)) and the challenge of the new world which Gayéta and his comrades represent. Being "civilized" has become distasteful to him and he longs to be able to stop being the "zombie élégant, parfumé" (A. 82) which he has become and belong, instead, to this emerging nation which has a sense of purpose. He comes to realize that it is his whole civilization which is out of step with the times ("L'avenir n'est plus à nous: notre peau est trop pâle (A. 76) ) and that he and his race have lost the ability to believe in revolution (A. 100) or commitment: "nous avons perdu le sens du risque et gagné le goût de la fuite" (A. 108). Gayéta must face "...des années de travail archarné" (A. 139) alone because "...nous ne comprenons rien à ces luttes, si ce n'est qu'elles sont presque inutiles" (A. 139). It is not only the narrator who is this cynical but "nous", the white race, who are tired and indifferent just when emerging countries are pursuing the values we disdain. 44

The basic opposition in the novel between those within the Casa and those outside reinforces the differences in culture between "ici" and "ailleurs", between those who stagnate in the present and remain mired in the enclosed, suffocating atmosphere of the Casa Occidentale.

and those who achieve some measure of escape into the future. For most inhabitants of the Casa there is no escape from the country or what they have become: the Poles are political exiles from their home country with neither a past nor a future (A. 76); Lauzon, a French Canadian, has found a permanent escape from an unpleasant present in alcohol; Pauline, the missionary, has no desire to return to his past and sees no possible future in his relationship with another homosexual, Stan, who is also "engouffré" in the Casa/aquarium. The Monsignore is no freer to move out of the country for he enjoys a status here which he would not have elsewhere. He has narrowed his world even further by his reluctance to step outside the Casa: "...réintégrer l'aquarium avant de prendre goût à l'air pur. Parce qu'on ne peut jamais être sûr de pouvoir résister" (A. 44).

Israël, who was perhaps closest to "lui", never manages to escape the Casa either. She felt "lui's" death deeply and became mentally unhinged as a result of that event and the continual, insistent pounding of the rain. Her husband, Vladimir, kills her by destroying her insulin supply thus ensuring their mutual entrapment in that time and space — Israël by physical burial in the grounds of the Casa and Vladimir by a mental imprisonment in the past. "Lui" is trapped

---

permanently in the past for he exists only in the memory and consciences of the others. His death becomes the event which marks the beginning of the rainy season and the start of the moral disintegration of the others. He aligned himself with the living outside the Casa and placed a great value on his own life: "Jaloux de tout il ne voulait rien perdre. Ses colères étaient intenses, son appétit de vie immense" (A. 34). There is a lack of humanity in "lui" - his dislike of "contingences" (A. 94) and the sarcasm in his dealings with the others - which makes him an unapproachable, two-dimensional character; however, while the others were indecisive and turned their backs on the future (A. 32) he could give words meaning and draw hope from them as with the ideas and encouragement he gave to the revolutionaries. In that sense, part of him lives on in the hopes of the revolutionaries like Gayéta. His greatest importance, however, lies in the influence he exerts on the narrator's development.

Despite a basic opposition between the revolutionary activity outside the Casa and stagnation within, the revolutionaries are also trapped in their time and space for, by their commitment to their cause, they are constrained to remain in their country during "...des années de travail acharné" (A. 139) in order to "...prendre en main leur propre révolution" (A. 81). The fact that they are dedicated to their cause and, therefore, have no desire to leave makes it no less of a closed situation; for, if the Poles had an identity only in their former context
so the revolutionaries have meaning only in this time and place. They have no past to draw on which has not been tainted by colonialism and the future is yet to build for themselves and their country. It is a perpetual present with nothing behind and with an uncertain future ahead. Although a more dynamic form of existence, it is, nevertheless, a trap in time and space and Gayéta is beginning to show the strain of newfound responsibilities:

"Il a l'air épuisé, des poches sous les yeux, et puis la peau qui semble plissée vers le nez. Il n'a même plus son air de gosse. Finis les beaux jours, Gayéta est comme nous un faux vieillard en route...". (A. 138)

The only true escape out of this time and place belongs to the narrator in the company of Andrée; however, this flight is the result of a long incubation helped by "lui", Gayéta, and Andrée who all challenge his existence as an "escargot". At first, he shares the time and spatial constraints of the Casa ("Mon aquarium" (A. 66) ) which become even more pronounced as the rain closes them in on themselves more tightly: "La ville nous colle au mur. Comme si nous n'avions pas assez reculé devant la vie. Dos au mur parce que nous sommes aveuglés - nous vivons au ralenti. Dans l'humidité" (A. 62). Memory forms an important part of these constraints as they all see themselves as "lui" described them:

L'immeuble est un aquarium et vous êtes de petits poissons qui copulez sous mon nez... Vous êtes venus de partout pour la fraie de l'ennui et pour mieux mourir. Mais deux vitres nous séparent qui tuent le son et la couleur et l'apparence et la présence de la vie. (A. 32)
It is his sense of responsibility for "lui's" death which initially marks him off from the rest ("...je me sens responsable de tout oui tout, merveilleux petit agneau sur commande" (A. 22)) but he is still part of them: "...dans des cavernes individuelles vit une race curieuse. J'en suis à peine mais j'en suis" (A. 24). Combined with this guilt is a feeling of boredom and uselessness in being incapable of anything worthwhile (A. 52) - even political: "Je n'ai pas les mains sales, seulement salies" (A. 47). He cannot commit himself to taking part in the revolution, feeling that he is sinking into indecision and weakness (A. 60-61). As the pace of life slows and he becomes more isolated by the rain (A. 62) so he is increasingly introspective to the point of mild schizophrenia (seeing himself "face à face" (A. 83)) and confused as to what to believe (A. 82). He loses the taste for life and becomes more encrusted in his shell (A. 88).

This withdrawal is a necessary stage in his development for it allows him to forget the memories (A. 95) which are weighing down the other inhabitants yet he is still enough a part of them at this stage to feel threatened by Andrée's arrival. She will be a threat to "notre aquarium" which does not like strangers (even her name seems strange and foreign (A. 98) and he feels very defensive of the Casa: "...l'immeuble est à nous, à nous la société, nous sommes" (A. 99). There is a certain solidarity in their "mains salies" and in the way of life that they have
adopted in common which he believes not even Andrée can disturb; however, both her letter and Gayéta's approach for help trigger his further withdrawal into himself - "je suis seul" (A. 101, 104). They have both reminded him of another way of existence and he is starting to be more open to those influences (literally, he leaves his door open (A. 102) ) but he is not yet ready to join them.

He suddenly realizes, as though waking from a dream, that he and the other Casa inhabitants are alive (A. 108) but they have lost all sense of living and continue to turn in on themselves: "Je regarde Hélène qui s'est repliée sur elle-même..." (A. 108); "...l'immeuble s'est replié sur lui-même..." (A. 111). He finds it difficult to make a decision as to what to do ("...j'hésite toujours devant vingt sentiers" (A. 111) ) but he, at last, turns away from the others and withdraws even further into his own solitude: "Je referme les portes. Seul. Chez moi..." (A. 113). All around him he hears life (such as it is) go on but he is more reluctant than ever to leave his own apartment, having regressed even further in space to his own four walls: "Je n'ose plus sortir, passer la porte; c'est une lâcheté qui est devenue un vice. Qu'on me laisse seul!" (A. 117). His time span extends no further than his immediate concerns of eating and sleeping or speculating on the

stupidity of his existence. He has rejected the way of life of the others without defining what he does want.

It is at this critical point that Andrée arrives. She brings a reserve of oxygen to this aquarium where "...l'oxygène se raréfie" (A. 67). There is no possibility of escaping her presence which in itself is a threat to his way of life and he tries to avoid meeting her gaze, seeking refuge in the familiar surroundings of his kitchen (A. 119). She is "ailleurs" and he is "ici" (A. 122); however, he has evolved enough within his own person (by disassociating himself from the others) that he is able to realize that everything has already started to change in his own life.

He makes it clear to Andrée that he has been one of them but is no longer. As for her, she has not been affected by their dissolution and boredom and sees the others as they are (A. 128-129). The two of them now become "nous", sharing a warmth the others do not know. With her he has rediscovered the "...goût physique de s'en sortir, alors que tous les autres se contentent d'y penser". He is also able to leave because he is not tied to the aquarium as are, for different reasons, the revolutionaries and the others. He is now ready to leave it behind: "...il est temps que nous changions de décor. Celui-ci ne nous sied plus. Comme un soulier trop petit, trop usé" (A. 146-147).

---

As the countdown proceeds and it gets closer to the time of escape, he feels further and further removed from them in space (A. 150) and already senses his distance from them in time (he has begun to forget them already):

J'ai très mauvaise mémoire; alors hier, ce que j'ai pu faire... ou ce que je ferai demain... je ne sais prévoir. Je suis le quotidien fait homme. Tantôt soucieux, tantôt heureux. Je n'ai qu'un but: m'en sortir. (A. 145)

He and Andrée together have succeeded in escaping this space (A. 155) and together they will face the future in an as-yet unidentified space - New York, the whole of America, Europe (A. 156). The past of the aquarium will be forgotten (A. 151) and memories will have no importance in their unstructured and unrestricted future.

The colonial situation in the novel often echoes Memmi's description of the same atmosphere: "On ne peut s'empêcher, en approchant la société colonialiste, de s'attendre à rencontrer une élite...".48 The superficial show which these people put on only serves as a measure to hide their basic mediocrity,49 a condition which Godbout has also noted. The colonialist may not be able to accept the inequalities of his situation and will either leave (as did the narrator) or stay to fight it (as did "lui"): "...il ne peut plus accepter devenir ce que sont devenus

---

48 A. Memmi, op.cit., p. 61.

49 Ibid.
ses compatriotes; il décide de rester en se promettant de refuser la colonisation". Nor is this fight necessarily violent:

Cette indignation ne s'accompagne pas toujours d'un goût pour la politique agissante. C'est plutôt une position de principe... Une protestation, une signature de temps en temps, peut-être ira-t-il jusqu'à l'adhésion à un groupement non systématiquement hostile au colonisé.  

Just as "lui" despises the others so they despise him for not following their pattern: "Il met en question les siens dans leur existence même...". The narrator does not support this colonialism but does not become heavily involved in the revolutionary cause:

Il découvre que si les colonisés ont la justice pour eux, s'il peut aller jusqu'à leur apporter son approbation et même son aide, sa solidarité s'arrête là: il n'est pas des leurs et n'a nulle envie d'en être. Il entrevoit vaguement le jour de leur libération, la reconquête de leurs droits: il ne songe pas sérieusement à partager leur existence même libérée.  

For this reason alone, it was a better choice on his part to leave rather than stay behind. He realized that he could not be part of them, that his future did not lie in the same direction (A. 139).

The depiction of the decline of Western man, the "...décomposition d'un mythe (celui de la supériorité de l'homme blanc)...",  

---

50 Ibid., p. 41.  
51 Ibid., p. 42.  
52 Ibid., p. 43.  
53 Ibid., p. 44.  
the "vision du désarroi" which is presented also relate more specifically to the Quebec situation of the period. More than just the reflection "...d'un homme d'ici sur la révolution montante dans un pays sous-développé..." the country itself is "d'ici": "...les tropiques de l'aquarium sont moins un lieu qu'un prétexte: le bouillon de culture où peuvent se déchaîner, sans frein, les effets d'un vertige typiquement canadien-français".

The criticism of Church hypocrisy is omnipresent and relates directly to the Church in Duplessis' reign which was, with few exceptions, a staunch supporter of the state. Godbout himself indicated that the criticism was meant for Quebec. Recalling the time spent in Ethiopia and Haiti where he had seen the harm of which missionaries were capable, he indicates why he became "...fortement anti-clérical, en voulant trouver la peau de tous les curés, parce que, le tort qu'ils avaient fait ici au Québec, j'avais été en mesure de vérifier en pays de mission qu'ils en étaient partout coupables et capables". The fear which Monsignore


58 J. Godbout, "La 150e réunion", Liberté, XVI, nos. 5-6 (1974), 10.
demonstrates towards the outside is indicative of the Church's attitude in Quebec at that time: fearful of change that outside influences might bring.

Both the narrator and Lauzon are French-Canadian and many references are made to the country whence they came:

D'un pays froid où se cachent les hommes derrière leurs écharpes en tapant des pieds aux arrêts d'autobus - d'un pays qui a trop vite vieilli, où il n'y a plus rien à faire, qui a tout gagné sans grandes luttes. (A. 48)

When asked to participate in the revolution, the narrator must think about it: "...mon pays ne m'a pas appris ces luttes, il m'a appris la patience du froid, le goût de la somnolence beaucoup mieux qu'elle ne s'enseigne en Inde; j'ai fui parce que les révolutions ne s'y faisaient pas et je rêve d'y retourner pour les mêmes raisons..." (A. 60). It is "ailleurs" that glorious feats are accomplished but for him it is the "courage de la merde" (A. 152) to which he is answering. They, as French-Canadians, have arrived too late to take part in events, to be heard, or to be meaningful (A. 84); they have become so much vermin who accept their lot without quarrel and will never go very far very fast (A. 85). Their "cousins", obviously in France, live on in love, glory and superiority but they, as French-Canadians, have missed out and may only seek comfort in the "blues" as did the American Negro (A. 114-115). Are they not, after all, the "nègres blancs d'Amérique"?

59 J. Godbout, "Joyeux anniversaire", Liberté, III (mai-août 1961), 593.
The "poids du passé" is indeed heavy for the main character and the phrase "je me souviens" (A. 33, 109, 123, 150) (Quebec's provincial motto) recurs frequently. Godbout indicates in the novel that it is useless to remember and that it would be better to turn to the future as do Andrée and the narrator. How should one interpret this ending?

Ce n'est pas un happy end, mais ce n'est pas non plus un dénouement catastrophique. C'est une option en faveur du possible, du réalisable. De la vie. Je me plais à voir dans cette option une caractéristique "d'ici"... 60

To this I would add Godbout's interpretation: "...le personnage principal découvrait que les révolutions ne sont possibles que chez soi et il s'échappait à la fin, avec une femme, vers chez lui". 61 In other words, on the collective level, Quebec must learn to turn its back on the past and stop trying to escape its responsibilities if it wishes to join the rest of the world. The journey towards that goal had begun since 1960 on both the personal and collective levels for the people of Quebec.

60 E. Kushner, op. cit., p. 222.
61 J. Godbout, "Ecrire", 142.
The Metaphorical Journey

The imagery in *L'Aquarium* may be seen on a life/death axis which closely follows the Casa/revolutionary division in the narrative. Life imagery (clear water, warmth, light, the outside world) is associated with Andrée, Gayéta, and the other revolutionaries in opposition to death imagery (aquarium, darkness, dissolution, enclosure) which is associated mainly with the other characters in the novel. The narrator as he moves in time and space towards escape with Andrée - "princeipe de vie et de propreté" 62 - becomes increasingly associated with her aura of light and life leaving behind the "créatures mourantes" 63 of the aquarium.

There are other levels of meaning to be gleaned from the life-death struggle in the aquarium. *L'Aquarium* may be termed an allegory: this may mean simply presenting one thing in words and another in meaning 64 or, in a more defined way, presenting a literal level which makes sense on its own but becomes richer and more interesting when interpreted. 65 The structure of the allegory itself is a spiral which, in this particular case, relates to the shell of the "escargot":

---


Thus the progression of an allegory is spiral—virtually simultaneous in all three directions: backward to the thing represented (the story, the literal depiction of reality), which is itself symbolic, pregnant with signification, and forward and upward to the consummation of its meaning in the whole work.  

The physical environment and life-death imagery in L'Aquarium is both an allegory for the state of mind and conscience of the characters in the novel and, beyond that, an allegory of the state of Quebec prior to 1962. The allegorical method translates into concrete form an idea which is difficult to explain simply and Godbout has indicated that this methodology has a place in describing the Quebec scene:

...comment traiter du Canada—français dans ce qu'il a de plus vrai si l'on ne se situe point dans un monde de symboles? Tout, au Québec, est devenu symbole, mythe, parce que tout cela a été si souvent dit.

It is true that there are a number of interpretations possible as with any allegory but perhaps it is wrong to emphasize the universality of the theme without first understanding the particular for, if the tropical setting is far from home, the intention is not:

Ce climat favorise l'hypocrisie d'un régime qui masque son visage d'oppression sous des dehors de bonne entente, émasculant ainsi la nation de la combativité nécessaire à son affranchissement.


La conscience du québécois moyen s'enlise dans la tiède vapeur de cette ambiguïté qui, dissolvant toute action radicale, favorise, sous le couvert des protestations les plus désintéressées, les intérêts d'habiles privilégiés.69

Even though the novel succeeds on literary merits alone, we cannot ignore the other levels of meaning.

The major image, as the title denotes, is the aquarium the importance of which is reinforced by the other images:

Je note... l'importance et la signification que prennent dans certaines œuvres les symboles évoqués par un titre bien choisi... . Leur récurrence habile, à la façon d'un thème musical, dans le récit, ramène chaque fois l'attention sur le signe mystérieux et essentiel de l'oeuvre.70

An aquarium is, by its nature, an airtight environment which is sealed off from the outside by layers of glass; thus, "...deux vitres nous séparent qui tuent le son et la couleur et l'apparence et la présence de la vie" (A. 32). The effect on the residents is suffocating and numbing:

L'aquarium, mon aquarium, se vide et tous ensemble, nous oublions de renouveler l'eau. Nous remettons à demain. Il sera toujours temps. Et je me tape les cuisses comme si j'avais avalé une forte dose de somnifères; me brûle les doigts; je fume, je fume, l'oxygène se raréfie. Et nous portons de plus en plus souvent des habits râpés auxquels nous accrochons des rubans noirs. (A. 66-67)


The aquarium is also "...le cercle fermé qui rend l'homme prisonnier, la vie absurde..." and traps the characters within its space and time: "Le cercle, où qu'il apparaîsse, sera toujours symbole de la totalité temporelle et du recommencement". By forcing the characters to turn to one another for companionship, it shapes them: "La maison tout entière est plus qu'un 'vivoir'; elle est un vivant. La maison redouble, surdétermine la personnalité de celui qui l'habite...".

