

LOVE IN THE NOVELS OF ANDRÉ LANGEVIN

THE THEME OF LOVE IN THE NOVELS OF
ANDRÉ LANGEVIN

by

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The thesis presents an analysis of the much ignored yet essential theme of love in the novels of André Langevin. Love between man and God proves ineffectual while that love between man and others as well as the love between man and woman, although being characterized by several intrinsic limitations, are none the less beneficial to the Langevinian characters in providing a measure of relief from their basic condition of solitude.

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INTRODUCTION

André Langevin, who is now occupied as a C.B.C. producer and feature writer for Le Magazine Maclean has gained considerable recognition as a French-Canadian novelist--"Ecrivain des mieux doués parmi ceux de la génération actuelle" is the appraisal of Jean-Louis Major¹--and his literary repute is in large measure a consequence of the success of his three novels: Evadé de la nuit,² Poussière sur la ville,³ and Le Temps des hommes.⁴ The first two mentioned were each awarded the Prix du Cercle du Livre de France, having been judged the best French-Canadian novels by this company in their respective years of publication. It is my personal conviction that the last work, by offering a well presented synthesis and development of the ideas perceived in the first two novels, merits the highest distinction. In approaching Langevin through a study of his novels, one may fairly assume to be treading on safe ground, though it will readily

¹"André Langevin", Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (1964), 207.

²(Montréal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1951).

³(Montréal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1953).

⁴(Montréal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1956).

be admitted that this may not give an exhaustive view of his literary merit, as he has also written plays and short stories.

The thesis limits itself to an examination of what is considered here to be one of the central, though much ignored themes of the novels, namely that of love, which will be discussed in the chronological sequence of the novels. This examination takes the form of a methodical analysis of specific relationships that deal with (1) speculative love between man and God, (2) individual love between man and woman and (3) fraternal love between man and other men, and which seem to arise naturally from the works themselves. The relationships will be considered in an inverse order of importance for each novel. One must immediately state that none of these relationships is treated or developed in splendid isolation from the others, and indeed they are all interdependent, as may well be deduced from Langevin's reply to a question about his third book, Le Temps des hommes: "Il prolonge Poussière sur la ville et se rattache à ses dernières pages. Je les forcerai à m'aimer. La pitié qui m'a si mal réussi avec Madeleine, je les en inonderai".⁵ Even if one is obliged to accept Langevin's rejection of his first book on the grounds that it corresponds to a period of his life which he would rather forget, one must nevertheless

⁵La Revue populaire, (September 1961), p. 7.

recognize it as testimony of a certain period of the writer's existence, as constituting a part of his experience, and as influencing his future life and writings. It must therefore have relevance to an understanding of his two subsequent novels.

Whatever the diversity of themes in Langevin's work, be they solitude, anguish, violence, winter etc., they all have to do with human emotion and the communication of emotion or the failure thereof. This theme has become a common-place in modern literature but for that very reason it is important, and it is appropriate to analyze the attempt to communicate through love and all the latent possibilities as well as consequences of this attempt.

"When I talk with you, Socrates, the words seem to get up and walk away."⁶ Thus complains one of the opponents of the learned philosopher after being trounced in a discussion, and one may easily be left with a similar impression after trying to define the term "love". One may experience and describe it, but when the task is set to define it, the word seems "to get up and walk away"; in short, it seems to defy any attempt at an all-embracing definition. Most definitions illuminate some feature or aspect of love, but

⁶Quoted by Avrum Stroll, Richard Popkin Introduction to Philosophy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 59.

most are misleading in some respect. Indeed, no simple definition of love, capsulated in a phrase, is likely to do justice to the variety and intensity of emotions which are subsumed under that term. Consequently, time will not be lost in an attempt at a definition. On the other hand, it is hoped that some clear notion of what love has meant in the mind of André Langevin will emerge from the analysis of the theme of love in his novels.

CHAPTER I

EVADE DE LA NUIT

God and Man

For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.¹

With reference to Evadé de la Nuit, Paul-Emile Racicot writes: "De cette aventure, Dieu est exclu".² God is absent in spite of the fact that He and the eternity He promises are desperately wanted:

Fouillez la terre et vous retrouverez les visages, des millions de visages pourris, saccagés, modelés brutalement par une existence assoiffée d'éternité. . . . Aucune béatitude ne les a fait se refermer sur un lambeau de réponse. Leur imploration affolée demeure entière. Sinistre consolation de la piqûre d'eau que l'au-delà où la souffrance doit être comptée pour joie, la pauvreté pour richesse.³

Although these people crave for eternity, they do not believe in its existence.

The belief in a benevolent nature as evidence of a sympathetic Creator is sufficiently widespread to need no

¹John 3:16.

²Relations, XII (1952), 250.

³Evadé de la nuit (Montréal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1953), p. 154. [hereafter cited as E.]

explanation here. In the novel there are some references to the forest which might support the assumption of such a belief; for example, Jean Cherteffe, the central character states: "Ainsi pour moi, un de ces moments [de relâche] fut la forêt. . .[Là] une ivresse aiguë vous transcende" (E 134). But in Evadé de la nuit nature invariably becomes hostile to man; the joy that it brings, is dispelled with the coming of the night when "la forêt se venge [et] vous écrase de sa présence hallucinante" (E 134).

The critic Roger Godbout reveals the importance of "la grande nature" as an antagonistic force to the characters in the following:

Jean, Marcel et Micheline sont croqués à certains moments dans des espaces ouvertes: que ce soit en montagne, en forêt ou dans la belle campagne, le milieu physique leur est plus souvent hostile qu'accueillant.

Dans le chapitre où nous est présenté le sergent Marcel Cherteffe, la beauté des grandes espaces ne fait que souligner l'absurdité de la guerre. Le lever du soleil, aperçu d'un avion, est un spectacle dangereux qui subjugué, par sa grandeur démesurée les soldats. Devant ce symbole de l'absolu, ils ont des figures de vaincus.⁴

It is obvious that in Evadé de la nuit, the overbearing feelings of uneasiness and fear that emerge from contact with nature discourage the conceptual association of nature and a kindly Creator.

⁴Roger Godbout, "Le Milieu", Livres et auteurs canadiens (1966), 199.

In Langevin's novels, the Christian God is symbolically identified with the child's own father and mother. Paul Gay explains: "Non seulement l'enfant ne peut être étranger à son père et à sa mère, mais il agrandit singulièrement l'attrait de l'un vers l'autre; il. . .les rend plus semblables à Dieu-Amour".⁵ If the child is without parents and therefore is without parental love, this absence can symbolize the absence of God and divine love. And so it is significant that two important characters, Jean Cherteffe and Claude Benoît are both raised in orphanages.

Moreover, one gets the impression that Christmas in the orphanage causes more pain than it relieves. The manger scene is vividly portrayed and speaks for itself:

Le sourire peint de la Vierge reçoit
l'hommage de cent sourires charnels d'enfants
vivants qui ouvrent la bouche comme pour avaler
un peu de la douceur, du calme, de la beauté de
cette femme qui ne ressemble pas à celles qu'ils
connaissent, dont ils aimeraient toucher le
visage, les mains, la robe.

La naissance sur la paille d'un enfant entre
son père et une mère blesse ces enfants sans
parents comme l'événement le plus triste qui se
puisse. (E 17)

The statue of Mary makes the orphans all the more aware that they are without a mother's tenderness, "the human feeling that is nearest divine love" and it consequently fills them

⁵Paul Gay, Du Sentiment de l'amour dans le roman canadien-français contemporain 1952-62, M.A. thesis at University of Ottawa, 1964, p. ix. (Published in 1965 in L'Enseignement secondaire au Canada.)

with a longing for their absent mother.⁶ As if to heighten their despair, the nuns advise the children to pray for the preservation of their father, the very person who has most likely placed them in the orphanage. Jean gives a pathetic prayer to God: "Faites que mon père se souvienne que je suis ici, que je reçoive quelque chose de lui demain" (E 18). When unanswered, Jean, whose sensitivity and lucidity are sharpened by his experience at the orphanage, is disillusioned in God and is disappointed that his father, the symbolic representation of God, neither remembers nor loves him.

Although acquainted with the concept of God the Father, Jean cannot dissociate Him from the idealized image he has of his own unknown father who is: "Celui qui nageait à longues brasses et sur le dos duquel l'enfant saisissait l'univers. . . Dieu immense, honoré et craint ainsi qu'une idole" (E 21). Years later he confides to a friend, Micheline Giraud: "Enfant, il occupait mes songes les plus exclusifs et il me tenait lieu de Dieu le Père" (E 133) for, at this early stage, his father symbolized the most essential thing in his life: "l'amour rédempteur" (E 23).

⁶W. E. Collin, "André Langevin and the Problem of Suffering", Tamarack Review, X (1959), 79. Cf. also Yvon-Maurice, André Langevin romancier de l'inquiétude humaine, unpublished M.A. thesis at University of Montreal, 1958, p. 15.

Then suddenly at his father's death, the cruel reality of the situation shatters his illusions. What he sees in the coffin is a "visage d'ivrogne précocement vieilli" (E 19). "Un dieu inconnu gît impuissant aux pieds du jeune homme."⁷ He now loses faith in his own immortality (E 32) and therefore logically loses any faith he may have had in a Christian God. "On comprend que son incroyance remonte à un traumatisme de jeunesse",⁸ the traumatism being the shock of discovering his father's identity. Moreover, his loss of trust in God is symbolically revealed when his father's rosary breaks into three pieces as Jean removes it from the coffin.

Jean suddenly feels like a victim of "un univers effroyablement clos où ne serait rien permis d'autre que de regarder sa vie sourdre piteusement, inutile et dérisoire" (E 23). Gilles Marcotte succinctly sums up the situation in this way: "le refus de Dieu: voilà la haine du père".⁹

Upon meeting an alcoholic named Roger Benoît, Jean

⁷Roger Duhamel, "Evadé de la nuit", Action Universitaire, XVIII (1951-52), 78.

⁸Gérard Bessette, Mary Jane Edwards, "Le Thème de la solitude dans les romans de Langevin", La Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, XXXII (1962), 269.

⁹Gilles Marcotte, Une Littérature qui se fait (Montréal: Editions HMH, 1962), p. 52.

launches an attempt to recreate his own father. Jean insists upon repeating to Benoît: "Mais vous êtes Dieu, l'univers vous appartient" (E 60). Although the reference to God is obviously being used in a figurative sense, Jean could conceivably rediscover God, if he could rediscover his father in Benoît. Conversely, when Benoît commits suicide, the symbolic absence of God is again reinforced.

The fact that Benoît too denied the existence of God and of a hereafter is revealed in his conception of life, which concerned "la vie dans son absolu; c'est-à-dire. . . la naissance et la mort. Nous créons le vide entre les deux pôles. Nous nous regardons nous consumer" (E 52). His frequent suicidal attempts and his resulting death also testify to his belief in the pointlessness of life. It is assumed that after Micheline's death, Jean also commits suicide because his life has become meaningless to him. The characters' desire to commit suicide without having fear of the consequences shows their lack of religious belief.

Indeed, a general absence of belief pervades the novel. Just as there is no communication between God and man, there is no specifically Christian communication between the practising Christians and their fellow man.

The nuns who are institutionally devoted to imitating Christ's love and good works, beat the children in the orphanage to insure their submissive manners. When Jean is

forgotten by his father, he bursts into tears and a nun unsympathetically reproaches him for his childish behaviour.¹⁰ In addition, "vers la fin du volume, Langevin rapproche deux phrases prononcées par une religieuse exerçant ses fonctions dans un hôpital: 'Nous pensons à l'enfant' dit-elle d'abord, puis quelques instants plus tard, elle affirme: 'Il vous faudra payer immédiatement une partie des frais', accentuant ainsi un dévouement trop soucieux de rémunération."¹¹

Other practising Christians presented in an unfavourable light are the ladies from the League of Decency. Having been bequeathed a considerable inheritance, "les rapaces se rabattaient de nouveau sur la maison du mort" (E 204). These women take inventory of the furnishings immediately because they fear that someone might rob them of their newly-acquired possessions.

Evadé de la nuit bears testimony to the lip service society pays to God, Christian principles and rites; there is absolutely no question of a love for God. Aunt Marguerite's shallowness at the funeral home is only too evident when she revels in little details such as: "Mais, vous savez, il a

¹⁰Cf. also Godbout, op. cit., p. 203.

¹¹Jean-Louis Major, "André Langevin", Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (1964), 208.

reçu les derniers sacrements et il est mort en bon chrétien" (E 15) and "Votre père parlait souvent de votre frère, Marcel" (E 20). She seems to get satisfaction from causing Jean pain with her lack of tact and therefore she is disappointed when Jean does not pursue the matter further. In fact, during that terrible moment when Jean is trying to free the rosary from his father's hands, "tous [ses parents] ont savouré respectueusement son trouble, ont évité de parler" (E 26).

The ritual of spending the night with the corpse is described in a nightmarish fashion; everyone half-heartedly plays the role of a mourner of someone they never really befriended. The next day Jean rebels against the meaninglessness of the funeral; he asks himself: "Que signifient ce décor, ces mots, cette amertume que l'on nous promet pour lorsque plus rien n'existera" (E 26).

The characters have no real belief in God and therefore no love for Him; He is, in fact, replaced by an awareness of fate. Immediately after his father's death, Jean loses his self-confidence and submits to the forces of life; he states: "De volonté je suis devenu instrument. . . .J'ai vu hors de tout doute les ficelles du mécanisme. . . .J'avais une nature prédestinée" (E 32f.).¹²

¹²Cf. also words of "la voix" in Jean Cocteau's play 1934 La Machine infernale (Paris: Grasset Livre de Poche, 1967), p. 13. *Regarde, spectateur, remontée à bloc, de telle sorte que le ressort se déroule avec lenteur tout le long*

Fatalism is also characteristic of Benoît, a supreme example of passivity. Twice Jean causes Benoît to fall and twice Benoît acts as if nothing has happened to him. Jean is aghast: "Ce fatalisme, cette obéissance hallucinée à des lois cruelles et inconnues l'ébranlait à la fin" (E 45).

The references to the myth of Sisyphus amplify the idea of fatalism. Jean, like Sisyphus, is lucid enough to realize that all his efforts to elevate Benoît will fail since Claude's death is imminent. "Il [Jean] s'acharnait à briser le mythe de Sisyphe. Mais à tant suer sur son rocher, il l'avait aimé, plus que la victoire" (E 93). Jean is generally seen as "la victime impuissante d'une fatalité impitoyable".¹³

The most convincing evidence of such fatalism is the series of thoughts that go on in Jean's mind following Benoît's death: "Roger Benoît, nous aurions pu. . . .Mais non! Ni l'un, ni l'autre ne pouvions nous échapper du mécanisme rigoureusement exact. . . .Nos coups n'étaient qu'un simulacre. D'autres que nous les assénaient. Et ce n'est pas moi qui t'écraserai." (E 105).

d'une vie humaine, une des plus parfaites machines construites par les dieux infernaux pour l'anéantissement mathématique d'un mortel.

¹³Yvon-Maurice, op. cit., p. 36.

Thus, God's love and God Himself are absent throughout the novel. The quest to find God is in vain; as a result the characters succumb to their own isolation and to the forces of fate.

Man and Woman

In novels love between man and woman is readily comprehensible because readers can identify themselves with the literary characters.

In Evadé de la nuit, Langevin explores several different forms of love ranging from the sordid, to an attempt to find the ideal. The essential problem of communication during each stage of love, is always carefully examined.

A fictional author Parckell defines love and explains why he thinks it is condemned to failure:

L'amour est l'expression la plus sensible de cette tentative de communication dont nous sommes tous victimes. . . .J'ai désiré tellement créer un amour qui sublimerait la vie et lui donnerait valeur d'éternité que chacun de mes livres a été pour moi un échec plus cruel qu'une rupture. . . . Et qu'importe des mots [d'amour] quand les hommes meurent réellement, que nous ne pouvons rien pour eux. (E 186)

As the passage suggests, death plays a significant role in many of the relationships of Evadé de la nuit.

The first amorous relationship depicted involves Jean and Anne-Marie, the wife of his cousin Paul both of whom he meets at the funeral home after his father's death. Jean is

immediately attracted by her "sourire fragile comme celui des enfants" (E 12) and "sa voix. . .comme une promesse d'eau dans un désert" (E 13). At the same time he is aware of her self-assurance and he is somewhat displeased that she talks with such familiarity about his father.

Shortly afterwards, Anne-Marie offers herself to him "sans questions, comme s'il était hors de propos de refuser un rôle dans le jeu" (E 31). Love-making for her is merely an amusement in which she nonchalantly agrees to play a role without really believing in love.

