

FRENCH CANADA IN FICTION

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"**M**ARIA Chapdelaine" by Louis Hémon (Gresset, Paris) first appeared as a feuilleton in *Le Temps*, in 1913, and about two years later Louvigny de Montigny brought out a limited Canadian edition. In 1921 the book was republished in France and has already reached a sale of about 400,000, a figure exceeded only by Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *L'Aiglon*.^{*} Apart from the intrinsic excellence of the work, this success appears to arise from the fact that Hémon's *nouvelle* (for it is little more, so far as size goes) is exactly to the taste of the moment. Since the passing of the realists in the nineties there has been a growing appreciation of the regional novel, and the war has given the *coup de grace* to the partisans of Art for Art's sake. There is even a revolt against the cult of Flaubert. One turns almost with a sense of relief from "Madame Bovary" to the saner if less skilful novels of René Bazin: moral values, we seem to feel, must be more direct and positive than those drawn from the negative picture of the unhappy Emma. Quebec has been discovered as a literary province of France, and "Maria Chapdelaine" comes like a strong healthy breeze from its lakes and forests. Moreover, it is a book of high literary merit that can be placed in the hands of the *jeune personne*.

In Canada, the publication of "Maria Chapdelaine" and its two translations is a literary event of primary importance. This is not merely because the book tells the English-speaking provinces something about the soul of Quebec that it cannot easily find elsewhere, or because it draws a picture of pioneering days into which many a Canadian family can insert its own forebears. It is more than that; it is a sign-post on the road of Canadian literature; it points the way to the sources and indicates the nature of the material. Those who have the will and the equipment may follow the trail of Louis Hémon

^{*} *Living Age* 22nd. April 1922. The next novels in order of circulation are:—Le Feu, Le Lys Rouge, Les Désenchantées, La Débâcle and La Terre. The figures given above probably do not take account of the English translations of Maria Chapdelaine by Blake (Macmillan) and Macphail (Oxford Press.)

into the back of Quebec or stake new claims for themselves elsewhere. What the habitant owes to Hémon is essentially this: he has once and for all destroyed the popular impression of the *Canadien* as an amusing individual, speaking a hybrid language expressly compounded for the needs of amateur reciters, and has rehabilitated him as a real man capable of expressing thoughts and feelings, and endowed with a tremendous courage and capacity for hard work. "Maria Chapdelaine" is the first *chef d'oeuvre* of the French-Canadian novel. That it is not written by a Canadian is unessential: its existence establishes a *genre* that must eventually produce the native masterpiece in one language or the other.

The most accessible source of biographical information on Louis Hémon is a recent article by René Bazin in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," which throws a clear light on the man and his life, his personality and the manner in which the novel came into being. Hémon was a Breton, of the same race as Jacques Cartier and Chateaubriand, and combining the adventurous spirit of the sailor with the poetic soul of the writer. Grandson of a revolutionary of the '48, and son of a high official in the educational service, Hémon was destined for his father's profession, but acquired an early and fortunate distaste for it, and passed successively through the schools of law and of oriental languages, without adopting the careers thus opened to him. He was, it appears, a man of strong determination and feeling beneath a calm demeanour, having definite tastes and the will to cultivate them. He cared for sports and the open air, for Greek philosophy and the French poets. Some of this might be deduced from the book itself. Impersonal as "Maria Chapdelaine" is, it is clearly the work of a man who loves the outdoor things, and it is undeniably poetry. Perhaps also there is an echo of Sophocles and Racine in his use of the forest and the winter as an ever-pending fate-like menace throughout the course of the narrative.

Louis Hémon was born to travel and to write. His writing began with journalistic work on a magazine known as "le Vélo," since become "l'Auto," and consisted mainly of sporting stories. He stayed for several months in England, and—being of a temperament and habit well pleasing to the English—made many friends there. He learned to box, and wrote a novel about prize-fighters and the ring; developed his great skill in swimming and produced short stories of a wet-bob tendency; lived in London and collected material on slum conditions and the life of the metropolitan poor. In all this work Bazin finds, what we cannot fail to distinguish in "Maria Chapdelaine," a deep respect for religion, a high

sentiment of moral values, and above all, a power of emotion proceeding from the truth and directness of the man's soul.

