NARRATIVE VOICE IN

ANNE HEBERT'S KAMOURASKA

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IN ANNE HEBERT'S KAMOURASKA

by

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INTRODUCTION

> ...une technique romanesque renvoie toujours à la métaphysique du romancier. La tâche du critique est de dégager celle-ci avant d'apprécier celle-là.[1]

Inasmuch as narrative voice is an integral part of technique in the novel, we shall attempt to show how narration serves to express the main themes in Kamouraska. Indeed, without close analysis of the characteristics and roles of each narrative voice within this novel, one can neither appreciate the creation of the novel, nor its total significance on a thematic level. Hence, our purpose here is to discover the importance of narrative voices for the theme of Kamouraska.

It is important to realize that one cannot arrive at any general conclusions about the different types of narration from a particular study. Thus, a general discussion of the technique of narrative voices, although necessary for its recognition in a novel, can only lead to a superficial understanding of the effects that any one type of narrative voice provides. For instance, the reason for using first person narration in La chute[2] differs from

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[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, Situations I (Paris 1948), p. 71.

[2] Albert Camus, La chute (Paris 1956).

that of Le torrent[3], as we shall demonstrate later.

There are essentially three narrative voices, one or several of which may be used to narrate a story. These voices correspond to the three personal pronouns, "I", "you" and "he", "she" or "it". The latter, by far the most frequently used in the traditional novel, presents the reader with an external view of the characters and situations within a novel. Owing to his privileged position outside of the action of the novel, this narrator is considered omniscient. As such, the reader is firmly controlled by the narrator who is also in complete control of his characters. Any of Balzac's or Zola's novels illustrates the use of this type of narrative voice. Let us take L'assommoir as an example. In the latter, the reader is told the time of day, the colours of buildings, the geography of streets, and the particular characteristics of the individuals within the novel. As such, the reader, having been totally alienated from the character, accepts as truth the dictates of the third person narrative voice. Thus it is that much of what happens to Gervaise simply proves her given identity:

> On avait tort de lui croire une grosse volonté, elle était très faible, au contraire; elle se laissait aller où on

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[3]Anne Hébert, Le torrent (Montréal 1963).

> la poussait par crainte de causer de la peine à quelqu'un.[4]

Hence, from the beginning of the novel, the reader knows that Gervaise is weak, and that nothing will change this basic feature; the main character's actions are then predictable. The problem with this type of narrative voice lies in the reader's ensuing passivity towards the creation of a work of art. He is not asked to make any judgements on the narrative world, nor arrive at any conclusions, for the omniscient third person narrator does all this for him.

Both the traditional and the modern novelist realized the problems facing them with the use of the omniscient third person narrative voice, and sought to make narration far more realistic with regard to the reader. The introduction of an opinionated narrative voice gives to the narrative world a dimension of subjectivity. Contrary to the omniscient third person narrative voice outside the action of the novel, the opinionated third person narrative voice, by his criticism of the characters, places himself within the narrative world. We can again look to L'assommoir for an example of this:

> Vrai, on voyait les bedons se gonfler à mesure. Les dames étaients grosses. Ils pétaient dans leur peau, les sacrés goinfres![5]

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[4] Emile Zola, L'assommoir (Paris 1965), p. 58.

[5] Ibid., p. 249.

By describing Gervaise's birthday dinner in this manner, the narrator is taking a direct stand, and hence is no longer objective. The effect of this technique can readily be understood. The reader is left with one man's opinions which, although they lend realism to a novel obviously created by one man, he must either accept or reject. Thus, the reader becomes involved in the narrative world in so far as he can no longer sit back and accept the absolute truth of an omniscient narrative voice; rather, he must seek to justify the comments of a particular narrative voice by studying patterns of language or symbolism in the novel. However, even the opinionated third person narrative voice does create a certain amount of distance between the reader and the character, for the perspective of the reader still remains, in part, that of the narrator.

With the introduction of the second person narrative voice within the novel, there arise new aspects of narration which offset the unreliability of an opinionated third person narrative voice or even of a first person narrator. The second person narrative voice tells a character what he has done, and for this reason, is deemed more reliable; the character himself may be hiding something from the reader. Michel Butor justifies his use of this technique in La modification[6] by saying that,

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[6]Michel Butor, La modification (Paris 1960).

> C'est parce qu'il y a quelqu'un à qui l'on raconte sa propre histoire, quelque chose de lui qu'il ne connaît pas, ou du moins pas encore au niveau du langage, qu'il peut y avoir un récit à la seconde personne, qui sera par conséquent toujours un récit "didactique".[7]

In the case of La modification, the second person narrative voice, the only narrator of the novel, plays the role of the main character's conscience, and as such, is deemed far more reliable than narration in either the first or the third person.

There are definite advantages to the use of first person narration in a novel. Since the narrator is the character himself presenting his own story, the traditional distance between the character and the reader is eliminated. No longer is there an outside voice controlling the mind of either the character or the reader, and the latter is forced to arrive at his own conclusions. An example of the effect of this technique can be seen in Le torrent by Anne Hébert. Here, François narrates his own story exclusively for the reader, and as such, the impact of the former's mind becomes more acute for the reader. However, there can arise problems with an exclusive use of first person narration. For example, in La chute by Albert Camus, the first person narrator contradicts himself over and over again (as most human beings do) which forces the reader to question the

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[7]Michel Butor, Essais sur le roman (Paris 1964), p. 80.

credibility of what the narrator says. This, in itself, can prove very valuable, for the reader must then seek to form his own opinions concerning those of a realistic character who is not omniscient.

The problems of unreliability, although realistic, have been solved by many novelists through the use of several narrative voices which, only together, form the true personality of the main character. An example of this technique can be found in a Mexican novel, La muerte de Artemio Cruz[8] by Carlos Fuentes. We shall outline briefly the effect of the narrative voices in this novel for it bears close resemblance to that of Kamouraska. In the former novel, the first person narrative voice presents the reality of a dying man's mind struggling, by means of his memory and of taped conversations, to remain alive. Beneath this external reality lies the subconscious, exteriorized in the second person narrative voice, and set up as a contradiction of the first. What follows, then, is a dialectic between two realities of the same man, and the ensuing victory of the subconscious. The third person narrative voice forms the background for the two, and as such, presents the necessary information about the main character's past life. Together, these three narrative voices form the total picture

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[8]Carlos Fuentes, La muerte de Artemio Cruz (Mexico 1969).

of the main character, Artemio Cruz.

Although for different reasons, the technique of three narrative voices used to present one character is found in Kamouraska. Hence, we shall seek to discover the effect of such a split in narration; ultimately, narrative technique is the process by which the theme of the novel is developed.

The novel of the twentieth century is no longer a purely fictitious history of one man endowed with a fixed identity and predictable reactions. On the contrary, the modern novel is a testing ground wherein are suggested certain aspects of existence beyond the superficial realities of life. As such, new techniques are necessary for the manifestation of a theme which is no longer stated by an omniscient narrative voice, but rather, created by narrative technique and an intelligent reader.

The influence of phenomenology (to be discussed further in our conclusion) has forced the novelist away from the illusion of an absolute truth. Since nothing is certain beyond one man's view of something, the omniscient third person narrative voice is far from realistic. In his novel, La jalousie [9], Alain Robbe-Grillet clearly demonstrates the principle that nothing is true beyond the personal view of the husband. As the narrator of the novel, the latter has

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[9] Alain Robbe-Grillet, La jalousie (New York 1963).

no characteristics, name, nor identity beyond what he actually sees and how he sees it. Much like a camera lens, the narrator sees; his vision is divorced from all cultural significance that man puts on that which surrounds him. In this manner, Alain Robbe-Grillet places before the eyes of the reader scenes which are more than just subjective, but also relative to the position of the narrator. Thus, the reality (and hence the theme) of the novel is created by the vision of one man, rather than presented and controlled by the absolute power of an omniscient third person narrative voice.

It is interesting to note that the critics of Kamouraska have been most hesitant to discuss the technique of the novel. Although their articles are, for the most part, short, very little is even said about narrative voices. Just as in their analyses of Anne Hébert's other works, they tend to place the entire emphasis of their discussion on symbolism and on general themes. It seems obvious to us that, if the novelist purposely creates a series of narrative voices, they should not be over-looked, since they form an integral part of the narrative world. In his article, "Kamouraska d'Anne Hébert", Alain Bosquet refers only to the use of the first and third person narrative voices, as a way to "varier la tonalité du récit".[10] Similarly, neither Réjean

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[10]Alain Bosquet, "Kamouraska d'Anne Hébert" in Le Monde (3 octobre 1970), p. 17.

Robidoux[11] nor Jean Ethier-Blais[12] go beyond their discussion of theme to analyze the creative process of the narrative technique. Albert Le Grand,[13] on the other hand, does examine, to a certain extent, the structure of time in Kamauraska but makes no mention of narrative voices. However, Grazia Merler[14] does describe narrative technique, but, by limiting herself to a general view of the three narrative voices, and by not examining closely the language and roles of each, she fails to see how they unite with each other to form an over-all view of the main character. Thus we have decided that, since the narrative technique of Kamouraska has not as yet been carefully analyzed, and given its importance in the modern novel, we shall look carefully at the novelist's technique of presenting the theme of the novel.

