

THE RELEVANCE OF THE CARNIVALESQUE IN THE QUÉBEC NOVEL

MAROUSSIA AHMED
McMaster University

"A Québécois cannot read Bakhtine's *Rabelais* without particular delectation. He sees himself, so to speak, in every line," wrote the French-Canadian critic André Belleau back in 1970.¹ Indeed, the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque seems to provide a most appropriate means of reading the Québec novel.

The forms and symbols of the Carnival's idiom are filled with the pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of gay relativity. They are marked by "the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties—comic crownings and uncrownings" (Bakhtin 11). The horizontal, egalitarian and topologic structure of the Carnival lowers the hierarchical verticality of Lent and of the "official feast," for "the narrow, vertical, extratemporal model of the world, with its absolute top and bottom, its system of ascents and descents, was in the process of reconstruction" (Bakhtin 403). As for masks and various games, these help create a climate of joyous relativity during Carnival. The fact that the Carnival is a transgression of the law, and therefore is anti-law, obliges us to define the law, just as Bakhtin perceives the Carnival in its relation to Lent, or Renaissance history in its relation to medieval history. For the purposes of this article, we shall consider as "the law" the traditional Québec novel (the genre known as the "roman de la terre" which flourished until 1945, and also the introspective novel of the 1940s and 1950s). After 1960, in opposition to the traditional novel there will be a transgression of the novel's signifieds and signifiers (as in the novels by Roch Carrier, Marie-Claire Blais, Anne Hébert, Jacques Godbout, Hubert Aquin and Réjean Ducharme, to mention only a few). The horizontal

topology of the Carnival and the vertical topology of Lent and of the "official feast" embrace at the same time the cosmic, the social and the corporeal, the temporal, the spatial and the scriptural, all indissolubly linked together. Given the vast field of study this subject represents, we shall focus our analysis on the carnivalization of *geographical* and *scriptural* space.

It was in the name of God and the King of France that Jacques Cartier, in the sixteenth century, took possession of New France, thus sanctifying the territory of Québec from the very beginning, and transforming symbolically a space we could call "chaos" into another space: "Christian cosmos." The cross planted by Cartier on the Gaspé peninsula had the function of the "axis mundi."² This sanctification of Québec remained strong right up to the Second World War. A conservative nationalism censured Carnival and inspired a literature that was largely proselytizing in nature.

In Felix-Antoine Savard's *Menaud, maître-draveur* (an example of the "roman de la terre" genre and a novel that has been republished seven times since its first publication in 1937), nature is animated by a divine breath, the Québec wind spills "magic" words into Menaud's heart, and Menaud "contemplates the priceless crown of mountains on the horizon, an image of the eternal: between the changing plains and the rolling sky, motionless blue between the double field of the ephemeral" (Savard 99). One recognizes the verticalization ("mountain"), the hierarchization ("crown"), and sanctification ("image of the eternal") of space that is characteristic of any sanctified universe, whether it be the mountain of Moses, of Roland, or of Menaud. The description of a sacred space, especially through the choice of metaphors, disincarnates (as does fasting) geography—hence the spatial indetermination in the novel of the land ("le roman de la terre") or in the introspective novel. Space (*the* mountain, *the* city, *the* country) has a categorical or exemplary value. The description of the hero, which parallels the description of space, emphasizes his vertical posture (Menaud is "straight and strong despite his sixty winters") (Savard 11), the social hierarchy (Menaud is a leader and master lumberjack), and the moral values (rectitude) which reflect a normative moral and unchanging perennial order.³ The sanctification of space, and therefore its closure, as well as the sanctification and closure of this novel lead to the devalorization or the exclusion of that which is situated outside this space: the city, the United States, the foreign—in other words, that which is different.

Jules de Lantagnac, in the novel *L'Appel de la race* by Lionel

Groulx, is exiled in Ottawa and returns to his native village in Québec, at which point the narrator says: "Think, after all of this, the pilgrim sang in a half smiling, half solemn voice . . . inebriating air inflates your nostrils; and youthful and springtime sap runs through you . . . while you walk bareheaded into the warm wind and while your feet, your poor feet, tired from walking on hard city streets, dance on the soft grass."⁴ Words with religious connotations are followed by vertical movement in the passage just quoted: "pilgrim," "solemn," "sap" (grace), "youthful" (eternity), "bareheaded into the wind" (the divine breath as well as the exaggerated height of the hero), "feet . . . dance" (levitation). In these novels by Savard and Groulx, cities have negative connotations and are the first terms of the following paradigm: chaos/horizontal (streets)/hardness (paving stones)/finiteness (tired)/history.