In the Fall of 1911 Hémon left Europe on a tour of literary adventure, perhaps even with the already formed intention of writing on New France, certainly in the hope of escape from cities and over-civilized men. His early letters from Montreal are the usual expressions of immigrant wonder, touched with a not so usual colouring of appreciation. He likes the climate, finds the inhabitants rather stimulating, is interested in the old vocabulary of Canadian French, but on the whole finds that the great city is too much like Europe, and so pulls out for the North. The winter he spends in the Lac S. Jean region, varying his sojourn in small hotels and farms with occasional trips into the bush, including a couple of months hard work with a railroad survey. This he reports as excellent for the health, and he believes himself fit for a campaign in Germany in the highly improbable event of war. That was in February of 1912. The letters are not on the whole very illuminating or amusing—general observation, a touch of humour here and there, such as that about the habitant who had once eaten his fill of sausages (*une piastre de saucisses*), and an occasional gleam of emotion. What emerges is the impression of a very reserved personality taking things as they come, perhaps a touch of that aloofness which was fashionable in the generation before the war and sometimes developed into *je m'en fichisme*. One remembers an extreme case of the disease in the person of a young French professor, a *normalien*, who carefully abstained from looking out of the taxi windows as he drove up Broadway for the first time.

In the spring of 1912 Hémon settled down as hired man on the newly cleared farm of M. Bédard, some miles north of Lac S. Jean, and the novel is the fruit of his observations and experiences. It was completed early in 1913, and the young author set out for the west, in his characteristically energetic manner, on foot. In the summer of that year, tramping the ties in a rain-storm near Chapleau he was run down and killed by a train—an incalculable loss to literature and to humanity. One likes to think that he might have written other cantos of the Canadian epic, the Wheat, for example, or Power, or the Lakes; but in any case it is most improbable that such a man as Louis Hémon would have survived the war.

The most intimate portrait of him is drawn, appropriately enough, by his hosts, the *défricheurs*, in their account of his labours given to a literary deputation from Quebec. M. Léon Mercier Gouin, interviewing M. and Mme Bédard—the death of the latter

is happily fictitious—who are the originals of the Chapdelaines, found that Hémon had left behind him a memory of the warmest affection and respect. The gist of their report is, that he was an entirely imperturbable creature who wrote all the time, cheerful in all circumstances, even in “la misère noire”, good to the children and always ready for a bit of fun. In the way of work the verdict is not so favourable: Hémon “ne forçait pas pour le grand ouvrage,” would not stop writing to put the horses out of the grain—so he did not entirely assimilate the farm spirit—but then he had been hired for eight dollars a month, and liberty to write was doubtless in the bond. Mme. Bédard offers a little sketch of the author at work, which is doubly interesting because his impressions of the same job reappear in the story: the observer is in fact under close observation. Here is Madame’s account:—

Un jour, dit-elle, nous arrachions des souches sur notre terre d’Honfleur. On suait à mourir. M. Hémon, accoté sur un tronc d’arbre, nous regardait faire sans grouiller. Il avait deux pouces enfoncés dans les ouvertures de sa veste, il était bien à son aise, je vous en donne ma parole! Je m’approche de lui. Comme il ne travaillait pas depuis une bonne secousse, je lui demande en riant: “M. Hémon, est-ce que ça serait-il fête légale aujourd’hui?”—and the dialogue continues with a pun on fête.¹

We read the novel with more understanding for this little picture recovered by M. Gouin. Now Louis Hémon, sitting on his log and jesting with his hustling *patronne*, saw the toil and sweat as a detail in the epic struggle of man with the forest, and this is how he wrote it:—

Edwige Légaré s’était attaqué tout seul à une souche; une main contre le tronc, de l’autre il avait saisi une racine comme on saisit dans une lutte la jambe d’un adversaire colossal, et il se battait contre l’inertie alliée du bois et de la terre en ennemi plein de haine que la résistance enrage. La souche céda tout à coup, se coucha sur le sol; il se passa la main sur le front et s’assit sur une racine, couvert de sueur, hébété par l’effort.²

¹ One day we were pulling stumps on our lot at Honfleur, sweating fit to kill. There was M. Hémon sitting on a trunk, watching us without stirring a finger, two thumbs in his armholes, and quite at his ease I promise you. I go up to him, and as he had not done a tap of work for quite a bit, I say to him, laughing—“M. Hémon, would it be a fête légale to-day?” “Better than that” he replies; “Your fête, eh?” “Yes, Madame, and nobody fêtes me; I fête myself. See?”

