

THE WILL TO LIVE
AS SEEN IN THE NOVELS OF ROCH CARRIER

By

JOANNE OLINA McCracken, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Joanne Olina McCracken, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Doctor Paulette Collet

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: To show how the novels of Roch Carrier provide an evolving portrayal of some of the problems facing Quebec in the twentieth century, and to show how the characters in the novels struggle to survive in a positive way. To show how the imagery, especially of light and darkness, conveys the author's emphasis on life over death.

PREFACE

The quotations preceding the introduction are from:

Roch Carrier. "Les formes de ma vie", Les jeux
incompris. Montréal: Les Editions Nocturne, 1956.

Anne Hébert. "Poésie, solitude rompue", Poèmes.

Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960.

The foot-notes in the thesis, when referring to books, are given only in abbreviated form throughout. References to articles are always given with full detail.

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"Car parmi la détresse des feuilles mortes
Ont commencé à poindre des fleurs nouvelles"

Roch Carrier, "Les formes de ma vie".

"...et cette parole confuse qui s'ébauche dans la
nuit, tout cela appelle le jour et la lumière."

Anne Hébert, "Poésie, solitude rompue".

INTRODUCTION

According to Ronald Sutherland, the history of both the French and English Canadian novel, in the last forty years, consists of three, major, interlocking themes.¹ He calls the first "The Land and Divine Order." It is characterized by the roman paysan or roman du terroir, such as Maria Chapdelaine. Such novels have a rural setting and stress the merit of submission to divine will. With World War II comes the second theme, "The Breakup of the Old Order". A book such as Bonheur d'Occasion illustrates the shift of social focus from the country to the city and the consequent alteration of social awareness and values. Within the period of the last five or ten years, we have "The Search for Vital Truth". The critic suggests Prochain Episode and Couteau sur la Table as representative novels of the third theme. At this point, all values have been discarded and one starts at zero.

Roch Carrier's three novels were published between 1968 and 1970, and all certainly can be included within the third category, on the basis of the spirit that motivates their author. However, if one considers the setting and major concern of the books, they fall, one each, into the three classifications suggested by Sutherland. Floralie, où es-tu?, published in 1969, is set in the country. The book revolves around the prescribed teachings of the church, regarding, in particular,

¹Sutherland, Second Image, p. 3.

sex, and one's relationship to God. In 1968, Carrier's first novel, La guerre, yes sir! appeared. Unlike the example given for the second category, Bonheur d'Occasion, it has a rural setting. Nevertheless, its historical setting, the second world war, and the crisis of changing social awareness, as portrayed in the novel, place it within the second category. Il est par là, le soleil, published in 1970, falls into the third category. Having cast off the restrictions of the rural family existence and of his religion, the hero (or anti-hero) is empty-handed, and he is striving toward the sun for what it symbolizes. Carrier's novels, therefore, form a historical trilogy, which parallels Sutherland's critical outline. What is crucially important, however, is the altered emphasis given by a modern author to dated settings (in the case of the first two novels). In Floralie, où es-tu?, the author suggests not meek submission, but rather a revolt against the negative morality inculcated by the church clerics. La guerre, yes sir! is not simply a realistic depiction of Quebec society as affected by the second world war. It is an implicit statement of the need of this society to become aware of itself and to assert itself positively.

Georges-V. Fournier stresses the importance of Carrier's first two novels for having restored to Quebec parts of its history, without deforming or white-washing it to conform to an idealized view of the French Canadian. He writes: "It also constitutes a milestone: for perhaps the first time an author is dealing with the past and present reality of Québec without falling into either of the twin pitfalls:

idealizations of his subjects, or their depiction as poor wretches."²

Also, in discussing the difference of the settings of Carrier's short stories and his novels, Fournier remarks,

"... there is an underlying reality uniting these worlds that apparently are so distinct: the author's attempt to restore to man his dignity and authenticity -- to man here, but also to man in other parts of the world in whom man here has a share."³

These comments lead us to the theme to be studied in our thesis: the will to live as seen in the characters of Roch Carrier's three novels. Moreover, what is seen in the novels is not simply the will to survive, despite any odds, but the will to live positively in a fully human and authentic way. In Floralie, où es-tu?, we see Floralie and Anthyme struggling with the negative morality preached by their church -- the one to assert herself as a person who wants to enjoy, not be damned for her sexual desires, the other to accept his own experience of life, not that deemed correct by the authority of the church. La guerre, yes sir! portrays the world of the French Canadian, forced by the war to come to a political awareness of the troubles within his own community and of his need to struggle against the attempts of outsiders to dominate his life. Philibert, of Il est par là, le soleil, is the French Canadian, completely lacking in wealth and education, who is trying to find happiness in the urban setting.

It has already been mentioned that the themes of Carrier's short stories are based on the same concern for man's dignity and authenticity as is found in his novels. We find that his poetry, the first

²Georges-V. Fournier, "Roch Carrier: A Quest for the Authentic", Ellipse, IV (Summer 1970), 36.

³Ibid., p. 40.

published works of his literary career, reveals similar concerns, just as his means of poetic expression are like those of the short stories and novels. We read such lines as: "Nous ne voulons plus que les hommes se mangent les mains."⁴ This statement is reminiscent of scenes with Joseph in La guerre, yes sir!, and with Philibert in Il est par là, le soleil, which will be discussed in the thesis. The title of the poem from which this line is drawn is "J'ai allumé un feu." It indicates fire as a power of destruction and regeneration, an image prevalent throughout Carrier's work. Generally speaking, Carrier's poetry expresses a desire for natural and positive goods in life, which are conveyed by the images of light opposed to darkness, birds, and flowers. There is, however, a feeling of some disillusionment throughout, and a sort of nostalgia for better, happier times. We shall see that these characteristics are to be found in the rest of Carrier's work.

Where the novels are quite firmly fixed in place and time, the short stories take place beyond these limitations. Through them, we see that Carrier is concerned with a positive ethic not just for the people of Quebec but for people everywhere. "Whether he is dealing with man in Quebec or man in general, Roch Carrier's intention is to denounce whatever wounds or destroys the individual."⁵ We refer now to a few of the short stories, to note how they are based on themes comparable to those of the novels.

⁴Carrier, Cherche tes mots Cherche tes pas.

⁵Georges-V. Fournier, "Roch Carrier: A Quest for the Authentic", Ellipse, IV (Summer 1970), 40.

In "La chambre 38", the central character, Strelinik, undergoes an experience somewhat similar to that of Floralie and Anthyme in Floralie, où es-tu?⁶ As night falls, Strelinik is subjected to a vision of the world, where all normal order that sustains life has been turned upside-down. Floralie and Anthyme, too, experience a strange psychological upheaval, the night of their wedding. Happily, the characters in both works are restored to an ordered world of light and growing plants. The story of Martine, the woman of "La Noce", is comparable to that of Floralie.⁷ Since Martine has succumbed to love and sexual passion, the result of which is a child, she is condemned. By means of a dark ceremony, conducted by nuns, she and the man she loves are forced to drown themselves. Floralie's religious education has obliged her as well, to feel guilty for the love and sex that she enjoys.

There are at least two of the short stories that convey an atmosphere like that of La guerre, yes sir!. "L'oiseau" is a story where the cold has removed virtually all marks of life; there is one small, red flower left that quivers with life.⁸ La guerre, yes sir! takes place in the dead of winter and at a point where the life of the people is gravely threatened, not only by the cold, but by various other negative forces at work. The effort to maintain life is concentrated here in the villagers who have come together to keep death

⁶Carrier, "Contes pour mille oreilles", Ecrits du Canada français 25, p.155.

⁷Carrier, Etudes françaises, V (1969), 51.

⁸Carrier, Jolis Deuils, p. 11.

at a distance in this cold night. In the same novel, Henri's vision of the coffin that consumes the world is similar to the image of the hand in the short story entitled "La main."⁹ In the latter, a great hand comes to darken the sky; it covers the whole town and threatens to bear down on it, crushing all forms of life there.

"La science" tells a story where the hero, like Philibert of Il est par là, le soleil, forgets the address of the woman who has brought him immense happiness, through her beauty, and offers of sex.¹⁰ "L'ouvrier modèle" reminds us of Philibert's dream of becoming a boot in the factory where he works.¹¹ Just as the factory dehumanizes the men who work there, the worker of "L'ouvrier modèle" has reduced his own capacity as a human being, by wearing away his limbs, through his assiduous efforts to please his boss.

One's dress, particularly women's, is a frequent symbol in Carrier's writing. We may think of the black dress of Floralie's wedding, or the white, but sullied, wedding dress of Molly. "La robe" tells of a wonderful wedding gown, displayed in a shop-window.¹² Somehow, it is borrowed in the night by a young woman who returns it with a blood-stain, where her heart would be. She, like Floralie and Molly, must have undergone some great suffering the night of her wedding.

Thus, we reveal, already, some illustrations of Carrier's themes and his means of expressing them. We have also mentioned the

⁹Carrier, "Contes pour mille oreilles", Ecrits du Canada français 25, p.144.

¹⁰Carrier, Jolis Deuils, p. 105.

¹¹Ibid., p. 111.

¹²Ibid., p. 147.

central problems of each of the three novels. We turn now to a detailed analysis of the novels to set forth the situation of each one and especially, to show the will to live as depicted therein. To present an evolving picture of Quebec in the twentieth century, Floralie, où es-tu? will be discussed first, followed by La guerre, yes sir! and Il est par là, le soleil.

CHAPTER I

FLORALIE, OÙ ES-TU? - RELIGIOUS DILEMMA

Floralie, où es-tu? is Roch Carrier's second novel, published in 1969. Within the context, however, of Quebec's evolution in this century, as depicted in Carrier's novels, it must be examined first. Its concern is the religion of Quebec and the effect of the mores propagated by the particular theology of this religion as seen in the characters of the novel. Ultimately, it is a portrayal of life-forces against those of anti-life conveyed almost exclusively by the imagery of light and darkness.

Jansenism, as a theological doctrine, could never have been officially recognized by the Catholic church of Quebec, since it was, in fact, condemned by the Pope. Nevertheless, its presence within Quebec and its influence on that society has been abundantly evident and is equally evident in the characters of Floralie, où es-tu? Ronald Sutherland in his critical study, Second Image, sees Calvinism within the Protestant church as a parallel of Jansenism and draws several general conclusions, concerning the tendencies of such doctrines. There is, he says, a basic mistrust of woman by man, since it was she, embodied by Eve, who first betrayed man and thus lost for them the Garden of Eden. Human beings are subject to predestination; they will never enter heaven without the grace of God having been bestowed upon them. Such things as the capacity for hard work, resignation to

misery, and conscientiousness in attending church may be considered indications of a person's being one of the "chosen few". Emphasis lies heavily upon human insignificance and impotence. And the joys of the flesh will inevitably result in punishment and misery, rather than satisfaction.¹

In a world imbued with such beliefs, we can readily see that love between man and woman, and the enjoyment of sex and sexuality are virtually excluded. So, too, the likelihood of independence of thought and action on the part of individual persons is limited. And the believers in such a theology are much more apt to be pre-visions of hell and punishment than with the joys to be had from their worldly surroundings.

