

Chapitre inachevé

Comme une page d'histoire incomplète
Je remonte le temps avec mon âme
Un peu comme ma mère le faisait
Avec la clé de la vieille pendule grand-père
Dans mon livre, il y avait un chapitre
Avec des pages blanches
Pourtant, il avait un beau titre.

J'avais quinze ans, lui, bien plus vieux
Il s'en est allé de par le monde se bâtir
Des aventures, des folies du bord de la vie
Au lieu de photos, il rapportait des mots étranges
Des anecdotes à faire pâlir les étoiles
Il racontait des histoires à faire frémir
Tous les arbres, toutes les fleurs
Toutes les jeunes filles à l'âme sensible.

J'avais quinze ans, lui était bien plus vieux
Il écrivait que les caribous ne croyaient pas
Au Père Noël et que les loups sont heureux
Il racontait que l'aigle contait des mensonges
Il chantait que les Montagnais étaient restés
Les enfants de la terre, du ciel et du feu
Il racontait, disait, parlait, parlait
Puis il repartait au milieu d'une phrase
Qu'il laissait inachevée. Il la reprenait toujours
Quand il venait fêter son retour.

J'avais quinze ans, il n'était pas si vieux
Il est revenu planer sur mes songes
Sur la mélancolie que j'avais de lui
Il m'a apporté dans son sac à dos
Tous ses mots, toutes ses images faites
De lichens, d'épinettes noires, de lacs vierges
D'espoir et plus encore de nuits
Qui n'en finissent plus.

Comme une page d'histoire inachevée
Je remonte le temps avec mon âme
Un peu comme ma mère le faisait

Avec la clé de la vieille pendule grand-père
Dans mon livre, il y avait un chapitre oublié
Avec des pages blanches, et un beau titre
Je les ai remplies avec des lettres de douce folie.

Albert Roy

Ton visage

Ton visage changeant
Saisonnier
Dans tes yeux
Les yeux de mes ancêtres
Ton regard
Qui se voile d'une myopie future
Ta mélancolie que tu ne connais pas encore
Ton visage tout rond
Qui l'espace d'une expression
Devient
Ton visage de vieillard
Ton visage tout bon
Tartiné de confiture
Douce peau de fruit nouveau
À peine touchée
Par la vie

Sophie Bérubé

Il se rendit à la chasse

Au bord de marais salins
Aux grandes herbes bruissantes
Aux arêtes aiguës
À la faune abondante
Il avait laissé ses empreintes
Profondes, acérées
Sans se soucier
Des millénaires
Qu'il avait ainsi écrasés

Il sortit son fusil
Et se rendit à la chasse
À la chasse à la conquête
Avidement
Avec ses chiens
Excités
Entre copains

Ce pays battu
Depuis toujours
Inspiré et expireé au gré des bourrasques
Ravalé et rejeté comme la mer folle
Lui appartenait
Maintenant
Simplement
Parce qu'il en avait foulé le sol
De ses pieds
Lourdement chaussés

Et il se rendit à la chasse
À la chasse au pouvoir
Cruellement
Avec ses molosses
Meurtriers
Entre amis

Sophie Bérubé

La noirceur

Les bruits dans le noir
Sont souvent amplifiés
Étrangers
J'ai entendu des chien japper
Dans le bruissement des feuilles
Des grognements étouffés
Dans le clapotis des algues
Aveugle
Un râton laveur devient ours
Un rire, un soupir
La tête perdue dans des sons
Non-identifiés
Extra-terrestres
Les pieds deviennent la tête
Dans la noirceur
J'étouffe me bruits, mes cris
Dans l'obscurité
Le mal
Ou l'extase
Retenu
Dans le noir
L'attente
La lassitude
Dans la noirceur
J'ai vu sur un fond noir
Le soir s'approfondir
Le noir ne pénétrer

Sophie Bérubé

Abigail Smith answers a letter from John Adams in which he sends her a list of her imperfections, defects and faults.

There are frogs mating in the pond tonight.
 I hear their love songs and I think of you.
 All day I have been trying to write
 an answer to your letter. Just a few
 words to thank you for your kind list; your true
 and detailed catalogue of all my
 defects and faults. You wait for my reply.

This morning I woke early to sit by
 my window. There were crows flying low
 over the spring meadows. Dearest friend, I
 had such a joyful heart and such a flow
 of spirits. I thought both would break and flow
 into my pen. But such was not to be.
 I could not concentrate or think of me.

Instead I tarried in my chamber all
 day. I made up my brass bed with the sun-
 flower quilt. I put on my cashmere shawl
 with palm-leaf border and hoped someone
 would call. No one did, so I folded some
 clover and lavender with their sweet scent
 into my bureau drawers. Now this day is spent.

The twilight deepens from the nearby
 pond, the wild cry of a loon disturbs the night.
 Forthright, I take my pen in hand and greet
 you. *“My friend, I read your letter with quite
 a bit of pleasure. In fact, as one might
 read of his perfections, I read of my
 imperfections. Please excuse me if I*

*still persist in some of them. I agree—
 neglect of singing is a fault but I
 have a voice as harsh as the screech of a peacock.
 You should not complain again of my
 not singing. Next thing, you tell me that I
 hang my head like a bulrush—that I do
 not sit erect—that this makes me seem too
 short for my beauty. This fault will be rectified.
 My ambition is in every way
 to appear agreeable in your eyes.*

*Still another fault you find which you say
is inexcusable. You express dismay
that I read and think too much. You tell me
to repent—that these things ought not to be.*

*You say I ruin my figure when I
sit with my legs crossed. I will amend
this fault. Since you wish it, I will comply.
For my part, I do not apprehend
any bad effects, but this practice will end.
As for the legs of ladies—” I find I
cannot concentrate. I don’t know why.*

I watch the fireflies drifting in the night.
In the meadow, a wingless female glows,
till a male, falling toward her pale light
finds her in the dark. The fire burns low
and the lamplight flickers. Parrot-toed,
you call me. I do not possess, you say,
a stately strut because of my way

of walking with my toes bent inward. I
know this fault of mine has only one cure
and that is dancing school. But before my
room grows cold, I must continue with your
list of my faults. Then I remember your
other letters. In this still room I hear
your words, “Miss Adorable” and “My Dear.”

All this day I have been trying to write
my reply to your kind letter. My head
has been filled with my faults and defects, like
how I cross my legs, how I hang my head.
Now “Miss Adorable” is going to bed.
Under my sunflower quilt, all night long
I’ll hear the mating frogs sing in the pond.

Margaret C. Kay

Swimming Lessons And More

Thin strands of muscle dance along his forearms as he holds her like a pillow above the water. My daughter's eyes are whitecaps flickering with excitement. The two of them move across the pool on time with coach's whistle. Three feet of water—an ocean to her—is the quiet crossing of generations to him. Waves move like memories to me:

Hunting—we walk through thick forest in red plaid, rifles held loosely at sides, talking of women and sex, my face turning the color of my jacket beneath leaves of orange.

Swimming—an ice-cold May lake stuns us to life at 5 a.m. as a loon sounds, calling all to life. This, after a night of playing cards, talking golf beneath a single white light bulb in a lake-side cabin.

The night before my wedding—in setting sunlight outside a stone church, his impassioned voice speaking of what it means to be a husband and father.

The salty scent of chlorine brings me back. My daughter, my dreams for her, move through the sea of jade in the same arms that showed me all.

J.R. Corrigan

Pig Eyes

(Juarez, Mexico, 1997)

A bridge arches and I
descend to where the pink
eyes of a pig stare without blinking

at mine, which are blue, while
others, like a wall of brown,
follow my every move. The rotating pig's

burning flesh smells like mine spinning
atop a stake, like steaming hot-top
laid on a hundred-degree day. In the market

a man in a stained Dallas Cowboy hat speaks
to my wife who cannot answer him; he thinks
she is refusing and storms off. Footsteps

click and tap on the floor and the rhythmic sounds
of a language not my own hums tranquilly
the way locusts do at night in the country. But

I'm leery here, a blue-eyed stranger
looking at the pale pink eyes of a pig
and holding the hand of a brown-eyed

dark-skinned woman while men
speaking a language I don't know
look at me and nod to one another.

J.R. Corrigan

Open Windows

At night I would lie in bed,
the spotlight outside my open window
cast shadows like black stick figures
which danced elongated on the walls of my room.
One night I woke to a knock at the front
door, then the sound of my father greeting
the town's Constable. Suddenly his voice
became the low growl of a dog,
and the door's slam sent vibrations which
seemed to move my bed. He called upstairs,
reporting the fine to my mother, his words running like
lava, and she telling him to calm. His
shadowed silhouette bobbed in black
on my wall, the clacking of
hard steps filled my ears,
then was replaced by his voice
from the neighbor's lawn calling
the man outside in a fit of anger that
would leave spittle on the chin, eyes
bloodshot, his Irish face the red of Hearts. I
remember my mother's sobs, then my
father cursing the man who
would not leave his house. I lay in bed,
watching my father's shadow
grow larger on my wall, then heard
the front door open and slam again.
I got up from bed, crept to the window
and silently slid it shut,
then pulled down the shade.

J.R. Corrigan

Billy Neal

My white-haired, even-keeled
grandmother, God rest her soul,
taught first grade, and if that
wasn't trying enough,
married an Irish drinker
who ran with a professional

drunk named Billy Neal. My
grandmother hated no one. She
disliked Billy monumentally,
frowned upon the week-long
benders my grandfather and he
called fishing trips after

World War II. When my grand
mother was widowed Billy took it
upon himself to teach my father
life's essential lessons, classes
held at an Exchange Street bar,
attended with a fifth

and beer chasers. Later my father
would say he sensed the man's
loneliness, his restlessness, and tried
to hear what was said in the
echoes of his words. No one else had given
Billy that much. And on his death

bed in 1966, as his liver turned against
him and his throat took the role of a rusted gate,
Billy said: "If they draft you, never make
friends." My father retraced those words
to a blood-red field, to a
boy named Billy Neal who

held a best friend and watched pink strands of skin
and intestine dance—where legs once had been—
moving crazily like snakes hanging from a tailgate.
And my father told this all as we drove from Texarkana
to Memphis and covered territory found on no atlas
and spoke of a man known by no one.

J.R. Corrigan

144. The Paris Dirt

*mai, France 1994
for maman*

The Paris Dirt
and
Cuban cigarillos
arrived
in the yellow postal
box
from France
marked for *douane*
“*Parfum*”.

(It all depends
on what
you
consider—
aroma.)

Pinkish, chalky
dirt from
under the Tour
Eiffel
taken in an almost
midnight sun.
To be spread
like the
ashes of
memory on her grave.

Planted like seed
to sow more
France-et-Maine
piled on
generation
after
generation
in payment
for
her
Jean Patou
Vogue Paris Original
haute couture
she
sewed for me.

I haul Paris
home, graveside
to her
so she can say:
“I never went to Paris,
but that never stopped
it
from
coming to me.”

Rhea Côté Robbins

We Spread The Dirt

We spread the dirt
wife
husband
son
 on
maman and dad,
pépère and mémère
 from
daughter and granddaughter
son-in-law
grandson and great-grandson
on the ancestors
 like
we are priests
without ritual—
Eiffel Tower pink-tinted dirt and rocks
 for her
France-on-the-Loire brown
country farmer's soil
 for him,
like cremation ashes
of memory.

Rhea Côté Robbins

The Farmer's Dirt

*mai, France 1994
for dad*

At the *gite*
 in memory
 of the kiss,
 we scratch at the earth
in some farmer's field.
Squatting, two women
with stones,
digging, scratching
at the crust-
gratter, scraping
soil—
piling
 it into a baggie
to carry home
to anoint the farmer's grave
with what remembers
best.

Rhea Côté Robbins

ice break-up

walking in circles around circles
looped like spaghetti without sauce
pesto or your pale alfredo
sit on a frozen icy bench
in snow beside the open river
watching pans on ice drift
in the unusual january break-up

of course i picked up the clothes
didn't want you to peel them
and drop them anywhere
don't want your mouth on me
and am not a couple with you
curl against the cold walls

hate this impoverished lie
paranoid eyes see bugs everywhere
no longer can i write
how can i love without . . . ?

until there's no room
inside my dyslexic battle
to write to read to speak
my mind always elsewhere beyond
who are my personal references
local and without brain tumors
who would speak up for me

gaunt and malnourished
haunted by horrors and spirits
drinking hot cocoa with maple sugar
sweetener for powdered fermented cotyledons
another night slipping into morning
so tired of this sleepless life

Joe Blades

new fog

on a foggy morning
wake up clear
walk to the river
but the river's not there
walk to the bridge
but the bridge goes nowhere
there is no other side

elm trees ghost themselves
shyhook holds legislature dome up
pulls eyes open
but they don't see too well
in this fog

where to go?
downstream to the sea
upstream like salmon
leaping over rock hurdles
and beyond
where fog condenses on leaves
drips
runs down trunks
to the ground
joins with itself
giggling and laughing
rolling downhill
to land in a heap
and flow away

last night's moon gibbous
early harvest orange
the weather changed
from before full moon

first mushrooms
push their white heads
out of riverside earth

Joe Blades

Cyclamens

Ô bonheur impossible que n'es-tu autre chose ce matin
que cet humble pot de cyclamens mauves rangé sur le rebord
d'une fenêtre
fermée?

E. M. Langille

Pervenches

Sautoir du bocage
et perle buissonnière
forêt bleue
d'une nuit
Où la pervenche
aux feuilles lisses et vertes
enlace
de mille guirlandes tendres
le pied touffu des aulnes
en fleurs

E. M. Langille

Anémones

Triste chœur d'anémones
aux yeux bistre
s'ouvrant une à une
sous le pâle soleil
d'hiver
Feuille fougère
et boutons blancs
gorgés
d'inde
de pers
de rouge vif
d'encre violacée
Et couleurs poudreuses
- oui -
puis déversées
dans le papier
de soie froisée
Pétales lisses
puis caressants
Anémones,
en jolies bottes
rangées
Attendant
muettes
dans le jardin glacé
du Désir

E. M. Langille

To Think of Time

Robert Root

To think of time--of all that retrospection,
To think of today, and the ages continued henceforward...
To think that the sun rose in the east--that men and women
 were flexible, real, alive--that everything
 was alive,
To think that you and I did not see, feel, think, nor bear our
 part,
To think that we are now here and bear our part.
 Walt Whitman, "To Think of Time"

On the morning after the night the old millennium ended, I rose groggily a little after 8:00, shuffled bleary-eyed to the bedroom window, brushed aside the curtain. Blinking back the fog of sleep, I peered outside. The remnants of my life span would cover only a minuscule portion of this new millennium. I wanted to glimpse it before stumbling downstairs to start living through its brief early scenes and my (hopefully long) final act.

In our front yard, where the north side of the house shields the ground from the winter sun, the mottled remnants of the second millennium's final snowfall lay patchy and stuccoed with late leaves from its final autumn. Away from the shadow of the house the ground was bare and dry, its snow removed by the sun and wind over the last week. The sky was clear and pale blue. The weather had not altered overnight with the new millennium. The year 2000 had arrived on the International Dateline at 6 a.m. Eastern Standard Time, passed through the midnights of seventeen intervening time zones while we waited our turn to welcome the future, and moved west beyond us for six hours more. By the time I awoke on New Year's Day most parts of the world were already on their second day in the third millennium but, from my window at least, the 20th century and the 21st century seemed identical.