² Edwige Légaré had tackled a stump, alone; one hand against the trunk, with the other he grasped a root, as a wrestler might grasp the leg of some huge opponent, and he struggled with the joint inertia of earth and wood, like an enemy filled with hatred and infuriated by resistance. The stump gave way suddenly and rolled over on the ground; he passed a hand across his brow and sat down on a root, dripping with sweat, numb with exertion.

The picture is symbolical of one aspect of the work. As Bazin points out, "Maria Chapdelaine" is the epic of the pioneer's struggle with nature, but it is not wholly, not even mainly, epic. The French critic's insistence on this point may well have arisen from the line of continuity that links it with his own novel "La Terre qui meurt" to which the Quebec story might well have been intended as a sequel and a reply.

In "La Terre qui meurt" the old Vendéen farmer sees his land grow poorer, his landlord bankrupt, and his family drawn from the fields of the métairie by the lure of town labour and the glamour of emigration posters: and Bazin ends his tale of woe with a gleam of hope in the eternal youthfulness of the peasant soul. Now Hémon's characterization of the Quebec peasant centres round this very quality of youth's resilience, and the theme is suggested almost in so many words. It is at least permissible to suppose that Hémon had in mind "La Terre qui meurt" as he plotted the structure of "Maria Chapdelaine": in any case the two novels should be read in sequence.

As we have said, the epic side is not obtruded. The whole method is too realistic for that, and there is no one to suggest the flutter of *panache* that has to go with any epic treatment of a theme by a French writer. It might be said with more accuracy that "Maria Chapdelaine" is a sort of Canadian Georgic in monthly cantos: twelve out of fifteen chapters, for instance, are definitely assigned to different months. The story opens with the last crossing of the Peribonka in April, and ends with the death of Mme. Chapdelaine in the spring of the following year. There are sketches of most branches of farm work, and a gallery of rural portraits.

The plot is simplicity itself. Maria, the silent daughter of Samuel the défricheur, is sought in marriage by their only neighbour, Eutrope Gagnon, who comes to "veiller", but dare not declare his suit. With spring and open water, arrives the romantic figure of François Paradis, *coureur de forêts* and guide—François of the clean-cut features and daring eyes. They are in love, but nothing is said; only before he goes north again, François murmurs "you will still be here next spring" and Maria replies "Yes." But François will not wait for spring: in the last days of the old year he leaves his logging camp, alone, on foot, and is lost in the bush. Maria's romance is over, and the true dramatic struggle of the plot begins with the arrival of another suitor in the person of an Americanized Canadien. Lorenzo Surprenant works in the cotton mills at Lowell, and is in a position to offer all the comfort and amusement so conspicuously absent from the Saguenay farm. Maria must choose

between Eutrope and Lorenzo, between Quebec and New England. She loves neither of the men, but she knows she must settle down and begin her "règne." In a magnificent final chapter she hears the voice of the old province and decides for Eutrope and the habitant life.

The plot as outlined seems conventional, and one may be pardoned for suspecting at first that it is merely a string to fasten together a series of habitant pictures, or that perhaps the real centre of the work is the *défricheur* with the spirit of the forest planing like a malignant fate above his unwitting head. But these ideas are soon dispersed, and it finally appears that every scene and incident have their place in a perspective that leads straight to the climax of the Voices. The work is a labour of exact selection and composition, as fine in construction almost as a play, and containing page after page that are poetry in all but rhyme. It is clear that the author's entirely successful intention is to portray the soul of New France in the real and human though allegorical person of Maria. On the artistic side, a fine specimen of French craftsmanship; on the emotional, a profound evocation of the soul of a people.

Setting aside for the moment the emotional content of the novel to regard it as a series of sketches, one realizes the visual possession of a gallery of rural types and scenes that can be compared for variety and clearness with those of Thomas Hardy, though in spirit and manner they are widely different. There is none of the Wessex writer's "aesthetic pagan pleasure in natural life and lush womanhood," no hint of the love-sick maidens in *Tess* with their suggestion of Bunthorne and the opening chorus of *Patience*, no trace of Hardy's over-sexed landscape in the vale of Frome. The Frenchman's work is marked with a classic restraint that in the end but gives more poignancy to the underlying emotion: but for its vocabulary, "Maria Chapdelaine" might have been written in the grand siècle.

