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The Myth of the Fall in Roch Carrier's La Guerre trilogy

by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Roch Carrier published La Guerre, Yes Sir! in 1968 and it was soon translated into English in 1970 by Sheila Fischman. Carrier's first novel caught the attention of both French and English speaking readers, who were impressed, as was Andy Wainwright, with its "humor" and "bitter irony."¹ Carrier's next two novels, Floralie, Où es-tu? (1969) and Il est par là, le soleil! (1970), were also translated into English by Sheila Fischman as Floralie, Where Are You? (1971) and Is It the Sun, Philibert? (1972). This group of novels, the La Guerre trilogy, forms a coherent unit.

Although in Carrier's writing his sense of the absurd and his love of tall tales is evident, critics of French Canadian literature, among them Jeanette Urbas and Ronald Sutherland, tend to focus on the dark and pessimistic overtones in the trilogy. In From Thirty Acres to Modern Times Jeanette Urbas sees Carrier's trilogy as combining many themes in French Canadian literature:

¹ Andy Wainwright, "War as Metaphor," in Saturday Night, No. 85 (May, 1970), p. 42.

La Guerre, Yes Sir! (1968), set in a village, reveals the narrowness and insularity of rural life as well as the French-English antagonism. Floralie, Where Are You? (1969) exposes hypocritical and repressive attitudes with regard to sex and religion and Is It the Sun, Philibert? (1970) depicts the move to the city with its attendant alienation and dispossession.²

Urbas notes the darkness which seems to predominate in the trilogy.

Writing about Is It the Sun, Philibert?, she states:

What strikes one about Philibert is his essential aloneness, of which he is aware from time to time. He talks to people at work, to anyone who happens to be near, but he is isolated and helpless in an alien world, possibly a reflection of Quebec in late Forties and Fifties. Like Floralie he lives in darkness and, in his way, is searching for the light.³

But Urbas also recognizes the note of hope in the novel:

He [Philibert] does not find it for himself, but is it there, not far off, awaiting those who are to follow? This intimation of hope to come is even more strongly suggested in the French title than the English translation, for the French Il est par là, le soleil! is an exclamatory affirmation rather than a question.⁴

However Urbas does not explore the hope in this novel or elsewhere in the trilogy.

Ronald Sutherland places Carrier's works in a more universal frame-

² Jeanette Urbas, From Thirty Acres to Modern Times (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson, 1976), p. 147.

³ Ibid., p. 154.

⁴ Ibid., p. 154.

work. He relates the despair and the possibility for violence that are present in the first novel of Carrier's trilogy to part of a world-wide phenomenon: ". . . Roch Carrier's La Guerre, Yes Sir! convey[s] a sense of depression and hopelessness subject to momentary eruption in violence, as a condition of life hardly peculiar to the province of Québec."⁵ He sees the Canadian novels of the 1960's as exhibiting

the existential vacuum which is currently haunting the forefront of literary consciousness. As a result, the heroes or anti-heroes of these novels do not finally succeed in finding a way to accept and integrate the world around them . . . when these characters are not being side-tracked by the oblivion principle, they are searching painfully for a vital truth, for a rationale which will somehow sprout a workable *raison d'être*.⁶

Sutherland's thesis is that the protagonists of the '60's do not find this vital truth which was once available to such characters in French and English Canadian literature as George Stewart of Hugh MacLennan's The Watch that Ends the Night and Fabrice Naravin of Jean Simard's Mon Fils Pourtant Heureux.

However, to view Carrier's trilogy as simply part of this pessimistic writing of the '60's is to ignore the author's rich humour and the delight in living that some of his protagonists enjoy, and to focus instead upon what is dark, grotesque, and pathetic in the novels. The myth of the Fall, when applied to Carrier's trilogy, assimilates these

⁵ Ronald Sutherland, Second Image (Toronto: New Press, 1971), p. 120.

⁶ Ibid. p. 155.

two aspects of his writing: the struggle in darkness and the enjoyment of light and life. Carrier does offer a vision of an Edenic state man should enjoy as well as a portrayal of dispossessed man, maimed, lost in darkness, and his language fragmented. In spite of their fallen state, there are characters in each of the novels who search for a joyous existence and who attempt to transcend the limitations placed upon them by their church and state.

The obstacles that Carrier's characters must overcome in order to retrieve their lost state of joy remain the same throughout the trilogy and two of his later novels: they won't demolish me! (translated in 1974) and The Garden of Delights (translated in 1978). The world in which his characters live is dominated by a social order which denies them its wealth, and which exploits their labour, and by a church that forbids their desires. However, his characters can and do fight back--sometimes heroically, almost always comically. Dorval of they won't demolish me! ferociously attempts to save his tenement from being demolished by the capitalists who wish to construct skyscrapers and eliminate the homes of the poor. For a time, J. J. Bourdage in The Garden of Delights persuades the villagers drinking at L'Auberge du Bon Boire that there is gold in their fields and that the gold can bring material wealth that can be enjoyed on this earth, in contrast to the spiritual nature of the heaven promised by their church.

The desire to enjoy the pleasures of the earth is inherent in Carrier's protagonists who, as a result of being cast out of Eden, live in a world that offers limited joys. His protagonists search for joy in much the same way as the ancient heroes would journey to fulfill a quest

which would reward them with their rightful inheritance. To see Carrier's men and women as existing in a fallen world perhaps clarifies the emphasis he places on the darkness of their lives, their reduced physical stature, and their denied voices. His characters' journeys to fulfill their desire for happiness, however, place them in a maze that threatens to engulf them, so that the forces that oppose the hero virtually overpower the benign ones.

The benign powers, nevertheless, survive in various forms. These are the sources of vitality that cannot be permanently suppressed by church or state. The life-giving sun and earth offer warmth and beauty to man. Also, maternal and sexual love sustains and nurtures life. As well, wise elders may assist those who remain true to their quest for joy on this earth.

CHAPTER II

The Edenic State

The journies of Roch Carrier's characters toward some fulfillment takes place in a modern maze similar to the one of which Joseph Campbell speaks in The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Campbell describes the travels of the hero who

journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward.¹

As their eyes are opened to the ascetic philosophy of their church and the sterility of the modern city around them, Carrier's characters seek to rediscover a world in which man's unity of body and spirit is not denied and the pleasures of the body are not forbidden. Carrier's protagonists, like many modern heroes, search for a way to cope with or to transcend the ignominies of their fallen state.

According to the myth of the Fall, mankind begins his existence in a state of grace and innocence which he subsequently loses. In this

¹ Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 245.

initial state man is the rightful heir to the kingdom of earth; its fruits are his to enjoy. Pastoral literature depicts man in this Edenic setting where he is one with nature. As man is innocent, he experiences no dichotomy between the intellect and appetite; perhaps at this early time, man's unsophisticated intellect exists in harmony with his appetite. Thus, as all man's desires and acts are innocent, sin and guilt are foreign to him.

According to the Christian tradition, man's loss of Eden and subsequent suffering on earth are caused by the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, his original parents. Once Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, Paradise was lost to man, and deprivation and death became his lot. Carrier, however, romantically sees man's joyless state as caused by the very institutions that should enhance his existence--his religion and his society. These are the forces that restrain or thwart human spontaneity and vitality.

Roch Carrier's trilogy, consisting of La Guerre, Yes Sir!, Floralie, Where Are You?, and Is It the Sun, Philibert?, gives evidence of the joyous state of innocence before the Fall. In each novel of his trilogy, Carrier presents a glimpse, however brief, of man living in harmony with the natural world and with his own instincts--an Edenic vision of his fallen state. In these episodes his characters reap the benefits of the natural world, enjoy their sexuality, and above all else, believe their lives are worth living.

The novels in Carrier's trilogy all contain characters who attempt to derive pleasure and joy from living in spite of the artificial conventions of church and state. Their relationship to the life-giving

sun, to the simple joys of nature, and to those around them clearly reveals their desire to return to and enjoy the Edenic state.

The forces that thwart such enjoyment are dramatically represented by characters such as the English soldiers in La Guerre, Yes Sir! who refuse to participate in the feasting at the Corriveau wake and remain "at attention, impassive, like statues,"² and the priest who at Corriveau's funeral service warns the villagers of the eternal flames that await them if they do not live "like angels" (G 105). Neither statues nor angels embody the humanity to which Carrier's more exuberant characters aspire.

