

CLAIRE MARTIN

LOVE IN THE WORKS

OF

CLAIRE MARTIN

By

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: It is my intention within this thesis to analyse the conception of love which Claire Martin presents in her works. This conception of love, based on the author's own childhood experiences, has as its central idea the emancipation of women. Claire Martin delves directly into the minds of her characters, revealing to the reader their innermost thoughts. The universe which she creates, however, is a particularly negative one, viewed almost exclusively from the perspective of a past love which has been eroded by time. Her novels propose no revolutionary outlook or ethic of love - their value lies in the analytical study which they offer into the very minds of characters influenced by the force of love. It is the aim of my thesis, therefore, to reveal rather than to explain this picture of love.

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

	Page
INTRODUCTION	I
CHAPTER I -- THE MALE CHARACTERS	13
CHAPTER II -- THE FEMALE CHARACTERS	27
CHAPTER III -- CLAIRE MARTIN'S CONCEPT OF LOVE	42
CONCLUSION --	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY	64

INTRODUCTION

Diversely described as a "théoricienne du coeur humain"¹, a "moraliste de l'amour"² and a "romancière de l'amour"³, Claire Martin is one of several modern French-Canadian writers who grant in their works an increased social status to women, introducing them into the sophisticated world of the salon. The theme of love has long been ascribed a secondary place in French-Canadian literature, behind the traditional themes of the family and the land, the struggle for existence in the towns and the challenge of the elements. In the works of Claire Martin, the theme of love has at last been transformed into the principal concern of the characters and the sole motivating force of events. This transformation has brought about, by its change of emphasis, a re-evaluation of love and of its nature. No longer is the woman's role to be confined to duties in the kitchen: no longer is she to be subservient to her husband's demands, merely fulfilling her task as wife and mother of a numerous family. From the hard-working, simple-natured, spreading figure of maternity, the woman has become a young, slim creature, intelligent and cultured, whose natural surroundings

¹Y. Rivard, "Claire Martin, notre théoricienne du coeur humain", Action Nationale, LVI (juin 1967), 1041.

²J. Ethier-Blais, "Entre femmes seules, Claire Martin", Signets II, (1970), 224.

³Ibid., 225.

have changed from the kitchen to the salon, and who has liberated herself entirely from the trammels of motherhood:

Claire Martin, bien qu'en langage plus sobre, en actes moins excessifs, délie la femme de sa sujétion ancestrale et la laisse conduire éprement sa destinée. Elle lui offre la stérilité, comme une délivrance, une liberté qui en fait l'égle de l'homme.

This new-found vitality in womanhood and the reversal of the traditional roles ascribed to male and female characters (that of dominant and dominated) present certain difficulties of language and concept to the critic. The traditional values attached to the adjectives masculine and feminine are no longer relevant. Physical strength, virility and force of character, traditionally masculine attributes, are now terms applicable to women. Likewise, traditional female characteristics - such as passivity, delicacy of sentiment - are, in the works of Claire Martin, more relevant to her male characters. The critic is, therefore, in a position whereby he may describe the male characters in the novel as feminine and vice-versa.

The love which Claire Martin describes in her novels is not, however, one which is merely fortuitous or of transitory importance, a trifling occupation or an idle pastime to her characters, (although individual relationships may be both): it is a love which provides an essential force and "raison d'être" without which the characters cannot fully develop their potential or achieve any

⁴S. Paradis, Femme fictive, femme réelle (Québec: Garneau, 1966), p. 149.

measure of happiness. Absence of love, indeed, directly induces disintegration of character and both physical and mental dessication. Love as the "force motrice" of their thoughts, however, provides a complex, subtle and often self-contradictory set of stimuli. "Amour-passion", "amour-apaisement", "amour de compensation", "amour maternel" and "amour de tête" exist side by side within Claire Martin's world: her characters are subject to the infinite variations of these different types of love. It is in their response to such divergent impulses (that is to say in the vast range of sentiment, contradictory and yet simultaneous⁵, which the characters experience) that the pen of Madame Martin shows the full measure of her psychological insight.

The universe which Claire Martin creates is, however, a particularly denuded one, existing almost within a void. It is a closed world, where the influences of material ease (as in Quand j'aurai payé ton visage⁶) and of childhood experiences (as in Doux-amer⁷) leave no lasting impressions either on people or events. Within this world, love dominates and guides; it provides the motivation for all actions: it holds the strength to bring them

⁵As the titles of Claire Martin's novels themselves suggest: Avec ou sans amour, Doux-amer, and Quand j'aurai payé ton visage.

⁶C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage (Montréal: Cercle du Livre de France, 1962).

⁷C. Martin, Doux-amer (Montréal: Cercle du Livre de France, 1960).

to fruition and contains within itself the promise of happiness. One segment of life in its irresolvable complexity is laid before the reader, but however just and skilled such a picture may be, little or no account is taken of the multitudinous other factors which also constitute an important aspect of human character and experience. Claire Martin's universe is a reduced one - a world in which the characters are subject only to the chameleon transformations imposed by love.

Not only, however, is the love which Claire Martin sets out to depict given a prominence, which it lacks in everyday experience, but this love is also seen exclusively in retrospect. Claire Martin's novels are, without exception, written in a first person narration of past events:

Pour moi, un roman c'est une histoire dont les personnages ne sont plus capables de garder le secret. De là vient que mes romans sont écrits à la première personne.

Both the inevitable selection of events to be recounted and this perspective on a past love in which the narrator himself has been intimately involved, modify considerably his interpretation of these events. His analysis of the past is coloured by the knowledge of the consequences of that past; judgements are passed in the remembering, where only passion existed in the event - and these judgements distort when they do not actually falsify. As Robidoux says, "les événements

⁸C. Martin, "Témoignage", Le Roman canadien-français, Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (janvier 1967), 352.

de leur vie qu'ils choisissent de nous livrer^{sont} en fonction du terme où ils nous dirigent"⁹.

Before considering the male and female characters in the works of Claire Martin and the concept of love of which they are the exponents, we must first look more closely at the novelist's childhood. Claire Martin is the key to her own work. It is through her - or more exactly through her upbringing - that the reader should consider the characters and the love which they experience:

Le romancier québécois semble, à la faveur des techniques nouvelles qu'il pratique, plonger plus que jamais au plus intime de ses récits, arranger ses récits autour de son être le plus intime. Son récit, c'est lui. . . C'est l'écrivain-pivot qui se regarde pivoter.¹⁰

It is necessary, therefore, to consider initially Claire Martin's two explicitly autobiographical works, Dans un gant de fer¹¹ and La Joue droite¹². I say "explicitly", for as we shall see, the situation and the characters which she creates in each of her works are, in fact, the reflection of their creator and take their impulse from her own revolt against her wretched and unhappy youth.

⁹R. Robidoux, "Claire Martin, romancière", Etudes françaises, I (juin 1965), 70.

¹⁰C. Martin, "A propos de ces nouvelles techniques", Incidences, VIII (mai 1965), 17.

¹¹C. Martin, Dans un gant de fer (Montréal: Cercle du Livre de France, 1965).

¹²C. Martin, La Joue droite (Montréal: Cercle du Livre de France, 1966).

Claire Martin¹³ was brought up, with her brothers and sisters, in a cold, isolated house by a timid, self-effacing woman, subservient to the Victorian precepts of paternal dominance and wifely obedience, and by an arrogant, brutal and ignorant father. The hatred which this deprived childhood inspired in Claire Martin made a deep and lasting impression on her attitude towards life: the harsh judgement which she passed on all that pertained to that past, finds its echo everywhere in her novels.

Claire Martin's father, a true tyrant, persecuted his wife and children. Sadistic, he beat his family indiscriminately and without provocation:

Dans une fureur hors de proportion avec l'incident, mon père m'attrapa par l'épaule et abattit de tout son poids son gros pied sur le mien en disant que j'avais besoin d'une leçon.¹⁴

He deprived his family of books and was himself so obsessed by the idea of vice and the fear of any sexual manifestations that he was ready to suspect his own children of incest. His brutality extended even to attempting to prevent them from expressing any overt physical sign of emotion. In a reference

¹³ Claire Martin was born in Québec in 1914. Having completed her studies first in the Convent of the Ursulines and then in that of the Congrégation de Notre Dame, she became a radio announcer in Québec then Montréal. Married in 1945 to Roland Faucher, she now lives in Ottawa.

¹⁴ C. Martin, Dans un gant de fer, p.148.

to her mother's death, Claire Martin writes:

Durant les deux jours que maman fut exposée, il ne cessa pas un instant de nous surveiller, le visage empreint d'une colère toute prête à éclater si l'un de nous osait manifester sa peine.¹⁵

Claire Martin revolted not only against her father's conceit and brutality, but against all that he represented and condoned—that is to say, his marriage, his religion, his ideas on education and morality, his ignorance and stupidity.