Throughout this thesis, we shall refer to Elisabeth's situation in re-living her past, as a dream. We are aware, however, that this dream is a mixture of both conscious and unconscious thoughts, and of moments of hallucination, and

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[11]Réjean Robidoux, "Kamouraska" in Livres et auteurs québécois (Montréal 1970), pp. 24-26.

[12]Jean Ethier-Blais, "Kamouraska d'Anne Hébert: à lire avec les yeux de l'âme" in Le Devoir (19 septembre 1970).

[13]Albert Le Grand, "Kamouraska ou l'ange et la bête" in Etudes françaises (mai 1971), pp. 119-143.

[14]Grazia Merler, "La Réalité dans la prose d'Anne Hébert" in Ecrits du Canada français XXXIII (Montréal 1971), pp. 46-81.

that hence, it is not a dream as such. Nevertheless, the main character is, at this point, divorced from her physical surroundings, and is for the most part unable to prevent the visions that occur. Thus, all that happens to Elisabeth's mind when she is alone in her room, will be referred to as dream. By this word, we are not referring, as some would believe, to fantasies of the mind, but rather, to its importance as a product of the unconscious.

Chapter I

THE THIRD PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE

In this chapter we propose to analyze the role of the third person narrative voice. Traditionally, the use of this perspective creates distance between the narrator and the character, and indeed between the character and the reader, for the third person narrative voice remains outside the action of the novel and is omniscient. The modern novel has, for the most part, replaced the traditional third person narrative voice with one which does not give the absolute truth and which is often an integral part of the narrative world. The effect of such a narrative perspective varies greatly, depending on the novel and hence, one cannot derive any general theories from a particular novel.

There are two aspects of the third person narrative voice in Kamouraska. We have, on the one hand, a narrative voice which seems to be traditional and yet displays many characteristics to the contrary, and on the other hand, a narrative voice within the dream, which is obviously Elisabeth herself, the first person narrative voice. We shall analyze both of these aspects to discover the effect that they have on the theme of Kamouraska.

Let us look now at the third person narrative voice as it depicts Madame Rolland at her home in Quebec City. The opening paragraph of the novel presents the reader with an objective view of Madame Rolland who, due to her husband's illness, stayed home that summer. Grammatically the sentences are complete, but the use of the past definite tense is unique to this paragraph only. We can presume then, that this is the perspective of a traditional third person narrative voice outside the action of the novel or indeed, that of an implied author. In the following paragraph (and this also applies to the remainder of the book where a third person narrative perspective is used) there is an entirely different style of narration. The tension portrayed through the repetition of words, and groups of words, the use of many infinitives, and the preponderance of incomplete sentences, is distinct from the detached narrative style of the opening paragraph. By using the present tense exclusively (except in its opening and concluding paragraphs) this third person narrative voice is with Madame Rolland at all times. Indeed, like a shadow, it sees what she sees and tastes what she tastes:

> Goûter les framboises, manger les petits pois crus, croquants comme des perles. Madame Rolland est à nouveau saine et sauve, ravie absolument. Un instant. Puis elle recommence à tourner en rond.[1]

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[1]Anne Hébert, Kamouraska (Paris 1970), p. 37. (From now on we shall refer to this novel as K.)

The style used here parallels Madame Rolland's tension as she runs up the stairs to her husband. It is important to note that there is absolutely no difference in style between the first and the third person narrative voice. For example, one has only to compare the words of the third person narrative voice,

> Jette des morceaux dans sa jupe qu'elle relève d'une main. Reprend la lampe allumée. Grimpe l'escalier.[2]

with those of the first person narrative voice:

> Confondre le songe avant qu'il ne soit trop tard. S'ébrouer bien vite dans la lumière.[3]

Both use incomplete sentences as well as sentences beginning with verbs rather than subjects. The third person narrative voice describes the door bell after Monsieur Rolland had rung for Florida:

> La sonnette de la porte d'entrée. Un coup. Un seul qui reste en l'air. Inachevé.[4]

With the same type of incomplete sentence, the first person narrative voice describes her children:

> Veillés par des bonnes triées sur le volet. A l'abri des parents.[5]

Thus, the only difference between these two narrative voices

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[2] Ibid., p. 21.

[3] Ibid., p. 23.

[4] Ibid., p. 21.

[5] Ibid., p. 20.

seems to lie in the personal pronoun used; the third person narrative voice refers to the main character as "Madame Rolland" or "elle", whereas the first uses "je". Despite this difference, confusion does arise between these two narrative voices as they alternate with each other:

> Monsieur Rolland est furieux. Qu'est ce qu'elle peut bien faire, cette idiote? Elisabeth ne sait plus quoi inventer pour calmer son mari.[6]

Who is asking the question in this passage, the first or the third person narrative voice? The reasons for this similarity in style will be discussed later; at this point it is necessary to go beyond the style to discover the role of the third person narrative voice in portraying the main character.

Besides being omniscient (for it knows exactly what Madame Rolland is doing at all times), this narrative voice is also opinionated. Madame Rolland's two oldest children are described in the following way:

> Chapeau haut de forme, favoris blonds, beaux jeunes étrangers qu'un premier mari, brutalement, lui a, un jour semés dans le ventre.[7]

Similarly, Madame Rolland is characterized when she is alone with her husband;

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[6] Ibid., p. 37.

[7] Ibid., p. 19.

> Il n'y a que cette femme. M. Rolland est seul livré au pouvoir maléfique de sa femme qui, autrefois a...[8]

What is more interesting than the opinions of this narrative perspective is the inability, shown here, to complete the sentence and state what she has done. A third person narrative voice, seemingly outside the action of the novel, would express a past already hinted at by the first person narrative voice. However, contrary to the detached style of the traditional narrative voice, the language of this narrator gives not only characterization but also portrays Madame Rolland's tension, as she races downstairs to find sugar for her husband. Thus we find that as the mental anguish of the first person narrator grows, so the style used by the third person narrative voice makes the tension more obvious.

This leads us to a very important characteristic of the role of the third person narrator. Although the style of the third person narrative voice is similar to that of the first person, the former is limited for the most part to a physical description of Madame Rolland, as she races up and down stairs, as she gazes through the window, as she reads to Monsieur Rolland, as she leaves to sleep, and as she wakes periodically in a struggle to rid herself of her

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[8] Ibid., p. 14.

dream. Indeed, one would say that all of her actions as a good wife and mother are portrayed by the third person narrative voice.

In limiting itself to the visible aspects of Madame Rolland, the third person narrative voice uses imagery which is visual rather than intellectual. For example, the effect of Monsieur Rolland's question about Aurélie Caron is described in this way:

> La petite question insidieuse de Jérôme Rolland se glisse au fond. Le silence refermé. Le silence recousu à grandes aiguillées.[9]

Similarly Monsieur Rolland is described as "Une huître hors de sa coquille."[10] Grazia Merler justifies this technique of visual imagery when she says that,

> il s'établit une complicité entre le lecteur et l'auteur, et le lecteur ne s'identifie pas avec l'un ou l'autre de deux personnages ou avec leur état d'âme, mais avec le détachement de cette observation.[11]

Madame Rolland is not a character as such but rather a series of frantic actions visible to those around her and divorced from her own thoughts. The third person narrative voice portrays a mask, Madame Rolland, and as such does not use imagery which would allow the reader to penetrate Madame Rolland's mind. Rather it uses visual imagery to

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[9] Ibid., p. 29.

[10] Ibid., p. 14.

mask any real thought which alone the first person narrative voice relates. Further proof that this narrative voice is describing only a mask, Madame Rolland, can be found in a quotation of the first person narrative voice:

> Je dis "je" et je suis une autre. Foulée
> aux pieds la défroque de Madame Rolland.
> Aux orties le corset de Madame Rolland.
> Au musée son masque de plâtre.[12]

Clearly the first person narrator views Madame Rolland as a mask which, because she can throw it away, is totally divorced from herself. Thus the third person narrative voice is indeed Madame Rolland, the mask which alone is visible to those around her.

In describing the main character in her present situation as a good wife and mother, this narrative voice refers to her for the most part as Madame Rolland, a name denoting the respect due to a wife of a lawyer in Quebec City and the mother of eight healthy children. It is not surprising that in describing a wife and mother, the third person narrative voice should refer to her as Madame Rolland. However, on a few occasions, she is referred to as Elisabeth. Each time that the name Elisabeth is used by the narrator, the main character seems to have withdrawn partially from her physical reality in Quebec City. However, this withdrawal is visible; for instance, it is Elisabeth who closes all the

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[12] Ibid., p. 115.

windows and curtains to protect herself from the world outside; it is Elisabeth who sits, far away from her husband, seemingly absorbed in her own thoughts; Elisabeth, not Madame Rolland, closes her eyes to dream, and finally, it is Elisabeth who allows her daughter to arrange her dishevelled hair. The mask of Madame Rolland is slowly disintegrating as she withdraws from her surroundings. No longer the perfect wife and mother, she is now called Elisabeth. Thus we see that Madame Rolland is indeed a name and a mask in a given place; bodily presence but mental absence suggests another aspect of Madame Rolland, Elisabeth, who, when completely alienated from her physical surroundings, is the first person narrative voice. Thus, slowly her mask of Madame Rolland fades away as she falls deeper and deeper into her dream. The technique of two names suggest to the reader the distinction between Madame Rolland and Elisabeth, two aspects of one and the same person.