The choice of the "escargot" and the fish imagery to represent the characters illustrates this and reinforces the idea of "repliement sur soi" or doubling up: "Le poisson est le symbole du contenant redoublé, du contenant contenu. Il est l'animal gigogne par excellence". The use of the fish image to refer to the two dead inhabitants (A. 62) links it to the death imagery associated with water. The snail carries the redoubling image even further. The spiral shell in which it is encased suggests by its physical appearance "repliement sur soi" and a defense against the influences of the outside world: "...la forme hélicoïdale de la coquille de l'escargot terrestre ou marin constitue

71 P. Wyczynski, *op cit.*, 32.
un glyphe universel de la temporalité, de la permanence de l'être à travers les fluctuations du changement”. What better symbol for defenders of the status quo.

From time to time the characters drop their defenses with one another and come out of their shells for brief periods:

Les escargots sortent après la pluie – nous, le soir, nous sortons de nos coquilles.... (A. 55)

Un à un, les escargots mâles et femelles se sont glissés dans la salle du roi... Ils ont quitté leur coquille pour tâter du monde. (A. 56)

However, a snail never completely leaves his shell and thus an opposition is set up between "les arrières de l'être [qui] restent emprisonnés dans les formes géométriques solides” and the part which is free:

En fait, l'être qui sort de sa coquille nous suggère les rêveries de l'être mixte. Ce n'est pas seulement l'être 'moitié chair moitié poisson'. C'est l'être moitié mort moitié vivant... .

This is why the narrator must totally free himself from this atmosphere before he can feel alive. The abruptness of his departure relates to the force with which he emerges from his "shell" or former life. His withdrawal from the others was like the snail receding into its shell before the final re-emergence:

75 Ibid., p. 361.


77 Ibid.
L'être qui se cache, l'être qui rentre dans sa coquille prépare 'une sortie'. Cela est vrai sur toute l'échelle des métaphores...Les plus dynamiques évasions se font à partir de l'être comprimé... 78

The colonial setting pollutes all it touches by destroying the "colonisé" and his culture and creating decay among the "colonisateurs" who live in an artificial, privileged environment. 79 This colonial environment has profoundly affected the characters who do not escape but remain mired in a hopeless situation. The fact that they live a mole-like existence within the tomb-like Casa and that we meet them in mainly night-time conditions is not without significance. Night has a tendency to completely reverse value systems 80 and the narrator observes they have lost any commonly-accepted sets of values (A. 106). Night also has neither time nor space, metaphorically-speaking, and is the symbol of unconsciousness which allows memories to come back. This reinforces the characters' inability to escape the Casa and their attempts to find solace in their respective pasts. Wine which is "...symbole de la vie cachée" 81 aids them in their escapism.

In their disintegration and withdrawal from the world they become less than human and begin to be described in animalistic terms: an

78 Ibid., p. 110.
79 A. Memmi, op. cit., p. 105.
81 Ibid., p. 298.
oyster (A. 108), a turtle (A. 107), or "hippopotame affamé" (A. 114).

When Andrée sees them all together in the salon she quickly learns to view them in these terms:

Elle se renfrogne et se cale dans son fauteuil pour regarder la salle comme une volière, au zoo. Ici un pélican boîte, là une corneille fourre son bec dans l'oreille d'une grue, cependant que des canaris par dizaines s'attaquent aux plumes d'autruches d'un curieux kangourou. (A. 129)

They have all been inside the Casa so long that when they leave to bury Israël they avoid daylight like moles (A. 72) and thus, on the symbolic level, any idea of hope, escape, or future life. In our final glimpse of the group, they are following one another into the narrator's room "...comme troupeau à l'abattoir et pas un mufle qui tremble, pas un hennissement lointain, pas un seul qui se cabre" (A. 150).

Animal imagery is often interpreted as a sign of blockage of anxiety which, in an adult, is the result of an inability to adapt to change and subsequent regression. In their instance this would apply as would the interpretation of it as a death symbol linked to the aquarium. The fact that Godbout also uses animal imagery to describe the threatening sounds of the revolution (A. 54) may indicate his own uncertainty about the validity of revolution and would further explain his main character's reluctance to join it.

__________________________
82 Ibid., p. 76.
Rain and humidity are dominant influences invading all aspects of their lives. The incessant rain which begins shortly after "lui's" death (the only one who had any sign of vitality) lessens with Andrée's arrival (the other life-force who exerts an influence on the narrator). It is an isolating death-image for it cuts off all communication outside the country (A. 21) and encourages the Casa residents to stay inside the tomb-like Casa ("odeur de sarcophage" (A. 97)):

C'est comme une suie, comme une vapeur de mazout qui colle aux mains, aux vêtements. Les murs et les plafonds suintent à grosses gouttes d'humidité âcre. Plus rien ne sèche. (A. 21)

Ici la pluie lave tout, les vitres, les cerveaux, les rues.... (A. 22)

La pluie a transformé l'immeuble en une masse gluante. Nous avançons mais avec lenteur, une lenteur étudiée que nous voulons inévitable - nos chairs sont blanches et flasques - l'humidité est telle que les cheveux et la barbe ne poussent plus - nous nous sommes arrêtés de penser, peut-être de vivre.

Les ongles plient, ils ne cassent plus...Il y a de la boue partout - les dalles autrefois polies ont reconquis cet aspect glaiseux qui nous est cher. (A. 32-33)

Even other forms of imagery are affected. The light becomes "...lâche et tendre tout à la fois" (A. 29) and is even "mouillée" (A. 41). Dust, which was as omnipresent as the rain before the seasons changed, becomes "humide poussière" (A. 121). Heat combines with the rain to hasten dissipation and moss which has begun to grow in the flooded basement erupts into a veritable jungle:
Il pleut. Si rien ne sèche, il ne sert à rien de laver; le savon lui aussi s'est figé dans une mare et les puces s'en donnent à cœur joie sur nos corps, et les insectes ont déjà commencé de dévorer les tissus qui recouvrent les meubles, de percer les rideaux, les tentures, là où il y a des taches de sucre ou de cognac. Dans la cave, le ruisseau s'est tari: l'eau a trouvé une meilleure voie. Mais la mousse est si dense qu'il semble qu'une forêt monte à l'assaut des murs. (A. 67)

The Casa itself is invaded by water and, combined with equatorial heat, the stagnant pools spawn moss, insects, and general disintegration (A. 67). Even the central supporting pillar of the building has been undermined and is leaning (A. 49) - a symbol in itself of the disintegration of Western society. The characters do not escape the influence of water imagery: the important events of Monsignore's life have happened "sous le signe de la pluie" (A. 127) and he and Pauline are "oiseaux de pluie" (A. 40); "lui" and Israël are drowned birds ("... les oiseaux se sont noyés" (A. 73)). Even their deaths are linked with liquidity: "lui" by sinking into quicksand "...pendant la saison chaude alors que tout fondait si facilement..." (A. 23) and Israël who is killed because she and her husband have both been driven mad by the rains (A. 29). "La loi c'est celle de la pluie..." As the residents of the Casa become more removed from the life outside, they begin to become more liquid themselves in the sense of excessive drinking "...pour mieux correspondre au paysage" (A. 25) and the "glouglou des bouteilles" (A. 79) is a common sound.

The narrator's emergence from his "shell" is a movement into positive life imagery and the death imagery associated with water is offset by its cleansing, purifying qualities in washing the apartment — what Cécile Cloutier refers to as "cette cérémonie de purification". Water and fire may both have a purifying effect and in this instance the author's intention is clear from the following sequence:

Nous allons changer le décor. Pour que d'autres personnages en naissent qui ne soient pas des escargots. (A. 135)

J'ai fait un immense feu dans la cheminée en y brûlant tout ce qui me rappelle trop l'immeuble. (A. 135)

Il faut tout laver: planchers, plafonds, portes, fenêtres, murs même. Parce que la poussière c'est l'ennui. (A. 136)

La pluie a presque cessé. Elle ne tombe plus que spasmodiquement. L'appartement comme la ville s'éclaire lentement. Tout est propre, reluit; cela sent bon...La vie s'est glissée entre nos murs. (A. 137)

The rain which had been all-pervasive has now almost stopped and other imagery shows a similar reversal.

Light imagery is at first associated with the sun — here quite unlike the triumphant presence in Salut Calarneau! for the sun is not "...un archétype stable et les intimations climatiques peuvent très souvent lui donner un net accent péjoratif. Dans les pays tropicaux, le

---

84 Ibid.
soleil et son cortège de disette et de sécheresse est néfaste". The sun is strongest during the search for "lui" and creates intense heat and discomfort:

...ce soleil qui ressemblait à une lampe à arc - les mouches collaient à nos corps, avec avidité, elles mangeaient le sel. (A. 35)

...la chaleur faisait bouillir l'air. (A. 34)

Il faisait horriblement chaud et avec ça les mouches et les courroies des fusils qui sciaient les épaules... (A. 37)

In the present time of the novel, the light is at first modified and weakened by the rain and then becomes stronger ("la lumière se fait plus précise" (A. 108)) at the same time as the narrator's situation becomes clearer to him.

Both the heat and light imagery become positive after Andrée's arrival: the intense, destructive heat is softened to a "chaleur partagée" (A. 130) and she herself is "encadrée de lumière" (A. 118) with eyes which have "beaucoup de lumière" (A. 120). The apartment gets gradually lighter as does the day outside (A. 137) and at the moment of their escape the rain has almost stopped and the light is taking over:

Et puis la lumière était telle que je me suis attardé à l'écouter s'avancer vers les murs du palais. La lumière. Comme un faisceau coloré sous une tente de cirque. (A. 143)

He and Andrée have become associated with the positive light imagery

---

86Ibid., p. 81
while the others have remained untouched by it, still grappling with the dark night of their consciences.

The basic structure of the novel incorporates two time levels: the present which deals with day-to-day existence in the Casa and the past which consists of memories of "lui". These "moments nuls" and "moments merveilleux", respectively, create an atmosphere which echoes the monotonous, meaningless "nappe étale" of their present lives and juxtaposes with flashbacks the real meaning of their existence. This indirect method of presenting the real significance of the novel indicates the degree to which those in the aquarium seek to avoid the realities of life for it is only in the narrator's memories that we encounter what has gone before.

The novel is divided into two parts which mirror the narrator's development from an "escargot" to a human being who is capable of escaping the aquarium. In Part One, we are introduced to the enclosed existence in the Casa which is echoed in the use of static or reflexive verbs: "Il m'arrive de frissonner..." (A. 55); "...s'est-il vu forcé..." (A. 64). It appears that the inhabitants do not actively choose their course of action but rather play a passive rôle in an environment where others (people or objects) make the decisions: "On a coupé le gaz..."


(A. 62); "...je fais des bruits avec ma bouche qui m'inquiètent..."
(A. 88); "la ville nous colle au mur" (A. 62). Broken sentences and the use of ellipsis give a feeling of ambiguity or "unfinishedness" as though there is no point in completing a thought. Also, there is so little surprise left in their lives "mise en commun" that they already know what the other will say before the sentence is finished.

The future tense is avoided in this "présent perpétuel"\(^89\) except for the revolutionaries whose only hope lies in the future (A. 59-61). The memories of "lui" begin with his death and proceed in reverse order as the narrator recalls his words and actions. At first we only glimpse what has happened ("Je vous emmerde..." (A. 21)) but the details become longer and more descriptive until the entire picture is revealed. A word ("lui", "il") or phrase ("Je vous emmerde") is then sufficient to recall the entire remembered past and sets a past-present rhythm which accelerates as the narrator evolves in his own conscience to an awareness of his situation:

Nous remontons donc peu à peu à reculons, depuis la mort jusqu'à Andrée. Quand celle-ci s'amène, on peut dire que tout ce passé rejoint en fait le présent, coïncidant désor­
mas avec lui, car le narrateur s'est assez dégagé de la
condition d'escargot pour pouvoir se substituer à l'inconnu
auprès de la jeune femme.\(^90\)

\(^{89}\) C. Cloutier, op cit., 23.

Andrée's letter begins Part Two and takes us furthest back in past memories of "lui". It also signals the end of those memories for she has now replaced "lui" as the point of reference in the narrator's mind and, because they share no past, he must think of her in terms of the future. After her arrival in the aquarium, they plan their future - and their escape - together. The "compte à rebours" parallels the flashbacks in Part One as a method of accelerating the pace towards a conclusion. The passive, static verbs of Part One have become action-oriented as he arranges their escape: "...je descends l'escalier quatre à quatre..." (A. 150); "...fermer la porte, les oublier" (A. 150); "...rassemblez la milice..." (A. 148). The future tense which had been avoided ("...l'avenir, c'est ridicule" (A. 22)) is now allowed to take over as he breaks out of the suffocating circle of memories. The countdown "...conduit à la fois à la cessation de la pluie, à l'éclatement de la révolution et à la fuite libératerice" and this links the narrator's solution, the imagery, and the structure.

The language used in L'Aquarium is international French with the occasional English phrase incorporated as it might occur in speech: "zoom back" (A. 85); "made in Japan" (A. 112); "to go ahead" (A. 116). The only occurrence of "popular" Quebec French is in Lauzon's speech.

---

91 Ibid., p. 201.
92 M. Tétu, op cit., p. 277.
The narrator does not openly identify himself with Quebec, preferring to allude to his origins and speaking an international French.

The structure of the novel has been much discussed in terms of the cinematic influences on it (flashbacks) and the "nouveau roman" aspects. While some found these techniques disconcerting, others felt that the real statement of the novel lay more in the structure than in the plot: "Or, il suffit de lire L'Aquarium, pour comprendre que l'expérience essentielle menée par l'auteur se passe bien moins au niveau de l'anecdote narrée que dans la dimension vaste et profonde du style". While the structure may be part of the "nouveau roman" tradition, what is more important is that it relates to the society in which it was created:

Les manières du nouveau roman ne sont pas seules en cause, ici, et des critiques français, même, ont aperçu que L'Aquarium, malgré son exotisme d'apparence, transpose une expérience fondamentalement canadienne-française.

Thus, in spite of its setting, L'Aquarium does deal with the Quebec situation at the time which was an emergence from a stagnant political period into a new era of hope. The future is uncertain in this new Quebec but if they can reject the past (C'est inutile; c'est inutile de se rappeler" (A. 157) ) and the status quo of their aquarium

94 G. Marcotte, op. cit., p. 70.
they will find true values outside the old system. Godbout seems to warn that the time has come to act: the "oxygen" is running out in the Quebec aquarium and the "revolutionaries" are at the door. It is time to "return home" in one's commitments and become collectively engaged ("les mains sales") in the task at hand.
Socio-Political Background

The 1962-64 period during which Godbout wrote his second novel was characterized by its instability and confusion, a time which Gérard Bergeron has referred to as the "désblocage" after the stagnation of the Duplessis era. It was a time for airing new ideas and either discarding or altering old ones to fit the new mood, a period of change and uncertainty.

On the one hand, there was an emerging "nation" beginning to insist on its "special status" (as evidenced by the 1962 Liberal campaign slogan "maîtres chez nous") and, on the other, a federal government not overly sympathetic to the problems and demands of Quebec. One issue which served as a focus for this underlying conflict was the area of language rights. On January 20, 1962, André Laurendeau published an editorial calling for the establishment of a Royal Commission on bilingualism. Initially, the federal government rejected the idea but pressure for such a commission grew until the decision was reversed and Laurendeau was appointed as its co-chairman in 1963. Although the preliminary report was not released until 1965, the whole issue of bilingualism and

---

its importance for Canadian unity was kept constantly before the public by the media.

The same year witnessed the eruption of violence in the United States with the assassination of President Kennedy and race riots in major cities. Elsewhere in the world, nationalist movements had taken a more violent turn in the process of achieving independence. The violent mood invaded Canadian politics as well with the appearance of bombs in Westmount mailboxes. The FLQ (Front de Libération du Québec) and the later Armée de Libération du Québec were both modelled after similar organizations in Algeria and drew some of their initial organizers from a Belgian liberation front. Their cause was the total political separation of Quebec from Canada—by violent means, if necessary—and the bombs in Westmount mailboxes were a symbolic stance against the federal and English Canadian presence in Quebec. More than any other single factor the FLQ were responsible for bringing the issue to international attention and Godbout was certainly affected by the death of their first victim:

La mort de William O’Neill a changé ma vie et la fin de mon roman.... Je suis une victime de l'actualité.\(^2\)

They found support with the left-wing intellectuals of the period who felt that the existence of Canada meant the negation of the

---

\(^2\) G. Godin, "Jacques Godbout: '...on est un petit peu usés'", Le Magazine Maclean, IV (sept. 1964), 63.
Quebec reality and that "actions brutales" were called for; however political terrorism was supported by few and the ideological sympathy which many French-Canadians may have felt for their cause quickly dwindled with the death of O'Neill. Neither was there widespread support for independence: a poll published by Le Maclean in November 1963 showed 13% of Quebecers for independence, 15% opposed, 23% undecided and 21% who did not know what separation was. That 44% could not answer one way or the other on this question indicates the confusion of the period.