Her formal education was entrusted to nuns - first in the Convent of the Ursulines and then in that of the nuns of the Congrégation de Notre Dame. Deprived even there, however, of any real learning and culture, she was exposed to the stupidity and short-sightedness of the nuns, and was made conscious of their hypocrisy. There also she was subjected to a violence parallel to that which she had experienced from her father. The same sexual taboos existed within the convent as in her own desolate home. Claire Martin describes the situation thus:

Nous étions si habituées à avoir honte de notre corps, à penser que tout ce qui s'y passait était la punition de quelque crime inconnu que même la pousse d'un poil nous bouleversait.¹⁶

Totally deprived of love, therefore, both at home and at school, Claire Martin experienced the only affection and happiness of her childhood with her grandparents: married for love and not by arrangement as her own parents, her grandparents were for her

¹⁵ Ibid., p.229.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.175.

the example both of ideal parents and of an ideal marriage. Her grandfather, intelligent and generous, the antithesis of her own father, represented the perfect husband. As a child, Claire Martin had declared, ". . . je n'épouserais qu'un homme comme grand-papa, paisible et de bon caractère¹⁷." Her grandmother was for the child the ideal of womanhood. The deep influence which Claire Martin's grandparents exerted over her youth is made evident in the portrayals of the male and female characters in her later novels.

From such a Jansenistic education, Claire Martin did not emerge as might have been expected, a timid and self-effacing woman like her mother, ready to submit to a life of resignation at the hands of a brutal husband. On the contrary, she unequivocally declares in her novels her complete revolt against her Victorian upbringing and the institutions of her parent's generation - despising religion and its acolytes, and rejecting arranged marriages with their onerous tasks and annual child-bearing: as she herself says, "Pour ce que je savais des hommes, il me semblait que j'aurais été plus enragée avec que sans."¹⁸

Everywhere within her works an unquenchable hatred for the sufferings of her youth and for those who perpetrated

¹⁷ Ibid., p.198.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.194.

them is apparent. Her proclamation, "j'ai tout pardonné"¹⁹, is incessantly belied by both the direct and the barely concealed personal references which abound in her fictional writings: the hatred which Clémence in "La Mort n'est pas suffisante" experiences for her dying step-mother is one of bitter poignancy, which inevitably recalls to the reader Claire Martin's hatred for her own step-mother. Clémence's memory of a wretched childhood is also that of a bitter and unforgiving Claire Martin:

Six écorchés, six abandonnés du ciel, vivant leurs nuits courtes et leurs journées interminables d'un bout de l'année à l'autre. Six, avec chacun ses motifs particuliers de haïr, six à débattre, à conspirer, à écouter ce bruit de pas stupide, lourd et sec à la fois, qui ébranlait toute la maison.²⁰

Gabrielle Lubin²¹, lonely and struggling to make her way in the world of literature - a world which offers her compensation for her emotional aridity - is Claire Martin herself, "lésée du plus normal des amours"²². In the misery of her childhood in the convent, writing had provided Claire Martin with a similar means of compensation for her unhappiness. She states: "Pour me consoler, je me mis à écrire des romans."²³ It is the narrator

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁰ C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p. 96.

²¹ C. Martin, Doux-amer.

²² Ibid., p. 40.

²³ C. Martin, Dans un gant de fer, p. 186.

of Les Morts²⁴, however, who is most closely integrated into the harsh reality of Claire Martin's past and present. No other work is so clearly influenced by the author's childhood and adolescence. Besides containing direct references to people and events of her past - to her mother, to her father, to her sisters, to her love for the carpenter, Phydime Tremblay - the whole work is imbued with a veritable hatred for those who destroyed her youth. The novel describes explicitly the emotional and moral climate in which the young Claire Martin was educated:

Je pense à maman si effarouchée devant l'amour charnel, elle et combien d'autres en son temps. Inconsciemment, l'horreur de la chair les poussait vers celui avec qui on ne²⁵ risque pas de connaître les plaisirs de l'amour.

The author lays bare before the reader the transformation which she has undergone before being able to liberate herself from her Victorian upbringing and create the emancipated example of womanhood, which the narrator has become:

Mais vous avez refusé. Jamais vous n'auriez abandonné cet état que vous avez atteint, à quoi vous êtes parvenue, la liberté, l'équilibre, l'égalité, toutes ces choses difficilement acquises. Maintenant vous êtes rassurée. Vous connaissez la force de votre résistance. Et l'étendue de votre orgueil, peut-être.²⁶

²⁴ C. Martin, Les Morts (Montréal: Cercle du Livre de France, 1970).

²⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 78.

The ambivalent attitude towards love which Claire Martin's childhood has created - she is at once attracted by it and yet fearful of it - finds, as we shall see, its solution in the roles which she attributes to her male and female characters. Adept at deceiving her father from an early age, she has gradually learnt to develop this ability for deception and ruse in the face of adversity:

Quand cela devenait trop difficile, je recourais à la stupidité: je ne savais rien, je n'avais rien vu, rien compris, et rien entendu.²⁷

This ability will bring her a sense of superiority and freedom which will allow her to escape not only from the reach of her father but from that of men in general: as we shall see, the characters of her novels are not just male and female but "dominés" and "dominants" - and the superiority is definitely feminine.

Claire Martin's novels represent both a compensation for her past and an opposition to the standards of a previous generation. The compelling need of her female characters to love, their passionate feelings and their cerebral dissection of those feelings, their beauty and intelligence, their superiority

27

C. Martin, Dans un gant de fer, p. 47.

and intellectual dominance over their male counterparts, the sexual freedom which they enjoy, and the social limbo in which they live - all these features are the direct flowerings of a wretched and tarnished childhood. Love itself, the single dominant theme of her novels - its existence, the possibility of its existence - strikes out against the empty past: "J'allais apprendre que tant au pensionnat qu'à la maison, aimer n'était pas simple."²⁸

Even within the fictitious world of her novels, however, the destruction of love remains forever imminent: the characters live in a world of an ephemeral happiness which may be dissipated at the turn of the wind and whose dissolution is associated with the very realization that one has experienced a moment of happiness:

Il y a quelque chose de poignant à ce qu'une partie de son bonheur soit déjà dans le passé. On était là soudés l'un à l'autre, sans penser que l'irremplaçable nous échappait, que ces moments ne nous seraient jamais rendus, que, quoi qu'on fasse, quoi qu'on dise, ils ne seraient ni aussi miraculeux, ni aussi exceptionnels qu'on les aurait voulus, et qu'ils seront à jamais inchangeables. Tout de suite après, on est réduit à ne pouvoir plus qu'en rêver.

Let us now look at the characters of this fragile world, and the concept of love fashioned on such unhappiness.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

²⁹ C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 25.

THE MALE CHARACTERS

The male protagonists of Claire Martin's tales and novels come from varied backgrounds, generations and professions. In Avec ou sans amour, for example, the reader is transported through Jacob's dusty clothes shop, the efficient world of radio broadcasting a shady hotel, an apartment and the worldly ambiance of the salon. In Doux-amer the narrator is a middle-aged publisher who lives in comfortable circumstances and who is generous by nature. Michel Bullard, his rival in love, reveals himself as a vain opportunist in his attempts to win fame as an author. Robert, in Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, is the handsome, immature son of a rich, industrial family; refusing to continue the architectural studies imposed on him by a dictatorial father, he devotes himself to singing. His brother Bruno, is, on the other hand, the epitome of the bourgeois values which Robert has rejected. The "deuxième du nom" in Les Morts is a "dix-septièmiste", a lonely bachelor, who has been spurned in love.

It becomes rapidly apparent, however, that this diversity in the male characters is merely superficial and that the protagonists of Claire Martin's "contes" and novels alike, do indeed share certain essential traits: these common features are the direct - and according to Claire Martin inevitable - consequences of the power of love. In the ensuing study of the masculine characters of Claire Martin's works we shall consider firstly the nature of

the male-female relationship, which existed in previous generations; we shall then study the character of the man of Claire Martin's generation as he has been created by the author.

The man had, for long, held the dominant role over women both in society and in the home. As the undisputed master of his wife and family, he inspired in them fear and awe: Georges in Quand j'aurai payé ton visage forces his wife to arrange dinner parties to further his business connections; the rules which he lays down, however harsh or bigoted they may be, cannot be openly broken or even disputed. Such a position of power often leads to abuse, however. The man described by Claire Martin is not merely a patriarchal figure whose attitudes are prejudiced, but he is also a violent tyrant. In "La Portion congrue" Valérie's husband, a drunken, libidinous, middle-aged man treats his wife brutally and inconsiderately:

Elle n'avait pas prévu que ce tout petit homme pût être tyrannique, exigeant, libidineux, qu'il pût lui imposer son approche quand et comment il le voudrait.¹

Her dreams of the marriage ceremony and her future home crash to the ground under the imperious demands of this man. Brigitte's husband is no less inconsiderate and rapidly reveals himself as an imperious, unfaithful and intolerant marriage partner:

Elle s'était mariée jeune. Et elle avait bien mal choisi. Avant que la première année fût terminée,

¹C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p.9.

son mari avait déjà des maîtresses avec qui il buvait beaucoup. Puis il prit l'habitude des fugues. Il disparaissait des jours, des semaines. Il revenait agressif, ne souffrant ni un² reproche, ni une mine désolée, ni même le silence.