It is even a question whether, for foreign readers, the balance and rhythm of the story's progress are not too obvious, whether the composition does not obscure the colour. One has perhaps a sense of a system of forces and their resultant, almost mathematically diagrammed. The romanesque of François and the forest is counter-balanced by the glitter of Lorenzo and the crowded streets. Samuel's urge towards new concessions and the struggle to "faire de la terre" is set against his wife's longing for the "vieilles paroisses" and the ordered beauty of new furrows and wire fences. The warmth and brightness of a summer day's berry-picking are dis-

counted by the shrill ravening chorus of mosquitos, and sunset glories are dimmed by the thick smudge of Téléphore's *boucane*. These objections, if such they are, are of course less obvious to the French reader, who likes logic with his literature, and is not averse to turning his stage into a debating society. In any case they do not detract from the charm and clarity of the sketches themselves.

These little scenes and portraits represent the more poetical part of the author's work. What is to be observed in them is his power of drawing an apparently commonplace picture and then suddenly illuminating it with a living flash of colour or idea, much as stage lighting can turn drab textures into rich-dyed stuffs.

Samuel Chapdelaine is introduced with the faintest of outlines—tall and strong, leather-complexioned, and

dans ses yeux vifs la même éternelle jeunesse qui donne souvent aux hommes du pays de Québec leur éternelle simplicité.

That is the dominating trait of his character, and the author never departs from it in further delineation. It is this youthfulness that drives Samuel repeatedly to "faire de la terre," to take up and clear a new concession:—

Samuel Chapdelaine en parla avec une flamme d'enthousiasme et d'entêtement dans les yeux. C'était sa passion à lui: une passion d'homme fait pour le défrichement plutôt que pour la culture. Cinq fois déjà depuis sa jeunesse il avait pris une concession, bâti une maison, une étable et une grange, taillé en plein bois un bien prospère; et cinq fois il avait vendu ce bien pour s'en aller recommencer plus loin vers le nord, découragé tout à coup, perdant tout intérêt et toute ardeur une fois le *premier* labeur rude fini, dès que les voisins arrivaient nombreux et que le pays commençait à se peupler et à s'ouvrir.³

Mme. Chapdelaine not unnaturally objects to this periodical uprooting. She stands for the social and gregarious element so strong in the habitant character, and is for ever lamenting, though rarely aloud, the "old parishes" with their cleared lands and pleasant Saturday evenings. But she follows her pioneering spouse, profoundly understanding his restless temperament, ready with en-

³ Samuel Chapdelaine spoke of it with flaming enthusiasm and the light of set determination in his eyes. It was his passion, the passion of a man made for clearing rather than cultivation. Five times since his youth had he taken up a concession, built house, barn and cow-stable, hewn out a prosperous farm from the living bush; and five times had he sold this farm to pull out and start again further north, having suddenly lost heart and dropped all interest and enthusiasm when the first rough toil was over and neighbours had begun to come in.

couragement and praise. Here is one of the passages that warrant the qualification of epic, and one too that gives a hint of what Hémon's manner might have been in the treatment of a purely agricultural theme.

The men are eating after a hard forenoon clearing stumps. Madame has served them, and instead of taking her place at the table remains standing in a sort of mystic ecstasy:—

Elle célébra la beauté du monde telle qu'elle la comprenait: non pas la beauté inhumaine, artificiellement échafaudée par les étonnements des citadins, des hautes montagnes stériles et des mers périlleuses, mais la beauté placide et vraie de la campagne au sol riche, de la campagne plate qui n'a pour pittoresque que l'ordre des longs sillons parallèles et la douceur des eaux courantes, de la campagne qui s'offre nue aux baisers du soleil avec l'abandon d'une épouse.

Elle se fit le chantre des gestes héroïques des quatre Chapdelaine et d'Edwige Légaré, de leur bataille contre la nature et de leur victoire de ce jour. ⁴

Then suddenly the vision passes: the five men are sitting, dull with toil, smoking, motionless, and the paragraph ends with the crystallizing touch:

immobiles comme des effigies après leur longue besogne: des effigies couleur d'argile, aux yeux creux de fatigue. ⁵

In his outdoor scenes the poet becomes unconsciously a little more subjective. A new-comer from a softer land, he has given an extra rudeness to the breath of winter winds, an added sharpness to the sting of summer insects. Nature plays a part in the drama, a sort of fate-chorus in the varying guise of the "norouâ," the lowering forest, the swift torrid rush of summer, or the patter of spring rain: yet the seasons are so accurately described that the book might be used as a guide for intending immigrants, though it is doubtful if it would fill the steerage of many steamers. These nature pictures are unusually permanent in the memory, producing as it were the effect of a series of soft-toned paintings in a music gallery; for there seems to be, especially in the emotional passages, a sort of obligato of natural sounds. Without quite knowing why, I find my im-