Clearly, Carrier sees the effects of these convictions as negative and anti-life. His sympathies are with those who, despite their tormenting visions of hell, are struggling to assert themselves in the light of their own knowledge and experience of life. He condemns those who perpetuate the negative beliefs of an anti-life church.

We shall look first to Floralie as the embodiment of vital and sexual drives. The frequent mention of her dress, both as a faithful expression of Floralie's vitality, and also as an effort to repress it, will be considered. We shall discuss mainly Floralie's sexual encounters, both lived and dreamed, as positive and negative life experiences. We shall then attempt to show Anthyme, less specifically concerned with

¹Ronald Sutherland, Second Image, pp. 61-68.

sex itself, as the man who, upon investigating his psyche for the first time, must question his relationship to God. The last part of the study will deal with the significance of light and darkness, conditions of life, as a general setting in the story.

Floralie, as her name suggests, is a creature of delicate beauty, to be associated with flowers, birds, and sunlight. The story takes place, in greater part, the night of her wedding to Anthyme, sometime in May. The month is a fitting one for a wedding, being the period, when, in Canada, the land has been freed from the snow and cold of winter. The spring arrives then with fine weather and the renewal of life. May, since pagan times, is also the occasion for various festivities celebrating the fertility of the land, along with all its flora and fauna.

Having set off by horse and buggy for Anthyme's town, Floralie expresses to her husband her fear of making her wedding trip in a black dress. As she says herself, "Le deuil, c'est contre la vie."² Her mother has told her that black is a practical colour to wear, considering the dusty roads to be taken, but it seems rather a symbol of the attitude of her mother, and therefore of her society, toward human sexuality: that it is degrading and debasing. The colour is also a premonition of the darkness of the events to ensue during this wedding night.

Wondering whether her mother knew that she was not a virgin at the time of her wedding, Floralie thinks that perhaps her mother had her wear black for her loss of innocence. She ponders the question

²Carrier, Floralie, où es-tu?, p. 14.

in connection with an image taught her by the church: one is born with a spotless, white dress to be kept as free as possible from the stains of sin throughout life. At this point, having been violated by Anthyme, Floralie is sure that her dress is more soiled than a rag and that God must be very angry with her.

However, when Anthyme has brusquely decided to take his wife for the first time, we see Floralie's beautiful brightness beneath her dark dress. She is revealed dazzling in silk and lace, her breasts shining like blinding flowers. Anthyme can barely keep his eyes open; his eyes burn as though he were looking directly at the sun. He dares not touch Floralie, "comme l'on n'ose toucher à la flamme fascinante."³

In contrast to the dark dress of her wedding to Anthyme is the one Floralie was wearing the day that she and an Italian railway-worker made love in the fields near her house. The colour is not given, but since it is her Sunday dress, adorned with pink ribbons, we may assume that it is light-coloured. It seems an appropriate costume to celebrate her first and very happy sexual experience.

Floralie's dress is mentioned again when, in her prolonged and fantastic dream-vision, she becomes part of the Seven Deadly Sins' dramatic presentation. At that point, she is to play the Holy Virgin and must put on a white gown that she finds in a green trunk labelled: "fairies, queens, souls, angels". There is significance in the colour of the trunk, in that green is most often associated with spring and particularly with life-bearing forces. The creatures listed on the trunk, given their ethereal nature, seem fitting company for

³Ibid., pp. 28-9.

someone with Floralie's qualities. Nevertheless, there is evident irony in Floralie's wearing white, a symbol of virginity, now that her virginal state is long past, physically and spiritually.

The accounts of Floralie's various sexual encounters, both actual and dreamed, reveal that Floralie is most capable of enjoying her sexuality and of distinguishing between positive and negative sexual experiences. At the same time, she is marked by emotional conflicts that are due to her religious education.

The relationship of Floralie with her father, though not sexual, obviously, in an adult context, was a premonition of the torment and sadness that conjugal life had in store for her. She recalls him, when she was a little girl, as having a totally dark face; his hair, beard, and eyebrows were black and his eyes, even his teeth, when he unclenched his lips, were black. She loved to sit on his knee, to comb his hair, to search out his ears beneath his hair. But suddenly he would tip her back and give her a fierce whisker-rub until her face was raw and she was in tears. Then, rather than consoling his daughter, he would demand to be kissed and, if she refused, threaten her by doing such things as destroying her school note-book. Thus, she learned to endure, in silent hatred, her father's enjoyment at her expense.

The violation of Floralie's sensitive and light-filled soul continues with her marriage to Anthyme. Clearly, the society that reared Anthyme is to blame for his awkward and insensitive treatment of his wife. His concern is not to love, to enjoy sexual fulfilment, or to share these pleasures with Floralie; he is simply interested in deflowering a virgin.

Like Floralie's father, Anthyme has a dark complexion and a tough, black beard. From the outset of their wedding-trip, Anthyme shows a somewhat fearful aspect of himself in his pride in mastering his horse, in his cruel whipping of the animal to speed it on along the rough and muddy road. Presently he makes his first sexual essay with Floralie. Holding her roughly with one hand, he presses his spiky, bearded cheek against hers, and grasps her breast with his other hand, as if he wanted to put out a flame.⁴ Floralie's exclamations that he is hurting her being ignored, she finally scratches him with her nails, whereupon he releases her.

In his attempt to make love to Floralie for the first time, Anthyme is rough and constricting. She feels bound by chains as if he were trying to drown her in himself.⁵ He forces her, like an animal, to submit to him. Floralie is spared momentarily by having spotted a snake that she fears is the devil. That sex is a sinful activity and part of the devil's workings for Floralie and her society is manifested here. Given Anthyme's approach to sex, it is not surprising that sexual activity was considered a sort of diabolical punishment for women.

Eventually, Anthyme sees that his wife's spirit is broken. "Les yeux de sa femme n'étaient plus lumineux de crainte, mais gris du regret qu'il y lut."⁶ Taking advantage of Floralie's lack of resistance, he makes her his wife, violently, as they race along in the

⁴Ibid., p. 15.

⁵Ibid., p. 27.

⁶Ibid., p. 32.

horse-drawn buggy. She says nothing; her light is gone out. In contrast, she sees his fiery eyes, the eyes of a stranger. Anthyme's light is a fiery one, like that of hell.

Shortly thereafter, with the suspicion that he is not the first to have sex with Floralie, Anthyme becomes furious and beats her. Calmed somewhat, perhaps by drawing her blood now, he takes her a second time; "en elle, il trouva comme un feu qui aurait été doux, qui aurait eu la douceur de sa chevelure."⁷ He loves his wife, destined by God for him, "comme la lumière pour le jour."⁸

After this short-lived tranquillity, anger overtakes him again and he leaves. Floralie knows now that never again in her life will she say, "I love you!"⁹

Floralie's sexual encounter, her first, with the Italian railroad-worker, provides a wonderfully positive contrast with her experience with Anthyme. The Italian is likely of Catholic background as well, but he must have been spared the puritanical upbringing that corrupted the men of Anthyme's world.

After the frenetic scene of their making love in the buggy, Anthyme and Floralie go to lie down in a little clearing in the woods. Floralie's anxiety disappears in this sun-flooded spot. The stone that she has felt in her heart turns into a butterfly that flits about in her bloodstream.¹⁰ Her thoughts wander to a day "que le temps ne

⁷Ibid., p. 48.

⁸Ibid., p. 48.

⁹Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 34.

pourrait jamais salir,"¹¹ a day that was part of a spring and summer more dear to her than her whole childhood.¹²

This was the time that saw the railroad built through the countryside where Floralie lived, when her house and the neighbouring houses were filled with workers of various origins, but particularly the vivacious, musical Italians.

During the festivities arranged for the arrival of the first train, the young Italian approaches Floralie and touches her lightly; "un éclair caressant traversa le corps de la jeune fille. ... Elle découvrait la merveille d'être vivante, d'avoir son sang affolé par le regard d'un homme, d'être une jeune fille."¹³

In a field of golden, ripe oats, under a sunny sky, Floralie and her Italian make love. They roll over and over, hugging each other, and it seems to Floralie "que le soleil était tout proche d'eux et qu'il roulait avec eux."¹⁴ With the innocence of tired children, they fall asleep. Floralie awakes, saying, "Je t'aime!" We know that this is the only time in her life that Floralie will really love, in a positive sense.

Floralie's recollection of these pleasant hours is suddenly interrupted when she recognizes her husband's dark face leaning over hers.

Thoughts of the Italian pass through Floralie's mind once more: "grâce a lui, sa jeunesse ne s'évanouirait pas en fumée."¹⁵

¹¹Ibid., p. 35.

¹²Ibid., p. 36.

¹³Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 53.

Sunniness and fecundity pervade the atmosphere of this experience, the antithesis of the darkness and aridity of Floralie and Anthyme's situation.

Lost in the dark, unable to find Anthyme, Floralie kneels down, her eyes closed. She has a vision of a vast, golden and light-filled field from which she hears the music of a harmonica rising. She recognizes the tune as one the Italian used to play. The music continues so close by that Floralie shivers as though a bird's wing has brushed by her. At length, Néron appears, a sort of charlatan, and one of the diverse characters that figure in Floralie's dream-visions and that personify the various fears and inclinations of her conscience.

Néron reads Floralie's heart and tells her that love will never flourish there, because she refuses it. Presumably, Floralie feels guilty for rejecting the sort of love her husband has to offer. Moreover, she may feel perturbed by no longer being considered free to accept love from men other than her husband.

Through a ritualistic sort of trance conducted by Néron, Floralie's capacity to love is restored. Once again, the sight of her Italian lover recurs beneath a vast, luminous sky, and she repeats the words, "I love you!"

Like Anthyme, Néron exhibits a cruel violence in beating the children with him, as well as his horse. He offers one small comfort: a warm arm placed around Floralie so that she can doze for a while.

Refusing Néron's offer to go to industrialized America, where they would find wealth, Floralie is hurled from the buggy. The children

pitch mice at her and, overcome with horror at the creatures scurrying over her, she loses her breath. She finds herself entirely alone in the midst of a night that has devoured everyone she has ever known. Only Floralie, Néron and the children remain. Néron becomes a frog in Floralie's memory; this frog held her in its arms and she wonders whether it placed its drooling mouth on her lips. Thus, apart from the briefly restored sight of her Italian lover, Floralie's meeting with Néron has been a dark one. He and the children's cruelty are truly inhuman. They signify the anguished state of Floralie's mind.