This picture of male brutality is but the transposition of the events of Claire Martin's youth: it is the memory of her father which has directly inspired the portrayal of these male characters, and it is her revolt against him which influences her description of the man of her own generation: a man who will be, in every way, the antithesis of her father. The male-female relationship will also consequently undergo a transformation with the reversal of the dominant role in the partnership.

Claire Martin attributes to her contemporary masculine characters quite different traits from those of men of previous generations. The modern men are educated, prosperous, sophisticated, express little concern for material possessions and little preoccupation with or anxiety for the moral strictures of society. Indeed, the material circumstances of such heroes in Avec ou sans amour remain largely unknown to the reader. The principal characters of the novels, with their respective careers of publisher, singer and "dix-septièmiste", are linked to a world of art and literature which is at best suspect to the established pillars of bourgeois society. It is Robert Ferney who most directly represents this rejection of bourgeois standards of morality and social conduct. His revolt against his rich,

²C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p.49.

industrial, authoritarian father is also a rebellion, on a wider plane, against the upper middle class:

Que je les ai haïs. Que je les hais encore. Et que je hais la haine, que j'en ai de dégoût pour les avoir vus s'en gaver devant moi, et sans vergogne encore. Haine des Juifs, des protestants, des adversaires politiques, des ouvriers, des intellectuels; haine des asservis et des libres, car celui qu'on méprise et celui qu'on envie n'ont droit qu'à des nuances différentes du même sentiment.³

This position of relative freedom from society permits these characters to react to more private dictates, to more personal and perhaps more exacting demands - that is to say, without exception, to the demands imposed by love. They are each totally submitted to the power of love, but the emotion which they experience is not an anonymous force, torturing their hearts and sparking off impulsive and reckless action: on the contrary, the love which they feel is a controlled, purposeful force whose command lies not within their grasp but within that of the women who have inspired it.

Confronted with such women, the men are reduced to the role of mere puppets, subordinated mentally and often physically to the superior dictates of a dominating force. With this reversal of the traditional roles ascribed to the man and the woman, the dominant features of each sex have also been transposed. Claire Martin has herself declared:

Aussi il me déplait fort que tant de romanciers figent leurs héroïnes dans une prétendue fémininité et leurs héros dans une prétendue virilité qui se rencontrent

³C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, p.17.

rarement dans la vie. Les genres ne sont pas si tranchés et ce que l'on croit être des caractéristiques viriles - l'égoïsme, la préséance sur l'amour donnée au travail, le donjuanisme - se trouvent tout aussi bien chez les femmes que se trouvent chez les hommes la faiblesse, l'enfantillage, la tendresse, la fidélité.⁴

Many of the heroes of Avec ou sans amour and those of the novels - the publisher, Robert and even "le deuxième du nom" into whose life and character we are given but the briefest glimpse - may be qualified as possessing "feminine sensibility". They are portrayed as more susceptible to events and characters, more disposed to be carried away by the strength of their emotions than women. In "Confession", for example, the husband, who is overcome by remorse after the perfect murder of his wife Geneviève, feels impelled to return to the scene of the crime where he subsequently suffers a mental breakdown:

On m'a arrêté pendant que je courais sur la route, en hurlant. Je savais qu'il n'aurait pas fallu hurler, qu'il n'aurait pas fallu courir, mais rien au monde n'aurait pu m'en empêcher.⁵

It is the young lover, experienced and blasé, who ironically suffers from the lack of reaction shown by the lady he himself has spurned:

Nourri la moitié du temps de café et de biscottes, il avait maigri. Les barbituriques lui avaient

⁴C. Martin, "Témoignage", Le Roman canadien-français, p. 351.

⁵C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p. 185.

cerné les yeux et engourdi le cerveau.⁶

The publisher in Doux-amer is distraught and emotionally moved by Gabrielle's first absence:

Je n'oublierai jamais ce pauvre bougre, ce pauvre bougre, qui était moi, qu'en cette fin d'après-midi, je regardais errer, désolé, dans les rues poussiéreuses, pour entrer chez lui, le soir tombant, et continuer à errer...⁷

Her laconic telegram, "Bien arrivée. Lettre suit. Baisers." underlines the emotional difference which separates these two characters.

The publisher's despair at Gabrielle's marriage and his subsequent unhappiness will find no echo within her heart, even when she is faced with the imminent destruction of her relationship with Michel Bullard. It is also the publisher who seeks the peace, the gentleness which love can offer, while Gabrielle, a hard, virile master, remains aloof from such comforting tranquillity.

In Quand j'aurai payé ton visage Robert's angry outbursts against his father, his display of emotion when Catherine tries to recount her meeting with Bruno, mark both his immaturity and his sensibility. Influenced strongly by his grandmother in his youth, Robert is open to the beauty of art and literature.

His revolt against his puritanical upbringing with its sexual taboos is coupled with a rejection of religion as he had observed it in the actions of his father.

⁶Ibid., p. 157.

⁷C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 28.

As he declares, "J'ai perdu la foi tout jeune, comme les enfants la perdent: par le scandale."⁸ Despite his arid childhood, however, Robert will prove himself sensitive to love and tenderness:

Je resterai à jamais étonné d'être capable d'aimer, et si je devais aimer cent fois mon étonnement resterait le même, car ceux qui m'ont fait ne m'ont guère nourri le coeur.⁹

The suicide to which the "deuxième du nom" has recourse in Les Morts - the final gesture of the lonely lover brought to despair by the refusal of his lady to join him - is coldly analysed by a narrator who has placed her own liberty above all else.

More sensitive, therefore, than a woman, the man is also depicted as being a facile victim of female wiles. We have already seen this characteristic in Claire Martin's portrayal of her own father - unable to overpower him by force his children resorted to the trickery of silence and deceit. In the same way, André is completely duped by the distorted statements of Mariette concerning her friend Valentine's character and appearance, and he is eventually forced to conclude that "...elle n'aime que les hommes extrêmement intelligents".¹⁰ Jacob,¹¹ dominated by two generations

⁸C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, p. 22.

⁹Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p. 105.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 39-43.

of women, finds his universe in ruins with the painful revelations of his grandmother's duplicity. Man's own attempts at trickery and deceit are, on the other hand, vigorously denounced and he himself is spurned: in "C'est raté" the lover's attempts to incite his lady's jealousy by flirtation are countered by her total rejection of his love:

Mon Dieu, vous allez bondir, disons rapidement que vous êtes sadique, égoïste, médiocre. Que vous avez le coeur sec et que vous êtes sans scrupule.¹²

In the same way Bullard's flirtation will definitively end Gabrielle's love for him¹³, and Robert's silence about his renewed friendship with his brother Bruno almost destroys Catherine's love for him¹⁴.

Sensitive and easily misled, the man is not even spared the fears and the physical deterioration which advancing years will bring. Indeed, the fear of old age is shown as even more detrimental to a man than to a woman. Waiting on a lady he had loved more than twenty years previously, the narrator of "Autres Temps" is made conscious of his own age when he finds her, "rayonnant de jeunesse, avec à peine une petite ride au coin des

¹²Ibid., p. 108.

¹³In Deux-amer.

¹⁴In Quand j'aurai payé ton visage.

yeux, une petite veine au dos de la main"¹⁵. The publisher, Robert and the "deuxième du nom" all share the fears of approaching old age and look, consciously or not, to love as a remedy. The publisher, for example, seeing in Bullard a younger and consequently more successful rival, becomes acutely aware of his own age:

Je ne l'avais jamais vu d'aussi près et j'étais frappé de sa finesse. Quelle âge pouvait-il bien avoir ? Pas un cheveu blond, pas une ride, les dents intactes - je les voyais toutes quand il riait en renversant la tête. Trente ans ? Trente-cinq, mais bien conservé ? J'en recevais comme une sorte d'injure.¹⁶

Love as a compensation for old age is one of the key themes of Claire Martin's works and it is one to which we shall return in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The transposition of traditional male-female characteristics inevitably affects the man's social position. At work the man must henceforth be prepared to accept and contend with the challenge presented by the female. Sonia will successfully supplant Thierry¹⁷ in his profession of author of radio plays after the latter's dismissal. In a similar manner Gabrielle in Doux-amer eventually dispenses with the help of the publisher and proves herself to be a writer of considerably more skill than Michel

¹⁵C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p. 66.