⁴She declared the beauty of the world as she understood it; not the uncouth beauty of high barren mountains and perilous seas, a conception artificially built upon the wonderment of town-dwellers, but the real quiet beauty of the rich farm country, the flat lands that are picturesque only in the ordered length of parallel furrows and in the charm of flowing water, the beauty of fields that lie bare in nuptial surrender to the sun's embraces. . . . She became the bard of their heroic deeds, she sang the combat with barbarous nature, and the morning's victory.

⁵Graven images, earth-coloured, eyes hollow with weariness.

pressions of "Maria Chapdelaine" confused with the New England picture of Robert Frost, whose opinion of the book would be of absorbing interest.

Here are three short sketches:—

A vingt pas de la maison le four, coiffé de son petit toit de planches, faisait une tache sombre; la porte du foyer ne fermait pas exactement et laissait passer une raie de lumière rouge; la lisière noire du bois se rapprochait un peu dans la nuit. ⁶

That is of course optically true, but the fact is used as a sort of foreshadowing of disaster, for Maria is dreaming happily of her absent lover. The same theme recurs after the blow has fallen:—

Vu du seuil le monde figé dans son sommeil blanc semblait plein d'une grande sérénité; mais dès que Maria fut dehors de l'abri des murs le froid descendit sur elle comme un couperet, et la lisière lointaine du bois se rapprocha soudain, sombre façade derrière laquelle cent secrets tragiques, enfouis, appelaient et se lamentaient comme des voix. ⁷

This might be an instance of colour-audition, reversed, but one would need to examine the whole book with that in view before offering the suggestion as anything more than a guess.

The next is a summer impression of blueberries and black-flies, an excellent example of the author's use of words for tonal as well as visual values. François has returned, and the family is spending a fine Sunday afternoon in the brûlé:—

D'innombrables moustiques et marangouins tourbillonnaient dans l'air brûlant de l'après-midi. A chaque moment il fallait les écarter d'un geste; ils décrivaient une courbe affolée et revenaient de suite, impitoyables, inconscients, uniquement anxieux de trouver un pouce carré de peau pour leur piqûre; à leur musique suraigue se mêlait le bourdonnement des terribles mouches noires, et le tout emplissait le bois comme un grand cri sans fin. ⁸

⁶ Twenty paces from the house the bake-oven showed as a dark mass, hooded with its little wooden roof. The fire-door did not shut tight, and a ray of red light shone through. The dark border of the forest drew a little nearer in the night.

⁷ From the door the world frozen in the white slumber seemed to be filled with a great calm; but as soon as Maria was beyond the shelter of the walls the cold came down on her like the knife of a guillotine and the distant border of the forest drew suddenly near, like the dark wall of a tomb covering a hundred tragic secrets, calling and wailing with a hundred voices.

⁸ Countless gnats and mosquitos danced and whirled in the burning afternoon air. Every moment they must be driven off with a flick of the hand; they would make a wide curving sweep and come back at once, pitiless, heedless, eager only to find a single square inch of skin for their stab; with the high thin note of their singing mingled the droning buzz of the fearsome black-fly, and the whole chorus of them filled the woods like a long unending scream.

This is one of many passages that defy the translator, unless he have the true poetical gift of language. How else is he to suggest the wild dance of syllables in "moustiques et marangouins tourbillonnaient," or the out and back swing of "décrivaient une courbe affolée," the hovering menace in "impitoyables, inconscients," and the pungent alliteration of the phrase "un pouce carré de peau pour leur piquêre"?

The fact is that most of the descriptive passages are rhythmically and syllabically pictorial. The method is rather that of poetry than that of prose. Only occasionally can the translator transfer the image to his own medium: the whole colouring can be found only in the original, and fully appreciated only by a French ear.

Poetic also is Hémon's use of sound to announce his more emotional moments, generally that most evocative of nature's instruments—the sound of falling water. Thus now, when Maria and François are about to plight their dumb and simple troth,

un souffle de vent apporta à travers les aunes le grondement lointain des chutes.⁹

Similarly the soft patter of rain, the whispering trickle of thaw-water, and "that other great voice of the Péribonka proclaiming its freedom" are the prelude to François' first return and the symbol of Maria's emotions. The sound of the falls is a sort of intermittent bass throughout the story.