The issue of Canadian nationalism also came to the fore in this period. What was Canada? What was a Canadian? It was felt by many that English Canada was dominated by both Britain and the United States and that "exception faite du Québec, le Canada manque totalement d'homogénéité et même d'identité". One issue which brought this feeling to light was the flag debate which pitted the "traditionalists" who felt strong links with Britain against the "pro-Canadians" who felt that Canada should assert her independence as a nation - at least symbolically.

American dominance of Canadian affairs on the issue of nuclear warheads


also spurred discussion on Canadian identity and the possibility of independence from the American monolith:

Ni géographiquement, ni historiquement, ni économiquement, ni culturellement, il n'y a une naturalité canadienne, une canadianté. Et pourtant, il y a un Canada qui dure depuis 100 ans. Contre les défis de la nature, s'est quand même établi un style de vie 'canadien', constitué du principal ingrédient du britannisme que recouvre et pénètre de plus en plus l'américanisme avec l'assaisonnement plus ou moins piquant d'une québécitûde - comme on dit 'négritude' depuis qu'Aimé Césaire a lancé le mot.6

French Canada also had to decide to what extent they were French or American:

Qu'est-ce que, ou plutôt que doit être, que veut être ce Canada: une instance américaine de la "francité" ou bien l'expression française d'un contenu américain? Quelque chose d'original, en tout cas. Un être qui se cherche et vaut mieux que ce qu'il lui a été donné de faire jusqu'à présent.7

Many of the issues which had concerned Godbout during the Aquarium period continued here but had more distinct political overtones. This was undoubtedly partly the result of his affiliation with a new periodical, Parti Pris, which had become the forum for left wing, pro-separatist ideology. It counted among its contributors Jacques Berque, Paul Chamberland, Hubert Aquin, Michel Van Schendel - and


Jacques Godbout who contributed seven articles between October, 1963 and July, 1965. This review, by its very name, implied a commitment to the philosophy it promoted but beyond that it had an influence on the literature of the period. Godbout later remarked that a review "...doit se réfléchir dans une perspective d'action politique..." which is what *Parti Pris* attempted to do. On the same point, he criticized *Cité Libre* for attacking the new nationalism instead of helping to change the system.

Godbout reiterated his attack against the Church for continuing to control the educational system and against the government for allowing religious segregation to continue in the schools. The importance of education to Godbout was that it influenced minds and he felt that it was through the schools that nations are formed: politics and economics come later after the psychological needs of nationalism are met. He

---


therefore welcomed the establishment of a Minister of Education which would allow citizens to concentrate on building a country rather than being faithful to the Church first. 14

He also realized how far behind Quebec was in the production of books for its educational needs 15 and how much education affected the development of writers in Quebec where serious novelists had only started to emerge since the 1950's. 16 They would continue to emerge and develop not only through education but also because of "...la force des choses" 17 for Godbout believed that a writer, more than any other artist, would become involved in the "...aventure collective qui enrichira leur aventure individuelle". 18 In fact, he felt that an artist in Quebec had no choice but to be "engagé":

A cause de l'aventure même de notre nation, il nous est difficile, je crois, de refuser l'engagement. En fait, le créateur, ces années-ci n'a qu'un choix: être engagé ou être barouetté.... aujourd'hui une réplique de cinéma, un poème, un tableau, ne peuvent être pensées en dehors de la lutte des classes, de la lutte des nations, de la lutte des générations, suivant le pays qu'on habite.


17 Ibid.

En somme le créateur doit accepter que l'action publique, pour qui n'est pas politicien, soit un acte d'amour, absurde peut-être, mais nécessaire autant à la nation qu'à la création.

Godbout himself wrote on the need for public picnic grounds and the possible benefits of televised parliamentary debates.

The publication of Poésie-Poetry '64 (which Godbout co-edited) presented new poets from French and English Canada in a bilingual format. Despite his participation in this publication, he opposed the principle of bilingualism because exposure to the English language eroded the ability to think in French and caused writers to forget their syntax and grammar, leaving the Quebec writer inarticulate and unable to cope with the challenges of technique.

He warned readers in France that writers in Quebec were also more preoccupied with the socio-economic structure than with new literary forms.

---

19 Ibid., 238.

20 J. Godbout, "Pour riches seulement", Parti Pris, I (1963), 60-1.

21 J. Godbout, "Pour une information globale", Parti Pris, V (fév. 1964), 59-60.


23 J. Godbout, "Les mots tuent", Liberté, VI (mars-avr. 1964), 140.

24 Ibid.
and that their goal as "... (d'anciens paysans français) devenus américains"\(^{25}\) was to live not merely survive. To achieve this in English North America had meant developing a defense against assimilation. The Quebec language which was neither "paysan" nor Parisian French but rather "... une forme avancée du français"\(^{26}\) became "... l'expression juste et grave d'un effort conscient de décolonisation"\(^{27}\). It was time for France to realize that a French-Canadian would never be a Frenchman\(^{28}\) and be willing to accept different versions of her language as the English had with "American"\(^{29}\).

In 1964, his view was that there was no "littérature canadienne-française" but rather "... de la poésie française du Canada, du roman français du Canada"\(^{30}\) inasmuch as they belonged to a linguistic community which included Europe, Africa and America. By 1965, in the preface to *Le couteau sur la table*, while still feeling part of French literature, he emphasized the necessity of being distinct from the

---


27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.


...ce roman, s'il fait encore partie de la 'littérature française', est peut-être déjà plus près de celle de la francité, dont parle Berque. Dans cette francité nous nous reconnaissons, de Dakar à Montréal; mais plutôt qu'être Français, d'une façon personnelle, nous préférons maintenant être nous-mêmes, en français.

Robidoux saw this as a major example of the shift to being "...nous-mêmes, face au monde entier". 32

Godbout also felt that French literature in America reflected the experience of a minority who sees itself in a colonial situation which must be destroyed by verbal or physical violence: where the 30-year olds thought in terms of the old analogy of "nègres blancs" the younger generation looked to new examples of colonialism for "...leur colère froide et une haine qu'ils disent nécessaire à l'amour". 33 He agreed that liberation movements in the rest of the world made French-Canadians more aware of their own position but felt that the Algerian pattern did not totally apply in Quebec where there was a discrepancy between the generations. 34 The differences in dealing with their situation can be seen

31 J. Godbout, foreword in Le couteau sur la table (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965). Hereafter referred to as Couteau; textual quotations identified by (C.) and the appropriate page number in my text.


34 J. Godbout, "La haine", Parti Pris,II, no. 3 (nov. 1964), 19-20.
in the literature to come out of the period:

Cette aventure sera violente ou pacifique, haineuse ou sublimée dans une nouvelle forme de jazz, mais elle sera à coup sûr la constante d'une écriture qui oscillait entre un provincialisme étriqué et une tendance à s'exiler à tout prix. 35

As the next section will show, this oscillating rhythm is basic to the structure of Le couteau sur la table. We shall also see to what extent the concerns of the period are evident in Couteau: the problems of coping with identity in the midst of English North America; the need to belong to the twentieth century; increased perception of the need to "de-colonise"; and the violence appearing in Canadian politics.

The Narrative Journey

In this second novel we meet a young French-Canadian who is "...le même personnage quelques années plus tard...". This time the novel is set in North America - particularly Montreal and Western Canada rather than in some unidentified tropical country - but the problems faced by the central characters are familiar. The narrator is once again concerned with defining his own identity, this time in the midst of English North America:

Dans ce roman, le héros a envie de vivre. Il veut être quelqu'un, il veut posséder l'Amérique. Il est partagé entre la tradition française et la vie américaine: il est à la recherche de son identité, de sa définition de nord-américain. Il lui semble possible de le faire en possédant une anglo-saxonne, Patricia. Temporairement l'idylle réussit.

The relationship between the narrator and Patricia spans a ten-year time period (approximately 1953-1963) and may be separated into four phases: their early days in the West; their growing apart in Montreal; his escape into another space during the ten-year odyssey; his return to Patricia (Canada) and the necessity of facing the impossibility of the situation. Within these phases, the narrator is dealing with both a personal and a collective situation:

36 J. Godbout, "Ecrire", Liberté, XIII, nos. 4-5 (nov. 1971), 142.

...la vie personnelle du narrateur en rapport avec Patricia et Madeleine, le manque d'appartenance du Canadien français dans un continent anglais, l'homme face à la misère du monde.  

He is concerned with a relationship on the personal level which is greatly affected by his ability to cope with being a French-Canadian in North America; in other words, his ability to find his place or identity in the time and space of modern North America affects all aspects of his life. When he discovers how dominated he is by this society - economically and culturally - he seeks ways to escape it either mentally or physically. One after another these avenues of escape are closed off and he is left with the choice of accepting the status quo or changing his situation.

In the first phase at an army camp in the West, he is in the midst of an English milieu where he must deal with the threats to his identity - Patricia, English North America - and come to terms with them in his own way before he will feel at ease. His involvement with Patricia and her life-style brings his problems into focus:

[Sans en être le tout début, ma rencontre avec Patricia, cet été-là, avait quand même précipité (empré) ma situation vis-à-vis le bien d'autrui. (C. 14)]

In addition to economic problems (which mean he has to cheat at cards or write gossip columns to afford her entertainment) he is faced with a culture which he finds at once alien and dominating.

---

38 M. Primeau, "Nouvelle vague", Canadian Literature, no. 40 (spring 1969), 85.
He is disoriented on all levels. On the personal level, he cannot even imagine what Patricia's days are like when they are apart because their backgrounds are so different (C. 31). While she copes very well in this society, he is a "Frenchie" (C. 46) in the midst of anglophones. He only half-understands the songs at the barracks and often witnesses the age-old fight of French versus English at the camp bar:

...les Canadiens français vengeaient, à coups de bottine, la déportation des Acadiens, la perte de la Louisiane, les sacrifices de Dieppe, pendant que les Anglais cherchaient à défendre leur droits sur l'Amérique et la petite colonie de Québec. (C. 32)

He finds himself surrounded by streets which all look the same and a people "...sans fard, sans privilège, sans amour..." (C. 61).

It is a civilization of "...les brosses Fuller, et les catalogues de Simpson's Sears (C. 67), a vast monotonous country. The epitome of this civilization is the Lake where they spend their weekends - artificial, controlled, geometric (C. 19) where even the sounds may be synthetic (C. 37).

They are both "...des gitans sans passé, médiocres, sans traditions, sans vierge à la mer l'automne, sans chapelets..." (C. 30) and she has replaced the church as his catechism. It is the cinema, not the church, which has become their new object of worship. This is the North American time and space where Walt Disney characters are better known than their own heroes (C. 30). Patricia sings songs from American
musicals (C. 40) and dreams of one day living next to millions of people in New York or perhaps Chicago (C. 55). He finds that Patricia is "... un peu ce clinquant, cet univers de parvenus, ce chrome qui parle anglais..." (C. 27-8). He is attracted to this world and its "mediocrity" but finds it difficult to relate to. Patricia makes it easier for him to enter that culture:

Patricia, c'est mon côté faible, ma mère, le moyen terme par lequel j'entre en contact charnel avec les cent quatre-vingt-dix millions d'individus qui m'entourent. Mon petit catéchisme du vide colorié. (C. 28)

To this point, the relationship between Patricia and the narrator has been fairly stable because it is her space and she has entirely dominated. He has been ill at ease in her world but has depended on her to get along in it. Occasionally, he has slipped briefly out of this narrow space to feel part of the universe ("incroyablement humain" (C. 53) ) or to take a "voyage" with Patricia around the world through postcards (C. 58). He also escaped in time to his childhood while walking in the woods with her but, when they try to exchange childhood memories, their differences are too great: she grew up as a rich girl and he came from much humbler origins (C. 72). Their collective memories are different as well: English Canada has war monuments and wounded men while French Canada has a psychological scar from the conscription crisis (C. 73).

The train trip out of the West is as much a mental escape for him out of this unfamiliar space as it is a physical journey from the vast
expanse of the Canadian West to the city he knows. As they enter Montreal, they are moving from the wide expanses of the Prairies which he finds so empty into the ever-narrowing streets of the city "...qui ne m'était pas étrangère (C. 81). They must pass through a long tunnel before entering the heart of the city - an almost physical separation between what has gone before and the new life before them (C. 81) - and once they go from the immense station into their small apartment on Mountain Street (C. 81) they spend most of the winter "...repliés sur nous-mêmes" (C. 86).

She is the one who pays the rent which soon puts a strain on their relationship and he begins to analyse his situation both with Patricia and as a French-Canadian. As their personal relationship runs into problems, they become increasingly aware of differences on the collective level which cannot be ignored:

...le couple n'est pas une cellule isolée, une oasis de fraîcheur et d'oubli au milieu du monde; le monde entier au contraire était dans le couple. 39

All his "frustrations passées" 40 have been revived since he has come back to Montreal and he becomes preoccupied with a "...tâche

---


collective, je parlais des foules, des devoirs, avec des envoûtées électorales" (C. 88-89). He criticizes her, half-jokingly, for being part of those who dominate the French-Canadian (she has acquired an English-Canadian lover from Westmount (C. 88) ) but she is not amused. The "moments tendus" (C. 89) between them increase.

He now meets Madeleine from east-end Montreal who is as much a political choice as a personal one: "Patricia n'était plus qu'un territoire abandonné au premier Anglais venu, Madeleine, elle, était ce pays conquis que je retrouvais lentement, calmement" (C. 105). They share a common background and she fits much more easily into his new circle of intellectual friends whom Patricia could not stomach: "Pour moi je n'hésitais pas entre la solide chaleur de ces nouvelles amitiés et l'amour à heure fixe qu'elle [Patricia] m'offrait contre temps perdu" (C. 108). Together he and Madeleine meet a wide range of people who open up another side of society for him — "...toute une société nouvelle en marge de l'antique unicité locale..." (C. 105).

He finds that these meetings are largely useless "...avec des Européens en exil, rencontrés au hasard d'un no man's land culturel" (C. 105) and prefers to spend his time with fellow French Canadians. Their discussions are just as interminable but at least they are from this space even if it may seem that they could have been elsewhere: "...paras en Algérie, cultiver le poivre à Cayenne, s'affirmer objecteurs de conscience à Clermont-Ferrand, ou mourir, simples fantassins dans la
loyale armée de Sa Majesté toute britannique" (C. 109). Their conversations are more like monologues with each trying to outdo the other in political metaphor or analogy (C. 108-109) and each of them "gêntiment fausse" (C. 105) like the "escargots" of L'Aquarium.

He sought out these café intellectuals because he felt a need to find a meaning for his existence - something he was still lacking in his personal life - but he realizes (as the others must) that their revolt is only talk as they plot a bloody vengeance (C. 110). They have not fought in two hundred years and their weapons and thinking are badly outdated (C. 109) but they are able to ignore this fact in the dream of establishing their "country" to its former status, busily replacing the old devalued myths by new ones: "C'étaient les conditions mêmes de la création" (C. 119). These conversations are reminiscent of voodoo ceremonies which Godbout described in another "colony" - Haiti: "...ils oublient pour l'instant, par leurs danses, que celui qui invente l'outil est celui qui domine la terre. Ils oublient leurs maîtres". 41

Berque felt that these conversations were their way of keeping the feeling that they were still alive but he also felt that the intellectuals were not united enough to fight the negativism in French-

---

Canadian life. Although they were the first to notice the effects of "dépersonnalisation", they were not effective in taking measures to fight it and soon lost any initiative for change:

Dans ses efforts les plus catégoriques d'auto-affirmation, elle donnait la preuve, en se parlant trop, qu'elle se cherchait davantage qu'elle ne se faisait: d'où son essoufflement prématuré.

It is comfortable to be with friends in the warmth of a café but they have no answer to his problem of identity. Instead of broadening his horizons with these people, his focus was becoming more narrow for, as with any nationalist movement, their primary focus was their own time and space and until that situation was rectified (in their opinion), they had no time for any concerns beyond that range.

He knows that he still would have chosen Patricia over their revolution ("cauchemar de salon" (C. 120) ) without hesitation but it is too late for that. He sees the richness of her cultural background and realizes that their differences stem from childhood "...comme chacun vit suivant la mémoire qu'il a d'un certain rythme, d'une danse complice. Nous étions avalés par nos mots, nos mots d'enfants" (C. 112). Their

---

43 J. Berque, "Les révoltés du Québec", 50.
political differences have created a "mur des nervosités" (C. 112) between them which is not possible to overcome. They no longer share memories; instead, he and Madeleine now exchange them "...comme au marché, faisant vivre Montréal au niveau de ses superstitions" (C. 124).

Just when it appears that this relationship might work, Madeleine is killed in an accident. Any hope that he might have had in their future together as an aid to his own definition is no longer possible. With her death, his only reason for staying in this time and space has died as well. The rest of his acquaintances are concerned with the past and not with a way of coping in the present. He finds no one with whom he can share his concerns: Montreal has become "...silencieuse et vide..." (C. 147) and too confined. He feels the need to be "ailleurs" (C. 129) in any city which is "...bien de son siècle bien de son temps" (C. 128) and decides to explore America after stealing the money to finance his adventure.

This trip becomes a criss-cross network across the continent as he seeks to escape from the law but it is also a voyage of self-discovery. He is able to see the civilisation of the United States first-hand and measure himself against the economic and cultural standards of America. He believed that the money he had would allow him to live as he wished and have anything he wanted for this was a society in which God was the wealthiest banker (C. 149); however, in spite of his new-found wealth, he found it difficult to adapt: "Ah n'échappe pas qui veut à ses idéaux
La philosophie du chèque de paie hebdomadaire, seventy eight dollars and thirty cents, c'est comme un repas à l'ail" (C. 150).