Amélie, the woman who has two husbands, and the Corriveaus, the grieving parents of the dead soldier, all characters in the first novel of the trilogy, La Guerre, Yes Sir!, desire to live fully despite the restrictions imposed by the war being waged by their state and the stern moralizing of their church. As a symbol of his desire to rejoice in creation, Anthyme Corriveau conserves the fertility and energy derived from the sun in his potent apple cider which he keeps buried in the earth so that "'The light of the cider won't get out.'" Over the years Anthyme's cider became charged with the marvelous forces in the earth" (G 49). Anthyme's apple cider clearly reinforces the idea of man's enjoying nature's bounty. Here, the apple is not the source of the Fall as it is in the Christian myth, rather it produces a cider that

² Roch Carrier, La Guerre, Yes Sir!, trans. Sheila Fischman (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1970), p. 59. All further references to this work appear in the text as G.

contains phenomenal light and energy, contributing to and confirming man's vitality and spirit. In producing this cider, Anthyme shares in creation; he is not dominated and reduced by an autocratic God who threatens him through the voice of the official clergy. Rather, Corriveau becomes like a god. When Anthyme fills the glasses with cider, he "wore a smile like God the creator" (G 49). Mère Corriveau, as well, is close to the earth. She uses ripened fruits to enhance the taste of her tourtières, whose odours rouse the villagers at the wake from their prayers for the dead. The sauce for her tourtières contains "a mixture of apples, strawberries, bilberries and currants" (G 49). This reference to ripened fruit symbolizes the fulfillment of nature's promise which is used to enhance man's enjoyment of life.

At the wake the Corriveaus provide a feast that affirms their joy in being alive; the villagers celebrate by eating the pork and drinking the cider offered to them by their hosts, rather than mourn by denying their flesh and partaking of the official sacrament of communion, the more ascetic bread and wine of the mass. The Corriveaus extend hospitality not only to the villagers, but also to Bérubé's wife, Molly, the prostitute from Newfoundland, and to the Anglais soldiers. Mère Corriveau offers Molly and Bérubé her dead son's bed; she and her husband treat the foreign soldiers "as though they were boys from the village" (G 92). The active charity to be found in the novel resides in the Corriveau home and not in the official institution of the church.

Carrier links Floralie, the central character of Floralie, Where Are You?, most closely with the sun which is equated with life and joy in the novel. When Floralie and the Italian railway worker make love, it is

in the oatfield in the presence of the life-giving sun. Carrier also associates the oatfield, "beautiful, tall and thick,"³ with fertility. The sun, symbolically a source of life, shines on the young couple so that Floralie feels "very near the sun" (F 22). Floralie commits herself to this life-enhancing sun and rejects conforming to the denial of the flesh demanded by "that other sun" conjured up by her religious beliefs: "Floralie was not afraid of that other sun, the fire of the Devil. The infernal sun was much farther away from her than the heavenly one" (F 29).

Floralie wishes to enjoy the natural world around her as well as the natural sexuality within her. Symbolically, she abandons herself to the light of the all-embracing sun: "She opened her arms and surrendered to the caress of the light" (F 27). In this light the sights and sounds around her offer innocent pleasures to her senses: "The forest was perfumed. Every tree had a good smell, like a flower that you bring up to your nose . . . Birds were singing in the branches, wild as school children" (F 30).

Carrier stresses her enjoyment of the things of the earth. That same sun which blesses her union with the Italian also illuminates "the earth with its beautiful colours, like new dresses" (F 29). It is significant that Floralie's first sexual experience is with an Italian, not with a partner of her own ethnic background; she has not yet learned

³ Roch Carrier, Floralie, Where Are You?, trans. Sheila Fischman (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1971), p. 22. All further references to this work appear in the text as F.

the cultural prejudices that in the fallen world inhibit relationships between people.

The title of the last novel of the trilogy, Is It the Sun, Philibert?, links its protagonist to the object of his quest--the light of the sun. The sun, however, remains continually beyond Philibert's grasp. This motif of happiness being continually beyond his reach is painfully evident in the first episode of the novel. Philibert finds his Christmas present before Christmas Eve; it is wrapped in "green paper with gaily-coloured designs, pictures of snow, little red men, deer and spruce trees with lights on them."⁴ The parcel contains a toy car which his father throws out into the snow to remind Philibert that "In this life you got to learn to wait for things" (P 6). The Christmas gift could signify a gift of grace which is freely given and happily received, a condition of the unfallen world. Certainly the pictures on the wrapping paper offer a glimpse of the world Philibert seeks--a harmonious, natural surrounding, one that is pastoral, even Edenic, in its connotations.

Throughout his life Philibert wishes to enjoy the pleasures of the natural world. As a child, he delights in walking to his grandfather's home "under the canopy of fragrant leaves that sang softly for him, making the day fresh again" (p. 15). His grandfather's stories of the past too revive a joy in being alive, when listening to them "the child

⁴ Roch Carrier, Is It the Sun, Philibert?, trans. Sheila Fischman (Toronto: House of Anasi, 1972), p. 5. All further references to this work will appear in the text as P.

Philibert shivered with the delight of being alive" (p. 15). Even in Montreal Philibert recognizes the possibility of a pastoral life. He sees, set back from the streets, a house that "in summer . . . must be hidden in whispering green music" (P 25), a music reminiscent of the mysterious path to his grandparents. Philibert cherishes the simple, often past pleasures life can offer; in his loneliness in the city, he is filled with nostalgia for his village, remembering "the fragrance of fresh bread" (P 51), pleasing to both a sense of taste and smell.

Philibert responds warmly to people outside of his own ethnic and religious background, a quality which, as already mentioned, is a condition of man's unfallen state. For instance, when an Englishwoman initiates Philibert to sexuality, he finds for a time in her embrace the warmth and joy he desires. He imagines the happiness that he and the Englishwoman could experience, thinking of "her naked as Eve in paradise, him wearing her husband's pajamas" (P 32). If to Philibert she is Eve, in their union he would be the new Adam. Later, Philibert finds a new, more compassionate father-figure in the Ninth Wonder of the World, a multi-named man of uncertain ethnic origin. Philibert senses the words of this giant's song are "words of joy" (P 76) in contrast to his own father's harsh words. These encounters, in spite of their comic overtones, offer Philibert a glimpse of the unfallen world.

Carrier thus plainly offers a brief vision of the unfallen world, even in the dark world he portrays. His characters are sustained by the memory and the occasional presence of the Edenic world they once enjoyed. Despite their reduced state, they try to recover an innocence and grace they once knew and enjoyed. The Corriveau's try to revive in their home

a vital communal unity through sharing food and drink which evoke memories of a time of growth and fertility. Floralie finds solace in the memory of her love-making with the Italian, "the most precious joy that life had given her" (F 101). Philibert delights in his grandfather's recollections of the past and his own memories that offer some respite from harsh reality. The Englishwoman's embrace provides for a brief time comfort and warmth in the bleak and cold environment of modern Montreal.

In Carrier's novels, however, any enjoyment of a paradisaical state is soon lost to man or seldom accessible to him, as the next few chapters will demonstrate. Evidence of this fallen state appears in the author's symbolic use of light and darkness; light becomes blinding and darkness for the most part prevails. Man himself is diminished in physical stature; a startling number of Carrier's characters show signs of being maimed or crippled, unable to enjoy their bodies. Their communication is hindered by their inability to articulate thoughts or by language that is misunderstood or that is itself a source of conflict. Man's quest for joy takes place in a maze that threatens to devour him. When man obeys his church and denies himself earthly pleasures, Carrier sees his existence as being a barren and joyless one. The Beatitudes promise that the meek will inherit the earth; however, according to Carrier, a powerful, repressive religion, and an equally powerful, dehumanizing state threaten to wrench the kingdom of earth from the weak.

CHAPTER III

Pervasive Darkness

Carrier's characters exist in a fallen world where darkness pervades. This world of darkness and repressed vitality contrasts to a world of gentle caressing light where man could live in spontaneity. An intensely sunlit universe, conventionally identified with an ideal to which man could aspire, does not represent Carrier's utopia: the sun can blind. But man could live joyfully if he recovered a world where the sun is warm and nourishing and where the things of the earth are his to enjoy. Carrier, himself, answered the question of where he would wish to live by saying: "Sur le soleil, dans un petit coin d'ombre."¹

Carrier's first novel, La Guerre, Yes Sir!, takes place mainly at night in an almost total absence of sunlight. The predominant symbol of the novel is the coffin of Corriveau, the young villager killed during World War II, which contributes to the atmosphere of mourning, darkness and death. Man is now part of the mortal world where death and decay rule. The natural light of the winter sun is too weak to dispel such forces. The night of the Corriveau wake "The sun had set very early, as it always does in winter, when even the light does not resist the cold"

¹ Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, ed., Quand les écrivains québécois jouent le jeu! (Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1970), p. 60.

(G 85). In this absence of sunlight, the deserter Henri, significantly locked in his attic, away from life, can only dream of the warmth of the summer sun, of "a real ray of sunlight caressing your face on a summer morning" (G 86). Henri's imaginary sun is not so vibrant or so comforting as the actual sun, it is "only a mirage, a poor thought that would not revive the dead earth beneath the ice and snow . . . Henri's sun would not even light up the sad recesses of his mind" (G 86).