As my vision cleared I gazed up and down our block. None of the other houses showed signs of life. The nonagenarian across the way was no doubt spending New Year's Day at her daughter's house, and the fraternity houses and the student rentals were still empty over the college's inter-semester recess. One car cruised slowly north on Maple Street but even the neighborhood squirrels seemed to be sleeping in. I saw no sign of the third millennium, no indication even that it was Saturday, and early January was indistinguishable from late December.

Downstairs Sue had let the dog out and let her back in, made coffee, and started working at her place at the dining room table. The dog had successfully completed her morning migration from her upstairs bed to her downstairs bed and looked at me disinterestedly, shifting her gaze without moving her head. In the living room three transparent star-shaped helium balloons decorated with gold stars, New Year's Eve mementos, swayed on ribbons tied to a foil-wrapped conical anchor-stone. Only the balloons made the day seem different from any other.

We'd seen the New Year in at the home of friends and stayed on chatting over the background of television commentary. In Times Square, while cheering people still crowded together in Y2K hats or 2000 glasses or blue and gold foil wigs, news personalities began reporting the failure of things to fail; despite their best efforts they had found nothing going wrong. They seem discouraged. Sam Donaldson, importantly stationed at the "Y2K Command Center" according to the caption on the screen, observed, "The real news is, there is no news." Lisa Stark, a lesser luminary covering mere Washington, soon after reported, "The real story is, there is no story." There being no news and no story didn't prevent the millennial anchorperson and the reporters from opining at length about non-events and the importance of the media in regard to them, but the real significance of the conversation was, there was no significance.

One of our friends observed that the problem with media coverage of the millennium was that it wasn't covering events or people, it was covering time itself, and there was nothing to show. (The event was, there was no event.) The clock ticked, the big hand moved 1/60th of a circle, the visual event was over. In Times Square a massive Waterford crystal ball plummeted slowly to light up a 2000 sign, but that was just a flashy tick of the clock. The fireworks and the confetti and the cheering throng were not the tick but the aftermath of the tick, no more significant than the empty street I awoke to this morning.

I remember once having thought, perhaps in 1950, when the 20th century was halfway-through, that I'd probably never see the year 2000. The end of the century was so far away, so out of reach. But it wasn't far; it didn't take long to reach at all. We talk of dates and events as milestones, a measure of space metaphorically indicating a measure of time, but milestones only indicate distance between one terminus and another—they are not the destination. In space they're useful as measures of how far we've come and how far we have to go; in time they measure nothing at all. What does this "milestone," the end of the second millennium of the Christian era, mean to the planet? to the solar system? to the galaxy? to the universe? Has the big hand landed on 12 for the universe or has only the second hand twitched? (Never mind the question of Chinese and Jewish and Moslem and Hindu calendars; never mind the problem that the millennial celebration should come at the end of 2000, not the beginning, and even then we're one year shy of two thousand, there having been no Year Zero.)

On New Year's Eve 1999, early in around-the-world coverage of the New Year, I saw revelers in Antarctica being interviewed. They announced how hard they were going to party, how much they hoped people back home would be partying, how concerned they were about the Wildcats' (or maybe Bobcats or Tigercats) big game on New Year's Day. They sounded, in other words, exactly like the revelers in Akron or Albany or Altoona. The significance of their being in Antarctica was, it had no significance. None in space, apparently, since location altered nothing about their behavior, and certainly none in time.

To think of time—of all that retrospection," Whitman mused. "To think of today, and the ages continued henceforward." In my study I pulled open the curtains of the window behind the computer and could not find the millennium in the back yard either. But I didn't really expect to and instead turned away from the window, to a folder of old

travel notes, trying to think my way back to one of the places where I felt I had encountered time.

On a morning in mid-June 1995 we check out of a bed-and-breakfast in Digby, Nova Scotia, and begin the drive around Annapolis Basin to Port Royal. The basin, an inlet of the Bay of Fundy, is foot-shaped. Digby nestles at the heel, the basin stretches northeast like a long thin instep, and the highway parallels the sole. All along the highway wild lupine blooms, in pinks and blues and purples, bright against brown grasses. At the end of the foot we circle around the toes, across the Annapolis River, and through the town of Annapolis Royal, and double back along the upper side of the foot, looking for the reconstruction of the Habitation at Port Royal National Historic Site.

The Habitation is a notable site in North American history. This is the first place north of the Caribbean that Europeans attempted to establish a permanent base in North America. The European settlement of Canada began here. In little over a hundred years after Columbus made contact with the New World, the French had established a presence in the northern latitudes, where they hoped to locate a northwest passage around the New World to Asia. Expeditions by John Cabot and Samuel de Champlain had already pressed on up the St. Lawrence River from the Gulf of St. Lawrence. In the early years of the 17th century Pierre du Gua, Sieur de Monts, was granted a trading monopoly by the French king, Henri IV, with the stipulation that, in addition to building a permanent trading post, he establish a colony in Nouvelle France. In 1604 colonists, de Monts and Chaplain among them, attempted to establish themselves in the Bay of Fundy on Ste. Croix Island, a small island with limited resources; half of them died of starvation and scurvy over a harsh winter. In 1605 they relocated to the site of Port Royal, on the mainland of what the French would identify as la Cadie or Acadia and what would later be called Nova Scotia.

The area around the reconstructed Habitation is now well populated, particularly on the road near Annapolis Royal, and the landscape of private homes and small businesses and farms is unremarkable, a scene that could be observed with slight variations of terrain across late 20th century North America. We could be driving between the city where we live and any number of neighboring communities in mid-Michigan. It's the Habitation, when we reach it, that reminds us where we are, not only on the map but also in time.

The site occupies a small space between the highway and the basin. The parking lot is small and a grove of trees blocks off the view of the Habitation until we emerge from them and see the outer walls, a plain façade of dark gray, rough, weathered boards. We circle the exterior towards the basin where an upright defensive palisade extends out from the main entrance. Across from the palisade, at the other end of the buildings, a cannon platform similarly juts out from the main structure, to allow defenders to catch attackers from the basin in a crossfire. We enter through the recessed entrance and find ourselves in a flat grassy inner square surrounded by steeply roofed buildings, all abutting one another tightly though varied in height and breadth. In the center of the square, where stone walks from each of the four walls meet to form a cross, is a well with a fieldstone wall and a small roof. In the grassy sections between the walks and the buildings are signs of daily labor: two tubs and a washboard in one rectangle, a barrel and a handcart in

another, the shavings-strewn workplace of the woodwright with its sawhorses, fresh cut timber, and tools in a third.

We investigate the interiors of the buildings in a clockwise tour: the forge, the kitchen, the bakery, the artisans' quarters, the chapel, gentlemen's dwellings, the residence of the company's chief officers, the storeroom, the sail-loft, the trading room, the guard room. All of the rooms that are open for inspection are sparsely furnished with furniture and implements made on the scene, using reconstructed tools of the period. The effect is to give the site a sense of newness, of recent construction. The authenticity is in the details.

I've visited many forts and historic buildings over the years and have always been conscious of the extent to which they have been reconstructed or revived. It's difficult to maintain buildings intact over centuries when they have been abandoned or neglected, as so many fortresses have been. Stone walls crumble, wooden buildings weather and collapse, nature reclaims any place without persistent preservation efforts. In some historic buildings the sense of authenticity comes from recovered original furnishings of the period—the actual desk that such and such a writer used, the actual cradle that such and such a statesman's infant children slept in, the silverware of a pattern used in the period by a different family in the same region--or from replicating known aspects of the building—a painting that copies an original portrait of a contemporary of the people who lived in the house, wallpaper specially manufactured to duplicate a design popular in the period, a chair upholstered to match the fabric in a photo of the homeowner late in life. It's something to be in the presence of artifacts that historical figures have used and touched, to feel you are occupying the same space that they moved through, as though they had stepped out just before you stepped in. It's one way to be transported in time, and it has the benefit of keeping you constantly aware of the passage of time. The age and condition of an artifact or a structure makes it venerable in your mind, in addition to whatever reverence you might feel for the cultural icon who lived there or the circumstances of the lives of people of the period.

Of necessity, the Habitation transports you in time a different way. It closes the gap between then and now by treating then as if it were now. It was never venerable but always vital. Though the reconstruction has now survived longer than the original did, in its time the Habitation seemed similarly this recent. Its timbers were hewn on the spot, its furnishings manufactured on the site by colony artisans, its walls just this rough to the touch and the smell of wood shavings on the ground just this fresh and pungent. The colonists were just as stout and robust as these bearded young men in rough blouses and breeches and floppy toques bustling through their daily chores of re-enactment. Four centuries ago none of this was historic, all of this was new. The reconstruction and re-enactment collapses time, interlocks then and now, makes the past more immediate and momentarily obscures your sense of intervening centuries without obliterating it.

So. In the way that such historic sites often do, the Habitation at Port Royal helps us think of time by letting us temporarily bridge the gap of centuries. But as we tour the Habitation that day I become aware of other connections, of feeling somehow that the bridge runs both ways and that the past is more than a casual visitor in the present.

The colony at the Habitation was short lived. The intricacies of the politics behind the occupation of the Habitation are well told in Elizabeth Jones' *Gentlemen and Jesuits*,

from which I draw the details of the following sketch of its history. The French established good relations with the Micmac people of the region (also identified as the Mi'kmaq or Souriquois) and their chief, Membertou. The Sieur de Monts, who had shared the hardships of the year on St. Croix, returned to France and remained there while Jean de Biencourt, Sieur de Poutrincourt, returned to the Habitation with a new company of men. When de Monts lost his monopoly on the fur trade and Poutrincourt and the colonists were forced to sail back to France in 1607, Membertou and the Micmacs expected them to return and made certain the Habitation remained intact and well-preserved over the interval. De Monts' attention was increasingly drawn to the interior of Canada, toward Quebec, but Poutrincourt struggled to re-establish the settlement at Port Royal. In 1610 Poutrincourt, his son Charles de Biencourt, and a company of settlers and Jesuit missionaries returned to the Habitation and restored relations with the Micmacs. Despite tension between the Protestant Poutrincourt, who wanted to build a permanent settlement at Port Royal, and the zealous Catholic missionaries, who wanted to convert the Micmac to Christianity at almost any cost, the settlers at the Habitation thrived and lived in neighborly harmony with the Micmacs. But international politics took a hand in affairs. In 1613, in one of the earliest acts that marked the conflict between France and England for control of eastern North America—a conflict which would not be resolved until France's loss of Nouvelle France at the Treaty of Paris in 1763 and which still simmers in the Quebec separatist movement of the 20th century—a group of English settlers from Virginia sailed north and burned the Habitation to the ground while all of its inhabitants were gone working in distant fields.

That was the end of the Habitation. The survivors found their mill still intact and set up living quarters there but their provisions were not sufficient and there was considerable hardship throughout the winter. Undoubtedly Membertou and the Micmacs contributed to their well-being in some way but when Poutrincourt arrived from France to inspect his settlement he found all in ruins. Poutrincourt returned to France, but his son, Biencourt, stayed on, continuing to trade with the Micmac and living a life more similar to their lifestyle than to a European one. Intermarriage between French and the Micmac helped to blur distinctions. The Habitation did not rise again until the replica was constructed in 1939 for the Port Royal National Historic Site.

As we tour the replica early in the tourist season, we are almost the only visitors. The re-enactors go about their chores but don't need to perform for us. Instead, we rely on the attentions of a guide, Judy Pearson, dressed not in period costume but in a jaunty blue expedition hat and park ranger costume. In one of the dwellings she explains the symbols on a ceremonial moosehide cloak, pointing to the picture of a moose and depictions of caribou, herons, and longhouses. She says that the two young men outside dressed as seventeenth-century French artisans are in fact descendants of French colonists. She herself is Micmac, and members of her tribe, descendants of Membertou and his followers, still live throughout the region. To me it seems fitting that this knowledgeable woman putting us in touch with the Habitation's past is herself a descendent of the native people who first befriended the Europeans. The past here is not separated from the present; it is not merely a local curio or a disembodied theme park; it is still a portion of the time in which they are bearing their parts.

Much of what we know of the Habitation comes from the writing of Marc Lescarbot, a lawyer who spent a single year in Port Royal, from July 1606 to July 1607, but whose *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*, originally published in 1609 but revised and expanded in 1617 and 1619, covers events thoroughly. At the restored Habitation one of the dwellings is made up to look like one he might have lived in. The fascinating aspect of Lescarbot for me is his literary aspirations. He wrote a number of poems at the Habitation and created the first theatrical spectacle performed in the New World. As a graduate student twenty years earlier, I uncovered a reference to Lescarbot's *Le Théâtre de Neptune* in a history of French theater when I was reading medieval, Renaissance, and Neoclassical French and English drama. I was then fascinated by court masques, particularly those of Ben Jonson, and began pursuing a literary tangent for the sheer delight in the chase. I once even considered writing a fresh translation of Lescarbot's play and still had a photocopy of the French text in my files. For two decades I had wanted to visit the Habitation.

Le Théâtre de Neptune is an intriguing artifact, drawing on both the court masque, in which courtiers acted out or danced allegorical roles usually drawn from classical mythology, and the civic *entrée* or entry, a festive event welcoming royalty or nobility to a city with pageantry, theatrics, and feasting. Poutrincourt and Champlain had been away from the Habitation on an expedition of exploration since early September and when they arrived at Port Royal on the 14th of November they were greeted by a spectacle written, produced, and directed by Lescarbot.

Especially considering the wilderness circumstances it was an elaborate performance. As Poutrincourt prepared to come ashore he was greeted by Frenchmen in small boats dressed as Neptune, god of the sea, and six Tritons. Neptune, dressed in theatrical buskins, a blue veil, and a flowing beard and wig and holding a trident, hailed him as "Sagamos," the Micmac word for chief, congratulated him on his valor, and extolled the triumph of France in the New World. Each of the six Tritons, except for one who spoke in a comic Gascon accent, enlarged upon that theme. Then a canoe with four Frenchmen garbed as New World Indians welcomed Poutrincourt, and the assembled group burst into a four-part song. The party came ashore, the trumpet was sounded, the cannon was fired, and the basin echoed with celebration "*& semble à ce tonnerre que Prosperine soit en travail d'enfant: ceci causé par la multiplicité des Echoz que les côtaux s'envoient les uns aux autres, lesquels durent plus d'un quart d'heure.*" ("It seemed like the thunder when Prosperina [the wife of Neptune] is in labor, caused by the multiple echoes that the coast sends itself one after another which last more than a quarter hour.") The entrance to the Habitation was decorated with the coats-of-arms of the king of France, the Sieur de Monts, and the Sieur de Poutrincourt, and "*un compagnon de gailliard humeur,*" a merry fellow, welcomed them to a banquet and invited them to empty their cups, sneeze away their "frost humors," and inhale the sweetest vapors of the feast.