The possibility of any real understanding between Jean and Anne-Marie is squelched the moment Jean realizes she had some sort of relationship (presumably sexual) with his father and that she apparently can become involved with anyone at all. In a letter Jean explains to his brother Marcel that his relationship with Anne-Marie amounts to nothing but "un remède rose, une sur-intoxication" (E 33). When Jean leaves his aunt's home, their association ends with no one being hurt since neither cared intensely for the other. No communication, except a temporary, physical one ever existed between the two.

At the end of the novel, Jean again meets Anne-Marie. She is in a bar offering her affection to anyone that will take it (thus verifying a previous assumption about her promiscuous and frivolous nature). When she tries to seduce him, he rebuffs her as he has recently reached the stage of

real communication with another person who has just died in childbirth. Before leaving Anne-Marie who is repeating:

"Je vous aime", Jean gives her his impression of love which is clouded by his bereavement: "Faites-le jusqu'à ma mort et vous aussi vous aurez un crêpe devant les yeux" (E 245).

Here the mourning veil represents an achievement and reveals the extent of his affection and devotion to Micheline, his real love. Love is once again linked with death and grief.

A more pitiful arrangement exists where there is a one-sided infatuation as in the case of Françoise and Pierre Gobineau. Françoise humiliates Pierre and delights in relating her experiences with him; she scornfully tells a friend: "Si tu le voyais avec ses yeux enflés, son air de chien battu. Il me lécherait les pieds" (E 69). When she leaves him despite his need of her, he is the victim of a nervous depression and complains that he puts more into love than he receives from it. However, he begins to realize that "[il] n'avait jamais atteint que la surface du brouillard dans lequel s'enveloppait Françoise" (E 70); in other words, Pierre becomes aware of their great barrier in communication.

Some time later Françoise returns to Pierre and her return, in view of her indifference to him, indicates that she requires his attention although she is evidently unhappy with him. Their situation is more desperate than the previous one described, for in the latter, neither partner is content nor compatible with the other yet they still cling fiercely

to each other.

Benoît presents several different outlooks on love for he engages in a circle-like development in the man-woman relationship. As an adolescent, he turned to the love of woman after failing in his attempt to love humanity. He confesses that the result of this experience was more disastrous than the first: "Cherchant en elle la tendresse. . . l'apaisement. . . je connus, il va sans dire, des déceptions plus vives" (E 57). Then without believing in the existence of love, he married a woman who subjugated but supported him.¹⁴

Mme Benoît is a prostitute who receives the clients her husband sends her from the tavern. Benoît's reaction to being his wife's pimp is somewhat confused as he states: "Je ne vous dirai pas ce que je fais aujourd'hui à cause d'elle ou, plutôt, par suite du droit que je lui ai donné de me diriger" (E 58). On the other hand, Mme Benoît has precise feelings about her trade: it serves to ward off her boredom, to give her and her husband a living and it also uplifts her as she feels she provides a useful service to her customers. She explains to Jean: "On dirait que je leur ai refilé leur morale. . . .Entre l'arrivée et le départ, il y a un moment où ils vous aiment presque. . . .Il y a les dégoûtants, bien sûr, mais il y a surtout des craintifs qui s'abandonnent avec moi comme ils ne l'ont jamais fait avec

¹⁴This unpleasant type of marital relationship that

leur femme. On est toute transfigurée" (E 75). From these words, it is evident that a certain contact is established even in this depersonalized sexual relationship. Furthermore, she seems to accept the men's scorn at their departure as she feels her mission has been accomplished.

Her ability to console and to relieve those who come to her for support resembles that of a mother. Indeed, Philippe Lacelin remarks that "cette femme voue un amour maternel à tous les hommes sans exception parce qu'elle sait qu'ils sont en réalité des enfants avides d'affection".¹⁵

Yet, it must not be overlooked that Mme Benoît's relationships are not as satisfactory as she is trying to make them appear. The momentary contact that is established is relatively inconsequential since the relationships can never develop. Jean is not misled as he reflects that: "à son plaidoyer, elle avait sans doute mêlé un cynisme qui l'affaiblissait. . . .Elle avait tenté simplement d'indiquer que ses rapports avec le monde n'étaient pas que méprisables." (E 95).¹⁶

Since Jean is sheltering Benoît at this time, he

is devoid of mutual tenderness and understanding is typical of all Langevin's married couples (except for Baptiste and Marie in Le Temps des hommes).

¹⁵Philippe Lacelin, "La Femme dans les romans d'André Langevin", Lettres et écritures, I, Series 3, (1964), 22.

¹⁶Mme Benoît, the only professional prostitute

contemplates helping the Benoît couple, only to drop this idea again in view of Benoît's total indifference to the idea and to his wife. Then following the death of his son, Benoît of his own accord returns to his wife hoping to establish a rapport with her before he commits suicide. What he wants to create between them is "une certaine chaleur humaine. . . . Pas l'amour certes. Mais une compréhension heureuse" (E 106). At this point Benoît kindles the reader's pity for the tremendous understanding he shows of his wife, the one who to defend herself remains callous to his approaches:

"C'était cela qu'il voulait lui faire sentir, non pas pour qu'elle le regrettât, mais pour qu'elle ne prît pas en haine son souvenir, pour qu'elle ne pensât pas que son suicide était à cause d'elle. Aucune autre femme. . . n'eût pu. . . le soutenir, ne pas l'accuser de sa chute. (E 107)

Finally Benoît does reach her for she contemplates a more meaningful relationship with him and she also asks him to wait till her client leaves so that they can talk. "Il l'avait touchée. L'instant avait eu la plénitude qu'il avait souhaitée et il était comblé." (E 109)

Benoît is so greatly overwhelmed that he finds suicide his only answer to run away from the grief caused by Claude's death and from the challenge to face up to love. As he has

depicted in Langevin's novels does share the belief of the value of her services with real-life prostitutes. James H. Bryan says: "Respondents [in a survey consisting of 52 prostitutes] also commonly indicated that prostitutes serve as important psychotherapeutic agents giving comfort, insight and satisfaction to those men too embarrassed, lonely or isolated to obtain interpersonal gratification in other ways". ". . . Call Girls", Deviant Behaviour and Social Process, ed. Wm. A. Rushing (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), p. 215.

previously explained to Jean: "Adam a quitté le Paradis parce que la joie lui était intolérable" (E 57). As far as Benoît is concerned, joy is as great an affliction as grief. He has made the full circle because he again has sought to find tenderness and understanding in a woman, and once more he fails to make the relationship succeed.

The male-female relationship that is furthest developed is that of Jean and Micheline. At their first encounter, Micheline creates a distinct impression of coldness; her aloofness is emphasized by her extremely high forehead which becomes an image of her inaccessibility to Jean throughout the novel.

In spite of the distance between them, Jean later recognizes, "[sa] douceur communicative. . .[sa] tendresse inemployée en quête d'un objet" (E 90). Since he is seeking a substitute for Benoît who has rejected all his attempts of friendship before committing suicide, Jean temporarily yields to her compassion: "Il lui fallait avouer que Micheline l'avait sauvé, que, si elle n'avait pas été à ses côtés, il eût touché le fond lui aussi" (E 119).

Micheline has several good qualities to put at Jean's disposal: "[sa] joie éternellement disponible" (E 111), "son amitié" (E 114), "sa confiance" (E 118), and her interest in him stems from his very uniqueness. The fact that Jean is of a different social class is no barrier to her: "De fait, elle ne s'interrogeait jamais sur ses rapports avec les êtres

et elle ne résistait pas au besoin d'aimer" (E 124). As Roger Godbout suggests, "la ténacité de Micheline dans ses rapports avec Jean trahit une incessante recherche d'affection".¹⁷

Thus, her mission is to "le changer, l'obliger à aimer la vie et à la goûter sans honte" (E 125). Her concept of love is an ideal one whereby one must "se livrer l'un à l'autre sans réserves. . . .C'est une foi qui accepte de ne pas interroger" (E 132). In fact, Micheline, will eventually be able to "l'arracher à sa solitude, à son refus de vivre. Elle lui fera comprendre l'amour véritable".¹⁸

Jean defines love this way: "L'amour évidemment n'est que le fruit d'une entente, d'une convention acceptée afin de pouvoir croire en une évasion" (E 125). Later, Jean's objections to love are even more precise as he tells Micheline: "Si je vous aimais, j'aurais désir de vous briser le crâne pour communiquer avec cela seul dont j'aie faim et. . .que je ne saisisrai jamais. . . .L'amour ressemble assez à la lâcheté de deux ennemis que de vulgaires intérêts obligent à pactiser" (E 131). He adds that love is meaningless as it is impossible to give oneself, to give our soul (E 131); in other words, he concludes that because people

¹⁷Op. cit., p. 203.

¹⁸Jean Filatrault, ". . .La Révolte dans notre littérature romanesque récente", Recherches sociographiques, V (1964), 184.

cannot really communicate, nor communicate for any length of time, love only consists of a fleeting physical pleasure.

According to Jean, man is a solitary being (E 132) who is all the more aware of his loneliness by the knowledge that death thwarts his attempts to love: "Que vous ayez pour un être la tendresse la plus intense, la mort vous retirera du coup et votre tendresse et son objet" (E 132). In the words of Yvon-Maurice, "l'amour lui paraît inutile, puisqu'il doit être brisé par la mort".¹⁹ Langevin consistently links love, which is regarded as an escape (E 125) with death the final escape. It should be noted that at this stage in the novel, Benoît is the best illustration of love being frustrated by death. If such a thing as death did not exist, Benoît would not have been able to commit suicide at the very moment that he and his wife were genuinely interested in, and moved by, each other.

Jean and Micheline's relationship begins to crystallize when he finally admits to himself that he needs her; she represents the unknown but greatly desired mother of his dreams--dreams of "une présence féminine jamais précisée, en laquelle s'étaient réfugiés les derniers abandons et les dernières confiances" (E 139). Instinctively Micheline senses that beneath Jean's mask of cynicism and solitude lurks a

¹⁹Op. cit., p. 24.

repressed child (E 144). Moreover she is able to identify her needs with those of Jean for they both try to resolve their problems of loneliness by going to others: "Ce qui les liait, même de façon ténue, s'enracinait en des régions de l'âme plus profondes. Effacer le souvenir de leur rencontre était aussi impossible que le revivre" (E 144). They met at the hospital where Micheline was visiting Claude for whom she was a mother substitute and where Jean took Benoît so that the latter could establish a relationship with his son. Thus, the couple is able to reach a certain degree of intimacy since both share similar problems.

Then during a walk on the mountain in Montreal, they reach a high point of happiness in their relationship. However, their newly found joy abruptly ends with the sight of a dying dog convulsing in pain. Jean reflects on the solitude and suffering of death and shortly afterwards, he learns of the death of Marcel, the last living member of his family.

When faced with the news that Marcel, the strong one, has come to know solitude and to realize the failure of his life, Jean "jugeait son amour dérisoire, pitoyable son abandon d'aujourd'hui, ridicule son espoir inavoué de s'échapper à la faveur d'une tendresse féminine" (E 150). Fearing that he would suffer from the inevitable breakdown of their romance and being continually plagued by the thought of the servility and impossibility of love, Jean decides to run away from

Micheline.

She, on the other hand has complete confidence in their love and never expresses anger nor asks any explanation for his absences: "Son amour est au-dessus de tout, au-dessus de l'intelligence et de Jean".²⁰ Hers is a totally gratuitous and understanding love that constantly begs to be accepted: "Laissez-moi vous aimer. J'ai foi en vous" (E 176).

Jean continues to mistrust a relationship that would bind him in any way and he therefore is demanding a great deal: a total union in love as well as the assurance of keeping his own identity. It is true that one is told he begins to hate Micheline because she represents "une autre tentative ratée de communication" (E 175). But, contrary to the view that this feeling is outright abhorrence of her,²¹ it seems to be his adolescent fear of love that is coming to the fore. Jean is uncertain of its implications and is suspicious if not fearful of it.²² Jean Filiatrault is of the same opinion: "Jean Cherteffe, . . . n'est pas préparé à accepter l'amour sans culpabilité. Et pourtant ce n'est pas sa chair qui se refuse, mais son esprit".²³

²¹Jean-Paul Pinsonneault, "Evadé de la nuit", Lectures (1951), 124.

²²Cf. Denis Boucher's attitude to love in novel of Roger Lemelin Au Pied de la pente douce (Montréal: Institut Littéraire du Québec, 1944), p. 53. "Il estimait que les femmes sont d'un autre monde, et il se méfiait de leurs armes."

²³Op. cit., p. 184.

Jean's fear of love basically amounts to his own insecurity and lack of self-assurance which are brought out in the following: "C'est une idée terrible que vous avez eue de m'aimer. . . .J'ai peur de moi, Micheline" (E 180).

After testing their love through a separation of three months, Jean finally "savait hors de tout doute qu'il n'aurait plus jamais à s'interroger sur Micheline, sur leur aventure" (E 185). Their love has remained intact in spite of the passage of time and the distance between them. On learning of Micheline's pregnancy, Jean announces without any discussion that he will ask her father for her hand. This voluntary decision shows how far their relationship has progressed since the time Jean aggressively insisted on his solitude (E 114). After her father rejects Jean's request, Micheline too refuses marriage and thereby overcomes the obstacle of the restriction of love. Her confidence permits her to say: "Je ne veux pas de chaînes pour notre amour. Nous vivrons côte-à-côte aussi longtemps que nous nous aimerons et ce sera beaucoup plus long qu'un mariage" (E 204).

Micheline speaks of the uniqueness of their love while Jean warns that their happiness could suddenly disappear: "Le don mutuel de deux êtres ressemble assez à un pari aveugle. Les mains qui s'ouvrent à la lumière découvrent que ce qu'elles renfermaient s'est volatilisé. Eviter la lumière à tout prix. Ou arrêter la vie, la figer dans un moment" (E 208). Two very important notions of Jean are brought out here: if man wants

to retain his love he must either try to live entirely in a dream world, or he must stop time for love is a momentary passion. Jean again contrasts the dream world of love with the real world, pointing out how one fades into the other: "La vraie vie et l'autre. . .elles ne sont pas meilleures l'une que l'autre. . . .L'amour, la métamorphose du papillon à rebours. Il naît papillon et meurt chenille" (E 214); that is, love is able to be glorious but only for an instant; it must then gradually fade. Since Jean can pick out the disadvantages of love, even while he is experiencing it, his ludicity is a handicap as he cannot be satisfied with a substitute for total communication.²⁴

As if to negate all Jean's doubts, the couple has three days of unsurpassed bliss in a rustic cabin in the forest. However, on returning from a trip to the village, he finds Micheline in a drunken stupor. Her apparent defection can be readily explained by her fear of the outdoors and by her consequent solitude. Jean had previously explained that the absence of one of them weighed heavily upon the other (E 208). Critics who use this example to say that their physical love could not resist a few hours' separation²⁵ are ignoring the many moments of contact of the couple.

²⁴Major, op. cit., p. 212.

²⁵Yvon-Maurice, op. cit., p. 31.

Nevertheless, a climax has been reached for neither party is at ease with the other. Micheline is ashamed of her conduct but this time it is Jean who is understanding; her anguish "le liait plus intimement à un autre être que la naissance d'un fils. . . Micheline valait mieux que ses frustrations" (E 217).

As time passes, both are aware of "cette usure lente de leur amour contre laquelle ils s'acharnaient à résister. . . . Il se réfugiait dans l'alcool. Non parce qu'il n'était pas heureux, mais parce qu'il craignait de ne plus l'être" (E 219). Jean is forever fearful that time will destroy their love and he goes to the point of thinking: "Jamais leur union ne pourrait le satisfaire si elle devait toujours s'interrompre aux bords de l'âme" (E 221). Jean is claiming an absolute love: one that goes beyond the physical, one that is eternal. Yet Micheline is giving him all that she had to offer; she is regarded by several critics as the incarnation of divine tenderness²⁶ and total love.²⁷

The contradictory nature of love is revealed when Jean cannot tolerate the idea of Micheline being unfaithful yet his joy upon discovering her fidelity not only leads him

²⁶Collin, op. cit., p. 90.

²⁷Duhamel, op. cit., p. 78.

to make love to her unfair accuser but also causes his desire to make love to all womankind: "Pourquoi ne pas aimer l'univers entier? . . . Il pouvait aimer toutes ces dames qui venaient à l'établissement. . . toutes celles qui avaient soif" (E 224). This is a flagrant example of the double standard for his promiscuity and jealousy are contrasted with her fidelity and trust.

Once in the hospital, Micheline has an incessant need of Jean's presence, not because she doubts him but because she fears childbirth. As Jean witnesses her suffering, he feels guilty for causing her pregnancy and cannot help wishing for the eternity of total happiness in contrast to "la plénitude de l'instant, son éternité dans l'intensité" (E 234).