He mingled with the downtrodden wishing to be accepted by them and to be able to identify with them (Jews, Negroes, immigrants) but he could not (C. 151).

The one person he did relate to at all was Pedro, a Mexican labourer in Laredo, who could not understand a word he said but served as a listening post while he unburdened himself of the major annoyances of his life and tried to sort out his thoughts on being a French-Canadian in North America. The fact that Pedro is the only one in whom he confides is significant: "C'est un beau jour que celui où ces deux êtres vaincus se parlent et se comprennent précisément parce qu'ils sont tous deux balayés". 45

As the danger of arrest passes, he feels a "vertige inquiet" (C. 152) and decides it is time to return home. He has not succeeded in finding himself here and realizes that one cannot hope to find an identity outside one's own time and space. His attempt to escape his collective responsibilities has not been possible either and he is more committed to defining his collective identity as well on his return.

It is winter when he returns to Patricia/Canada - for the two are now synonymous in his mind. His present is full of "moments nuls" as he evaluates their past as well as their present in an effort to determine what is best for him and what will best answer his personal and collective needs. He hopes that she will prove to be "...cette femme utile..." with the missing pieces to his puzzle (C. 65).

He wants to speak of what happened to him while he was away and of its importance to him but she escapes into sleep whenever he brings up the subject: "...elle tombe de sommeil dès que je lui parle d'hier ou de la vie ailleurs..." (C. 42). She leaves him to sort through these memories by himself for they are from a time and space out of her control where she cannot dominate. The self-assurance which she had had ten years before is now more securely in place than ever and she is firmly anchored in the North American time/space. She sees no need for showing interest in anything outside these boundaries: she does not follow the news (C. 26) and she is sarcastic to him for carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders (C. 28-9). He, on the other hand, feels a concern for his fellow-man (C. 133) but also realizes that this concern is partially an escape mechanism to avoid dealing with his own situation.

---

He begins to realize that his problem on the collective level, as a French-Canadian, is that they do not belong to a universally-recognized culture:

...peu à peu émerge de ma conscience le Problème: si j'avais la peau noire, le nez sémite! Mais voilà de grandes cultures universellement reconnues! Je parle français en Amérique, c'est là la grande connerie, la faute, je serais fils putatif des Folies-Bergère et du Paris by Night que la Salvation Army n'en serait pas plus émue... (C. 71)

Patricia, who is Jewish, has a rich cultural heritage ("universellement reconnues" (C. 71) ) and brings up the old analogy between the Jews and the French-Canadians which he rejects:

...cette analyse mille fois recommencée, mille fois inutile, reprise d'une génération à l'autre, amenant chaque fois quelques adolescents à la révolte et puis au sommeil, bien entendu. Deux cents hivers semblables... (C. 93)

Others have conquered their space (C. 120) and for them the "beat" of Jack Kerouac's generation means "...beaten, battu, écrasé, vaincu à la guerre et au commerce" (C. 113). Kerouac was a genius because he left: "ton génie ici, au pays, on te l'aurait étouffé, tordu, asséché" (C. 114). Godbout felt that this was why the French-Canadian culture had never flourished here while Kerouac had succeeded in spreading "notre douleur" (C.114) across an entire continent:

---

47 Jack Kerouac (1922-1969) was born in Lowell, Massachusetts of French-Canadian parentage and in the 1950's wrote On the Road in which the word "beat" meant "beatific".
Avec Kérouac, c'est facile d'avoir des affinités parce que même s'il écrit en anglais, il est vraiment un Canadien-français, de ça il n'y a aucun doute.48

However, Kerouac's solution meant compromise and assimilation which was no better than what they already had.

On the personal level, he discovers that the feeling of emptiness and uselessness which had begun on his trip through America is within him and is part of his unease in being "...chez soi sans y être (C. 120), of feeling more at ease in her skin than in his own. She is still able to dominate him monetarily (C. 43) and emotionally ("...Patricia me tient par le bout du coeur, me ramène à elle..." (C. 80)) but he knows that some day he will yell "...comme un nègre..." (C. 80) to be set free. It is only a matter of time before this happens but at this stage he still feels that he needs her (C. 43) and that there must be, for both of them, something "valable" to do (C. 42).

Gradually, he realizes that their time together is reaching its end as inevitably as the nursery rhyme which they both share - "inimi nimaïnimo" (C. 50). He tries to ignore the facts as long as he can but he cannot escape the inevitable conclusion: that their backgrounds are


too divergent for building a relationship and that their futures do not lie in the same direction. Patricia wanted a child but he knew that it was already too late for them (C. 87) and he now admits to her that he has never felt that she was completely his (C. 154) - ("cet univers étrange" (C. 57) ).

He does not feel at home in her space (C. 154) ("...ce n'est plus mon pays, cela l'a-t-il jamais été?" (C. 57) ) and realizes that she would continue to dominate their relationship because of her economic superiority (C. 135). He now knows that he could no longer accept that - any more than his people could continue to submit to economic subser-vience. He has linked his personal future with his collective existence:

Le destin personnel qui s'accomplit ainsi demeure cependant inséparable des significations collectives qui ressortissent au caractère à la fois nord-américain et québécois du roman.50

Thus the breakdown of their personal relationship is also a political awareness "...analogue à celle du F.L.Q. qui naît au moment où s'écrit le livre, en 1963".51 He tries to explain his decision to Patricia who does not understand (C. 155) but "...cela n'a aucune importance. Nous sommes des millions à comprendre..." (C. 155).

The ending is ambiguous but seems to imply that if there is no struggle on her/Canada's part, there will be no violence: "(Je ne te


51 J. Godbout, "Ecrire", 142.
ferai aucun mal, si tu ne dis mot, Patricia..." (C. 157). Critics differ on its interpretation: is it a murder, an ultimate possession ("C'est ainsi pense-t-il qu'il va conquérir l'Amérique avec sa francité et ne se fera pas avaler par elle") or is it simply a negative definition of self because he has decided what he does not want or cannot be without defining the positive aspect of his new life? There is also the danger that he may return to his old habit of talking instead of acting.

The violence of the ending is a reaction to a colonial situation as described by Memmi:

Mais la révolte est la seule issue à la situation coloniale, qui ne soit pas un trompe-l'œil, et le colonisé le découvre tôt ou tard. Sa condition est absolue et réclame une solution absolue, une rupture et non un compromis. Il a été arraché de son passé et stoppé dans son avenir, ses traditions agonisent et il perd l'espoir d'acquérir une nouvelle culture, il n'a ni langue, ni drapeau, ni technicité, ni existence nationale ni internationale, ni droits, ni devoirs: il ne possède rien, n'est plus rien et n'espère plus rien.

The ending is also ambiguous because the narrator is still traveling, still searching for his real self. He is leaving this situation but we do not know the end of his trip just as Godbout did not know the final ramifications of the separatist movement. The narrator

52 M. Tétu, op. cit., p. 275.
53 J. Allard, "I, ni, mi, ni, mai, ni, mo", 113.
55 A. Memmi, op. cit., p. 117.
had succeeded more than the others in discovering himself in his time and space and in being able to move beyond the present into the future. He was also able to see beyond strictly Quebec concerns being the only one of the major characters to leave the country and show concern for man's universal condition.

Patricia is well-suited, as we have seen, in her time and space but she is also locked into it. The extent of her spatial movement has been a round-trip from Winnipeg to Montreal, returning to where they first met as though nothing had changed in the intervening years: "nous étions partis d'ici, ici je te retrouve" (C. 35). She is not interested in the rest of the world nor they in her (C. 117-118) and she will not be part of his trip out of this space. She is also stopped in time: no future is possible (no children) and the present seems to have come to an abrupt end – if not in death then in changed circumstances.

Madeleine's world never moved outside Montreal and ended with her death. Had she lived she would have linked together the past (common memories), present, and future (a child) for the narrator. The café intellectuals are caught in a perpetual present, creating myth after myth, where their only move is an occasional backward step into the collective past of Quebec but never forward into its future. They are lost in their world where they dream of a future which may never exist or of a past coloured by interpretation:
Dans cette aliénation grossière qui fait de lui [le Québécois] un être qui n'est pas d'ici, mais qui n'est pas d'ailleurs non plus, il a perdu le sentiment de ce qu'il est réellement. Certes, il conserve le souvenir de ce qu'il était. Mais ce souvenir est lui-même déguisé par les histoires revues et corrigées qu'on lui raconte sur son passé.\textsuperscript{56}

As in \textit{L'Aquarium}, the ability to move in time and space will influence the imagery associated with the characters and, in particular, the narrator as he searches to define his identity in the North American content.

The Metaphorical Journey

Where the life-death structure in L'Aquarium is based on the imagery associated with an aquarium - snail shells, murky water, lack of oxygen - the imagery in Couteau has moved north with the content. The major life-death structure in this instance is winter-spring and the images associated with those seasons: with winter, there is snow, cold, whiteness, and a muffled stillness - a form of hibernation; with spring, there is warmth, sudden bursts of renewal in nature, and a noisy return to activity after a long winter. In this case, the narrator and, briefly, Madeleine are the dynamic life-forces opposed to the static situation of Patricia and the café intellectuals. By extension, on the thinly-veiled analogical level, the narrator-Quebec is life and Patricia-Canada is death.

Patricia is strongly identified with winter imagery:

...une peau nordique...des yeux du nord, des cheveux d'un blond nordique, une langue du nord... (C. 36)

...j'ai bu l'eau qui coulait de son épaule et sur sa peau glacée j'ai cherché à épouser son sang qui bouillait. (C. 56)

...cheveux blonds couleur femme du nord... (C. 154)

She does not seem to mind the cold of winter (C. 21, 60) and identifies herself with a Christmas tree (C. 95) - a coniferous variety which is the only kind to survive winter. The narrator, on the other hand, seeks escape from the cold by searching out restaurants with exotic names (C. 27) or by dreaming of a warmer climate (C. 58). The Castle becomes
his ultimate refuge - a sort of hibernation while he waits for spring; "Nous dormons de plus en plus souvent, de plus en plus longtemps, comme si l'hiver avait peu à peu usé notre éveil" (C. 92). The Castle belongs to the "nocturne" world of withdrawal and synthesis and the feminine, intimate associations of the house are increased by the winter which rages outside (C. 126):

De l'hiver, la maison reçoit des réserves d'intimité, des finesse s d'intimité. Dans le monde hors de la maison, la neige efface les pas, brouille les chemins, étouffe les bruits, masque les couleurs. On sent en action une négation cosmique par l'universelle blancheur.

De toutes les saisons, l'hiver est la plus vieille. Elle met le l'âge dans les souvenirs. Elle renvoie à un long passé. Sous la neige la maison est vieille. Il semble que la maison vive en arrière dans les siècles lointains.

After a long winter of reverie and remembered injustices of the past two hundred years, the narrator is ready to emerge with the spring break-up.

Winter brings with it other associations: "...le Nord, pays du froid, de la guerre, de la mort...". The "guerre" in this case is the "war" of economic domination. Godbout felt that French-Canadians would weigh the economic advantages of separation and then stay with Ottawa.


59 G. Durand, *op cit.*, p. 481.
"for the winter"; that is, while the difficult times lasted. Berque links the perception of winter by French-Canadians to their cessation of activity on the land: "Cet homme a perdu son alliance avec le terroir rustique, sans pour autant s'approprier la ville. C'est seulement alors qu'il s'aperçoit de l'hiver". In other words, they have given up an area of work in which they had some control for a life in which they are economically dominated. The "silence" associated with winter is a symbol of this dominance: "Ce peuple est silencieux tout l'hiver. L'été venu, il a désappris à parler" (C. 56).

Madeleine who was strongly associated with life ("radieuse" (C. 103), "solide chaleur" (C. 107-8), pregnancy (C. 131) is another form of escape for the narrator which ends with her death and the "...silence énorme, inattendu" (C. 134) which accompanies it. Montreal also becomes "silencieuse et vide" (C. 147) after her death. He seeks escape from this emptiness in the company of his friends and in drink (C. 147-8) which he tries as a means of escape once again when he is at the Castle (C. 118). Drink in both instances allows him to pass beyond the level of daily life:


61 J. Berque, "Préface", p. 10.
La vertu de ces beuveries est à la fois de créer un lien mystique entre les participants et de transformer la condition morose de l'homme. Le breuvage enivrant a pour mission d'abolir la condition quotidienne de l'existence et de permettre la réintégration orgiastique et mystique. 62

The bird imagery which is used throughout Couteau is linked with an undercurrent of violence and death. It also indicates the ambivalence within the narrator who has not yet resolved his identity: "Ce dualisme de la personnalité non intégrée se reflétait dans l'image onirique de l'oiseau tour à tour cruel et protecteur". 63 He fantasizes about harming her while confusing it with loving her: "...j'ai vite la folle envie de lui arracher ses plumes les unes auprès les autres: je t'aime, beaucoup, passionnément, à la folie, jusqu'à ce que son corps nu et rose tremble de froid" (C. 87). When he and Patricia return to her home, Eastview Castle, the bird imagery continues as they run through the rooms like crows, "...les yeux vitreux, le bec recourbé, sec, les plumes hérissées" (C. 107). He and a stuffed owl are the guardians of her château, the owl being a symbolic "...gardienne de la maison obscure de la terre", 64 the "obscur" relating to the "nocturne"

62 G. Durand, op. cit., p. 299.


world of synthesis already associated with the house. The house as a
"nest" again reinforces the reflective aspect:

La maison-nid n'est jamais jeune... On y revient, on rêve d'y
revenir comme l'oiseau revient au nid, comme l'agneau revient
au berceau. Ce signe du retour marque d'infinies rêveries,
car les retours humains se font sur le grand rythme de la vie
humaine, rythme qui franchit des années, qui lutte par le
rêve contre toutes les absences.65

As winter ends, he realizes how "unhealthy" their situation is
("tout cela est malsain" (C. 154) ) and that he must leave before he,
too, dies like the goslings who do not survive winter (C. 154). He
realizes that in order to escape the cage (domination) he must choose
(C. 157) and that this choice will undoubtedly involve "d'ailes brisées
..." (C. 157).

Violence has been suggested in other images as well: Patricia
in a red dress becomes a "...tache de sang contre le mur..." (C. 20)
and has "...sang qui bouillait" (C. 56). In one of the narrator's
political harangues he speaks of the blood of his people which was used
to build the château of the enemy (C. 89) and his companions cry out
for a bloody vengeance (C. 110).

The "couteau" of the title reappears frequently as an under-
current of violence: a knife in Patricia's hand is juxtaposed with

death ("...la mort son couteau...") (c. 28); the light from passing cars forms "couteaux" (on the ceiling) as tires screech on sharp turns outside (c. 43-4); the brisk movements of the porters on the train remind him of "...une lame de couteau qui s'enfonce... des gestes en rasoir..." (c. 64). When he talks to Pedro in Laredo, the symbol moves from the unconscious to conscious level. He speaks of buying a knife with the motto "mi vida para un amor" engraved on it (c. 95) as though preparing for his final encounter with her. The knife is meant as a symbol of violence for the collective level as well: his café friends talk of revenge for their people and discuss the necessity of placing their weapons on the table (c. 108) and his final statement that the knife will stay on the table perhaps implies that the ultimate violence - death - will be avoided (c. 157).

The knife also symbolises purity:

C'est donc naturellement en des rites de coupure, de séparation dans lesquels le glaive minimisé en couteau joue encore un rôle discret, que nous trouverons les premières techniques de purification.66

In this instance, the "rite de coupure" is the separation of Quebec from Canada and of the narrator from Patricia. The "purification" of the narrator/Quebec would lie in the achievement of a sense of identity by this separation which need not be violent.

---

66 G. Durand, op. cit., p. 191.
Violence carries through to the light imagery as well and the light which reflects off the waves on the water forces them to avert their eyes "comme d'un horrible spectacle (C. 16); however, the image is most frequently found associated with other death imagery - winter and snow. The "soleil éclatant" on the Place du Tertre reflects off the snow to such an extent "...qu'on le croirait possédé de lumière"(C. 15) and squares of light fall from shop windows which "...comme des bruits éclatants forcent les gens qui passent à baisser à demi les paupières, peut-être à cause de la lueur trop vive..." (C. 34). The snow and light in combination conquer even the night: "La nuit n'existe plus vraiment: c'est un demi-jour, une pénombre (à cause de la neige abondante sans doute...)" (C. 82).

Patricia is closely associated with this cruel light from the beginning of the novel. She wishes to be pregnant by a winter sun (C. 15) which is at its weakest point in that season. The image is a sterile one reminiscent of the Bergmann film, Winter Light, the title of which was chosen for precisely that reason. Even indoors, her back is striped by the sun coming through a venetian blind (C. 18) and on the beach she bares her body to its brutal assault:

Patricia...offrait tout sons corps à la lumière qui éclatait de partout, blanche, blanche, blanche comme s'il lui manquait des demi-rayons, des ultra-quelque chose, comme si d'avoir traversé cette atmosphère elle en avait perdu les teintes qu'on lui connaît au spectre. Crue, comme si le ciel était taillé dans un coeur de céleri. (C. 40)
The light reaches her even at night when she watches the "jeux de lumière" (C. 47) on the ceiling. She plays at reflecting it with a piece of broken mirror, pretending that she is destroying the city with a death-ray (C. 117). The light beam flashes violently around the room and "...va s'écraser à une vitesse vertigineuse contre un tableau, un coin de mur, contre les meubles, raye le plafond, perce la porte..." (C. 117). She is clearly associated with the "diurne" world of harsh light and quick, sharp movements as opposed to the "nocturne" world of the narrator.