In a further development of her hallucinatory dream-visions, Floralie undergoes yet another sexual encounter. This time, she meets a dramatic troupe called the Seven Deadly Sins; they are clearly an allegorical representation of the concerns of Floralie's Catholic conscience. Needless to say, it is Lust who draws the greatest attention.

He, too, sees into Floralie's heart; he knows that pure innocence cannot exist, even as in the purest water, there are bacteria. Floralie imagines the face of Lust, seen only in shadow, to be ugly. The troupe decide that she can reward them by playing the Holy Virgin in their presentation and ask whether Floralie is in fact a virgin. Horrified, she hides her face but nothing will rid the darkness that she feels slithering on her back, like a serpent.¹⁶ The sinister group begin to raise her skirts to see how she would be as a virgin, but it is Lust who orders them all away, leaving Floralie and himself alone on the wagon.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

Lust's caress radiates like a star through Floralie's hand and her blood is stirred by his insistent gentleness.¹⁷ She finds that in truth, his eyes are beautiful, but she is afraid to lose herself in them, afraid to give way to sexual temptation. Floralie protests, as Lust gently lays her down in the wagon, and he replies, "Tu ne dois pas dire non à la vie."¹⁸

Lust's erotic whisperings alternate with the condemning voices of Floralie's mother and husband. She is tortured by the conflicting desires to yield to sexual pleasure and life or to heed the sexually inhibiting and anti-life teachings of her religion.

As when she was loved by the Italian, Lust's love-making evokes images of light and life. After the first tremor of sexual excitement, Floralie feels a calm and fragile dawn that gives way to a slow sun rising in her, blossoming with immense petals that hide the earth. Her stomach is as vast as the sky; the sun tastes like the best of fruits.¹⁹

Obliged by her conscience to say no to Lust, Floralie finally releases herself from his hold. With rather brutal irony, Lust announces to the others that Floralie is a virgin.

Floralie is yet to endure another seduction before the end of the night, this an extremely dark one. With the pretense of asking God's pardon for Floralie, Father Nombillet, another of the characters in Floralie's dream, leads her away to a little chapel in the woods.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 108.

The darkness in it is completely opaque and smells of rotten earth and urine. It is so dark that all the lamps of those people gathered in the clearing nearby would be drowned.²⁰ The priest is dressed, surely, in clerical black.

Kneeling before the priest, Floralie must accept that the joyous act that gives life is pernicious. She is ready to regret each day on which the thought of this joy has created some light for her.²¹

Like a frog too, the priest, huffing and sweating, seduces Floralie. The night bears down on her like a heavy, sweaty man.²²

Quickly dressing so that he will not catch cold, the priest assures Floralie that both God and the devil know that she is a great sinner and that she must offer an equally great penitence to God.

Anthyme partakes in the same visions of this "dark night of the soul" as Floralie, but separately. Their paths converge finally at the gathering for the Holiday of the Holy Thorn. Anthyme's crise de conscience, though provoked by a sexual question, that of Floralie's virginity, seems to be concerned more with the question of authority, God's and that of those who interpret it. This must be the first occasion that has forced Anthyme to investigate his conscience thus.

Georges V. Fournier, in an article on Carrier, sees Anthyme's strife as that of the whole Quebec people, when Anthyme debates between his own knowledge that Floralie had no hymen to be broken and his acceptance of what others say: that there ought to be a hymen. He thinks that he will go to the priest who ought to be the final authority

²⁰Ibid., p. 157.

²¹Ibid., p. 160.

²²Ibid., p. 161.

on the matter but then wonders whether this wall or curtain (i.e., a hymen) to be broken down is just another story.

"In fact the French Canadian - intellectual or not - has always had to choose between reality and its negation, i.e., the dictum of his élite. Québec's people, Québec's literature, have wavered for many years between the word and the flesh, between what they were told and what they have lived."²³

We see, too, that Anthyme is very aware of the darkness of this night. He feels extremely lost and alone within it. With his first realization of Floralie's lack of hymen, he becomes cold; it is no longer summer for him.²⁴ Furious, Anthyme begins to curse and blaspheme at the injustice of his situation, but in the end, he is powerless; his fist cannot reach the sky.²⁵

Abandoning Floralie, Anthyme returns to the road to find that his horse and buggy are gone and assumes that it may be some sort of satanic punishment. Still, he is baffled, since in fact he abides by all the moral precepts of his church.

Anthyme sets off wandering through the forest, partially in search of his horse, partially to avoid Floralie. The darkness of the forest renders him blind. He fears being caught in quick sand, where he would become a tree growing into the earth, toward Hell, rather than toward the sky.²⁶ His own image indicates that there is an inverted and unnatural quality in Anthyme's life.

Anthyme's world is drowned in darkness, a pebble at the bottom

²³Georges-V. Fournier, "Roch Carrier: A Quest for the Authentic", Ellipse, IV (Summer 1970), 38.

²⁴Op. cit., p. 45.

²⁵Ibid., p. 47.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 65-6.

of the sea.²⁷ He has never seen the night before this evening and he is overcome with vertigo. Possibly he could ask God to light up the road for him, but he knows that God would never light the sun for a man such as Anthyme. His God is not a comforting one.

To express his violence, Anthyme wants desperately to beat someone or something. But he is alone in the middle of the darkness; he cannot wound the forest or make the silence sob.²⁸ In the centre of this forest he is alone and the night has erased all traces of his life. He is quite powerless and inconsequential. Anthyme can hardly imagine the day that preceded this terrible night. "La nuit avait changé cette journée en une fumée épaisse et noire."²⁹

The darkness and the forest squeeze around Anthyme; they are cold, soft, black snow in which he is slipping away.³⁰ He begins to suffocate; he is losing life in the absence of light and warmth. A flock of black birds, shrieking and pecking at him, finally drive him to a state of panic where he tries to shout out, appealing for Christ's help, but no sound is actually uttered.

As the birds withdraw, the darkness becomes less dense. Now Anthyme sees his own horse and buggy approaching through the sky, an omen of death; they are come in search of the soul of the person who sees them. Anthyme tries to hide himself; he does not want to die. Life is wriggling in him, in his body, despite the desperate odds

²⁷Ibid., p. 80.

²⁸Ibid., p. 81.

²⁹Ibid., p. 82.

³⁰Ibid., p. 83.

against him.³¹ Dozing, Anthyme thinks of the warm sleep that he knew by Floralie's body -- her life-giving warmth.

Abruptly, Anthyme enters into the dream-visions already begun with Floralie, and is confronted by Néron. The latter reads Anthyme's heart too and sees nothing but blackness, blacker than this deep night; even his blood is black.³² We see Anthyme overwhelmed with guilt and shame. He tries to defend himself by saying that he always goes to church. Néron ignores his efforts at self-defense and insists on the blackness of Anthyme's heart. It is so dark that he darkens the night.³³ It is so rotten that one would think himself next to a corpse.³⁴ Néron, evidently the bad conscience of Anthyme, asks him why he has hurt a human being, a woman.

Anthyme tries to snatch Floralie back from Néron's wagon, but the wagon races off quickly with her still in it. Anthyme manages to retain one small lamp from the wagon, which he throws into the woods, anticipating that it would burst into flame, breaking the night, and devouring the forest. The lamp's small flame simply goes out. Anthyme is plunged again into a total darkness that matches his heart.

For a short time, he seems to revel in his own diabolical nature. No light can enter his heart. "Il n'avait pas voulu qu'y entra [sic] l'amour de Floralie."³⁵ However, Anthyme, quite contrite, immediately begs God for enough time to convert himself before he is crushed. Anthyme believes that perhaps he is destined to be a sinner,

³¹Ibid., p. 84.

³²Ibid., p. 88.

³³Ibid., p. 88.

³⁴Ibid., p. 89

³⁵Ibid., p. 91.

despite his efforts to be God-fearing and his remorse for having been cruel to his wife.

He wanders on through the night, pathetically disparaging himself and declaring his love for Floralie. Then, in a long monologue addressed to God, Anthyme begins to give voice to many doubts concerning what he has been taught about Him. First, Anthyme lists the numerous ways in which he has conformed to his religious teachings. Resisting his instincts, he has never touched a woman before Floralie, and he seldom got drunk, but he has not been rewarded for being good. When he had nightmares, as a child, God never came to comfort him; he was too busy trying to catch those individuals indulging in carnal pleasures. And tonight, despite his faithful prayers to God, Anthyme is punished by losing his horse, by being thrown into the arms of a dishonest woman, and by a night brought to fall like a deluge. He cannot understand why, and God supplies no answers.

Slowly revolting, Anthyme says that if he had anything to drink, he would get drunk, then piss on God's pant-leg. Anthyme's self-assertiveness grows.

"Avec une grande force, comme, au printemps, celle qui monte de la terre dans les arbres pour les faire éclater en bourgeons, la colère montait en lui."³⁶

He becomes ever more lucid, telling God that he is not just, that he is hiding as though he did not exist. Anthyme understands now that God is afraid of a man who does not fear him. Ultimately, Anthyme realizes that whether he prays to God or insults him, he will not help Anthyme to feed his pigs or find his wife.³⁷

³⁶Ibid., p. 121.

³⁷Ibid., p. 123.

Still mulling over the problem of Floralie's virginity, Anthyme finds himself in an imagined world of ice and snow. He even wishes it were winter, "un hiver si mort que rien ne pourrait enflammer."³⁸ Just as the energies of light and warmth have reached a crucially low ebb in him, Anthyme comes upon the gathering for the Festival of the Holy Thorn, where he finds Floralie.

Subjected to the threats of Father Nombillet, Anthyme must accuse himself of being a man -- his only sin. Now though, despite his religious revolt, he feels comforted and re-assured by being pardoned by the priest. Anthyme's revolt against God's authority is short-lived.

Light and darkness prevail as a general setting throughout the story of Floralie, où es-tu? For the author, light, particularly from the sun stands for natural and positive forces of life. Darkness is the negation of these forces. This expression of nature is very similar to that of Amer-Indian culture, where religion is a pantheistic celebration of natural forces. It suggests a far greater acceptance and enjoyment of the natural goods to be found in life than the religion of a Father Nombillet. Thus the revolt of the French Canadian is perhaps not so much against religion as against clericalism; it is the officials of the church of Quebec who have distorted genuine religion and turned it into an aspect of a restrictive society. The latter is an idea suggested by the critic, Odoric Bouffard, himself a Catholic monk.³⁹

³⁸Ibid., p. 151.