In the sacred universe of the novel *Thirty Acres* by Philippe Panneton, the reader is not surprised by the inevitable relationship that the author establishes between sowing and the Annunciation, nor by the announcement Alphonsine makes to her husband of her imminent motherhood, expected at the end of the year. A few pages earlier, before his marriage, the husband contemplates "the earth, all decked out in gold and purple for its own wedding in the spring, when the sun would fertilize it once again, after it had waited patiently all through the long winter under a white bridal veil of snow" (Panneton 23). A whole system of stereotyped metaphors establishes an analogy between the Father/sower/God/sun and the Mother/receptacle of the seed/Virgin/land, and thus the space described is again in a vertical axis (sun/land) with a strong euphoric connotation.

In the historical context of Québec which, until World War II, has been marked by agricultural messianism and conservative nationalism, the novel of sanctified, vertical space became the norm. Albert Laberge's *La Scouine*, therefore, had no chance of survival. Indeed, Monseigneur Bruchesi censured the novel in 1918 and it was not until 1963 that Gérard Bessette exhumed it from the forgotten works of Québec literature and gave it a serious introduction in his *Anthologie d'Albert Laberge*. *Marie Calumet* by Rodolphe Girard underwent the same fate in 1904. These two novels by Laberge and Girard, which we consider carnivalesque, were thus seen to be somewhat blasphemous. *La Scouine*, Laberge's heroine, is so named because she wet the bed (this is a carnivalization of the name of the heroine). Moreover, these two censured novels have women as their central characters, which is in accord with the carnivalesque,

whereby “the popular tradition is in no way hostile to women; it is related to the material bodily lower stratum” (Bakhtin 240). Furthermore, la Scouine became infatuated with the vicar, while her brother Charlot, unable to resist his carnal instincts, threw himself on an Irish farm helper in a haystack. As is often the case in the traditional Québec novel, only a foreigner can be the object or subject of desire. Worse still, in *La Scouine* the land of Québec is desanctified, forcing the intervention of history and finitude: “The fires that farmers lit regularly each spring before seeding and each fall after the field work left huge grey spots similar to wounds, here and there; the land seemed eaten by cancer, leprosy, or some disgraceful, malignant disease. It was la ‘Complainte de la Faux,’ a tune that told of the hard work of every day, the continuous hardships, the concern to preserve an unproductive soil, the uncertain future, the pitiful old age” (Laberge 81). We stand far from the august “chanson de geste” of the sower, where “the rites of seedtime . . . were cousins to the sacred rituals” and where the Father every spring performed “the sacred liturgy of the wheat” (Savard 62, 52). Fire (man-made, the opposite of the sun), the hay harvest (cutting, the opposite of sowing), finiteness (the opposite of youth), history (the opposite of eternity) had no place in the City of God.

Within this sanctified space of Québec exist privileged places (*axis mundi*) that are links between heaven and earth, such as the mountain, the church, the house (for the woman) and the cemetery. This last place, the cemetery seen as “a sacred reliquary,” finds itself at the junction of the sanctification of both time (the generations) and eternal space; there, the ancestors, whom the ideology of conservatism had raised to the level of archetypes, rest. This sanctified space is an expression of the political Augustinianism of the period (“Civita Dei in Civita Vecchia”). Agricultural messianism became *the* way of fighting the ravages of history—namely, industrialization and urbanization and the pluralism that inevitably accompanied them.