In the fallen world the sun can no longer fulfil its functions as a life-giving force. The remembered sun of a perhaps Edenic past brings a sensuous warmth, while the ability of even an imagined sun to bring fertility and security to fallen man is severely limited. In Henri's dream the sun is far removed; it is "precise, high, immense, dizzily motionless" (G 67). Because harmony is no longer present in man's universe, the sun may withdraw or even threaten rather than bring comfort. Henri imagines that "if the wire [holding up the sun] were cut the sun would fall and, opening its mouth, it would swallow the whole world" (G 87). As seen by fallen people, the sun is distant and impersonal, another potential vehicle of destruction instead of a source of renewal and rebirth.

The brief scene of Corriveau's burial service, which takes place in daylight, indicates the lack of comfort a painfully bright sun brings to the mourners. The heavens appear indifferent to man's plight, or inflict pain rather than heal wounds. The sun shines on the snow, which "reflected the light so brightly that it hurt their eyes" (G 111). Only the earth, man's temporary home, mourns. While the sky, "very high, distant" (G 111), appears indifferent, "The very earth wept under the

snow" (G 111). The heavens are not disturbed by the death of one mortal, while mother earth weeps for her dead son.

The world of decay and darkness, night's kingdom, does not just dominate the Corriveau wake, it permeates the entire universe of the novel. Ironically Mère Corriveau imagines night will give her sons respite from the war, she believes that "right now her children were not fighting: they were asleep, because it was night" (G 95). Not only is she incorrect about the possibility about its being night around the world at the same time, she is more poignantly wrong about night being a refuge. Far from it, night is identified with war in the episode where the reader learns the truth of the way Corriveau died. The episode begins: "Elsewhere in the world there was night, war" (G 109). While Mère Corriveau associates night with a time of rest and peace, in truth night reflects the disharmony in the universe since the Fall plunged man into spiritual and physical darkness.

Since the loss of Paradise means that the light of the sun is now inadequate, other sources of light become necessary. So damaging is the Fall, however, that these sources are found wanting. For example, Mère Corriveau relies upon the light offered by religion, the blessed candles that "had protected her family during thunder and lightning" (G 44). These candles prove insufficient to illuminate the wake. Soon the mourners smell "the odour of the candles which were going out" (G 57). Later, after Bérubé's tormenting of Arsène, "The candles on Corriveau's coffin had burned out. Now the living room was lit only by the light coming from the kitchen. The light was yellow, greasy looking" (G 81). The blessed candles Carrier associates with religious values are

insufficient; the light from the kitchen, perhaps modern electric light, is not particularly illuminating either. Thus, neither church nor secular light is now satisfying. Indeed, the light of the blessed candles is not at all available for the dead Anglais soldier: "'It's very sad,' said Mother Corriveau, 'I have no more candles'" (G 99). The English and French are at war, and even the blessed candles cannot bridge the rift between them.

The villagers, searching for a meaning to their experience, find in the candle flames a reminder of their fallen state, of the flames of hell and purgatory, rather than of any blessed heavenly light. However, these infernal flames are reduced in stature: "To imaginations steeped in pork fat and cider, the flames of hell were scarcely bigger than the candleflames on Corriveau's coffin" (G 59). Their fears of damnation are calmed, not by the comforts of formal religion, but by the physical nourishment and reassurance offered by the cider and tourtière and by the message of hope given by Amélie. The bread and wine of communion is replaced by the food and drink offered by the Corriveaus. Amélie's urging the villagers to pray that Corriveau's soul soon will be released from purgatory is substituted for official church liturgy. Amélie's concern for the soul of the dead man is natural; her emphasis on salvation rather than damnation is a fundamental religious message. Rather than dwelling on the sinful nature of man, as do the official clergy, Amélie stresses the hope of redemption promised by Christ, who after his resurrection first appeared to Mary Magdelene, a sinner in the eyes of the public, as is Amélie in the eyes of the villagers.

Whereas the villagers, in their practicality, reject the idea of

eternal flames because "all the fires they were familiar with were extinguished after a certain time" (G 59), the curé identifies the candles at Corriveau's funeral with the "flames that purify the sinner" (G 105). He tellingly speaks of two flames--the flames of war and the flames of hell, both of them punitive. The flames of war he identifies with "the fires of hell that God is pouring over the old countries which are known for their disbelief in the teachings of the Church" (G 104-5). The villagers, in turn, will be punished "in flames that burn without consuming" (G 105) because of their "sinful voluptuous nature" (G 105). The church threatens that unless the villagers deny their physical lives, they will be "condemned to perish in the flames of hell" (G 105). The curé's threat of eternal flames, "if you do not live like the angels" (G 105), reveals a Jansenist attitude to human nature: pleasures of the flesh condemn man to an eternal and very physical suffering. Thus, there is irony in the curé's demand that people must live like the angels, for to do so is to deny their essential humanity.

The conflict between the passionate nature of man and the church's denial of that passion is central to Carrier's second novel of the trilogy, Floralie, Where Are You?. Sexuality often is a source of guilt to his characters, fallen as they are, since their church teaches that outside of the marriage (and often inside of it as well) sex is a mortal sin. Floralie recalls the joy that her affair with the Italian railway work brought her, yet fears "the demon that had taken hold of [her] soul in the oatfield" (F 32). Anthyme's horrified belief that Floralie is a fallen woman stands in direct conflict with his love for her. In order to heighten the theme of frustrated sexuality, Carrier sets the action

of the novel on Anthyme and Floralie's wedding night. The deep darkness of that night serves as a symbol for the chaos of their tormented psyche. Carrier associates what meagre light is available to them with the fire of hell. The sunlight, once so vibrantly present at Floralie's union with the Italian, has now diminished into only a faintly sustaining memory for her.

The black dress that Floralie wears on her wedding trip foreshadows the darkness that will engulf her on her nocturnal journey. Just as a white dress is denied Floralie, so is the light of the sun soon absent from the journey. No mere absence of light, the darkness that comes is actively frightening, approaching the forest "like the foot of some large animal crushing the day" (F 36). This powerful darkness causes Floralie to be prey to her superstitions in which "every tree concealed demons, every corner of the shadow might be a doorway to hell" (F 31). As a sign of her fear, guilt and unhappy sexual experience within sanctified marriage bonds, night is omnipresent, almost omnipotent, "gliding behind her back like an endless serpent" (F 64), peopled with allegorical figures that reflect her inculcated sense of guilt.

The darkness of the night in turn symbolizes the chaotic state of Anthyme's soul, tormented by his denial of Floralie's love and his acquired belief that any woman who is not a virgin on her wedding night must be labeled a fallen woman. Thus for Anthyme the night seems to be equally oppressive, like a pursuing animal that "had captured him, holding him in its claws" (F 37). Night violently blots out any other happier existence: "Because of this night, Anthyme could believe that he never lived the day that had brought him to this place. The night

had changed the day into thick, black smoke" (F 49).

Néron, the charlatan-priest who appears in the night, uncannily associates the blackness of the night with the darkness of Anthyme's heart. He declares that he can read Anthyme's heart and discovers the source of its blackness in Anthyme's hurting another human being. Anthyme recognizes his sin; he too equates the dark night with his disquiet heart; "no light would penetrate it. He had refused to let Floralie's love enter it" (F 55). Because of the false codes Anthyme has learned, he cannot allow himself to love and be loved by a fallen woman.

Whereas Néron recognizes the importance of human love, the official priest, Father Nombriillet, insists upon denying it. The profound darkness of the chapel to which Nombriillet takes Floralie symbolizes the inadequacy of his religious outlook and becomes a real source of human suffering: "There was so much night in the chapel that all the lanterns from the clearing would have been drowned there" (F 99). The joy Floralie experiences occurs in the brilliant sunshine, whereas Nombriillet's world is one of darkness, or of scorching flames like the ones that devour the chapel. The darkness of the chapel threatens to engulf the little light that is available to the pilgrims. In his life-denying vision of the world, Nombriillet wishes to convince Floralie that "the most precious joy that life had given her was wicked" (F 101). According to him, the only praiseworthy existence is a narrow ascetic one.

Light to pierce the darkness comes from the natural sun or from the lantern light Anthyme and the characters in the dream vision use to illuminate the night. However, either of these sources of light may be damaging. The light of the sun, when viewed directly, can be blinding;

the lantern flames cause a conflagration paralleling the flames of hell. Yet, gentle sunlight warms and caresses, and the lantern offers some comforting light in the darkness. Finally the novel ends in the light of an ambiguous dawn.

Carrier identifies pleasurable, non-destructive light with love, a joy his characters can experience even in their fallen state. However, one source of light, that of the sun, is too powerful to be faced directly. Floralie's father, Ernest, as he leaves the stable after contemplating her chances for happiness as a married woman, "was blinded by the light" (F 3). He stumbles upon an essential truth in realizing that Floralie's happiness will be "Not like a fish in water maybe, but like a married woman" (F 3). Ironically, this revealing truth is as painful to him, causing him tears, as the blinding light of the sun.