Most commentators remark that *The Theatre of Neptune* is no great literary shakes but also acknowledge Lescarbot's ingenuity and energy in composing and producing the event, especially recruiting the community under his charge to pour its energies into this superfluous pageantry by creating costumes, memorizing lines, and decorating the fort and the canoes. Its achievement is more in the area of building morale than in creating

theater. Champlain, a more experienced colonist than Lescarbot, having spent two winters in New France, may have taken a page from Lescarbot's book by soon after proposing the *Ordre de Bon Temps* (Order of Good Cheer), a revolving designation of each of the gentlemen in the company as master of the feast for a day, responsible for providing food for the day's dinner; it was a scheme, as Jones notes, that produced a friendly rivalry that kept them active and healthy during ensuing winter. School children in Nova Scotia still learn about Lescarbot's *Theatre of Neptune* and Champlain's Order of Good Cheer, and both serve as emblems and perseverance and *joie de vivre* in the provincial spirit.

But Lescarbot's *entrée* is not simply the Acadian equivalent of the first Thanksgiving in Massachusetts. Whether by intention or happenstance Lescarbot wove together several strands of history in his production. As is common in the court masque and the *ballet de cour* and similar Renaissance pageants the personages of the present are linked to an ancient, epic past, to the mythological machinery of *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*. Similarly Camoes, in his epic of Portuguese exploration, *The Lusads*, involved Venus and Jupiter in the fate of Vasco de Gama's expeditions and made Mercury accompany him on his voyages. To his classical commonplaces Lescarbot added the roles of Micmac characters, drawing no doubt on his own observations of their traditions and customs--they offer gifts of moose meat, beaver skins, *matachias* (quill or bead embroidery), and the promise of fish. The Fourth Indian, who has yet to catch his gift, asks for bread (*caraconas*) to share with his people. The Triton who speaks with a Gascon accent and the merry companion who sets them sneezing and drinking represent the immediate company of explorers. Classical literature, aboriginal tradition, and national custom all blend (lightly) in this production. And the Micmac themselves are part of the audience, observers of an unfamiliar but colorful and curious ritual. Lescarbot's little show in the harbor fascinates me, not simply because it attempts to connect the explorations of Champlain and Poutrincourt with classical myth but because the show is performed in full view of the Micmacs, who get the rare opportunity to see the Europeans displaying ancestral lore. There are complicated layers of intertextuality here.

As we tour the restored Habitation I am aware that all is replica, that the authentic artifacts of Lescarbot's time there had long ago made their way into some bibliothèque or musée in France or crumbled into dust. Yet I still feel a stirring of connection to the site. My long-ago interest in French drama, in sixteenth and seventeenth century theater, led me to Lescarbot and he in turn led me here. In that amorphous way in which what we read can become part of what we experience, *The Theatre of Neptune* and the Habitation somehow became part of my personal history. Perhaps merely being a tourist here would have been enough to connect me, but I feel all the more connected because of what I knew and imagined about the place in the past. Some things came together here once before, and visiting the site makes things come together again, connecting with the present moment as well.

All this is recollected in the tranquility of my study on a millennial morning. The recollection recaptures the moment incompletely, of course, and draws on photographs and journal entries and notes for details, but nonetheless it transports me across time. I travel back five years in a light hop and then four hundred years in a brisk bound and

pause at the threshold of the time that altered with the construction of the Habitation. I am in awe of the prospect of “all that retrospection” and it makes me conscious, almost in spite of myself, of the “ages continued henceforward.”

It’s often difficult to escape the orbit of the immediate. Moment by moment we are hurled toward the future at such relentless and frenetic speed that we can barely perceive what’s coming, let alone notice what’s gone. It’s hard to overcome the gravitational field of the here and now--the daily round of getting and spending that lays waste our hours, the attention to getting ahead or getting along or getting by. We hardly know how to ponder who we are, where we come from, why we’re here. The past is another country and our eyes are in front of our heads, always looking forward, barely distracted by peripheral vision, seldom looking over our shoulders to see how far we’ve come.

When, in the Book of Genesis, Lot and his family are spared the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, they are ordered by an angel to flee without looking back. Lot’s wife looks back, and she is turned into a pillar of salt, punishment for her disobedience, I suppose. Whatever the Old Testament moral of the story is meant to be, I’ve never been satisfied with the tale. Are we to learn from it not to acknowledge mass destruction as long as we ourselves survive? Are we to suppose that looking back itself is the fatal misconduct, that we will be punished if we wonder what’s become of where we’ve been? Are we to think that Lot, who blindly and obediently goes on, never looking back, is the admirable figure, Lot’s unnamed wife the sinful one? Why shouldn’t we think that Lot’s later unforgivable sin--the drunken and incestuous impregnation of his daughters--is a punishment for refusing to acknowledge where he comes from and who he is? To me the story would make more sense if Lot is punished for his callousness and Lot’s wife were rewarded for breaking the rules, if God could stay his hand again because he realizes that, in Kurt Vonnegut’s words, “it’s very human” to look back. Lot’s wife is the one I learn from here, even if the pillar of salt she becomes is formed by her own tears. Vonnegut says of *Slaughterhouse Five*, “This book is a failure and it had to be, because it was written by a pillar of salt.” Yes, I say, this essay too.

So. A new century or a new millennium arrives (or doesn’t yet arrive), and it hardly matters when we celebrate it because we are centered on a moment virtually devoid of context in itself. A few weeks later, where I live, I will want to stay up, as I did on New Year’s Eve, to see a total lunar eclipse but the night is overcast and it’s lightly snowing and the sky doesn’t clear until after the eclipse. I will have no more sense of the eclipse on that cloudy night than I had of the millennium on a night that was perfectly clear.

But during my visit to the Habitation, and in my memory of that visit, I do have a sense of event and I do think of time. Roughly four centuries have passed since the Habitation was constructed and destroyed, but it’s not exactly lost in time. We have Lescarbot’s texts; we have written accounts of the colony; we have a reconstruction that replicates the design of the Habitation, if not entirely its ambiance. And we have the opportunity to intersect with history--of the Micmacs, of the French in Acadia, of the court masque and public pageantry, of our own personal lives. These histories intersect whenever we examine where we are in time and what the various levels of the past have been where we are in space.

Suddenly we get that sense of awareness that Whitman speaks of, where we struggle to think “that the sun rose in the east” without us, to think “that men and women were flexible, real and alive” when we had no existence, to think that it’s only for this moment that “you and I are now here and bear our part.” This is the moment to recognize that, as Whitman says, “the law of the past cannot be eluded,/the law of the present and future cannot be eluded,/the law of the living cannot be eluded, it is eternal.” To bear our part is to observe and acknowledge this eternal law.

But a portion of bearing our part is also to record this moment where cultural and environmental and literary and personal histories intersect and leave it as an inexact milestone for those who will bear their part after us. Let them encounter this artifact and say, “Ah, there’s where we were; oh, here’s where we are.” We don’t need to depend on global coverage by media conglomerates to provide it. We need only be awake and alert to moments of intersection, we need only think of time with humility and grace. The real story is, you and I are here now and bear our part. The real news is, every moment is a milestone.

Last Will & Testament

I want only blue sky over me.
I want the clouds, so many
of them, variations, passing,
changing as they pass.

I want the blackest nights
filled with turning stars.
I want birds to find me,
want the hot breath of animals.

The wind too will pass,
on its way to places
I have been.

James Koller

After Days of Rain

After days of rain
the sky is clear.
Almost full, the moon
hides in a giant oak
until I walk
some distance from the house.
Midnight, I hear
a dog barking.

He hears more
than I do.
Geese straggling north?
You too are looking
at the moon—
just out our kitchen door,
in what seems from here
another country.
After sixty years,
they say, one can start again.
I think I will
need some sleep first.

James Koller

How Myths Are Born

I gather my thoughts behind plate glass,
watching curls of mythic proportions cresting
a quarter mile off the headlands, reminding
me of Venus, born of sea foam

from drops of blood when Cronus castrated
his father. Not a Botticelli, borne by Zephyrus'
wind on a sea shell across a tranquil bay,
to step ashore in all her naked glory.

That's the way it is with history, the message
changing with the messenger. Better to have
lived the myth than pass it around campfires for
a thousand years, all the emotion drained away;

the Victory, sailing into battle, decks sanded
so bare feet would not slip in the blood, black
muzzles pointing through the ports, gunners
stripped to the waist, heads wrapped to keep
sweat from their eyes.

This is the same sea where Agamemnon sacrificed
his daughter to bring favorable winds for the Greek
ships sailing to Troy, where King Canute ordered

the tide to stop, Venus coyly exposed her arms,
and dorymen cut loose in the fog, wonder how long
it takes to drown.

Part of me wants to be out there teetering
on the deck of a frigate in stinging hail, fog
and gleaming threat of ice, the "mad seas

and most intolerable winds" of the Horn,
risking sudden death in frigid waters
too violent for rescue, breakers speaking

the language of myths, stories etched on
my brain to read with squinty eyes every time
the sea turns cold.

And in the end, no priest or mourning relatives,
no soft pillow or listening to the clock wind down,
Just the wind eating the canvas, sailors sinking

in a sunless void, everything becoming clearer
as they reach the depths, water music seeping
in their ears.

Jack Rickard

A CONVERSATION WITH ANTONINE MAILLET

Jacqueline Chamberland Blesso

This is an edited translation of an interview held at Daigle's Bed and Breakfast in Fort Kent, Maine with Acadie's best-known author of 17 novels, including *Pelagie-la-charette* for which she was awarded France's most prestigious literary prize, the *Prix Goncourt*, in 1979, 13 plays (*La Sagouine* is her best-known work) and numerous translations. She is also the recipient of 27 honorary doctoral degrees.

JACQUELINE CHAMBERLAND BLESSO: I greatly admire your manner of introducing your language, and ours, to other Francophones and to the French. You did not lecture and you didn't make excuses. You simply used the language and then added a lexicon at the end. In "*Derrière chez mon père*," you used the words explaining them at the same time, which I also admire. How do people, especially the metropolitans, react to our language and to these mechanisms which you have used?

ANTONINE MAILLET: When you say metropolitan, you are thinking of France?

BLESSO: I don't like to refer to standard French because that implies that other French languages are inferior. Thus, I use metropolitans and the metropolitan language, if that is all right with you.

MAILLET: Very well. Actually, at first the French were rather perplexed in seeing this language. They were both perplexed and slightly puzzled and even a little amused, and also quite enchanted. But it depended on the level of the reader. A reader who had the habit of frequenting more than his Parisian neighborhood had much more openness and much more comprehension. At that moment, I quickly realized that they were very much interested in knowing that the French language extended beyond the hexagon. And not only that, but that it extended beyond time, because this Acadian language rejoins the ancestors, including the French. It's an old language. It interested them from the ethnographic and historic points of view and also, to a larger extent, in the literary sense. So, the reactions were quite varied. Some said: "Oh, I don't understand anything, so I'm not going to read it." Others said, "I didn't understand the first 30 pages, but I quickly got used to it. Then, it was easy." Still others said, "I had to read it twice," but they made the effort to read it twice. Generally, I would say that it was well-received.

B: Here in the Upper St. John River Valley, the border between Maine and New Brunswick, some people have rejected their language and their Acadianness because they were made fun of, because their language was removed from the schools and they were given the impression that the language is inferior. To be proud of oneself, one must be proud of one's language, heritage, patrimony, and culture. Your writings celebrate the culture and the language. Have you always affirmed your Acadian heritage, or were there moments when it was difficult for you to do so?

M: Yes, there were difficult moments. For example, when I was a child, I was very proud to be French, but I was a bit embarrassed to be Acadian. When I say Acadian, I don't mean being Acadian, but speaking this language that I imagined to be inferior. We Acadians had every reason in the world to feel inferior, because we were, or thought we were, in relationship to the Québécois, who were, or thought they were inferior, with regard to the French. So, we were always on the bottom of the social or cultural ladder depending on the circumstances; and we imagined that our language was really of inferior quality. When I started to write, I tried by every means to write in the most standard language possible, precisely the word we don't like. And I tried to write in the French style. I quickly realized that I couldn't; that I was in the process of fighting something which was stronger than I was on its own terrain—and that, therefore, it was better to bring it to my terrain, and there I could master it.

B: And tame it.

M: Tame it. And that is why I like my second book *On a mangé la dune*. I already began infusing it with the spirit, the mentality of the Acadian language. And the third book, which was *Les Crasseux*, and in the same way also *Don l'Original*, and right after *La Sagouine*. There I took the plunge. I worked briskly, and I wrote in the language of the region.

B: I believe that that is what has made your literature.

M: That is what allowed me to go off in my originality and in my personality. Otherwise, I was on the territory of others.

B: When did you realize the need to fight for the culture and the language, and was there a defining moment which led you to this realization?

M: I started very young. I started even in school. In my last book, *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, I recount an episode in the life of the heroine, who is at that moment a bit identified with who I was, at least for that particular experience. When I started the first scholastic strike in the history of Canada, I was about 12 years old. I protested; I refused to write my essay in English. I wanted to write it in French. I demonstrated, I testified that I could subsequently live in French in Canada, and that I could not only so live but that I could also earn my living doing so. And when the teacher asked me how I would earn my living in French in New Brunswick or in Canada, I answered, "I will write." And then she wanted to make fun of me. She said: "But, write where? In the *Évangéline*, in *La Revue des fermières*?" She was being ironic. It was there that I felt the point of her irony, which reinforced my feeling that I had a cause to defend. As you said, there was a moment. That moment was certainly very strong. And, I said, "No, I will write books, and I will write them in French." I had never said it to anyone. I had not even said it to myself that I would write books. But there and then I asserted it to defend myself, and I have never changed my mind.

B: And you made irony a part of your works, your writings.

M: Yes, that's it. That is to say, I was provoked by a sword and I also defended myself with the sword.

B: I am very concerned with the loss of the language in the Valley. The Church has abdicated its role of guardian of the language and there are no other institutions to continue it. A few parishes celebrate mass each week in French, but the homilies are in English. English penetrates every aspect of life. A few of the primary schools have accepted a program with the goal of bi-literacy. But other schools have refused it. What would you say to our students and to their parents to encourage them to learn to read and write their language?

M: That is to say that in the United States I know very well that things are different than in Canada. The official languages of Canada are French and English. Whereas, in the United States, that is not the case. But, in another sense, the United States does not prohibit someone from having more than one language. Because a language is a resource. And having two languages is having two cultures. Thus, even if we cannot, of course, ask a young American not to know English, we can certainly ask him to know a second language, which in this case is his language, that is to say the French language, in his being Franco-American, or the people of the Valley, as you say. And there, I say, it is a richness, it is...it is an asset. It is an advantage to possess two languages. Not only is it an asset to have a second language, but that they possess a second language, which is their language, which is the one which expresses their frame of mind. Which is the language they have held for generations and generations, since Charlemagne and Clovis, you understand? Therefore, at that moment, it would be a shame to lose a heritage which has come to them from so far, while the only effort which they have to make is to keep it living, to keep the flame burning, because they haven't lost this language. But it must be revived, rediscovered and used as a cultural trump.

B: If the language is lost, the heritage is also lost.

M: That's right.

B: In *Derrière chez mon père*, you have said: "We paste ancient words onto new images: *roulis de la mer* become *roulis de neige*; *poudrerie de canon*, *poudrerie de neige*; and *bourrasques de vent*, *bourrasques de neige*." These are all expressions which we use here. You also play with words, the way Rabelais did. You talk about *Tétines de souris*, *spitoune* and other such words. Like him, you expand the language. Du Bellay had challenged the French of his era to enlarge the language. If the *Académie française* admitted our vocabulary as well as the vocabulary of other Francophones, the French language would explode and might even surpass the English language, which has a larger vocabulary than the French of the *Académie*. What do you think of that?