Although his lucidity does not permit him to believe in an immortal love, he has reached the stage where this question no longer matters: "Qu'importait qu'ils fussent mortels? . . . Les coups du sort ne pouvaient plus l'atteindre. Ils marcherait parmi les hommes, inconnu d'eux, soulevé par le bonheur et nul ne pourrait lui toucher" (E 235). At last Jean accepts the limitation that he previously found most objectionable; that is, that love is not and cannot be eternal. He is willing to enjoy his present happiness and to disregard the possible problems of the future. He now

recognizes the extent of Micheline's love for him²⁸ and in doing so, he has learned that despite many imperfections, a human being can have dignity. In spite of the fact that she dies, he places a wedding band on her hand to symbolize the union he feels with her: "Micheline demeurait en lui, unie comme elle avait souhaité de l'être" (E 242).

After trying to repress his grief with alcohol, he wanders off in the snow, towards the mountain, completely occupied by the thought of Micheline. Jean's death is presumably real and not purely figurative. In spite of the fact that Jean dies too, a total union of mind and body has been reached and thus the ending can be regarded as both tragic and gratifying. Parckell had once explained: "Une passion éteinte par la mort est préférable à celle que la vie elle-même dévore" (E 186).

"Micheline était le seul être qui avait réussi à accrocher Jean à la vie, à donner un sens à son existence désemparée, à le tirer hors de sa désespérance."²⁹ Because Jean eventually understands and accepts her love, it is impossible to regard their relationship as entirely physical³⁰ or the ending as revealing the complete victory of death.³¹

²⁸ Cf. Filiatrault, op. cit., p. 184.

²⁹ Yvon-Maurice, op. cit., p. 32.

³⁰ Bessette, Edwards, op. cit., p. 271.

³¹ Réjean Robidoux, André Renaud, Le Roman canadien-français du vingtième siècle (Ottawa: Editions de l'Univer-

Jean willingly and lucidly seeks a union in death which may be the final escape from life but which is definitely not "la dernière évasion, la plus désespérée. . . l'aveu de l'échec complet".³²

In the novel, romantic love is depicted as a possible solution to man's problems; it is not a perfect solution as it has several intrinsic limitations: the difficulty of communication, its temporary nature; but, at the same time, it does help to alleviate man's struggle.

Man and Others

The general plot of Langevin's works primarily concerns man's attempt to communicate with his fellows. In his novels, an individual usually confronts another individual directly rather than confronting society, i.e., organized man, at large. However there is a definite progression towards a more confined society or a smaller community with each novel: Evadé de la nuit occurs in Montreal for the most part; Poussière sur la ville³³ in a small mining town named Macklin, and Le Temps des hommes³⁴ in both an isolated hotel and in a lumberjack cabin.

sité d'Ottawa, 1966), p. 137.

³² Guy Robert, Revue dominicaine, LXII (1965), 211.

³³ (Montréal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1953).

³⁴ (Montréal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1956).

In Evadé de la nuit, man in general is usually presented from Jean Cherteffe's point of view. The first occasion on which he objectively studies his fellow human beings, takes place in a tavern:

Jean leva les yeux et prit conscience de la présence d'hommes autour de lui. Que dissimulaient les visages? Il s'aperçut que jamais il n'avait cherché à voir en eux l'être humain aussi vulnérable, aussi démuné, aussi individualisé que lui-même. Ils étaient peut-être une centaine dans l'établissement, durs, fermés. Seuls.

Il les regarda lentement, posant sur chacun d'eux un oeil interrogateur qui obtenait nulle réponse. Ils montraient des figures si fermées que tout désir de connaissance devenait dérisoire. . . .Eux aussi se fuyaient éperdument parce qu'ils n'étaient pas heureux. . . .Le sort commun; sans plus ni moins. . . .Un chassé croisé où personne ne touche personne. (E 41f)

He has come to realize that other men share his feelings of loneliness and unhappiness and yet this knowledge does not mitigate his own solitude. Consequently he believes that the human condition is one of despair: "L'humain déborde de résignation et possède la vocation de la douleur" (E 133).

The relationships of man and his fellows will be examined in three phases (1) total isolation, (2) the attempt to communicate and its failure, (3) the attempt to overcome the failure to communicate. Very few characters remain entirely in one category because most show some development in the novel.

"L'exemple de la solitude la plus totale et la plus

désespérée [est] celle de l'orphelin."³⁵ Langevin's young orphans have no intimate contact with other people. Claude Benoît has spent the major, if not total, portion of his life in an orphanage as his parents have always been too occupied with their own problems to take care of him: the father is a drunkard and the mother a prostitute. Indeed, one is informed that: "Cet enfant souffrait d'une solitude si terrible que personne ne pouvait alléger" (E 89). Furthermore, this young child, being afflicted with tuberculosis, is condemned to a very short life. Jean Cherteffe was also raised in an orphanage and the details he remembers about it reveal the isolation of its inhabitants: he thinks of the club foot of a deformed boy, and of the terribly repressive and tense atmosphere constituted by: "l'hébétude quotidienne, stigmaté de crainte, de naïveté et d'effusion brutalement réprimées" (E 17).

When Jean approaches adulthood, he is terribly shaken by his father's death. At the funeral home, Jean's sense of isolation is intensified by the presence of his physically grotesque relatives whom he cannot accept. Their very awkwardness serves to heighten his uneasiness for "tous se taisent, contraintes et gauches" (E 12).

³⁵Marcotte, op. cit., p. 52.

Roger Godbout effectively reveals the unpleasant atmosphere by relating:

La cruauté et le sadisme des petites gens. L'ouvrier Charron raconte au jeune Jean, avec force détail, la mort de son père; il ne lui épargne même pas d'évocation du sang sur le ciment. Les cinq paires d'yeux qui regardent Jean rendent sa confrontation plus cruelle avec le visage sépulcral de son père. Inconsciemment, ils regardent souffrir le héros. Avec quelle cruauté l'affreuse tante Marguerite lui dit que le père 'braillait comme un veau' quand il était soûl. ³⁶

The image of his deceased father, so unlike the idealized image he had for so long, haunts him, for he fears that his father's failures have been transmitted to him (E 23). W. E. Collin explains that what Jean as an orphan has inherited is: "a negative personality. He feels like a convict; he is destined to a mediocre existence; he is not in love with life; he has lost his self-assurance; he seeks and cannot find himself".³⁷ Now Jean is overcome by solitude, by an incapacity to participate in society.³⁸ He could never be part of his brother's world where one engages in specific actions directed to precise goals. On the contrary, Jean does not impose any prior definitions on himself; he drifts along according to the forces of fate (E 32f.).

³⁶ Godbout, op. cit., p. 202.

³⁷ Op. cit., p. 84.

³⁸ Filiatrault, op. cit., p. 183.

When one first meets Roger Benoît, he is totally divorced from humanity by his own will. He resists any attempts on the part of others to change him by insisting that he wanted to become what he is now. Later he restates his position to discourage Jean from interfering: "Je ne veuille pas de votre aide. . . .J'ai volé, j'ai trahi, j'ai corrompu des enfants; je me suis livré à tous les vices" (E 58). Benoît has come to the conclusion that he wants to live in isolation; this is a last resort for all his efforts have failed.

The one person who unconsciously has a carapace of aloofness until a short time before his death is Marcel Cherteffe, the conditioned army sergeant: "Jamais il ne s'est posé de questions sur les hommes" (E 34). He has automatic ties with his men in war but no ties of friendship as he is simply not concerned with the problems of others. The one thing that disconcerts him though, "c'est d'apercevoir soudain les visages des hommes et de connaître qu'ils voient aussi le sien" (E 35);³⁹ that is, he becomes conscious of the humanity of his subordinates in spite of himself.

Marcel unwittingly engages in self-doubt when his

³⁹Cf. "L'enfer c'est les autres" in Jean-Paul Sartre's Huis Clos suivi de Les Mouches (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), Livre de Poche, 75.

courage wavers during a leg amputation of a fellow soldier; then his murder of a child behind enemy lines causes nightmares and fear. Previously his one goal was to work for the happiness of mankind; now he projects the blame of his murder on others for making him an unconscious assassin.

The possibility of communion between Jean and Marcel is thwarted by Marcel's death. The one person that Jean knew who formed his own destiny was also doomed to discover human solitude before death.

Despite the fact that some people are willingly or unconsciously locked up in their solitude, most attempt to communicate with others even though this attempt may fail.

Jean is disconcerted that Parckell, whose books give the impression of his contentment and success, in reality believes that "il est aussi impossible de s'exprimer totalement dans un livre. . . que de communiquer avec un être. Et les livres, tous, représentent peut-être le plus terrible échec de l'humanité, la démonstration la plus évidente de son inhabilité au bonheur" (E185). Parckell tries to break out of his solitude by self-expression in literature and he constantly meets failure. Since one of the fundamental components of love is communion with another, how far from achieving love these characters must be.

Benoît too came to believe in the failure of human relationships when his adolescent love for humanity suddenly

seemed ridiculous in view of the realization that man liked his misfortune. Since his attempt to communicate by love of woman failed also, he became hostile to humanity in general and denied the possibility of any kind of love. At that moment, he published his poems which were an expression of his powerlessness but which were misinterpreted as an expression of revolt. . . . Because his earnest and enthusiastic efforts to establish a rapport with others were crushed once and for all, he fell into "une résignation sans amertume et puis dans la veulerie" whereupon he conceived the idea that life was nothing but "une immense banqueroute. . . un néant" (E 57).

The difference in social class is another barrier to communication. Jean continually reproaches Micheline for being a judge's daughter and "même le petit Claude ne s'était pas comporté avec elle comme avec les autres. . . [il] la considérait un peu comme la Vierge, une personne très secourable, mais incommensurablement éloignée de lui" (E 124). Her difficulty in being accepted resembles that of Hugo in Les Mains sales who is different from his comrades because he has a rich father.⁴⁰ Micheline does strive to eliminate any barrier between herself and others and her success will be considered later.

However, her father Judge Giraud fails to communicate with others in a meaningful way. He pitifully reproaches his daughter for her coldness yet it is not her fault:

⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, Les Mains sales (3^{ème} éd.;

"L'absence d'une mère avait laissée ce fossé que ni l'un ni l'autre ne pouvait franchir" (E 142). He blames her for his own failures because she physically resembles her alcoholic and unfaithful mother who died in childbirth. His hostility is so great that when Jean asks to marry Micheline who is expecting a child, the judge impulsively threatens to disinherit her and shortly afterwards commits suicide. Here is an extreme example of incomprehension, intolerance and lack of affection in a relationship.

The Judge is caricatured as a self-righteous bigot, whose desire to avenge himself for the failure of his marriage and of his life results in the enforcement of an incredibly rigid morality. He communicated with others through scorn and hate as his whole purpose in life was to degrade those around him (E 125).

However, there also are people who attempt to overcome the failure to communicate. Jean Cherteffe, in his attempt to rehabilitate the stubborn and alcoholic Roger Benoît, is one of them.

The reasons he concerns himself with Benoît are not purely altruistic; Jean wants to recreate a father, (the resemblance is obvious) and more important is his selfish desire to "s'oublier enfin dans la détresse d'autrui".⁴¹

Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 100.

⁴¹Duhamel, op. cit., p. 78.

He first considers his task in an objective, cold-hearted fashion yet after hearing about Benoît's earnest but vain attempts to establish a rapport with others, Jean is overcome with sympathy and compassion for the older man. His resulting devotion to Benoît "avait exigé. . . un effort total de l'esprit et du corps, une foi aveugle et systématique" (E 91). "Il en vint à aimer Benoît, à vouloir à tout prix le rendre heureux" (E 94). A vital development has taken place for genuine affection and concern for another being have emerged from Jean's selfishness.

Despite Jean's struggle for success, he is aware that only a miracle could save Claude and in turn save Benoît. Therefore, when Claude does die, Jean reflects: "Et Benoît brûlerait à son tour. Les pères et les fils faisaient la chaîne depuis le néant jusqu'à l'invisible, l'inexpliqué" (E 98). Jean seems to suggest that there exists an unexplicable chain of human love in a father-son relationship and that when one member dies, the effects on the other are inevitably tragic. Benoît is shattered as a result of his son's death just as Jean was shattered at his father's death.

Moreover, Benoît squelches any hopes of Jean to create a meaningful relationship by pointing out their intense lack of communication: "On ne s'installe pas dans la vie des autres. Entre vous et moi, la distance est infranchissable. . . . Il n'y a que deux sortes d'hommes sur

la terre: ceux qui donnent et ceux qui reçoivent. Les seconds haïront toujours les premiers" (E 101f.).⁴² Because Jean has renewed Benoît's thirst for life and for affection, Benoît is momentarily prompted to kill Jean out of revenge but then overcome by suffering, Benoît later commits suicide.

However, Jean never learns that he did reach Benoît for the latter in the moments before death, reveals his respect for Jean's anguished desire to overcome the limitations of the human condition: "Peut-être aussi avait-il été apitoyé par la danse aveugle et forcenée à laquelle se livrait le jeune homme pour se libérer, par sa volonté de puissance qui ne serait jamais satisfaite, par son désir orgueilleux de ne pas avouer à l'échec. Claude à vingt ans eût peut-être été ainsi" (E 109).

Benoît's corpse hauntingly reminds Jean of his father with whom he never had the chance to communicate. Jean concludes that there was no way Benoît, "le dégoût incarné" (E 112) could have lived. It is ironic that he imagines Benoît's terror at the moment of death because the notion of fear does not enter Benoît's mind; although the latter's conduct immediately preceding death is ambiguous, it would appear that he makes a last minute attempt to escape from the gas-filled room and to live. Even though Jean has been able

⁴²Benoît's definitive rejection of Jean's friendship parallels Laurier's attitude to Dupas in Le Temps des hommes.

to reach Benoît in a limited way, this contact is inadequate as they never simultaneously understand each other.

Claude Benoît plays an important role with regard to communication between people. Through him, one sees that Micheline, like Jean, forgets about herself by helping others: "Elle aussi avait un poids sur les épaules et tenait de s'en décharger en soutenant autrui" (E 88). Despite the class difference, she manifests a maternal love for the young boy in her protective attitude towards him; she, out of character, reproaches Jean and Benoît when they disturb Claude's peace of mind. Her love is self-effacing for her joy knows no bounds when Claude grows closer to his natural father than he had ever been to her.

Benoît, the man who thought he had succeeded in making himself totally insensitive, the man who previously regretted being the father of someone whom he neither loved nor hated, had been deeply affected by the gratuity of his child's love and explains: "Il [Claude] m'a aimé à me faire mal. . . . Pour lui, j'étais comme les autres pères, aussi digne d'affection et de respect. Et c'est de cela que je ne réussis pas à me guérir, de sa bonté. Tu sais comme j'ai toujours trouvé la charité exécrationnelle. Mais chez lui, ce n'était pas la même chose. Une sincérité, une simplicité qui me bouleversaient" (E 108). His constant watch over his son for the two days before his death, and his resulting grief and suicide are a testimony of the love he felt for Claude.

The theme of love in Evadé de la nuit has never been fully considered. Yet certainly the desire to love and to be loved in return, is one of the driving forces of the novel.

The notion of love between God and man is reduced to nothing because the idea of God, first expressed in a symbolical mode is finally replaced by an awareness of the forces of fate. However the God-man relationship is important because the characters' attitude toward God or to that which replaces God, naturally affects their attitude to other people.

Positive evidences of love do exist in the novel. After years of incomprehension and indifference, Benoît and his wife are able to share a mutual but short-lived compassion for the other: a development in their relationship is impossible because Benoît, unable to bear the suffering of life, consequently commits suicide.

A more real love centers around Claude who is the object of Micheline's and Benoît's respective maternal and paternal affection. In the latter case, there is a striking two-way love for father and son each respect and need the other. It must be emphasized that this mutual love, terminated by an involuntary death, is the most significant contact that either Benoît or Claude has experienced with another person.

Jean's compassion for Benoît soon develops into a deep affection which is not returned as Benoît is too occupied

with other problems. However Benoît, by sympathizing with Jean's attempts to overcome the problems of life, goes so far as to associate Jean with the person to whom he is closest, namely, Claude.

The most gratifying development is that of Jean and Micheline. First of all she saves him from total despair resulting from the apparent failure of his relationship with Benoît and then she evokes thoughts of a motherly tenderness. Finally Jean sees her as the optimum expression of human love; that is, a love that is not perfect, nor eternal, nor absolute but a love which he accepts. Jean and Micheline's love represents the most adequate communication in the novel for both characters understand and need the other.

But, because the person Jean loves is not living, and because he does not want to exist with only the memories of love, he presumably takes his life and thereby achieves a unity with Micheline in death. Jean's death is not a violent one nor perhaps even a conscious one as in the case of M. Giraud or Benoît. "La douceur le tuait" (E 245) suggests that Jean is drifting into something pleasant rather than unpleasant.

The obvious ambiguity of death always intervening at the moment when genuine affection and understanding have been established (as in the case of Benoît and Claude, Benoît and his wife, and Jean and Micheline) suggests that true

love is practically impossible to maintain although it is greatly desired.