¹⁶C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 70.

¹⁷C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, pp. 15-21.

Bullard.

The man who finds himself threatened in his work must also confront female challenge in the home. No longer is his very word the law; verbal abuse is met, not by resignation and obedience on the part of his wife, but by astuteness and positive physical action. The Girauds' neighbour, "une petite chose grise que la terreur talonne du matin au soir"¹⁸, definitively silences her husband with a bullet in the throat. For men such as Justin, André, the publisher, Robert and the "deuxième du nom", the bond of marriage will no longer hold a partnership together - a new relationship based on equality and trust must be evolved.

This physical equality at work and in the home is but the consequence of the evolution in the social and moral climate of the status of women. Socially imposed moral standards have been swept aside; the threat of childbirth has been eliminated. The new emancipated womanhood which has emerged will demand equal rights, therefore, in the game of love. Since love has become a two-sided battle the man is called upon to act and react, no longer as the undisputed victor, but as one who requires favours of his lady. The publisher, Robert and the "deuxième du nom" must vie with other men for the fulfilment of their love. Former philanderers, with excessive male egos, invariably find

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 162.

themselves cast aside by unrelenting women. Thierry is thus spurned by Sonia:

Thierry désespéré, hagard, maigre, les yeux cernés et les lèvres grises. Ce petit bourreau des coeurs payait pour toutes les autres et il payait comptant.¹⁹

Unfaithful husbands are avenged in kind for their infidelity; Madame Landry thus punishes her spouse without remorse: "Là-bas, elle était tout occupée de sa vengeance. Il l'avait prise dans ses bras et il l'embrassait."²⁰ Gabrielle flirts outrageously with Blondeau to punish Bullard for his infidelity. Husbands whose only crime is to be no longer loved, are cast aside in favour of adventure, love and liberty. As Yvette declares:

Il n'était pas plus mal qu'un autre. Au fond il n'avait qu'un défaut, celui de n'être pas aimé. Ce n'était qu'un pauvre homme que l'amour avait refusé.²¹

Catherine's flight with Robert originates from this same absence of love between herself and Bruno.

Equality in the home, equality at work, equality in love - these are the new dictates for the man. Claire Martin, however, has developed this theme further. Man is not, in fact, presented in her works as being on equal terms with his female partner: he is insidiously subordinate to her and the course of action

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 59.

²¹ Ibid., p. 70.

which he follows is imposed on him by a stronger will. It is Sabine, for example, who seduces Justin despite the latter's repulsion and his involvement with Blanche²². In "Confession"²³ it is Geneviève who is seen to be the worker, the bread-earner, the manager of the farm, while her husband, dominated by her strength of character, yearns after rest and luxury. The publisher in Doux-amer is constantly subordinated to Gabrielle's work: later he will agree to help her husband's work just as he had been obliged to accept her flirtations and her marriage with Michel Bullard. Even at the beginning of his love for Gabrielle the publisher is conscious of his own weakness:

J'aimais, j'étais sans doute aimé, mais je n'étais pas le maître de la situation et je m'angoissais d'avoir à mener l'affaire.²⁴

Robert Ferney's youthful impatience and his courageous request to Catherine for them to flee together are, eventually, solely dependent on the stronger will and character of Catherine, as she herself realises:

...et je compris qu'il se refusait à refaire sous mes yeux, en cas de faillite, les quelques pas qui séparaient le salon de l'entrée. S'il était arrivé chez moi sûr de lui, comme j'eusse été plus raisonnable.²⁵

²²Ibid., pp. 141- 145.

²³Ibid., pp. 175-185.

²⁴C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 19.

²⁵C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, p. 85.

In Les Morts, the "deuxième du nom", a nomad, an adventurer and an experienced lover is as dependent on the narrator as the publisher and Robert are on their respective loves. Although he questions the value of human ideals in society, he, too, has attempted to find hope and strength in the power of love. The narrator's refusal to join him, however, puts an end to these illusions and he commits suicide.

The picture of contemporary man painted by Claire Martin is that of an educated being who lives aloof from the material and moral problems posed by society. Love for such a man is a necessary experience to enable him to overcome the problems of loneliness and incipient old age. The emergence of woman as an equal partner at work, in the home and in love, necessarily alters the male-female relationship as it existed for previous generations. Man's own character, however, with his sensibility and his naivety, will dictate the essentially subordinate role which he will play in such a relationship.

THE FEMALE CHARACTERS

The female protagonists in Claire Martin's works come, like their male counterparts, from diversified backgrounds. Although they share a variety of ambitions, they are all, again like the masculine characters, motivated in their everyday actions, entirely or in part, by love. It is once more fitting to take as our starting point the women of the previous generation for whom love had completely different implications than for those women of Claire Martin's own generation. We shall then consider the character of the modern woman as it has been created by Claire Martin and the new role which the woman consequently assumes in the male-female relationship.

The role of women within marriage had, for long, been one of subservience to the husband, of self-sacrifice, and of acceptance of the drudgeries associated with a large family. This is the picture which we are given of Claire Martin's own mother in Dans un gant de fer and again in Les Morts. Love for such women is synonymous with brutality and unpleasant sexual demands: "Je pense à maman si effarouchée devant l'amour charnel, elle et combien d'autres en son temps."^I These women cannot conceive love except within the unbreakable bond of marriage, but alas this brings only disappointment in its trail. Valérie, in "La

^IC. Martin, Les Morts, p. 29.

Portion congrue", suffers from the sexual demands of her husband: although her dream of "une maison avec des parquets à encaustiquer, des carreaux à faire briller, des argenteries à polir, et des visiteurs pour louer tout ça"² crashes to the ground with the revelation of her husband's brutality, she is, nevertheless, irrevocably bound to him. It is only his accidental death which will bring her release from her torment. Likewise, Brigitte, in "Le Visage clos"³, who is illtreated and deceived by her husband, sees no possibility of redress, or of any definitive escape.

Claire Martin goes even further in exposing the unpleasant aspects of marriage. Not only is it a trap, but it actively destroys any love which may have previously existed between the man and the woman. Amélie's radiance and physical transformation during her courtship with the cobbler is cut short with her marriage and she gradually resumes her "démarche de cavale sauvage, son visage coléreux, et son regard en coup de fouet."⁴ Individual feelings also disappear within marriage. Madame Landry⁵ is capable of taking her own revenge for her husband's

²C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p. 9.

³Ibid., pp. 49-56.

⁴Ibid., p. 79.

⁵Ibid., pp. 57-60.

infidelity. Even her vengeance in kind, however, results not in feelings of success, remorse or guilt, but merely in the realisation of her own apathy and emptiness. Marriage has stifled all sensibility in her: "la petite Madame Landray était revenue de tout"⁶.

It is not, however, male brutality or the stifling of any ulterior feelings which is principally responsible for the destruction of love; in Claire Martin's work it is boredom within marriage which emerges as the main obstacle to love. Yvette⁷ turns to adultery as a means of escape from a marriage in which boredom reigns supreme. Her flight with Jacques marks both "la liberté et l'amour"⁸; the sudden death of her lover condemns her once more to the senseless routine of her life, "il fallait se mettre à la tâche. D'abord préparer le dîner"⁹. The narrator of "Confession" complains of the same overwhelming boredom:

Après cinq ans que restait-il de ce grand amour ? De la reconnaissance bien sûr, beaucoup de rancune, le souvenir du plaisir, l'ennemi de l'habitude qu'on en avait pris.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 69-74.

⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 176.

The modern woman, as we shall see, is also depicted by Claire Martin as the victim of boredom within marriage. Gabrielle in Doux-amer breaks her relationship with the publisher precisely because "pendant des années" the latter had treated her "beaucoup plus comme ma femme que ma maîtresse"^{II}. When she later marries Michel Bullard their passion is destroyed by habit. Likewise Catherine's two year courtship with Bruno in Quand j'aurai payé ton visage has established a routine of thought and action. The boredom which this life of habit inevitably creates destroys their love -- even before marriage. Marriage for this later generation of women is thus also a destructive force but the possibility of escape for them is greater.

Jeanne Ferney in Quand j'aurai payé ton visage offers the reader an interesting example of someone who successfully liberates herself from the prejudices of her own generation. Married not for love but because of social and family pressures, Jeanne belongs to the generation of women who never experience the pleasures of physical love with their husband. She is prudish and reticent, and her one adulterous affair with Gilbert has left her only with the realisation of all that she has lacked as the wife of Georges. The latter's death brings for Jeanne

^{II}C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 76.

a release and a liberty which she will never again relinquish. It also brings with it the possibility for Jeanne to experience love - in the form of maternal love for Robert.