But the artistic perfection of "Maria Chapdelaine" is not the main source of its potency and satisfaction. One closes the book with the same feeling of calm appeasement that comes after seeing a great play—a true catharsis of emotion. The elements of this seem to lie in the author's presentation of the struggle as a loyal and uncomplaining combat in which the antagonists are evenly matched: Samuel is at constant grips with the forest and the seasons, but hard work, courage and common sense pull him through. Madame Chapdelaine has her daily round and her occasional regrets for the "old parishes," but she believes in her man, and again the eternal *bon sens* of the French temperament is her stay. That is the essentially French note of the work, the capacity for seeing things as they are and accepting them for the best that can be got out of them: it is significant that the two representatives of this national *bon sens* are women. No country owes more to its women-kind than France, and in this little story of Quebec it is easy to understand the reason. One of the finest passages of the novel is Samuel's

⁹A puff of wind across the alders brought the distant rumble of the falls.

lament for Laura—magnificent in its quiet pathos and dignity, arresting in its picture of the woman's courage and restraint.

Samuel is describing how he felt when the migratory fever was on him. He pictures himself sitting motionless and gloomy at the house-door, looking out over the land that is beginning to shape into a prosperous farm, that he has cleared and fenced with his own hands, and hating it all:—

Alors ta mère venait par derrière sans faire de bruit; elle regardait aussi notre bien, et je savais qu'elle était contente dans le fond de son coeur, parce que ça commençait à ressembler aux vieilles paroisses où elle avait été élevée et où elle aurait voulu faire tout son règne. Mais au lieu de me dire que je n'étais qu'un vieux simple et un fou de vouloir m'en aller, et de me chercher des chicanes pour ma folie, elle ne faisait rien que soupirer un peu, en songeant à la misère qui allait recommencer dans une autre place dans les bois, et elle me disait comme ça tout doucement: "Eh bien, Samuel! C'est-y qu'on va encore mouver bientôt?"¹⁰

Dans ces temps-là je ne pouvais pas lui répondre, tant j'étranglais de honte, à cause de la vie misérable qu'elle faisait avec moi; mais je savais bien que je finirais par partir encore pour m'en aller plus haut vers le nord, plus loin dans le bois, et qu'elle viendrait avec moi et prendrait sa part de la dure besogne du commencement, toujours aussi capablement, encouragée et de belle humeur, sans jamais un mot de chicane ni de malice."

In Maria's sorrow, too, the same native dignity and self control; at the news of François' death she had suffered without a cry, and a month later her parents take her to see the curé:—

Maria n'avait pas songé un moment que sa vie fût finie, ou que le monde dût être pour elle un douloureux désert, parce que François Paradis ne pourrait pas revenir avec le printemps, ni plus tard. Seulement elle était malheureuse, et tant que ce chagrin durait elle ne pouvait pas aller plus avant.¹¹

The habitant priest's comment on this is characteristic:—

Alors il paraît que tu te tourmentes sans bon sens, de même?¹²

¹⁰ Then your mother would come up quietly behind me, and stand looking at our fields, and I knew she was happy in her heart because it all began to be like the old settlements where she had been brought up, and where she would have liked to live her règne. But instead of telling me I was a crazy old simpleton to want to quit, as plenty of women would have, she just sighed a little as she thought of the hard times to start all over again somewhere else in the bush, and she'd say, gently, "Well, Samuel, so we're going to move again soon, eh?"

¹¹ Maria had not for a moment thought that life was over or that the world must become a wilderness of grief for her, because François Paradis could not return with the spring. Only, she was unhappy, and as long as this feeling continued she could make no headway.

¹² So it seems you are grieving too much; that's not very sensible.

So she settles down; religion and *bon sens* save Maria from becoming a romantic heroine, and she wins her victory over life. I think Maria comes into full relief by contrast with Emma Bovary, who failed for the lack of both, but chiefly of *bon sens*, which is not a negation of emotion, but a check on its operation.

In this there is nothing typically Quebec. Some of George Sand's peasants, or René Bazin's, look at life in much the same way. But that is not to say that Hémon has merely dressed a French family in Saguenay homespun and surrounded them with the physical conditions of Canadian life and landscape. There is never a doubt that Maria is a Canadienne, and the end of the story is determined, not by the deep-rooted *bon sens* of her French peasant forebears, not by any family link with any one parcel of land, but by the active positive working of a strong national feeling. This sentiment, indicated by a hundred skilful touches in the course of the narrative, is admirably summed up in the final chapter; it appears as a sort of mystic devotion to language and religion.