The following interpretation of the enigmatic title Evadé de la nuit arises from the analysis of the foregoing pages. Jean, totally disillusioned with the idea of communion with God after the death of his father, finds himself destitute and isolated. Consequently, he makes two successive attempts to overcome his solitude by means of human love. He soon recognizes that his fraternal love for Benoît has resulted in failure: "Notre combat a été celui d'aveugles dans la nuit. Nous ne nous sommes jamais atteints" (E 105). On the other hand, his relationship with Micheline meets a certain measure of success, as a mutual love, affording some relief to his loneliness has been created. Hence, one may fairly assume that Jean has escaped from the night--that is, has emerged from the darkness of his solitude by means of communication through love of woman. Indeed, in Evadé de la nuit, Langevin seems to suggest a belief in romantic love or that love between man and woman, replacing a sense of unity in God and in relationships with others.

CHAPTER II

POUSSIÈRE SUR LA VILLE

God and Man

The manger scene, which symbolically represents God's love for man in the Christian tradition, has an important role in Langevin's first two works. In Evadé de la nuit, it causes pain to the orphans who realize that they, unlike the Christ child, are without a mother's love. In Poussière sur la ville, it instigates commercial activity: people rush to the stores as soon as the manger scene is on display. The religious symbols of Christmas have lost their significance: "C'est assez étrange cette façon de célébrer la naissance d'un enfant sur la paille par un débordement de mercantilisme".¹ Even the generally happy atmosphere associated with this season is found to be false (P 135). The author's attitude to Christmas is equally cynical and bitter in both novels and no doubt expresses his own disillusionment with Christianity. Langevin himself had been raised in an orphanage and possibly had an exposure to religion similar to that of the characters he describes.

¹(Montreal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1953), p. 89. [hereafter cited as P.]

Three main attitudes towards God and religious belief can be seen in Poussière sur la ville.

Madeleine Dubois, the heroine of the novel, does not recognize God and thinks that the question of religious belief is irrelevant. The only time she has been in a church was on her wedding day, and since then, her lack of respect for the church's moral authority is shown by her affair with a handsome youth, Richard Hétu. When the village priest tries to make her conform to his moral code, she gives him the impression that she thinks that she is above her duty.

Madeleine's husband Alain, shares her "refus religieux" (P 48) but the problem of God's existence disturbs him. He seems to vaguely recognize a God for he wants to protect Madeleine from Him and thus states: "Je ne veux que la consoler, la soustraire à l'injustice divine. . .[qui devient] l'absurde cruauté" (P 152f.). If God exists, he repudiates Him because He is unjust; Alain explains: "Je ne crois pas à une justice qui assène elle-même les coups, quitte à se reprendre ailleurs, plus tard. Une justice qui brise l'innocent avant de le reconnaître" (P 127).

In this respect, his attitude to God is quite similar to that of Camus, whose "estimate of the Christian faith is summed up most simply in his remark that: 'in its essence, Christianity. . .is a doctrine of injustice. It is founded on the sacrifice of the innocent and the acceptance of this

sacrifice'".²

At the end of the novel, Alain's attitude to God is most clearly one of defiance and denunciation: "Je continue mon combat. Dieu et moi, nous ne sommes pas quittes encore. Et peut-être avons-nous les mêmes armes: l'amour et la pitié. Mais moi je travaille à l'échelon de l'homme. Je ne brasse pas des mondes et des espèces. Je pense des hommes. Forcément, nous n'avons pas le même point de vue" (P 213).

Thus Alain Dubois "n'est pas un incroyant absolu comme Cherteffe mais la souffrance lui paraît absurde et lui fait mettre en doute la bonté et la justice divines".³

Although he seems to have a notion of a Superior Being, he refuses to believe in that Being's justice.

On the other hand Dubois's colleague, Dr. Lafleur has a blind but strong belief in God, although he too rejects the idea of divine justice: "Sa foi l'éclaire sans lui permettre de voir, mais son humilité n'exclue pas la tristesse et peut-être, l'indignation. . . .On ne parle plus du ciel à un enfant tordu par une méningite cérébro-spinale; ses convulsions et ses spasmes ébrèchent l'idée d'une justice absolue" (P 48). Lafleur will fight until his dying day

²Quoted by Thomas L. Hanna, "Albert Camus and the Christian Faith" in A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Germaine Brée (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962), 49.

³Yvon-Maurice, André Langevin romancier de l'inquiétude humaine, unpublished M.A. thesis at University of Montreal, 1958, p. 47.

against sickness and suffering, the evidences of God's injustice; his conviction is that: "il n'y a pas d'autres solutions que de faire notre métier d'homme" (P 128).

Dr. Rieux in Camus's La Peste reveals an identical attitude towards human suffering after witnessing the suffering and death of a young child. When a priest suggests that perhaps he should love that which he cannot understand, he replies: "Non, mon père. . . .Je me fais une autre idée de l'amour. Et je refuserai jusqu'à la mort d'aimer cette création où des enfants sont torturés".⁴ Rieux too finds some consolation in the medical profession through which he can help alleviate man's problems. Lafleur is strikingly similar to Rieux except for the fact that Lafleur believes in God despite His injustice, whereas Rieux denies God because of it.

The third attitude to God is presented by the priest of Macklin who believes in God on faith, and who acts according to what he considers are the laws of God. He cannot tolerate any behaviour that goes contrary to Christian morality and thus he threatens to stop the scandal Madeleine is creating. It is interesting that he distinguishes between

⁴Albert Camus, La Peste, ed. W. J. Strachan (2nd ed.; London: Methuen, 1962), p. 238.

the agent and the sinful act: "Je ne condamne pas l'âme. Je condamne l'acte scandaleux" (P 162). His weakness is not that he enforces the law, but that he does not understand men: "Il ne comprend ni la pitié ni la signification du pardon".⁵ This lack of compassion for his fellow man fits in with his disbelief of possible happiness on earth. Furthermore, he confesses that although his purpose is to save souls, his first duty is to save his own soul.

Although unsympathetic to man, he is humble before God in that he claims no absolute ability to save souls by performing his priestly functions (P 163). Since one has the impression that the priest is sincere and loyal, his hardness may be attributed to intellectual limitations; he can carry out orders that are given to him, but he cannot himself understand nor help the sinner. In fact, he does end Madeleine's affair with Hétu, but in doing so he causes further calamity: Madeleine attempts homicide and commits suicide.

In Poussière sur la ville, there is no evidence of a God of love. The dilapidated nativity scenes, symbolizing God's love for man through the birth of Jesus Christ, are a derision: the inhabitants of Macklin observe them "avec un peu d'amertume et de tristesse de sentir que les choses sont

⁵Gérard Bessette, Mary Jane Edwards, "Le Thème de la solitude. . .", La Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, XXXII (1962), 269.

si peu éternelles" (P 135). The Christian God is without sympathy or compassion for man since He at will, strikes down both those who are guilty, (Madeleine), or innocent (the young child afflicted with cerebral meningitis (P 48)).

Reciprocally there exists no confirmation of man's love for God. Dr. Lafleur worships God but his failure to find a logical motive or explanation for God's injustice prevents his love of God: indeed, he feels compelled to oppose God for he explains to Dupas: "Vous voyez, nous sommes deux à lutter contre lui" (P 128). The local priest also serves God but in a strictly codified manner; he acts according to rules alone and therefore there is no question of an emotional response to God. Ultimately Dubois cynically concedes that God, if existing, has love and pity: these two qualities traditionally attributed to the Christian God⁶ are apparently lacking in any vision the characters may have of God. In any case, Dubois believes that his own love and pity are superior.

Gilles Marcotte interprets the God-man relationship in a similar way:

André Langevin n'a pu faire que l'Amour soit présent dans son livre. Son Dieu, le Dieu contre lequel il revendique n'est que celui de la colère, la projection d'une absence

⁶ Bessette, Edwards, op. cit., p. 268.

cruellement ressentie. Il reste pour lui, comme dans Evadé de la nuit 'le père cruel'; Il l'est aussi pour les personnages chrétiens du roman. La foi du docteur Lafleur qui ne manque pas de grandeur, du reste, est une foi aveugle, celle d'un homme en lutte contre la misère ici-bas et qui, vaincu, ne sait que prier dans le noir. Dieu de justice et de colère, également, celui du curé de Macklin. . . . Pour qui, comme le jeune médecin, croit que 'la liberté c'est de pouvoir se rendre au bout de son bonheur', toutes les avenues sont fermées qui conduisent à un tel Dieu.⁷

No matter what approach Langevin uses to convey God, that is, through the eyes of a non-believer, a believer with reservations, and a believer of complete faith, God always lacks love and pity. Since God is assumed to be good, a God without love is meaningless and the universe therefore becomes absurd. In this novel the author's attitude seems to be that if God exists, He is unjust and unloving; one can fight against Him only by turning to, and having compassion for, one's fellow man. W. E. Collin reaches a corresponding conclusion about Poussière sur la ville regarding the association of man and God: "Our duty as men is to act in a manly fashion trying to undo the injustice of God".⁸

Man and Others

Poussière sur la ville is written in the first person and thus the reader learns everything from Alain Dubois's

⁷Gilles Marcotte, Une Littérature qui se fait (Montréal: Editions HMH, 1962), pp. 56ff.

⁸W. E. Collin, University of Toronto Quarterly,

point of view. Moreover, there is a symbolic value to the framework of action as the state of mind of the characters can often be associated with the physical milieu.

In the little mining town of Macklin, the inhabitants react as a group and their actions coincide with the constant rain and asbestos dust for both contribute to an inhospitable atmosphere: "Si le sombre nuage de poussière qui entoure Macklin donne aux mineurs des visages résignés, c'est surtout comme milieu social que la ville est hostile et cruelle aux héros. . .Macklin symbolise la médisance, la calomnie, l'ingérence grossière et cruelle dans la vie des êtres".⁹ Soeur Ste-Marie-Eleuthère stresses the importance of the town as a strong force in the life of the Dubois couple: "La ville de Macklin qui assiste à l'échec de leur vie conjugale, la ville de Macklin qui pèse lourd sur leur destin est considérée comme une personne vivante, une véritable protagoniste du drame".¹⁰

The men are immediately attracted to Madeleine who is completely at ease with those from a working class background as hers was the same. At the miners' change of shift "Madeleine marchait parmi eux comme si elle avait toujours

XXVI (April 1957), 388.

⁹Roger Godbout, "Le Milieu", Livres et auteurs canadiens, (1966), 201.

¹⁰Soeur Ste-Marie-Eleuthère, La Mère dans le roman canadien-français, (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1964), p. 109.

vécu dans la ville, la tête rejetée en arrière, le regard droit devant elle, fronçant les sourcils de temps à autre dans la pluie" (P 28). When the couple has conjugal problems, "La ville entière penche pour Madeleine. . .[qui] a préféré un de ses enfants et. . .qui est de leur race" (P 138).

In contrast, the townspeople are hostile to Dubois. This hostility, shown in their "regard" is noticeable from the outset. The first statement of the text reads: "Une grosse femme, l'oeil mi-clos dans la neige me dévisage froidement" (P 11). Later Alain hesitates to enter a restaurant because he knows that: "il y aura vingt paires d'yeux braquées sur moi qui m'examineront au microscope" (P 87). When he sees Hétu and Madeleine together for the first time, he is terribly upset but the townspeople have no pity; they stare at him; some smile indulgently at this slightly mad doctor: "la ville devient sadique. . .; les habitants se réjouissent en quelque sorte du malheur d'Alain".¹¹

What reasons can justify this hostility? First of all, the town assumes that because it is ultimately supporting him, it has the right to do as it pleases. The doctor reflects: "En somme, j'étais venu chercher leur argent; cela leur donnait presque le droit de déshabiller ma femme" (P 32). Thus, when the couple is having a disagreement at Kouri's restaurant, Alain realizes: "Ce n'est pas entre

¹¹Godbout, op. cit., p. 207.

elle et moi mais entre nous et les autres" (P 66). Moreover the values for which Alain stands are in direct contrast to those of the town. The town cannot understand the doctor's docility in face of Jim's flirtations with Madeleine, and Hétu's affair with her, and it interprets Alain's permissiveness as inferiority. Alain recognizes this immediately: "Je leur cédaï le terrain sur le seul plan qui les intéressait vraiment, celui de la virilité" (P 33).

At first there is general respect for Alain as a doctor, even though there is no respect for him as a person. Soon however, even this respect dwindles as it is replaced by a mistrust in his competence. Prévost, the town merchant, is skeptical of Dubois's modest diagnosis of his illness, and a cardiac patient is aghast when Dubois's remedy for her trouble is merely rest; she cannot understand how such a serious illness can require no medicine.

The real test of Dubois's competence as a doctor comes when he is asked to deliver a baby for a woman whose symptoms are not normal. However the doctor is at a disadvantage because he is suffering from a hangover, which is the result of a visit to a hotel following a quarrel with Madeleine; his conduct was neither accepted by the men at the hotel nor by himself for he thought: "Regardez-moi sans répit, vous me sauvez de moi-même. Je réussis enfin à ne plus penser à ma peau" (P 107).

Once at the home, Dubois realizes that if the operation goes well in spite of his inebriated condition, he will win the esteem of the household; if it does not go well, the news of his failure will spread quickly. In fact, the whole village does soon learn that not only was the doctor drunk, but that he also killed the baby he was supposed to deliver. Because of their religious indoctrination, they do not accept that the baby, a hydrocephalic, had to be killed in order to spare the mother's life; nor do they realize the unfavourable conditions under which he was operating nor the moral burden he has acquired.

Dr. Lafleur forewarns Alain of the reaction of the townspeople: "On m'aurait pardonné ou j'aurais pu leur faire comprendre. Avec vous ils seront sans pitié" (P 125). Indeed, the attendant in the gas station does not thank him for his gratuity; the druggist, contrary to custom, does not greet him, nor does he give him satisfactory service, and the nuns in the hospital receive him coolly. He reflects: "Pensez: un homme que sa femme trompe, qui boit et accouche un hydrocéphale. . . .Je sais qu'elles connaissent toutes ma turpitude" (P 138).

Dubois feels like an intruder in the town for he recognizes his own isolation. "Les autres, qui étaient là simplement, consciences, présences renvoyant les personnages à eux-mêmes, 'indiscrets du regard, jamais en

paroles', les Autres vont devenir une force agressive".¹²

Patients stop seeing him and refuse to pay him for past dues. At the instigation of the priest who wants to put a stop to Madeleine's affair, the town makes an about-face and turns not only against Dubois but against Madeleine as well; in fact Dubois has the distinct impression that he and his wife are being squeezed in a vice of the town.

After the fatal shooting, when Madeleine harms Hétu and kills herself, Dr. Lafleur explains the reaction of the city to Dubois: "Ils sont sans pitié. . . .On vous tient pour le seul coupable. Vous seul êtes indemne. . . .On vous accuse de lâcheté. On ne vous pardonnera jamais ce crime-là et votre vie toute entière ne suffirait pas pour leur démontrer que vous ne l'êtes pas" (P 208f). The city once more has opted for Madeleine and rejected Dubois in spite of her adultery and murder.

Arthur Prévost, the wealthy proprietor of the general store is the town spokesman. Because he has given Dubois generous terms for his loan, he also assumes the right to moralize and warns Dubois to correct his drinking habits and to stop the scandal his wife is creating. When this warning is not heeded, Prévost comes for his dues in order to crush Dubois once and for all.

¹²Jean-Louis Major, "André Langevin", Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (1964), 223.

The omnipresence of the city in the couple's lives is made possible by certain individuals notably, Dr. Lafleur, Alain's colleague; Kouri, the owner of the restaurant; Thérèse, their hired help; and Jim, the taxi driver.¹³ These people's attitude towards Dubois is generally more sympathetic and kind than that of the town, or if they are not friendly at the outset, they gradually become friendly.

Dr. Lafleur who knows Dubois primarily on a professional basis, proves to be a very likeable individual; the older doctor offers to lend Dubois money, and gives him several patients to help him begin practice. The reader is meant to take pity on Lafleur who is also somewhat rejected by the town; he is comfortable only with children and he must bear the mockery of the very people to whom he gave birth. At no time does he pass judgment on Dubois's private life; he continues to accept Dubois as an associate. Moreover, when Lafleur realizes that it will be practically impossible for Dubois to remain in Macklin, he kindly offers to establish Alain in practice elsewhere.

Kouri too shows himself to be friendly to Dubois. In fact Kouri is amicable to everyone, perhaps because he is a bit fearful of others. He nonchalantly allows the motorcyclists to spend hours in his restaurant and Dubois can even imagine Kouri consoling someone who is holding him at bay with a gun. It is Kouri who first warns Dubois of Madeleine's

¹³Cf. Réjean Robidoux, André Renaud, Le Roman canadien-français du vingtième siècle. (Ottawa: Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1966), p. 130.

constant visits to his restaurant, but this warning is not said with malice as Kouri is trying to help Dubois. The first evening that Madeleine brings Hétu to her home, Dubois goes to Kouri's to seek consolation: "Ce soir-là j'ai été boire chez Kouri. . . .Un homme sensible Kouri. Il a placé deux bouteilles sur mon pupitre, a refermé la porte sur moi et s'en est allé pour la soirée. Il est revenu vers minuit pour boire un verre avec moi sans mot dire. Avant que je ne le quitte, il m'a serré la main" (P 171).