Having considered briefly the women of the previous generation, let us now look at the picture of contemporary woman as it is painted by Claire Martin. Whereas the former were usually unhappily married, the latter, rich and sophisticated, have completely broken with the very institution of marriage. This new generation recognizes that marriage spells the doom of love, bringing with it only boredom and unhappiness. Marriage no longer plays a part of any importance in the lives of Mariette, Sabine, Blanche, Valentine or of the heroines of the novels. Love for them has become a game to be won or lost on completely equal terms with their male counterparts. Indeed, liberated from childbirth and accepted into the precincts of hitherto male professions, they have developed even further into the dominant and occasional domineering partner in love. "Le Talent", "C'est raté", "Dame Putiphar" and "Rupture"¹² all deal with the triumph of female strength of character, independence and self-sufficiency over excessive male self-esteem and philandering in love.

¹²C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, pp. 15-27, 107-110, 141-146, 155-160.

The background of the "new" heroines of Claire Martin is rather vague. They come from a rich, worldly milieu, with the exception of Gabrielle in Doux-amer who will acquire this status through her own successful work. Like their male counterparts, they take little account of material possessions and social restrictions. There is, however, one interesting parallel between each of the heroines of the novels: Gabrielle, Catherine and the narrator of Les Morts have each had an unhappy childhood. The love which they seek is thus a love of compensation for their past. Gabrielle is the product of a wretched youth in which love was never allowed to flourish:

La mort des êtres qu'on devrait aimer et qu'on n'aime pas, a quelque chose d'effrayant, de désespérant...¹³
 Gabrielle avait été lésée du plus normal des amours.

It is her work which initially compensates for this lack of affection in the past. When "amour-passion" for Michel Bullard strikes Gabrielle, it totally replaces her work as a compensatory element in her life and, indeed, she finds herself incapable of writing. Catherine Lange is, likewise, a victim of her past. After revealing her youth to Bruno Ferney she must accept a two-year trial courtship:

Avant ces confidences il avait, autant que l'autorisait ce roman encore en sa préface, quelque peu parlé de mariage. Après il n'en fut plus question.¹⁴

¹³C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 35.

¹⁴C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, p. 12.

Love, until this meeting with Bruno, had given Catherine a facile means of escape from herself and the memory of her past:

Mais je m'y étais, auparavant, toujours jetée avec une fureur qui ressemblait fort à une envie d'en finir, un besoin de rafler et d'épuiser, en toute hâte, comme on s'empiffre, comme un ivrogne veut voir le fond de la bouteille. Pour passer à une autre bouteille, assurément.¹⁵

Her love and marriage with Bruno and then her passion for Robert will, however, finally grant Catherine a stability and a security which had previously been denied her. The childhood of the narrator of Les Morts was no less unhappy. The memory of her past, imbued with a veritable hatred for those who destroyed her youth, invades the book. She declares to her friend:

Bah! les malheurs passés ne servent vraiment à rien qu'à faire des livres, et ça n'est pas la peine d'inventer quand on en a un aussi bel assortiment, plein un ciel, avec une affreuse étoile pour enfants-martyrs, accrochée au-dessus.¹⁶

As for Catherine and Gabrielle, love offers the narrator a compensation for past misery. This unhappy past, shared by each of the heroines of the novels, is a striking parallel to Claire Martin's own youth.

Let us now consider the principal traits of these heroines. They are intelligent women, capable of dissecting their feelings - and those of others - with perspicacity. In "Lettre à Werther"¹⁷ we see the state of mind of the male character revealed by his

¹⁵Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁶C. Martin, Les Morts, p.59.

¹⁷C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, pp. 81-83.

lady with great clarity. In "C'est raté"¹⁸ the woman rapidly detects the motives of the lover in inciting her jealousy. The form of the novel in Quand J'aurai payé ton visage and Les Morts allows the reader to penetrate directly into the minds of Catherine and the narrator. The judgements which the former passes on Robert shows an analysing and perceptive mind. It is the narrator of Les Morts, however, who is most intimately revealed to the reader. The form of the novel, that of a dialogue between the narrator, a spokesman for Claire Martin herself, and a questioner, who assumes the role of confidant and may be only another aspect of the narrator herself, allows the reader to penetrate directly into the narrator's mind. The judgements which she passes on her past and on her lovers are sharply perceptive.

This power of observation and ability to analyse events and characters emphasise in the female characters their coldness and unemotional attitude to love. The reader never sees the female characters as prey to their own emotions; on the contrary they retain a distance from and a superiority over the emotional upheavals of their respective lovers. Sonia remains impervious to Thierry's distress;¹⁹ the heroine of "C'est raté"²⁰ casts aside her despairing lover with calm. Gabrielle treats the publisher continually with coldness and indifference. Gabrielle's only

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.107-110.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.15-21.

²⁰ Ibid., pp.107-110.

emotional demonstration is not the result of her feelings for her dead husband, or for the publisher, who is once more offering her his love, but stems solely from the realization of the personal motivation behind her actions. Neither Catherine nor the narrator of Les Morts display any passionate outbursts of emotion. The tears and anger of Robert and the suicidal lengths to which the "deuxième du nom" is driven, are alien to the nature of these female characters.

Claire Martin's heroines are devoid of all those features which might connect them with a family and a home. Since they are now made sterile by the author, they are ready to give their physical love without experiencing any moral qualms. Claire Martin explains this new situation thus:

Pour ma part, je trouve gênant de commencer un manuscrit qui, demain - au cas où je survivrais - peut n'avoir plus de sens ni pour les autres, ni même pour moi. Cela conduit à la tentation de "l'aquoibonisme". C'est pour la même raison que mes personnages n'ont pas le désir, ni même la notion, de perpétuer notre espèce menacée. La vie s'arrête à eux et cela se reflète sur leur moralité.²¹

This liberty in love encourages equality between a man and a woman. The female's superior intelligence, however, allows her to turn the game of love to her own advantage. Deceitfulness is one of her main weapons. Sabine, for instance, has no scruples about robbing her best friend of her lover; "Comme ça sera doux de prendre l'amant de sa meilleure amie."²² Mariette cunningly and deceitfully destroys

²¹C. Martin, "Témoignage", Le Roman canadien-français, Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (janvier 1967), 348-349.

²²C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p. 142.

André's growing affection for Valentine.²³ Marie's girl-friend does not hesitate to show her friend every sympathy at the discovery of Luc's deception with Francine, while secretly rejoicing at the latter's misfortune and profiting from it to further her own relationship with Luc:

Une aussi bonne amie que Francine, qui aurait cru tout ça d'elle? Justement, ma petite Marie, puisque c'est une si bonne amie, qui n'aurait pas cru tout ça d'elle? Je lui tapote l'épaule avec, au fond, assez peu de conviction. Moi aussi, je suis une bonne amie.²⁴

As the publisher in Doux-amer says, "Chacun connaît l'extraordinaire duplicité, j'allais dire la naïve duplicité à quoi peut atteindre une femme amoureuse."²⁵ We must also remember that it was trickery which enabled Claire Martin and her brothers and sisters to outwit their father.

It is by means of this deceitfulness, by their intelligence and above all by their strength of character that women are superior to men in love. Indeed, the women may be considered as the victors, certainly as the dominant partners in the male-female relationship. Gabrielle is capable of dictating the way she and the publisher make love. He remains constantly subordinate to Gabrielle's work. When married to Michel Bullard Gabrielle has an intransigence and invulnerability which prefigure her husband's dismissal. Supporting him financially she resents the impressions, physical and mental,

²³ Ibid., pp. 99-105.

²⁴ Ibid., p.91.

²⁵ C. Martin, Doux-amer, p.82.

which his presence has made on her life:

Alors que cette présence lui était si précieuse
elle renâclait déjà sur les traces qu'elle laissait.²⁵

Catherine Lange, strong-willed and intelligent, is, likewise, the instigator of the action in Quand j'aurai payé ton visage. Her courtship with Bruno Ferney is undermined from the beginning by her determination to succeed, that is to say, to gain his approval so that he will ask her to marry him. When she achieves this goal, however, she is no longer in love with Bruno. Catherine's attitude towards Robert is marked at least initially by her considerably greater strength of character and experience. But again it is the narrator of Les Morts who most clearly illustrates this feminine dominance. The love which she practises is a game - a dangerous one in which she keeps the upper hand; the lover at her feet, she sees, not as a subservient admirer, but as a wild animal ready to pounce:

Ce mardi-là , l'homme qui étais assis à mes pieds
ne s'y trouvait pas comme un petit garçon aux pieds
de sa mère mais seulement comme un souple renard qui
se rapproche de l'oiseau qu'il veut fasciner.²⁶

Such an animal must be tamed not by strength, but by wile and ruse. She never relinquishes this domination, constantly gauging his advances and unobstrusively regulating his behaviour.

Besides being the dominant partners in love, Claire Martin's heroines also have a sensitivity to outward appearances which

²⁶Ibid., p.106.