During Elisabeth's dream, the presence of this third person narrative voice is rarely felt. At the beginning it describes Madame Rolland as she wakes but, from the time that the first person narrator says, "Madame Rolland n'existe plus,"[13] until the conclusion of the novel, there is no third person narration as such. This would lead one to

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[13] Ibid., p. 100.

the conclusion (as does the style and imagery of the third person narrative voice) that this perspective is indeed Madame Rolland in the strict sense of the word. As we have demonstrated, the third person narration describes only Madame Rolland, "une machine qui s'agite,"[14] as she is seen ministering to the needs of her husband and children. Her own thoughts do not form a part of the third person narration, and hence of her role as Madame Rolland, but instead are portrayed by another narrative voice, the first. At this point one cannot appreciate the reason for this split between Madame Rolland and the first person narrator, for it is necessary to analyze the other two points of view and their relationship to the third person narrative voice.

However, before discussing the first and second person narrative voices, we propose to study the use of the third person narration by Elisabeth herself. As we have demonstrated, the third person narrative voice, or Madame Rolland as a mask, is clearly separated from the thoughts of Elisabeth in the first person narrative voice. However, the latter also employs this technique to produce an effect of alienation from certain situations of her past:

> Cette distance même qui devrait me rassurer est pire que tout. Penser à soi à la troisième personne. Feindre le détachement. Ne pas s'identifier à la jeune mariée, tout habillée de velours bleu.[15]

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[14] Ibid., p. 37.

[15] Ibid., p. 71.

This technique (which she uses over and over again) tends to diminish the first person narration's credibility. By narrating some of her past in the third person, Elisabeth can pretend to have nothing to do with the visions of her dream. Indeed she even judges her dream as, "un roman peu édifiant."[16] However the struggle to remain indifferent to her past is in vain for she continually slips back into first person narration. For example, she summarizes the conclusions of her trial in this way:

> Le cas d'Elisabeth d'Aulnières est renvoyé aux assises de septembre.[17]

Immediately after this she says;

> J'ai tant regardé fondre les glaçons dans la petite fenêtre de ma prison.[18]

The use of the third person narrative voice by Elisabeth is an attempt to mask her true feelings and her fears, and thus, is like the third person narration of Madame Rolland. Indeed, this is further proof that the third person narrative voice as such is Elisabeth; she can only view her rôle as Madame Rolland in the third person. Certainly both aspects of third person narration contain visual rather than intellectual imagery to mask any real thoughts. For example, Elisabeth refers to herself and her mother-in-law in the third person

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[16] Ibid., p. 238.

[17] Ibid., p. 244.

[18] Ibid., p. 244.

and compares them to

> des noix entrechoquées dans un sac.[19]

What Elisabeth wants us to see are two nuts rather than two human beings feeling something.

Further examples of specific uses of the third person narration by Elisabeth will be discussed in Chapter III, since they point to certain characteristics of Elisabeth herself, and suggest to the reader the reasons for the fragmentation of the narration in Kamouraska.

Thus, the third person narrative voice which describes only Madame Rolland, technically separates the mask from Elisabeth's own thoughts. These thoughts are themselves masked by Elisabeth's use of third person narration.

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[19] Ibid., p. 245.

Chapter II

THE SECOND PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE

In this chapter we propose to study the effects of second person narration in Kamouraska. As in the third person narrative voice, the second person presents two aspects to the reader. There is a second person narrative voice as such whose source is not immediately obvious, and there is the second person narration which Elisabeth herself uses within the dream. The significance of this type of narration can only be realized after close examination of the characteristics displayed by this voice.

Let us look now at the second person narrative voice, seemingly outside the action of the novel, to discover the role that it plays in addressing certain characters of Kamouraska. Up until the beginning of the dream, this voice is directed to Monsieur Rolland. At first, it praises Madame Rolland for being so attentive to her husband and children:

> Quelle créature dévouée et attentive, une vraie sainte, monsieur Rolland. Et jolie avec ça, une princesse. L'âge, le malheur et le crime ont passé sur votre épouse comme de l'eau sur le dos d'un canard. Quelle femme admirable.[1]

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[1] Anne Hébert, K., p. 15.

If one examines closely the words used here, one finds a marked similarity with those used by the first person narrator, the voice of Elisabeth as she is thinking. She, too, uses religious imagery to describe herself. For example, she compares herself to the Jewish people crossing the Red Sea[2], and to "une pietà sauvage, défigurée par les larmes."[3] She also thinks of herself as royalty, in this case, the Queen of England, whom she resembles. Her idea of being untouched like the salamander[4] finds its echo here in the image of the duck. Again in another passage, we find similarity between the second person narrative voice and Elisabeth's thoughts. Immediately after she has said to her husband that she is tired, the second person narrative voice states:

> Monsieur Rolland, votre femme se fatigue.[5]

Thus, it would seem at this point that the second person narrative voice represents Elisabeth's desire to convince her husband of her virtuous existence as Madame Rolland. However, this voice addressing Monsieur Rolland takes on another perspective when it describes with great detail

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[2] Ibid., p. 8.

[3] Ibid., p. 38.

[4] Ibid., p. 10.

[5] Ibid., p. 16.

what is actually happening to him:

> Un mot de plus, et la provision d'air sera épuisée dans la cage de votre coeur. Cet amas de broussailles dans votre poitrine, ce petit arbre échevelé où l'air circule avec tant de peine. Il ne faut plus puiser d'air dans ce buisson qui devient sec.[6]

This description, along with others which state clearly what exactly Monsieur Rolland is feeling, could be interpreted as the voice of Monsieur Rolland himself. On the other hand, they could point to Madame Rolland's wish that her husband die. We refute both of these theories on the basis of Elisabeth's own anguish at the thought of her husband's approaching death. As we have demonstrated above, the second person narrative voice tries to convince Monsieur Rolland of his wife's virtues. We have proved that this voice is indeed that of Madame Rolland. When her husband, by reminding Elisabeth of her past, demonstrates his own mistrust of her, she in turn must not only try to keep alive in his mind the mask of Madame Rolland, but also convince him of how necessary she is to his life. Thus, rather than a desire for his death, or even Monsieur Rolland's voice these descriptions of approaching death are an attempt to reduce Monsieur Rolland to a state of complete dependency. Without the medicine, death will occur; without Madame Rolland, he is nothing.

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[6] Ibid., p. 17.

This aspect of the narration of Kamouraska provides us with an insight into the necessity for Madame Rolland to make her husband believe in her as a devoted wife who alone can bring him back to life. Her existence as Madame Rolland depends entirely on Monsieur Rolland, for she herself can only see Madame Rolland in the third person. Similarly François Perrault in Le torrent exists solely through his mother whose influence is so great that without her François is totally destroyed.

Although we are beginning to see that the three different narrative voices present three aspects of one and the same person, we shall continue to discuss them as different narrative voices, for, as we shall see, each plays a separate role in the novel. In our concluding paragraphs, we shall attempt to discover the significance of this split in narrative voice.

Let us continue then with the second person narrative voice as it appears during Madame Rolland's dream. One notes its presence up until shortly before Elisabeth says that, "Madame Rolland n'existe plus".[7] Thus, just as the third person narrator disappears completely as the dream progresses, so, too, does the second person narrator. One must not, however, confuse the roles of these two narrative

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[7] Ibid., p. 100.

voices. If the third person narrative voice represents a reality totally divorced from the conscious or unconscious reality of Elisabeth, the second person narrative voice represents a desire to keep alive the role of Madame Rolland. This desire becomes more acute within the dream as the second person narrative voice addresses Elisabeth as Madame Rolland in an attempt to keep her from withdrawing completely into the world of her own thoughts. As we shall show in the next chapter, the first person narrator has previously equated innocence with Madame Rolland. Elisabeth's desire to be innocent in the role of wife and mother necessarily conflicts with her desire to dream. Thus, a dialectic arises between the voice of her desired innocence in Madame Rolland and the voice of her own thoughts drawing her into dream. Hence, the second person narrative voice accuses Madame Rolland of guilt and of leading a double life. The guilt mentioned here seems to be more than that arising from leaving her husband alone, for this voice does indeed mention her past life and her servant, Aurélie Caron. It reminds her that there is no point returning to the manor house at Kamouraska because all has been burnt and replaced with imaginary roses. If this voice is indeed that of Madame Rolland trying to adjust to the image which others make of her, it is also the voice which, having lost some of its inhibitions through the dream, presents the

impossibility of her being Madame Rolland:

> Le coeur souterrain, l'envers de la douceur, sa doublure violente. Votre fin visage, Elisabeth d'Aulnières
> Mince pelure d'ange sur la haine.[8]

Thus, the second person narrative voice portrays the main character in her conflict between two forces, one pulling her towards the mask of Madame Rolland, "mince pelure d'ange", and the other towards, "la haine".

There is, however, another aspect of the second person narrative voice. We have seen that the second person narrative voice, discussed above, assumes the role of one part of Elisabeth, that part of her that struggles to remain as Madame Rolland. The use of the second person gives dramatic value to this struggle. However, Elisabeth herself uses the second person narrative voice to address other characters. For example when Elisabeth has read the quotation from Poésies liturgigues, she reacts to this using second person narration:

> Parle pour toi, le fond de ton coeur, à toi, livré, retourné comme un vieux gant troué. Ainsi tu n'as jamais cru à mon innocence.[9]

Clearly, this points to a fear of expressing in dialogue what she really thinks. Similarly she accuses Antoine of going to a prostitute,[10] but says nothing to him directly.