³⁹Odoric Bouffard, O.F.M., "Le Canadien français entre deux mondes", Culture, XXVIII (1967), 351.

Heaven and hell are examples, within a Christian framework, of light and darkness. But hell, too, has its fiery light. These allusions are to be seen in the story also.

We shall look further at the novel for some examples of light and darkness, both in the general setting and in the Christian context, with an effort to point out some of the ambiguities of these qualities.

First of all, the major part of the story takes place at nighttime. It is that part of the day when normally one sleeps and sleep gives rise to dreams. These dreams allow an exploration of the sombre regions of one's soul, areas usually well concealed during the waking day.

Floralie fears the fall of night. She awakes from the sunlit dreams of her Italian lover to find that Anthyme has gone, the sun is darkening and she is getting cold. "Comme un gros pied d'animal, la nuit allait s'abattre sur la forêt et écraser le jour."⁴⁰ She must struggle harder now to stay alive.

We have already seen Anthyme lost in the forest of total darkness, pleading with God to lighten his path. He feels his life threatened by the physical and metaphysical darkness of this night.

Floralie and Anthyme awake from their shared visions with "l'air délicat de l'aube."⁴¹ The light of day releases them from their dark preoccupations.

Before night falls, Floralie takes refuge in the sun against her husband who is calling her a damned woman. She may be damned but

⁴⁰Op. cit., p. 62.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 168

she is alive. A single ray of sun manages to break through the shade where she and Anthyme are lying. Floralie moves so that her face is in the sun and, stretching out her arms, she yields to the light's caress.⁴² The sun does not know that she is damned.

Floralie knows that in hell, there is a sun too, not a caressing sun, but one that devours and kills. Hell's sun gives no light, only rank darkness, and eternal shade.⁴³ She cannot be damned, she reasons; the damned are not alive, for hell's sun brings death just as the sun of the sky gives life.⁴⁴ As long as she can see the sun in the sky brightening the earth, Floralie need not fear the devil's sun. Still, Floralie is afraid that death's sun will, in punishment for her sins, take hold of her bit by bit with its awful cold.

Just emerging from the forest and his night of dark visions, Anthyme declares that he has seen hell already. The fire that he saw come out of the earth and the crying demons that he saw surge up with the fire will leave a horrible scar on his life.⁴⁵

The author indicates as well the necessity of some protection from the sun. In the scene where Anthyme and Floralie are resting in the woods, we are told that the sun is flooding the universe and that if there were not the protection of the tree's branches, the light would be violent. This suggests the balance needed within nature. Also, when Lust is tempting Floralie, his hands travel along "les

⁴²Ibid., p. 49.

⁴³Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 167.

baies ombrées de la jeune femme".⁴⁶ Surely, these shaded areas are considered desirable. We are reminded of Carrier's response to the question of where he would like to live: "on the sun, in a little corner of shade".⁴⁷

Finally, there is the great fire at the end of the story where Father Nombillet's chapel, himself and many of the pilgrims included, are consumed. Some may feel that the sinners are punished thus or that the fire has sanctified them. But within the author's outlook, this fire must be seen as one that destroys an old and negative way of life, thus giving way to the creation of a new and, hopefully, more positive one. Therefore, fire is both destructive and regenerative.

Floralie and Anthyme, and those they represent do not manage successfully to throw over the restrictions of religion upon their life at this point. When they awake, they hurriedly resume their normal existence of man and wife, within a society conducting itself under restrictive norms. Nevertheless, they have had a glimpse of the possibilities of other ways of life, that of enjoyed sexual fulfilment, that of independence before God in self-assertiveness, that of a natural life enjoyed without threat of damnation. The seeds of a new growth have been sown with this generation but they will not reap the benefits of it. Their reward is a story by Roch Carrier, dedicated "à ceux qui, appelant l'aube, n'ont connu que la nuit."

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 107.

⁴⁷ Quand les écrivains québécois jouent le jeu!, p. 60.

CHAPTER II

LA GUERRE, YES SIR! -- POLITICAL AWAKENING

Roch Carrier's novel, entitled La guerre, yes sir!, is his first written, but must be examined after Floralie, où es-tu?, if we wish to emphasize the development of Quebec in the twentieth century, as seen in the novels. In the novel, one of the characters says, "Des choses se passent aujourd'hui qu'on n'aurait pas crues il y a seulement trente ans."¹ We are situated at the time of the second world war. Floralie and Anthyme Corriveau are well aged now; the story is focused on the wake for their son, who was old enough to be enlisted in the army and who has been returned dead, from the war.

As World War II marked the end of the era of the roman de la terre in Quebec's literary history, the same period produced a new social and political awareness among its people. It was the war and the industry necessary to it that ended the Great Depression. Both urban and rural prosperity increased immensely. The war provided an opportunity, if not the necessity, of leaving the farm. With travel to cities and other countries, and with necessarily increased awareness of political events beyond their own sphere, people were exposed to alternative modes of life.

La guerre, yes sir! portrays this period, showing the increasing disintegration of the rural family in Quebec, the religious doubts of

¹Carrier, La guerre, yes sir!, p. 58.

its people and especially, the crystallization of their awareness of themselves as a particular social entity among others.

In the novel, we have examples of the diverse reactions on the part of the French Canadian to the war. There is Corriveau who seems to have seen the occasion, as many did, as an opportunity to escape from the confining limits of his rural home and religion. On the other hand, there is Joseph, who, though surely not a cowardly individual, is completely unwilling to risk his life fighting for the "maudits Anglais"; he mutilates himself to become ineligible for enlistment. We also meet a deserter and a draft-dodger.

Certainly, it is the generally political question with which Carrier seems most concerned. In one article the author is quoted as saying, "Je pense que notre révolution date de la deuxième guerre mondiale."² In another article, he outlines his accomplishment in writing this novel:

"Je fixe indirectement l'attitude des Canadiens-français durant et par rapport à la guerre. A la fois pas du tout concernés et peu à peu contraints à des prises de conscience essentielles."³

It is this larger war that brings an awareness of the wars among themselves and the ones that they are waging within their own country.

The word "war" immediately suggests struggle, one of life and death. It may be life and death in the physical, literal sense, or life and death in the psychological or political way. One may be alive and still quite lacking in the necessities for human fulfilment and self-assertion.

² André Major, Le Devoir, (2.3.68), p. 12.

³ Alain Pontaut, "Claude Péloquin et la conférence blanche", La Presse, (2.3.68), p. 25.

The Imagery of La guerre, yes sir! is still largely that of light and darkness. The novel, however, is much more a narrative of action and event than an account of psychological reflection and thus yields fewer possibilities for the use of imagery. But, as light and darkness have been seen in the previous chapter to represent the forces of life and anti-life, we shall extend our study here beyond the imagery itself to other related expressions of the basic urge for life among the characters of the novel. We shall consider such things as anger, food and warmth, sexual activity, as well as light and darkness, as evidence of the author's stress on positive life-forces, even in the calamitous situation given.

The first manifestation of anger on the part of the characters is a verbal one, specifically their swearing and their abundant and imaginative blasphemy. Confronted with the numerous injustices of their life, they swear. Bérubé says to Arsène, "Calice de ciboire d'hostie! Christ en bicyclette sur son Calvaire! Tu trouves qu'on s'amuse à la guerre?"⁴ They are angry at the war, at death, at those who have obtrusively entered into their previously closed existence, at God who provides no comfort or metes out no justice.

The right to blaspheme is even a sort of informal initiation into manhood. Men are allowed to swear while children are not. Philibert is accustomed to being physically abused by his father, Arsène, for his use of profanity. One day, however, Arsène suddenly recognizes his son as no longer a child and thus grants him the right to blaspheme. They then begin a riotous exchange of blasphemous

⁴Carrier, La guerre, yes sir!, p. 77.

phrases, such as, "La terre est dure comme un noeud dans le bois du Crucifix."⁵

Carrier explains his use of profanity in the novel: "Le sacre, ... j'en fais grand usage dans ce livre, parce qu'il m'apparaît comme la première affirmation d'une conscience individuelle."⁶ The author has also insisted on the need to reject formalized, imitative French in writing. He returns to "la source des personnages d'instincts, de colères, de sentiments profonds."⁷ His effort is to restore the language of Quebec (and thus its people) in its own right, with all its vitality.

Their anger takes on a more active aspect, when, late in the story, the villagers, les petits, finally revolt against one embodiment of les gros, who threaten their existence, the English soldiers who accompany Corriveau's body home. A terribly chaotic scene with Arsène and Bérubé having just ended, the English soldiers pitch all the villagers' belongings out into the snow and ask the people to leave the Corriveau house. Concerned with finding their clothes, the villagers fail to understand at first that they have been insulted. Once outside, however, the villagers are humiliated by the realization that they have been thrown out of one of their own houses by the English, and that they are being prevented by these English soldiers from lamenting and praying for one of their own people. They feel the cold no longer. "La colère les défendait contre le vent."⁸

⁵Ibid., p. 118

⁶Op.cit., p. 25.

⁷Renald Bérubé, Voix et Images du Pays, III, p. 148.

⁸Carrier, La guerre, yes sir!, p. 93.

In the meantime, mother Corriveau stokes the fire in the house. Despite her and her husband's resentment of the English intruders, they cannot prevent themselves from offering their life-sustaining gifts. She serves the soldiers generous portions of meat-pie, while her husband begrudgingly offers them some of his cider. "Nous savons vivre," Anthyme tells the soldiers, but they fail to understand.⁹

The villagers, still outside, fathom more and more the depth of their humiliation. They have been chased from the Corriveau house, inhabited for more than 100 years by the same family, by the English, who are not even Canadians, much less members of the village. Their first response is verbal; they begin to hurl "des blasphèmes enflammés" at the English soldiers.¹⁰ They revolt; the English may have taken the French in this country, but they will not take away the last night with their son Corriveau.

Led by Joseph, the man who has cut his own hand off to avoid going to war, the villagers storm the house; they grab the soldiers, insult them, tell them to go home to England. The sergeant gives his soldiers the order to attack and the violence and anger of the villagers increase twofold. The villagers are once again put out the door but "la petite guerre refusait de s'éteindre."¹¹ The battle ends when Henri shoots and kills one of the soldiers, thus gaining, at least, an isolated victory over the English soldiers.

Ultimately, the villagers may be defeated but, at least, they

⁹Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 100.

¹¹Ibid., p. 109.

have established themselves, through their fired cursing and angry revolt, against those people who have intruded upon their way of life. Where, in some circumstances, anger is of a dubious value, it must be seen here as a positive self-assertion. If not much more, the villagers have succeeded in saying "no" to the violation of their rights.