M: I think that the French language has been, at a certain time, in Rabelais' era, before Malherbe, before Vaugelas and before the *Académie*, richer than now. It was very broad. But it lost 100,000 of Rabelais' words to the advantage of 5,000 from Racine, because among other things, it was decided to purify the language. It's not a bad thing to refine language. It's not a bad thing to fix it, to make it more precise, more concise. But it should not have been done at the price of losing such a rich, such an old patrimony, which was this language which issued quite bluntly from Latin mixed with Gaulish, Celtic and several other languages. Therefore, I find that French could be as rich as English if today we accepted not so much to search out the old words, but to conserve them where they are still spoken. If we asked for the contribution of the entire Francophone world, the contribution of Acadians, Québécois, Franco-Americans, Haitians, Senegalese, Indo-Chinese, the whole of the world which has kept this language alive, and which has added to it, and which has continued to enlarge it, at that moment, of course, we would have a much richer French language. Notice that this is starting to happen. At this moment, very, very slowly, like all institutions, the *Académie française* is introducing in its dictionary some Francophone words, that is to say from other countries, from other provinces. But these 70 words are not enough, you know. In addition they make such a song and dance out of it as if they had rendered such a service to humanity. Well, in reality, it is we who are rendering them a service. It is not because the *Académie* has just introduced in its dictionary the word "*Acadien*." The day when the *Secrétaire Perpetuel* announced this to me as if he were telling me something extraordinary, I said, "That's very nice, only the word "*Acadien*" is much older than the *Académie*. It dates from Verrazano, which is the 15th century. The *Académie* was founded in the 17th century. Thus, you are late by a few centuries." So, in that sense, I find them quite timid.

B: You have said: "I don't believe that the Acadian language is a patois. It's an old language... We have invented nothing here: all the words that I use are French words, but old French words. Go and verify that, they're in Rabelais, in Villon, in Marguerite de Navarre, and even in Moliere." Here in the Valley we use "*greyer*," "*soubassement*," "*brassée the bois*" and "*mitan*." Is there something you could add to convince the people of the Valley, and elsewhere, that our language is anchored in the 16th century and before, that we should not be ashamed of it and that it is as important as the other French languages.

M: Yes, your question already contains the answer. That is to say that the Acadian language, since we are speaking of the Acadian or Franco-American language, which has Acadian and Québécois origins, this language is absolutely completely French. There are some rare words that we took from the Indians, *mashquoui*, for example, which is birch bark...

B: *Boucane*.

M: And *boucane*, yes, and *mocassin*, words like that. A few rare words, which we have taken from English, but those are neologisms. Those were words which did not exist, for example—*camion*. There were no trucks during Rabelais' time. So we say "*troque*."

Only the French say “*truc*,” and that’s French. We say “*troque*” and it is not. A Frenchman will say “*machin*” and that’s okay. We say “*chose*” and it’s not okay, while “*chose*” is more French than “*machin*.”

B: Yes. The Québécois say that they go “*magasiner*.” They have made a verb from a French noun, while in France they say, “*faire du shopping*,” which is English.

M: That’s it. On that subject, in France, there is a slippage now, a contamination of the French language by the American language which is catastrophic. The word is not strong enough. But, at any rate, to answer the initial question, I say, these words, this language, is extremely rich, beautiful, full of imagery, is not made of concepts but of imagery, precisely. It is more precise, more beautiful because one can visualize. Concepts are absolutely abstract. We don’t know. We don’t see anything, but when we talk about “grayer” a bride for her wedding, we see the rigging of the ship’s masts, and the sails of the bride. She is like the ship. Therefore, it is a heritage that we must not lose.

B: There is a question that always comes back. Which French language should be taught in school: the metropolitan, ours or both?

M: Well, it all depends because I would be against, for example, that the classical French language not be taught. When I say classical, it means the universally accepted French language. It is necessary to know that language.

B: It is necessary to have a language in common with all other French speakers.

M: That’s it, and that which is the very pureness of the French language. We must know that. That is not to say that we must speak *parigot*. Not at all, but the French language which many French don’t know either. That is to say that they sometimes speak a kind of local *patois*, a slang if we don’t want to use the word *patois*. But often Parisians speak slang. It is not that French we must teach. It is pure French, which has the genius of the French language, which has conserved its French roots. I think that is the language we must teach in the schools. Only I would add that we must also teach, as a heritage, as a treasure, the local language, the regional French, the language spoken by the people, while saying that it is an oral language; and that the other is the written language. And, that we can succeed, of course, in writing this oral language. The proof—I do it. But that it will remain the popular language.

B: Very good answer. I teach and when the occasion presents itself, I always say that this is the metropolitan word, but that one is the word we use in North America. The pacifist theme reappears in several of your works, in “*Don l’Orignal*,” “*Mariaagelas*” and “*Les Cordes de bois*.” But, in “*La Complainte du soldat inconnu*,” the soldier says: “Let me dream in peace of the life which I loved and of which I was robbed / for nothing / because my death has not served, / has not healed the quarrelsome nations, has not uprooted war, has not yet given the legacy of peace to a single generation.” It’s a

universal message, which shows the futility of war. Could you comment on this theme, and did you have a particular war or conflict in mind when you wrote it in 1986?

M: When I wrote that *complainte* of the unknown soldier, it was rather a commission. It was because I was asked to write it for a book that the United Nations, or UNESCO, I don't remember, was producing on the theme of peace. So a few Canadian authors were asked to write a poem or to write something, a text, on the subject of peace, and I wrote that. At that moment, it is not a message that I wanted to give, or anything. It was that I was answering a request. Of course, it is understood that it also corresponds with my personal conviction. I see war very much like that, war that is fostered by others but which sacrifices those who would rather have stayed home, who would have liked to have a life. And it is often the leaders of this world who decide to have a war for reasons which they have, for ideological reasons and often political or economic reasons; and they promote it; and they make young people fight war when the subsequent peace will not benefit them. That is why I wrote that. Now if in my other books I use the word "pacifist" or talk of that, it is because my deepest convictions are for peace. And I will say that I do not have a message to give. A writer does not have a goal when he writes. But his writings have a meaning. It is not the same thing. I don't write to give messages. I don't write to teach something. But, since I have personal convictions, they penetrate my writing.

B: It is not didactic, but it comes from your convictions.

M: It shows through in spite of oneself.

B: Then that leads to my next question. Except for the "*soldat inconnu*," which I saw as more direct, your pacifist, political, religious ideas never confront. You always veil them in the satirical voice of a funny and amusing character. *La Sagouine* takes away the sacred aura of the politicians, the clergy, the government, and she mocks the prevailing ideas of the time. Is that your nature? Do you approach life and people in the same manner?

M: I think that *La Sagouine* reveals a hidden side of me. I think that every writer creates a character because that character was in him. That doesn't mean that the character is he. *La Sagouine* is not I. She is larger than I am. She is more extraordinary than I am. But I surely carried her inside of me. That means that *La Sagouine* succeeded in saying a lot of things because she said them in a way that appears naive. *La Sagouine* can say anything, because she says it in such a way that she seems to be looking elsewhere when she says it. She never looks at anyone directly, she says it as if she were saying, "Why no, I was just saying that in passing." Perhaps the success of *La Sagouine* rests on the attitude she had while saying what she says. It is her character, it is her personality, and it is her way of saying things, which has made *La Sagouine* a success. She never gives lessons to anyone. She never says do this, do that.

B: She talks to herself.

M: She talks to herself. And, generally, when she realizes that she's said a little too much, then she turns to irony and does an about face so as not to appear as if she had spoken too bluntly to folks.

B: As to the theme of returning home, we have all read "*Maria Chapdelaine*," who is exhorted not to leave her homeland. In "*Pelagie la Charrette*," the Acadians have been forced to leave, but they must return. And even when they left, as Gapi says to Sullivan, "*Ceuses-la s'en avont revenu se bati' sus la côte une petite maison pour abriter leux vieux jours.*" [They came back to build a little house on the coast to shelter their old age.] In these metaphors which I understand to mean the discovery of self, even if one leaves the country, one always comes back "*chez nous.*" And the cart and the odyssey of all these people, this represents the voyage of life?

M: Yes, I believe that "*Pelagie*" has to be interpreted at several levels. The first level, of course, is a coming-home voyage of an exiled people that want to return home. That's the first level that everyone has understood. But there is also a search for self behind that. One must find oneself, and one cannot live that self outside of one's culture, one's natural heritage, one's memory, let's say. And one's language is part of that. Now, Pelagie has realized this—that people were going to disappear, not necessarily die, because each individual could become assimilated over there. But that would mean that a Leblanc became White. Understand? At that moment the Acadian lost his authentic personal identity. And he became another. In a sense, he died. And that is what she did not accept. Thus it was to recover, to give to each one, his own personal identity. And on other levels also, "*Pelagie*" is an epic. And, the definition of an epic is really the story that tells of the birth of a people in the fraction of a second which precedes its birth. That is to say, at the moment when two adversaries are fighting, one is going to give birth to his nation. Well, which one is going to win? If the nation, which is going to become X, loses at that moment, it will never exist. Thus, the battle which decides the moment, or just before one wins, it is then that the epic comes in and narrates. Then, once it is won, the epic is over. Take for example Homer's *Iliad*. Well then, it is at the moment when Achilles, yes or no, is he going to fight? And if Achilles does, the Greeks will win. And the Greeks do win the battle. Generally, the hero must be sacrificed. As you know, Achilles dies. But, it is at the moment when the battle is taking place, yes or no, will there be the birth of a people? *The Song of Roland* is the same thing. Roland dies. But at the moment when he sounds the horn, the battle is won because Charlemagne returns. Thus, the nation of the French is born, or the nation of the Francs in the era, is going to live. Well, Pelagie brings back her people. Is she or is she not going to reach the frontier? Is she going to get there? She does. The people are home, and the people will live. She has given birth, but she dies. It is an epic because without her the Acadian people would have died. Therefore, it is the birth, or rebirth, of a people, but told at the moment when it is decided. Thus, that is another level of "*Pelagie.*"

B: You deal with all aspects of life, as well as the scatological which I see in "*Pelagie*" and other works. Because that is part of life, one must talk about it. Thus, Maillet can talk about everything?

M: Everything, everything, everything which is human interests me, including the scatological. That is human also. There, of course, I am Rabelais' disciple. That is to say that there is a way of talking about everything, but with dignity and with respect. And humor is very helpful in elevating, precisely, the scatological.

B: The song "*Par Derrière Chez Mon Père*" goes in the direction of diminution and death. You take off in the opposite direction and enlarge the legend "towards life," and towards France. If one continues exploring in that direction, one arrives at the cosmic. Thus, the Mailletan work does not know any limits. It is open to everything?

M: It is life which does not have any limits. Precisely, I have a global intellect. My mind is much more synthetic than analytic. If you notice, my books don't analyze the psychology of the characters. I don't write psychological novels, because that needs an analytic mind, which I do not have. On the contrary, I like to synthesize. I am a character in a whole, and all of it starts by becoming a family, then it is a village, then a country, then a people, then a culture, then a civilization, it's the world, and finally, it is a place in the cosmos. And, in time, it's the same thing. It is time which is ours, the span of my life, then it is the span of my people, that is a few centuries, then it is the span of the human being, a few million years, then it is the time of creation. Thus, I always spill over in order to find my exact place in this spatio-temporal unity.

B: The oral tradition, magic realism, characters who do extraordinary things, legend, folklore, all play a very large part in Mailletan literature. Could you comment on these sources of inspiration and others?

M: I come from a tradition of oral literature. One must not forget. I can say a bit about myself, what Jacques Ferron has said of himself. He says, "I am the last of the oral tradition, and the first of the literary tradition." I am a little bit that in Acadie. That is to say, I have received my literary stock from two sources: in school, of course, with my professors who taught me literature, but also from these storytellers, narrators, drivellers, oral genealogists, all of these, who form the corpus of Acadian oral literature. Well, I am their heiress. Thus, inevitably, it is the meeting of two levels that forms the work which I have been able to create or have tried to create. That takes in all the baggage of legends, stories and beliefs. I realize that those belong to literature as well. Homer only wrote starting from what he himself called writing. He could very well have recited and it was written later. Thus, he is part of an oral tradition. Even Dante, who wrote so marvelously in the Tuscan language, the Italian language, was inspired by a whole series of beliefs and legends which circulated amongst his people. There is practically nothing but a jumble of oral tradition in that. Thus, if one looks at literature which would refuse to encompass that which is belief, and which would only reflect one's faith or belief, would extremely restrict one's universe, because the universe is not only made up of the living. It also includes phantoms, ghosts, those who have passed amongst us, who have left something.

B: Even while they were cloistered, from the point of view of responsibility, one can say that nuns were liberated women before the feminist movement. They were not the equals of their masculine counterparts, and they certainly are not even today. But even so, they were in charge of convents, schools, universities, hospitals, orphanages, etc. even before their lay sisters had those kinds of responsibilities, as we see in “*Les Confessions de Jeanne de Valois*.” It is obvious that you have an excellent knowledge of ecclesiastical politics. Could you comment on that aspect of religious life?

M: That is to say that I am telling you about religious life as I saw it in Acadie. In Quebec it was that, but it was more strict. Consequently, their life was more rigid. They did not have the same intellectual liberty that you find in *Jeanne de Valois*. Nevertheless, they had as much responsibility. Quebec also had superiors who supervised large institutions. But one can say that in Acadie, since we are talking about Acadie, the nuns had, at the same time, this avant-gardism, this pioneer side of feminism, and at the same time they had this open-mindedness. They were culturally open-minded. Since we’re talking of scatology, I can assure you that Jeanne de Valois did not do too much without, but always with dignity. She could tell us stories with double meanings, you know. Why? Because it’s part of life. Thus, there was nothing...dirtiness doesn’t exist when it’s clean.

B: Here in the Valley, women were always named by their maiden names in burial and marriage registers. But I saw recently that they are named by their married names in obituaries. In business, for the most part, we address men. The idea being that women know nothing of such things. We’re not the only ones to do this, but here women are identified by their associations with men, thus so-and-so’s daughter, wife or mother, identifies women. In your works, women are strong like La Sagouine whose wit and spirit outshines “*les gens d’en haut*,” Pélagie, who guides a group of people in order to return to her territory; and *Evangéline Deusse* who starts her life anew at 80. They are larger than life and they manage to assert themselves. Evidently, they are like you. Could you discourse on the subject of the inequality of women?

M: Women have always had an inferior “status.” I’m putting it in quotations. Nevertheless, in my own family, my father was very broad-minded and my mother was a very strong woman who took her place. But it was understood that it was the boys who would first pursue studies. Not the boys to sit first at the table, not the largest piece for the boys. It was not a question of that. But to prepare for life, in principle, it was the man who would be the breadwinner. Hence, it was necessary to send the boys to college. I had a sister who was my brother’s age, one or two years younger, who was much more intelligent than he was, who was much more determined than he was, who was stronger than he was. Well, he was the one who studied medicine, and she was the one who became a nurse, while she was the one who wanted to go into medicine. But it just simply wasn’t allowed. She was sacrificed. She was ten years older than I was. My generation avenged itself on her. I mean to say, avenged her, if you wish. When it came down to me, it was I who became a writer. You understand? And not my little next-door neighbor. Why? Because I wanted to be. And I worked for it. Only if I had had the same age as my older sisters, perhaps I would not have been able to. So it’s good that things have

developed in that way. There was an era in Acadie when women were kept in an inferior state. When I was young, I heard it said, and it revolted me, that the wife would always be subject to, that is to say, submissive to her husband. That he is the boss and he could decide everything, and everything, everything, everything. Horrors! [Long sigh]. It revolted me, even when I was little. These were old beliefs. But, as we grew older, we realized that it was false. So...