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[8] Ibid., p. 91.

[9] Ibid., p. 16.

[10] Ibid., p. 69.

Another aspect of her use of the second person narrative voice can be found in her description of Nelson. As he is leaving to kill Antoine, Elisabeth says:

> Tu laisses tinter joyeusement les grelots au col de ton cheval. Tout comme si tu les avais toi-même autour du cou, ces clochettes exubérantes.[11]

She also describes Nelson's childhood using the second person narrative voice. Similarly, she tries to convince him of the necessity to kill Antoine.

> Antoine Tassy mérite la mort Il réclame la mort. Par son silence même. Par son inexplicable absence. Il vous provoque, comme il me provoque.[12]

These examples clearly demonstrate Elisabeth's inability to communicate directly with another person. Rather, she attempts to relate to George's mind without recourse to the normal means of communication. One must recall, however, that dialogue is a part of the mask of Madame Rolland, and as such, is not a part of Elisabeth's own thoughts. Dialogue is usually the direct revelation of one's thoughts; as we have seen in our study of the third person narration, Elisabeth is afraid to reveal what she is thinking. Thus, Elisabeth uses the second person narrative voice in an attempt to reveal to George her own thoughts, while at the

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[11] Ibid., p. 190.

[12] Ibid., p. 164.

same time hiding them from society.

It is also interesting to note that Elisabeth switches constantly from "tu" to "vous" in addressing George. When she first meets him, she refers to him as "vous", which is of course natural, as is the fact that she addresses him as "tu" when she has become more intimate with him. However, even when she addresses him as "tu", there are occasions when "vous" is used. For example, when she is convincing him that Antoine must die, she uses "vous". Also, George is referred to as "vous" when Elisabeth tells him to send Aurélie to Kamouraska:

> Ce soir même, George Nelson, vous céderez aux adjurations d'Elisabeth. Vous parlerez à Aurélie et vous l'enverrez à Kamouraska à votre place.[13]

Generally, when Elisabeth is telling George about the murder that he will commit, she addresses him as "vous". This automatically creates distance between them, the distance between the one who is responsible for the murder, and the innocent one who awaits her lover at Sorel. By using "vous" Elisabeth can pretend that she has nothing to do with Antoine's death.

Thus, as in Elisabeth's use of the third person narrative voice, the use of the second person narrative

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[13] Ibid., p. 173.

voice undermines the credibility of what the first person narrator says, for it demonstrates Elisabeth's inability to state directly what she is thinking, and also it shifts the responsibility for her husband's death to George Nelson.

Chapter III

THE FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE

In our study of the second and third person narrative voices, we have arrived at some conclusions concerning the main character of Kamouraska. For example, we know that the third person narrator describes Madame Rolland, the mask of innocence. This narrative voice is used to distractthe reader from the real thoughts of Elisabeth contained in the first person narration. We have also studied the role of the second person narrator which portrays a woman caught between her desire to dream and the necessity for her to be Madame Rolland. From Elisabeth's own use of the second and third person narrative voices, we concluded that the first person narrator is afraid to commit herself to an honest relationship with another person, and to become a part of her own visions within the dream.

But what is beneath "Madame Rolland", the exterior reality portrayed by the third person narrative voice and supported by the second? Where is the real person? The answer, of course, should lie within the perspective of the first person narrator. However, the former's lack of

credibility, due to her use of the second and third person narrative voices, forces us to analyze very carefully what the first person narrator actually says, and compare this to her reactions to the visions of the dream. One must consider the reasons for the different types of narration, and also, the very interesting use of imagery.

Hence, in this chapter, we propose to study the first person narrative voice in the light of our knowledge of Madame Rolland; we shall also analyze the language used by this narrator, since it seems to portray certain elements of the unconscious.

Before beginning our study of the first person narrative voice, Elisabeth, we find it necessary to consider the first person narration of Monsieur Rolland. Since the latter type of narration appears only five times in the novel, Monsieur Rolland's own thoughts do not seem to be of any consequence to our analysis of the main character. However, these passages in which Monsieur Rolland is indeed the first person narrative voice demonstrate the total mistrust of Monsieur Rolland for his wife:

> Il ne faut pas que je boive une seule gorgée quand elle est là. Non. Rien quand elle est là. Elle me tuera.[1]

Indeed one could say that Monsieur Rolland, as a first person narrator, assumes the voice of society, a society

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[1]Anne Hébert, K., p. 15. Other examples are also found on pages 15,22,and 26.

which pretends to be indifferent despite its cruel condemnation of another's actions. It is this judgement by Monsieur Rolland which forces Madame Rolland to withdraw into dream, and (as we shall see) it is the society in which she lives which forces Elisabeth to withdraw behind the mask of Madame Rolland.

Let us return now to the first person narration of Elisabeth. As we have demonstrated, the conscious thoughts of Madame Rolland are not contained in the third person narration but rather are portrayed by the character herself as the first person narrator. Let us look at an example of the combination of these two perspectives:

> Madame Rolland se redresse, refait les plis de sa jupe, ajuste ses bandeaux. Va vers la glace, à la rencontre de sa propre image, comme on va vers le secours le plus sûr. Mon âme moisie est ailleurs. Prisonnière, quelque part, loin.[2]

Clearly, there is a split in narration to distinguish a physical reality of Madame Rolland, and a mental reality formed by her own thoughts. The importance of the mirror lies in its ability to reflect a mask and hence in its reassurance of the existence of Madame Rolland. By finding refuge in a mirror, Madame Rolland demonstrates her desire to portray an image rather than a mind to society. It is obvious, then, that she fears society because she does not place her own

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[2]Ibid., p. 14.

thoughts within it. Certainly she feels her own vulnerability in the streets, for she states:

> On m'observe. On m'épie. On me suit. On me serre de près. On marche derrière moi.[3]

In much the same manner, François of Le torrent is frightened into immobility as a result of his mother's constant surveillance. The outside world becomes for both François and Elisabeth the potential destruction of their autonomy and for this reason,they have no choice but to withdraw from it. Elisabeth is terrified of the other whom she feels is always watching her and hence, she takes great precautions in portraying a certain image, that of Madame Rolland, seen in the third person narrative voice. However, within the first person narrative voice, Elisabeth is a subject in her own mental world rather than an object in the eyes of a society that she fears. In order to discover what lies beneath this fear, and indeed beneath the mask of Madame Rolland, we shall examine the language used by Elisabeth to communicate her past. What she actually thinks and says consciously must be weighed against the language and type of imagery that she uses, as well as against the visions of her dream. This latter aspect of the first person narrative voice is a product of the unconscious mind, as we shall demonstrate.

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[3] Ibid., p. 7.

Before analyzing the unconscious aspects of the first person narrative voice, we shall consider briefly what Elisabeth is consciously saying and feeling. As in the actual story of Le torrent, the crime committed at Kamouraska is indeed a real one, for Anne Hébert states this in the short preface at the beginning of the novel. By means of the dream, the main character reconstructs her past which includes the murder of her first husband. On the pretext that she must face up to the fact that she is guilty of this murder, she begins to relive certain parts of her life as Elisabeth d'Aulnières and as Madame Tassy. These include moments with George Nelson, the man whom she loves, and who eventually goes to Kamouraska to kill Antoine for Elisabeth. We also learn that Elisabeth spent two months in prison, and that George left for the United States, never to be heard of again. However, there is much more to this story, for although past, it is present in the dream and fraught with imagery and emotion that go far beyond the superficial fact.

The first person narrative voice presents a woman fully aware of, and indeed sarcastic towards, the artificiality of her role as Madame Rolland. Considering herself an honest woman, she compares herself to

> Une dinde qui marche fascinée par l'idée qu'elle se fait de son honneur.[4]

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[4] Ibid., p. 9.

She is equally sarcastic towards her past. How could anyone accuse her of plotting to kill her first husband? Amidst the accusations in her past, and the sham of her present, she seems to be searching for love embodied in someone who has left her and is now in Burlington. However, it is more than just one man that she wants, for in her desire to dream, she wishes to,

> Regarder tous les hommes dans la rue. Tous. Un par un. Etre regardée par eux. Fuir la rue du Parloir.[5]

This desire for love and men seems to find its contradiction in her preoccupation with innocence and an untouched body. She says that she has been innocent for eighteen years since her sex life was a duty from which she derived,

> Parfois même le plaisir amer. L'humiliation de ce plaisir volé à l'amour.[6]

This physical pleasure seems to hold no passion and thus, she can consider herself innocent. The primary purpose of her sex life as Madame Rolland was to produce children, a purpose which is upheld by the Church. Since there is no mental commitment involved in the actions of her body, she can readily compare herself to the image of the salamander, an animal known to be able to go through fire unharmed.

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[5] Ibid., p. 9.

[6] Ibid., p. 10.