The life-giving activities that are stressed in the novel are simply basic necessities of life: food, drink, warmth and shelter, and sex. It is the lavish and unselfish offering of these things which distinguishes them from the sheer performance of duty. These villagers could not be criticized for mean-ness. Mother Corriveau the light and life-filled young woman of Floralie, où es-tu? still displays immense life-giving capacities in her loving offers of hospitality, in keeping the fires up to make more food and to have the house warm. "Quand on a un mort dans la maison il ne faut pas que la maison sente la mort."¹² The whole village having gathered at the Corriveau house for the wake, she feeds them generous portions of meat-pie, covered with a wonderful fruit sauce. Anthyme Corriveau contributes to the death-defeating effort by bringing out his bubbling cider. He has always been very careful with it, protecting it so that its light does not escape.¹³ "Durant des années, le cidre d'Anthyme se chargeait des forces merveilleuses de la terre."¹⁴ Anthyme has captured the life-forces of nature in a bottle, and now offers it to his friends.

Eating and drinking alternate with earnest praying at the

¹²Ibid., p. 56.

¹³Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 56.

wake. The villagers pray, "Avec toute leur force d'hommes, toute leur force de femmes accoucheuses d'enfants."¹⁵

As we have already seen, even the soldiers are treated by mother and father Corriveau as village sons and are given food and drink as well. But the soldiers eat and drink little. They talk little and do not laugh at all. The communication gap widens; the English think that the French are pigs, while the French cannot understand the English restraint and lack of gusto.

The people of the story also make an attempt to ward off death with sex, with greater or lesser success. More often than not, however, the urge for sex and love seems to be intensified in the face of death. Amélie, one of the village women, has acquired two husbands. Henri, her actual husband is a deserter; Arthur is a draft-resister and came to live with Amélie while Henri was away with the army.

They take turns sleeping with their wife, who is very frank about her sexual desires and calls at will upon the men to perform. She summons Arthur; he is dazzled by her soft flesh, white and shining.¹⁶ Arthur, however, fails to perform this time, too pre-occupied with thoughts of the dead Corriveau.

Amélie, too, keeps a house that smells of wood-fires and food on the stove. Having started preparations for the meal, she shouts at Henri to come down from the attic. Their love-making is delayed by the arrival of the Corriveau cortege. Once it has passed, however, they return to bed and "sans qu'ils n'osent se l'avouer, ils s'aimèrent."¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 44.

Bérubé, the picture of a man alienated from his own society, yet not accepted by his English soldier comrades, has married Molly, a prostitute from Newfoundland, and the personification of carnal pleasure. Mother Corriveau has offered them her son's bedroom. They go to bed there, and making love, they too are happy for a moment. They fall asleep, but later, Molly wakens her husband. She fears that he may die, like Corriveau, and she asks him to make love to her. "C'est la mort qu'ils poignardèrent violemment."¹⁸ After the brawl between the villagers and the English soldiers, Bérubé sees that he is rejected by both sides. He rejoins Molly in bed, and, with a terrible confusion of love and hate, he has sex with her again. She is the only means left to him of proving himself a real French Canadian.¹⁹

During the scene where Bérubé cruelly humiliates Arsene, presumably as Bérubé himself feels that he has been humiliated, Molly appears before the gathering, "comme une autre incarnation du diable".²⁰ Forgetting to put her underclothes back on, she has come downstairs virtually nude, with only her sheer wedding dress on. The women are jealous of her young and beautiful body; theirs have been spoiled by long years of child-rearing. The men, however, are consumed by this gently sculpted flame, Molly's body, beneath the thin tulle. "Un incendie crépitait dans leurs corps."²¹ The fire of sexual energy

¹⁸Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 110.

²⁰Ibid., p. 81.

²¹Ibid., p. 81.

that Molly generates is ambiguous. On the one hand, the men find it pleasant, but on the other, it is reminiscent of visions of hell. For many of this society, sexual pleasure is still to be punished for being a sinful pursuit. The flame that gives life may lead to eternal death. At Corriveau's funeral too, the priest goes to great lengths to emphasize hell's fire. He even suggests that the war may be a little of the fire of hell brought by God to punish those who no longer have faith in the Church. But he especially marks the hellish punishment in store for those who enjoy physical pleasures: "les flammes qui purifient du péché, ces flammes auxquelles vous serez soumis à cause de votre nature pécheresse et voluptueuse."²²

The image of the spiritual dress bestowed by God arises when mother Corriveau has a vision of her son in heaven. She sees him pardoned now for all his numerous, religious offences and clothed in the immaculate dress of those few chosen for eternal life.

Esmalda, Corriveau's sister, and a nun, arrives during the wake and knocks at one of the windows. With a gust of cold air, her face appears in the opened window. She cannot come into the house and so remains outside smiling parsimoniously at the villagers. After uttering a few statements of confused logic concerning life and death, she disappears into the cold and night. The black-clad nun is the antithesis of the women we have already discussed. Where they bring food, warmth, love and sex, she brings no comfort, only cold and darkness.

²²Ibid., p. 116.

Molly is the only person wearing white at the gathering, all the others being dressed in black mourning clothes. Certainly not an indication of virginity, perhaps it is a symbol of her vitality and life-giving capacity. Her dress is soiled by Bérubé who, in hitting her, draws blood that stains the cloth. At the end of the story, Molly is the first to disappear from sight. Her white dress blends with the snow, but also, as her dress has had blood spilt on it, so has the snow been dirtied by the war.

When her son's coffin arrives, mother Corriveau gets out all her candles, blessed and ordinary, to place around it. She believes that the blessed ones have protected them from various natural perils, such as thunderstorms, and presumably, their light will ward off other evils that may threaten this night. The gathering is centred around the coffin of the dead Corriveau, but the coffin, in turn, is bathed in the light from the candles. The juxtaposition of death and the flames suggests the regenerative power of fire; out of life dying may emerge a new one. Light and shadow from the candles continue to dance, making patterns on the wall; they remind us of the ever-continuing struggle of life and death.

The candle-light is sustained as the villagers continue to eat, drink, joke, and pray -- their efforts at keeping death at a distance. However, the gathering's atmosphere having been darkened by Bérubé's beating of Arsène, we see that the candles are now extinguished. The only light available is a greasy yellow one, from mother Corriveau's kitchen. It seems that even the vast life-giving energies of mother Corriveau are diminished, in the face of such an inhuman act on the part of Bérubé.

There are two visionary scenes within the novel that reveal the great anxiety, to which the fear of death, both individual and collective, has given rise. The first is Mireille's but tells, rather, Corriveau's sentiments about the life he left at home. The second vision is Henri's and shows his own obsessions with death. Mireille, a young paralytic of the village, lies in her bed the night of the wake. The darkness weighs down heavily upon her, like stones. Somehow detached from her, Mireille sees her foot move, the toes lit up. She stops bending her toes and sees her foot, as it really is, made of wax. Mireille turns dumb and cannot call for help. She becomes aware of Corriveau lying in her brother's bed. Suddenly, he gets up and, taking a match, lights up each of her waxen toes. They become ten small candles for Corriveau's wake. We know that Corriveau had wanted to abandon village life. He was dissatisfied with the restraints of the family and the fearful morality preached by the church. His opportunity to leave came with the war; only he has died at war. Mireille's vision indicates Corriveau's desire to bring to an end the excessively burdened life of the French Canadian, represented here by Mireille, the invalid. And as the regenerative image of the candles around Corriveau's coffin suggests, perhaps a new and positive life may emerge from the one that Corriveau would destroy now.

Henri, the deserter, is the victim of an even greater, threatening vision. He has stayed hidden in the attic the night of the wake, for fear of being arrested by the English soldiers. The original husband of Amélie, he has been displaced by Arthur. He hates himself for being afraid as he hates himself for having lost Amélie.

He can no longer find pride and dignity in being a free man, a husband and father; he must hide out in fear. The attic is glacially cold; human life is hardly possible in such circumstances. The sun is long gone, this winter night, "où même la lumière ne résiste pas au froid."²³ Henri has been unable to sleep, despite the overwhelming darkness. He finally does fall asleep, concluding that perhaps death is the only escape from unhappiness. He is awakened by the thought of the sun that is caressing his face as it does on summer mornings. But it is only a mirage that does not enliven the earth, dead under the ice and snow, or brighten the attic where Henri fears the night and its mysterious shadows. He buries himself under the warm covers, seeking some security.

The sun that Henri dreamt of was "un gros soleil, bien rond, comme un beau fruit".²⁴ But his dream of the sun yields to a vision of death, where Corriveau's coffin is the sole thing left on earth. The coffin, many times enlarged, consumes the villagers, some with their animals, and finally the villages of the whole area. Ultimately, all the world's peoples, trains, boats, and even the sea disappear into the coffin. Then Henri sees the coffin in his attic, where day has risen, and feels himself pushed toward it. The coffin is big enough now for only one man: Corriveau or Henri. Calling for help, Henri decides to go join the gathering at Corriveau's wake. He hesitates on the doorstep before this night that is so dark, that drowns the village in its darkness, that is so deep that it gives Henri vertigo.²⁵

²³Ibid., p. 95.

²⁴Ibid., p. 97.

²⁵Ibid., p. 99.

He takes up his gun and leaves, seeking the living comfort of his friends.

Henri's vision of death is complex. We sense a sort of willingness to see the whole world annihilated, to remove all questions of struggle to maintain life. He himself entered the coffin with the others at one point. On the other hand, he resists death at the end and effects a sort of revolt in taking up his gun and joining his comrades despite the risk involved. His dream may also indicate the passing of the way of life that the French Canadian has led up to the time of the war. The old order of the country existence is breaking up. Their sons are leaving and strangers are invading their insular existence. A new life must ensue. Perhaps, Henri fears, too, the ultimate holocaust that may be inflicted upon the world during this war.

As in Floralie, où es-tu?, the major part of this story takes place at night, the time when one's fears are allowed to gain greater hold and thoughts of death are closer. The darkness is also an appropriate setting for the inhuman events that take place. The forces of light and life have a hard struggle against the darkness of some of the deeds witnessed this night.

The winter, too, seems a fitting season for the story. With its cold, and ice and snow, there is very little sign of life to be perceived. Life in the country becomes immensely more difficult during the winter and the threat of death is much more imminent. The story features the death of an individual but is pervaded by a sense

of the death of a way of life, as we have already mentioned. At the same time, winter as a dormant period is necessary for many forms of flora and fauna to flourish again. The death period is inevitably followed by the spring where life flowers once more. So, in spite of the blackness of the story, there is an implicit promise that a life-asserting episode may follow. In offering us this cameo representation of rural Quebec, as it was being affected during the time of the second world war, the author has painted a generally dark and gloomy picture. But the characters ultimately exhibit their will to live against the odds given. They do know how to stave off death. They have begun to revolt against what is anti-life. They are groping for a new mode of existence.