²⁷C. Martin, Les Morts, p.84.

borders on intolerance. This trait assumes considerable importance in the success of love: Elmire abandons her escort when she sees that, "Au bout de chaque doigt, il y avait un gros ongle bordé de noir."²⁸ Gabrielle has an extremely delicate sense of smell:

La finesse de son odorat était extrême. Avec elle, le sujet des odeurs semblait inépuisable. C'était la source de la moitié de ses plaisirs et des trois quarts de ses mauvaises humeurs.²⁹

The love which the narrator feels for the "deuxième du nom", is one which she creates consciously despite her repulsion at the disorder within his apartment and the odour of tobacco which permeates it.

We have already considered the compensatory role for an unhappy past which love plays for the heroines of the novels. Love assumes, however, even greater significance for them as a compensation for and a weapon against the onslaught of time. Jeanne Ferney, who reexperiences love after her husband's death, is made acutely aware of the rejuvenating effect of this upsurge of love; "J'ai eu vingt ans à quarante-cinq ans. Je ne me rattraperai jamais."³⁰ The heroine of "Suis-moi"³¹, Gabrielle,

²⁸C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p. 132.

²⁹C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 41.

³⁰C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, p. 153.

³¹C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, pp. 45-48.

Catherine and the narrator are each preoccupied by the passage of time, which inevitably brings with it old age and death: they turn to love as a means of counteracting the emotional and physical effects of passing time. The passions to which the heroines give way are, therefore, the direct consequence of their acute awareness of life's fragility. Love, to be successful, must be immediate and passionate; each minute must be savoured to the full. The publisher recognizes that the failure of his relationship with Gabrielle was precisely this lack of passion. Catherine's marriage to Bruno is, likewise, doomed from its beginning, for she has not forgiven him for the loss of time involved in a two year courtship:

Et puis, j'avais le sentiment d'avoir laissé passer le plus beau de notre amour, sans y mordre, de lui avoir laissé prendre de l'âge, sans profiter de sa jeunesse. Le moment favorable pour que j'en tire le maximum de bonne heure était passé.³²

Fear of old age can lead, however, to rash action; Gabrielle is thus brought to tears with the recognition of the fundamental cause of her failure:

Tu sais pourquoi cela a tourné ainsi. C'est que j'ai confondu l'amour et la peur de vieillir. J'ai pris peur, comme n'importe quelle sotte.³³

³²C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, p. 13.

³³C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 185.

Again, it is the narrator of Les Morts, aware of impending old age, who has most consciously created her love for the "deuxième du nom" as a means of compensation for her past behaviour in love. It is also to this love that she looks for a compensation for the death which war has brought. Giving herself wholly to the present moment and the love it brings is, in fact, for her, a desperate attempt both to hold time still and to regain lost time:

Avant même qu'il ne me voie, je m'étais avisée que la vie passe, que cet homme me rappelait des amours anciennes, qu'il faut se pourvoir avant que la mort n'ait prélevé le meilleur.³⁴

Rich and educated, the heroines created by Claire Martin, live in a world dominated entirely by the power of love. This love provides them with a means of compensation for past unhappiness and a weapon against the ravages of old age. Untroubled by social restrictions and freed of childbirth, they enjoy a superior role in the male-female partnership, for their intelligence and emotional strength make them the dominant partner in love.

³⁴C. Martin, Les Morts, p. 16.

CLAIRE MARTIN'S CONCEPT OF LOVE

Before we analyse Claire Martin's concept of love, let us recapitulate those major features which we have discussed in previous chapters. The love which the male and female characters share must, in order to be successful, exist outside marriage. The relationship which is established between the latter, intelligent and emotionally strong, and the former, sensitive and weak, is determined by their respective characters. These features of love are, as we have seen, the consequence of Claire Martin's reaction to her own unhappy childhood.

The male and female characters of Claire Martin's universe are, however, artificial persons who lack "vraisemblance": their view of the world is a severely limited one which scarcely ever surpasses the immediate and is permanently distorted by the turmoil wrought within them by love. They are functional characters whose sole purpose is to reveal and illustrate their creator's own concept of love - a concept which is based on the experiences of Claire Martin's past. The characters accomplish this purpose not through their actions - in fact the "péripiéties" of the novels are of a startling paucity and of a stark simplicity, reminiscent of the style and content of the tales in Avec ou sans amour ; they fulfil this function

rather through their thoughts. Most of the tales and all the novels are written in a first person narrative which allows Claire Martin to reveal directly her own concept of love to the reader. The critic Annick Vanbrugghe comments: " Claire Martin saisit ses personnages sur le vif, les décortique avec une minutie de vivisecteur, met à jour les élans du coeur et les pensées les plus secrètes."¹ Although this is a specific reference to Avec ou sans amour it is equally applicable to all Claire Martin's works.

Before we consider the various types of love which are to be found in Claire Martin's works, we shall detail several of the attributes which are common to all forms of love. The love which is first generated between a man and a woman is based on the attraction of physical beauty. Claire Martin has herself declared:

Je suis très attirée, également, par le problème de la beauté physique, car c'en est un. Dans notre monde entiché d'extériorité, peu d'éléments sont aussi déterminants que la beauté.²

Catherine, the heroine of Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, is instantaneously attracted to Robert, "le portrait même de l'amour"³,

¹A. Vanbrugghe, "De la tentation de la lucidité à l'amour dépoétisé: Avec ou sans amour de Claire Martin", Livres et auteurs québécois, 1969, 236.

²C. Martin, "Témoignage", Le Roman canadien-français, Archives des lettres canadiennes, III (janvier 1967), 351.

³C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, p.55.

because of his physical beauty. The narrator in Les Morts demands that her lovers be "beaux" and "excitants"⁴.

The continuation of the male-female relationship, after the initial physical attraction, is based on words. This idea is clearly stated in Les Morts where love was kindled by words - "c'était le feu des mots qui nous allumait"⁵ - and where it was kept alive by words:

N'avez-vous jamais déploré, que, dans une aventure amoureuse, on ne se contente, le plus souvent, que de l'inévitable ? Ou est l'audace ? Nulle part que dans les mots, je vous assure.⁶

This love is finally consecrated in literature, the written word: "Un amour qui n'est pas garanti par quelques lettres brûlantes, est-ce de l'amour ?"⁷ J.-Ethier Blais describes this relationship thus: "L'instinct est à la fois sémantique et sexuel"⁸. Indeed, letters of confession and declaration abound in Claire Martin's work. The novel which the publisher is reading on the first page of Doux-amer is none other than the story of his and Gabrielle's love.

⁴C. Martin, Les Morts, p.25.

⁵Ibid., p.91.

⁶Ibid., p. 46.

⁷Ibid., p. 112.

⁸J.-Ethier Blais, "Les Morts de Claire Martin", Le Devoir (19 décembre, 1970), p.

Laughter, too, plays an essential part in the composition of love:

Il est vrai, le plus perdu de tous les amours est celui où l'on ne rit plus, car il manque de la plus chaude des complicités. Le rire, mais d'une certaine espèce, c'est l'aphrodisiaque, c'est le préliminaire rêvé.

It is the laughter which Gabrielle and Michel Bullard share in Doux-amer which marks the beginning of their love. Love will, in turn, bring as its principal characteristic order; "l'amour apporte de l'ordre."¹⁰ but order, like perfect mutual love, is an ideal which remains almost unattainable in a world where death from war, mistrust and incomprehension reign. Only Gabrielle, when her love is directed exclusively to the creation of her own books, attains a measure of order. The transference of her love to Michel Bullard brings chaos to her life and she finds herself incapable of writing. Since it is only on the final page of Quand j'aurai payé ton visage that Robert and Catherine reach a greater understanding in love, and on the final page of Doux-amer that hope of love is seen still to exist for the publisher and Gabrielle, we can only speculate on the establishment of greater order in their lives.

We have already briefly seen the threats which exist for love. Jealousy provides a weapon in love; it is, however, a two-edged one which can distort and ultimately destroy love. The

⁹C. Martin, Les Morts, p.62.

¹⁰ibid., p. 97.

jealousy which Marie and Francine¹¹ experience after the discovery of Luc's deceit, dictates their reactions and both lose his love. In the same way, by her jealousy, Gisèle¹² drives her lover, Léon, into marrying Colette. Gabrielle in Doux-amer indulges in flirtation and coquetry to regain her husband's fading interest but this only leads to self-destruction. Finally, Catherine, possessed by her jealousy of David, Bruno and the world of nightclubs, almost destroys her love by her own doubt and fears.