The implications of fire will be discussed later. We also notice that Elisabeth refers to herself only as "Elisabeth d'Aulnières" and never as Madame Tassy. The former name implies purity:

> Décliner son nom. Se nommer Elisabeth d'Aulnières à jamais. Habiter toute sa chair intacte comme le sang libre et joyeux.[7]

Thus for Elisabeth, innocence is inherent in her childhood, as well as in her concept of her conjugal duties towards Monsieur Rolland. What lies between these two periods in her life seems to be ignored in her search for innocence. Since she places so much emphasis on her purity, one feels certain that she is trying to cover up feelings of guilt. Albert Le Grand supports this theory when he says:

> La poursuite de l'innocence n'est qu'une fuite devant le mal.[8]

The evil from which Elisabeth is fleeing can be readily understood if one considers the imagery connected with fire. We have already noted Elisabeth's comparison to the salamander; it becomes obvious, when one thinks of her attitude towards sex with Monsieur Rolland, that the fire is sex and that she wishes to remain untouched by this fire just as the salamander does.

Imagery revolving around fire goes hand in hand

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[7]Ibid., p. 23.

[8]Albert Le Grand, "Anne Hébert: de l'exil au royaume", Etudes françaises Vol.IV, no. 1 (février 1968), p. 24.

with the idea of ashes. We shall analyze both of these concepts to discover their significance for our understanding of the first person narrator.

In counting the drops of medecine for her husband, Elisabeth is careful not to make a mistake, for if she does,

> La folie renaîtra de ses cendres et je lui serai à nouveau livrée, pieds et poings liés,fagot bon pour le feu éternel.[9]

The folly mentioned here is that of passion which, if her husband died, would break through the layers of ashes, which defend her innocence, and become a source of guilt. The idea of ashes, a natural result of fire is seen again in Elisabeth's conception of her two husbands. No longer are they two distinct people, but rather,

> un seul homme renaissant sans cesse de ses cendres. Un long serpent unique se reformant sans fin dans ses anneaux. L'homme éternel qui me prend et m'abandonne à mesure.[10]

If we recall that the snake is a freudian symbol of the phallus, it becomes obvious that she sees men only in terms of their sexuality. Such a concept points to Elisabeth's basic obsession with the act of making love; to see man only in terms of his physical use, is to fear him. If she were not afraid, she would not place so much emphasis on

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[9]Anne Hébert, K., p. 18.

[10]Ibid., p. 31.

sex. Furthermore, she sees each man as coming from the other's ashes, a word which, in itself, negates all concept of flesh. To perceive man as destroyed by the fire of passion and reduced to ashes, is to show one's own fear of destruction by sex. Thus, in repeating the words of her aunt as the latter testifies on behalf of Elisabeth, she says,

> Elle passerait au coeur du feu sans se brûler; au plus profond du vice sans que s'altère son visage.[11]

This is exactly what the salamander does, and what Elisabeth wishes to do. If she can make love, without being destroyed by the fire of passion, then she considers herself innocent.

We can fully realize the symbolic meaning of fire if we consider the encounter between George Nelson and Elisabeth. When the former examines her, upon her return from Kamouraska, she tries not to allow herself any emotion for fear, "de voir ma vie revenir au galop."[12] His eyes are like a "feu terrible"[13] (and hence, are symbolic of passion), to which she eventually responds by putting her arms around him. It is this fear of passion which ultimately makes her forsake him for the mask of

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[11] Ibid., p. 47.

[12] Ibid., p. 109.

[13] Ibid., p. 112.

innocence as Madame Rolland.

Elisabeth also sees her past life in ashes, for she fears, during her dream, that by entering her house at Sorel, the ashes will come alive again, and that once more, she will be a part of the fire and passion of her youth. We recall that the second person narrative voice described the manor house at Kamouraska as being in ruins. Elisabeth herself sees these ruins changing into life during her dream. Thus, fire is something that Elisabeth fears, for it implies life, a life that she has reduced to ashes.

Fire is also symbolic of hell, to which Elisabeth herself makes several references. We have quoted on page 38 (footnote 9) Elisabeth's fear of becoming a "fagot bon pour le feu éternel." Thus, the fires of hell are a direct result of sex, and their constant appearance in Elisabeth's mind demonstrates her guilt. In Les chambres de bois, Michel reacts in much the same manner when he has made love to Catherine:

> Tu es le diable, Catherine, tu es le diable.[14]

Similarly, François of Le torrent describes Amica as the devil:

> Amica est le diable, je convie le diable chez moi.[15]

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[14]Anne Hébert, Les chambres de bois (Paris 1958), p. 76.

[15]Anne Hébert, op. cit., p. 46.

The reason for this fear of sex, lies in Claudine's insistence on the power of one's evil instincts. Immediately after Elisabeth and George Nelson have made love in the snow, the former says:

> Quelqu'un en moi, qui ne peut être
> moi (je suis trop heureuse) pense
> très fort: Nous irons en enfer
> tous les trois.[16]

At another time, she says:

> Ah! quel cri d'agonie étrange me
> fera basculer en enfer. Consentante
> et résignée. Séduite et tuée par
> Antoine.[17]

This passage clearly shows that Elisabeth equates sex and hell. Thus her preoccupation with innocence and an untouched body seems to be a direct result of an underlying fear of sex. To reduce man and her past life to ashes is a defence, as is her mask of Madame Rolland, against her own instincts. As Elisabeth relives her past in dream, and as she loses all contact with the second and third person narrative voices, her unconscious fear of sex comes to the surface through imagery.

The imagery revolving around light and dark plays an important role in showing the extent to which guilt arises from sexuality. As she slowly sinks into a state of dream, wherein she says that she will be recognized

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[16] Anne Hébert, K., p. 137.

[17] Ibid., p. 167.

guilty by all, she struggles against it by remaining in the light:

> Le salut consiste à ne pas manquer sa sortie au grand jour, à ne pas se laisser terrasser par le rêve.[18]

Thus, light and the role of Madame Rolland are a safeguard against dreams which, according to the second person narrative voice, portray the "plus creux des ténèbres",[19] the soul. When Elisabeth first sees her house on Augusta Street, it is immersed in a soft light, which leads her to believe that she has found the first innocence of childhood. But when she is about to enter the house, it becomes very dark. This darkness is also associated with her desire to ask Aurélie about boys:

> Je passe brusquement du soleil aveuglant à une sorte de pénombre humide, envahissante.[20]

Using almost the same language,

> Passage du plein soleil à l'ombre profonde de la forêt,[21]

she leaves on her honeymoon with Antoine whom she has agreed to marry, "dans la nuit de ma chair."[22] It is in this same darkness that she becomes, "sensible à outrance."[23]

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[18] Ibid., p. 23.
[19] Ibid., p. 76.
[20] Ibid., p. 63.
[21] Ibid., p. 71.
[22] Ibid., p. 69.
[23] Ibid., p. 71.

It would seem, at this point, that Elisabeth wishes to cover in darkness all feeling and instinct; only fear can provoke such imagery.

All actions and feelings which occur in darkness, are thus invisible to others. It is interesting to note that, when Elisabeth has become completely immersed in the visions of her past, she fears light. Aurélie must remind her not to cover up her life in darkness:

> Les grandes scènes de votre vie s'en viennent Madame. C'est en pleine clarté qu'il faut les revivre.[24]

Elisabeth is afraid to reveal to others her own thoughts and desires; hence, she puts on a mask which alone will be seen in the light. Anything other than the mask of innocence must be kept in the dark and invisible to others. Thus,within the dream,Elisabeth fears light and its ability to reveal what lies within her mind.

> Un long rayon traverse la pièce, m'atteint de plein fouet. Je suis prise au piège de la lumière, à mon tour. Je détourne la tête.[25]

Through the images of light and dark, we can begin to see that Elisabeth wants to hide both to herself and others that part of her psyche which is instinct.

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[24] Ibid., p. 103.

[25] Ibid., p. 147.

What lies beneath this light which portrays the surface or the mask, is often pictured in terms of the earth. The quotation from Poésies liturgiques that Madame Rolland reads to her husband refers to, "Le fond des coeurs."[26] Memory itself is compared to the work of fish nets combing the bottom of the sea. Elisabeth refers to the use by her husband of the name Aurélie Caron,

> qu'il écume du fond de l'eau croupie comme une arme rouillée,[27]

as a way to kill her. The voice of Justine Latour and indeed the word "désistement"[28] which she recalls when she is with Aurélie, are like long roots slowly coming to the surface of her mind. The memories of her past life, portrayed as emerging from the bowels of the earth or from the depths of the sea, demonstrate the great distance between Elisabeth and her past. Throughout the dream, the natural defences of Elisabeth's existence are relaxed, as indeed they are in any dream, with the result that the hidden aspects of her unconscious thoughts come to the surface of the earth (to use the imagery of the novel). It remains for Elisabeth to relate to nature coloured as it is with her own past, and in so doing, she portrays

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[26] Ibid., p. 16.

[27] Ibid., p. 27.

[28] Ibid., p. 62.

her own inability to face certain aspects of her life. By immersing her own emotions and instincts in darkness, by hiding them beneath the surface, and hence by repressing them, Elizabeth feels these more acutely within the dream as they force themselves upon her. The description that she gives of the countryside where she meets Antoine for the first time is fraught with sensuous images but nonetheless detached from her by its lack of verbs:

> Les îles. Le bateau à fond plat. Le bruit des rames dans le silence de l'aube. Les gouttes d'eau qui retombent, épaisses et rondes.[29]

This fear of committing herself entirely to the visions of her past, filled as they are with references to passion and instinct, is clearly seen in Elisabeth's use of third person narration. As we have demonstrated in Chapter I, this technique enables Elisabeth to alienate herself from her own past to such an extent that she pretends that nothing is true. We noted that there were only certain situations in which she sought to create distance between herself and an episode of her life. Many of these are concerned with her sexual life and hence, will be discussed now, for they clearly point to the problem of guilt. For example, in describing her first night of marriage with Antoine, she refers only to "le marié" and

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[29] Ibid., p. 66.