The “introspective” novel also connotes the upper euphorically and the lower dysphorically, but as a function of the sanctification of the individual rather than the sanctification of the country, and according to a Thomist hierarchy of values which Etienne Gilson defines as follows: “At the summit of creation are the angels. They are incorporeal and even immaterial creatures. In this downgrade hierarchy of creatures, the appearance of man and consequently of matter, marks a characteristic degree . . .” (375). Introspective authors valorize the countryside, a place for spiritual meditation as

opposed to the city, which is the place of history, materialist compromise and immanence. They establish an isomorphism between the country and the upper part of the body, the upper crust of society, the "higher" human activities (the speculative as opposed to the menial). Thus in *Les Désirs et les jours* by Robert Charbonneau, Auguste Prieur, whose name has a double connotation, is deputy of Deuville (a spatial dichotomy?) and lives in a chateau in the upper city. He pursues interior elevation, while his political adversary, Bernard Massénac, lives in a poor alley of the lower city and gives himself up to low political compromises. In *L'Interrogation* by Gilbert Choquette the doctor Charles Dumais thinks, while walking along the slopes of Mount Royal one morning before beginning to look for work: "Never have I felt more free, more detached from materiality while being solicited by more thoughts:—like birds resting for a while before taking flight . . . without any physical attachments, without any social existence, as though suspended between heaven and earth, I soar for a long while on the winds of a questioning and fantastic consciousness."⁵ The paradigms of the sacred and its transgression already pointed out reappear; on the one hand, the upper/the good/spirituality/levitation/transcendence, and on the other, the lower/the evil/materiality/gravity/immanence. An attempt at reconciliation with the earth (in the manner of Teilhard de Chardin) can be observed in some subsequent novels, like *Le Poids de Dieu* by Gilles Marcotte, (God is now associated with gravity), or *Aucune créature* by Robert Charbonneau in which one reads: "We keep on regurgitating a millenary thought that has been around for too long. We are going to be swept away, along with Thomism and the other medieval institutions."⁶

After 1960, the Québec novel clearly takes on a carnivalesque air. Spaces formerly sanctified diminish in number and in importance. Moreover, they are debased and carnivalized. In *Une Saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* by Marie-Claire Blais, Jean-le-Maigre and his brother, le Septième, set fire to their school (the place of official knowledge) while Héloïse's convent strangely resembles the brothel, "Auberge de la Rose Publique," at the end of the novel; the Mother Superior likes the same cheese and feels the same responsibilities as the owner of the brothel, Octavie Embonpoint (the graphics of her name have an obvious iconographic function); and Héloïse passes happily from religious fervor to libidinous fervor. The nuns spy on Pauline Archange "through the shadowy grilles of a cloister buried in the colorless countryside, under a sullen sky" (*Manuscripts*, Blais 3),

and the chapel, in *Floralie, où es-tu?*, smells of “rotten earth and urine” (Carrier, *Floralie* 99). Several devices used by M.-C. Blais carnivalize sacred space: 1) the putting of sacred and secular spaces on the same level; 2) the permutation of their traditional connotations; 3) the use of oxymorons that generate an immanent form of writing in that it transgresses clichés (“dull countryside,” “joyful slandering,” “handsome profligate,” “flowering blasphemies,” “delightful remorse”) (Blais 3, 65, 16). In *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* by Roch Carrier, the key scene of Corriveau’s wake is totally constructed in the carnivalesque mode. Mother Corriveau orders the soldiers to put the coffin down on the kitchen table, with the head toward the end of the table where Corriveau used to eat, thus depicting the absorption of food, an essential function of the Carnival which (like copulation) marks the victory of life over death and the preeminence of earth over heaven. Later, the coffin is put in the living room, the place of prayer, while Mother Corriveau bakes meat pies in the kitchen; clearly distinguished at the beginning of the episode, the two spaces become carnivalized under the effect of cider, which derives its virtues from its stay in the earth of the cellar. Cider, like moonshine in *Les Enfants du sabbat*, is the Québec equivalent of the barrel of wine, indispensable in Carnival, as it contains the truth upside down and “liberates from fear and sanctimoniousness” (Bakhtin 286). During the wake, the flag covering Corriveau’s coffin became a tablecloth where plates and glasses were left and cider was spilled: “People sitting at the kitchen table leaned against a wall because it was hard to keep your balance . . . tourtière streaming down cheeks and chin; or they kept their heads high and dry on a pile of greasy dishes, or else, standing in the doorway which was open to the snow and cold, they tried to vomit to get rid of this dizziness; or they put both hands on Antoinette’s generous backside . . . and they ate juicy tourtières in the living room, . . . and they prayed in the heavy odour of the kitchen where the smell of grease mingled with that of the sweat of the men and women” (Carrier, *Guerre* 37). Just as carnivalesque writing will debase the essentialist concept of language that makes signifier and signified coincide as a sign for the referent, here the use of things deviates from its traditional purpose: the flag becomes a tablecloth, the living room (first the official and sacred space that contains the body of the deceased and of the immobile, serious, upright bodies of the English soldiers) is gradually carnivalized into a kitchen. There, the Breughelian villagers celebrate their vitality in order to exorcise their fear of religious and political authorities, as the following