The cold, white snow is a purifying agent but, in this context, it is also an image of sterility as it accompanies the other winter/death imagery associated with Patricia. The snow muffles sound, shrouds the city and its people in silence, and inhibits movement or action much as the rain in L'Aquarium. Gradually, the purity and strength of this image is weakened as the spring approaches: "les pluies froides d'avril teintaient les jours, la neige accumulée était grise maintenant..." (C. 120). The strong, violent light is also weakened by this rain and the grip of winter begins to loosen. Even in the narrator's memories of the past, spring has arrived — violently: furious streams of melted snow plunging into gutters (C. 122).

67 Ibid., p. 194.
At the Castle, the spring winds attack the house, breaking off icicles (C. 126), and the snow begins to melt (C. 153) until only puddles are left to remind him of that season (C. 155). Spring has come violently like a slap in the face and has awakened him to the decision he must make:

(La haine est venue, comme une saison. Le printemps est venu, comme une gifle; personne ne peut lutter contre le vent, les saisons, la lumière blanche, la neige ébouriffée des rafales.) (C. 157)

The image of a spring awakening after a long winter of inactivity is part of the Quebec situation as it has been for generations:

L'hiver a été très long. Il vient de commencer à prendre fin, il y a une décennie à peine. De vieux rêves de liberté et d'indépendance sont revenus avec le printemps.\footnote{M. Rioux, La question du Québec (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1969), préface.}

The narrator has made a long circular trip in time and space, tracing his route away from Patricia and then back to her. This circular pattern is also part of the "nocturne" universe which has allowed him to synthesize his experiences and thoughts\footnote{G. Durand, \textit{op cit.}, p. 372.} in preparation for his decision. This universe, as has been mentioned, is opposed to Patricia's "diurne" world and Jacques Allard outlines other oppositions (Canada/Mexico, today/yesterday, outside/inside) which reinforce the difference between the narrator's world and Patricia's:
C'est en faisant le bilan de ces réalités contradictoires et irréconciliables que l'on constate à quel point l'engin de Godbout est bien monté et doit exploser... 70

This dialectic carries through to the structure in the opposition between past and present throughout the novel. The present is relatively static in movement as the characters remain inside their cocoon waiting for winter to pass. For the narrator, any real movement or meaning comes from the past through flashbacks which occur on several levels: with Patricia ten years before, during his odyssey through America, and at intervals during childhood. The alternation between past and present begins in the first sequence when a present event triggers a past memory and these elements are juxtaposed with a design in mind:

...le mouvement ne se déroule pas selon l'incohérence négligée d'un hasard apparent; il organise rigoureusement dans une improvisation maîtrisée, le réel que saisit l'intuition et sa signification que retient la réflexion. Or cette improvisation...rend sensibles les rapports vivants entre les réels et leur signification, par le progrès des séquences du récit. 71

The narrator shows great ease in switching from one time to another as he seeks to explain his attraction to Patricia (C. 36) or in order to demonstrate the duplication which exists between their past and

70 J. Allard, "I, ni, mi, ni, mai, ni, mo", 112.
71 M. Blain, "Conscience de l'étrangeté", Cité Libre, XVI (avril 1965), 32.
present time (C. 41). It is as if by juxtaposing the two experiences he is stating the unchanging nature of their relationship or suggesting, by parallel construction, that they are leading parallel lives, 
"...refaisant les mêmes gestes, persuadés qu'ils sont neufs, alors qu'ils sont à peine renouvelés (C. 67). One striking example of this occurs on page forty-one:

> Vers midi, nos peaux chaudes et humides, étourdis de tant de lumière, nous n'eûmes même pas le courage d'aller jusqu'au lac...Nos pas mal assurés dans des sandales...nous sommes retournés à la chambre y chercher un peu de fraîcheur et, dans le lit refait, nous nous sommes endormis côte à côte...

> (Vers midi, la peau froide et asséchée, étourdis par tant de lumière, nous n'avons pu aller à la place du Tertre. Nos pas mal assurés dans des bottes fourrées...nous sommes revenus à la chambre dormir côte à côte dans un peu de chaleur.) (C. 41)

In several other instances, an identical word or phrase links two time sequences: "passion" (C. 103); and "...comme s'il était midi et l'heure de la sieste..." (C. 91) with "il est midi et c'est la sieste" (C. 92).

The first sequences alternate chiefly between the present and the past in Montreal as though to accustom the reader to the past-present-past rhythm. As the narrator's desire to escape the pressures of the present grows, so Godbout introduces other levels of memory to a greater degree. It begins with brief references to his Laredo/Mexican experiences and gradually occurs more frequently and in greater detail. Their first "crise" in the present (when they yell at each other like enemy birds (C. 83) ), and the violence which appears in his love for her in section 48 signal the descent into memory and the most complex
sequence of time levels in the novel. With just three brief interruptions in the present, he spends the entire sixth segment in various layers of the past (sections 47-55). This includes three long segments from his childhood as well as the entire series of conversations with Pedro in Laredo.

Section 53 contains all the time levels of the novel; it begins in Montreal at Christmas, goes to a conversation with Pedro in Laredo, incorporates a traumatic childhood memory of a Christmas pageant, and has a brief interjection in the present ("Elle resta un instant figée, me regardant avec la fixité craintive d'un oiseau malade (déjà...)") (C. 96). It is also this section which contains the expression "l'un des" which, for Jacques Allard, symbolises on the technical level the impossibility of the situation - the impossibility of reconciliation. 72

The remaining segments return briefly to Mexico but never in the same depth. The emphasis has now returned to the recent past in Montreal and to his developing political conscience in the present. Section 68 expresses the same problem on three levels as though to reinforce the unchanging nature of the problem: "être chez soi sans y être" (C. 120) in the present; in Montreal, the space of an entire people has been conquered and they all live in a "...bordel [où] on sert de l'eau bénite et...

72 J. Allard, "I, ni, mi, ni, mai, ni, mo", 111.
on couche avec le vainqueur" (C. 121); and in his childhood he recalls Sunday tram rides into the rich neighbourhoods (C. 122-124).

In a final retreat into his memory (Sections 78-81), he comes to terms with the fact that there is nothing left for him in Montreal and America is not his. He withdrew into memory as did the "escargots" into their shells, in both instances to better prepare their exit. 73 All levels of the narrative have been moving forward in time until they end, inevitably, at the end of Section 81. No further escape or retreat into the past is possible and in the final sections he must face the present and deal with that situation.

The leitmotif which echoes this oscillation between past and present occurs in the childhood rhyme "inimini mai ni mo". This phrase (or variations of it) is used in the novel to emphasize, by its pendulum-like nature, the inevitability of the choice which the narrator must make. Allard sees it as a further extension of the cold-warm dialectic:

A partir de ce premier couple de réalités antagonistes, se démonte une pile romanesque où la tension constante d'un système positif-négatif active incessamment le problème du choix à faire et prépare l'éclatement d'un engin dont le tictac lancinant se lit et s'entend: I, NI, MI, NI, MAI, NI, MO... 74

---

73 G. Bachelard, op cit., p. 110.

74 J. Allard, "I, ni, mi, ni, mai, ni, mo", 110.
He also finds there is "...une sorte d'inévitable force..." in the choice which is made because of the mathematical nature of the rhyme and feels that it should have been left as the title of the novel - as Godbout initially intended. Aside from the choice which it emphasizes, the rhyme also suggests violence: children singing it with clenched fists (C. 40); as a rhyme in the funeral parlour to guess who will die next (C. 139); and as a threat to Patricia who dominates him that one day he will holler "...comme un nègre, avec le feu..." (C. 80). The full rhyme is repeated in the final section and ends with the violent statement: "Choisir, à poings fermés" (C. 157).

The split which Godbout chooses for the rhyme is interesting as well. The first part of the rhyme is usually said together but he splits the last syllable thus: "inimi/ni" (C. 157). It is unclear why he does this but it may be to suggest the similarity between "inimi" and "ennemi" for Patricia has been defined specifically as his enemy on several occasions (C. 43, 83).

The dialectic of the entire structure extends to the syntax in the English-French opposition which occurs in successive sentences in the course of a dialogue (C. 43, 154), in the midst of a sentence (C. 138, 49, 34), or as an English phrase from an advertisement (C. 37) which occurs in the midst of a French descriptive passage. The dominance of Patricia's

75 Ibid., 112
world is reinforced by the intrusion of these English phrases and also by the choice of verbs; for example, "Patricia voulut..." (C. 76) and "Patricia avait choisi..." (C. 77) which show her control of the situation.

The use of numbers to separate the chapters is also part of the "mechanical" side of the American universe: "Ces chiffres évoquent la prédominance des affaires et la mécanique indifférente de notre époque où tout est classé, catalogué". They also serve to remind us of the mechanical rhyme which is controlling the entire novel: "inimini".

The occasional use of popular French in the course of political discussions opposes this universe: "zêtes" (C. 136), "baptêmes" (C. 109), "casquette" (C. 93). Vachon calls this language "...marginal, volontairement familier ou choquant" which reveals to the "Québécois" his "état d'homme dépossédé". D'Allemagne relates this state of the language to economic factors which precluded its use in business and caused the subsequent encroachment of English expressions.

---

76 M. Primeau, _op. cit._, 85.


79 A. D'Allemagne, _op. cit._, pp. 79-81.
Various other techniques are employed to set the pace of the novel and emphasize the state of mind of the characters. The use of brackets is widespread and they perform a variety of tasks: to qualify what the narrator is saying (C. 30, 122); to indicate the entry into a different time level (C. 36, 142); and to contain English expressions (C. 33, 30). The brackets and the use of commas, semi-colons, and "points de suspension" slow the action, indicate uncertainty, and lend an unfinished air to the novel – we either end in the middle (C. 63, 105) of a sentence or come in after the thought has begun (C. 125). Several times the punctuation is suppressed almost completely to let the ideas flow unimpeded; for example, after Madeleine's death when the narrator's mind seeks escape in rapid, mind-numbing thoughts (C. 139).

Godbout also uses the technique of footnotes to expand on a point he has made in the text (C. 27) or to bring the reality of universal concerns more closely into contact with the narrator (C. 14-15). He goes beyond the footnote to incorporate entire news accounts into the text (C. 38, 82-3) and accords the account of the FLQ bombing the most extensive treatment – a double column in English and French (C. 155-7) which also reinforces the dialectical structure. Both the use of footnotes and the preface to the novel serve to make the reader more aware of the collective level of meaning which was intended.

The unfinished nature of the novel (dangling sentences, oddly-placed brackets, unusual punctuation) is a very expressive manner in
which to reinforce an ambiguous content:

...le caractère d'inachèvement inhérent à ce roman est en accord profond avec son contenu, au diapason, par exemple, de la vie de ce personnage masculin en qui nous vivons et naissons. L'inachèvement apparent est achèvement profond, au plan romanesque.  

Another critic sees the "unfinishedness" as part of the narrator's state of mind: "Le récit reste en suspens, velléitaire comme le narrateur effrayé de 'laisser tout cela inachevé...!'"  

His journey towards an identity is still incomplete.

This incompleteness in the narrative structure and plot is an accurate literary approximation of the socio-political reality of the period which, as has been outlined, was in a state of instability and confusion. The violence on the political scene has been incorporated into the narrator's search for a personal and collective identity: where the solution in *L'Aquarium* was a rejection of the status quo and a flight into the unknown future, the same basic solution in *Couteau* incorporates the violence of the time-period. The novel also includes a preface (the only one in the three novels) which directs our attention to the collective level of interpretation so important here. The more obvious references to the Quebec situation (the F.L.Q. account) also matches the more

---

80 J. Allard, "I, ni, mi, ni, mai, ni, mo", 113.

politically-vocal Godbout who was then writing for *Parti Pris*.

The novel is perhaps less successful than *L'Aquarium* on strictly literary merits because the parallels with reality are more exposed but this in itself is a product of the period when polemics corresponded best to the social situation: 82 "*Le couteau sur la table* est daté avec précision. Il enregistre, et tout d'abord au niveau de l'écriture, l'ultime résurgence d'une idéologie qui vient peut-être d'éclater sur elle-même". 83 The violent imagery and confused syntax are also part of the period and the oscillating rhythm emphasizes as much as the narrative the political choice which must be made.

The narrator in *Couteau* observes on many of the same problems as were found in *L'Aquarium* but this time from a more clearly "Quebec" point of view. The narrator's circumstances in this environment force him to be more "engagé" but he is still searching for his identity, a quest which will lead into the last of the three novels.


Socio-Political Background

The confusion evident in the narrator of Le couteau sur la table perhaps foreshadowed actual events in Quebec. The post-1965 period saw the Quiet Revolution running out of steam and bogging down in ambiguity and uncertainty of direction:

Ce n'est plus une recherche active pour trouver, c'est une latence d'attentisme affairé comme pour 'occuper le temps', sans que personne ne soit sûr de 'gagner du temps'. A mesure qu'on dévale le second versant de la décennie, on sent qu'on s'en va quelque part, mais personne ne sait où. Nos politiciens, à force d'avoir le nez sur les choses, ne les voient plus du tout. La 'révolution tranquille' n'a jamais eu d'autre principe d'unité que d'être justement une contestation effective du passé. Ce qui la remplace apparaît comme juxtaposition de contestations cahoteuses et avec hiatus, allant en tout sens parce que sans objet unique. Le fil d'intelligibilité ne pourrait être que la ligne des préférences de celui qui parle ou écrit.

This lack of direction in the dream of a "new" Quebec bothered Godbout as well who felt that "...si d'ici deux ou trois ans ce rêve ne se concrétise pas on peut garantir sur billet que notre pays ne se relèvera jamais de son coma." The de Gaulle "Vive le Québec libre"

2. Ibid., pp. 530-1.
speech during 1967 did shake them out of this coma for a while ("Les déclarations du général de Gaulle nous ont réveillés! Nous recom-
mencions à nous endormir") and lent credibility to Quebec separatism on an international level. In Quebec, independence was now an acceptable political platform and formed the basis of the successful 1966 Union Nationale campaign: "Equality or Independence". A new FLQ cell had renewed bombings in Montreal sporadically but the emphasis had shifted from the narrow ideological concerns of the early years (as exemplified by the intellectuals in Couteau) to a broader public awareness of the problem of alienation facing the "Québécois" on the national and socio-economic levels.

On the federal level, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism had published its preliminary report warning of French-English differences which could destroy national unity; however, it was the American threat which continued to haunt English-Canadian nationalists who opposed foreign ownership of Canadian business and expressed a concern for their cultural identity which was dominated, in particular, by the American mass media. The American influence did not seem as threatening to French-Canadians already accustomed to the overwhelming English-Canadian presence and, in some quarters, there was less hesitancy

---


to identify with the United States because of perceived similarities with the plight of U.S. blacks.

In addition to the American influence, the international world's fair in 1967 focused the eyes of the world on Montreal and exposed Quebecers to an international array of influences. In spite of this, the "Québécois" wished to retain his individual identity:

S'ils ouvrent de plus en plus au monde et sont de moins en moins disposés à se cantonner dans leur 'réserve traditionnelle', ils n'en veulent pas moins continuer à durer comme peuple et prendre la gouverne de leur destin collectif. 6

Godbout continued to criticize the educational system and contributed to Le mouvement du 8 avril, 7 published in 1966, which outlined the main proposals of the "Mouvement laïc de langue française" (M.L.F.) for a lay educational system in Quebec. Godbout was concerned that Quebec youth was turning away from this problem, thinking it would soon be solved, but he warned that a lay Quebec was the first step toward a free Quebec 8 and that both these conditions were necessary for a "normal" life:

Il n'est pas indifférent que laïcité et nationalisme de gauche aient surgi en même temps. C'étaient là deux expressions d'un vouloir-vivre normal puisque nous, Québécois, étions dos au mur, n'ayant le choix qu'entre le sursaut d'énergie et la disparition totale. 9

6 Ibid., p. 11.
8 Ibid., p. 70.
9 Ibid., p. 13.
As we will see later, the idea of the wall becomes one of the major symbols associated with François Galarneau.

In the period 1965-7, Godbout no longer contributed to *Parti Pris* but wrote numerous articles for *Liberté* (a more moderate periodical), many of which centered on the effect of television or other mass media and their importance for the twentieth-century writer. He felt that a writer no longer had a clearly-defined field but faced a challenge of moving from category to category using a wide range of techniques. He also felt that new cinematic techniques should be adopted in Quebec or they would be left behind the rest of the civilised world:

*En fait sans le spectacle cinématographique les citoyens de ce pays ne sont que des demi-civilisés. Ils ont une technique, mais ne possèdent pas le plus grand outil de culture qu'est le nouveau cinéma.*

As for television, he felt that it was basically an "immoral" medium in comparison to traditional means of communication but that its strength lay in on-the-spot reporting, coverage of spectacular events, and in taking a dry subject and making it interesting. He later referred to the television news as his "téléroman" and "...le feuilleton des

---


The media also facilitated the spread of American culture:

La proximité des États-Unis et le rayonnement de sa culture sont tels qu'est née, vers 1967, l'expression 'presqu'Amérique' pour désigner avec un certain bonheur l'ambivalence, la dualité de la culture québécoise et de sa littérature... 14

Godbout himself remarked that the greatest musical influence in his life was the American hit parade but worried lest this cultural consumerism damage the "Québécois" identity:

Au niveau primaire cette culture lui vient des États-Unis, via l'Ontario. Au niveau secondaire le Québécois est schizophrène: il lit de la culture française et assimile des films américains... si les Québécois, de 1967 à 1980, continuent de vivre dans une société de consommation de la culture des autres, le Québec sera alors un Mississippi de langue française. Il l'est presque déjà. 16

The only thing which distinguished them from their neighbours was their language and, if mass media had a levelling and assimilating effect, the written word helped preserve this difference. 17

---

13 Jo Godbout, "La poésie contre l'angoisse", Le Maclean, XV, no. 4 (avr. 1975), 56, 58.


17 Ibid., 20-21.
The debate on the use or avoidance of "joual" in Quebec literature continued and, although he denied using "joual" himself, he realized the problem facing Quebec literature:

Ecrire joual et se couper tous les ponts, voilà ce qui fonde le tragique de l'écriture québécoise rêvée; pourtant seul le joual peut traduire l'épaisseur de la condition québécoise, car il est un objet social qui situe l'homme qui l'emploie mieux que toute autre approximation linguistique.