B: Things have changed.

M: Surely, absolutely.

B: You studied and you wrote your doctoral thesis comparing Rabelais' language with that of the Acadians, and it has been said that you are like Rabelais in making the language explode. But you do not resemble him in his misogyny. I have long looked for an antonym for misogyny and I have not yet found it. That tells me that there are men who detest women, but that the opposite phenomenon doesn't exist. In your works you scoff at men and you bring them down a peg or two with a bit of irony. But I also see that you respect them. La Sagouine has a great deal of respect for Gapi; there is respect for Jean in "*On a mangé la dune*;" and Pélagie for Beausoleil and for the centenarian, Belonie, that extraordinary Belonie, who decides in favor of life when he has just given birth to his lineage. Can you talk about your attitude towards men?

M: Well, first I would say, to defend Rabelais, he was a misogynist, but it was of the era. He wasn't more than others. All men were misogynists at that time. And also, very often, what we call misogyny, are jokes, which Rabelais told at the expense of women. But I tell those same jokes. I find them funny. And people don't understand that I can be ironic or repeat these same jokes from Rabelais which are apparently misogynist. But one has to be able to laugh at oneself. One of Rabelais' classic jokes that I tell that I find very funny is about the man who beats his wife. And then when he is asked why, what has she done? He says, "I don't know, but surely she knows."

B: [Burst of laughter.]

M: Things like that are just funny. You laughed spontaneously and you are a woman. But we also laugh at jokes about men. Thus, I do not discriminate in that way. I say, men and women are equal. They are different. They are equal. I don't try to compete with men in a boxing ring. I would not try to run faster than a man, and things like that. Physically, I can very well see that they have more muscles that they have developed, but that doesn't matter. Hence, the question doesn't lie there. But I see that we have equality but that we are different. When I read a feminine author, I know that I am reading a feminine author. Why? Because she has a different mentality. When I read someone who is black, I know that I am reading someone who is black. When I read a Hispanic, I know it even when he writes in English. Why? Because culture influences style. So if culture, skin color have an influence, imagine what sex does. It would be ridiculous to say that a woman does not write like a woman. That doesn't mean that her subjects are limited. It doesn't mean that

she is going to write only about feminine topics. Nor does it mean that she's going to write only about the potato—or how to cook it. Not at all. She must tackle every subject. But she will do it in her feminine nature. There you have it!

B: Like Moliere, you detest hypocrisy, especially religious hypocrisy. I'm thinking of la Sainte and Ma Tante-la Veuve in "*Les-Cordes-de-Bois*." La Bessoune, la Piroune, and Mariaagelas are free spirits who have thrown off social and religious shackles. Do they represent your thinking?

M: Yes, in that case, it's very clear. These characters reflect what I feel. Everything which is *tartufferie*, everything hypocritical, whether religious, political or anything else, exasperates me. On the other hand, sometimes they amuse me. I don't detest la Sainte, but I detest her faults. But la Sainte in a sense has something amusing, funny, and likeable about her. She also is the product of her parents. Thus, in spite of everything, she is not unpleasant. But I disapprove of her attitude.

B: In the character of la Sainte, I see the philosophy of Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss, "It's the best of all possible worlds." Were you at all influenced by Voltaire and also by other authors?

M: Not very much by Voltaire. I read Voltaire. I respect him as a writer, but it is not my family of writers. I have been influenced by many writers, probably very little by Voltaire. From that point of view, I would have preferred the style, language and spirit of Jean Jacques Rousseau to Voltaire. But the 18th century has had very little influence on me. Probably, it was because of the fact that when I was a student we would skip the 18th century. It was the Age of Enlightenment, the age of reason, considered as atheistic. In school or in college the 18th century was pretty much on the index. So I was very much influenced by the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the 17th and the 19th. Yes, I adored the romantics, even the naturalists, the realist authors. Then I studied the 20th. And, the 18th is the one I did on my own, afterwards. But, in school, in college, at that time, we did not study Voltaire.

B: Well, my next question was about Voltaire. When you talk of planting cabbages, it reminds me of Voltaire's recommendation to tend one's garden at the end of *Candide*.

M: That is not from him. In fact, he said it, but it was older than that. To plant cabbages, Voltaire then used a current saying of an image which already existed. Thus, it's the tradition that I imitate, not Voltaire.

B: So, planting cabbages is like life's work and goods, our goods. And your personal cabbages are your works?

M: There, I'm not sure. Yes, in a sense, I am cultivating my garden. It is, moreover, Voltaire's most beautiful phrase. It is not from him. It is beautiful to end *Candide* with it.

B: In Beckett, the character cannot stop talking, and the more he talks the more he degrades himself. In Maillet, it's the opposite. The character grows while he expounds. The silence of le Stop in "*Evangeline Deusse*" makes me think of the powerlessness of the Acadians. Evangeline Deusse shows him, and shows us, how to get out of this helplessness—it is by speech. We must talk, we must explain, we must commit ourselves and we must write. Is that what Mailletan commitment is?

M: Well commitment, but I would point out that I have never thought about that. You are making me aware that it is true that le Stop is mute. You saw him like that. But, I had not thought that he could represent a silence that should be shaken up, without a doubt, without a doubt. But, my commitment is always more profound than what I can see. Surely, each character represents a part of myself, but I am not always aware of that. You know, writing is a voyage into the subconscious in an extraordinary way. And one does not know what one is writing.

B: A voyage in the discovery of self. While discovering other things, one discovers the self.

M: It's a voyage to the exterior and to the interior at the same time.

B: The Valley is an interior logging and farming region. But I think that the smell of the sea has always remained in our nostrils. Our folks like to go to the ocean and love seafood. You have said, "Acadians were born with their feet in the water." The sea can represent many things—hope, birth, death, life and even the garden of Eden. Could you tell us about the significance of the sea in your works?

M: Acadie is under the sign of the *anima*, contrary to the *animus*. You know, the *anima* is everything about the living which is visceral, which is complex, which is nocturnal, lunar, that is to say the live, that which is emotional. While the part which is *animus* is that which comes from the mind, it's the cerebral, it's light, it's the sun. Well, the Acadians are a people of the sea; thus, a visceral, complex, live, restless, continually agitated people. So the sea has terribly influenced us, not only because there were fishermen, because there were *complaintes*, because we have shipwrecks, all of that, of course. But it is deeper than that—the symbolism of the sea which is made of this life and death which are in a continual struggle. The sea is the very symbol of life and death. Well, this has entered into the collective Acadian subconscious. I would even say that the shell or shellfish, its form is like the egg for us. Birth—we are each in our shell and we come out like Venus from her shell.

B: What a lovely image! Capitaine Beusoleil navigates on the ocean and Pélagie could have traveled in the same way, but she chose a route on land, in the forests and in the marshes. You also talk about the fields of clover. Thus, the land is also important for you?

M: Yes, I am, I don't want to say torn, but divided between the sea and the land. I have as much affinity with the land, the smell of the earth, the sight of buds opening. All of that is as inspiring for me as the ocean. It is the two. I know the mountains less. I cannot say that mountains would inspire me. I would go and I would visit there willingly for a while, but I would not live in the mountains. It is not part of my imaginary world, of my imaginary surroundings. While the land, the forests and the sea, yes. And the starry skies.

B: Gapi says: "*J'avons rien fait de nos vies, peut-être, ben; ben j'avons point fait de tort à parsoune, toujou ben*" [We haven't done anything with our lives, perhaps; but we haven't done any harm to anyone]. That is poignant. It shows the goodness of the people. Do you think there are many people today who can say that they haven't done any harm to anyone?

M: That is to say, even Gapi could not say it, but he said it. It is a way of justifying oneself and saying that we had nothing. But precisely because we have nothing we cannot take it from others. Others, who are rich have taken it from someone, while we have nothing. Thus, we have not hurt anyone. It's true that the more humble people are, the less one can reproach them. Poor people do not dominate, do not crush, and do not conquer. That doesn't mean that they don't quarrel amongst themselves. But I want to say that they are not the rulers.

B: "*L'Ile Aux Puces*" makes me think of the Acadian community. It is the English who have made the earth tremble. You have said, "*ceux de ma race—que Dieu leur pardonne*" [those of my race, may God forgive them]. Once again, you have surrounded history in myth, without mentioning the antagonists directly. Except in "*Pélagie*," you rarely talk about the "*Grand Dérangement*." Given the subject of the book, it is impossible not to mention it. The Jews say that we must never forget tragic events. What is your attitude concerning the remembrance of the "*Grand Dérangement*," and what should be our attitude with regard to this? Should we always treat it as the central event of our existence? Or else, as some other folks say, should we forgive it and forget it?

M: I think that the answer is neither one nor the other. Life must be built on the past, so that this past can be a base for growth. To brood over this and to never wish to forgive, never forget the tragic events in order always to demand reparation for this, is a negative attitude that the Jews perhaps hold. I don't know. But, nevertheless, it is a negative attitude. And I believe that it leads nowhere. On the other hand, to sweep it all away, forget completely, to deny this, means to deny ourselves. Besides we would not do that. If we put a blanket on something dirty, on a pile of manure, it does not mean that the manure isn't there. It simply means that we have hidden it. Thus, to put a bandage on the pus, we have not treated the wound. So we must acknowledge the wound. We must see it. We must know our history. But we must start from there, climb on top of it, and then go elsewhere. Especially we must not reproach the descendants of those who have done this to us to be the culpable ones. Not anymore than I want to be reproached for what my ancestors did to the Indians, understand? Because at that moment, we are never done. It's

an infernal circle because there is always this institutionalized hate. And that is unhealthy on every level.

B: On the subject of returning to infancy in “*Par derrière chez mon père*,” you have said: “The game of remembrance is perhaps the most maddening, but it is the most fantastic.” The fantastic plays a large role in your writings and you like to return to childhood. You like the simplicity and honesty of children like Radi?

M: The game of remembrance is the most maddening because we cannot relive it, because we must give it up. That is to say, the game of remembrance is maddening because we will miss the way our childhood was all of our lives. On the other hand, it is the most marvelous because we can relive it in our memory, and because we can endlessly start our life anew by remembrance. Thus, remembrance maddens us and fascinates us, the two together. And I believe that at the core of the writer there is a being who is frustrated and fascinated at the same time, because he plays with memories, because he is in an imaginary world. Thus, childhood is where everything is decided. Goethe said that everything that he has written, he already had it, he had already stored it within himself before the age of 12. I said that to a psychologist, who answered, “Before the age of six.” Apparently, before the age of six our life is already decided. Be that as it may, childhood is fundamental for the writer. Whether it is a happy or unhappy childhood, he cannot be a writer if he has forgotten his childhood. I remember someone who said, “I remember absolutely nothing before the age of 10.” He cannot be creative. Perhaps his conscious memory has forgotten, but the subconscious has not forgotten. That is because the writer is the one who plunges into his subconscious like an underwater diver who goes to the depths of the gloom of the ocean to find the treasures that are hidden there. And he doesn’t see what it he is searching for. Then, when he surfaces he has his hands like this [she shows her hands open], and he might have some small pebbles, perhaps some mud in his hands, then here you are: there is also a pearl. Therefore, he must go. He goes and he comes back with things. That means that if we do not have a rich subconscious, we come back with little pebbles. But why do we have a rich subconscious? Because we have stored up during our whole childhood, and during the time when our mother carried us in her womb, and during all the time when our ancestors transmitted to us, who carried everyone. Thus, we had the remembrance of the time when we were in the stars. That is what I say. And these memories are embedded somewhere. They are not in the memory, but they are in the viscera, they are in the genes. Indeed, the proof—a baby knows how to swim, because he remembers the time when he was a fish, you understand? So I say that the writer is the one who has the best subconscious memory which is called, precisely, the subconscious, and who has the courage and the technique. That is where virtuosity or talent comes into play to go and find this.

B: Like Proust’s madeleines...

M: ...Like Proust’s little madeleines.

B: In the Valley, a few years ago, there was a big discussion on the subject of who is an Acadian. You know that we are a mixture of Acadian and Québécois. So, it was said, he has an Acadian parent and a Québécois parent. Is he Acadian? And the whole gamut of possibilities. How would you answer this question? Who is an Acadian?

M: I would answer that I do not renounce my father because I have a mother, and I do not renounce a grandfather because I have a grandmother. I take everything. And so he who is lucky enough to have a mixture...sometimes I regret not being a little bit more of a bastard. I am too much French, in a sense. All my ancestors are French, as far as I can trace. So, I say to myself, mixtures are a blessing. Because instead of saying I only have the history of France, I would very much like to have possibly the history of Russia or the history of Spain, or the history...you understand? Thus, if we are Acadian or Québécois at the same time changes absolutely nothing. We are both. Instead of saying I am only half-Acadian, I am twice that. I am fully Acadian and fully Québécois. I say, let's not renounce anything.

B: What do you think of the separatist movement in Quebec?

M: I am against it. I voted "no," and I will tell you why. First, I am Acadian, and it is understood that the separation of Quebec would be catastrophic for Acadie and for all North-American Francophones, particularly Canadians. Thus, as an Acadian, I cannot favor the death of my people. But as I am the adopted daughter of Quebec—that is to say, since I have lived there for 25 years—I must not vote against the interests of Quebec because I am Acadian. So if I could truly see that Quebec's interests lay in separation, I would abstain from voting. But I am personally convinced that for Quebec this is not a good thing. I am convinced that Quebec defends itself better inside Canada. That the culture, the language, the heritage, the personal identity of each Québécois are better protected within Canada than a small group of 6 million lost within 300 million English speakers. Because then it becomes a North-American people. While now it is approximately one-fourth of Canada. Thus, 7 million within a population of 30 million can defend themselves. But 7 million within a population of 300 million cannot defend themselves. Further, Canada has always had a tradition of protection of French. Because at one time the French were more numerous. Or, even, they were half-and-half or one-third. Thus, Canada has developed a tradition of protection of French, even if it is not always well applied, even if the federal government has made all sorts of errors, even if sometimes the English do the job poorly. I agree with that. But, nevertheless, Canada is more receptive, is a better defender of the French language with its bilingual law, etc. than would be North America. The United States would have no reason to make gifts to Quebec. It is not in their tradition. Therefore, I am convinced that Quebec defends itself now because it has to fight. The day when it imagines that the cause is won, it's finished. In any case, right now my thinking is very clear on this that the separation of Quebec would not save Quebec, but would lose it—in the long run.

B: What are you passionate about?