metamorphosis of the fire indicates: “To imaginations steeped in pork fat and cider, *the flames of hell* were scarcely bigger than the *candleflames* on Corriveau’s coffin. The flames could not burn through all eternity, all the fires they were familiar with were *extinguished* after a certain time: fires made to clear the land, or *woodfires*, or *fires of love*” (Carrier, *Guerre* 59). In Anne Hébert’s *Les Enfants du sabbat*, Sister Julie lives in a hermetically sealed convent where even a particle of dust from the exterior would seem to her to hide the devil. The closure of the sacred place in these novels is isomorphic of the “closure” of the bodies in their religious dress. The concept of closure has a dysphoric connotation in the context of the carnivalesque. Sister Julie’s quest consists in transporting to the convent the carnivalesque universe of the mountain of B, the carnivalesque place of her childhood where she lived with her sorcerer parents (thus in a situation of transgression). This mountain is a natural space (the convent is a cultural one)—open, bright, fragrant, “ringing with insects and birds” (Hébert 7). Each sub-story of the novel constitutes a micro-carnivalization of space. Sister Gemma, “wild with whiteness and transparency,” cuts up the hosts in the sacristy (a sacred place characterized by whiteness, transparency, dryness, spiritual sustenance and order). Julie makes the hosts disappear, and to punish her, the Mother Superior sends Gemma to the kitchen (a carnivalesque place—red, opaque, wet, disorderly, full of scraps), “where she is assailed by all that dirties, smears, splashes, runs over, skims, cuts, and burns. The livid hands of the vestry nun flounder in meat and blood giblets, fish scales, chicken feathers” (Hébert 49). There Sister Gemma sheds tears and vomits. A place of ritual (the blessing of the wheat, the bourgeois meals), when present in the sacred novel, the carnivalized kitchen occupies a central position in the novel of the 1960s. Church, boudoir, cell, cemetery, school and convent, that is, places of mimesis and of solitary communication with the sacred, disappear, receive negative connotations or are carnivalized. Knowledge and power are obtained from now on in the street, the cellar, ravines, latrines and bed, open or low places, places of interaction with earth and with other bodies, the descriptions of which emphasize elimination, copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth.

In *Une Saison dans la vie d’Emmanuel*, Jean-le-Maigre (child/false king) decides to become a poet in the latrines, on the toilet seat. He and his brother have a predilection for the cellar where they get drunk on wine and poetry: “I am feeling great, hup . . . I could even

write poetry" (Blais, *Season 24*), says Jean-le-Maigre. In the latrines of France ("his library and university") (Carrier, *Demolish* 66), Dorval, the hero of *Le Deux-millième Étage*, becomes a self-taught man by reading re-cycled newspapers. The bedroom, in earlier novels, a place of agony and death—preferably by consumption, the intellectual and spiritual death "par excellence"—becomes the place where one explores one's body and the body of others. Not only is coupling frequently mentioned, but it appears often in the aberrant forms of prostitution, incest or homosexuality. As already noted by Michel Van Schendel and Hubert Aquin (who saw therein the expression of a general mediocrity in Québec) (Dumont 165): sexual inversion is only an epiphany of the topology of the Carnival based on "the logic of things upside down" and "the contrary." As for incest, it is the primary taboo, its interdiction is the first manifestation of social order. Another form of sexual transgression, a grotesque one, takes place in the house-brothel set up by Dorval in Roch Carrier's *Le Deux-millième Étage*. "La Vieille," the favorite prostitute as long as she is not ready to be put in the "bière" (coffin, death), never refuses the "bière" (beer) which Dorval offers her. Men line up in front of her bedroom door "as if going to confession" (Carrier, *Demolish* 147), and she only receives them hidden beneath a sheet/shroud until the day when she expires in the arms of a client. The carnivalesque figure par excellence, she is death giving life and is reminiscent of Kerch's terracotta figurines of senile pregnant hags on display in the Museum of *L'Ermitage* which Bakhtin mentions in his study of Rabelais (Bakhtin 25). In *Les Enfants du Sabbat* (Hébert 34-46), the opposition between the convent, site of the mass, and the ravine, site of the black sabbath, is expressed as antithetical paradigms of the sacred and the carnivalesque:

convent, mass	ravine, black sabbath
closed space, culture	open space, nature
single masculine celebrant	woman celebrant (Philomène)
celestial food	carnavalesque food (lard, beans and moonshine)
covered bodies, closed	naked bodies, open, fornication,
separate, fixed	mobility
centripetal glances	centrifugal glances (the circle is opened up)
esoteric speech (Latin)	popular speech, immanence

repetition, unison	cacophony (animal and human)
participation of the elect, adults	participation of marginal elements
order	transgression (sorcery, drink, incest, fornication)
dysphoric connotation	euphoric connotation.

Constructed around two paradigms and according to a Manichean, dichotomous view of the world, these novels are quite predictable, passing from the valorization of the sacred to that of the carnivalesque; black becomes white and vice versa. Furthermore, the opposite of black is not always white, but can also be other colors. This is an example of the multiplicity which, “according to the Bakhtinian view, surely was reflected in Laberge’s work; and is completely realized in the work of Hubert Aquin” (Belleau, *Bakhtin* 486). This multiplicity is also characteristic of the work of Réjean Ducharme. Space ceases to have signification other than as a metaphor for kinetic writing in Aquin’s novels, where endless chases on the road/typewriter lead nowhere except to a text. Nothing resolves the suspense of his novels except the word “the end,” and no culprit can be found for sentencing except the author. Movement is essential in Réjean Ducharme’s novels, as his narrators-heroes (Bérénice Einberg in *L’Avalée des avalés*, Mille Mille in *Le Nez qui voque* and Asie Azothé in *L’Océantume*), wander more among the words of the text than among objects in the world. Their world is the words. For Mille Mille, the word *hiérarchiser* (hierarchy) is nothing but a mountain with twelve sides which are, respectively, H-I-E-R-A-R-C-H-I-S-E-R (Ducharme, *Nez* 98) that he has to conquer. In *L’Océantume*, Asie Azothé lives in a boat cemented to the ground, thus sealing the concept of voyage in the text itself. The characteristics of the Carnival apply now to the signifiers; the transfer of the leading role to the horizontal lines, to the forward movement (Bakhtin 403) refers now to the typewritten lines. Mille Mille owes his name to his ability to run (“I have thousand miles in my legs” (Ducharme, *Nez* 98)) and to write, and in *Trou de mémoire*, the narrator simultaneously goes down the ribbon of asphalt and the ribbon of his typewriter.⁷

Scriptural relativism is the mark of Hubert Aquin’s novels (and of Réjean Ducharme’s, whose prolix plays on words create a scriptural immanence that is difficult to translate). As in the Carnival, his narratives obey the laws of their own freedom and offer “a strong

element of play" (Bakhtin 7). In *Trou de Mémoire*, different accounts of the same story follow each other revolving around the life of PX Magnant (X signifies the unknown) like "equations with many unknowns" (Aquin, *Episode* 19), each refuting the preceding one, adding and cutting the facts, making critical comments. But there are also the signed denials and corrections in the footnotes, which absorb the reader more and more. As in the Carnival which "does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" (Bakhtin 7), the reader is brought into the scene and thus transformed into a detective in spite of himself. The importance given to the margin/marginality (the footnotes), the masquerade of characters having doubles or even triples (PX Magnant has Olympe Ghezze-Quenum and the editor as doubles⁸), the narrative games that debase the rigorous structure of the Aquinian (that is, of course, Thomas of Aquinas) world and that of the detective story, create a relativity that plunges us into a complete scriptural Carnival. Only the immanent pleasure of the text remains: that of the author whose ironic writing with the reader and that of the reader-critic who amuses himself chasing allusions, possible meanings, picking up echoes in the hope that he will find the secret code that will enable him to decode these texts/cryptograms.⁹