"la mariée". It is "la mariée" and not Elisabeth who has just made love with her husband:

> Cette fraîche entaille entre ses cuisses, la mariée regarde avec effarement ses vêtements jetés dans la chambre...[30]

This situation can also be found in Le torrent by Anne Hébert. We recall François' words when he and Amica are in bed:

> J'observe le couple étranger en sa nuit de noces. Je suis l'invité des noces.[31]

Clearly, this is evidence of a deep fear to commit himself to another person in a physical relationship. We also notice that François describes Amica as the devil and that her arms are like reptiles. The latter characteristic can be interpreted as a fear of becoming totally engulfed by Amica. The source of this fear of destruction through sex lies in his mother who has made him feel that instincts are evil:

> Il faut se dompter jusqu'aux os. On n'a pas idée de la force mauvaise qui est en nous.[32]

Elisabeth, too, fears destruction of her identity through a sexual act and hence, can only see herself in the third person when she is making love.

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[30] Ibid., p. 73.

[31] Anne Hébert, op. cit., p. 43.

[32] Anne Hébert, op. cit., p. 11.

The first person narrative voice in Kamouraska also uses animal imagery which in itself, portrays this same fear of instinct, indeed of man's animal nature. We recall that the men in Elisabeth's life are compared to one long serpent, and that Elisabeth herself, at the beginning of the novel, imagines that everyone is looking at her, "comme une bête curieuse."[33] Although this expression is a common one, it is nevertheless significant within the context of Kamouraska for Elisabeth describes herself in terms of an animal:

> Toutes mes dents, des seins et une croupe dure. Une pouliche de deux ans. Et grande avec ça. Prestance de vierges indomptées.[34]

To consider herself in this manner, Elisabeth shows her own guilt feelings. She also refers to her sleep as "visité par les démons".[35] Again and again she feels the terrifying proximity of strange animals in her dream. She fears her house at Sorel in which "une bête sauvage"[36] awaits her. It is in this house that she will relive her marriage to Antoine and her love affair with George Nelson; the concept of a savage animal symbolizes her passionate youth and hence

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[33]Anne Hébert, K., p. 7.

[34]Ibid., p. 10.

[35]Ibid., p. 34.

[36]Ibid., p. 51.

the fear which the latter provokes. When Elisabeth begs Aurélie for knowledge of boys, there suddenly appears a little snake in the latter's eyes. Besides being a freudian symbol, this snake conjures up the impression of demon-like reptiles whose very ugliness symbolizes evil. Antoine, too, is associated with animals. Elisabeth refers to his preoccupation with something terrible within him:

> Alors qu'on sait très bien quelle
> bête c'est, quelle souris malicieuse,
> dans le sac, quel démon triomphant.[37]

Again, the idea of demons is attributed by Elisabeth to her husband, a man who clearly lives according to his instincts. Antoine is not alone in his association with animals and the devil; Nelson, too, has long pointed teeth when he begins to plot with Elisabeth the murder of Antoine. As she waits in Sorel for Nelson to return from Kamouraska, Elisabeth again sees his long white teeth which, "lui donnent un air de bête sauvage."[38] Fear of men and indeed of life as it presents itself in the form of deep-rooted passion provokes Elisabeth's visions of demons or black animals in the society that surrounds her. However, she, too, becomes a part of this imagery in a nightmare following her decision to kill Antoine. She dreams that she must cry out to bring home a domestic

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[37] Ibid., p. 86.

[38] Ibid., p. 205.

animal, but instead attracts the most ferocious animals. In stating,

> Je suis une sorcière. Je crie pour
> faire sortir le mal où il se trouve,
> chez les bêtes et les hommes,[39]

Elisabeth is beginning to see in herself evil that she has previously seen only in others. The reason for this is that she is becoming an integral part of the life in the dream, and fears her actions, stripped as they are from the protection of a mask. So great is her fear of this life and so great is her guilt that she eventually forsakes the love of George Nelson. Since Elisabeth cannot see any manifestation of human emotion, whether it be love or hatred, without also seeing black, evil-looking animals, it is obvious that she considers her love for Nelson as a great threat to her desired innocence. This love itself is characterized by an animal, for she says, just prior to her decision no longer to see George:

> Une chienne en moi se couche.
> Gémit doucement. Longtemps hurle
> à la mort.[40]

Thus, life for Elisabeth d'Aulnières is seen as shrouded in darkness, hidden beneath the surface of the earth, and filled with animals. By attributing these characteristics to her life, Elisabeth clearly feels that

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[39] Ibid., p. 137.

[40] Ibid., p. 213.

passion and instinct are something to fear and repress. Life itself, then, can only be a mask, for all other aspects of human emotion are alienated from her by their evil-like nature. Indeed George Nelson's horse, a black, almost supernatural animal, is symbolic of a life Elisabeth is unable to attain, just as Perceval represented life to François in Le torrent. The fact that the animals mentioned above, are for the most part ferocious or devil-like, and black gives further evidence of her innate fear of evil which is to Elisabeth life itself.

This fear is a direct result of Elisabeth's own guilt complexes. We have seen that, as she leaves for her honeymoon, everything is dark to hide her feelings of being "sensible à outrance."[41] Also, she refuses to see herself making love with Antoine Tassy. This would seem to point to a fear of her own body. We have already discussed Elisabeth's concept of innocence as being Madame Rolland, the perfect wife whose sexual relationship with her husband is summarized as, "mon devoir conjugal sans manquer".[42] This innocence is sustained by the reassuring reflections of a mirror and by the third person narrative voice.

It is interesting to note, however, that as the

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[41] Ibid., p. 71.

[42] Ibid., p. 10.

dream progresses, the emphasis turns to bones rather than flesh. She states that by dreaming,

> Le destin collera à mes os.
> Je serai reconnue coupable,
> à la face du monde.[43]

For Monsieur Rolland, she dons a mask of "l'innocence étalée comme la peau sur les os".[44] Another example of this absence of flesh is in Elisabeth's description of the bride and groom, herself and Antoine:

> Le marié est en bois colorié.
> La mariée aussi, peinte en bleu.[45]

As such, Elisabeth wants to see herself and Antoine as wood, and hence insensitive. Also, the colour blue is that of the Virgin. The emphasis on bones reminds us of the poem, "La fille maigre" by Anne Hébert:

> Je suis une fille maigre
> Et j'ai de beaux os.
>
> J'ai pour eux des soins attentifs
> Et d'étranges pitiés.
>
> Je les polis sans cesse.
> Comme de vieux métaux.[46]

Just as this girl must spend her time in a senseless polishing of bones, the result of a total negation of the flesh, so, too, must Elisabeth polish the image of innocence and perceive herself only in terms of bones,

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[43] Ibid., p. 23.

[44] Ibid., p. 35.

[45] Ibid., p. 71.

[46] Anne Hébert, "La fille maigre", Le tombeau des rois (Québec 1953), p. 33.

so as to forget the presence of her flesh and instincts.

Thus, the first person narrative voice presents to the reader the mind of Elisabeth d'Aulnières divorced as it is from the mask of Madame Rolland and hence, divorced from reality. It is a mind whose existence seems to lie in the quest for innocence and as such, it reveals the extent to which Elisabeth d'Aulnières fears a life which, through symbolic language, is portrayed as evil. The fact that Elisabeth d'Aulnières cannot exist as Madame Rolland but rather, withdraws into dream, is significant in itself of a great problem of alienation. In this chapter we have discovered a deep-rooted fear of life on an emotional level, seen in the visions of the dream as well as in Elisabeth's imagery. In Chapter IV, we shall attempt to describe the reason for such fear, and the source of her alienation.

Chapter IV

THE CAUSES OF GUILT

In this chapter, we propose to study Elisabeth's guilt as the source of her alienation. The latter, which is portrayed by the technique of three narrative voices, leads us to studies made by both Carl Jung and R.D. Laing, on schizophrenics. The patients whom they studied have much in common with Madame Rolland and hence, give us valuable insight into the reasons for the split in narration to describe one character.

There are two sides to the guilt which faces Elisabeth as she begins to relive her past. Consciously, she believes herself to be guilty of being an accomplice in the murder of her first husband. In the eyes of society, which includes Monsieur Rolland and the witnesses, Madame Rolland has committed a crime. However, beneath the guilt arising from this act, is a mind for whom life lies far beyond the superficial fact. Indeed, it is this mind, in all its psychological aspects which presents itself unconsciously to the reader through imagery and the language itself. It is not the guilt she feels for having helped to murder her husband, that threatens Elisabeth's

existence, but a very real fear of life and all that this implies.

What is the cause of the split between Madame Rolland, as portrayed by the third person narrative voice and Elisabeth, as she is revealed by the first person narration? Why is she so afraid of committing herself, both body and mind, to a relationship with a man? These and other questions surrounding the imagery of animals, darkness, and bones can be answered by examining how Elisabeth views her own childhood.