In Carrier's novels the joy that man can experience is always tempered by his fallen state. The unshaded light of the sun is now too painful for him. Even the idyllic love scene between Floralie and the Italian, which takes place in brilliant sunshine, is not immune to its painful rays. They are, for a moment, "very near the sun. They rolled, rolled together, and the sun rolled with them" (F 22). But then the Italian "could not open his eyes, the sunlight was so blinding" (F 22). When Anthyme for the first time watches Floralie undress, his eyes painfully burn "as if he had looked directly into the sun" (F 14). Carrier emphasizes the necessity of an intermediary between the brilliant sunshine and mankind. When Floralie and Anthyme reenter the forest, "The sun was flooding the universe and if they had not been protected by the vault of the branches the light would have been blinding" (F 18).

It appears that just as leaving the earth and approaching the sun proves fatal for Icarus and Phaeton, so it will prove for mankind now; life is to be enjoyed on earth.

Carrier associates light with passion, particularly in the description of Floralie's desire to express her love to her husband. The love she wishes to express is described as "the little flame at the tip of her lips that would illumine her whole life" (F 6). The words "I love you" would "ignite the precious little flame that only death would extinguish" (F 6-7). To Floralie's tormented conscience, however, these flames are associated with the fires of hell that will punish her for her passionate affair with the Italian.

Thus, the joyful experience of sexual love becomes, in the disapproving eyes of the church, a shameful provocation of eternal punishment. Floralie attempts to identify with the life-giving sun that pleasurably caresses her body, but she is reminded of the "other sun" (F 29), the church's punitive fire, whose flames will devour her "with jaws of raging flames, flames that killed like poisonous snakes" (F 28). She acknowledges that she is damned but still desires to enjoy life, the warmth of the sun:

Among the tangled branches a ray of sunlight
broke through the shadow and spread itself out
on the red blanket. Floralie moved, to offer
her face to the sun. She opened her arms and
surrendered to the caress of light. . .
The sun breathed so gently (F 27-8).

The most pleasurable sunlight here, as elsewhere in Carrier's fiction, is not direct; it is filtered through the trees' branches. It shines

on the red blanket, whose colour indicates her passion. Here Floralie is the sun's loved one; she sensually affirms her desire to live. So intensely does she enjoy this moment that she forgets, for a time, the punishment that she fears awaits her.

The religious teaching of the young couple attributes to God power over the sun, stars and universe. This power, it appears, is used to punish sinners rather than to illuminate their journey. Anthyme recognizes this when he is lost in the forest, he

could have asked God, who never sleeps in Heaven, to hurry the daybreak and light the earth and the road in the forest, but God would never have turned on the sun for a man like Anthyme. He lowered his gaze: salvation would not come from Heaven (F 48).

A corollary to Anthyme's observation would be that man must find his own salvation on this earth.

The possibility of joy in this life is offered by Néron who promises a man that he will "light the fire in you that will lick away the white frost that's covering your soul, and it will bring your sad soul back to life" (F 85). The "white frost" could signify the icy purity demanded by the church; Néron sees this frost as the cause of man's unhappiness. The "fire in you" could refer to the passion for living that gives vitality to man. However, ridden by her Catholic upbringing, Floralie fears that this fire comes from hell. The idea that flames might bring life to man contrasts to the teachings of the church that flames purify man's soul by purging his body of desire.

The conflagration that ends the dream-vision in Floralie, Where Are

You? forcefully illustrates the church's belief in the sinful nature of man. Nombriillet espouses a Jansenist doctrine when he tells the pilgrims that "God created the soul while he left it to the Devil to create the body and the senses" (F 104). His sermon on the Night of the Holy Thorn ends in a message similar to the one delivered by the priest at the Corriveau funeral. It is a good example of the "terror sermon" of which Ronald Sutherland speaks when discussing the Jansenist influence in French Canadian literature.² According to Father Nombriillet's grim sermon, the flesh must be subservient to the spirit: "God wants you to love the spiritual and hate the material. Now, my brothers, you love too much what you can touch, what you can see, what you can taste" (F 104). When the chapel in which he delivers his sermon catches on fire, Nombriillet believes that those pilgrims burned to death in the fire are thus sanctified and "going toward the Eternal Father" (F 105).

The dream-vision ends when Floralie and Anthyme are awakened by the villagers whose cries "made the delicate air of dawn burst out in the sky" (F 107). The light of this dawn is ambiguous: the presence of day and night are balanced, and the "delicate air" stresses this balance. When Anthyme tells Floralie, "You should never dream" (F 108), the readers wonders what aspects of the dream he rejects. The darkness of his heart is dispelled by his realization that in his ignorance and righteousness he may have misjudged Floralie. On the other hand, he

² Sutherland, Second Image, p. 70.

kneels to receive Father Nombriquet's pardon for being a man because "every man is a sinner" (F 98). In the end does he reject his new and enlightened view or his old, guilt-ridden view? Can he live fully with this contradiction? In the end, much the same ambiguity gathers around Floralie. If she forgets the sense of guilt which she feels, her soul will no longer be the desert Néron says it is, she will no longer be afraid to love. Yet, in confessing to Nombriquet what she now believes to be her sin with the Italian, "she was ready to regret every day of her life on which the thought of that joy had created some light" (F 101). If Floralie and Anthyme recall only their guilt, which is associated with the dark night, and forget their love, associated with light, the "delicate air of dawn" will not blossom into a sunlit day.

Carrier has said that he placed his trilogy in "the last third of Quebec's dark ages."³ The hero of the third and last of these novels, Is It the Sun, Philibert?, certainly wanders in a world of darkness and decay, searching for an elusive light that would bring joy to his life. Philibert, son of the gravedigger Arsène in La Guerre, Yes Sir!, wanders alone in an underground maze which is the modern city of Montreal, not the rural landscape of the first two novels. Thus the opposition in the novels is between the natural, Edenic world that is lost to man, and the artificial, fallen world in which he resides. In this fallen world the journey of the protagonist does not follow the final phase of the pattern analyzed by Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces when "the hero

³ Sheila Fischman, "Translator's Forward" to Is It the Sun, Philibert?, p. 3.

re-emerges from the kingdom of dread. . . . The boon that he brings restores the world."⁴

Carrier identifies the joy that Philibert, like the earlier protagonists, wished to obtain with light, the golden sun. Yet, this joy continually eludes him. Philibert's Christmas toy that his father grabs from him is a symbol of what he wishes to attain. Ironically, the colour and implicit harmony in the pictures on the gift's bright wrapping paper are conspicuously absent from Philibert's own life. The pastoral scene on the Christmas wrapping contrasts to the mechanical, fast-paced urban life evoked by the toy car inside the box. More accurately, the toy car foreshadows Philibert's dismal failure in an urban environment, where he constantly pursues, but never finds, happiness. Readers recall the toy car when Philibert, an adult years later in Montreal, chases a pretty bank clerk in a yellow Pontiac and when he finally acquires an old '37 Chevrolet in which, appropriately, he dies. We also will remember that in the earlier childhood scene Philibert's father takes the toy from him, stamps on it and throws it into the snow. Joy is not to be experienced now, his father sternly insists: "In this life you've got to learn to wait for things" (P 6). Philibert finds that joy, like the sun, is always receding in the distance, never present.

In the trilogy Carrier continually portrays the fathers as authoritarian figures who deny happiness to their children. Fathers cast their children, either literally or figuratively, from their home into

⁴ Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 246.

the darkness of the world outside. Anthyme Corriveau, the grieving father in La Guerre, Yes Sir!, sends his son out of his home to a warring world outside because of his son's drunkenness, a sin of which Anthyme's wife says he too is guilty. Anthyme recalls his dismissal of his son at the wake: "I stood in the doorway of his bedroom and I said, 'We won't argue. Just go back where you came from and don't set foot in this house again, drunkard.' He left, and he's come back to us today" (G 54). Ironically, his son's return to his home can only come through his death. In the same novel, Arsène leaves his son Philibert in the darkness of a freshly dug grave: "In the pit the child would cry, calling to his father until he seemed about to burst. Arsène would not answer: he was seeing to other tasks" (G 107). Seemingly, these are analogies to the Old Testament story of God the Father casting Adam and Eve from Eden for their disobedience. Carrier's characters, like the modern anti-hero, feel abandoned by God and condemned to perpetual darkness, as does Anthyme when, in Floralie, Where Are You?, he comments that "God would never have turned on the sun for a man like [him]" (F 48).