It was this language which was necessary to deal with their situation in the American time and space and Godbout felt that France was finally realizing that, while Quebec had a similar culture, she had a North-American situation in which France had no part.

He stated his position on the place of Quebec literature for the French press in a 1967 interview:

Ce que nous avons à faire en tant qu'écrivains canadiens, c'est justement d'entrer dans la littérature française, mais avec notre particularité, avec notre réalité propre. La littérature est un moyen, comme la sociologie ou l'économie politique sont des moyens, de prendre conscience et de prendre possession à part entière de ce qui nous entoure. C'est en acceptant et en

---


20 J. Godbout, "Entre l'académie et l'écurie", Liberté, XVI, no. 3 (mai-juin 1974), 33.

défendant notre réalité que nous pouvons créer une littérature française d'Amérique.22

While it would be ridiculous to expect everyone to write nationalistic literature, he felt that from time to time it would be necessary to deal with it "...d'autant plus que la querelle fondamentale, ou la lutte fondamentale du Canadien-français se situe au niveau de la langue".23

He later became more insistent on this point that a Quebec author has no choice but to write both the "Texte Unique" and the "Texte National" until such time as Quebec becomes a "pays normal", that is, independent.24 The important question for Godbout when he writes a novel is not who will read it but rather who the characters will be:

Car la véritable question, quand il s'agit d'un livre, d'écriture littéraire, n'est pas 'Pour qui écrire?', mais bien plutôt: qui parle?...Et le livre n'est que la réponse à cette question: qui parle?

... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...

L'authenticité de la voix et la vérité de l'oeuvre se mesurent aux rapports entre l'écrivain et l'oeuvre et non pas à ceux qui s'établissent entre l'oeuvre et ses lecteurs.25

Thus the identity of the narrator in Salut Galarneau and the language in which he expresses himself will be of paramount importance

22 C. M. Cluny, op. cit., 6.
24 J. Godbout, "Ecrire", Liberté, XIII, nos. 4-5 (nov. 1971), 139-140.
to Godbout "pour traduire les nuances de cette vie d'ici...": 26

A compter du 'Couteau sur la table' je découvre combien la tentative d'une œuvre littéraire 'personnelle' est vaine et inutile au Québec. L'évolution des consciences, la lutte des langues, l'apparition du groupe Parti Pris, la défense du joual, et finalement l'illustration de la marde, la répression, le terrorisme, les trahisons, les ambiguïtés, les générosités, les discours de Gaston Miron... me font découvrir ce personnage merveilleux qu'est François Galarneau cousin des héros de l'Aquarium et du Couteau... 27

In the next section we shall determine to what extent these and other influences of the period affect Salut Galarneau 28 and how Godbout has expressed them in terms of François' condition.


27 J. Godbout, "Ecrire", 142.

The Narrative Journey

In this third novel, Godbout has moved his focus and characters back to the space he knows best:

...j'écris donc 'Salut Galarneau!' (le premier roman heureux) et...me voilà dans le Texte National or en plus, géographiquement parlant, le stand de Galarneau est situé dans l'île Perrot, à côté de Montréal: Me voilà donc en plein Québec.\(^{29}\)

François Galarneau runs a hot-dog stand in a suburb of Montreal where he ponders life and reads books in between serving customers. It is a rather calm existence which takes on a new dimension when, at the suggestion and prodding of his mistress, Marise, and brother, Jacques, he decides to write a book. This "book" is the novel we are reading and is filled with François' minute-by-minute observations on the state of his world and how he fits into it. It is also a comment on the values of his society and how an individual in that society comes to terms with his identity on both the personal and collective levels:

François Galarneau est québécois dans son langage, sa force et ses échecs, mais il doit s'accepter, et les autres avec lui, à travers le souvenir, le désespoir et l'indéracinable goût de vivre. Comme les autres romans de Jacques Godbout, Salut Galarneau est une découverte de soi et du social. Mais cette fois il s'agit de se découvrir et de se choisir dans le malheur et la joie d'être Québécois.\(^{30}\)

---

\(^{29}\) J. Godbout, "Ecrire", 142.

One by one he broaches his problems in this society. Education was a sore point with François who felt he was a victim of the system in that it had been useless in either helping him to get a job or being happy (S.G. 13). It succeeded only in educating him in how to worry and in knowing what he could not have (S.G. 25). Like so many other things, it is controlled - in François' mind - by the rich who use it for their own ends:

Les gens instruits savaient ce qu'ils faisaient. Partageons les fardeaux lourds à porter: ce n'est pas une raison pour partager l'argent.(S.G. 26).

The only way to be rich without education is to steal (S.G. 45). He knows that there is a basic economic pattern which he cannot break and that he will never totally be part of "...le jeu de l'Amérique. Son insatisfaction québécoise le retient partagé". 31

François also comments on the Church (which was intimately involved in his education) either by irreverent references to the Virgin Mary (S.G. 27-8) or by parody of the annunciation (S.G. 25). The observations, although generally amusing, contain a core of criticism of the Church as "big business". He decides that, instead of God, he will believe in women (S.G. 100) but in this he is disappointed as well: his first wife tricks him into marriage and Marise disappoints him when

he most needs her. He begins to wonder if there is anything left in which to believe.

If the Church was a dominating influence in his early years, the American way of life more than equalled it. In many ways François fits Godbout's description of a Quebecer as "...un homme qui a...du sang français dans les veines, avec un peu de pepsi au travers". Americans and their culture confront him at every turn. There are the American tourists who arrive at his stand for a hot-dog and a chance to speak French (S.G. 13) and Hollywood films which, he claims, exert a bad influence on all who watch them ("c'est ça, la mauvaise influence du cinéma. Les gens ne vont plus au bout de leur pensée" (S.G. 30)). Nevertheless, the American media has coloured his life: his mother looked like an actress in a Fred Astaire or Frank Sinatra film (S.G. 68); a barmaid reminds him of Doris Day (S.G. 117); his grandfather is compared to Johnny Weissmuller (S.G. 134); and his initiation ceremony was taken right out of Reader's Digest (S.G. 136). His childhood reading consisted largely of American comic books and his adult fantasies are often based on a film he has seen (S.G. 103-4, 124).

He is drawn to America but realizes at the same time her great ability to control events. To be American is to dominate:

Les Américains, ça pense à tout. C'est un grand peuple, une belle nation. Si j'avais été instruit, je me serais fait américain. Si j'avais été américain, j'aurais été instruit. Puis riche. (S.G. 141)

His world is also ruled by advertising which has created an artificial need for products. This situation is emphasized by identifying objects by brand names: a cigarette is a Buckingham (S.G. 36); a car is a Toronado (S.G. 72) or Buick Riviera (S.G. 36); a pen is Northrite (S.G. 22); and his air freshener, Florient, is a necessity of life for him (S.G. 40). The advertisements for these and other products are part of his daily existence as a "Québécois":

Dans la consommation, il [le travailleur québécois] est à nouveau exploité et aliéné. Aliéné, parce que la publicité et les techniques de diffusion de masse arrivent à lui imposer de faux besoins, à lui montrer sans cesse des images qui créent des aspirations qu'il ne peut assouvir, qu'en se privant de besoins essentiels; ainsi l'automobile est privilégiée plus que l'éducation.

The advertising which François encounters sells not only products but a value system at the same time and those products he does

33 J. Godbout, "Pour une révolution culturelle", p. 125.


buy "...lui rappellent constamment qu'ils portent un autre nom et ont un autre visage que le sien... . En eux, par eux, il n'achète que l'illusion de sa capacité". It is an alienating experience which eventually takes its toll on François. During his later withdrawal from the world, he overlaps the advertisements in a poem (S.G. 143-6) in an attempt to understand this society which Godbout refers to as "...la société du Kleenex". It is not the news programs but rather the advertisements which tell him who these people really are (S.G. 142).

It is on the economic front, however, that François becomes truly aware of how completely he is dominated. On money hangs all personal achievement and political power in this time and space:

Dans mon temps, dans mon Amérique à moi, pour être heureux, il fallait être riche, très riche, ou instruit, très instruit, ou crever ou crever des bulles, des rêves, des si. (S.G. 43)

He feels that he has escaped this trap to some extent by owning his own stand. This gives him a sense of independence - economic and personal - which he finds indispensable:


37 Ibid.

38 J. Godbout, "Ça sert à quoi, eh?", Le Maclean, XIV, no. 7 (juil. 1974), 11.
He, in fact, decides to expand his operation and open more stands with the help of his brother, Arthur, who could finance the project. His brother, however, accustomed to a 13% profit by running church charities, refuses to finance the venture.

This idea of "stuffing" is one which reappears when he talks of Members of Parliament (S.G. 125), Marise (S.G. 32, 137), and Martyr (S.G. 109) as a way of controlling those who dominate him: the Americans with his hot-dogs and Marise with his poems. These are both areas where he feels he is in charge – in his stand as the "roi du hot dog" and in his "cahiers" where no one interferes and he controls and edits our exposure to the other characters.

The act of writing serves to concretize what he had been feeling for a while but had never really articulated. He describes himself as "un homme d'aujourd'hui" (S.G. 74) and assures Marise that he is still the same in spite of writing a book (S.G. 80) but this is not quite true.
Writing has become an obsession ("...j'ai même la fièvre d'écrire")
(S.G. 79) so that he begrudges even one evening away from it:

Une fois qu'il a commencé à écrire, Galarneau se rend immédiatement compte qu'il ne peut s'arrêter à mi-chemin, qu'il ne peut s'interrompre avant d'avoir tout dit. Ses cahiers le 'suivent, [le] rattrapent, [le] sollicitent'.

Writing is an intense personal experience for François which causes depression (S.G. 60-1) and nervousness (S.G. 61-3, 77). He is heading for a nervous breakdown — a mild form of schizophrenia in his case — almost in spite of himself. Yet he cannot give up writing or throw his book away (S.G. 89) even though he realizes that it has begun to dominate him and is causing him to withdraw: "... plus je travaille, plus je me retire, moins je suis capable de parler, c'est comme si je vivais dans les cahiers, que je ne pouvais plus vivre pour vrai..." (S.G. 106).

He also begins to tire of the hot-dog stand which had been his refuge in the simple life (S.G. 24). As he becomes increasingly disenchanted with the world around him, he discovers that his own sensitivity to problems has surpassed the understanding of all the others. This puts a strain on him and he begins to view life as a "...réservoir qui continue de se vider" (S.G. 72). What had been a feeling of being "too full" and a need to empty himself in some way (S.G. 26) had

---

changed to a sense of feeling continually drained. As he withdraws from society (Jacques and Marise in particular) he increasingly identifies with Martyr, the old horse in the field beside his stand, who is a symbol of resignation and the old static Quebec before the Quiet Revolution: Martyr is the king of his château just as François is ruler of his (S.G. 106); Martyr is his best friend (S.G. 109); and he will wait for death like Martyr (S.G. 124) and be alone like him to die (S.G. 131).

The conflict between François and his society has created such tension within him that at last he decides to withdraw from the world by building a wall around his house. It is also a constructive act to try to forget Marise who has left him for Jacques. He rids the house of any trace of her and the others in an effort to isolate himself and get in touch with who he really is: "Je me suis dit: Galarneau, tu vas te clôturer, tu vas vivre face à toi-même, ça t’apprendra" (S.G. 124).

To get through to what he considers his real self he regresses to childhood, to the beginning of his life before he was influenced by his society. It is a mental regression which he feels as a physical shrinking: "Je me ratatine comme une saucisse bouillie oubliée au fond d’un pot..." (S.G. 129). He tries to persuade himself that he feels better with no one around (S.G. 131), deciding to bury himself in his writing (S.G. 129) but remains divided within himself about the usefulness of the wall because, while it may protect him from the outside world, it
also cuts him off. He has regressed in his memories as well to the night of his initiation into manhood by his grandfather. This memory comes at the point of deepest regression and emphasizes, by comparison, the plunge he has taken within himself.

The opposition which had existed between François and the others has been internalized in the form of a split personality in François. This dramatizes his difficulty in accepting society while maintaining his own identity. His "other self" asks questions about life outside and François tells him that people are sick: "Ils ont la diarrhée des sentiments, et personne pour les soigner" (S.G. 139); however, he begins to understand them as he watches the advertisements which rule their lives:

Ce sont des gens propres, lessivés, à la recherche de toute tache, d'une pureté merveilleuse, de l'impeccable blancheur, de l'impassable purification. Ils sont comme Jean-Baptiste le Précurseur: ils se lavent tous les jours et se poussent dans l'eau du Jourdain. (S.G. 142)

There follows a litany of products which all advocate "une vie Immaculée-Conception" (S.G. 146). He begins to realize their over-concern with cleanliness and decides that they need him to teach them how to be "dirty". He will have the "mains sales" which the narrator in L'Aquarium lacked; in other words, he has the commitment to action and change which was missing in the others.

It is on his birthday when he finally comes to terms with his imprisoned condition and realizes that he needs the others as much as
they need him. He decides he must get out of this self-imposed exile:

"...mieux vaut être trompé qu’isolé, j’ai envie de parler, d’êtreindre, de serrer des mains, de jouer aux cartes, de mentir à quelqu’un..."

(S.G. 153) — in other words, be human. This does not mean that he is giving up writing: he will return to his "écritoire" to write of his experiences in the world, striking a balance between living and writing — "vécire" (S.G. 154).

This regression and "rebirth" which François has undergone has brought him to terms with himself as a human being and as a "Québécois" in North America. His answer to domination — economic, political, cultural — has been to become his own master through writing. Jacques and Marise are no longer important to him — what matters now is that his book be read by "...tous les Gagnon de la terre..." (S.G. 155).

In analysing the reasons for François’ withdrawal, Roland Bourneuf cites several factors:

Pauvreté économique, solitude, dénuement moral, humiliation de colonisé dont ces personnages rendent responsables les Canadiens anglais, eux-mêmes, les curés, la fatalité, le colonialisme, Dieu. L’écoeuré se replie, s’isole, et parfois il trouve confortable sa vie végétative... 40

The reasons for his schizophrenic symptoms lie within the Quebec "colonial situation". Albert Memmi stated that the "colonisé" will

begin to refuse his existence as such either by trying to become like the "colonisateur" (which is not really possible) or by regaining his own identity. Jacques, who writes speeches for whoever pays him, and the French-Canadian pharmacist who prefers to speak English are the former instance but François belongs to the latter.

Colonialism in Quebec has also been blamed for the disintegration of the personality by denying an identity and a sense of history to the colonised, creating a permanent neurotic condition among them:

La proportion inquiétante de maladies nerveuses chez les Canadiens français, l'expression souvent schizophrénique de leur pensée ou leur difficulté à s'exprimer sont probablement plus que simples coïncidences.

Paul Chamberland claims that it is being a minority people which is alienating and causes the "minoritaire" to be torn apart as was François:

Le minoritaire est un être scindé: il voudrait réaliser à la fois son être propre, conserver sa spécificité et participer, comme partenaire égal, à la réalisation d'une société dont le caractère est déterminé, presque exclusivement, par le majoritaire. Il ne se sent vivre que par la communauté et la communauté lui renvoie le visage de l'autre; il est nié dans le mouvement même qui le porte à l'accomplissement de son

---

43 M. Van Schendel, op. cit., p. 29.
identité propre. Intériorisant la contradiction, il est déchiré entre la poursuite de sa spécificité et son insertion réelle dans une communauté qui est la sienne parce qu'il en est une part constituante. De toute façon, il doit se résoudre à la suppression de son être minoritaire: soit par assimilation, soit par émancipation. 44

All these theories are valid in Galarneau's case because of the close parallels between his situation and those described and also because Godbout defined the "Québécois" as a schizophrenic in his daily cultural consumerism: "...il lit de la culture française et assimile des films américains". 45 In Godbout's own case he recalls that his childhood (much like François') was heavily influenced by American media. 46 The schizophrenic condition extends to the very identification as a "Canadien-français" where the hyphen creates a distance and separates the two identities. A "Québécois", on the other hand, is a completely integrated person and identity. François enters his confinement as the former and emerges as the latter.

The significance of Galarneau's decision to rejoin the world has been seen as his acceptance of American mediocrity for what it is and going beyond it. 47 It is also the acceptance of both good and bad

45 J. Godbout, "Pour un ministère de la culture", 3.
46 "Témoignages d'écrivains", Etudes françaises, III, no. 3 (août 1967), 303.
47 M. Tétu, op. cit., p. 274.
in the past and its integration into the present; for example, unlike the narrator in Couteau, he is able to contemplate Westmount without rancour. His escape also parallels the desire of the "Québécois" to end his isolation and join in the mainstream perhaps by seeing his struggle for independence in the light of similar movements around the world.