In attempting to become a part of her own childhood at Rue Georges, Elisabeth can only see "la petite". She is not even called Elisabeth, and is unable to voice her own opinions in the face of judgement from her mother, the servants and the aunts. She is deemed a "petite fille malfaisante"[1] and "une vraie sauvageonne"[2] for the simple reason that she plays with other children. All that she can do, as she looks back upon these days, is use the words of those around her to reconstruct her childhood:

> Pas moyen de s'habituer à une bonne que déja il en surgit une nouvelle. Madame d'Aulnières change de bonne comme elle respire. C'est à cause de la petite. La petite échoit aux domestiques, corps, et âme.[3]

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[1]Anne Hébert, K., p. 51.

[2]Ibid., p. 53.

[3]Ibid., p. 51.

Much like Catherine's father in Les chambres de bois, Elisabeth's mother has surrounded herself by a wall of silence. No communication between parent and child is possible, with the result that Elisabeth has no choice but to become what her aunts decide that she should be. Catherine, too, has no opportunity to live (except in a dream of a mansion) in the face of having to be the home-maker. Thus, in an almost cinema-like fashion, the house of Rue Georges disappears into a fog to make way for the aunts' house, Rue Augusta.

Surrounded by religious objects, and three frustrated old aunts, Elisabeth begins an education whose primary goals are to produce a young lady of good social and religious upbringing. Here, too, Elisabeth cannot relate to the child who is making her first holy communion:

> une enfant qui est moi me regarde bien en face, et me sourit gravement.[4]

The fact that Elisabeth cannot become this child, during her dream, clearly shows that she was not allowed to develop her own identity in her aunts' house. The environment of the latter is the obvious source of Madame Rolland, the perfect wife and mother. One has only to compare Elisabeth as portrayed by her aunts at the trial, to the description of Madame Rolland by the third person narrative

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[4]Ibid., p. 58.

voice. Luce-Gertrude Lanouette says of Elisabeth:

> Elevée dans les meilleurs principes de la religion et des familles bien nées, ladite Elisabeth d'Aulnières demeure au-dessus de tout blâme et de tout reproche.[5]

Elisabeth herself states her aunts' attitude towards her in this way:

> Elle passerait au coeur du feu sans se brûler.[6]

Clearly, this is the source of Elisabeth's own belief in the image of the salamander. Elisabeth's life with her aunts excludes the normal experiences of a child as an autonomous human being with emotions and needs. All her desires to play with other children and to ask Aurélie about boys are repressed in the face of a necessity to know her catechism, to sit up straight, and to be well dressed for the Governor's ball. It is this existence which prompts Madame Rolland's insistence on black material of good quality, her desire for a well-groomed body, and her preoccupation with innocence. When Elisabeth is about to marry Antoine, she receives no answers to her questions about love. The attitude of her aunts is put in this way:

> Je te bichonne, je te coiffe, je t'envoie à la messe et au catéchisme. Je te cache la vie et la mort derrière de grands

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[5] Ibid., p. 46.

[6] Ibid., p. 47.

> paravents, brodés de roses et d'oiseaux exotiques.[7]

The use of the second person narrative voice here, demonstrates again the fact that Elisabeth had no independent voice as a child but rather, became a mouth-piece for the thoughts of her mother and aunts.

Thus we can begin to see how the split is formed between Madame Rolland and the first person narrative voice. The former is a mask shaped by her aunts and her mother to protect Elisabeth from life and death, and to repress all instincts within her. These instincts have become hidden or buried beneath the surface of her day to day existence as Madame Rolland. However, by means of the symbolic language of the dream, the unconscious comes alive, as did the ruins of the manor house, to reveal to the reader the extent to which Madame Rolland has become totally alienated from her own existence as a human being.

Elisabeth's childhood is not the only factor which determined her mask as Madame Rolland. Indeed, society plays an even greater role. In reliving moments of her past, Elisabeth cannot rid herself of the voices testifying against her. In putting her arms around Nelson, she says:

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[7] Ibid., p. 69.

> J'ai beau savoir que le juge n'attend que ce geste de moi pour orienter toute son enquête. [8]

Indeed, the judges' concern revolves entirely around Elisabeth's relationship with Nelson. When they are together for the first time, nothing happens, much to the relief (although feigned) of Elisabeth:

> Les juges doivent être bien attrapés. Il n'y a rien à reprendre à la conduite de cette femme et de cet homme. [9]

Society judges favourably only the mask of Madame Rolland or Madame Tassy in so far as it represents a picture of the perfect wife at church each week, surrounded by many well dressed children. The least suggestion of an existence other than this provokes a judgement of guilt. Albert Le Grand describes this society surrounding Elisabeth:

> Dans ce monde de fausseté et de sclérose dort un monstre qu'il faut cacher, emmitouffler, sous de multiples épaisseurs de vêtements de nonnettes: la chair. Il faut haïr, combattre, refouler, ignorer l'instinct de la chair devenu l'instinct du mal. [10]

Through the technique of narrative voice, Anne Hébert has succeeded in presenting a character whose image for society is the nun. Her clothes and her actions make

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[8] Ibid., p. 112.

[9] Ibid., p. 110.

[10] Albert Le Grand, op. cit., p. 133.

up the mask of Madame Rolland. By presenting the latter in the third person narrative voice, the novelist technically separates the mask, or the conscious desire for acceptance by society, (seen in the second person narrative voice) from Elisabeth herself. Although one person, she has been divided by her family and society into three parts, Madame Rolland, a person struggling to maintain her existence as Madame Rolland against her past, and finally, Elisabeth herself as "je".

It is important to realize that this "je" does not represent, in itself, a complete person for it has been alienated from reality, and is living in a world of dream. The first person narrative voice is struggling for a life in a world which has no reality, for it is past. This struggle is characterized, on the one hand, by a desire to throw off the mask and live, and on the other, by the inability (due to fear of instinct) to become a part of this world of dream. Elisabeth's own background, and the society in which she lives present obstacles far too great for her really to become a complete person, even within her dream. Thus, in the conclusion of the novel, Elisabeth's final dream shows that her plea for life will always remain unanswered by a society which has buried her instincts and which fears her thirst for life.

In her article, "La réalité dans la prose d'Anne

Hébert,"[11] Grazia Merler posits the theory that the three narrative voices in Kamouraska are, in effect, unrelated. The first is Elisabeth, the second, a neuter voice representing a chorus, and the third, an observer. Indeed, if one does not take into account the similarity, both in style and imagery, of these three narrative voices, as well as their roles in presenting three aspects of one person, one would arrive at this conclusion. In this thesis, we hope to have disproved this theory, since it is obvious from the onset of the novel, that the main character is schizophrenic. In his book, The Divided Self, R.D. Laing describes a schizophrenic whose actions as a child,

> were ruled not by his own will but by an alien will, which had formed itself within his own being; it was the reflection of the will of his mother's alien reality operating now from a source within his own being.[12]

Elisabeth, too, was only a puppet in the hands of her mother and aunts. The schizophrenic cannot cope on his own terms with reality. His great fear of losing what little identity he has to the world outside, forces him to divide into two parts, himself and a false self. In Kamouraska, the two parts, Elisabeth and Madame Rolland,

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[11] Grazia Merler, op. cit.

[12] R.D. Laing, The Divided Self (Harmondsworth 1971), p. 93.

split again into various other aspects of one person, and their interaction clearly demonstrates the schizophrenic's mind. Thus, Anne Hébert has created the mind of the schizophrenic by splitting her narration into three parts, each of which plays its own role in the existence of Madame Rolland.

The use of the word "role" is indeed a reality in Kamouraska for there are constant references to the idea of theatre. The dream itself is presented to Elisabeth as scenes in her life from which she cannot escape. "Trois coups" announce the arrival of Nelson, and reveal Caroline Tassy's disgust with emotion. In her dream, Madame Rolland observes Elisabeth d'Aulnières and Madame Tassy acting out their parts, whereas, in Quebec City, it is Elisabeth who observes Madame Rolland in her role as a good wife and mother. There is always a spectator, and always an actor in this novel; the first person narrative voice observes the third, and the second person narrative voice observes the first. According to Dr. Laing, the schizophrenic is subject to this, for one part of him is always observing and criticizing the other. Dr. Laing's description of one of his patients bears close ressemblance to the mind of Madame Rolland:

> Each partial system seemed to have within it its own focus or center of awareness
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> She would refer to these diverse aspects as 'he', or 'she', or address them as 'you'.[13]

In this manner, she alienated from herself those parts of her which she feared or wished to criticize. Thus, Madame Rolland, created completely by three aunts and Madame d'Aulnières, is portrayed by a third person narrative voice to demonstrate Elisabeth's rejection of their values and of a society which makes them the norm. The second person narrative voice is really the voice of society in so far as it has become, to a certain extent, the voice of Madame Rolland struggling to preserve her status in society. This voice demonstrates to what extent Elisabeth's conscience is controlled by the views of society, for it criticizes her desire to dream, and reminds her that she must play the role of Madame Rolland to the end. However, there is yet another aspect of this mind, that of Elisabeth as she falls prey to her own visions in dream. The first person narrative voice presents both the conscious and the unconscious thoughts of Elisabeth. Consciously she even tries to structure her dream, and succeeds in part when she admits that she purposely left the actual murder until the end. Similarly, her narration loses credibility when she tries to maintain a certain

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[13] R.D. Laing, op. cit., p. 198.

distance from her 'story', as we have seen in her use of the third person narrative voice. On the other hand, the imagery and the type of vision produced in the dream are unconscious. There seems to be a polarisation of the conscious and the unconscious. By consciously trying to get out of the dream, she shows fear of the unconscious as it presents itself in the dream. She even denies the power of the unconscious as it slowly forces her into a reality that Madame Rolland has repressed:

> Vous vous trompez, je ne suis pas celle que vous croyez. J'ai un alibi irréfutable, un sauf conduit bien en règle. Laissez-moi m'échapper, je suis Madame Rolland.[14]

However, she cannot escape a part of her own mind which she has feared all her life. Madame Rolland's unconscious thoughts and fears come alive in her dream and in her imagery.