Carrier has said that the story takes place in the Middle Ages of Quebec.²⁶ Instead we can read Dark Ages, if we choose to continue the prevalent imagery. And we know that the Renaissance, a re-birth, followed the Dark Ages.

The novel's humour, produced largely from the use of irony and satire, stands, as well, as evidence of the author's concern for life opposed to death. The prejudices and failings of both the French and the English are thus exposed. Nevertheless, the characters are not belittled for being laughed at; the author respects their primary validity as human beings.

Renald Bérubé, in his study of La guerre, yes sir!, believes that the novel allows the French Canadian to laugh at his former shortcomings. The lapse of a quarter century has seen so many changes

²⁶Ronald Sutherland, "Faulknerian Quebec", Canadian Literature, XL (Spring 1969), pp. 86-87.

that the reader can laugh at what he used to be, since he is that no longer. The critic also feels that the novel provides for a solidarity among Quebec people by uniting them through the reading of their common past and by identifying the weaknesses that previously paralyzed them.²⁷

Thus, the story of La guerre, yes sir! does not show the positive forms that Quebec life might yet assume. We see only the incipient shapes of such a revolution. The author is not immensely optimistic but he has clearly shown that he would establish the powers of life against those of death.

²⁷Renald Bérubé, Voix et Images du Pays, III, pp. 163-4.

CHAPTER III

IL EST PAR LÀ, LE SOLEIL - FLIGHT TO THE CITY

At the end of La guerre, yes sir!, Philibert says to his father, "Mon vieux Christ, si je suis un homme, je fous le camp."¹ He is going to become a soldier, like Corriveau. His declaration may almost be considered an omen of the pattern that the events of his life will take on. We know that Corriveau has been killed at war. Not only that, Philibert is helping his father to dig the dead soldier's grave at this very moment.

In any case, we sense Philibert's desperation to leave his family and his society. He no longer wants to honour his father; he sees the disintegration of the old way of life, particularly through his grandparents; religion seems to offer him little. So he will escape his situation by setting off for the city, as we shall see in Il est par là, le soleil.

Philibert's story could easily be that of a given individual, but, sadly, the truth of his experiences is surely that of a multitude of people. He is the French Canadian "[qui] a appris comment aller au ciel, mais non comment aller à la banque."² The wealth, the enticement of material goods, the glitter of the city, all tempt Philibert. But he is painfully lacking in the means to cope with such a world. He is

¹Carrier, La guerre, yes sir!

²Carrier, Il est par là, le soleil, p. 132.

not adequately educated, and he has no money with which to start his new life.

The fictional story of Philibert is largely supported by the factual account of the French Canadian situation, given by Pierre Vallières in Nègres blancs d'Amérique. His descriptions of the poverty of his people, the resignation of his mother to misery, the hope of his father for a better world, the immense difficulty in freeing himself from his situation, are all to be found in Carrier's novel. Even the imagery of light and darkness that Vallières uses is similar to that of Carrier. In a chapter entitled, "la grande noirceur", Vallières expresses what could easily be Philibert's own thoughts: "... je n'étais plus que désir fiévreux, d'un monde meilleur, qu'impuissance inquiète, en même temps, que volonté perdue dans la nuit de l'incertain."³

The historical period to which Vallières refers in this chapter, 1944-1959, may well be the time setting for Il est par là, le soleil. Unlike the other two novels, already studied, that take place within twenty-four hours, this one takes place over an unspecific, but extended length of time. The second world war is being waged, as Philibert comes to Montreal. Also, once again as its literature shows, the emphasis in Quebec society was shifting from the rural to the urban situation.

The author provides us with a few glimpses of Philibert's childhood. Then we find him, moving in picaresque fashion, from job to job. The continuity of the story arises from the perpetual up and

³Pierre Vallières, Nègres blancs d'Amérique, p. 144.

down balance of hope and disappointment. Always enticed by the sun, that is, freedom and the good life, Philibert passes from one circumstance to another; inevitably he is thwarted in his attempts to extricate himself from depth and darkness, to attain the sun.

Arsène, Philibert's father, is a grave-digger. While at home, the son helps his father, even digs his own small graves. His whole life-struggle is an attempt to climb out of these dark depths, and move toward the sun. As in Floralie, où es-tu?, the imagery of light and darkness conveys, in great part, Philibert's struggle for life over death. In this novel, depth, as well, is closely associated with darkness as an expression of what is anti-life.

We shall first consider Philibert's family situation that he wants so much to escape, to see what makes him so dissatisfied there. In Montreal, we shall see Philibert in his succession of diverse jobs. We leave until later a discussion of the events which do offer Philibert some hope and light. We shall mention, too, Philibert's contacts with religion and politics, those pursuits which often provide one's raison d'être in life, but not for Philibert.

Philibert's father makes his living, ironically enough, at the expense of other human and animal lives. He is a grave-digger and animal-slaughterer. He looks forward to funerals for the profits to be gained from both digging the grave and killing the pig necessary for the wake. He seems to enjoy killing animals; the days when he is slaughtering are the only ones on which he resists beating his children.

The opening incident of the novel provides further evidence of the father's cruelty. Philibert has discovered his Christmas present,

a toy car, hidden away. Delighted, he runs to thank his mother for it, but his father grabs it away and crushes it with his foot, telling his son that he must learn to wait for things. The pain of the little boy's disappointment is still increased; his father wraps up the empty box that contained the car and places it under the Christmas tree. Needless to say, Philibert anticipates receiving another car, but his hopes are crushed as flat as the toy was. His initial reactions of delight, gratitude, and affection are supplanted by negative ones of hurt and disappointment.

On the other hand, Philibert's mother appears as a somewhat more compassionate and loving person. It was she Philibert ran to kiss when he found his Christmas present, and it was to her he called for comfort when he would wake from a nightmare. The picture of Philibert's mother is consistent with Carrier's apparent view of women as the suppliers of loving warmth and light in life.

When in Montreal, Philibert receives, from his mother, a letter "[qui], devant ses yeux, tremblote comme la flamme d'une petite lampe à la fenêtr[^]e de son enfance."⁴ Despite the light that she furnishes in her son's life, Philibert is aware that his mother has been robbed of her youth and beauty by having too many children. The social norms that prevented her from smiling for the family photograph have forced upon her, as well, the impoverished existence of being nothing more than a producer of babies. Even her children who have died "nagent dans l'eau grise de ses yeux."⁵ Her dulled eyes indicate the vitality

⁴Op.cit., p. 73.

⁵Ibid., p. 78.

of which she has been deprived. When Philibert's parents make love on their creaking bed, all he hears is "une bête torturée dans la nuit."⁶ Like Corriveau, Philibert would wish, even if only unconsciously, an end to the society where too many children are born, for whom life will surely be too hard.

His grandparents' house has always been a refuge for Philibert. It was always painted "en blanc pour effacer les années," and completely concealed among willow-trees.⁷ Whenever the day became too hot or bright, Philibert would seek the protection of the willows' shade. One day, however, the trees are cut down. "Privée de leur ombre verte", the house is quickly decaying; "elle n'a plus les saules pour donner à son bois le goût de ne pas mourir."⁸ We see Carrier's emphasis on the necessity of some shade to maintain life, as we have already noted in Floralie, où es-tu?

The house also signifies a sort of moral decay, the death of an old way of life. The grandparents kept the house young, while they were young. Now that their children are gone and they are no longer actively participating in life, they have grown old and their house has degenerated to a pig-sty. None of the children will inherit the house to continue its life. The children prefer a heritage of money and therefore, their parents have sold the place. Philibert's grandfather revolts for an instant; he picks up his gun and sends the pigs scurrying, saying that he wants to live. But the grandmother, apparently

⁶Ibid., p. 13.

⁷Ibid., p. 22.

⁸Ibid., p. 23.

resigned to her life's passing, simply replies, "A quoi ça sert de vivre?"⁹

In the part of the novel dealing with Philibert's childhood, there are three sections that indicate his preoccupation with imprisonment and death. The first is a vision prompted by a story that Philibert has been told about thirty-nine ducks captured in a frozen river. The old man who tells the story asks Philibert to imagine himself in the same situation. Evidently, the boy identifies readily with the entrapped ducks. He pictures the old man slicing the ducks' heads off with a scythe. The severed heads come to haunt Philibert at night, "comme de douloureuses étoiles."¹⁰ They cry out, drip blood on him, and infest his bedclothes. He is terrorized by a vision of the ducks, as helplessly trapped and slaughtered victims, perhaps like himself.

Next, we see Philibert, in imitation of his father, digging a miniature grave. He first considers putting the coffin of a dead child waiting for burial into it, but cannot manage to lift the coffin. Instead, he decides to bury his own hand that he fancies dead and worm-ridden. He even sees it undergoing the last judgement, being damned to eternal punishment. The scene recalls the one in La guerre, yes sir! where Joseph cuts off his own hand. The mutilation of oneself indicates a tendency toward self-alienation and a frightening resignation to at least partial death.

Fortunately, Philibert can withdraw his hand intact from the grave, and death's grip. He substitutes his sister's doll for his hand. Philibert is happy at how realistic his feigned burial ceremony has

⁹Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 12.

been; his sister is even weeping, as she looks for her lost child.

Finally, Philibert has a nightmare that reveals his fear of an imprisoning death. He finds himself in a situation where he cannot get his bearings; the ground moves under his feet and all the plants around him disappear, "comme s'ils étaient devenus nuit."¹¹ "Le silence et la nuit ont de grosses mains velues qui pèsent sur son cou."¹² He cannot find his village; even the comforting smell of fresh bread is gone. Suddenly, Philibert sees his father where the village ought to be. Totally black, in this totally black night, his father appears; "les sueurs à son front sont noires aussi."¹³ He has just finished burying the whole village. It is small wonder that Philibert should wish to flee his father as death's accomplice. There is also further evidence of Philibert's sense of alienation in this nightmare. As Joseph did when he was preparing to sever his hand, Philibert hears his own breathing coming from someone behind him.

Philibert sets off for the city and freedom. The snow of the countryside still ensnares him, but now, "Il plane, toutes ailes offertes au vent."¹⁴ The snow erases all memories of his past; the steps he is taking now are "les premiers signes d'une vie."¹⁵ Bursting with new-found life, Philibert can barely contain himself. Later in

¹¹ Ibid., p. 16.

¹² Ibid., p. 16.

¹³ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

the story, we will read of Philibert: "Montréal pèse sur ses épaules comme une pierre, mais il est libre! il est libre tandis qu'au village, le ciel écrase les gens."¹⁶ Despite the unhappiness of his life in Montreal, Philibert has escaped the suffocating existence of his family and rural village.