M: Life. Life and the broader aspects of life. Well when I say that I don't mean only: I get up in the morning, then I have my coffee, then I go up to the attic, then I work, then in the afternoon I receive guests, then in the evening I eat, then I go to the theater. Not that. That, yes, I already have that. But the power to transmit that life by reliving it introspectively and writing it, then in reconstructing it, then in adding to the seventh day of creation, the eighth. That is, by adding to life everything that life has not given me, all the beings I have not known because they remain possible beings. In the last book I have written, which is called *Le Chemin Saint-Jacques*, a lot of the answers which I give you would already be in my book. And, indeed, there is a little boy who has drowned, the young Firmin Richard. When I was coming over this afternoon, I was alone, and I was driving, and then I was thinking, if he hadn't drowned, he could very well have married. Who would have been Firmin's descendants? In other words, all of the possible beings. Last week, I was looking at my brother and my sister-in-law in a family photo. From this couple, there are six children with six wives or husbands, and their descendants. An immense family photo. And that is only one brother. Imagine now, my uncle Donat, who was my father's brother. There were 300 of his descendants in that photo. You understand? Thus, the descendants of my grandfather, now, are in the thousands. So, I say to myself, that is what I am searching for. Thus, to answer your question—that is what I have a passion for—it fascinates me to recreate the real world and the feasible world and the imaginary world and to have it nourish this creation.

B: What do you detest?

M: Reason. Everything that is reason, everything Cartesian. But here I would like to digress a little. One must not accuse Descartes of being Cartesian. Descartes was more open than those who have analyzed him, than those who have succeeded him. But, at any rate, what we call Cartesianism, that is to say reasoning reason which decides everything, the narrowness of those who "I believe what I see." I detest that, because it means that they deprive themselves, that they cut off all that would be the rest of the world which they do not see. Or also, all that is, precisely—only for whites—we deprive ourselves of everything which blacks could have brought us. Only for men—we deprive ourselves of everything women could have brought. Only for the rich, and so on. Thus, everything which limits life, which diminishes existence, exasperates me. Which leads to, in conclusion, that I cannot be racist, nor anti-Semitic, nor anti-old, anti-young, anti-black, anti-white.

B: Who are your heroes?

M: Very often, old people, and old people who have not necessarily been educated. There are some who have been educated. Others are self-educated. They are self-made men, and that life has made. They have developed a wisdom, a sort of prudence, in the noble sense of the word. Not fearful, who does not dare. Not at all. But the great prudence to make the right choices in life. Those are my heroes. Those who have dared,

who have attempted the great adventure of life to its limits, who have not balked in front of anything, who have not given up.

B: Do you have any advice for people who write and are trying to write?

M: Yes, I have one piece: never imitate another. Never be second best. Being first best means being oneself. If I try to write like Shakespeare, I cannot be better than him. Thus, he will be number one and I will be number two. If I try to imitate Giono, same thing. One must never write what someone else has done; but it is necessary to discover what constitutes oneself, how I see things, and not how I look at them through the eyes of someone else who has seen them before me. There you have it. That is the advice I would give. Let's discover how we laugh, how we sneeze, how we walk, how we see the world. Well, that's what I must tell with my words—my way of looking at the world and not how the other sees it. Because fashion, I detest fashionable writing styles. Someone invents the *nouveau roman*, everyone writes the *nouveau roman*.

B: Yes, yes. I have always thought that in the *nouveau roman* form is more important than content.

M: Yes, a form which, finally, becomes so stereotypical that it is then no longer form. It's taking six pages to describe a doorknob.

B: Or to describe a tomato. Do you have any other advice for the people of the Valley?

M: To be proud that they are unique in the world. They are Franco-Americans. That means that they are of French origin, and that origin is noble, it is beautiful. It is a heritage of a very old civilization, of a great culture. They have received that heritage. They have transplanted it on American soil, which is nothing to look down on either. Thus, here is the meeting of two riches—the French ancestral richness and the present American richness. So it's important to be proud to be that and to try to exploit it to its maximum. Then, to say that it is unique, because the African Francophone cannot tell about this. Nor the French Francophone. And the Louisiana Francophone will do it differently. The Franco-American is the only one who is able to tell what it is to be Franco-American. So he must consider it as a source of pride, as a richness.

B: Is there something else you would like to tell our readers?

M: Read. Read. Because every time we read a book, we penetrate into the thought, the subconscious of someone, in a sense, richer than we are, or at least as rich as we are.

B: And having a different experience.

M: And of a different experience. So one enriches oneself by seeking out the best of the other. And generally, someone who writes a book puts the best of himself in it. Instead of simple chance meetings in the street: "Hello, how are you? Ah, yes, your father is ill. I am sorry." Instead of that, it is a meeting at the level of what is most important to

someone. Thus, a reading is a meeting of two people at a very high level who wish to understand something more.

*

You spray always too far off
as if the sun whose only crop
is light and side to side

—you tune the nozzle
for that distant evening
when the first plow

cut open the night sky
and the Earth was born
with no turning back

—what you hear are streets
row by row, frail, their hills
allowed to fall

and without any shade: paving
is all it takes, the grass
made whole, already spreading out

and nobody dies anymore, your belly
lasts, covered with the same dust
all roads return to

for the slab smoothed down
by road crews and rakes: the black hair
beginning to stir, the breasts

become another heart
already trembling, filled
by a garden not yet green

torn apart by a touch
almost morning and roads
for the first time endless.

Simon Perchik

Vain Attics

Trying at night to hold it all together
 in my head: scraps of lace whirl above me.
 As if peace instead of grief could come through
 remembering
 where the hairline held before it retreated—
 leaving behind no tide-mark—
 or recalling how my neck felt, my voice soared, before
 Adam's tree dumped its apple,
 and insistent whiskers sprang up,
 repetitive as pop songs on the radio,
 lyrics that once felt so accurate they embarrassed me
 for fear that if someone guessed the one I clung to,
 they'd know why I'd never fit in.
 Today, an oldies station found me out,
 though I couldn't recall the group's name
 till I hunted down scratched 45's in my psychedelic-orange,
 fake-fur carrying case under the stairs.

Trying to relearn what I presumed indelible:
 Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour,
 Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard, Catherine Parr;
je suis, tu es, il est, nous sommes, vous êtes, elles sont
 —the symmetry of the seventh grade.

Trying to refurbish my childhood: Willowware's pattern
 stands in for Aunt Pearl's Blue Onion;
 I smoothe the same soft tablecloth as my mother's
 and save parochial-school textbooks that I once memorized
 in a box among titles that haunt me:
 RETURN TO GONE-AWAY LAKE;
 THE CLUE IN THE CRUMBLING WALL;
 and the dishwasher takes up its rhythmic, womblike sloshing—
 a lullaby to my middle-class psyche
 as I still do homework at the kitchen table.
 Sometimes it's as if I never moved away.

—Of course some old people sell their homes
 to escape unmanageable memories.
 They either hide in the present
 or are unravelled by the past.

But after we've moved on,
 who will remember what we've forgotten,

decipher our checkbooks, see to our New Year's
resolutions, attend our reunions?
Who will make sense of our random
musings, those vain attics?
Who will grope along the rasp of our lives,
feeling for webs among the splinters?

I am my own archivist.
Trying to reassemble more than I can remember,
I go back long before I was born
to a priest who unrolls a cloth scroll,
points out the family plot.
I trace the crest of a long ridge.
This cemetery looks out over nothing
but trees, the mill town below obscured.
There's French on every stone.
We could be in Brittany or Lachine.
But five rows down and six across,
the one word, one surname
that would have leapt out at me
is missing.

Even spider webs are mostly
gaps. Sometimes we come up against
silence so total, it echoes.
Unmarked graves—
Whole lives forgotten—
perhaps more whole because forgotten,

but more in vain?

Steven Riel

Coincidences

Randall Jarrell, John Berryman, Dylan Thomas
were all born in the same year as my mother was.
She was a quilt maker and gardener who eschewed
White Horse brews, although she did serve Cold Duck
occasionally when hosting her Bible study group:
then she would wipe the wine glasses shiny clean,
arrange them on the buffet with the family silver. Platters
of homemade potato salad and bouquets of late asters
would grace her table where the carefully ironed napkins
folded just so were arranged in rhythmic rows.
No suicide thoughts at these affairs, but she was not
a well-known poet seeing darkness like a heavy blanket
draped from snowflake to star, star to snowflake,
or headlights to beams, beings to wet highways,
beings contemplating a rim of suds ringing the last glass
ever. The blanket grew heavier, interminable. Her
bright scraps of fabric and flowers unreachable,
she could not save anyone, even with the prettiest quilt
ever. It was the beginning of the end in August 1914
when my mother was born, perhaps not a good time
for baby poets or ordinary women with skill in
embroidery. Late at night in her kitchen, cleaning up,
she mulled over injustice, Job, the grocery list. Stitch,
stitch, stitch. She never got rich, yet like many a woman
with farmgirl roots, her hands had talents. That's when
she was happy: coaching seeds to grow, sewing little quilts
for my daughter's dolls as she had for my dolls thousands
of nights ago. She was much like them, those stars,
gifted poets who could see the heart inside the husk,
despite their grief, even despite the heavy blanket making
it hard to breathe. Guests leave, what do they leave
behind? Ideas for poems perhaps? In the evening solitude,
after the listeners are gone, what then? She would
clear the table carefully, wash the dishes in foamy suds,
stack them to dry, arrange the wine glasses on a rack
by the sink, while the poets sipped a night cap as they slowly
typed remarkable words. They worked past midnight,
polishing poems, while she slept at last (her rheumatic heart
protesting), gasping for air, perhaps like them, like
famous poets born in 1914. The beginning of the end

in 1914, knowing and not knowing. Some things are important: late nights are devoted to craft (they would all agree.)

Mary K. Herbert

Father

It is morning my father
before you leave in the gray light
to drive the mountain roads.
It is this autumn that I remember
as you creaked the carpet
dressing in the dark
until your descent on the worn stairs
to the breakfast room still
cool above the blue Formica table.
The clink of your spoon in the cup
as you lit your first cigarette and blew
the smoke through your nose is
an intimacy,
I've grown used to...
an image from the lake's surface
when you told me to jump
into the deep water or
that first hunt when I killed
the rabbit beside the purple briars
after you had walked there
to flush it out.
This holy incense is what redeems me
from the light broken
by clouds and that loss
that growing brings,
when what moves
through this privacy
is but a shadow sinking
through the membrane of memory,
a failing at the heart of things to stay.
Now, as I watch
my son moving
through the afternoon,
silent and alone
disappearing before me,
a rustle I listen for
in the leaves.
It is this wet scent of morning
I long for,
the road winding
through the mountains
in that fine gray light.

C. Hood Frazier

The Bibliophile's Escape

Each night in lamp lit desperation,
searching for something to believe in,
you leaf through lives thick with significance
as if they could bring solace
in this dying light;
while upstairs
rising in white dreams,
she crosses the bed's expanse
and drifts over ice fields
beyond the windowpanes of her desire.
Each night she leaves
the cool linens of this life
to wander that silver river
beyond wanting, beyond the steady
sheen of what she has grown used to,
loosened from the abstract landscape
of her body.

Descending into the snow
of the page, your hand becomes transparent,
your body, invisible
as you caress its cool skin.
You follow the black tracks
to the edge of sense, to where they cover themselves
and turning, fuse,
branch-like in the surrounding dark.
Each line deepening the night
till at its tunnel's end
a haze envelops you
in that soft wash
you take inside.
When dawn grays your face with ash light,
you return to the morning house
silent and less warm.
This creaking house, the sound of her sighing
in her sleep, you begin an incarnation of hands
touching the edges of things in this twilight
which will bring you back
to the clock's steady discontent.
Soon you will hear her dressing,
moving through the upstairs
as if she were air. Each sound punctuated
by the silence she will become.

And in the coffee's familiar brew
and the teaspoon's clink on the china saucer,
you will follow her through the house.
Each moment a journey of loss.
Until, her words come strained and distant
as she crosses beyond the inevitable hush
of the front door
leaving you
in your solitude of things.

based on the woodcut
Bibliophile
by Felix Vallaton

C. Hood Frazier

The Rose Window (for Rowan Le Compte)

Suspended above the nave, this morning
glory of light boils above a rock arc
till diffusing green along the floor's shallows,
it reaches the apse and sinks to violet blue
We stand here staring
as threads of light weave the floor
like our first flight over Dresden
when trailing thunder, we droned on
praying that the night was dark enough
to hide in.
And in the light we left behind,
incinerated in the moment,
a fatal beauty and lament
in the marbled shoe and roadside stain.
Now, beneath these rose-hued ribs
and arches, below this sanctified eye
of light where I pray for our salvation,
in a circle of light
no bigger than a face,
a blonde haired
child her hands above her head
dances in perfect circles.

based on stained glass window entitled:
The Rose Window
in the Washington Cathedral
by Rowen Le Compte

C. Hood Frazier

de l'eau
de la bouche
mots se noient morts
l'arbre rit
l'oiseau se tait
le silence danse entre les mots
 texte mutilé
tendre ramage d'entre les dents
 feuille par feuille
l'écriture se déchire sans sens

seul le ciel s'écrit en maître
et avale le livre pré-conçu
con et presque pas con
la bouche de rien ne dit
rien
oeuvre inachevée
même pas commencée
le chemin est parti
le soleil sous le bras
rien ne reste
rien
cauchemar de poète
fou à lié
comme la botte en été
arrachée à la terre
et dressée comme une plume au vent
labeur des hommes
pain béni
tout ou rien
rien

C. Baurin

*de la **toile** de **nuit** vagabonde
déchirer le
silence endormi
en
monde de mots enterrés
à ressusciter*

*temps à éroder
de letters
nues*

espace de

parole à pensée

*écriture à crucifier **mort vivant***

C. Baurin

dense

*brume de mon corps
née du temps d'antan*

dense

*irrigation de l'écriture
visage crevassé de mots*

dense

*mouvance de vie
née de la mort fugitive*

à mes pieds s'agenouille

prions ensemble

C. Baurin

laisse-moi
de ta peau me vêtir
et respirer le parfum de la chair

laisse-moi
de ton corps me nourrir
et savourer le temps du plaisir

laisse-moi
de ta bouche m'imbiber
et sucer les lèvres de tendresse

laisse-moi
de tes yeux me baigner
et admirer les larmes de l'amour

laisse-moi
de ton sein m'enivrer
et mordre le goût de la vie

laisse-moi
de tout m'échapper
et errer dans le désert des mots

laisse-moi
de toi me souvenir
et chanter la louange des anges

laisse-moi

seul

C. Baurin

Sweet Talk

Alice Bolstridge

Why didn't I ever get married? Eliza's Lizzie has pestered me with that question all her life. When she was little, it was easy. I answered her like I did so many of her questions, like, "Why can't we fly to the moon?"

I said, "Maybe some day we will. Maybe someday the scientists will learn how, and we'll be able to fly to the moon. Now you go ask Justin to tell you about gravity and the oxygen on the moon." And she'd go find Justin and talk to him. Justin was only about nine years old then but already reading science books and Mama's science fiction, and he liked to talk to Lizzie better than anybody except Mama.

Before she grew up, she got an answer to that question about flying to the moon, but not to the one about why I didn't ever get married. Not really anyway. After a while I couldn't keep telling her anymore, "Maybe someday I will." I started telling her, "I was shy." Which is true, but not the whole truth. I couldn't ever tell her the whole truth.