Nevertheless, if one considers the Carnival as a return to primitive chaos one can, like Aquin, who was a militant member of the RIN party (Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale), give a political meaning to one's carnivalesque writing: only a writing of chaos can correspond to a country that is obsolete ("revolue"). Thus "the previous text, predictable, structured according to the golden number, falls prey to the worst blackouts, the ones (my) obsolete country has experienced and fears, of which we don't know if they are going to be followed by genesis."¹⁰ Revolution is associated with action, oral utterance and Eros; esthetic creation is, on the contrary, linked with passivity, written utterance and Thanatos. These two antithetical paradigms nevertheless share the metaphorical space of the text. Consequently, the heroes-narrators, constantly circulate *between* two countries, two cities, two utterances, two signifieds. One could compare the stories to sine curves of different frequencies which sometimes cross at the same point, that of a metaphor signifying for all the "I's": mountain/valley, love/impotency; cry/silence, and hyperboles/syncopes at the rhetorical level. The seme "revolution" itself contains two possible antithetical signifieds, one that evokes a stasis (cyclical movement, "going in circles" like the revolution of the planets), and one that evokes a drastic upheaval. But as in the

Einsteinian relativist world, antithesis does not preclude complementarity. The narrator wishes that his book (stasis) would act in the mind of the reader like a detonator and incite him to take up arms and start a revolution. The examples of the "cry" and the "penthatol" which, like the Carnival, represent life-giving death constitute powerful metaphors for the revolutionary writer, for Québec's history for the revolutionary writer, as well as for the episodes in the life of various narrators. In *Trou de mémoire*, the cry ("Le Cri") designates at once the Ameridian tribe (the Cree tribe: the first society), the first cry emitted by the human being (the cry of birth), and the cry of death. This polysemy allows the reader to move from one level of the narrative to the other, as the following quotations show: "I am of Bulgarian ancestry, second generation on my mother's side, with just a drop of Cree blood. The Cree in me is dead, scalped by the other clan of my genetic mixture. The complete savage however cries out again at full moon, a strangled cry which echoed once more when Joan gave up. . . . But my own cry has been killed in every throat since Louis-Joseph came back after the British amnesty." As for the Québécois, they are "a nation of dumb fish," walled in a silence of Lent since the Conquest, waiting for the cry of their historic deliverance. PX Magnant begins his revolutionary discourse (future or past? one does not know) with a long strident cry and the crowd replies with "a raucous cry of pleasure" (Aquin, *Blackout* 77, 41). Joan, his English lover, cries out her last cry in the arms of her rapist-assassin PX Magnant who himself emits the cry of his orgasmic deliverance. From this derives the importance of blasphemy which conjures up at the same time silence and the sacred, for "silence can exist only as a function of the blasphemy which is the cry of the savage" (Aquin, *Blackout* 32). He hopes that his book/blasphemy will be like penthatol ("penthotal"), a lethal drug for the past, and he hopes to share the whole bread ("pain total") with his revolutionary brothers. The "penthotal"/"pain total," the blasphemy/cry, at once death and birth, do not fail to remind us of the ambivalence of the pharmakon, a lethal and healing drug and the role of the spoken word that has the power "of alchemical transformation which links it to magic and sorcery"¹¹ according to Jacques Derrida. However, here, the effect of the spoken word/cry/blasphemy is neutralized by the fact that it is paradoxically typed.

It is not by chance that the study of the Carnavalesque leads us to the discovery of an impressive number of writer-heroes and witches that Roland Barthes has identified in his *Essais critiques* as being

both marginal and having the same kinetic function (marginality, transgression, transformation) via the same medium—the spoken word. One could mention Jean-le-Maigre, Pauline Archange, François Galarneau, all the narrators/pharmacists/writers of Aquin's books, Mille Mille, Julie, and all the women in Québec feminist texts like *La Nef des sorcières*, *Les Fées ont soif* for *l'Euguélonne*. Furthermore, a book by André Belleau, *Le Romancier fictif*, has been devoted to this literary phenomenon. But in trying to resolve antithesis and paradoxes, is not the reader himself going in circles like the narrators of both novels? When the narrator of *Prochain épisode* states, referring to the loved woman (or the act of writing or the chase after de Heutz—that is, to the loved enemies): “All the curves I weave so passionately and valleys I follow” (Aquin, *Episode* 36), is he not simply setting in a metaphor the very act of writing, an act of pleasure that a striking recurrence of the letters L.O.V. transmits as the only message of the book? Short of making revolution with a revolver and love to K, the protagonist of *Prochain épisode* makes revolutions in his Volvo in the valleys of Switzerland, and volutes with words, while remembering a love scene in Acton Vale (“A” being an inverted “V” as the Alps are inverted valleys) on the path of the Patriots who failed in their Revolution.¹² Writing can only be a substitute for action. What remains is the fact that carnivalesque writing leads nowhere (the chase has not ended, it is its own end). In the Carnival, “language still has a tremendous potential for play since it has not come under the domination of its signifier.”¹³