Marcel Rioux particularly remarks on recent Quebec literature which has shown the "...lente reprise en main par les francophones de leur personnalité propre". In choosing to publish his book and continue writing "...Galarneau témoigne à sa façon de l'avènement de l'âge de la parole au Québec. Après avoir découvert les mots 'qui valent plus que toutes les monnaies', il ne peut plus se taire. Désormais, pour lui, écrire sera vivre ou, si l'on préfère, vivre sera écrire. Bref, Galarneau 'vècrira'...". François will be able to end the silence of generations through his writing.

Of all Godbout's characters, François is the one most closely identified with Quebec and seems firmly anchored in the Quebec of the

48 G. Bergeron, op. cit., p. 430.


50 M. Rioux, op. cit., p. 179.

51 J. Cotnam, op. cit., 279.
1960's in respect to both his personal time and space and that of his
people. Godbout defined him as one of many French-Canadians facing the
same problems:

"...isolé dans son langage, dans un continent, vivant en
vase clos dans un milieu où tout le monde se connaît et
supporte les mêmes contraintes, et à peu près les mêmes
conditions sociologiques."52

His soul is a strange mixture of different cultures (S.G. 57-8) but
he also has dreams more closely related to his heritage as a 'québécois':
"Ça doit être notre côté coureur des bois, ce besoin continu d de partir,
et notre côté vieille France celui de revenir..." (S.G. 58). He has a
very well-developed genealogy which goes back to his grandfather,
Aldéric. His voice was like his grandfather's - very distinctive and
rich - which the others did not inherit. A voice is important to
François because it gives sense to words and is the truest legacy which
can be passed on from father to son (S.G. 64).

His space is clearly defined: he was born and raised in a
Montreal suburb were he now operates his hot-dog stand and his terri-
tory extends from one fence to the other around his stand. Even the
advertisements which surround him have a very local flavour: the
flowers at his father's funeral come from McKenna, a local Montreal
shop (S.G. 45); the hot-dogs he uses are "La belle fermière" instead

52 C. M. Cluny, op. cit., 6.
of Hygrade (S.G. 54); and he would call Vito's for a pizza or go to "Saint-Hubert Barbecue" (S.G. 76) — both local Montreal restaurants. His identity with Quebec carries through to his final statement about publishing his work so that all the "Gagnon de la terre" (S.G. 155) may read it. "Gagnon" is a very common French-Canadian name which is not likely to be found outside Quebec, and, therefore, defines the boundaries of François' readership within Quebec.

The time-span of the novel on the present level is from August to October 18th but Galarneau's memories reach back to childhood and his dreams extend beyond the end of the novel. Often he will recall the present in the midst of a reverie by a word or phrase relating to present time (S.G. 38). His fantasies are also trips whether touched off by smell ("...le voyage par l'odorat" (S.G. 40)) or the desire to escape his present situation: a trip to the moon with Martyr where he will set up a Moon Snack Bar (S.G. 61); signing up on board ship going to "Nouvelle-Calédonie" (S.G. 102); and the last great fantasy during his withdrawal in which he and his brothers travel in his hot-dog stand down to Lowell, Massachusetts to visit their mother (S.G. 147-51).

The sense of "universality" or references to extra-Quebec time and space which marked the narrators in the previous novels is also present here: he wants to spread his name throughout the States with personalized matchbooks (S.G. 23); the rain makes rivers on his windows
like the Ganges or the Mississippi (S.G. 41); he names foreign ships which pass by Marise's childhood home (S.G. 78); and a newsreel of events in the Congo greatly disturbs him - but not the others (S.G. 84). This ability to move in time and space gives him added depth as a character.

In contrast to this, the other characters remain fixed in their particular time. Jacques and Marise who are trapped in the present also exist in the past through François memories -- not their own -- but have no future plans. Jacques is highly educated and talented but floats aimlessly in a job which pays well in which he daily denies his identity by working under another name (S.G. 56). He talked one day of giving up his job to do some serious writing but the odds of his breaking out of the consumer cycle are very slim. Marise who, symbolically, was on a "nowhere" when she met François (S.G. 35) comes from a family of sailors who travel the river between Quebec and Saint Lambert (never beyond) and who have all lived in the same house for generations (S.G. 77-8). She now belongs to the world of "...tapis en twist doré et de filières de métal gris" (S.G. 114) which reclaims her after two years with François. Arthur also exists only in the past and the present. He has literally stayed in the same place by buying back the parental home for his office and restoring it to the way it had been. François can still smell fish in the kitchen and chocolates in the parlour (S.G. 120) - a reminder of his parents.
The other characters exist solely in the past as a function of François' memory and only move into the present briefly here and there when François calls them to mind. His father's world was his boat where he spent all his days catching fish and drinking beer; his mother's world was the house where she spent the nights reading movie magazines and eating Black Magic chocolates (S.G. 68). The limit of his father's world was the mouth of the Ottawa River and his mother's the corner store (S.G. 69). His father was stopped in time and space by death and his mother by losing touch with reality in a timeless existence. His grandfather, Aldéric, who took charge of his upbringing when his father died, is also firmly tied to the past and adores recalling his youth — often embellishing the details (S.G. 43).

François mobility in time and space while still identifying strongly with his roots makes him the only "survivor" in the novel in the sense of being able to know where he comes from without being limited by it. This mobility will influence the imagery associated with him.
The Metaphorical Journey

As in the previous two novels, it is the characters who are able to move in time and space who are associated with life imagery while the others are not. In spite of apparent differences, François' parents are both the latter case: "...papa vivait le jour, maman, c'était la nuit... quand je me souviens d'eux dans notre maison, ils étaient déjà chacun de leur côté du soleil" (S.G. 65). They both belong to the "nocturne" world of synthesis, viscosity, and miniature which has neither time nor space.  

This perfectly suits his mother who, as has been discussed, is quite lost in her own particular time and space. She is linked to the female-womb-darkness symbols of the "Régime nocturne" and the house, which is her domaine, is an extension of this intimacy and redoubling. The smell of her chocolates which permeated the parlour are part of the odours in the house "...qui constituent la coenesthésie de l'intimité..." Even her physical description is replete with night imagery: her hair is black (S.G. 63) and her eyelashes "...de soie noire... lui faisaient de l'ombre sur les yeux..." (S.G. 68).

---

54 Ibid., p. 250.
55 Ibid., p. 262.
56 Ibid., p. 278.
François' father lives in a liquid daytime world, leaving on his boat every morning to fish and returning every evening at dusk. Just as the house is "un grand berceau", his boat is also a symbol of intimacy and "emboîtement", a "Lieu clos, île miniature". Also, just as the house envelops his mother in an endless, timeless night so the boat engulfs his father in a liquid death when it sinks. Even while alive, the father was closely identified with this death symbol by drinking enough beer to become as liquid as the water which surrounded the boat (S.G. 67).

François as their son must inherit a certain identification with the nocturnal world and his situation, although different, will have similarities: "Le Fils est répétition des parents dans le temps bien plus que simple redoublement statique". Examples of this are his voice which is like his father's and grandfather's and his girlfriend who resembles his mother and has her name (S.G. 76). These links with the past give him a sense of where he comes from without trapping him in the death-like situation which has encompassed and immobilized the others. He must sort through the "nocturne" world in which he finds himself and synthesize what


58 G. Durand, op. cit., p. 287.

59 Ibid., p. 350.
is important to him before emerging as a whole person at the end of the novel.

One of the most important contacts with this world is the night of his initiation into manhood as arranged by his grandfather who spirits him off for a long and dangerous swim. When they return safely to shore, Aldéric explains that they have "conquered the dragon" (S.G. 135); that is, death or the fear of death. Unlike the purification ceremony in L'Aquarium, the water in this instance is too dangerous to have purifying properties; it is instead the enemy which has been overcome and it is important that François remember this victory when he is contemplating giving in to death (S.G. 131).

The death symbol above all others with which he deals is Martyr and François' progressive identification with him, as previously outlined, is the symbol of his inner turmoil and death-wish. In folklore, to dream of a horse is the sign of approaching death; François goes beyond mere dreams with a conscious identification. His initial remarks about Martyr are impersonal and Martyr is a separate entity; in the middle period he closely identifies himself with Martyr's death; and in the final stage, he draws away from Martyr and rejects his solution (withdrawal). François, however, has become strong enough in his

---

60 Ibid., p. 79.
own self not to reject Martyr but rather tries to draw him back into the realm of the living by asking the life-giving sun to warm him as it passes (S.G. 155).

The final major symbol identified with the "nocturne" is the house in which he withdraws from the world (as though into a womb) while incubating his ideas. More than just a refuge, the house is also linked to the maturing process which is what François must undergo in order to achieve a livable compromise. The house provides the sense of intimacy and security necessary to return to "...les sécurités premières de la vie...". It it through a process of "emboîtement" that François regresses to the essential part of his being:

C'est dans le 'Régime Nocturne' de l'image, par le jeu des emboîtements successifs, que la valeur est toujours assimilée au dernier contenu, au plus petit, au plus concentré des éléments.63

The wall which encloses the house is also a definite symbol of his withdrawal, of his desire—literally—to cut himself off from the world but it has more than just a negative, divisive aspect. If we may borrow from the introduction to La Grande Muraille de Chine written in 1968:

61 Ibid., pp. 276-277.
62 Ibid., p. 278.
63 Ibid., p. 316.
... un mur est un élément positif qui délimite un territoire - et je crois sincèrement qu'il existe en nous un instinct de 'territorialité' - et au pied duquel il fait parfois bon s'asseoir au soleil, faire l'amour, regarder les lézards. 64

The fact that Galarneau will keep the enclosed house for his "écritoire" removes any negative sense from the wall for it will provide privacy for reflection rather than aid an escape from the world.

Although François seems to spend most of his time dealing with the "nocturne" world, he is not lost in it (as are his parents) but rather uses it as a means of healing his inner conflicts before emerging as a stronger, more forceful character much as the butterfly emerging from the chrysalis or an "escargot" from its shell. The life instinct clearly dominates: "Des deux instincts, celui de vie, celui de mort, toujours présents chez l'homme, le premier l'emporte chez Galarneau....". 65

Even when he is about to withdraw behind the wall, he plans to donate his eyes to the eye bank so that they will continue to live (S.G. 125) and he allows Dugas to leave a ladder "en cas" behind the shed (S.G. 126).

The sun is the major life symbol in the novel and is closely linked with François. His father called the sun "Galarneau": "...il


disait: notre père à tous c'est le soleil, il s'appelle Galarneau lui aussi, comme nous. Il nous regarde de là-haut, mais il est de la famille" (S.G. 57). François is so identified with the sun/life through his family name (which is often used in the novel) that his death-like withdrawal cannot last. He has excluded the sun from his territory by the wall — shade on the inside and the life-giving sun without (S.G. 139) — but on his birthday (a life symbol in itself) he turns to the sun to ask its co-operation for a minute's silence. Galarneau feels he has been reborn and is ready to rejoin the world of the sun on the other side of the wall. As if sensing this, the leaves he has pasted on the ceiling to mentally ward off the increasingly cold autumn nights have fallen, no longer necessary in the warmth of the midday sun.

The rising sun as an image is a powerful force over the darkness:

C'est donc ici la puissance bienfaisante du soleil levant, du soleil victorieux de la nuit qui est magnifiée, car il ne faut pas oublier que l'astre en lui-même peut avoir un aspect maléfique et dévorant; et dans ce cas être un 'soleil noir'. C'est l'ascension lumineuse qui valorise positivement le soleil.66

The force of the image is made more human and real by personifying the sun as a worried partridge:

66 G. Durand, op. cit., p. 168.
Il s'assied sur le mur, le soleil, il réchauffe notre carré de sol, il me regarde dans les yeux, il s'inquiétait peut-être de me voir lui préférer l'ombre. On ne s'était pas vus vraiment, depuis le départ de Marise Doucet, je le fuyais, mais plus maintenant, je ne le fuirai plus. (S.C. 155)

This down-to-earth image of the sun is best suited to François character and personalizes the solution as his.

The images associated with François' withdrawal and eventual re-emergence are past of his situation as a "Québécois". Jacques Berque relates those problems to his "nocturne" outlook:

Ce Français qui n'a guillotiné personne, pas édifié de grosse métallurgie, non plus qu'asservi de masses ouvrières ni fait de colonies, bref, ce Français innocent s'apparaît à lui-même comme nocturne. En tout cas, comme relégué, frustré, abandonné. 67

The wall which surrounds François in his withdrawal is reminiscent of the "Mur des Lamentations" described by Godbout as a block to imagination or a wall of silence which must be overcome and has definite similarities with the "Québécois" situation:

Les choses sont ainsi faites que l'homme du Québec, ce colonisé d'entre les colonisateurs, claquemuré dans son exception, n'est plus compris de personne. Mais cette exception il veut la faire sauter, et par l'effraction rejoindre le cortège de tous. 70

68 J. Godbout, Ecrire", 144.
70 J. Berque, "Préface", p. 12.
François' withdrawal and his regression to zero are linked to the need to find one's true self which is a theme in many modern Quebec novels:

...le personnage doit assumer totalement son aliénation, l'épreuve qui lui est imposée est de se reconnaître colonisé, diminué dans son être, et de s'autodétruire, de tuer en lui le colonisé. Et toujours, comme le phénix, il renaît de ces cendres, émerge de l'épreuve comme d'un bap­tème qui le rend à lui-même, pleinement homme à nouveau... 71

Another critic interprets this self-destruction and rebirth as a way of destroying his French-Canadian identity (which recalls the consequences of a crushing defeat) in favour of a more hopeful "Québécois" identity,72 the elimination of a hyphenated being (as stated earlier) for a whole person. The Galarneau who emerges from this experience is perhaps exactly the whole, "new" person described by Godbout as necessary for the State of Quebec to exist: "Les seuls militants qu'il nous faut ce sont des hommes et des femmes, intégres, nouveaux".73

The sense of identity of the main character extends to the manner in which the novel is written which makes several departures from Godbout's first two novels. The premise of this novel is that it

72 J. Cotnam, op cit., 293.
73 J. Godbout, "La conversion préalable", Liberté, IV (mars 1962), 126.
is François Galarneau's book and there is no possibility that we can forget that. The novel is written as a diary in the first person throughout and is distinctively marked by François' character; Jacques, for example would use the language found in *L'Aquarium* and *Couteau* whereas François writes the same way that he speaks – in "québécois".

Godbout has made several other changes to better suit the form to the content. In keeping with the more personal nature of the novel, the numbers which were used to mark off chapters in the first two novels have here been replaced by letters which spell out the name of François' stand: "Au roi du hot dog". This also provides a sense of continuity to the novel, relating each part to the whole. Within the chapters, there are no footnotes as in *Couteau*; instead, everything is incorporated into the text, everything belongs:

Les mots anglais francisés, les jurons, les images saugrenues, des recettes de cuisine, des lettres imaginaires, des annonces de journaux, des messages publicitaires, des inventaires d'objets composent un texte très libre, d'un disparate en réalité fort conscient.\(^{74}\)

Attention to detail (genealogy, physical description) which is a symptom of the "nocturne"\(^{75}\) world necessitates lists of words or phrases and the extensive use of descriptive similes to explain or qualify a

\(^{74}\) R. Bourneuf, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

\(^{75}\) G. Durand, *op. cit.*, p. 309.
statement. The phase "je veux dire" is used frequently to denote further explanation and gives the sense of immediacy, of the "here and now" of what he is saying. The frequency of its appearance throughout the novel also indicates François' need to be understood by others and to properly record what he really thinks or feels. When the phrase is followed by a pause in the sentence ("je veux dire..." (S.G. 97)), it indicates his hesitation and uncertainty with what exactly it is he is trying to express. He readily admits that, at times, finding the right word gives him a headache (S.G. 79, 129).

The general style is a flowing, interlocking sentence structure which suits François' informality and allows his "...sens de l'humour impayable" (S.G. 113) to come to the fore on numerous occasions. This humour is both conscious and unconscious in the form of puns ("mots de tête" (S.G. 139)), juxtapositions, similes, and malapropisms. It is in the language itself, however, that the most significant departure from the other novels occurs: "La réussite intégrale de cette 'vécriture' réside essentiellement dans le phénomène du langage où la coïncidence est parfaite entre le personnage et son style populaire et truculent". 76

It is François' voice that we are hearing "...avec ses intonations, des modulations particulières de la phrase qu'accentuent les jurons, une voix qui retrouve d'emblée tout le jaillissement d'images

colorées, vives, justes, qui s'alimente directement à la verve populaire". He uses English phrases in the middle of sentences as in Couteau but goes beyond this to incorporate Quebec expressions: "la chède à bois" (S.G. 127), c'est le fonne" (S.G. 36), "trop craoudée" (S.G. 61). The swear words are also strictly "québécois": "baptème", "stie", "sacrement". His Uncle Léo, a strict grammarian, insists on the correct French translation for "hot dog" which François refuses because it would not make sense here: "Vous voyez ça d'ici? Je veux dire: c'est quand même un peu ridicule et ça me fait vomir rien que de penser à un chien chaud..." (S.G. 33). The sense of "here and now" which has been a key element of the narration is echoed here in the necessity for a language which is part of this time and space.