The night Dubois is at the hotel drinking, Kouri feels most awkward "avec sa bonté un peu honteuse" (P 111), when he is quizzed on Madeleine's conduct as he does not want to cause Dubois pain. He kindly follows the intoxicated Dubois home to give him assistance if it is needed. Kouri is the "bonne âme qui veut pousser à la roue et préférerait qu'on ne vît pas son geste" (P 111). It is stressed that Kouri receives only one or two visitors at his summer cottage and since Dubois is offered a holiday there, this offer may be regarded as a sign of true friendship.

Thérèse is the one who has the best view of the couple's intimate life: "Par elle la ville a pénétré jusqu'en leur foyer".¹⁴ Since she is a friend of Madeleine, it is natural that she defend her in front of Dubois. However,

¹⁴Major, op. cit., p. 218.

Thérèse is annoying to him because she does not follow his instructions to write out his messages, and she always witnesses his quarrels with Madeleine; Thérèse is truly their "Asmodée" (P 98). In spite of this, her presence makes the couple's conjugal life less bitter as she can fill in the many gaps in their conversation; in fact, Alain often wonders what he and Madeleine would do without Thérèse.

Dubois is somewhat relieved that she never resents him for his rough treatment of her when he is annoyed with his wife. He reflects: "Elle me panse directement, ne m'abandonne pas. . . .Elle m'offre sa bonne humeur comme si Madeleine et moi ne côtoyions pas l'abîme" (P 124). Her amicability is revealed when she does her best to bring a Christmas atmosphere to the troubled household. Dubois thinks of the possibility of physical contact with her, as he is sure that she would not reject him but he dismisses this idea on the grounds that he lacks the energy to engage in a new relationship as he is so occupied with Madeleine.

The favourable contact that has been established between Thérèse and the couple is seen by Alain's reflection: "Je suis sûr qu'elle doit réussir à nous défendre tous les deux en ville" (P 142). This is a difficult task in view of the hostility of the town. Even when Madeleine has died she shows her independent closeness to Dubois by refusing to leave him alone as she is certain that her presence can somehow

help him.

Jim also sees the couple from a very close range as his taxi business is situated across from the Dubois household. He has the title of "le scrutateur des consciences du pays" (P 150); "il sait mieux que personne dans la ville quels sont les rapports entre amoureux et époux. . . Jim absorbe tout et rend tout un peu plus sale" (P 33). He is rather disagreeable for he is extremely lazy, coarse in his manners and sadistic in the way he causes Alain discomfort by insinuating that Madeleine is unfaithful and then by refusing to enlighten him. Alain's mistrust of Jim is brought out by the following: "L'équivoque flotte toujours autour de lui. Vous avez l'impression qu'il vous poignarderait pour le plaisir d'éponger soigneusement le sang de la plaie ensuite" (P 79).

Yet there is a development in Alain's relationship with him. When all the others refuse to associate with Dubois because of his damaged reputation, Alain feels: "Jim est devenu mon ami. . . Il est le seul à me parler dans la rue sans rougir et sans baisser les yeux" (P 169). Moreover, it is Jim who is most moved (besides Alain himself), and most helpful, after Madeleine dies. Until now, Jim had been known for his tremendous insensitivity: "chercher à l'humilier serait vouloir fendre l'eau avec une épée" (P 45). When Alain weeps in the taxi, Jim too is overwrought for

he sniffles loudly; in spite of everything, Jim "a quand même conservé un peu de dignité, très loin dans son âme. Elle émerge dans les occasions extraordinaires" (P 194). Shortly afterwards, Jim is inebriated since the tragic events of that day have moved him immensely; this callous and imperturbable person has come to understand Dubois's loss and to sympathize with him.

Therefore, despite the general antagonism of the townspeople, those who are closest to Dubois not only comprehend his attitude but also acquire compassion for his suffering.

As a doctor, Dubois is sensitive to people's suffering as he reflects: "Légende que l'insensibilité du chirurgien" (P 47). However, his feelings to the people of Macklin have developed greatly from the time he regarded them as nothing better than vermin (P 34). He recognizes that between his attitude and that of the townspeople, there is a clash of values: "Je sais depuis le début que personne ne me comprendra et je ne m'y attends pas" (P 173); whereas they think a man's dignity rests on his virility, he believes that it comes from pity and understanding for one's fellow man. "Comme Camus, Alain ne reconnaît plus qu'un moyen de salut: une charité toute humaine, la pitié".¹⁵

¹⁵Marcotte, op. cit., p. 57.

Thus, Alain's pity is not only meant for Madeleine; it also is to encompass Jim, the mother of Madeleine, and even Hétu who was not free to spare him torture (P 205). When Alain realizes that his services are still needed in the town, regardless of past events, he decides to remain in Macklin: "Je resterai contre toute la ville. Je les forcerai à m'aimer. La pitié qui m'a si mal réussi avec Madeleine, je les en inonderai. J'ai un beau métier où la pitié peut sourdre sans cesse sans qu'on l'appelle" (P 213). Because Alain has rejected God, he decides to try to make his life meaningful by helping men. His goal of establishing a mutual love may fail, as some critics believe: "La pitié n'est peut-être qu'un amour qui ignore la vie, qui s'ignore lui-même. . .Macklin, non plus que Madeleine, ne se laissera vaincre par cette arme. . . .Ce n'est pas la pitié, c'est l'amour qui est fort et qui abat les murailles".¹⁶

However it was previously shown that Dubois equates pity and love and that his pity has affected Jim. Moreover, Alain has learned to go beyond himself; he has not only been able to love and help his wife in the most difficult circumstances but he has also been able to pardon and understand those who were without pity for him.

¹⁶ Marcotte, op. cit., p. 58.

Man and Woman

The man-woman relationship is essential to Poussière sur la ville for without it, the book itself would not exist. Virgilia Peterson, in stressing the importance of this aspect states that the novel "shows a great concern with the conscience and preoccupation with the moral ingredients of love between man and woman. . . .The interest stems from the struggle between jealousy and love, between wounded self-esteem and generosity of instinct, between outrage and pity in the doctor's own lacerated heart".¹⁷

The nature of Alain's love, like Micheline's before him, is unique: it embodies those qualities of understanding and pity, self-sacrifice and tenderness. Despite the fact that Madeleine betrays him and eventually takes her own life so that he no longer can be with her, his love for her is without limitations for he assumes the herculean task of re-orientating his love for her upon the hostile townspeople and forcing them to reciprocate that love.

Certain critics suggest that Alain is a cowardly masochist¹⁸ "[qui] éprouve une amère satisfaction à cette

¹⁷Virgilia Peterson, New York Herald Tribune Book Review, (September 18, 1955), p. 3.

¹⁸Jean Filiatrault, ". . .La Révolte dans notre littérature romanesque récente", Recherches sociographiques, V (1964), 188.

douleur entrée si loin en lui".¹⁹ However this interpretation seems invalid when one considers that Alain never enjoyed the torture he received at the hands of his wife; indeed, his conduct amounted to "une résignation qui était plus un équilibre moral qu'un consentement" (P 205). Far from degenerating, Dubois transcends the usual limitations of man and acquires an almost super-human dignity.

In La Revue populaire, Langevin makes his intentions explicit:

J'étais hanté par une image fascinante à incarner, l'image d'un homme agenouillé aux côtés de sa femme morte. Il s'en voudrait alors de lui avoir volé ses chances de bonheur, mais il serait trop tard. La mort constitue une telle aliénation au départ qu'un autre être ne peut pas ajouter à cette aliénation sous prétexte de droits conférés par le mariage, la religion, l'amour ou quelque autre forme de contrainte.

Un être n'a pas le droit de brimer la liberté d'un autre être. Du fait qu'il y ait la mort et que celle-ci pollue la vie au départ. Bien entendu, on a trouvé généralement, que mon héros était un faible. Pour moi, c'est un fort, qui s'est élevé au-dessus de sa propre passion.²⁰

Let us now examine the difficulties the couple encounter and their reaction to them in order to appreciate their attitude to each other.

Dubois's love for Madeleine originated in "un besoin de domination parce qu'elle avait une allure trop libre,

¹⁹ Roger Duhamel, Action universitaire, XX (1954), 68.

²⁰ André Langevin quoted in La Revue populaire (September 1961), p. 7.

[et] ensuite [dans] un amour d'adolescent"²¹ and it grew gradually from these beginnings. Madeleine's love however, changed from intense passion to mild indifference. It was her mother who encouraged her to have the security of being a doctor's wife although she herself, contrary to the view of some critics,²² felt indifference, if not repulsion for his profession (P 89). Thus they slipped into marriage "sans rien préméditer, avec une passivité égale de part et d'autre" (P 220). The most amazing feature of their marriage was that neither person had much knowledge of the other; later Madeleine confessed: "Tu sais, je ne t'ai jamais connu vraiment" and Alain replied "Moi non plus" (P 155).

In fact it was physical desire that led Alain to Madeleine; this desire then continues to be a cardinal feature of his love for he affirms: "son corps. . .me tiendra toujours" (P 131). But even the first physical contact, which occurred before marriage, makes Alain aware of his lack of communication with Madeleine; she shows herself capable of an impulsive desire and passion but this feeling quickly diminishes to indifference.

Roger Duhamel points out the initial flaws in the marriage: "Pourquoi ce mariage mal assorti? Le désir chez

²¹Major, op. cit., p. 220.

²²Anonymous, The Catholic World (November 1955), p. 150.

l'homme et la vanité chez la femme? Peut-être bien".²³ The possibility of their happiness is doubtful right from the beginning for Dubois himself remarks: "Il se terre en elle un être qui ne m'appartient pas, que je n'atteindrai jamais. J'ignore si cet être-là m'aime, mais je sais qu'il est sa part essentielle. Un peu comme si je ne la possédais qu'à bout de bras avec, entre nous, une opacité infranchissable" (P 19).

It is necessary to examine the character of Madeleine for she is basically the controlling factor in the marriage. Since she is "le refus de la contrainte" (P 31); i.e., the incarnation of freedom itself, and since she is only interested in that which is new and different, she is simply not capable of a lengthy union wherein "les rapports doivent n'être plus qu'une perpétuelle répétition" (P 17). In fact Alain is vaguely aware that she might consistently be attracted to other people because they have continual mobility and a certain instability.

Madeleine is directed by emotion rather than by reason and thus she tends to be intensely selfish as she must follow her whims. At one point she insists on pressing the accelerator of their car just as a train is approaching

²³Op. cit., p. 68.

a crossing; she knows no fear and lives to be thrilled. Her motto is: "Je continuerai de faire ce qui me plaît" (P 66) but even in doing this she is perpetually unsatisfied. She has the traits of a manic depressive for "sa vie est faite de moments d'ardeur et de grands espaces vides où elle est d'une passivité déconcertante" (P 17). Her need to win or lose everything and her desire to try and know all make her even more absolute than Jean Cherteffe in Evadé de la nuit. Like Jean Anouilh's Antigone, Madeleine would say: "Moi, je veux tout, tout de suite, et que ce soit entier ou alors je refuse".²⁴ In fact, she worries Alain, because her absolutism leads him to think she is somewhat abnormal. Intuitively, he senses her fragility and vulnerability: "Un égarement que j'ai surpris dans son regard à de rares moments. Elle vit avec trop de hâte. Son intensité quand elle est heureuse inquiète comme une maladie" (P 132). Alain somehow cannot imagine her old; he even feels that her beauty invites destruction. Critics tend to regard her as "dés-équilibrée",²⁵ "un cas pathologique".²⁶ This instability is further brought out by her excessive need for escapism through movies or the juke-box which put her in "un état

²⁴ Antigone (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1946), p. 97.

²⁵ Guy Robert, Revue dominicaine (1956), p. 213.

²⁶ Paul Gay. . . . L'Amour dans le roman canadien-

de disponibilité. . .comme le ferait l'alcool" (P 62).

Yvon-Maurice says this of Madeleine: "Un abandon définitif dans l'amour serait opposé à un caractère d'une mobilité aussi capricieuse".²⁷ This attitude is born out by her ill-humoured behaviour immediately following her marriage. On the day after their arrival in Macklin, Madeleine bitterly and scornfully regards Dubois as a jailer, herself as his prisoner. She is so bored already that she must be taken to a restaurant where she proceeds to amuse herself at Alain's expense. Later that evening Alain pardons her scorn, and her cross disposition and then comes to realize that Madeleine "[sa] femme, était spectatrice aux jeux de l'amour" (P 38). Right from the outset her frigidity and extreme lack of communication combined with her selfishness and insatisfaction suggest that she is entirely unsuited for marriage.

Love is not a static thing for it is always developing; its intensity can increase and decrease all the time. Thus Alain first disregards Kouri's warning about Madeleine's visits to his restaurant, in thinking their three months of married life testify to her innocence. However, suspicion gradually works on him because Madeleine makes him feel like an intruder in his own home, a tormentor of someone who wants

français. . . , M.A. thesis at University of Ottawa, 1964, p. 154 (published in 1965 in L'Enseignement secondaire au Canada).

²⁷Op. cit., p. 46.

to be free. Ironically it is Madeleine who restricts Alain because he heeds her wishes: "Que je puisse être jaloux, soupçonneux, autoritaire blesserait davantage sa fierté que le méprisable regard de Jim" (P 43). Although her independence humiliates him, her loneliness and unhappiness evoke his paternal feelings: "C'est un peu la souffrance de Madeleine qui m'émeut certes, mais surtout mon impossibilité d'intervenir, sa solitude qui m'eût touché chez n'importe qui d'autre" (P 69). In view of the fact that Alain knows Madeleine will necessarily die, he, as her husband, feels responsible for her: "Cette idée de sa mort, et c'est la fin logique de notre mariage, donne à mes paroles et à mes actes les plus anodins une impressionnante gravité. . . .Je suis engagé envers elle, sans possibilité de recul" (P 73). Alain is therefore forgiving and indulgent when Madeleine either leaves him alone or shows her indifference to him.

A crisis occurs when Madeleine resorts to role playing; she pretends she suddenly is happy with her life in Macklin and this behaviour irritates Dubois who makes an insinuation about her involvement with Richard Hétu. Dubois is confused by her cool reaction for "elle peut être assez perfide pour donner l'illusion d'un malheur inexistant" (P 85). Their relations become so strained that their mutual dissatisfaction and boredom cause Dubois to ponder: "Quels plaisirs communs avons-nous eus depuis notre mariage? Sur quoi nous accordons-nous?. . .Nous ne sommes liés que par

un échec commun" (P 89).

Contact between the two is established the moment that Dubois sees Madeleine and Hétu together; the contact is through hate: "Nous nous sommes pénétrés enfin. . . . Ame contre âme liés par la glu de la haine, autrement plus tenace que celle de l'amour" (P 96). Dubois feels his solitude more intensely than ever before and thus considers the possibility of reconciliation: "Devant l'effondrement du bonheur, Dubois se découvre seul et désemparé. Quand on ne peut supporter le vertige de cette solitude, il ne reste que l'illusion voulue, la recherche de l'acceptation. 'L'exigence excessive tue le bonheur'. . . . Il veut croire aveuglément que le bonheur est possible".²⁸ Dubois is still vulnerable; he continues to need and love Madeleine because he believes she is a vital, if not the best part of him.

In order to diminish his suffering, he begins to drink. Since Madeleine reproaches him for his conduct and refuses to communicate with him about Hétu, Alain dominates her physically and sexually in revenge (P 104). Madeleine's resulting indifference brings about his reflections on their relationship:

Quels ont été d'ailleurs, nos liens spirituels?
Fragiles. . . . Sur le plan intellectuel nous
n'avons jamais communié. . . . Je ne l'ai jamais
non plus, par la force des choses, dominée par
l'esprit. Nos rapports étaient physiques

²⁸Major, op. cit., pp. 221f.

essentiellement. J'ai aimé en elle la liberté de son corps et cet amour-là, qui peut affirmer qu'il n'est pas le vrai? (P 131)

At this point Alain seems to think physical love is the only kind that has any real meaning.