Not only does darkness pervade his world, but Philibert must also distinguish, in the little light available in his fallen state, between light that would truly illuminate him and "false suns" that would ensnare him. Jean Cléo Godin mentions this problem in his article "Roch Carrier: Une terre entre deux (ou trois) soleils."⁵ One of these "ersatz du soleil" Carrier associates with religion. As Philibert

⁵ Jean Cléo Godin, "Roch Carrier: Une terre entre deux (ou trois) soleils," Livres et Auteurs Québécois, 1971. p. 307.

observes the procession of the Laliberté children, which is led by the curé, he observes "The sun was caught in the monstrance that the Curé held at the level of his head so it seemed to be made of sparkling gold" (P 17). The light of this deceiving sun is widespread: "The sun, still very high, embraced the earth in its rays" (P 20). From its height the dazzling light of the sun shines on a procession that epitomizes the church's condemnation of the flesh and exaltation of the spirit. The twenty-one Laliberté children, officially "little angels, chosen by God in his Heaven to represent his justice and goodness on earth" (P. 18), have no firm physical form, only grotesque "bodies of liquid flesh" (P 19). In the procession "The youngest was closest to the monstrance and the eldest was farthest away. Each day that one lives makes one less worthy to be close to God" (P 17). This procession further illustrates the church's belief that man's nature is essentially sinful, that the more fully we enter physical life, the more unworthy we become. In a shocking illustration of the logical outcome of such a philosophy, Carrier presents "angels" who are pitiably misshapen, ugly and suffering, but who are sanctified in the eyes of the church. Seeing this appalling spectacle, Philibert rejects the traditional belief in his flight away from his tradition-bound community to Montreal.

Philibert finds Montreal, however, a dark, infernal city that offers few glimpses of the sun. The darkness and decay he finds illustrate forcefully man's mortality and fallen state. In Montreal "The snow was brown" (F 21), "too dirty" (p. 23). After being unable to find places to sleep, Philibert feels "the darkness struck thorns into his body" (P. 39). He is tormented in this painfully dark environment as was

Christ during his trial and crucifixion.

The mortality of the fallen world is reflected in the putrefaction and sterility of the subterranean places in which Philibert generally works. When digging a trench down the middle of Ste. Catherine Street, Philibert works in a pit remarkably similar to the graves his father digs. In Montreal the fact of death pursues him despite his attempts to flee it. The very earth in that city seems to be rotting and he is repulsed by "the dead city earth that smelled of oil" (F 41). Even when above ground, Philibert cannot free himself from the omnipresent dirt in the city. Cleaning the skyscrapers, "he was a man, wearing overalls, and condemned to clean away the black spittle of the Montreal sky" (P 43). His chances of even cleansing, let alone redeeming, the fallen city are slim, especially since divine aid is denied to him.

The physical darkness into which Philibert is plunged indicates an underlying moral darkness. That dimension figures clearly in one of his subterranean occupations which requires him "to peel potatoes in total darkness" (P 58). The cellar to Philibert "was like night . . . as dark as the time before creation" (P 58). Philibert is condemned by Papakatos, the "Papa" in his name indicating another father-figure, to a time when, according to Genesis, "the earth was void and empty,"⁶ or according to the Greek creation myth, all was chaos. Tempting Philibert with the promise of heaven, the Greek offers him his wife in order to take Philibert's pay. Disappointed by the joyless encounter with the woman when he learns she is his employer's wife, Philibert is further

⁶ Genesis 1.2

dismayed by the sordid dealings of Papakatos. In his despair Philibert contrasts the life others enjoy outside in the sun with his smothered life in the "cellar's mouldy breath" (P 63), where "the night seemed like coarse, black earth, stinking and heavy, that had been poured over [him]" (P 64). He cannot escape from a world of corruption and death.

Glimpses of the sun, which offer a respite from the darkness that surrounds Philibert, are granted to him when he becomes the manager of Boris Rataploffsky, the enigmatic Ninth Wonder of the World. Philibert tours with this giant and later recalls these excursions with nostalgia: "He often dreamed of trips he had taken on beautiful sunny days . . . from the salty Gaspé air to the dry forests of Val d'Or" (P 86-7). These special days were filled with the sun and fresh air so conspicuously absent from his usual environment. However, Philibert's happiness depends upon the giant containing his rage at his assailants. When Boris Rataploffsky explodes with anger and crushes some of his would-be tormentors, the giant drowns himself in remorse. "His body was found by a child swimming in the last rays of the sun" (P 78). The light that the Ninth Wonder brought to Philibert's life soon disappears. The paradise that seems to be offered by this giant victim, who embodies the traditional French Canadian attitude of resignation, proves to be an ephemeral one. Rataploffsky's rage plunges Philibert into darkness. As he labours in "the bottom of his grease-pit," the "springtime sky" (P 86) is lost to him.

However, the money the giant leaves Philibert seems to offer him a chance for light and colour rather than decay and darkness. He dreams of buying a grocery store "with jars of jam arranged in multicoloured

pyramids" (P 91). In those jars he would unconsciously preserve what is natural, forge a link with the pastoral. The new world he tries to create would be a contrast to the dirt and darkness of his former environment. His store would be "all clean and neat and smelling good" (P 93); it would be pleasurable to the senses of sight and smell. "A big front window" (P 91) would allow natural light to enter his new-found world.

In the end, Philibert's dream is never realized. Perhaps as Ivanhoé Beaulieu suggests in his article, "Philibert, enfin retrouvé," to be an entrepreneur Philibert would have to be born at another time, not at the end of Quebec's "dark ages."⁷ The opportunities for young French Canadians did not permit them to enjoy even limited success.

Philibert is again plunged into chaotic darkness when his car, the '37 Chevrolet reminiscent of his ill-fated Christmas present, strikes what he imagines is the "phosphorescent Cross of Christ" (P 94). What finally takes his life, then, are the combined forces of the materialistic society to which he aspires and the denying religion which he flees. The tensions between light, symbolic of his desire for a joyous fulfilling life, and darkness, symbolic of the terrors inspired by his religion and society, are heightened in the final scene of the novel. Even in his agony, Philibert does not deny his desire for life or light. He believes he utters the word *live*, which he remembers as "a beautiful

⁷ Ivanhoé Beaulieu, "Philibert, enfin retrouvé," rev. of *Is It the Sun, Philibert?*, by Roch Carrier, in *Le Soleil*, 28 November 1970, p. 52.

word, beautiful like a horse galloping across a field" (P 96). To Philibert the word evokes an image of unrestrained power, vitality and freedom.

This beatific vision is countered by the snakes which appear from the darkness to mock Philibert's affirmation but which can tempt him only to confess "I never asked to live" (P 99). Despite the fact that light is far from Philibert, the darkness does not stifle him; ironically, it feels pleasantly "warm to him, like a mother" (P 99). In this now comforting warmth that surrounds him, he still seeks joy in life. His question, "Is that the sun?" (P 100), also becomes ironic when we realize it is perhaps addressed to the wheel of his overturned car. However, it affirms that the sun is still something Philibert desires, although it continually eludes him.

The brilliant light of the sun, throughout the trilogy, remains far beyond man's aspirations. In any event, it is much too bright for the unshaded eye. Yet, light in a muted state symbolizes the joy and fulfillment for which man yearns. In his fallen world man requires a warm, caressing sun to dispel the cold and darkness of the night. Carrier associates darkness with death and decay, the terrors of mortal existence, and with fears of a spiritual nature. These terrors are often manufactured by the institutional guardians of mankind who, damagingly locked in their limited vision, are determined to impose their views on others.

CHAPTER IV

The Maimed Body

The state of man's body, as well as his environment, reflects his fallen condition. Throughout the La Guerre trilogy Carrier portrays his characters as being maimed, crippled, or otherwise incapable of positive action. In general, the forces that repress their humanity are the doctrinaire church, through its teachings that emphasize the sinfulness of the body, and the modern, impersonal state in its denial of man's spirit and its insistence on his subservience to its aims. Man's body sustains the wounds of these forces that would inhibit him. This repression can result in physical or psychological suffering; the Portuguese work in Is It the Sun, Philibert? blows himself up in order to escape a dehumanizing society, while Bérubé in La Guerre, Yes Sir! becomes powerless to act according to his own will and can only inflict his self-loathing and dehumanization on others.

The motif of a maimed or crippled body is introduced right from the opening episode of La Guerre, Yes Sir!. Joseph, one of the French Canadian villagers, is deciding which hand he should remove so as not to be conscripted into the army during World War II. To remain alive, one cannot remain whole. Perhaps because he is right-handed, Joseph decides to remove his left hand which is less essential to him. However, the left side is traditionally associated with evil, often of a physical

sort; thus, even while trying to preserve his life, Joseph seems to be subconsciously punishing himself. By removing a hand, he has reduced his ability to touch and to communicate, aspects of being human.