Godbout had recognized the importance of language in distinguishing the French-Canadian from his neighbours and further explained the choice of language used in Salut Galarneau: "Pour traduire les nuances de cette vie d'ici, le français classique ne suffit pas. Il faut prendre possession de la culture indigène". He also noted the broader ramifications of this choice in giving a means of expression to his people:


78 J. Godbout, "Pour un ministère de la culture", 20.

79 J. Folch, *op. cit.*, 69.
la langue ne meurt pas, et nous avons enfin l'impression qu'elle va nous permettre de nous exprimer et d'exprimer une réalité. Galarneau n'était pas encore entré en littérature; avec lui, en quelque sorte, c'est à un peuple muet que j'ai voulu donner la parole. 80

The political importance of language is also emphasized by Memmi:

"Or la revendication la plus urgente d'un groupe qui s'est repris est certes la libération et la restauration de sa langue". 81 François' language has been liberated, at this stage, from the confines of European French but several critics have argued that it is not yet "restored". Jacques Allard identified Godbout as using "joual" in Salut Galarneau! to truly reflect the Quebec situation "...en lui donnant enfin une parole qui fût la sienne, chargée de tous ses empêchements et grognements, rageusement souriante comme seule le permettait la positivité de la perspective révolutionnaire...". 82 Roland Bourneuf also linked François to the "joual" movement of the 1960's in the "misère de son langage". 83

Without doubt there are expressions which could be considered as "joual" but the novel as a whole is too lyrical and grammatically well-founded to be part of "joual" literature: "On ne saurait confondre ce

80 C. M. Cluny, op cit., 6.
81 A. Memmi, op. cit., p. 104.
83 R. Bourneuf, op cit., p. 266.
langage coloré, avec la platitude d'une littérature joualisante qui veut être vraie en étant terne, plate. It is precisely in the differences between levels of language used by the character that we see his inner turmoil and indecision about who he really is.

*Salut Galarneau* is as much a part of its time as the two previous novels have been of theirs. The generally more optimistic outlook by the narrator in this novel is part of a more positive attitude in the socio-political atmosphere of the time. As outlined in the first section, the Quebec society in this period seemed to be awakening to its full potential and François was part of this movement by the "Québécois" to take their own future in hand without resorting to the destructive violence of the previous period. The feeling of economic subservience and alienation in North American society had been answered by François' desire to be his own boss and communicate in his own language — in writing — with those around him. This was also Godbout's solution to the threat of the American media as outlined in the first section.

The imagery here is the most strongly positive of the three novels and François' language is "...nettement d'ici sans être forcément d'un

---


joual opportuniste et condescendant". The exclamation point in the title is an emphatic affirmation of life as the narrator at last comes to terms with his own identity and that as a "Québécois" in the North American context.

86 R. Duguay, 'Salut Galarneau' ou le Ti-Pop jovial", Parti Pris, V, nos. 2-3 (oct.-nov. 1967), 60.
CONCLUSION

The journey from L'Aquarium to Salut Galarneau has been made on several levels: in terms of the narrator who has found the space with which he may truly identify; in terms of the imagery and language of the novel which have become, respectively, more positive and more related to Quebec as the narrator has journeyed homeward; and in terms of Quebec's journey from the Duplessis years to the modern Quebec of the Expo era. The journey has been remarkably homogenous in the sense that it has been the same narrator and the same narrative through the three novels. In each chapter we have seen the vertical link among the various factors (socio-political background, the narrative, the imagery and language) and we will now examine more closely the horizontal link between the novels.

The narrator in L'Aquarium is a nameless character with no personal history whose homeland is only hinted at when he speaks of a northern country where revolutions do not happen. The country in which he finds himself is unidentified as well and an air of ambiguity surrounds him; he is the "quotidien fait homme" (A, 145) with no past and no future goal except to escape. The other characters are an international cast with a past they wish to forget and no hint of future escape. His withdrawal from them is made possible by memories of "lui" and his decision to leave needs the support of Andrée. In choosing to
leave, he has rejected the past and any involvement in trying to change the status quo. He realizes that his future and his identity are not here but he is still unclear as to where they might be found.

He returns to Canada in Couteau to continue his search in a more clearly-defined space - Western Canada and Montreal. He had left this country in L'Aquarium "comme une mule qui cherche un puits" (A. 48) and he seems to have found it, at least temporarily, in Patricia who is "...un puits de plaisirs..." (C. 57). He soon discovers that the distance between them due to their political differences is too great to resolve and tries to identify with his own roots through Madeleine and the café intellectuals; however, these attempts prove futile for the intellectuals are as trapped in their past as were the "escargots" of the aquarium. Faced by a lack of identity with his own "nation", the threat of assimilation by English North America appears greater. The realisation of this situation is, once again, through another character - Patricia, in this instance. It is against her identity as a member of the English-Canadian majority that he seeks to define his own; that is, he knows what he is not without defining what he is or will be. The past and present situations are again rejected in favour of an unclear future.

François Galarneau is the next logical step in the journey. His space and personal history are the most Quebec-rooted and clearly-delineated of the three. The other characters in the novel have also moved from the international ambiguity in L'Aquarium and the "Canadian
mosaic" of Couteau to the "identifiably-Quebec" characters of Salut Galarneau. François is also a more autonomous character in several ways: he is the first narrator to have a name and the other characters here are definitely secondary where in the previous novels they have played important roles ("lui" and Patricia); the withdrawal which he undergoes is brought on by his own realization of his situation through keeping his daily journal rather than through someone else's prodding; and he finds the answer to his situation through solitary confinement within the walls of his home. The "mur des nervosités" (C. 112) in Couteau has now become a physical wall and the regression phase here is the most complete of the three novels: the narrator of Couteau had wished to be a child again as though sensing that it was there that he would find his true self and François now regresses to age zero, to the most essential part of himself and his identity, before re-emerging on his birthday as an integrated person.

The solution to guarding one's identity as a "Québécois" in North America without assimilation or domination is to "vécrire" (S.G. 154) and in this way control one's own economic, political and personal destiny. This is the most positive and definite answer to the search for identity which had begun in L'Aquarium. He is able to achieve it without ignoring his roots and is able to accept the past (as symbolized by Martyr) without being trapped by it. The novels have traced an evolution "...d'un exil sans issue à un difficile rapatriement puis
à un enracinement passionné":

The imagery has also evolved as the narrator has become more certain of his identity from being generally negative in the first two novels to a strongly-positive position in *Salut Galarneau*. In *L'Aquarium*, the death images of the aquarium and the rain dominate the novel with only a brief reprieve at the end when the sun shines feebly through the rain. This same sun is much stronger and harsher when it becomes associated with the negative winter/death imagery of Couteau and the positive aspect of the life symbol, spring, is weakened by its association with the knife which symbolizes both purification and death. Life imagery clearly dominates in *Salut Galarneau*: the powerful rising sun which triumphs over the darkness of the wall is linked to François and all the Galarneau or, by extension, to all "Québécois". The narrator has come out of the shadow of the Casa Occidentale and Western Canada into the realm of the positive rising sun of the east, out of the healing "nocturne" world of confinement (Casa, castle, walled-in house) into the light of day. The regression phase in *Salut Galarneau* has been the most complete (in solitude rather than with one or more others) and the subsequent healing process or solution most totally his own.

---

The silence or inability to communicate, symbolized in L'Aquarium by the metaphor of suffocation and silent fish and in Couteau by Madeleine’s death ("...ce silence énorme..." (C. 134)) and the smothering silence of the snow, has now been broken in Salut Galarneau. François’ daily journal is an "oral" experience in the sense that it is a monologue which continues even when he is alone. The joy he has discovered in writing in this way encourages him to write for all the "...Gagnon de la terre..." (S.G. 155) or, in other words, to communicate with all Quebec and end the silence of generations with his "Québécois" voice. This communication was made possible by the narrator reaching self-acceptance and identity in this time and space. The language has travelled from standard French which had no special identity in L'Aquarium, to a bilingual format and American pace which reinforced his domination in Couteau, to a "Québécois" French which showed self-acceptance in Salut Galarneau. The tone has shifted as well from ironic to a more genuine and joyful sense of humour and the point of view has become more personal as we have moved from an omniscient author to a first-person account.

On all levels the novels have journeyed from ambiguity and confusion to a clear definition of what has been missing. The "manque" of L'Aquarium has been righted in the trip from "ailleurs" to "ici" and from the stultifying past to the present and future. Godbout experienced a similar move homeward from the classically-educated, worldly traveller of his youth to the writer concerned with "ici" and the socio-political
issues which affect Quebec on all levels:

...baptisé, catholique, libéral, fédéraliste et bilingue, je suis devenu à travers les ans agnostique, laïque, socialiste, indépendantiste et en faveur des territoires unilingues... 2

We have linked Quebec's evolution to the narrative in each preceding chapter and have seen how it follows the narrative journey: from the stagnant early 1960's of L'Aquarium when Quebec was struggling to emerge from its past but reluctant to let go of the status quo; to the confused mid-decade of Couteau when violence seemed the only way to avoid assimilation; to the more confident late 1960's of Salut Galarneau when eventual independence seemed more certain and by non-violent means. We have seen that for Godbout it is impossible for a Quebec writer to ignore his "...condition de Québécois" and his own work has been closely associated with his society: "...il est impossible de dissocier l'oeuvre de Jacques Godbout de celles de ses amis, tout originale soit-elle. On est l'écrivain d'une génération, sauf circonstances atténuantes. Le temps d'un peuple est celui de ses générations". 4

The approach used in the thesis which stressed the links between Godbout's work and his society is not limited to the novels of Godbout.

---


3 J. Godbout, "Ecrire", 138.

It could equally be applied to his contemporaries or, indeed, to any novelist in a society undergoing extensive political, economic or social upheaval. At a congress of Quebec writers, including Godbout, the consensus of opinion would seem to support that statement: "Toute écriture est politique, non parce qu'elle est écriture, mais parce que tout est politique".  

5"L'écriture est-elle récupérable?", Liberté, XVII, nos. 1-2 (jan.-avr. 1975), 44.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Godbout: texts


Godbout: other works


---------. "Quelques questions sans réponses", Liberté ’59 (mai-juin ’59), pp. 203-205.

---------. "Il n’est aucune justice", Liberté ’59 (juil.-août ’59), pp. 249-255.


140
"Ces sujets inépuisables", Liberté '60 (jan.-fév. '60), pp. 63-65.

"Cartes postales de Russie", Liberté '60 (mars-avr. '60), pp. 129-132.


"Témoignages: Alain Grandbois", Liberté '60 (mai-août '60), pp. 187-188.

"Au musée des beaux-arts", Liberté '60, II (sept-oct '60), 308-309.

"Pour croire aux miracles", Liberté '60 II (sept-oct '60) 288-289.

"Borduas et l'école", Liberté '60, II (nov.-déc. '60), 386-387.

"Lettres refusées au 'Devoir' ", Liberté '60, II (nov.-déc.) '60), 359-361.


"Joyeux anniversaire", Liberté, III (mai-août '61), 592-594.

"La peinture", Liberté, III (mai-août '61), 668-671.

"Pour se déniaiser", Cité Libre, XII (nov. '61), 22-23.

"Chocolates for supper", Liberté, III (déc. '61), 779-781.


"La conversion préalable", Liberté, IV (mars '62), 122-126.

"Lettre à des amis français à propos de ce qui nous arrive", Cité Libre, XIV (mars '63), 24-25.


"Un 'show' cochon", Liberté, V (mars-avr. '63), 173-175.

"L'engagement et le créateur devant l'homme d'ici", Liberté, V (mai-juin '63), 235-238.


"Un aveu", Vie des Arts, XXXII (automne '63), 81.


"Pour riches seulement", Parti Pris, no. 1 (oct. '63), 60-61.

"L'égoïsme sénile ou les amendements de N.N.S.S.", Parti Pris, no. 2 (nov. '63), 58-59.


"Du court métrage au roman", Vie des Arts, XXXIII (hiver '63-'64), 72.

"Témoignages des romanciers canadiens-français", in Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (1964), 373-374.


"Pour une information globale", Parti Pris, no. 5 (fév. '64), 59-60.

"Les mots tuent", Liberté, VI (mars-avr. '64), 139-143.

"L'année zéro", Parti Pris, no. 7 (avr. '64), 6-10.


"Trouble-fête", Vie des Arts, XXXIV (printemps '64), 55.

"Perspectives", Vie des Arts, XXXV (été '64), 55.
"Au festival de Montréal", Vie des Arts, XXXVI (automne '64), 45.

"Une nuit vaudou" (sept. '64), in Le Réformiste. Montréal: Les Editions Quinze, 1975, pp. 53-56.

"Manicargent", Liberté, VI (sept.-oct. '64), 357-360.

"Trois hommes, trois témoignages", Liberté, VI (sept.-oct. '64), 345-346.

"Lettre ouverte à François Truffaut" (oct. '64), in Le Réformiste. Montréal: Les Editions Quinze, 1975, pp. 57-60.

"Faut-il tuer le mythe René Lévesque?", Le Magazine Maclean, IV (nov. '64), 46.

"La haine", Parti Pris, II no. 3 (nov. '64), 16-22.

"Cinémathèque canadienne", Vie des Arts, XXXVII (hiver '64-'65), 57.

"La commission Durham-Laurendeau", Liberté, VII (jan.-avr. '65), 64-75.

"007", Parti Pris, II no. 6 (fév. '65), 59-60.


"L'Atlantique est disparu", Liberté, VII (mai-juin '65), 316-318.

"Cité Libre était au pouvoir", Liberté, VII (mai-juin '65), 203-206.

"Des miracles au dominion", Parti Pris, II nos. 10-11 (juin-juil. '65), 107-110.

"Georges Dufaux, artiste de la lumière", Vie des Arts (été '65), p. 56.

"Une raison d'écrire", Devoir, LVI (30 octobre '65), 17.

"De la poésie au roman", Liberté, VII (nov.-déc. '65), 522-527.

"La télévision c'est votre affaire!", Liberté, VIII (jan.-fév. '66), 64-65.
"Citations", Liberté, VIII (mars-juin '66), 99-100.

"Une expérience", Liberté, VIII (mars-juin '66), 160-168.


"Opinions II", Liberté, VIII (juil.-août '66), 77.

"La télévision est immorale", Liberté, VIII (sept.-déc. '66), 152-156.

"De la dramaturgie à la télévision", Liberté, IX (jan.-fév. '67), 71-75.

"Pour un ministère de la culture", Liberté, IX (mars-avr. '67), 3-24.


"L'affaire des deux langues", Liberté, X no. 2 (mars-avril '68), 11-15.

"Quelques interventions", Liberté, X no. 3 (mai-juin '68), 49.

(in collab.). "Dictionnaire politique et culturel du Québec" Liberté, XI no. 1 (jan.-fév. '69), 7-64.

"Salut Germain!", Europe, nos. 478-479 (fév.-mars '69), 260-262.


"La communicationité", Liberté, XI nos. 3 & 4 (mai-juil. '69), 44-45.

"The Time Machine", Canadian Literature, no. 46 (Dec. '69), 137-142.

(in collab.). "Dictionnaire", Liberté, XII no. 2 (mars-avril '70), 5-30.

"Introduction aux travaux de la VIIIe rencontre des écrivains", Liberté, XII (mai-juin '70), 3-20.


"Quand je retournerai au Parc Belmont...", Devoir (30 octobre, 1971), supplément littéraire, p. 8.

"Écrire", Liberté, XIII nos. 4-5 (nov. '71), 135-147.


"Enlisé dans le qéca", Le Magazine Maclean, XIII no. 5 (mai '73), 14.

"Le Québec de force", Le Maclean, XIV no. 1 (jan. '74), 12.

"Lettres piégées", Le Maclean, XIV no. 2 (fév. '74), 12.


"L'année du brie", Liberté, XVI no. 2 (mars-avr. '74), 77-79.

"Entre l'académie et l'écurie", Liberté, XVI no. 3 (mai-juin '74), 17-33.

"La 150e réunion", Liberté, XVI nos. 5-6 (1974), 5-43.

"Ça sert à quoi, eh?", Le Maclean, XIV no. 7 (juil. '74), 11.

"Quinze ans plus tard", Le Maclean, XIV no. 8 (août '74), 7-8.

"L'âge du catsup", Le Maclean, XIV no. 9 (sept. '74), 10, 12.

"Le livre ou la vie", Le Maclean, XIV no. 11 (nov. '74), 16.


"La poésie contre l'angoisse", Le Maclean, XV no. 4 (avr. '75), 56, 58.
Literary theory: general


Literary theory & criticism: French-Canadian


Duguay, Raoul. "'Salut Galarneau' ou le Ti-Pop jovial", Parti Pris, V, nos. 2-3 (oct.-nov. '67), 60-61.

"L'écriture est-elle récupérable?", Liberté, XVII, nos. 1-2 (jan.-avr. '75).


---. "Livres en français", University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXV (July 1966), 513-514.
Folch, J. "Nous parlions de Salut Galarneau", Liberté, no. 53 (sept.-oct. '67), 68-70.


Godin, G. "Jacques Godbout: '...on est un petit peu usés!'", Le Magazine Maclean, no. 4 (sept. '64), 63-64.


Maheu, Pierre. "Le poète et le permanent", Parti Pris, II, no. 5 (jan. '65), 2-5.


Primeau, M. "Nouvelle vague", Canadian Literature, no. 40 (spring '69), 85-86.


"Le roman canadien-français de demain", Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (1971), 241-256.

"Livres en français", University of Toronto Quarterly (July '68), pp. 571-577.

"Une approche du 'nouveau roman' ", Incidences, VIII (mai '65), 5-14.

"Témoignages d'écrivains", Études Françaises, III, no. 3 (août 67), 303-304.


Turgeon, P. "Jacques Godbout et la course sur béquilles", L'Illétré, no. 6 (déc. '70), 2-3.


"L'espace politique et social dans le roman québécois", Recherches sociographiques, VII, no. 3 (sept.-déc. '66), 259-279.


Socio-political theory


"Les révoltés du Québec", Parti Pris, III (déc. '63), 48-51.

Chamberland, Paul. "Les contradictions de la révolution tranquille", Parti Pris, no. 5 (fév. '64), 6-29.


Other books