Those who know the book will remember the majestic crescendo of its conclusion, rising from the return of Lorenzo, through Samuel's lament and eulogy, to the climax of Maria's decision. It is spring again, and Maria ponders the future in the light of her mother's devotion to duty, while the rain drums its message on the roof. The hardships and difficulties of her mother's life take their true proportions, until the girl sees her as a pattern of the heroic virtues of her race toiling and enduring in loneliness and wild surroundings, without losing her grip on the reasoned orderliness of life, without abating the gentleness and gaiety which are the fruit of generations of settled existence. In this, Maria feels, she has the power to follow her mother's example, but is it worth while?

Then her thought passes into a sort of waking dream and she hears, like the Maid of France before her, the voices of her country. The first speaks of the poetry of the seasons, the wonder of returning spring, the feel of newly softened earth under-foot, the joyful beasts turned out to the new grass, of summer and harvest and winter. But now, as by a miracle, the hate and fear of winter had left her. Winter meant the homeliness of the weather-stopped house, and without—the long deep silent peace of the drifted snow. The glamour of the cities rises again, and the second voice reminds her of the foreign tongue and strange songs in the mouths of children; it recalls the old familiar sound of lake and village names—Lac à l'Eau Claire, la Famine, Saint Coeur de Marie, Pointe Mille Vaches—with their warm suggestion of brotherhood and friendship. The tune of "La claire fontaine" rings through her imagination. But

the light is failing and the forest resumes its hostility, stretching the black bank of its trees, terrible as an army with banners.

Maria shivered. The emotions that had warmed her heart passed away, and she said once again:—

“Tout de même.....c'est un pays dur, icitte. Pourquoi rester?”

Alors une troisième voix plus grande que les autres s'éleva dans le silence: la voix du pays de Québec, qui était à moitié un chant de femme et à moitié un sermon de prêtre.

Elle vint comme un son de cloche, comme la clameur auguste des orgues dans les églises, comme une plainte naïve et comme le cri perçant et prolongé par lequel les bûcherons s'appellent dans les bois. Car en vérité tout ce qui fait l'âme de la province tenait dans cette voix: la solennité chère du vieux culte, la douceur de la vieille langue jalousement gardée, la splendeur et la force barbare du pays neuf où une race ancienne a retrouvé son adolescence.”¹³

The Voice goes on to tell Maria of three hundred years of custom and tradition faithfully preserved, so that the ancient leaders might return without regret to find nothing changed, nothing forgotten. In a passage of sustained poetry the Voice extols the eternal conservatism of the peasant mind, with perhaps an echo of that blessing pronounced by one of the old founders of Montreal, which André Siegfried quotes:—

Vous êtes un grain de sénevé, mais vous grandirez jusqu'à ce que vos branches couvrent la terre.

It reminds her of the stout hearts and strong hands of her peasant forefathers in old France; of the sacredness of all that they brought with them, their language, religion, virtues: yea their very faults are sacred things, not to suffer the touch of change. The one duty, the Voice tells her, is to endure, so that after centuries the world may say—This is a people that cannot die:—

C'est pourquoi il faut rester dans la province où nos pères sont restés, et vivre comme ils ont vécu, pour obéir au commandement inexprimé qui s'est formé dans leurs coeurs, qui a passé

¹³ “All the same, it's a hard country here. Why stay?” A third voice, stronger than the others, rises in the silence, the voice of old Quebec, which was half the song of a woman and half the sermon of a priest. It came like the sound of a bell, like the solemn shout of organ pipes in churches, like a song of plaintive mourning, like the long piercing call of woodsmen in the forest. In that voice in truth was all that makes the soul of the province—the cherished rites of the old faith, the charm of the ancient close-guarded language, the splendour and savage strength of the new country where an age-old stock has recovered its youth.

dans les nôtres et que nous devons transmettre à notre tour à de nombreux enfants: Au pays de Québec rien ne doit mourir et rien ne doit changer.....

And that is why, in May, Maria says to Eutrope:—

Oui... Si vous voulez je vous marierai comme vous m'avez demandé, le printemps d'après ce printemps-ci, quand les hommes reviendront du bois pour les semailles.