The climax occurs Christmas eve as Madeleine finally confides in Alain: she loves Hétu and is unhappy as this love is not requited. When Madeleine states that it is not her desire to hurt her husband, a meaningful contact emerges: "Il a conscience que leurs âmes se rejoignent et c'est dans la pitié".²⁹ Dubois analyzes his love for her: "Ma pitié, c'est peut-être ça l'amour en fin de compte, quand on a cessé d'aimer comme si on ne devait jamais mourir" (P 153). Now Alain has a broader definition of love for the feeling of pity emerges as an important aspect of it. A reciprocal understanding comes into being: Alain decides to let her act freely as he feels responsible for her, not in an abstract way as before, but for her happiness; thus he goes to the extent of tolerating Hétu at his home. Madeleine worries about him for the first time and physically gives herself to him as this is her way of expressing her concern. Since it is now clear that a permanent contact cannot be established, Alain receives no joy from this physical contact and concludes that his existence will irrevocably be parallel to that of Madeleine; he knows their paths will never unite (P 156).

²⁹Yvon-Maurice, op. cit., p. 57.

Despite the fact that Madeleine seems genuinely happy because of their new arrangement Dubois instinctively feels she must scorn him for not according a greater value to her fidelity. In order to acquire a passive state and to sustain his courage, alcohol is the only means by which he can continue to bear pity on Madeleine (P 170). Although he feels Madeleine will collapse if her new endeavour does not succeed, he absolutely refuses to limit her freedom.

Then since Madeleine actually is crippled as a result of Hétu's engagement, Alain suffers as he cannot help her. Before going away, she humbly asks for Alain's forgiveness: "Pardonne-moi. . . .Je te jure que je n'ai jamais voulu te faire mal" (P 186). Philippe Lacelin comments on the significance of her sympathy: "La femme-enfant égocentrique du début, montre à la fin qu'elle est capable de pitié et qu'elle prend conscience de la souffrance de son mari. Nous assistons au cheminement d'un esprit se montrant de plus en plus lucide et présentant son malheur".³⁰ One has the impression that Madeleine's moments of love for Dubois are impulsive and absolute. Perhaps she always loves him in her own particular fashion; she will not allow herself to be bound by any law which insists on fidelity. The only type

³⁰ Philippe Lacelin, "La Femme. . .", Lettres et écritures, I, Series 3 (1964), 22.

of love she can give is one that is spontaneous and total.

"From disdaining the conventional language of love to the more tangible incidents of her adultery, she never ceases to love him and never begins to consider him".³¹

When Madeleine supposedly has left to visit her mother for a month, Alain's tremendous love for her is revealed; he vows that they will move anywhere so that she will be happy and he already feels the pain of being separated from her. Shortly afterwards, on seeing her dead before him, he reflects: "Je lui avais tout pardonné. Même ma chair pour la première fois oubliait. Ma vague de pitié se résorbait dans l'amour que je n'avais jamais cessé de lui porter" (P 193). His nobility is underlined by his assumption of responsibility for the actions of his wife and his strength is seen by his decision to bear love for a hostile people, for: "En les aimant eux, c'est Madeleine qu'[il] aime encore" (P 213).

In spite of the instability Madeleine revealed by her excessive need for freedom and resultant suicide, she finally has learned to appreciate the love Alain offers her. At her death, she wears his bracelet and necklace "comme si elle voulait signifier que par delà la mort, elle revenait

³¹Jack Warwick, The Long Journey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 125.

à son premier maître".³² A united has been achieved for Dubois states: "L'ame m'habite et je ne puis m'en décharger. . . .Je dois. . .apprivoiser l'âme de Madeleine en moi, lui assigner sa place" (P 200).

Paul-Emile Racicot concludes: "L'amour est conquérant".³³ Love is victorious but only because Madeleine has died. As has been shown, Madeleine is not capable of maintaining a lasting relationship; novelty is too attractive to her. Dubois analyzes: "Aliénée, elle l'était depuis sa naissance. . . .On ne lui a pas laissé d'autre choix que d'accomplir ce qui devait être accompli" (P 195).

In Poussière sur la ville, love triumphs over death; Langevin makes an original addition to this conventional theme as love simultaneously triumphs through death itself rather than through life. Moreover, it is Madeleine's death that brings about Dubois's decision to love the townspeople as he can no longer love his wife except through them an in memory.

Madeleine is so independent that one may surmise that her attitude to anyone else would have been similar to her attitude to Dubois she absolutely refuses to compromise her desires: "On ne peut la plir à sa guise: elle se brisera plutôt" (P 132). The couple's basic

³²Paul Gay, op. cit., pp. 152f.

³³Paul-Emile Racicot, Relations, XIV (1954), 156.

lack of communication was dispelled only when Madeleine chose to stop considering herself and to realize Dubois's point of view. Dubois realizes that "pas un regret n'effacera cette opacité qui nous empêcha toujours de nous voir" (P 212). Dubois was concerned about the relationship all the time; Madeleine, by definition, was not. On this plane, the conflict of the novel appears to concern a female impulsive and spontaneous activity and a male rational, analyzing spirit. They rarely understand each other simultaneously but they are essentially interdependent.

The triumph is granted to Dubois because he, unlike Madeleine, transcends his problems; surely there is greater nobility in facing an exceedingly difficult problem with patience and determination than in avoiding it by suicide. Guy Sylvestre's interpretation, though answering extreme views of Alain by passing to another extreme, does clarify his real importance in the novel:

Seul Alain Dubois donne au roman son prix car seul il est un homme qui s'interroge. Le malheur est qu'il n'a pas d'adversaire digne de lui, car sa femme n'est qu'un petit animal qui ne vit que dans l'instant, irréfléchi, plus agie qu'agissante. . . .Le drame d'Alain Dubois est de vouloir vivre conscient et responsable dans un monde qui oublie de se poser des questions et refuse la lucidité. C'est lui, Alain Dubois, qui donne au récit tout son intérêt et c'est également lui qui donne au livre sa portée humaine et sa dignité.³⁴

³⁴Guy Sylvestre, Nouvelle Revue canadienne, VIII (1954), 99.

In Poussière sur la ville, the concept of a reciprocal love between God and man is scoffed at because of the derision of the religious symbols, and the overwhelming antagonism on the part of the characters to the idea of a God of love, if indeed God is accepted as existing. Moreover, one has the distinct impression that Langevin is recommending human compassion as a means to combat God's evident injustice.

An interesting relationship between man and others is portrayed in this novel. Despite the overt hostility and lack of pity on the part of the townspeople of Macklin, several individuals acquire a genuine friendship for Dubois. Lafleur, Kouri, Thérèse and Jim gradually grow close to the young doctor if they are not already friendly at the outset. The most marked development is that of Jim who changes from a totally insensitive person to one with understanding and sympathy; both qualities are important aspects of love.

Physical desire is obviously a key factor of love in the man-woman relationship--whether this be with Madeleine and Dubois or Madeleine and Hétu. In contrast to Madeleine's desire for the impossible achievement of absolute love, Dubois's love is most realistic; although first involving physical attraction almost exclusively, it gradually broadens to include infinite pity and tenderness.

This novel appears to manifest the greatest number of

positive evidences of love in the works so far described.

Alain's tremendous desire to live and to shower his love on the townspeople as opposed to Jean Cherteffe's suicide and burial of his love, denotes that in Langevin's second novel, a greater emphasis is placed on life and on love.

CHAPTER III

LE TEMPS DES HOMMES

Man and Woman

In his first novel, Langevin briefly sketches several amorous associations although he concentrates on one of these for approximately half of the novel. The second novel is devoted solely to the struggle of a newly married couple and to their efforts to live together. Finally, the most recent work, which intimately depicts the life of one couple and which also presents a detailed description of other types of male-female contact, gives a synthesis and an enlargement of different attitudes to love; in addition, Le Temps des hommes reveals the first portrait of a successful marriage.

A characteristic of love which is emphasized in all three novels is its unpredictable nature. It is difficult to describe this feeling which can give a new direction to one's life. Yolande, an important female character of Le Temps des hommes explains to her sister Marthe: "Tu vois Marthe, l'amour c'est quasiment injuste. Tu peux aimer quelqu'un qui te rendra malheureuse et passer à coté de quelqu'un qui ferait ton bonheur. Ou quand on aime on ne sait pas ce que c'est. Ce n'est pas facile".¹

¹Le Temps des hommes (Montreal: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1956), p. 204, [hereafter cited as T].

Yolande first ponders about the nature of love during an affair with her husband's foreman. It is the tyrannical attitude of her husband Laurier that has, in great measure, given rise to her infidelity; he thinks in this way: "Elle est à moi et je la traiterai comme je voudrai" (T 33). His restrictive concept of marriage necessarily reduces his wife to the status of an object, a possession; in his eyes, "l'amour. . .c'est peut-être cela: une femme qui attend sans rien demander. . . .Le mariage pour avoir un sens devrait être une espèce de mur. Tu mets un clôture autour de ton champ et personne n'y passe" (T 119). Laurier, being incapable of tenderness, mocks the passionate love which is portrayed in the cinema; he gives Yolande no sexual satisfaction as he "ne connaissait rien aux jeux de l'amour" (T 11). Consequently Laurier never has any significant contact with Yolande, not even during sexual intercourse; he sees in her only "la fausse soumission, l'étreinte de glace qui le laissait insatisfait, en proie au ridicule, blessé dans son orgueil; l'étreinte dont elle était absente" (T 47).

Although claiming not to understand why Yolande risks her life for a stranger, he does recognize that he and his wife were unsuited to each other and that it was he who forced her into marriage. His desire for her originated as a youth when even then he was her "gros chien de garde. . .[car elle] était devenue tout à coup ce qu'il y avait eu de plus nécessaire au monde, la seule possession qu'il importait

d'obtenir" (T 48). Thus, it bothers him terribly that he has no security in marriage and his resulting jealousy leads him to keep his wife under strict surveillance. Yolande's coldness both hurts and humiliates him since his need of her intensifies with marriage. He later explains: "Il y a des gens qui feraient n'importe quoi pour de l'argent, ou obtenir un poste, ou trouver de l'alcool. Moi, mon alcool, c'était Yolande. . . .Jamais un homme n'a désiré sa femme come j'ai désiré la mienne" (T 124f).

However Laurier's love for Yolande is so warped that he only provokes her boredom, indifference and repulsion. Indeed, Yolande requires a daily consumption of alcohol to dispel her depression and to maintain her tolerance of him. She, like Madeleine of Poussière sur la ville, sees herself as her husband's victim: "La jeune femme dérivait mieux aussi loin de Laurier, de ses droits et de sa tyrannie de mari" (T 11). Marriage for Yolande amounts to a pitiful attrition and her resulting dissatisfaction leads her to engage in a relationship with Gros Louis, her husband's foreman.

Having discovered the existence of this relationship, Laurier becomes insanely jealous. In fact, his intense jealousy is the dominating passion of the novel for it leads him to murder his wife's lover and to plan a torturous atonement for Yolande: "Elle paiera. Longtemps. Des années et des années pour la faire expier" (T 127). The murder of

of Gros Louis significantly changes his life: his desire for revenge has grown greater than his need of her and he becomes indifferent to her: "Même l'accueil de Yolande ne donnerait rien" (T 202).

When Laurier discusses his conjugal problems with another character, he is told: "Tu ne regardes qu'en toi, Laurier. Elle, tu ne la vois pas. Tu interrogues et tu réponds" (T 215). Laurier had been too selfish in love to be able to establish a meaningful relationship with Yolande.

Langevin makes several distinct references to the sexual aspect of love in his novels and thus it acquires great importance. Laurier's attitude to women in general is physical desire: he makes this evident when he says: "Les femmes, d'habitude, tu penses à leurs corps. Tu les déshabilles; tu essaies d'imaginer comment elles sont. Tu les désires ou tu les désires pas" (T 119).

Moreover, Arthur Derome, a hotel proprietor and the father of Yolande and Marthe, has a passion for pornographic magazines; for ten years after his wife's death, he has had physical relations with "une dizaine de femmes de ménage qui s'étaient succédées à l'hôtel" (T 121). Having a similar outlook is Maurice, the cook in a lumberjack camp, who also has a propensity for obscene photographs although his relations with women only occur in his dreams. His base desires are revealed even when he looks at a girl, for Marthe

has the disagreeable sensation of being touched by him as he gazes at her. Love is an unattainable necessity for him as he desperately feels its absence: "Pourquoi, fait de sang, de chair et d'os comme les autres, tout un côté de la vie lui était-il dérobé, interdit: celui du désir assouvi, de l'amour, de l'amitié" (T 84).

Although the sexual aspects of love are mainly associated with the men of Le Temps des hommes, Yolande imagines herself as some sort of sex goddess; she tries to imitate the appearance of women in movie magazines in order to entice the clients at her father's hotel. Her affair with Gros Louis "lui restituait tout ce dont l'avait privée Laurier" (T 13). However, she expects a further relationship to develop from sexual contact and is noticeably disappointed when: "Ses bras ne parvenaient pas à rétablir une communication entre l'homme et elle. L'homme était ailleurs, étranger et inquiétant" (T 28).² Unfortunately for Yolande, Gros Louis equates love of woman in a romantic sense with physical love, and he at first scorns those who suffer emotionally because of a woman. Despite this mockery, an emotional relationship does soon develop between him and Yolande who needs him and offers her life to him.

Previously Gros Louis had placed women in two

²The inadequacy of sexual love here parallels that of Laurier and Yolande (T 47).

categories: D'abord celles qu'il connaissait le mieux, qu'il pouvait désirer, embrasser, toucher et puis celles qu'il ne pouvait que regarder de loin, aimer avec les yeux seulement, protéger plutôt que désirer" (T 85). His sister, who is dying of leukemia, belongs to the second group; he feels so close to her that he insists on giving her the best of care and separation from her causes him grief (T 87). Despite Gros Louis's mockery (T 57), he obviously accepts the suffering of men for those women who are in the second category. This tender affection also spreads to Yolande who "avait éveillé en lui un sentiment aussi subtil, aussi tendre que celui qu'il ressentait en quittant sa soeur. . . . Il sentait une bouffée de chaleur dans sa poitrine et un pacifiant désir de caresser, de calmer, de protéger" (T 87); that is, "Gros Louis découvre. . . que l'amour peut être autre chose qu'un accouplement passager".³

Yolande has become so necessary to Gros Louis that he willingly risks the respect and confidence of his men in order to see her. His great desire is to protect her and make her happy. Although fearing the responsibility for another human being, he feels that a woman would bring meaning to his life (T 172).

³Gilles Marcotte, Une Littérature qui se fait (Montreal: Les Editions HMH, 1962), p. 60.

However, their love is destroyed when Gros Louis is murdered. Since he was essential to Yolande's happiness, she goes into a state of shock upon learning of his death. At the end of the novel, the kiss she gives to the unconscious priest Dupas, signifies her great suffering due to the loss of Gros Louis since Dupas's presence serves as a reminder of her loved one: "Elle toucha l'homme, demandant à ce contact physique le souvenir d'un autre contact" (T 232). She is aware that the existence that lies ahead of her is even bleaker than the one behind her: "A la fin du roman, la jeune femme demeure plus seule qu'auparavant, sans mari et sans amant".⁴

Another case of great need is that of Maurice for his mother. Whenever overcome by terror, he pitifully evokes the image of his mother: "Maman aide-moi; maman aide-moi" (T 196). His mother's love for him is genuine and gratuitous for it accepts his weaknesses without scorn. Even though it is unfortunate that Maurice cannot gain the affection of anyone else, it is better that he feels some support rather than none at all.

The only picture of a healthy conjugal relationship in the novel concerns the lumberjack Baptiste and his wife Marie. They have a well balanced physical and emotional

⁴Gérard Bessette, Mary Jane Edwards, "Le Thème de la solitude. . .", La Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa, XXXII (1962), 273.

rapport with each other. Since they have only been married two years and since Baptiste has just finished the last winter of work in the bush, their interests are entirely devoted to the family, home and farmland that they will have in the future. The continuation of their love terminates when Baptiste is senselessly killed. As in the case of Yolande and Gros Louis, a violent death brings an end to happiness.

The purest form of love is that of Marthe for Dupas: it is "un amour enveloppé de voiles blancs" (T 24f.). Marthe, still single at thirty years of age, waits patiently all year to spend a few hours talking to Dupas when he returns from the forest. She suffers greatly when told not to wait for him and to marry someone else. Her infinite tenderness for him is revealed as she lovingly dresses his wounds: "Tout ce qu'elle avait désiré lui dire pendant ces dix ans. . . tout ce qu'elle avait voulu faire pour lui, . . . tout ce qu'elle avait voulu lui demander, . . . tout cela passait de son coeur à ses doigts" (T 55). Then this young woman "qui aime sans le dire mais en le prouvant suffisamment par des gestes tendres, attentifs",⁵ feels a tremendous heart-ache upon accidentally learning he is a priest, especially since she thinks she has just made contact with him. At the end of the novel she

⁵Guy Robert, "Le Temps des hommes", Revue dominicaine (1964), 161.

openly manifests her love for him but he is unconscious.