It wasn't that I never thought of getting married or didn't want to. And it wasn't that I never had the chance, or thought I did. At least once. But I suppose I'd ought to have known, all that sweet talk in Norm Dennison's letters, ought to know it was just sweet talk, didn't mean anything. I was shy with boys though, so shy they never stayed around me to talk much. So I hadn't ever heard any sweet talk like that before except in stories I read, and I was thirty-one when Norm stopped by that afternoon of July 11th, 1958, attracted by my strawberries.

I picked all that morning to catch up. Ripening so fast, they'd got ahead of me. I had the counter on my roadside stand covered with baskets, and they were piled up three tier deep on the ground in front, fifty-six baskets of the prettiest berries you'd ever want to find anywhere, warm from the sun, red-red ripe, and so clean—because I mulched them with sawdust—they shone. I could just see what a pretty sight that must be to drive up to, all unexpected like that. All the strangers that stopped by said how they couldn't just drive by a display like that. I took time to arrange them, and then rearrange as they sold to keep the whole scene picture pretty. Mama used to say when I'd get going on making something look pretty, "Why don't you fix yourself up picture pretty, attract yourself a boyfriend."

I was just sitting down at my stand that day, glad to get off my feet and straighten my back, when Norm drove up in his powder-blue Buick. With a car like that I knew he wasn't from around here. I suppose I was taken by that car first thing. I used to daydream about having me a car and riding all around the country to see them pretty places—deserts and mountains and seashores—I liked to look at in the *National Geographic*. I knew it wasn't any use to daydream about going outside the country, except to Canada which was just thirty-five miles up the road, and I got to do that some after my pictures started making a little money. Got my brother Thurston and Jane to take me once in a while on Sunday afternoons. Their kids loved those trips.

Norm Dennison stepped out of that Buick and walked toward me. In my mind I can see him right this minute, all these years later—over six feet, lovely dark hair blowing in the breeze, blue sky around his head sparkling like it does on a clear day.

With hair long enough to blow like that, I knew for sure he never had been from around here. I was afraid I couldn't breathe, and I knew not to try to talk to him, I wouldn't get through one word. Right then I was taken sure, but I didn't know it.

He looked straight into my eyes and said, just like everybody else, "These strawberries are so beautiful, I couldn't possibly drive past." But not exactly like everybody else. Nobody else I ever knew could talk the way he did, so musical his voice was. He had just the slightest hint of a foreign accent. He told me later he was born in Quebec. I was taken by that voice too, so taken I forgot I couldn't talk without stuttering. I wanted too bad to say, Thank you. So, without thinking at all, I tried, "Th, th, th. . . ." And then of course I remembered and stopped trying and blushed like I always do when anybody hears me stutter.

He reached out his hand and said, "I'm Norm Dennison, pleased to meet you. Do you pick these strawberries?"

I nodded, grateful not to have to try to talk to answer that. And, honest, I don't remember touching his hand right then, but I suppose I must have. I wouldn't have been so rude as not to. He said, "Do you grow them too?"

I nodded again.

"And do you paint those pictures of strawberries behind you, framing you so pretty."

I nodded again and blushed. My face got all hot. He bought five baskets of my strawberries and two of my pictures. I made change, careful not to touch his hand. Then he asked if I painted any other kind of pictures.

I nodded and pointed to the barn where I kept all the pictures I wanted to sell. He said, "May I see them?" I nodded again.

He stayed in there a long time. Old Glen Fossgate from down in the hollow came by. He asked me whose was the blue Buick. I told him and he was looking that car all over, kicking the tires and all, like men do, when Miss Lawrence walked up. To the day she died, she always bought fresh strawberries from me every day during the season. I knew them both all my life, Glen retired from janitoring down at the schoolhouse, and Miss Lawrence from teaching. We talked about the weather. Glen said, "This is a weather breeder sure, too good to last more'n one day, thunder storm tomorrow."

Miss Lawrence said, "Amelia, I remember clear as though I could hear her this very minute, your mama telling about that ball of lightning coming into the house that time and rolling across the floor, scared the life right out through her hair she said." She always said how her hair didn't fall back down around her shoulders until she washed it again. Hester was such a story teller.

"I hope you remember to unplug everything like your mama always said to do. You know how lightning strikes this place, not only that ball of lightning, but that huge old pine across the road split right down the middle in the summer of '42, biggest tree left in Maine your daddy always said. Melted and curved that iron stake your cow was chained to so's it looked like a cane after, killed poor Lily dead. And your daddy's first barn that time before you were even born, killed all the animals in the fire. Mind, you unplug everything."

“Yep,” Glen said. “Lightning strikes fast and dangerous around this house.”

Right then Norm came out of the barn with three more of my pictures, all ones I’d painted of the old furniture in the house. He introduced himself to Glen and Miss Lawrence, held up the big picture of one of my Holy Families with the faces of Eliza, Maxwell, and little Lizzie, Eliza sitting in the old rocker. I painted that picture after I’d stripped the old paint all off and before I put any varnish on it. Eliza is rocking Lizzie, and Maxwell is behind in the shadows. Eliza got a kick out of thinking how her family was titled *Holy Family* and hanging on some stranger’s wall. It was my first numbered *Holy Family* I painted to sell. After I titled that one *Holy Family*, Eliza made me title the one I gave her *Holy Family*, too. That one doesn’t have a number. And I’d sold another one, unnumbered, that looked like a stained glass window. I have 26 now. I’m working on 27, a big one.

Norm said, “Now, isn’t that a beautiful picture? Who are your models?”

Miss Lawrence said, “That’s her sister Eliza, oldest in the family.”

I was surely taken by his flattery, too. People said my pictures were pretty, said that regular, but beautiful, I don’t think anyone had ever said that before. Though people would say it later on, after Norm Dennison started getting more money from them.

That day, he said, right there with Glen and Miss Lawrence listening, “I tell you what I’m going to do for you. . .” He looked down at the corner of the picture he was holding where I always write my name, just *Amelia*. “Amelia, I’m going to make you some money on these pictures. I’m going to take them down to this place of mine, and I’m going to sell them for you.”

Glen spoke up. “Oh no, you don’t. You want those pictures, you got to pay for them. Amelia, don’t you let him out of here with those pictures without his money in your pocket.”

I started blushing again, just when I was beginning to feel like I could start talking to Norm, since he already knew I might stutter. But with that about money, it took a little longer.

Finally I did get it out: “It’s all right, Glen, I’ll take care of it.”

But Glen wouldn’t let it be. “No, it ain’t all right. By God, Amelia, you know your daddy would never let nobody off this place with nothing without he paid every cent it was worth. Now don’t you neither. I won’t stand for it. Miss Lawrence, you tell her. Don’t let her do it.”

Miss Lawrence was staring at Norm. “Now, Glen, Amelia’s a grown woman. What’s the matter with you? We can’t keep on telling her what to do. I swear, you’re just a suspicious old fool sometimes. Don’t I tell you that often enough? Anyone would think you’d learned it by now. You mind your own business. Amelia, tell Glen to mind his own business. Tell him there’s nothing wrong with selling something on consignment. I know about that consignment business. People do it that way all the time. I know for a fact. That’s how Thurston’s Jane sells all her quilts right down to Big Bear. She told me all about it. Tell him, Amelia. Glen, you need to understand what’s going on in the modern world. You just don’t understand. You never did. Amelia, tell him he doesn’t understand a thing about the modern world.”

I said without stuttering one bit, “Oh, it’s all right Miss Lawrence. Glen don’t mean no harm.”

Norm said, "Of course, he doesn't. I can understand him wanting to look out for Amelia. And you're perfectly right too, Miss Lawrence. You certainly are a woman of the world. That's just how I mean to do business, on consignment. Now, Amelia, this is how it works."

I said, "I know . . . I know what consignment means. I understand things." I hated blushing worse than stuttering.

Glen said, practically shouting, "And so do I. I ain't neither no fool, Miss Lawrence. How many times I need to tell you I won't stand for you calling me no fool."

Norm said, "Why sure you know, Amelia. I can tell you know. I will make out a contract right here for these pictures, and if the arrangement works satisfactorily, as I know it will, we can talk again about possibly mailing some more pictures to me. How's that? We'll sign right here before witnesses. And sure you're no fool, Mr. . . . uh, sorry, didn't catch your name."

"Fossgate," Glen said.

"Mr. Fossgate, I can surely tell you're no fool. I can tell you have Amelia's interests at heart. And that's perfectly right. I assure you I mean to make this transaction a legal contract. Here's my card, phone number, address, name of my place. See right there, *Rockcoast Arts*. Everything you need to check my credentials. Here, I'll even write the phone number of the Portland Chamber of Commerce. You can call and check on me. There now, how's that? Surely that should take care of your concerns about Amelia?" Oh, he was smooth.

I knew it wouldn't satisfy Glen. Ever since Daddy died, he'd been coming by regular to see how things were, to remind me how Daddy always did things. He worked for Daddy sometimes in the summer when school was out, trading his work for strawberries, apples, and vegetables. He figured he knew Daddy's work habits better than maybe anybody else ever did. He thought Daddy was just the greatest farmer in the whole world, said often, "Nobody knew farming better than your daddy." And he'd go on about what he saw me doing, always insisting I had to do just a little more manuring, or use just a little less sawdust mulching because too much of the pitch from that cedar sawdust could leech into the ground and spoil the strawberries. I figured it wasn't any harm to let him think he was helping me. He hadn't much to do after retiring, with no more potatoes growing on our farm and his arthritis getting worse and worse, so he liked to come around and tell me how to grow the strawberries. Sure enough he said, "Well, *Mr. Dennison*, you just remember me, I keep an eye on this place and on Amelia, and if she don't get her money for them pictures, I'll know about it, and you'll hear from me. You just remember it."

Norm had his pen out and some paper on a clipboard. He leaned against his shiny Buick and wrote, reading out loud as he wrote, "*I, Norm Dennison, agree to pay Amelia . . . What was the last name?*"

Glen said, "Last name's Harding. Been Hardings in Little Bear ever since Eighteen-ought-two. Came here and settled after the revolutionary war, when there was nothing but Micmac Indians and woods and bears. Kin on my mother's side."

Norm said, ". . . *pay Amelia Harding her selling price plus 50% for three pictures, priced respectively at \$5.00, \$10.00, and \$15.00, upon the sale of said pictures.* How's that Amelia? Does that sound like a fair deal?"

Miss Lawrence was staring now with her mouth open. It hadn't been but a few months before that I sold her one of my big pictures for twelve dollars when she told me she wanted to buy one for her grand-niece, getting married in June. "Don't you think," she'd wanted to know, "those big pictures are just a mite overpriced?"

Glen didn't say one word either. He was looking hard now at Norm.

"Oh," I said, "I don't think those pictures are worth . . ."

Glen recovered and interrupted. "'Course they are. They're worth that and then some. No sir, Amelia, don't you for nothing give him those pictures for less than the asking price plus 60%." He moved over beside me while he talked and poked my arm with his elbow. "Take my advice, think what your daddy would do."

"Oh, Amelia," Miss Lawrence said, "take the 50%."

"Don't you listen to her Amelia. Just like a woman, she'll fall for a pretty face and a line. You hold out for the 60% like I said." He poked me again, harder.

Norm said, "I tell you what. If these sell as fast as I believe they will, I'll want some more, maybe I can sell all you've got, all you can paint. If they sell fast, I'll give you your selling price plus 60% plus the cost of shipping them to me. How's that? Here, I'll include all that in this contract, just to show you my good faith." He wrote it all down. Glen poked me again and winked. Miss Lawrence stared at Norm, a funny smile on her face. Norm handed me the contract.

Glen grabbed it and read it out loud and said, "Now I think that might be OK, Amelia. You can go ahead and sign that, but mind, I'll be keeping an eye on this here transaction. I'll be wanting to know if he keeps his word."

Then we all signed: me, Glen Fossgate, Miss Lawrence, and Norm Dennison.

That's how I got to know him. It wasn't any time it seemed before I had a check from him for \$56.00 and a letter saying send him three more of each size, nine in all. I showed the letter and the check to Glen when he came by. And to Miss Lawrence when she came along behind him. I used to think she must watch for him to go by and then follow in about ten minutes. That's about how long it always took for her to get here after Glen showed up, just about every time. I showed that check to Thurston and Eliza and even Justin. I thought I might even hang on to it to show my other brothers, Willard and Carl, when they came home the next summer, but Miss Lawrence said, "You better not keep a check around long, better cash it, or it might not be any good." So I did, started a savings account with it, first savings I ever had.

I didn't show Glen the whole letter. The business part was written on business stationery with *Rockcoast Arts* across the top, but there was another page written on dusty pink paper that smelled like roses.

My dear Amelia,

I hope you won't think I am being too forward, but I must tell you how pleased I am to make your acquaintance. You are quite unlike anyone I have ever met. I remember how pretty you looked surrounded by your strawberries, your golden hair shining, little curls around your face pulling out of your braid, and your green eyes, ahh, your green eyes. Even in overalls you were prettier than the pictures you paint, and you already know how beautiful I think they are. I hope I can see you again before too long. In the

meantime, maybe you would write a few lines when you send me some more pictures? Please don't think me out of line for writing this. If I am, just tell me, and I will apologize.

Very truly yours,

Norm Dennison

Well, then I was really taken. I think maybe then I even knew it. I had never been talked to like that in all my life. Because I was shy, no boy ever talked to me much at all while I was in school. And then, Thurston and Eliza both already moved out when Daddy died, I stayed home here and helped Mama, getting Willard and Carl through high school. And tending to Justin. Not right in the head like he is, he always needed a lot of tending in those years before we knew what was wrong and got medicine to help. So I stayed shy with boys, never had much attention from them. Mama used to worry about it. She'd tell me, "You're pretty when you fix yourself up. There's no need for you to stay home all the time in pig tails and overalls and flannel shirts. Boys don't care that you're shy. They only care that you're pretty. Show them how pretty you are.

I never argued with her, but I kept on staying home wearing overalls and flannel shirts to work in the garden and walk in the woods, keeping my hair braided out of the way, thinking there would be plenty of time after I got over being so shy and blushing all the time. After I learned to talk more easy.

Then Mama died, and Willard and Carl both gone, so only me to take care of Justin. I stayed on here growing and selling strawberries, painting pictures, cooking for Justin and me, making him take a bath, cleaning out the potato pickers' shack so he could go out there and play his music loud. The years go by. Everybody around got married or moved away. That's why I hadn't got married, because I was so shy, and because everyone married someone else before I got over it.

And because it always took all my time to make enough money for me and Justin to live on. Even after he started getting that little check from the welfare, I kept on feeding him. I knew he wouldn't eat right if he was left to himself. Money's another reason I never got married back then, so I was sure glad to start a savings account. I got me a TV set, too, that winter, first TV I ever watched much. I love those nature programs, the ones that get real close up and show the mating and eating habits. I watch and wonder at how quick the capture always is, no matter how long the hunting and stalking goes on. The hunter always seems to catch its prey by surprise. Except the ones that get away. And then sometimes if they are not very hungry, they play with it a while before they kill it and eat it. I watch and try to predict if and when the prey will get caught. All these years I been watching all that on TV and in the fields and woods around here. I watch storms too and try to predict where lightning will strike in the sky. But I can't predict any of that better than a wild guess would be.