The war in Europe to which Joseph fears being sent, a war run by the "big guys" (G 23), is the cause of his maiming. If he were sent overseas, he fears he would be reduced to "jam" (G 5). The word jam, as it is used in Joseph's monologue, has two meanings. It refers to the disfigured, lifeless body which results from war. Thus Joseph sees death and dismemberment happening to him much as it did to Corriveau: "Their Christly shells would have made jam out of me . . . They've already made jam out of Corriveau with their goddam war" (G 5). Joseph also uses the word in another way, to express his desire to preserve his life: "me, I'll be making jam next fall: strawberries, blueberries, gooseberries, red apples, raspberries" (G 5). Jam, or preserves, is a symbol of the fruition of life, the result of fertility. Joseph wishes to remain part of the cycle of life, to be active in preserving the fruits of nature.

Joseph's maimed state reduces his stature in the eyes of his wife. Mme. Joseph sees him as being less than a man, hardly a fulfilling sexual partner: "You marry a man and you find out you're sleeping with an invalid. What's Joseph going to do with his stump in my bed?" (G 24). By cutting off his hand to avoid a political war abroad, Joseph causes a domestic battle in his own home. He and his wife quarrel over what he sees as a defiant act. For trying to avoid the war, Mme. Joseph accuses him of being less than a man: "A man who doesn't have the courage to go and fight a war to protect his country is no man" (G 27).

The villagers do not disapprove of Joseph's action, illustrating their ingrained suspicion that the body is a source of evil. They sympathize with Mme. Joseph but their attitude is shaped by their mistaken belief that the Gospel tells them: "Tear out thy hand or throw it on the fire" (G 24). Thus, they cannot condemn Joseph for his act, nor are they angered at the cause of his injury. The youth of the village, however, now instead of using "a frozen horse turd" (G 24) as a hockey puck, use Joseph's hand. This shocking identification of the body with excrement is repeated in the novel. By focusing on these associations, Carrier dramatically emphasizes the body's debasement in a society that fears the flesh.

The external war has a profound effect upon the villagers. Whereas Joseph is physically maimed because of the war, Bérubé is psychologically harmed. Bérubé is tormented by fears instilled by the English officers who command him, and by the church which teaches him. As a result he cannot act with spontaneity and is reduced to the stature of an automaton.

Bérubé's mind, dominated by his church, is at war with his natural sexual desires. The church's teachings prevent him from enjoying his encounter with Molly, the prostitute he meets and marries in Newfoundland. He recalls the threat of hell, the punishment for those "who go naked and those who touch naked women" (G 32). The image of hell, full of serpents and eternal flames, is the church's constant threat to those who enjoy the pleasures of the body. Due to his limiting upbringing, Bérubé believes these pleasures are only acceptable after they are sanctified by marriage vows.

The proscriptions on Bérubé are not limited to the Quebec church's; some come from outside the province. Bérubé's domination by his English officer renders him powerless to act according to his own will and instincts. When he sees Molly praying for Corriveau, he jealously begins to beat her but is brought to attention by the sergeant: "Bérubé stood at attention. He clicked his heels. Bérubé was nothing but a ball of obedient muscles . . . He was crying because there was nothing he could do" (G 46). His inability to behave according to his instincts again emerges during the fight between the villagers and the English soldiers. Bérubé's strong feelings of loyalty to the people among whom he was raised are erased by the words of the sergeant. At the officer's call to attention "Bérubé was paralysed . . . The sergeant had given an order: Bérubé, simple soldier, was hypnotised" (G 97). Ultimately, Bérubé's attack upon his own people becomes an attack against himself --the dramatic height of his alienation from himself.

Bérubé is reduced to recreating his dehumanization in others. He coerces Arsène by his kicks and blows to act like a soldier. Bérubé debases Arsène as he himself is debased, forcing Arsène to laugh when Bérubé says that nothing is funnier than war, and to admit seeing a "pile of shit" (G 72) when he looks at himself in the mirror. Bérubé forces out words which express an ultimate in self-loathing when he reduces Arsène to identifying himself as excrement, human waste, and to not seeing himself as a complete human being. Arsène obeys all of Bérubé's orders; he becomes "nothing but a mass of obedient flesh" (G 79). Finally, humiliatingly beaten and naked, Arsène is thrown out of doors. Bérubé's rationale for his brutal actions, "Sometimes I feel

a little crazy" (G 80), is an apt analogy to the insane slaughter occurring in the alien war.

The war threatens the men of the village with being less than men; it completely destroys Corriveau. Carrier uses the dead soldier Corriveau as the most compelling illustration of the effects of the war upon an individual. Corriveau's body returns to his village in a coffin symbolic of the various forms of repression to which the villagers are subjected. His body, once whole, is now fragmented into "several shreds of flesh, several bloody bits of clothing, a billfold" (G 100) by a mine he accidentally detonates. Philibert's vow, "If I'm a man I'm going to be a soldier like Corriveau" (G 109), becomes poignantly ironic when everything in the novel points to how being a soldier robs one of his masculinity, if not his humanity and his very identity.

Whereas in La Guerre, Yes Sir! evidence of repression is shown mainly in the form of man's physical state, in Floralie, Where Are You? Carrier reveals man's tormented emotional state. The novel vividly portrays the anxieties shared by Floralie and Anthyme, who are both taught that man's joys are essentially sinful and that his own judgement is not to be trusted. These teachings inculcate a guilt and fear in enjoying physical pleasure.

Anthyme's physical drives are repressed by his church's teachings about the nature of man. Being taught that the body is a source of evil, Anthyme believes that the pleasures he experiences are essentially sinful and, conversely, that the misery he finds in abstinence is deeply righteous: "I hardly smoke at all . . . I never drink, but when I do I can tell you I don't get drunk very often. I get up early, I go to bed

early, and I've never gone with a woman" (F 98). As a man who attempts to follow the rules of his church, he thinks his union with Floralie is not sinful because it is blessed by the church.

Yet, Anthyme's happiness with Floralie is seriously threatened by his adherence to the traditional beliefs of his religion and community; he lacks confidence in his own judgement and distrusts his strongest impulses. As a result, he cannot reconcile his love for Floralie with his suspicion that she is a fallen woman because in the eyes of the church she has sinned and is therefore unworthy of his love. He resolves he will trust the curé's answer to the question of whether "women have a wall or a curtain" (F 25). He also believes his society's unstated code that masculinity involves brute strength rather than affection or sentiment: "I'm not a real man if I haven't got the courage to hit her" (F 25).

Floralie's religious and social teachings also hamper her enjoyment of life. She believes that eventually she will be damned for her affair with the Italian, that her body will be everlastingly tortured for her sin. Floralie believes in the traditional role allotted her--that of the obedient wife. She practices obeying her husband so that eventually "she would obey without thinking about it" (F 10). Floralie is thus denied the enjoyment of her body and any independence of mind.

Both the rural and urban societies of Is It the Sun, Philibert? deny physical fulfillment. In the predominantly rural society the body is commonly seen as a source of evil; in a modern urban society it loses the vitality necessary for the enjoyment of life. In the city as well as in the country man's spirit is nearly crushed by the forces that

constantly threaten to dehumanize him.

The identification of the body as a source of evil begins when Philibert is a child. In a revealing scene Philibert buries his hand in a mock grave so that he can imagine experiencing the decay that will at a later time suffuse his body. He imagines the flesh of his hand being punished because "it was damned, the fire of hell with all its shiny teeth was devouring his hand and it would suffer eternally" (P 9). The fear of sin overwhelms him even in his youth: "Philibert used to spend a lot of time looking at the picture [of hell], frightening himself . . . The more scared he was the less he would feel like sinning" (P 97).

The motif of the snake/dragon that tempts and torments man is evident throughout the trilogy. The book Philibert gazes at in his childhood, with its "drawings of the open-mouthed dragon whose stomach led to Hell" (P 97), presents a visual image of the terrors threatening the child, and later the man. The dragon in hell is another form of the snake in Eden, the animal that is associated with temptation and evil. Carrier uses the snake in Floralie, Where Are You? in an ironic sense. The snake which Floralie spies in the clearing where Anthyme leads her to make love for the first time, and which Anthyme throws far into the forest, is not a sign that their love is illicit. The presence of the snake symbolizes their attitude to their sexuality: as sex could be enjoyable, it must be evil. In Is It the Sun, Philibert?, too, Carrier employs the dragon in an ironic parody of episodes in the lives of saints, for example, Daniel in the lion's den, according to which they are not harmed by the beasts that surround them. In this novel, the child Philibert is not harmed by the dragon, rather, he dreams that

"gently, lovingly, the dragon in the drawing would begin to lick his face" (P 97). Thus, Carrier emphasizes Philibert's innocence, that his "sins" do not merit punishment.

The identification of the mortification of the flesh and the punishment of hell is repeated in the procession of the Laliberté children. These children are praised by the church because their unformed bodies prevent them from being sinful. The philosophy that the body is a source of evil is emphasized in the order of the procession whereby the youngest of the deformed children is closest to the monstrance that heads the procession and followed by the others in order of age. After these children come the maimed and deformed of the village, who are in turn followed by the widows. This procession shows the values of the community which are instilled by the church -- to be alive and whole and sexually active is to be evil.