The Manichean binarity of many Quebec novels explains their predictability and testifies to the existence of ideological pressures. But when the carnivalesque seen as the space of the multiple emerges, whether it be narrative or lexical, it creates a space of immanent pleasure for the reader.

Carnavalesque writing continues with François Charron and the post-modernist poets of *Les Herbes rouges*, and especially in feminist texts, which in order to exist must transgress the Law (the unique, the cultural made into the eternal) and the language of the Father to celebrate the multiple, the natural, the everchanging life represented by the Mother. But carnivalesque transgression risks in turn becoming a new Gospel, calling for perpetual subversion as the condition of its existence.

NOTES

¹ “Un Québécois ne peut lire le *Rabelais* de Bakhtine sans une singulière délectation. Il s’y retrouve pour ainsi dire à chaque ligne” (Belleau, *Bakhtine* 486).

² Mircea Eliade, *Le Sacré et le profane* (Paris: Gallimard, “Idées,” 1965). We have borrowed the concept of “Axis Mundi” from this study.

³ The same can be observed of any literature that manifests an ideological discourse, particularly in countries where strict censorship exists. Michel Foucault underlines the links between political power and various discourses (literary, scientific, legal . . .) in *L’Ordre du discours* (12).

⁴ Lionel Groulx, *L’Appel de la race*: “Songez, après cela, chantait toujours le pèlerin, moitié riant, moitié solennel . . . un air enivrant vous gonfle les narines; et je ne sais quel fluide de jeunesse et de printemps vous pénètre . . . pendant que nu-tête vous foncez dans le vent chaud et que vos pieds, vos pauvres pieds fatigués des durs pavés des villes, dansent presque sur la douceur de l’herbe” (105).

⁵ Gilbert Choquette, *L’Interrogation*: “jamais je ne me suis senti plus libre, plus dégagé de toute matérialité, et en même temps sollicité par plus de pensées . . . tels ces oiseaux se posant un instant devant moi avant de s’envoler . . . Sans attaches charnelles, sans existence sociale, comme suspendu entre ciel et terre, je vogue longtemps aux vents d’une conscience fantasque et questionneuse” (35).

⁶ Robert Charbonneau, *Aucune créature*: “Nous remâchons une pensée millénaire qu’on a rabachée trop longtemps—on nous balayera avec le thomisme et les autres institutions du Moyen-Age” (128).

⁷ Hubert Aquin, *Blackout*: “But it’s hard to keep an eye on the RPM’s, another on the hot race-track and another on the funeral quadrilateral of my little notebook . . . and here I go, down my ribbon of asphalt . . . among the other contenders who seem not to be writing novels” (30).

⁸ This double patronym has in turn a double referent. Olympe Bhêly-Quenum is a writer from the African Republic of Bénin and Ghezso was a king of Dahomey—both were preoccupied by African identity. (Information: Mathurin Gagbégnon, M.A. student, McMaster University)

⁹ An undecipherable cryptogram appears in *Prochain épisode*, p. 19 and p. 47, with an ironic function that parodies the detective novel.

¹⁰ Hubert Aquin, “Profession, écrivain,” in *Point de fuite*: “Le texte antérieur, prévisible, structuré selon le chiffre d’or devient la proie des pires synopses, celles que mon pays révolu a connues, nécroses dont on ne sait pas si elles seront suivies d’une genèse” (58).

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination*: La parole possède “un pouvoir de transformation alchimique qui l’apparente à la magie et à sorcellerie” (287).

¹² The narrator remembers driving with his beloved through the towns of the Eastern Townships (like Papineauville, La Nation, Chénier, Durham South) that remind him of the 1837 Rebellion of the Patriots in *Prochain épisode* (1, 59, 68).

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Le Texte du roman*: "Il exprime la joie devant la possibilité qu'a le langage de s'enrouler sur lui-même, sans la main-mise du signifié sur lui" (174).

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