Norm Dennison wrote a dusty pink letter with every check, and each one got sweeter. Or so it seemed to me. Maybe I should have showed those letters to Glen. I bet he could have told me. But I didn't. I liked them too much I guess and didn't want Glen to tell me what he thought. I did show some of them to Miss Lawrence though. I showed her the first one. She said, "Oh Amelia, that's lovely. He surely does have a way with

words. Wouldn't it be lovely to have someone like that around all the time?" Miss Lawrence never did get married either.

I showed her some of my letters back to Norm. My first one didn't say much.

Dear Mr. Dennison,

Thank you for the check. I surely am grateful for that. I'm going to put it in savings. I'm sending you nine more like you asked for. It took me all morning to pack them up, and I hope I did it OK. I used three different boxes for the different sizes. Please tell me if they are all right when you get them.

Sincerely,

Amelia Harding

When she saw that, Miss Lawrence said, "Amelia, he's going to be looking for something different than that. Don't you know he's flirting with you? Don't you want to flirt back.?"

I blushed, and stuttered again, trying to say yes, but I didn't get it out. Instead, I said, "How do you know about flirting?"

She said, "I read a lot." I remembered being in her house a few times right after I'd got done the sixth grade down to Little Bear where she taught all six grades. I remembered thinking how funny that a school teacher like her had all those romance books just like I was reading all the time then. When I remembered that, I blushed again.

But I let her help me pretty up my words some. She took a pen and crossed out my greeting and wrote, *Dear Norm Dennison*. Then she crossed out my closing and wrote in another paragraph. *And thank you for your lovely letter. It is more lovely than strawberries, more lovely than my pictures. more lovely than roses that grow in any garden.*

Very truly yours,

Amelia

"There now," she said, "that's flirting. You've got to flirt back if you want to keep him interested." Blushing really bad, I didn't say anything. She said, "You go buy yourself some pretty pink paper that smells of roses, and you copy your letter over. You flirt back. Your letter is just too business-like. He'll think all you're interested in is the money."

The next time I went down to Big Bear with Thurston to buy groceries, I bought some creamy white stationery that had a rose embossed on each sheet and on the seal flap of the envelope. I bought two boxes. It took me a long time to finish that first letter to Norm Dennison. After what Miss Lawrence said, I kept practicing what I wanted to say on scrap paper. Finally I got one written I could send without blushing too bad.

Dear Norm Dennison,

I am very grateful for your lovely letter.

I sent the nine pictures you asked for in three different boxes. Please let me know if these are all right when you get them. I've never mailed my pictures any place before.

Packing them up made me remember old times that gave me ideas for the

pictures. I hope you like the ones of the fawns. When fawns are real little, if you come up on them, they are not scared. But it's hard to see them, so camouflaged they are. I only ever saw one. I snuck up pretty close before the mother snorted nearby, scared me. I was only about ten then, so I left. I had to look at other pictures a lot to paint the littlest one. I wanted to show how hard it is to see them. I think that picture is sweet, but I like the other one better, the bigger one that seems like it just learned to be shy, so surprised and afraid it looks. The first time I saw one like that, just before they lose their spots, I went right home and started that picture. I've seen many full-grown bucks with head and antlers high, but I never painted any yet. Maybe I will.

I think your letter is lovely like real roses.

Yours truly,

Amelia

I didn't tell him all about that first time I saw one of those deer just learning to be shy. I was with Daddy hunting, late summer, not yet hunting season. We were hard up that year, no meat in the house for weeks. I didn't even see it at first. Daddy had to nudge me and point. I hardly got a good look at it, standing and staring at us, just curious it seemed. But suddenly I saw it get scared, I saw it in the eyes. Right then Daddy's gun boomed. The deer leaped, staggered, and fell. I never went hunting again. After that, he would tell people I was a good gardener and fisherman but wasn't worth nothing as a hunter.

I showed Miss Lawrence other first copies of my letters to Norm Dennison. She'd tell me I wasn't flirting enough. She'd cross out and add in, and then I'd write and write on scrap paper until I wasn't blushing too bad, and I'd copy it onto the creamy white stationary and send it.

Writing to him like that, I learned to talk about what I was doing with painting the pictures. I'd never talked to anybody about that before, never tried to explain what I was doing. And I'd thank him for the nice things he said to me. I wrote, *Your talk is sweet, sweeter than my strawberries, sweeter even than wild strawberries in a summer when there has been lots of rain.*

Norm told me in every one of those letters through that winter how he remembered I looked pretty. Early spring he started telling me how much he wanted to see me, how he was looking forward to coming up here again, so we could really get to know each other. But I never did write real sweet talk back to him until the letter from him that finally captured my heart completely. I remember the exact words that did it: *I think of nothing any more but when we will see each other. I long to touch you, to hold you in my arms, to smell your hair warm from the sunshine. I imagine you smell like sweet hay and wild roses. I imagine you taste like strawberries. I want to love you, gently, tenderly. I want to love you eternally. Amelia, my sweet darling.*

Then I learned to talk my own sweet talk. I didn't wait to show Miss Lawrence. I sat right down that very minute and wrote him. I hardly used any scrap paper. I hardly blushed.

Dear,

Your talk is so sweet, Norm Dennison, I swear, it's real hard not to be taken by it. No one ever talked to me like this. It's as pretty as the sun setting on the lake. Sometimes I walk down there and sit on the shore and watch it. The sky gets redder and redder as the sun goes down, and sometimes there's green and purple in it too. As the color gets brighter and darker, it gets quieter and quieter. Crickets stop chirping. Birds stop singing. Water stops lapping on the shore. There's a time after the sun drops out of sight when it seems there's not a sound in all the world. And then the loons start to call across the water. That always gives me chills no matter how often I hear it. Later when the bright color has all gone from the sky and the stars are shining. I sometimes hear foxes howl to each other. I have sat there sometimes on a clear night until the moon has gone down and I see the billions and billions of stars. Once I lay there and stared at the milky way until I thought I saw the whole thing whirling, and myself whirling with it. That's something like how I'm feeling right now about all your sweet talk to me. Dear Norm Dennison, I remember how you looked, your hair blowing in the breeze, your dark eyes looking right into mine until I thought I'd die with blushing. I want you to come see me.

Love,

Amelia

Yeah, I'm sure if I had showed those pink letters to Glen, he could have told me that was nothing but sweet talk. But I just showed him the checks and the business letters asking for more pictures, and then the changed contract when he raised the price to \$20.00 for each painting plus 70%. Because by then he had sold all my pictures I had on hand, and he said don't bother to paint any more of the five and ten-dollar pictures because he could sell all the twenty-dollar ones I could paint. So I sure was kept busy then and wondered how I was going to get time to grow my strawberries come summer. But I did anyway, never could stay inside all that much once the weather started to warm up.

Justin was spending more and more time at the old potato picker's shack. When I knew for sure what day Norm was coming, I asked him, "Want me to have Thurston help us move your bed up there? You can live up there, have it for your very own house. You can play your music as loud as you want all night and won't bother me."

When I talked to Thurston about it, I said, "Justin, wants to live in that picker's shack so he can play his music all night. We need help moving his bed."

Thurston didn't think it was a good idea, I could tell. He said, "I'll come talk to you about that when I got time."

He was busy with planting, and I knew he wouldn't get to it in time, so I went up there every night for a week, tried to catch him at supper time to ask him to do it the next day. He kept saying he would talk to me about it the next day, but every day he had something more important to do. Finally the day before Norm was coming I went up to ask him one more time. He hadn't gone in to supper yet, was standing with his back to me doing something with a wrench to the John Deere's engine. I said, "I'm going to move that bed myself tomorrow morning whether you help me or not."

His hand stopped in mid turn, and he just stood there for a minute, silent. Then he turned and said, "What you in such an all fired hurry about?"

I said, "It's what Justin wants, and I need . . . I need . . . I need . . ."

He put the wrench down on the tractor seat, leaned against the tractor facing me, and said, "All right, take time to breathe and then you can tell me what you need."

So I breathed, and then I could say, keeping my head down, "I need privacy. Norm Dennison is coming to talk business. Tomorrow." Then I could look at him.

He was silent again for a minute, but then he grinned and said, "Well, why didn't you tell me? I'll come down first thing in the morning after breakfast."

So Justin was sleeping his first night in the shack when Norm Dennison came in the night, late June before the first strawberries ripened.

I remembered what Mama used to tell me about how to look pretty, and I wore my white graduation dress. I was leaner and harder by then than I was fifteen years before at graduation, so I didn't fill it out so much. But it was full-skirted with white eyelet around the hem and neck, and I thought it made me look rounder and prettier. I washed my hair and let it hang down my back. I put white roses in it and one over my heart. I got out some of Mama's old rouge and lipstick and put just a delicate touch of color on my cheeks and mouth.

I watched him drive in and went to meet him out under the pine tree. We didn't talk. He took one of my hands and put it to his lips. We stroked each other's hair. We looked in each other's eyes, moonlight shining through the branches of the old pine tree. I don't understand it, but I hardly felt shy.

That night I got to know what Mellors and Lady Chatterly knew. It was the loveliest night of my life. I've never forgotten, I'll never forget. Times right after it was all over, I wanted to forget. I put all his letters and all my scrap-paper trials in the trunk in the closet at the head of the stairs and locked them up with a padlock. But then, after a long time, I was glad I didn't forget. Since I've gotten out those letters to read sometimes to remind me there are moments in life that are purely beautiful.

We were still awake when the dark was turning gray. We heard the door knob turn. Norm said, "Who's that?"

I said, "Justin, is that you?"

He said, "Is it breakfast time yet? I'm hungry."

I said, "No, it's only four o'clock in the morning. You get yourself a doughnut and go on back to bed and stay there until I come get you."

So I had to tell Norm about Justin. I felt shy then, stuttered a lot. He asked me questions until I'd told him the whole story of how Justin needed tending, hadn't ever taken care of himself. It broke the spell. I felt it break.

Norm slept until about the middle of the morning while I got Justin his breakfast, sent him back to the shack, and cleaned up the kitchen. We ate breakfast without saying much. Then he said, "Amelia, now we know what is really important between us, words are no longer necessary. We've gotten beyond words." He said he'd call, said we'd get together again soon. And he left before Justin came in for his lunch. Maybe I knew right then that was all I'd ever have. Maybe I did.

Maybe that's why I tore open the envelope of the next letter the way I did. There was no letter on dusty pink paper, just the business one and a note on plain white paper

that said he was sorry he couldn't write more right then, said his mother died and he was too upset to write but would soon.

I never saw him again, no more sweet talk. I kept on hoping for a while, with every letter. He kept on saying he was sorry he wasn't feeling up to writing much but would soon. I kept hoping until Glen came by and said it was time we took a good hard look at how Norm Dennison was cheating me, said he'd passed through Portland on his way to visit his brother in New Hampshire and stopped at that place of Norm Dennison's. Said he was going to pay his respects but when he saw my pictures there in the window with a price tag of three and four hundred dollars, he thought he'd better just keep his silence. I was still just getting \$34.00 for my twenty-dollar pictures. Then I knew I couldn't fool myself any more.

It took a while for me to get out of that contract, and before it was all over I had to hire me the lawyer, Robert Spevey. Thurston helped me with it. I had to tell him the whole story Glen told me about seeing that price and all. After that, I never had to worry any more about money. Not that I ever got rich, but I don't need much, never did, and so I felt rich after Thurston started managing my money. He said, "You got to treat your pictures like a business, same as I do raising potatoes, if you're going to make that kind of money. I'm going to manage your money, Amelia, and you won't have to worry any more about that. Just keep on painting your pictures." He would have done it from the beginning if I'd asked. But instead I let old Glen Fossgate and Miss Lawrence think they were helping me.

I only got one more letter from Norm Dennison, not too long after he heard from Robert Spevey. He said how disappointed he was that I broke the trust and the beauty of our love with my greed about money, said he was heartbroken that our love meant no more than that to me, said it wasn't bad enough he was filled with such sorrow about his dear mother, but now he had to deal with this too. And he sent back all the letters I'd written to him.

I never could figure out what it all meant to him, all that sweet talk in his letters for nearly a year. And that night. Coming all this way, over three hundred miles for just that one night. And then no more sweet talk. He could have cheated me without doing all that. Because I never could figure it all out, I never really gave up believing in his sweet talk.

I should have given up believing in my own sweet talk. Then maybe I could have married someone else, even after him. When the chipping mill started up, a lot of new people moved into town. Some of them I got to know. Some of those men tried to talk some sweet talk to me when they'd stop by for strawberries. Not like Norm Dennison's sweet talk, but it might have been good enough. Sometimes I'd even flirt, just a little, but my heart was never in it. Maybe I could have married one of those, had babies like Thurston and Eliza. I might have lived life like they did. I doubt there was ever much sweet talk in their lives, but likely they wouldn't say if there was, no more than I did. I know for sure though that even if there was sweet talk, neither Thurston nor Eliza would ever believe it, not really believe it, like I did, like I still do.

I think about Glen and Miss Lawrence too, how they wrangled with each other all those years at the schoolhouse, how she used to show up here just about ten minutes after he did and wrangle with him some more, how neither of them ever got married but they

still, in a funny way, had each other without ever any sweet talk between them. Sometimes it seems to me they might as well have been married. But she had an appetite for sweet talk, too. I could see that.

And I wonder about Lizzie, now years older than I was when I first met Norm Dennison and still no closer that I can see to getting married than I ever was. Never had boyfriends that I know about. Stayed in school for years and years. Works all the time as an anthropologist studying families. She and Justin were good friends when they were little, until the time I caught them in the barn with Justin's hands where they'd no business being, and I slapped them both. Did that spoil it all for her? With Justin being mentally odd all his life and needing tending, it's a good thing he never got married, but Lizzie is a different matter. No way I can think to make it right.

I think how beautiful it all is, all the mating and eating habits I watch on TV and in the woods and fields. How beautiful, and how terrible.

L'écrit

Il poussa ses lumières
jusqu'aux ensablements
d'un corps noué
quand dire et résider
troublaient la plaine
ses silencieuses évidences
question inquiète
d'un ailleurs
plus vaste que sa réponse
Il se souvint alors
peu sûr
des champs de force
point de rejet du tourbillon
âcre mouvement
de connivence
Un premier cri
arpente ses errances

Alain Raimbault

Été

Le bleu pâle de Port-Royal

dérive en ses pastels

comme un mal nécessaire

à l'éclosion d'une distance

Glissement chromatique

de la perte à l'oubli

j'avais été en Méditerranée

mère barbare

une enfance pillée

morte en moi

à peine

portée

La vie dure

s'éloigne

le bleu parle à Port-Royal

été, passé décomposé

il me reste

l'entre-moi et le monde

réconcilier

ce qui aurait pu être

et ne sera jamais

Alain Raimbault

Désert

Depuis l'empreinte brune
des grottes aux mains fâchées
douze cunéiformes
pour marchander Sumer
écritures de cire et de bois
flambée de signes
établis dans les migrations
d'un né au chemin
le souvenir
est un silex pointé
vers le chant continu
de vents cheminant en nuages
de rires aux côtes maigres
de pauses sacrées
Toile dressée au desert
née au sel
vole au temps
la ligne coupable
de sa fuite
marche à mon pas
épouse
mes aveugles indolences

le sentier vaut d'or

ses pèlerins

la lente penitence

Alain Raimbault