Because of this damaging emphasis on the mortality and evil of the flesh, Philibert finds little enjoyment in sexuality. He is at first ashamed of his body's sexual response to the English woman who initiates him to sex. Later he cannot forget the memory of his mother exhausted by her years of childbearing. Any sexual encounter recalls her image to him, identifying sexuality with the ravages of aging. Philibert sees the fertility of his mother's womb as being the cause of her aging: "The children had nestled in her belly, distended it and made her breasts sag" (P 55). Added to his sense of guilt, Philibert's image of his mother further prevents his enjoying sex with the women he meets. He is afraid to enjoy the loveliness of a young girl's body because "A fat old woman might spring out of it" (P 55).

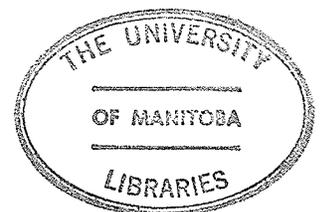
Carrier frequently associates the human body with the decay Philibert finds in Montreal. The women Philibert meets do not have a vitality which he could share; the body of the "African Tigress" under his "was a soft living corpse" (P 80). Philibert is saddened by his encounter with the woman in Papakatos' cellar: "he had wept because he felt so little joy" (P 63). He is even repulsed when he learns she is the means by which Papakatos takes back his pay. Sexuality, rather than being a source of joy, reminds Philibert of his own mortality and of the tired corruption around him.

The spirit as well as the body is threatened in the urban environment where Philibert lives. He identifies with the Portuguese worker who commits suicide by attaching dynamite to his body and blowing himself up; "Philibert could not erase the image of a chopped-up face, bleeding, whose laugh was a wound. The face was so disfigured he could not be certain that it was his own" (P 86). In the trilogy the obliterated face and dismembered body become a symbol of lost identity; Corriveau is dismembered by the explosion of a mine, Arsène's face is beaten until he will resemble "a bloody face like a crushed strawberry" (G 70). Philibert becomes painfully aware of the destructive effect an industrialized society has on the individual. He sees sanity in the Portuguese' violent reaction to an intolerable situation: "We're crazier than the goddam crazies. If we weren't crazy we'd do like the Portuguese guy and this baptême of a pile of scrap iron we're sewing up for the rich guys would be fertilized by a flood of human meat chopped up by dynamite" (P 85).

Finally, as the logical outcome of the series of fragmentations and

deaths, Philibert's own body is destroyed. As he is dying, he imagines he sees his limbs scattered by the accident. With his dismemberment and imminent death, the terrors of his childhood, the serpents of hell, return to mock him. "To be alive is a curse" (P 99) is the despairing message given, appropriately, by a hare-lipped creature whose physical deformity matches the depravity of his statement. A monster reminiscent of the butchered pig and the child's skeleton of his past mocks Philibert by saying "You have always wanted to suffer" (P 99). These images of broken bodies with their questions about the value of living haunt Philibert while he is (perhaps) dying. Even in death, Philibert's body is violated: "His heart was a little berry between big iron fingers" (P 100). The iron fingers could represent his church and society, both sources of his repression that wish to maintain control over his body, his emotions and his mind.

Carrier's characters, then, are for the most part denied the use of their bodies to express themselves as vital, spontaneous, independent individuals. Their bodies are maimed and almost paralyzed by the powerful, impersonal society and punitive religion which dominate them. Characters thus need another means of expression--a language adequate to communicating their hopes, fears, and dreams, and the freedom to use it.



CHAPTER V

Denied Language

The maimed bodies of Carrier's characters is evidence enough of their fallen state. In addition, their ability to speak effectively in their own tongue is denied them. The dominant powers in their province, the church and the English, use a different language from their local French. The church forbids language that is blasphemous or sexual in nature, so that characters find it difficult to express their thoughts even in the national language allowed them. The semi-articulate state that results serves as a symbol of the general paralysis the characters experience in trying to cope with their environment. Then, too, their actual attempt to give voice to their plight are often misunderstood or rejected. For various reasons--their church's prohibitions, their political disenfranchisement, or their own acquired inhibitions--the crucial words often go unspoken or unheard.

Carrier's character's use of language in La Guerre, Yes Sir! reflects the central conflicts of the novel--the English-French struggle and the gap between religious formulae and personal needs. The various wars in the village--between father and son, husband and wife and the spiritual and temporal orders--have their effect upon the ability of the villagers to communicate. The English-French war causes a husband and wife to use a code of taps and animal sounds rather than

human speech, while the language of each warring group is not understood by the other. Because the ascetic spirituality of the church's message is far removed from the intensely physical lives of the villagers, prayers turn into phonetic recital of formula which have lost their meaning. This impairment of language poignantly demonstrates the plight of man in a fallen world.

Man's need for help in his fallen state is emphasized by the sounds in the opening scene of La Guerre, Yes Sir!. What Joseph believes to be his "great laugh" (G 5) is actually his cry for help. The distinction here between the real and imagined voice presents only one form of division in this episode. First, Joseph's breathing comes from behind him, not from within him as it would in a whole man; then he severs his hand completely from his body. Finally, his "great laugh" shows his rejoicing at avoiding the war; however, the cry for help which he also emits perhaps comes as a hurt plea to remain whole, to live fully.

The war which separates the deserter, Henri, from his community and family also robs him of his speech. Driven to virtual silence in his refuge, Henri resorts to a particular series of signals to communicate with his family. His reduced state is shown both in his entrapment in the attic and in his use of a code which depends on non-verbal animal sounds rather than human speech. By contrast, the man who takes over Henri's original position as father and lover is significantly free and able to talk with the family. In fact, he uses language to make the absent Henri's children his own: "With these words Arthur became the children's father . . . Henri, their real father, had never known how to talk to the children" (G 9-10). Finally, Arthur becomes a physical as

well as spiritual father to Amélie's children.

Similar to the way in which Joseph's and Henri's language shows the effect of war upon the individual, the prayers and blasphemies that the villagers utter show the negative effect of religion upon them.

Anthyme's response to Philibert's blasphemies illustrates a deep belief in a God of wrath. Anthyme fears his son's words "would bring down misfortunes on the house" (G 15). To avoid punishment from a vengeful God, Anthyme vents his wrath upon his own son Philibert in a series of kicks. Language here gives rise to a chain of violence.

In the face of a God who punishes irreverence, the villagers respond with a language that removes virtually any semblance of subservience. Their prayers at the Corriveau wake unintentionally amount to subversive distortions of standard ritual prayers. Instead of being respectful "spiritual" praises and requests from the villagers, the prayers ironically gather around the sensual appetites of the French Canadians for food, drink, and sex. Anthyme's comical prayer, "Que le Seigneur des fidèles défont les lunes en paix dans la lumière du paradis" (G 42), asks that the God of the faithful break up the moons at peace in the light of paradise. In his ignorance he perhaps thinks he is saying "Que le Seigneur des fidèles défunts les unis en paix dans la lumière du paradis"; that is, "May God of the faithful departed unite them in peace in the light of paradise." Anthyme asks God to initiate cosmic destruction, an act more consistent with his avenging nature than that of granting eternal rest in paradise. The "Hail Mary" is equally, and significantly, distorted as Anthyme recites it: "Je vous salue Marie, pleine et grasse, le Seigneur avez-vous et Bénédic . . ." (G 42). His

prayer translates: "Hail Mary, full and fat, do you have the Lord and Benedict?", thus becoming an absurd and sexually provocative parody of the original: "Je vous salut, Marie, pleine de grâce, le Seigneur est avec vous; vous êtes bénie . . ."¹ which means "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed art thou . . .". Anthyme's prayers reflect both the disorder in the world around him and his irrepressible interest in sex which his church tries to eliminate. Finally, the villagers request "repas éternel" (G 52)--eternal food not eternal rest. Their prayers are for "Nous pauvres pêcheurs" (G 52)--poor fishermen instead of poor sinners--thus inadvertently, but revealingly, denying their own ostensibly sinful nature. As ironic parodies of the inherited verbal codes, the villagers naive, comic prayers reflect their desire to enjoy life now, in the flesh, rather than to wait for the less appealing hereafter promised by the church.

The deep division between the English and French is effectively displayed in the inability of the two groups to understand each other's language. When the soldiers arrive with Corriveau's coffin, they cannot follow Mme. Corriveau's instructions about placing the body: "The English soldiers didn't understand the language the old people were speaking. They knew it was French, but they had rarely heard it" (G 38-39). Only with the mediation of Molly, who exists marginally in both worlds and who translates the instructions into English, can the soldiers see what is wanted or needed.

¹ Missel Quotidien Saint Joseph (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1956), p. 1228.