As we have seen,¹³ it is, however, primarily marriage which menaces love, for marriage inevitably entails both routine and boredom. It is as a reaction to this fear of boredom that we may now consider the first kind of love which exists in Claire Martin's works: namely "amour-passion." It is the routine created by time which destroys passion and the delicate relationship which it has created. The principal characteristic, therefore, of "amour-passion" is that it must be of short duration. Just like the "deuxième du nom" in Les Morts, the perfect lover must be an itinerant, who is already on the point of departure from the very first meeting. The "amour-passion" which Gabrielle shared with Michel Bullard and which burned so brightly for a short time, flounders on the reality of their characters, and they both return to the monotony of everyday existence:

¹¹C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, pp. 87-92.

¹²Ibid., pp. 35-38.

¹³See above pp. 28-31.

Leurs amours suivaient la courbe ordinaire des amours orageuses: disputes, fougueses réconciliations, disputes de plus en plus fréquentes, réconciliations de moins en moins fougueses, puis s'écourtèrent, se rétrécirent, fondirent jusqu'à ne se produire plus. Une brève éclaircie. Un sursaut de désir chez lui. Un reste d'humilité chez elle. Puis ils retombaient dans la hargne coutumière.¹⁴

Likewise, the passion which Robert inspired in Catherine, is gradually dissipated by the pressures of society and the greater knowledge of each other which life together has brought. The necessary brevity of "amour-passion", therefore, results inevitably in a superficial relationship where the man remains detached from his lady, unable to attain any deeper knowledge of the essential being of his partner. The narrator of Les Morts explains the distance which must be kept between the lady and her lovers thus, ". . . sans jamais les laisser accéder en nous à rien de douloureux, ne leur présentant de nos plaies, que des cicatrices lisses par où il leur est bien inutile de vouloir atteindre notre vérité".¹⁵ This attitude is, of course, a reaction against the domineering side of men as it existed for the previous generation of women. A passionate, brief love, which remains superficial is, however, by its very nature, an idealistic one: and one which is doomed to destruction. Only in Les Morts does this kind of superficial love attain perfection and only because the death of the "premier du nom" beats time

¹⁴C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 104.

¹⁵C. Martin, Les Morts, p. 96.

at its own game. He is the perfect lover, "celui à qui on n'a rien à reprocher, rien à pardonner, et qui mourra à temps."¹⁶

"Amour-idée", the opposite of "amour-passion" is, in Claire Martin's novels, closely associated with the cerebral unemotional approach of the heroines to life: Valentine, Marie, Sabine, Blanche¹⁷ never express any passionate feelings for their lovers; their love is one of circumstance and convenience. Catherine's love for Bruno in Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, centers, likewise, round one particular goal - that of marriage - and it is this ambition which binds her to him. Gabrielle's work in Doux-amer also inspires an "amour-idée", which helps the author to retain a sense of "mesure" and moderation in thought and action; the narrator describes his first impression of her thus:

Elle qui n'avait jamais pensé que juste ce qu'il fallait dans sa vie, qui ne me l'avait racontée qu'à demi mot. Tournez-vous chère, que je change de corsage.¹⁸

The advent of "amour-passion" will strip away all such moderation, all reticence; "Et puis, voilà qu'elle ne se borne pas à me montrer, mais la chair vive au-dessous, et les nerfs et les viscères."¹⁹ The narrator's love in Les Morts is one which is created solely from her own attempt to recapture the memories

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁷ Heroines of Avec ou sans amour.

¹⁸ C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

of her love for the "premier du nom". It is also a love which, as we have already seen, was consciously created in an attempt to hold back time. "Amour-idée" is ideally suited to the temperament of Claire Martin's heroines: it answers their quest for security and happiness without endangering their freedom and newly-won independence from men. It has none of the crises of "amour-passion" but neither does it offer any hope for the future.

Let us now turn to the form of love which Claire Martin would appear to suggest as a practical solution to the inevitable disappointments of love: Namely "amour-apaisement". Love as described by this author is full of unhappiness and bitterness. It is continually threatened:

En amour comme autrement, le mieux en est probablement l'ennemi. Pourquoi pas ? Presque tout est l'ennemi de l'amour.²⁰

It demands such a delicate balance of sentiment and action that moments of sublime happiness are rare indeed: the publisher and Gabrielle seem fated to know only the joy of a happiness already past. It is Catherine who comes closest to formulating Claire Martin's own theory of love:

Parce qu'on a beau vouloir l'oublier, on sait, au fond, que l'amour est trop complexe pour qu'un seul être puisse vous le dispenser toujours, qu'il intéresse en nous de parts trop différentes, le coeur et le corps, que les désirs de l'un vont vers l'inexploré et ceux

²⁰C. Martin, Avec ou sans amour, p. 90.

de l'autre vers la pérennité, que le coeur peut s'attarder là où le corps se dessaisit. . . L'amour est, comme toute chose, un sentiment qui évolue. Il perd et il acquiert, et ce qu'il perd, il est trop facile de le trouver ailleurs.²¹

Love is a sentiment which evolves, which demands effort and patience - it must fulfil both heart and body, but it is so complex and its demands on each individual are so varied that the time of complete harmony is bound to be brief. Because of this frailty and seemingly inevitable self-destruction, the only hope for a continuation of life together seems to lie in the "apaisement" which the publisher offers Gabrielle:

Voici un peu de paix, des travaux qui se rejoignent, une grande habitude l'un de l'autre, un remède à l'esseulement, de l'indulgence, de la fraternité.²²

Robert and Catherine's final calm acceptance of their mutual deficiencies reflects this same "apaisement": "c'est ça l'amour. Il ne sera jamais tout à fait comme je l'aurais voulu, mais tel quel, je le garde."²³ Thus, in the final event, the sweet aspect of love does take precedence over the bitter, disappointing side. The final pages of Quand j'aurai payé ton visage reveal a new hope of love for Robert and Catherine. Likewise Gabrielle's letter to the publisher reopens the same

²¹C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, p. 119.

²²C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. 191.

²³C. Martin, Quand j'aurai payé ton visage, p. 183.

hope for contentment.

There exist other kinds of love in Claire Martin's works: the "amour-maternel" of Jeanne Ferney and, as we have seen, the "amour de compensation" of Gabrielle, Catherine and the narrator for their unhappy youths. Despite the diversity of the types of love described, however, the portrait of love which is revealed in the novels is a partial one. It is a love viewed in retrospect and which carries the scar of a bitter, analyzing and unforgiving memory: "Et la mémoire, envenimée, vomit des mots, des mots, des mots."²⁴

In Doux-amer, the psychological time which is presented is only the duration of the narrator's act of remembering (and therefore the time necessary for the reader to read the book). Apart from the last two pages, the point of view of the narrator on his past is, from the outset, coloured by the experience of the more immediate past and of his present situation - that is to say the knowledge of Gabrielle's unhappy marriage and her final departure to the country. His love for Gabrielle is thus relived in the knowledge of its failure. The analysis he makes of his love, the judgements he passes, are those of the present on the past:

Je crains que tous ces souvenirs lointains ne soient faussés par ce qui s'est passé après. La mémoire, comme le coeur, se laisse abuser, et souvent par

²⁴C. Martin, Les Morts, p. 41.

celui-ci, comme de juste.²⁵

This retrospective story, although recounted in chronological order, is based entirely on psychological time: The account of Gabrielle's happy life together with the publisher, a happiness which in reality lasted ten years, is reduced so as to appear a minor part of their relationship: "Ce n'est pas le temps des événements évoqués, mais l'intensité de la conscience présente qui en fait état."²⁶ The emphasis thus placed on the destruction of their love, distorts and falsifies this love. Claire Martin, through the mind of the publisher, has chosen to remember and emphasize the pessimistic side of love. Doux-amer, far from representing the course of love in its entirety, is in fact the story of the destruction of that love, seen through the distorting mirror of the narrator's memory.

Although in Quand j'aurai payé ton visage there is diversity of point of view, the concept of love which is conveyed therein is no less depressing. This novel juxtaposes the points of view of two people who have been deeply involved in the same events and who, in their retrospective consideration of their past, judge events differently. For each of them, the memory interprets

²⁵C. Martin, Doux-amer, p. II.

²⁶R. Robidoux, "Claire Martin, romancière", Etudes françaises (Juin, 1965), p. 75.

and analyses the past. These "modulations du souvenir désolé"²⁷ strike at the foundation of love even more directly than in Doux-amer; how precarious, how fragile love, built on such diversity, must be. The variety of emotions which Robert and Catherine experience in the face of the same events, the importance which the concealment of this variety of emotion assumes, the difference of interpretation of events while they are nevertheless linked closely in a mutual passionate love, emphasize the delicate nature of the male-female relationship. Quand j'aurai payé ton visage thus reinforces the image of love as it was presented in Doux-amer.