Philibert's introduction to Montreal is a hard one. The snow here is not white, as at home, but brown, and it smells of cinders. The city appears totally chaotic to him, and the smell of exhaust fumes pervades the air. He is famished, but there is no clean snow or grass to be eaten here.

Finding himself in an evidently wealthy, English-speaking part of Montreal, Philibert quickly experiences the hard lot of the poorly prepared French Canadian in the urban setting. He begins to shovel walks, in order to earn some money or to be given some food. He is refused at every door, however, being taken either for a beggar or an immigrant. No one can understand, and no one offers to help him.¹⁷

Thin and flat-footed, Philibert fails his examination for enlistment; even the army, his great hope for an escape to a new life, considers him inadequate. He is very saddened.

Philibert then starts his long succession of varied jobs, all labouring ones, each one a sort of living death. Nearly every time, he will give up his job in revolt, and the hope that he will find something positive after that arises. But, in fact, each job seems slightly more horrible than the last.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁷with one exception which will be discussed later.

His first job is as a stock-boy in a grocery-store, where he feels he may be condemned to carry boxes up and down stairs, for the rest of his life. Throwing down the boxes, he says "no" to this possibility. "Les bras libres, il dévale l'escalier comme s'il était poursuivi par le feu."¹⁸

Philibert's next job finds him, once again, in a dark depth; he is making a trench in St. Catherine Street, just as he used to dig graves with his father. The trench is just wide enough for his shoulders. The heat of the asphalt burns his eyes and the cars scream by him on both sides, leaving their exhaust fumes for Philibert to inhale. He can envisage the trench closing and swallowing him up. "Au milieu de la rue Sainte-Catherine, Philibert creuse sa propre fosse."¹⁹ With this realization, he runs off, far away from the potential grave.

Following the road-work, Philibert takes up window-washing, which may have got him out of the ground, but is still a black job. The windows are as dark as the brick. Philibert's face is as dirty as his cleaning-brush. As in his childhood dream, the scaffold vacillates under his feet, and later Philibert sees the roofs of the buildings waving below him. He finds it hard to get a secure footing in life. He is "condamné à nettoyer les crachats noirs du ciel de Montréal."²⁰ Philibert is confronted with a vast, brick wall, held together with soot. And he ponders the words of a pamphlet, given to him that morning: that man needs a reason for being, that life should

¹⁸Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 60.

²⁰Ibid., p. 61.

be beautiful. With utter cynicism, Philibert tears up the leaflet and casts it to the wind.

Philibert is next to be found enduring the hardships of factory work, making boots. Here, the men's minds become prisoners of the perpetual vibration of screaming machinery. But Philibert has a story to tell them, a dream that he had, and with that, "l'ombre poussiéreuse a été chassée de leurs visages."²¹ He brings some life into their existence by recounting his own story, thus breaking the fatal monotony of the machines. In the dream, Philibert took on the physical form of a boot, still with all his other human capacities of thought and emotion. He managed all right for a while as a boot but suddenly, he became very sad. "Je me sentais l'âme écrasée comme un pied dans une bottine trop étroite."²² Finally, he kicked the foreman in the bottom, whereupon he became a man again.

Philibert's dreamed revolt against those who control his life is materialized, since he does, in fact, leave the factory now. Still he is weighed down with sadness; through the escape of alcohol, he temporarily manages to forget his whole life. When he awakes, the printing on the newspaper that he sees in front of him suggests the outline of Montreal, at this point, a depressing sight for Philibert.

"Les caractères du journal composent un ensemble gris, comme une ville aperçue de très loin, une ville grise, dans un brouillard noir, désordonnée ..."²³

His life is consumed with darkness and disorder.

²¹Ibid., p. 63.

²²Ibid., p. 65.

²³Ibid., p. 68.

"Philibert est condamné à peler des pommes de terre dans l'obscurité totale."²⁴ Condemned, once again, Philibert is to be found in his most hell-like situation. As a potato-peeler in a Greek restaurant, he must work in the basement, without any electric lighting,

"au centre d'une nuit pourrie dont l'odeur lui rappelle celle de la terre boueuse du printemps où son pere creusait."²⁵

The peelings slither over Philibert's wrist like a long worm.²⁶ Thinking of how people must be coming and going under the sunny sky, outside, Philibert concludes that life is not for him. Nevertheless, he revolts against this death-like situation, throwing down the potatoes, the knife, and leaves. "Dehors il crache à la face du printemps."²⁷ Philibert is the man so cynical, frustrated, and disillusioned, that he cannot even enjoy the spring.

Philibert is next to be seen washing the floor of a pizza and hot-dog shop. There is only one, small, yellowish light here. His shadow is just barely distinguishable from the gray linoleum.²⁸ Philibert's vitality is nearly obliterated at this point.

For a short time, Philibert works for the Dominion Company, at building construction. He is there long enough to witness the suicide of one worker and the totally heartless and inhuman reaction

²⁴Ibid., p. 83.

²⁵Ibid., p. 87.

²⁶Ibid., p. 91.

²⁷Ibid., p. 92.

²⁸Ibid., p. 96.

of the foreman to the incident. Understanding all too well the man's desire to kill himself, Philibert quits the construction job, before he himself is driven to suicide.

Philibert's last job is working in a very dark garage, again below ground-level. He is working in the grease-pit, breathing in noxious exhaust fumes. Gray water, grease, and oil rain down on him. He goes for days without seeing the spring sun. Philibert is saved from this deep, dark situation by the news that he has received a legacy of money.

There are a few incidents in the novel where Philibert does enjoy some positive emotions, where his hopes are raised at the prospect of some valid communication and encounter with another human being. Each of these encounters, however, is ultimately tinged by disappointment and disillusionment.

The attraction of sex provides a few of the lighter moments in Philibert's life in Montreal. When Philibert has just arrived in the city, he is finally invited into the house of an English-speaking and apparently wealthy woman. Assuming that Philibert is an Italian immigrant, she takes pity on him and feeds him lots of buns and tea. Finally, Philibert's hunger-pangs are assuaged. Offering Philibert a bath, the woman comes in to help dry him off. "Un grand feu doux l'enveloppe qu'une main tendre étend dans son dos. Son sexe soudain bat des ailes."²⁹ Having made love with the woman, Philibert leaves her house, immensely happy and proud of himself. The problem is that he can no longer find the house when he decides to return.

²⁹Ibid., p. 45.

The next sexual encounter that Philibert has in the novel is a more mature, but a more embittering one. With his cheque from the boot factory in hand, Philibert goes to cash it at the bank. The cashier that serves him there overwhelms him with her beauty. "Les beaux yeux derrière la grille l'éblouissent."³⁰ Having arranged a date with her at quitting time, Philibert returns to the bank, washed, shaved, and perfumed, feeling as tall as the buildings on either side of him. Instead of meeting Philibert, however, the cashier gets into a yellow Pontiac car and is driven away. Philibert tries to follow them in a taxi; the two cars "filent vers l'étang jaune du soleil."³¹ Eventually, Philibert gives up the pursuit, bereft of a possible love, and his money.

This scene is very reminiscent of the novel's title. The attractive woman and the yellow car seem aspects of the sun, the good life, that Philibert finds alluring, but never attainable. He thinks of the power he would feel, driving such a car, at his own speed, pushing its bright buttons. "Il ne sera pas heureux avant de posséder une Pontiac jaune."³² Sadly, we know that Philibert will never possess such a car.

Philibert has a rather sordid sexual encounter with the wife of the Greek restaurant-owner. His boss, instead of paying him, offers him a chance to have sex. "Le coeur de Philibert bat comme les ailes

³⁰Ibid., p. 71.

³¹Ibid., p. 71.

³²Ibid., p. 72.

d'un oiseau qui s'enfonce dans le ciel ..."³³ But the woman, evidently accustomed to being prostituted, is completely unconcerned with Philibert as a human being. "Quand cette femme était entre ses bras, il a pleuré d'être si peu heureux."³⁴ It is only after leaving her that Philibert recognizes the woman's face as that of his boss's bride in their wedding photograph.

Enjoying a period of temporary wealth, Philibert takes up the glamorous night-life. "La vraie vie, celle qui enflamme les artères de Phil, crépite dans les clubs de nuit de la rue Saint-Laurent."³⁵ One of the dancers in a show stops by Philibert to caress his hair; it sets fire to his head.³⁶ "Le torse fier, il suit le serpent de feu qui disparaît dans ses paillettes éblouissantes."³⁷ Philibert makes love to the woman, trying to transmit his vitality to her. She remains a sort of living corpse under him. "Il quitte la rue Saint-Laurent avec une envie de vomir."³⁸ This glittering life has not, after all, been the sun that Philibert is seeking.

One of the great highlights of Philibert's arrival in Montreal is his seeing Maurice, "the Rocket", Richard. He is the great French Canadian hockey player, who crosses the ice "comme un oiseau seul dans

³³Ibid., p. 89.

³⁴Ibid., p. 90.

³⁵Ibid., p. 113.

³⁶Ibid., p. 113.

³⁷Ibid., p. 113.

³⁸Ibid., p. 115.

le grand ciel bleu."³⁹ He embodies the desires of the ordinary French Canadian to surpass his situation, to become a success. Just as "the Rocket" is about to shoot for a goal, a Toronto player trips him. "Ces Anglais ne tolèrent pas que des petits Canadiens français comme Maurice Richard leur soient supérieurs."⁴⁰ Slightly drunk, Philibert leaps into the arena and punches the guilty Toronto player in the teeth. Philibert becomes the hero of the day; warm hands pat him on the back and everyone is his friend. Maurice Richard, however, has tears in his eyes, because he is so deeply moved by Philibert's action. Perhaps he even senses the futility of a single action, like this one, as a revolt against the social plight of the French Canadian.

Boris Rataploffsky, "La Neuvième Merveille du monde", is the person who provides the greatest opportunity for success, in Philibert's life. This giant man, we learn later, has several names of various nationalities, none Anglo-Saxon. He seems a personification of all the petits in Quebec, that is, the exploited and disenfranchised of society. He makes his living by allowing himself to be physically abused in return for money. Eventually, however, he can no longer bear the psychological abuse, inherent in such a prostituting occupation, and he rebels. His rebellion, though, culminates in his own suicide. Despite the immense human power that he embodies he is still personally defeated. And the people that he represents may, too, commit a sort of suicide, if they do not refuse to be exploited.

³⁹Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 54.

Nevertheless, he does provide some light for Philibert. "Radioux de dignité", Philibert becomes the giant's chauffeur.⁴¹ For the first time in his life, he is proud of his work, the master at the wheel of the giant's truck. Philibert becomes the cook and housekeeper of the giant, too. Filled with life-positive purpose now, Philibert has the kitchen gleaming, cleansed of its grease and dirt. And Philibert is protective of the giant; when, in fact, some blood is drawn on Boris' face, Philibert ends the paid beatings and takes him away.