Dupas's affection for her has always remained aloof or distant as his sense of religion has been his foremost preoccupation: "Il la regardait, mais il voyait au-delà d'elle" (T 26). "La conscience du devoir est plus forte chez Dupas que l'attrait de l'amour mais la bonté qui imprègne son âme fait trouver pénible de démolir les rêves amoureux d'une jeune fille digne, délicate, réservée qui lui a toujours manifesté de la sympathie".⁶ When goaded rather cruelly about Marthe, he rebelled angrily since his love for her was paternal and pure and he could not tolerate someone slandering it.

It is doubtful that a union between Dupas and Marthe could develop; that is, if the priest were to live, because he appears to have made himself immune to romantic love. As one critic points out: "Aucun des personnages ne peut êtreindre l'autre de façon à le rendre totalement présent et à se rendre soi-même présent totalement. . . . Les couples de Langevin sont pris dans l'impossible tentative de se rejoindre"⁷--again, with the exception of Baptiste and Marie.

In this novel one has a panoramic vision of love

⁶Yvon-Maurice, André Langevin romancier de l'inquiétude humaine unpublished M.A. thesis at University of Montreal, 1958, p. 70.

⁷Jean-Louis Major, "André Langevin", Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (1964), 224.

which is either rooted in jealousy, physical desire, tenderness or purity. Yolande and Gros Louis experience a meaningful but short-lived contact and the healthiest relationship remains as that of Baptiste and Marie but it too, is necessarily terminated by an involuntary death. Although love between man and woman does not take priority over the other forms of love in the novel, it must be emphasized that Laurier's jealousy, arising from his selfish and overbearing need of Yolande, is the most forceful passion of Le Temps des hommes.

Man and Others

"Dans Le Temps des hommes, le problème essentiel ne se pose plus en termes de la rencontre des époux; il est plus universel et plus particulier à la fois. . . . Les personnages sont orientés par les désirs semblables: tous veulent sortir d'eux-mêmes".⁸ That is, all the characters naturally have a strong desire to establish a close rapport with someone else; they want to love and be loved in return. One realizes the individual needs of each character as Langevin's technique in the novel is to give several individual and staccato portraits of the characters in succession directly confronting another character. The story is most often presented through the eyes of the different characters; rarely does one see an overall picture of group interaction other than

⁸Ibid., pp. 224f.

the functional ones of the men working together.

The majority of these individuals are concerned with their physical necessities of work, sleep, food and pleasure; they are relatively simple as their lives are uncomplicated by intellectual concerns. Langevin describes them thus:

"Des exemplaires d'hommes, sans camouflage, réduits à l'essentiel" (T 62).

The most self-sufficient character is Gros Louis, the foreman who dominates his men because of his position and physical strength. He assumes the right to take Laurier's wife: "parce qu'il [est] le plus fort" (T 19). For the same reason, he can order Maurice to clear the road, although Maurice's normal duty is to prepare meals, just as he can command his gang to work as long as he deems it necessary. Gros Louis is known for his pride and loyalty as well as his strength (T 38); therefore, when he deceives his men by leaving them in the bush without warning, they are all disappointed in him. The reason for this betrayal is that his self-sufficiency is not absolute; it dissolves as his relationship with Yolande develops. Despite this defection, he still realizes his sense of duty: therefore he does not stay with Yolande nor run away with her in a company truck as he feels he must deliver the provisions to his men.

Baptiste is one of the most likeable of all Langevin's characters. His friendly disposition is undoubtedly favourably influenced by the happy relations he enjoys with

his wife; indeed his thoughts always go back to her when the two are separated as he greatly needs her presence (T 38) and thus his self-sufficiency is also limited by love. Because he suffers from bronchitis, he struggles fiercely not to cough at night and thereby disturb his companions: "Baptiste. . . était d'un naturel doux et n'aimait pas causer d'embarras" (T 37). His amiability does not mean he is cowardly for his sense of justice causes him to intervene in a fight between Laurier and Gros Louis on one occasion and to warn Gros Louis that Laurier was lying in ambush on another, when no one else takes the initiative to do so.

Although disapproving his foreman's conduct of taking another man's wife, Baptiste tries to see things from Gros Louis's point of view and understands that: "Un homme tout seul c'était un homme qui n'avait rien. Forcément, il lui fallait prendre aux autres. Ce n'était pas simple" (T 38). Furthermore, he senses the loneliness of Dupas and does not hesitate to show him friendship, however crude it may be: Baptiste spits in the snow as this is "sa façon de faire un signe d'amitié à un homme qu'il savait ne pas être heureux" (T 69).

There are people that Baptiste dislikes but these people do not inspire friendship; for example, the cowardly cook who laughs to flatter others, or Laurier who unfairly uses a gun against an unarmed man. With such people Baptiste has little patience; he boldly defies Laurier who is trying to

subjugate his companions: "Ton revolver, tu ne dormiras pas avec. On t'aura aujourd'hui ou cette nuit" (T 176).

The undisciplined priest Pierre Dupas imposes upon himself the ideal of developing good relations with his fellows.⁹ He too is not self-reliant as he craves the affection of man and God. After concluding that man as, defined in the seminary, does not exist, Dupas tries for ten long years to establish his own rapport with his fellow man. He renders small services whether they be intervention in their disputes, lending money, or doing small jobs but many of these acts go unnoticed or are taken for granted. He occasionally advises others but this advice is unheeded: for example, his attempt to dissuade Gros Louis from his usurpation of Yolande is to no avail. Even his actions are futile for he unsuccessfully tries to interrupt a scuffle and later to gain possession of Laurier's gun when danger is imminent.

Despite these fruitless efforts to make contact with other men, Dupas himself is primarily responsible for his isolation. His own timidity creates a barrier between himself and others: "On lui reprochait son silence, son isolement qu'on prenait pour du d edain" (T 17). Even when questioned about his past life, he refuses to reveal any information; he is consistently "absent, dans un vide

⁹Dupas's general attitude to others will be discussed here and followed by a more detailed analysis in the last section since his relations with others (Laurier in particular)

familier né de la fatigue, de l'ennui, d'une solitude qu'il ne cherchait plus à rompre. Un désœuvrement de l'âme" (T 116). He is so resigned to his solitude that he gradually becomes indifferent to others (T 62).

Another person who has problems in communicating with others is Maurice, "le paria du camp, être qui inspire la répugnance, qui ne peut rejoindre les autres que par ce qu'ils ont de plus bas".¹⁰ He desperately seeks companionship by evoking feelings of lust with his obscene pictures. His attitude to others vacillates between fear and scorn: it is fear when he is ordered to do unpleasant tasks like stoking the fire or cutting wood, and scorn when he believes he is superior, such as when he is holding others at bay with a gun or when he thinks he can shift the burden of his murder on someone else. Perhaps the root of his inferiority is his family life. Although his mother is the one person who kindly accepts him, his father scorns and hates him and his brother seems infinitely superior. His life is but "un long supplice dans la grisaille" (T 84), and he therefore hopes others are as lonely and miserable as he.

Laurier, "la cruauté des hommes" (T 115) is of the same disagreeable breed as Maurice. He too wants others to suffer, and to feel his own pain, which is caused by the loss

are intimately related to his attitude towards God.

¹⁰Pierre Gobin, "Le Temps des hommes", Le Français dans le monde (1964), 40.

of his wife and which "devenait une sorte de tremplin pour torturer les autres" (T 118). Although respected for his strength, he is mocked for his fits of jealousy and cowardly actions. He does not play fairly as he strikes his opponent from behind when fighting and resorts to assassination when his desires are thwarted. Because of fear and loneliness after accomplishing this fatal act, he seeks companionship with the priest who, he knows, will not abandon him. In this unpleasant relationship where Laurier is using Dupas for his own ends, "un amour informe, fait de peur et de cruauté naissait en lui pour le curé" (T 182). "Laurier, le chasseur, va apporter à ses rapports avec Dupas la même ruse, la même ténacité qu'il a mises à traquer Yolande".¹¹ He eventually tries to repress all those with whom he comes in contact.

The concept of self-sufficiency is actually a myth because the desire to be accepted and to be liked is common to all the lumberjacks: "Entre ces êtres qui s'affrontent cruellement d'abord à l'hôtel de Scottsville, puis à un camp isolé, c'est une fraternité qui se cherche".¹² However, when physically close together in their remote cabin in the woods, they all feel horribly alone. A nervousness grips each person: Baptiste hears imaginary wolves; Gros Louis abruptly orders the oil lamp to be blown out at an untimely moment;

¹¹Ibid., p. 41.

¹²Marcotte, op. cit., p. 60.

Maurice is haunted by the thoughts of his own death and of the wickedness of the world. Langevin emphasizes that: "Chacun dormait enferm  dans sa solitude" (T 89). While striving to shatter the carapace of loneliness around each man, Dupas finds that: "Il  tait difficile et p rilleux d'aimer dans la solitude, sans l'appui d'un syst me connu o  tout  tait pr vu" (T 90); without the support of his theology, he is destitute and helpless.

R nald B rube shows that when the men feel most alone, they all long for love and dream of getting outside the selves:

Tant bien que mal, chacun demande au r ve une sorte d'ersatz protecteur contre la r alit ; et tous, tous r vent d'amour. Baptiste r ve   sa femme; Maurice   sa m re et aux plus belles com diennes; Gros Louis   sa soeur et   Yolande; Laurier   Yolande embrass e par Gros Louis; le cur ,   l'humanit  humblement aim e et peut- tre   Marthe.¹³

The unhealthy atmosphere of the forest especially after the desertion of Gros Louis adds to their loneliness: "La for t,   la fin de l'hiver, leur donnait la fi vre, les hallucinait" (T 111). Isolated in an inhospitable territory characterized by death and decay, the men desperately search for anything to calm themselves: Baptiste becomes totally inebriated as he fears solitude for the first time and feels as abandoned as a child. Laurier's solitude increases after

¹³R nald B rube, "L'Hiver dans le temps des hommes", Cahiers Sainte-Marie, I (1966), 13.

he kills Gros Louis and following Baptiste's death, he once again "écouta la solitude tomber sur lui comme une pluie" (T 193).

Two men have been murdered and a third banished from the camp. Of the two remaining men, the onus is on the timid priest to break the curse of loneliness and fear and to bring something better from misfortune.

Langevin's heroes characteristically share the same solitude as those of Malraux in La Condition humaine. Referring to this book, W. M. Frohock states: "The badge of this generally shared condition is man's loneliness. Each of the characters in turn suffers from solitude".¹⁴ The same statement could apply equally well to Le Temps des hommes and to all Langevin's novels; indeed, Langevin himself acknowledges the influence of Malraux on the writers of his generation in a review in Liberté.¹⁵ Since loneliness is such a deplorable state, it is a key factor in producing an insatiable longing for love and is therefore integral to the theme of this work.

Man and God

In Le Temps des hommes, there is a recognition of God on the part of the characters, no matter how slight this may

¹⁴W. M. Frohock, "The Power and the Glory", Malraux, ed. R. W. B. Lewis (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 56.

¹⁵André Langevin, "Albert Camus", Liberté, II (1960), 51.

be. Baptiste shows this recognition when he follows his religious duties by repeating his aves over the corpse of a companion. Moreover, in the general context of the three novels, one may confidently attribute some element of literary significance to even the most idiomatic references to God such as Gros Louis saying of Yolande: "Elle se jette sur moi comme si j'étais Dieu le Père" (T 99). Here the reader is reminded of God as the Heavenly Father as is seen in the first two works. Yet Gros Louis never turns to this God as he himself apparently has no real religious faith; it is: "sa soeur [qui est] son unique échappée sur la douceur et le mystère du monde" (T 87).

In addition to the conceptual association of the father and the Christian Deity, the idea of the mother is also important to the characters' comprehension of God: "Même l'idée de Dieu en eux était confuse. Ils l'associaient à leur mère et à leur mort" (T 62). One can assume that the feelings of the characters about God have been largely determined by the relations they have experienced with their own parents, the symbolic representations of God. It is therefore significant that the majority of individuals in the novel are virtual orphans.

Dupas, who lost his father at two years of age and who was abandoned at twelve by his mother, associates God with his adoptive father, the kindly abbé Pottier. The fact that Gros Louis and his sister were orphans at a very early

age may account for their lack of interest in God. Likewise, Yolande and Marthe, as adolescents, lost their mother who was constantly being replaced by a different cleaning woman each year; these sisters also appear to lack faith.

The only glimpse of a parent-child relationship (except for that of Maurice, which is recorded and not witnessed) is that of Arthur Derome and his two daughters. He is not a good father as he hardly concerns himself with his offspring nor does he show them any love; he accuses the gentle Marthe of being slow and lazy and does not care to understand her problems. Yolande is unquestionably delighted when she defies him by allowing others to kiss her in his presence. He too realizes that: "Il n'avait jamais eu l'art avec ses filles qui ne l'avaient jamais admis dans leurs univers" (T 211). Clearly, if God is symbolically represented by a character's parents, and if no love exists between the parent and child, if indeed he has a parent at all, there is little if any love for God. Moreover, the men being simple, uncomplicated beings are without much concern for a Superior Being or an afterlife. Therefore, the question of a God of love or of anything else does not affect them greatly.

One portrait of a priest is that of Monseigneur Major, a man consumed by self-love as opposed to love of God; he looks at the church as a means to fulfill himself and to bring out his own capabilities, only to be disappointed when his

dreams do not materialize: "Lui aussi avait nourri des illusions, lui aussi avait rêvé de jouer un grand rôle dans l'Eglise" (T 145). W. E. Collin aptly points out that Major has turned away from God: "He had spent twenty-five years in church administration and had lost his soul somewhere along the road. Holiness, for him, meant finding money to build churches, provide for sacraments, masses etc."¹⁶ Major takes it upon himself to justify the temporal role of the church and leaves the care of souls to his fellow clergyman.

In contrast to the attitude of these characters is the unlimited confidence in God on the part of the mother of the dying boy. Although first doubting that God could be entrusted to someone as young as Dupas, she soon believes that through him, God will bring about the miracle of saving her innocent son; she authoritatively assures Dupas: "Il va guérir. Je sais maintenant que vous le guerirez" (T 134). When the desired miracle fails, she is devoid of any feeling except indifference as her hope has been crushed and as she cannot comprehend what has just happened. The reader can only infer that even during those moments when the characters have intense passion for God, His absence is cruelly felt.

¹⁶"André Langevin. . .", Tamarack Review, X (1959), 82.

The attribution of certain Biblical names to corresponding characters in Le Temps des hommes may be significant. Since the title of the novel is derived from Job 10,5, the Biblical connotations of the names must be examined, although it is unknown to what extent Langevin intended these connotations to be taken. Marthe can be compared to the Biblical Martha known as the worker, who is reprimanded by Christ for being more concerned with the temporal matters than spiritual needs. In contrast, Langevin's Marthe, a waitress, is told by the priest Dupas to think of her temporal life and to marry. The fact that he does not approach her on spiritual grounds nor concern her with the love of God, implies that he, already having rejected the dogma of original sin, now associates his role with the Martha role; that is, through the serving of men, or through good works, he is seeking salvation.

Although the choice of the common French-Canadian name Baptiste may not have any Biblical overtones, it is interesting to note that John the Baptist and the Baptiste of the novel are both believers who are violently killed. It is possible to deduce that the Christian God permits the slaughter of those who love and believe in Him.

The affinity between Pierre Dupas and the apostolic Peter is perhaps most important of all. The latter, who is the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and who thereafter pledges his devotion to Him, later betrays Him. Similarly Pierre who intensely desires to serve God, denies Him at the

bedside of a dying boy. It is suggested that the person who has dedicated his life to loving God and helping men can easily fail them both and himself as well. Indeed, there is also a parallel between St. Peter holding the keys to heaven and Dupas wanting to be the link between man and God.

Pierre Dupas is unquestionably the central character of Le Temps des hommes and to appreciate his predicament fully, it is necessary to examine both his relationship with God and with man.

Pierre's devotion to the Christian God originated in his affection for a timid and rather unorthodox priest named Pottier who emphasized the physical activities over the other duties of his ministry and who sincerely believed that sin was practically non-existent in men. It was this simple soul who above all stressed the love of mankind that served as a model priest for Dupas.

Consequently "par désir d'aimer, il [Dupas] s'était engagé dans le sacerdoce. Il voulait aller vers les hommes".¹⁷ As the text reveals: "Il avait envisagé le sacerdoce comme une sorte de médecine imprécise. . . .Un ministère presque plus physique que spirituel" (T 63). The teachings of the seminary which, in contrast to those of Pottier, stressed separation from "sinful" humanity, bewildered Dupas completely.

¹⁷Major, op. cit., p. 224.

He remained irresistibly attached to the world of men: "De tout ce qu'on lui avait enseigné il n'avait retenu que le 'Aimez-vous les uns les autres'" (T 141). Thus he left the seminary intent upon forcing the world's consent to his message of love.