Since Les Morts is situated completely outwith any social context - in the mind of the narrator - the consequent abstraction allows the reader to penetrate more completely into Claire Martin's world of love. It is also the novel which offers the least hope for any durable love relationship. The dialogue is concerned with a love story whose end has been marked by the receipt of the envelope with "deceased" written on it. Within the story, however, already situated in the past, the narrator delves further back in her memory to remember the "premier du nom", and even further to recapture the memories of her youth. Between the story of her two lovers and of her youth, the memory

²⁷Ibid.

establishes a network of communications and interrelationships which may be real or fictitious. It destroys, reconstructs and interprets differently an episode lived in the past, and the narrator is not aware of the transformation. She herself realizes however that "ce n'est qu'aujourd'hui, en vous le disant, que je souffre de cette intonation de pauvre"²⁸. Likewise the loves which the narrator has experienced have also undergone such a transformation. The feelings which love aroused in the narrator were passionate, tragic, but not only does the memory render them cold and lifeless, it also falsifies them:

Mais sitôt que l'amour tarit, tout éclate de ces vieux projectiles dont on avait oublié ou même dont on ignorait l'existence. Une phrase vieille de quatre mois, et qu'on avait à peine écoutée quand on aimait, blesse comme si elle venait d'être dite et même plus encore car la rouille du temps la rend plus meurtrière.²⁹

This distortion of the point of view is one which we have already seen in Doux-amer and Quand j'aurai payé ton visage. Claire Martin's portrayal of the diverse types of love is thus completely transformed by the manner of their presentation.

Although we have attempted to dissect Claire Martin's concept of love, the enumeration of those features which stimulate love, which prolong it and which eventually destroy it, and of diverse types of love, removes much of the complexity of love

²⁸C. Martin, Les Morts, p. 17.

²⁹Ibid., p. 41.

which the author manages to create so successfully in her works. Her characters do not progress in love along a rigid pattern of physical attraction, laughter and the boredom which habit creates. They are, rather, subject to the hazards of chance; they react not just to one well-defined type of love but are seen to be driven and influenced simultaneously by many. It is this atmosphere of realism which Claire Martin manages to create which is the principal achievement of her work. Although the ideas which she expresses are in themselves unoriginal, credit must be given her as one of the first writers to express these ideas in French-Canadian literature.

CONCLUSION

In the three preceding chapters we have sought to elucidate Claire Martin's attitude towards love and to emphasise those features which appear to be central to her work. If we wish to evaluate, however, the validity of Claire Martin's portrait of love, we are faced with a considerable problem: the critic must initially accept that such a portrait is of necessity a partial one, for no writer can hope to encompass in his works the whole experience of human love. Claire Martin has been criticized precisely for the limited plane of action and thought in which she situates her characters. It is indeed true that the male and female characters alike, as the events related, are seen from one single point of interest - that is to say they are seen exclusively in their reaction to a love experienced in the past. The reader's knowledge is limited to the principal events in the course of love: the insight which he gains into the minds of the characters is, likewise, restricted to those thoughts pertaining to love.

Although this criticism of Claire Martin's work would therefore appear valid, the discerning critic appreciates the diversity of love itself which is to be found within the novels: diversity of love in its manifestations, in the varied reactions it provokes, and in the consequences of its power. The range

of situation, of motivation, of action which love is seen to create in the works of Claire Martin is a clear indication of the author's imagination and skill. "Amour-passion", "amour-idée", "amour-apaisement", "amour de compensation", "amour maternel" - in such a wealth of sentiment, the critic who sees only the limitations of one single theme brought into prominence, is blind indeed.

Likewise, despite the outward uniformity of treatment of the theme of love - a first person narrative of a past event - the very function to which this form is put, varies from novel to novel. Doux-amer is a psychological novel; R. Robidoux calls it a "roman intérieur"¹. In this work love is seen as playing exclusively on the emotions of two people. In Quand j'aurai payé ton visage love has become an expression of social revolt; it is presented as a direct means or expression of rebellion against the hypocrisy and false values which exist within a sector of society: "Dans le roman canadien, la recherche de l'amour est en même temps une recherche d'évasion et de libération."² In the latter part of the novel the focus will be once more, however, on the delicate balance of Catherine and Robert's love. Les Morts is almost a "roman à thèse" in which Claire Martin's

¹R. Robidoux, and A. Renaud, Le Roman canadien-français du vingtième siècle. (Ottawa: Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1966), pp. 147-162.

²A. Renaud, "L'Héroïne du roman canadien et l'expérience de l'amour", Le Roman canadien-français, p. 186.

most explicit ideas on love are contained in the form of aphorisms and proverbs. The role of love has been extended even further in this work: love is the final solution for the solitude of humanity, for the death brought by war and the hypocrisy of society which the "deuxième du nom" has rejected. It would not be amiss, therefore, to consider the theme of love as developing within Claire Martin's works to assume a more conscious social role. Although love is the single theme of Claire Martin's novels and tales, it has so many facets, so many paradoxical yet complementary aspects that the restriction of content and point of view does not interfere with the realism of the author's portrayal of love.

Realism is also present in the character portrayal, for although the protagonists are all motivated by love they are not stereotypes. The female characters are not matriarchal beings, intent on the subjection of man; despite their essentially functional role they arouse sympathy in the reader through their human qualities - they show doubt and uncertainty, they are capable of coquetry, they daydream of future happiness. The men are never pitiful in their weakness; their display of emotions, their naivety and their fears are failings which merely help to humanize them in the eyes of the reader. Gabrielle and Catherine, the publisher and Robert, are not interchangeable characters.

Despite the lack of particularity of circumstance, despite their single motivation in life, the characters retain their individuality in the mind of the reader.

The criticism has also been levelled at Claire Martin that the love described in her works is a particularly negative one in which unhappiness and disaster appear as the dominant characteristics. Indeed, since the point of view is in all the novels a retrospective one it is true that the events narrated follow psychological time and inevitably reflect the present state of mind of the narrator. Nevertheless, as the narrator in Les Morts admits, "écrire des romans, c'est toujours un peu mentir dans la sincérité."³ The pessimistic aspect of love is certainly very strong in Claire Martin's works: even while recognizing the absolute necessity of love, the narrator of Les Morts explains the choice of the traveller as the perfect lover in the following terms:

C'est une bonne façon de combiner ce qu'on a, avec ce qui vous manque, de concilier le solide et le fugace, de ne pas compromettre l'avenir tout en embellissant le passé.⁴

To see only this negative side to love in the novels is, however, to ignore several of its important aspects. Does the ending of Doux-amer not open up the possibility of happiness? More

³C. Martin, Les Morts, p. 136.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

especially, does the final reunion of Robert and Catherine not pave the way to a more durable love ? In all Claire Martin's works the bitter and the sweet aspects of love are seen to run concurrently: sometimes the one, sometimes the other appears the stronger. Even Les Morts, which seems to offer the least hope for any kind of happiness - which discards even the "apaisement" offered in the two previous novels - is transformed in its adaption for the stage into Moi, je n'étais qu'espoir⁵.

It is true that such a picture of love is neither original nor is it better painted than those of authors who have previously written on the same theme. Claire Martin's concept has neither the formalism of Stendhal's seven stages of love⁶, nor the philosophical ^{import} of Sartre's declarations on love⁷. Her women lack the dominating passion of Racinian figures - but rather sink back into the mediocrity of everyday "apaisement". Claire Martin's reader does not expect, nor indeed find, any new concept of love; there are no startling revelations within her novels, there is no aesthetic of love offered therein:

Tout cela sans doute est de la littérature pour consommation courante: c'est menu, c'est du quotidien, cela va à ras

⁵C. Martin, Moi, je n'étais qu'espoir (Ottawa: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1972).

⁶Stendhal, De l'amour (Paris: Garnier, 1959), p. 15.

⁷J.-P. Sartre, L'Être et le néant (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 434.

de sol et ne découvre aucun monde, cela n'introduit aucune perspective transcendante.⁸

Her skill and insight lie, rather, in the dissection, in retrospect, of a heart which has suffered: she follows the innermost turmoil of the mind, aware both of its meanest thought and its most generous impulse. The reader is plunged directly into the very thoughts of the characters: between them and the reader there exist no barrier, no external judge to reinterpret the facts or recreate the emotions by conjecture. It is the mind of the narrator itself which is laid bare before the reader. Letters, confessions, dialogues and, more often, a first person account of events, are techniques which adapt ideally to Claire Martin's insight into human character and behaviour. The reader experiences, along with the narrator, the fears, the envy and the passions which love arouses - nothing remains hidden, neither the most perfidious thought nor the humblest joy. The love which Claire Martin describes is not a flat emotion which may be classified in its diverse stages of development and manner of manifestation. It retains its contradictions, its irreconcilable impulses. The reader can recognize in her aphorisms on love the reflection of his own nature.

⁸ P. de Grandpré, "Comment l'esprit vient aux filles, Avec ou sans amour", Dix ans de vie littéraire au Canada français (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1966), p. 161.

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