As the giant's manager, Philibert becomes Mister Phil. They travel all over Quebec that year, making vast sums of money. Philibert is no longer exploited by a ruthless boss. He has emerged from the dark depths of graves and cellars and travels freely about the countryside. He has acquired material success now, some of the sun that has always enticed him.

When Boris Rataploffsky dies, however, Philibert quickly loses all the positive gains he has made. For a short while, he is glamorously out-fitted and indulges in the artificially lighted night-life of la rue Saint-Laurent. But, as we have mentioned earlier, this life sickens him quickly. Philibert is once more sinking into a depression. As he concludes upon the giant's death, "A quoi sert un géant sur la terre? A quoi sert un homme ordinaire?"⁴²

After some time, the giant, again, furnishes Philibert with the opportunity to climb out of the dark pit where he is working.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 101.

⁴²Ibid., p. 113.

While working in the garage grease-pit, Philibert receives a lawyer's letter that leads to his receiving a substantial legacy of money from the giant. Straightaway, Philibert imagines how he will be able now to establish himself, in a life of material ease and success; "il doit la vie à la Neuvième Merveille du monde."⁴³ He will become a grocer, whose store will smell good and be light-filled. The walls will be white and his hands will be clean. Philibert, with the knowledge that to succeed in business, he must know English, plans to take English lessons and to subscribe to English magazines. Perhaps he will even become a lawyer and a politician, previously undreamed-of heights for the humble Philibert.

Now he will face the pretty cashier, whom he fancied, in the Savings Bank, proudly, without shame. "Sa seule faute est d'avoir été pauvre."⁴⁴ No longer poor, Philibert will have her respond to him now, giving him "le goût d'être fort, d'être bon et d'aimer la vie."⁴⁵ Philibert believes that love will restore life to him. Suddenly, Philibert's dreams are smashed, as his car crashes, killing him. "La vague sombre de la nuit retombe ..."⁴⁶

Even when the car has crashed, Philibert puts up a great struggle to defeat death. He walks an imaginary tight-rope in the sky, above the abysmal night. He loses his footing and falls,

⁴³Ibid., p. 132.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 133.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 134.

"oiseau sans aile".⁴⁷ Finally he dies, the sun always just out of his reach.

As he is dying, the influence of Philibert's religious training comes to the fore again in a horrific vision of hell as a dragon. This serpent first wraps itself around him, then enters Philibert's body to emerge again, torturing him sexually. Perhaps the association of carnal pleasure with hell's punishment still lingers on from Philibert's childhood. He becomes a vast and eternal suffering. His hallucinations subside before the approaching night of death.

Apart from the recurrence, at his death, of the damning religious visions of his childhood, Philibert rejects religion in its diverse forms. One of the incidents that urged him to leave home was the sight of a religious procession of retarded, or somehow otherwise deprived members of the village. There is the ironically named Laliberté family who have twenty-one monstrous children, for whom they are declaring their gratitude to God. No matter his or her plight, everyone in the procession is resigned to God's will. Philibert, if only intuitively, knows that he must free himself from such a life-denying institution as is this religion.

Philibert is also subjected to a very perverse type of religious experience, after he comes to Montreal. There, his landlord invites him to attend a sort of black mass that he and his wife are conducting.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 137. As may be seen from the quotations in this chapter, the image of a bird, relating to Philibert, occurs frequently. Usually, the image is associated with sexual arousal, and especially, with Philibert's sense of freedom. At this point in the story, Philibert has no wings; he has lost all means of saving himself from falling into the abysmally dark depths of death.

The setting is totally dark, apart from one small candle that gives off an inadequate yellow light. The centre of the ceremony is a tiny skeleton, held in a black box. The landlord and his wife announce that it is life. Quite like the nun, Esmalda, and the priest of La guerre, yes sir!; these people confuse life and death in an apparent attempt to disguise the latter from themselves. Philibert is as disgusted by this quasi-religious ceremony as by the orthodox ones he has witnessed at home.

Philibert has already expressed quite a high degree of cynicism concerning God, while working at the boot factory. Told that, ultimately, it is God who is in charge, and that it is he to whom Philibert needs to give a kick, Philibert replies, "Le bon Dieu, il est comme le patron, on le voit pas souvent. Il fréquente pas notre genre de monde, le bon Dieu ..." ⁴⁸ And later in the story, we hear Philibert discussing God with two friends. By this time, he has reached a very existentialist viewpoint. Without God, Philibert finds himself alone, but finds ample compensation in accepting himself as a man.

"Privé de Dieu, j'étais un amputé, mais, hostie, j'étais un homme ... Dieu existe pas, mais moi, j'existe ... Je respirais. J'étais responsable de ma respiration." ⁴⁹

If not happiness, Philibert has at least found pride and dignity as a man, through his rejection of religion. His dying vision may recall a very vivid impression made on a child's mind, but has little concern with belief in God.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

Philibert has also attained a certain awareness and cynicism regarding the French Canadian's position in relation to the monied Anglo-Saxons. He realizes that the English stood to gain because they owned factories and would profit by the production necessitated by the war. The French Canadian had nothing to gain, but he had his life and limb to lose. And when Philibert has a chance to vote, he declines. "Ma croix sur un bout de papier changera pas le monde. Il tourne comme il veut."⁵⁰

The story of Philibert in his effort to attain the positive goods in life, represented by the sun, is an arduous one, and a largely saddening one. His attempts to reach the sun are virtually all thwarted. What is extremely important, however, is his rejection of what is negative and anti-life. He refuses to be restrained in non-human circumstances, in dark depths. Through his struggles to throw off the conditions that impair his opportunity to have a good life, Philibert has acquired pride in asserting himself as a man, independent of the security of his family and his family's religion. Hopefully, not all the men caught in Philibert's situation will have their life abruptly ended. There must be men, who, with the independence and political awareness already attained by Philibert, will be able to alter the social and economic conditions of their world enough to assure the attainment of life's goods for themselves.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 100.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that Carrier's novels do portray a struggle of life against death, and that this struggle is largely conveyed by the symbolism of light and darkness. The characters of the novels, in their diverse circumstances, know when they are being threatened by forces of death. They are all gripped in a contest to affirm what is life-fulfilling for themselves. More often than not, their efforts are thwarted; the situations given by the author are dark ones. They are lighted, however, by the qualities of strength and vitality in the characters. Once more, we refer to Fournier: "Despite the dark, depressing reality of Québec history, a will to live and a joy in living emerge on the level of daily life -- as they do in Carrier's novels."¹ Through exaggeration and caricature, through fantasy and dream, Carrier has successfully portrayed the reality of Quebec in the twentieth century. As its history has most often been one of darkness and defeat, so are the stories. But the life of the French Canadian has persisted in Quebec, and we witness now many attempts on his part to assert a new life, in a positive direction.

Upon the virtual completion of the work for this thesis, we became aware of an article written by Jean Cléo Godin that is based on a view of Carrier's writing similar to the one that we have taken.²

¹Georges-V. Fournier, "Roch Carrier: A Quest for the Authentic", Ellipse, IV (Summer 1970), 39.

²Jean Cléo Godin, "Roch Carrier: Une terre entre deux (ou trois?) soleils.", Livres et auteurs québécois 1971, p. 305.

The critic, too, sees the novels turning on the dilemmas of life and death, and of sun and night. None of the discussion within the thesis has been altered in the light of Godin's remarks. We shall discuss here, however, some of the more important points that he makes, with the goal in mind of elucidating some of the conclusions of the thesis.

The critic begins with the life-death duality: if one is to live, one must die, and from death may spring new life. We agree here, having already made frequent mention of such things as the destructive-regenerative forces of fire, and the significance of winter. The examples chosen by the critic to support this idea have been discussed within the body of the thesis, though within a different context. He cites the incidents of sister Esmalda and the priest in La guerre, yes sir!, and of the black mass experience of Philibert in Il est par là, le soleil. The characters in these scenes all conclude that to die is to live and vice versa. As Godin himself suggests, however, Carrier is mocking these characters through his depiction of them as dark and ludicrous individuals, and also through Philibert's reaction to the religious ceremony that he witnesses. These scenes expose an anti-life attitude, rather than an attitude for coping with life. It is not religion as seen in the novels that will provide the necessary death of an old life and the birth of a new one for French-Canadian society.

In discussing the sun of Il est par là, le soleil, the critic gives a somewhat different, but not conflicting, interpretation of the sun as a symbol. Where we have seen it as a general symbol of freedom, happiness, and the good life, Godin sees it as a symbol of something specific in each of Philibert's attempts to emerge from a

dark, underground situation toward the sun. This seems an especially valid approach in that it allows for a distinction between false and genuine suns. The critic cites the night-life of la rue Saint-Laurent as an example of a false sun that attracts Philibert but that can only lead to disillusionment. This incident has been similarly discussed in the thesis. The critic concludes that the sun of Philibert's dying remark is an indication of a life beyond death. This sort of vision, not necessarily but usually, is part of a religious faith. But Godin emphasizes the fact, as we have done, that Philibert has rejected religion as a possible sun. Thus, this life beyond death must be seen as a new and prosperous life to be conceived for the society of Quebec, gained only after arduous struggles to defeat a negative existence.

The critic stresses the necessity, particularly in Floralie, où es-tu?, of rejecting idealized views and dreams, for a more balanced and realistic attitude toward life. He sees the sun as a symbol of a perfect, but unattainable life, opposed to the sun of hell. Rightly, he suggests that one must accept life, as it is, somewhere between the two suns. This seems an affirmation of Carrier's numerous references to the necessity of shade, and of balance between light and darkness. We disagree, however, when the critic suggests that Floralie must deny the dilemma produced by having to choose between the life that her Italian lover offered her and Anthyme's way of life. We feel that the light-filled scenes with the Italian stand far superior to the parallel experiences with Anthyme. The Italian has brought Floralie light and life, while Anthyme, at least during the time of the story, has brought her darkness that deprives her of the opportunity for sexual love and

enjoyment. Nevertheless, Floralie and Anthyme do find themselves together, at the end of the story, being wakened by the gentle light of the dawn. Perhaps Anthyme will show that he has been enlightened by the experiences of his wedding night.

In an interview with Georges Raby, Carrier says that his next novel is to be set in the city.³ Perhaps it will portray the Quebec of today, still troubled and threatened, but making even more positive advances in the realization of a positive expression of life. Roch Carrier himself, is clearly one of those French Canadians, who, through his writing, is contributing to the fulfilment of a life-affirming vision of Quebec.

³Georges Raby, "Yes sir!", "Perspectives", Le Droit (14.11.70) pp. 31-32.

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