On his very first mission he became disillusioned with his priestly role. His crisis occurred as a result of the physical suffering of a dying boy and the mental suffering of the mother. As he later recognized (T 147), by praying for the child's life rather than for the soul, he had chosen man in preference to God. Because of his disbelief in the idea of original sin, God's justice and all the other theological trappings he had been taught, he then, like Alain Dubois of Poussière sur la ville, desired to carry out his work exclusively on the level of man: "Aller à Dieu par les hommes" (T 155).

However, Dupas found himself helplessly isolated from man in spite of his intentions to: "établir une communication amoureuse entre les hommes pour valoriser l'immense somme de leurs souffrances".¹⁸ He neither belonged to the world of God nor to the world of man: he was "en suspens dans une zone de refus" (T 43).

¹⁸ Bérube, op. cit., p. 16.

After a lapse of ten years Dupas is finally approached by a fellow man when Laurier relates his marital problems to him. At this moment, "il y a fondamentalement un besoin de servir longtemps inemployé, enfin assouvi"¹⁹ in the heart of the young priest. Finding it exceedingly difficult to pity and to help someone as arrogant as Laurier, Dupas becomes aware of his own inadequacy: "Pour la première fois qu'il était en forêt. . .quelqu'un exigeait l'essentiel, et il avait les mains vides" (T 120).

After being probed, he humbly admits he is a priest while claiming at the same time that this is not important as he wants to reach Laurier as a man. For this same reason Dupas later does not use his priestly authority to forbid Laurier to commit murder. Ironically it is Laurier, "le moins indulgent des témoins" (T 129) who allows Dupas to have a certain perspective on his own life; Dupas thinks he can communicate with Laurier and thus eventually help to save Laurier's soul by confessing his failure as a priest. Indeed, because he does temporarily establish a sense of fraternity with Laurier who states: "Au fond t'es un homme comme moi" (T 148), Dupas hopes to prevent Laurier from committing murder and thereby redeem his own soul and justify his past

¹⁹ André Langevin to Pierre Gobin, Le Français dans le Monde (1964), see p. 38.

life. Dupas explains: "Tu ne vois pas Laurier, que de l'enfant à toi la boucle se ferme. Peut-être ne suis-je venu ici il y a dix ans que pour t'attendre" (T 158).

Nevertheless, Laurier carries out his murder plans and feels little but fear and hatred (T 179) for Dupas who had betrayed the murder plans to Baptiste. At the same time, Laurier clings to the priest with "un amour informe, fait de peur et de cruauté" (T 182) because there is no one else to whom he can turn.

Recognizing his failure among men, Dupas makes an about-face in accepting the God of the seminary and in conditionally offering this God the suffering of the child of ten years before in return for the soul of Gros Louis and the salvation of Laurier: "Il [Dupas] revenait à Dieu parce qu'il n'avait pas réussi avec les hommes. Il ne possédait qu'une disponibilité" (T 184). Since his love of humanity has proved ineffectual, he now bestows his unused love on God. Yet just as the child could not swallow the host until it had completely lost its consistency so too does the doubting Dupas eventually accept God, but only after he has accused Him of injustice and has almost lost his own soul in the process.

The priest appears to be personally addressing God when he reads Job's lament which is strikingly similar to Dubois's statement in Poussière sur la ville: "Il doit ou

m'écraiser définitivement ou faire cesser mon supplice" (P 120). The implications of the Biblical passage are that Job wonders why he should be so heavily afflicted when he has always been exceptionally good. Despite his questioning of God he never ceases to have "an indestructible longing for the God whom he cannot understand".²⁰

It is significant that Langevin omits Job 10,3: "Pourrais-tu favoriser les mauvais desseins des méchants?" when quoting Job 10,1-6. If Dupas truly does believe in God at this moment, as one is led to assume, he must accept the fact that he, unlike the innocent Job, had been guilty of betraying God at the child's bedside and that God did not favour his wicked ways.²¹ In any case, Dupas seems to mistrust God as he cannot understand why God is making his life so difficult.

Later Dupas accepts to follow Laurier on a dangerous trek through a deserted land because he claims he can help Laurier, and that the justice of men is not his concern and also because Laurier "représente sa dernière chance de communication avec une société qui ne l'a pas encore accepté";²²

²⁰ Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribners' Sons, 1947), p. 471.

²¹ This passage lends itself to several interpretations. The guilty person could be any one of Dupas, Laurier or Yolande, or could refer to them all generally as each one has betrayed God in some way.

²² Yvon-Maurice, op. cit., p. 81.

that is, Dupas, still in a limbo between God and man, wants to ally himself to the side that will accept him and to serve as a link between the two sides because he requires the love of both God and man.

When Laurier reminds him of his failure among men:

"T'es pas un homme comme les autres" (T 200), the priest plans to stay with him no matter what the outcome will be: "Il le suivrait jusqu'à ce qu'il se rende ou qu'il emporte avec lui son refus" (T 202). After accepting responsibility as a priest for the child's agony and death,²³ Dupas is warned that he will never be given charge of Laurier's soul for Laurier has no desire to absolve them both before the eyes of God. Dupas then wonders whether his conduct really does amount to nothing but "un vulgaire troc" (T 217) and whether he will ever again possess the fervour or purity of a real priest.

At this point, "Dupas n'avait même plus pitié. Il avait une tâche à accomplir, mécanique presque, qui était de soutenir Laurier et de le relever chaque fois qu'il tomberait" (T 224). As Jean-Louis Major points out, the priest is part of an absurd universe where there are no given solutions: "Pour Pierre Dupas dans Le Temps des hommes, l'existence prendra la forme sisyphienne de l'engagement dans

²³Laurier tells him: "Tu dis que tu as tué un enfant" (T 216).

l'absurde".²⁴ Any lingering hope Dupas may have to redeem Laurier and himself is lost when he kills the delirious Laurier out of self-defense: "Ainsi est perdue la dernière chance du prêtre, qui cherchait sa rédemption par le rachat d'une âme égarée".²⁵ The mentally and physically exhausted priest is now figuratively dead himself: "Un lien venait d'être coupé entre la vie et lui. Il ballottait au gré du vent. Il dérivait. Il perdait son âme, grain à grain derrière lui" (T 230).

Dupas has been completely disillusioned with man and with God because he has failed to communicate his love to either. His problem is that of seeking salvation of men in a world where God does not answer. Even when he opted for man, there was no question of his rivalling God as "[il] reste prêtre et il poursuit un Dieu caché".²⁶

Moreover, since God is absent, Dupas as a priest is meaningless; as the title suggests, the author obviously favours "le temps des hommes". However, Dupas cannot be a man among men because, as his theology professor once told him, a priest outside the protective walls of his theology, neither belongs to the world of God nor to that of man; he is perpetually condemned to be a misfit, an intruder (T 43).

²⁴ Op. cit., p. 222.

²⁵ Gérard Tougas, The French Review, XXX (April 1957), 411.

²⁶ Marcotte, op. cit., p. 59.

Thus Dupas, the semi-man, is meaningless also, and his love will necessarily be in vain.

Langevin has combined Dupas's impossibility of loving man with the impossibility of loving an absent God. Indeed God is essentially absent for all the characters of the novel, even for those who, like the mother of the unconscious child have a burning passion for God and who ardently desire his presence and a tangible sign of His love.

Futhermore the characters are denied fraternal love; there is no evidence of intimacy between the lonely lumberjacks and contact is limited to that of work. Only two of the men seek companionship with their fellow workers: Maurice, who is doomed to failure because of his unlikeable nature and Dupas, who is too reticent and timid to encourage friendship except for a momentary contact with Laurier (T 148).

Love between man and woman is portrayed as having the best chance to prosper. Yet when two people succeed in overcoming the usual difficulties in communication by establishing a mutual love as in the cases of Baptiste and Marie, Gros Louis and Yolande, and Gros Louis and his sister, an external force, like that of death, can eliminate the continuation of this love.

In an interview with Michelle Tisseyre, Langevin reveals the following with regard to his last novel, Le Temps des

hommes.

C'est le drame d'un prêtre très ordinaire qui est tellement scandalisé par la souffrance d'un enfant, qui symbolise les souffrances absurdes de l'humanité, qu'il décide d'abandonner le sacerdoce, pour n'être qu'un homme parmi les hommes. Mais il vit en reclus, en marge des hommes, il n'accepte pas ce qu'il y a de vivant dans la vie - l'amour, le mariage, - donc son expérience échoue.²⁷

One has the impression that if Dupas had accepted Marthe's love, his life would have been a success--possibly because he already had the right attitude to others: love of humanity. During this same interview, Langevin rejects his first novel which, he explains, "correspond à une période de ma vie que je veux oublier, qui est morte pour moi".²⁸ In this novel the pessimistic Cherteffe fought for his own solitude at great length, and Benoît renounced his attempt to love humanity and woman. One may presume that Langevin, at the end of his career as a novelist²⁹ and himself possessed by "[un] amour passionné de l'humanité"³⁰ has reached the stage where he feels that love is a possible solution to man's problems.

²⁷La Revue populaire (September 1961), p. 7.

²⁸Ibid., p. 7.

²⁹See Bessette and Edwards, op. cit., p. 279.

³⁰Michelle Tisseyre, La Revue populaire (September 1961), p. 7.

CONCLUSION

Most critics have emphasized solitude as the initial postulate, if not the cardinal theme of the novels of André Langevin. The desire to overcome this solitude, to get outside oneself by achieving a meaningful communication with others is inherent in all Langevin's characters. The extent to which they are successful is in direct proportion to the degree to which a mutual love is established.

The author appears to be obsessed with the longing to find a loving God or to see some evidence of His benevolence to man. In the first novel, humanity is portrayed as craving eternity as well as knowing that such a thing does not exist. Jean Cherteffe simply disregards any thoughts about a Supreme Being by making earthly relations the object of his life. One gets the impression of a development in Langevin's thought in the second novel, for the idea of God is not dismissed entirely; instead Dubois is left in doubt as to whether God exists or not and he concludes that the only way to deal with his problem is to fight against this enigmatic Deity by directing his affection towards man. Finally, in the third novel the central character accepts the existence of God and devotes his life to loving and serving this God but these actions are to no avail.

In all these works, man's desire or love for God

proves to be in vain; God's love is absent just as He himself may be absent. Connected with the idea of God, or to that which replaces God; i.e., fate in the first novel, is the theme of the death of innocent children: a tubercular child dies after two days of suffering in Evadé de la nuit; a hydrocephalic baby is necessarily killed at the moment of birth in Poussière sur la ville and a child afflicted with cerebral meningitis dies after suffering tremendous physical pain in Le Temps des hommes. Furthermore the priest Dupas is led to kill the very person whom he is trying to bring to God. If anything positive can be stated about Langevin's God, it is that rather than possessing love, He only seems capable of expressing hostility towards mankind. Since it is commonly believed that evidence of a kindly God can be found in a beautiful and hospitable nature, Langevin's desolate and forlorn landscapes would be regarded as a sign of cosmic hostility: the inimical qualities of the forest at night and the glaring sun subjugate Jean and Marcel respectively; the perpetual falling of asbestos dust and rain in Macklin oppresses the Dubois couple, and the unhealthy atmosphere of death and decay in the outdoors hallucinates the lumberjacks in their isolated cabin in the woods. Thus, the hope that man would be able to free himself from his solitude by means of a reciprocal love between himself and God is dismissed as impossible. The absence of a loving God was suggested even in the first novel when Jean was completely disillusioned

with this idea at the death of his father, who symbolized God in Jean's mind.

Fraternal love is also presented as a possible solution to man's isolation. The first Langevinian "hero" meets a measure of success in his own development as he, in the beginning, attempts to reach his fellow man for entirely selfish reasons, and then is willing to undergo any amount of self-denial in order to help his protégé for whom he has acquired a genuine compassion. Jean does reach Benoît but only in a limited way for Benoît never returns his affection nor does he allow Jean to think that anything satisfactory has emerged from their relationship. There is a more positive evidence of fraternal love in Poussière sur la ville since Dubois is able to merit the sympathy and friendship of those who know him personally (as opposed to professionally) and since he intends to gain the affection of the rest of the townpeople who appear to be without sympathy for him. His future success is indicated by the final humanization of the previously indifferent and unfeeling Jim. Finally, Dupas's love for his fellow man is not an end in itself; it is rather a means by which he tries to find God and to bring about his own salvation. His desire for salvation does not specifically limit the value of his fraternal love as he requires both the love of man and of God. Rather it is his own timidity and silence which create a barrier between himself and others, and which is only broken in a momentary contact with Laurier. Since

Cherteffe and Dupas ultimately fail to reach their fellow man while Dubois succeeds in creating mutual compassion between himself and his friends, Poussière sur la ville is Langevin's best expression of fraternal love.

Jean-Louis Major justly observes the following with regard to Langevin's novels as a whole: "C'est ce rapport difficile et jamais terminé de l'individu avec l'autrui", qui constitue la trame essentielle et la continuité de l'oeuvre romanesque d'André Langevin."¹ Indeed, this rapport that the characters are seeking is none other than the bond of love.

Inherent in the desire to be loved is the concern with oneself, as this desire indicates a greater care for one's own interests than for those of others: for example Jean's need to create a bond with Benoît and later with Micheline, Madeleine's need of Hétu, and Laurier's need of Yolande all emerge from self-preoccupation. In Langevin's relationships between man and woman, sexual attraction and the desire for sexual gratification are always important features. However this physical desire can lead to perversion as in the cases of Maurice and Arthur Derome, or eventually to understanding and compassion as in the cases of Jean, Dubois and Gros Louis.

As opposed to the desire to be loved, love given to

¹"André Langevin", Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (1964), 208.

another is basically self-effacing and gratuitous: for example Micheline accepts that Jean is free to leave her and to do as he pleases; Dubois too places the whimsical desires of his wife above his own needs and Marthe is grateful for the few hours a year spent with Dupas although she obviously would like much more time with him. Moreover, Gros Louis's affection for his sister, and that of Micheline and of Benoît for Claude, brim with tenderness and a strong desire to bring happiness to their respective protégés.

Thus, from the foregoing summary one can now conclude that love, for André Langevin, is constituted by a self-interested desire for affection which can lead to an altruistic tenderness, including all the varying degrees of affection in the gamut between the two.

It is important that in the first two novels, love is victorious over death, and in the second, it is actually brought about through death. However, in the last novel, there is a more realistic attitude as Gros Louis's death causes Yolande intense grief and Baptiste's death terminates the only successful marital relationship in Langevin's novels.

Furthermore, it is interesting to trace the development of certain characteristics in the novels. Jean's absolutism, dissatisfaction and selfishness are evident in Madeleine and they appear partially in Yolande. These qualities essentially pertain to the association of man and woman since Jean's desire to have contact with his fellow

man is not seen in Madeleine or Yolande. Furthermore a definite parallel can be drawn between the tenderness and understanding of Micheline in her romantic and fraternal relationships, and the same feelings in Dubois and Dupas-- an exception must be made for Dupas whose love of woman is not distinct from that of humanity in general. When two people are portrayed with very similar characteristics and are supposedly suited to each other, i.e., Marthe and Dupas, contact between them is made impossible because of lack of interest on the part of one of the characters (Dupas), who believes he is concerned with infinitely higher interests.

Thus, in Dupas are summed up all man's failure to establish relationships: His love of God and of humanity are ineffectual and love of woman is never seriously attempted. Although his failure may serve as an indication of how difficult it is to establish a mutual love, it also may be attributed to his personal inadequacy. As has been shown, Langevin himself points out that Dupas's refusal to accept and to return the love that Marthe offers him, is the principal reason for his downfall.

Guy Sylvestre makes the following comment on Langevin's attitude to the characters of Poussière sur la ville: "Ce qui est certain, c'est que cette pitié qu'il éprouve pour ses personnages, et qui est très sensible aux dernières pages, est un état intermédiaire qui peut aussi bien dé-

généraliser en refus ou se transmuier en amour."² It can most fairly be assumed that Langevin does indeed feel a great affection for all the characters he has created and for their desperate struggle to find love and happiness in a world where the task of achieving meaningful communication is so arduous. In any case, whatever Langevin's intentions may be, the reader himself can surely not be insensitive to the plights of the Langevinian heroes: Micheline and Jean achieve union in death; Dubois who is left without the person whom he adores, and in whose name he will continue to live; Yolande and Marthe respectively suffering from the death and unrequited love of their men and finally Dupas whose sincere attempts to help the humanity he loved resulted in dismal failure. Truly, compassion for these lonely and suffering characters must be one of the dominant sentiments evoked when one reads the novels of André Langevin.

Undoubtedly solitude is a prominent feature of Langevin's works; yet coupled with solitude is the strong desire to communicate with others: to love and to be loved in return. Langevin eliminates the possibility of loving God and suggests that love of others and love between man and woman is extremely difficult to achieve yet at the same time it is a positive goal towards which one must work and through which one can obtain a measure of relief from solitude.

²Nouvelle revue canadienne, VIII (1954), 99.

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