We have analyzed this aspect of Madame Rolland to discover the source of her guilt, and hence, the reason why she cannot be a complete person. Carl Jung defines the conscious as the logical, rational part of one's mind, whereas the unconscious is man's instinct. Both must have equal rights in man's existence:

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[14]Anne Hébert, K., p. 57.

> For the sake of mental stability and even physiological health, the unconscious and the conscious must be integrally connected and thus move on parallel lines. If they are split apart or 'dissociated' psychological disturbance follows.[15]

Primitive man, and to some extent children live according to their instincts. However, man in society becomes a rational being in danger of losing all contact with nature and with his instincts. In society, man represses his unconscious so as to become a social being, but in so doing, destroys an essential part of himself. The dream, then, is the only outlet for the unconscious; through the dream, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and many other psychologists have discovered the deep-rooted problems of the mind. Indeed, it is the dream of Kamouraska which reveals Elisabeth's basic fear of sex and of committing herself completely to life. The society which produced Elisabeth d'Aulnières denied her the right to exist on an emotional, instinctive level, and hence, split her personality into various parts. Her final dream bears witness to this fact. It is a plea for life in the face of a sterile society which fears the unconscious and all its implications.

Thus, Elisabeth's mind, split as it is into various personalities, depending on her situation, is the

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[15]Carl Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious", Man and his Symbols, (New York 1971), p. 37.

victim of a society who has made guilt the greatest obstacle to life on an emotional level. The technique of three narrative voices successfully portrays the interaction of several distinct parts of one mind, and bears witness to the total alienation of Madame Rolland from her own thoughts.

CONCLUSION

The problem of guilt and the ensuing fear of life form an integral part of many of Anne Hébert's works; they force many a character to flee his surroundings, and find refuge in solitude. In Le temps sauvage,[1] for example, the entire Jancas family is forced into isolation and ignorance by the mother, Agnès. Similarly, in Le torrent,[2] Claudine's guilt is the source of François' solitude and fear of life. Michel, in Les chambres de bois[3] is yet another example of a character whose guilt forces him to retreat into a world of fantasy. The source of the guilt always lies buried in the past, and hence, the present is characterized by a struggle to overcome the forces of the past. François overcame them by killing himself, and Adélaïde in La mercière assassinée[4] did so by killing those who had created her sense of inferiority.

Into this world of guilt and sterile life, Anne Hébert introduced the characters of Kamouraska. Many of

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[1]Anne Hébert, Le temps sauvage (Montréal 1967).

[2]Anne Hébert, op. cit.

[3]Anne Hébert, op. cit.

[4]Anne Hébert, La mercière assassinée in Le temps sauvage (Montréal 1967).

the novelist's previous themes remain unchanged in this novel, as we have demonstrated by a comparison between the attitudes that Elisabeth d'Aulnières, François, and Michel have towards sex. In the same manner as in the other novels or plays, the source of guilt lies somewhere in the past, and slowly comes to the surface of the present through the actions of the characters.

In what way, then, does Kamouraska differ from Anne Hébert's other works? The answer, of course, lies in the narrative technique. By means of a split in narration, Anne Hébert has succeeded in showing not only the existence of guilt, but also, how it affects the mind. The three narrative voices are external signs of an internal reality, and as such, the symbol of the schizophrenic mind is transferred to the printed page itself. By this, we mean that the symbol is no longer a word evoking a mental picture for the reader, but rather, a mode of writing which in itself exteriorizes the mind of Madame Rolland. Thus it is that each different part of narration represents visually one aspect of the main character's mind. This innovation in Anne Hébert's narrative technique involves the reader to a much greater extent than in her other works, in the creative process of the novel. Moreover, it demonstrates much more clearly how the schizophrenic is created by society.

By means of narrative technique in Kamouraska,

Anne Hébert has shown how, in the modern novel, form produces content. Jean Ricardou summarizes its predecessor, the "realistic" novel, in this way:

> Faisant donc de l'écrivain le propriétaire d'un "quelque chose à dire", le dogme de l'expression-représentation occulte bien et le texte et les exacts travaux qui le produisent.[5]

The third person narrative voice constitutes a traditional aspect of "realistic" expression. Its utilisation is taken for granted and hidden, as the reader faces an illusion of reality, (representation). However, where an interplay of narrative voices is observed, their contrasting modes of expression force the reader to concentrate on the use of personal pronouns in order that meaning may be derived from the text itself. In short, expression representing content is replaced by expression creating meaning. Thus, Anne Hébert, along with many other modern novelists including Michel Butor, has created the theme of her novel through form.

Form also plays an integral part of the novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet. As we have mentioned in the Introduction, the camera lens or the eye of the narrator sets before the reader scenes or objects divorced from any pre-established significance.

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[5]Jean Ricardou, Pour une théorie du nouveau roman (Paris 1971), p. 22.

> Une philosophie phénoménologique ou existentielle se donne pour tâche, non pas d'expliquer le monde ou d'en découvrir "les conditions de possibilité", mais de formuler une expérience du monde, un contact avec le monde qui précède toute pensée sur le monde.[6]

Phenomenology has greatly influenced authors such as Alain Robbe-Grillet. For the latter, the eye is of great importance in the creation of the narrative world. Vision is also an essential part of Kamouraska. The reader knows only what the main character herself sees, and it is through her visions that the narrative world is created. The importance of vision in this novel is heightened by the use of cinema-like descriptions:

> Depuis un instant il y a quelque chose qui se passe du côté de la lumière. Une sorte d'éclat qui monte peu à peu et s'intensifie à mesure.
> -
> Soudain, cela s'arrête et se fixe sur une seule maison.[7]

This passage, like many others, shows the extent to which Anne Hébert has followed Alain Robbe-Grillet in his attempt to create a reality wherein nothing is certain beyond the limited view of the narrator in contact with an object without pre-conceived significance. Neither the theme of

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[6]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, quoted by Olga Bernal, Alain Robbe-Grillet: le roman de l'absence (Paris 1964), p. 16.

[7]Anne Hébert, K., p. 50.

jealousy in La jalousie nor of guilt in Kamouraska are ever stated. It is only through examination of what exactly the narrator is seeing, and what the reader is seeing, that the latter can understand the theme of the novel.

Perspectives

Within the scope of literary technique, there remains much to be studied in the novel Kamouraska. Although linked to the technique of narration by its development of the theme of the novel, individual studies of the structure of time and space would present further interesting conclusions on the theme of alienation. For example, time in the novel is related to the narrative voices, since Madame Rolland functions in the present whereas her own mental world of Elisabeth d'Aulnières is nourished by the past or by the imagination, and is in constant conflict with the present. On the other hand, the sense of timelessness so desired by Elisabeth in her dream as a means of escaping reality, conflicts with the very precise accounts of time by the witnesses to the murder of Kamouraska. In so far as the narrative voices of this novel present the reader with Elisabeth's fear of committing herself to life, a study of time would also suggest this, for life is composed of moments and hours, and is not eternal, as Elisabeth seems to desire.

A study of the structure of space would also enhance our conclusions on the polarization of the conscious and unconscious, as we have seen in our analysis of narrative technique. A very interesting study of this has been made on Le torrent by Gilles Houde.[8] A similar study on Kamouraska would prove very valuable for the analysis of the structure of space in this novel. The unconscious, as seen in the visions of the dream, forms the emotional and instinctive part of Elisabeth, and seems to be closely related to the country-side of Kamouraska and to Antoine Tassy. On the other hand, Madame Rolland, seen in the third person narrative voice, is totally divorced from the unconscious, and as such, is placed with Monsieur Rolland on Rue du Parloir, a name which in itself implies a sterile society. Between the unconscious of Kamouraska and the conscious of Rue du Parloir, lies Sorel, a possible meeting place for the two. As we have demonstrated, Carl Jung points out the necessity for balance between these two aspects of the mind. At Sorel, George Nelson represents this combination of instinct and logic; when Elisabeth refuses this in him, she places herself at the mercy of her aunts at Rue Augusta, a

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[8]Gilles Houde, "Les symboles et la structure mythique du torrent", La Barre du Jour (octobre-décembre 1968), pp. 24-46.

name (implying nobility) soon to be eclipsed by Rue du Parloir and the mask of innocence. It is interesting to note that the only place where Elisabeth ever really lived according to her instincts was at the place of her birth, Rue Georges, a name which is also that of her lover. Thus, a study of the structure of space would prove very valuable for the further appreciation of the theme of Kamouraska.

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