Even with this assistance, the soldiers often do not want to understand. The contempt which the Anglais soldiers feel for the French Canadians is perfectly evident in their attitude toward the villagers' language. The soldiers regret that these provincials do not "accept the privilege of becoming English" (G 82), so that they would be civilized: "They would speak a civilized language, not a patois" (G 82).

The Corriveau's are acutely aware of the soldiers' superior attitude. Significantly, in what Carrier might present as a parable on English power in Quebec society, the old couple are made to feel uncomfortable in their own home because of the alien soldiers' presence. Under these circumstances, language, which could be a bond uniting the grieving parents and attendant soldiers, only becomes a source of alienation: "Anthyme and his wife could not understand what the Anglais were saying, but they didn't like to hear the sounds of their language because of their eyes . . . They had the impression that the Anglais were making fun of them when they spoke" (G 92).

The gulf between the French and English is further illustrated by the unenlightened attitude of the French toward the Anglais soldiers. Mme. Corriveau is astonished that these soldiers would kneel down to pray, as people of her own religion do. Anthyme cannot believe that the English and French could share the same God, since he has always known that the English are damned: "The God of the English and the God of the French Canadians couldn't be the same one . . . there couldn't be a God for the damned in hell" (G 44). Anthyme's religious teachings are threatened by the possibility that these soldiers, too, could pray in English and be heard. Indeed, finally, it appears to the villagers "that God himself seemed to

be on [the soldiers'] side" (G 101). God, seemingly, prefers the powerful English to the meek French Canadians.

What little effective communication once existed among the villagers themselves is badly disrupted by the war. The letter that Corriveau writes to his mother is not delivered until after his death. For a time, the letter brings him magically to life: "They forgot that their child was lying in his coffin It wasn't true that he was dead; he had written. The letter would correct the facts" (G 56). Père Corriveau naively rejoices in the fact that his son is decorated; the villagers sing "Il a gagné ses épaulettes" (G 57), a song of praise. Ironically, what he wins is death, a dramatic halt to his letters or any other form of communication. He is severed from his family and community.

Bérubé's isolation from his village and his divided loyalties are demonstrated in his attempt to pray after the death of the English soldier: "Bérubé didn't know whether he should pray in English for the Anglais or in French Canadian for Corriveau" (G 99). His broken prayer, an ironic distortion of the De Profundis, the prayer for the dead, which he remembers from childhood, reflects his despair. His words, "Au fond tu m'abimes, Seigneur, Seigneur" (G 99), mean: "You have damaged me (or sunk me) to the depth, Lord." Psalm 129, "Du fond de l'abîme je t'invoque, ô Yahweh,"² means: "Out of the depth have I cried unto thee, O Lord." The irony in Bérubé's distorted prayer rests upon the similarity of the sound of "de l'abîme" and "tu m'abime". In Bérubé's

² La Sainte Bible

prayer God appears to be the source of his despair rather than the hope of his salvation as in the original.

The individuals in the second novel of the trilogy, Floralie, Where Are You?, are linguistically separated from their community and from the person to whom they should be united. The estrangement experienced by the young couple, Floralie and Anthyme, and their individual guilt and fears are emphasized in Carrier's references to language in the novel. From the opening episodes characters are unable or unwilling to communicate with each other, caught in their own private worlds. Ernest regrets not speaking to his daughter Floralie on her wedding day, so he addresses his fatherly message to one of his cows. Despite the ridiculousness of his actions, his displaced speech carries a very real pathos. Later, when Floralie tells Anthyme he is hurting her in his passionate advances, "Anthyme did not want to hear" (F 5). Not saying words or not listening to them produce the same result--the loss of meanings.

For her part, Floralie is unable to tell Anthyme of her love. She recalls practising the words "I love you" but, faced with her sweating husband, she can only say "I'm scared, Anthyme" (F 7). Her reluctance to tell Anthyme she loves him reveals her acquired fears of intimacy with this man who is now her husband. The alarm that silences her speech comes directly from the church's attack on the body, making its desires unspeakable and its enjoyment forbidden outside of marriage. Floralie is struck dumb in two senses--unable to express her desire for Anthyme, unable to confess her pleasure with the Italian.

Although Anthyme expects Floralie to tell him of her love, he himself

does not know how to speak when he is with her: "How did you reply to a woman?" (F 13). He does not know what kind of language to use and confesses: "Sometimes us men, we talk a lot, we talk loud. But we don't always know as much as we say we do" (F 13). Denied the right words by his upbringing, when Anthyme finally makes a reluctant Floralie his wife, he does so "In silence" (F 16). Silenced by a religion that denies intense physical love, he cannot approach a woman, not even his wife, with words of tenderness.

As a contrast to her lawful relationship with her husband, Floralie's first sexual experience with the Italian railway worker is a joyous one, and she speaks to him without restraint. When Floralie recalls this experience, she remembers her language and emotions as being one: "she kept saying 'I love you' to a young man with black hair whose name and language she did not know. The words were as clear as the oats and the sun had been on that day" (F 44). These simple direct words come as naturally to her as does life to the oats growing in the sun around her. However, this perfect unity of world, body, mind and language proves to be ephemeral for her; it is banished to her past by the dictates of the church and her mother.

In no time Floralie's language is suppressed by fears and guilt. When, perhaps years after meeting her Italian lover, she wanders alone in the forest, Floralie fears the presence of the night but can call Anthyme only in a "tiny begging voice" (F 36). Her fear of another sexual encounter with Anthyme so outweighs her terror of the dark that once she recalls Anthyme's bearded embrace, "She was silent. She would not call again" (F 36). Her fears cut off her speech.

While she is in the arms of Lust, that bizarre dream-world figure which appears later in the novel, Floralie hears voices from her tormented conscience--the sounds of her mother reproaching her: "What are you doing . . . Is that what we taught you?" (F 66); and the shouts of Anthyme cursing her: "Damned girl! Fallen Woman!" (F 66). Themselves twisted by their upbringing, these characters cannot express love easily, but they are quick to find words of reproach.

It is not in the least surprising, therefore, that Floralie expects punishment for what the church calls her sinful nature. As a result, she fears that the words she uses in a prayer to chase away the sound of chains in the sky are understood and answered not by God but by Satan: "Because of her sins God had refused to hear her, but the Prince of Darkness, the King of Hell, where she would be going one day, had made haste to come to her aid" (F 72). She believes that her personal unworthiness and guilt restrict her to communication with the devil. Her forbidden affair with the Italian has removed her, a fallen woman, so far from the official language which would grant her access to salvation, that she is limited to speaking with the fallen angels.

Floralie believes her ultimate punishment in hell would entail a loss of everything that makes her human--her body, language and knowledge. We are not surprised to read that Floralie believes her body "because of all her faults, would burn on the inside" (F 29), nor are we startled, by now, to see that the fire would catch in her mouth, the source of her words. Her mouth would burn as her body does, spitting out "all the prayers and blasphemies it had learned on earth" (F 29), both the official and the forbidden words. Once all of her body and

remembered words are burned, and "she no longer knew anything" (F 29), her identity would be completely destroyed: "her soul would be nothing but a flaming, suffering rag that would not remember that it had once been a young girl" (F 29). The unity she has experienced with the Italian would cease to exist even in memory. Floralie's vision of her ultimate fate reflects her belief in her sinful nature and a punitive God who will not permit his creatures to enjoy themselves physically.

Anthyme admits his inability to decipher the truth about Floralie's chastity. Language, oral and written, fails him. He is tormented by the thought of Floralie's being a "fallen woman" and of his accusing her perhaps unjustly: "Was I telling the truth? Are you a fallen woman?" (F 69). Though, like many Carrier characters, Anthyme is effectively silenced, he needs a verbal affirmation of Floralie's purity, one that she is unable to give him. He is not apt to get help from anywhere else, either. The truth is difficult for him to ascertain, especially if it exists in printed words: "the truth isn't written down anywhere . . . anyways, I don't know how to read" (F 95).

Both Father Nombrillet and Néron, as priest figures, should be able to communicate the truth to their followers. The charlatan Néron is closer to bringing truth to Floralie and Anthyme because he affirms the physical nature of man, whereas Nombrillet, the official priest, denies it. Néron rejoices in creation while Father Nombrillet reviles it verbally and attacks it physically. In a symbolic gesture Nombrillet "began to tear up the painted curtain, the earth, the sun, the hand of God" (F 93) that is the representation of the universe in the theatre organized by the Seven Deadly Sins. Néron's words emphasize his desire

to heal mankind and his belief in his ability to triumph over evil, while Nombriillet's language concentrates on the essentially sinful nature of man and the triumph of evil.

Néron affirms his unity with the natural universe in his professed ability to communicate with it: "Néron . . . can talk to the moon and the sun. He knows the language of men too" (F 40). He claims that he can even communicate without using words: "Woman of the forest, you need not speak; I can read what's in your soul" (F 41). He recognizes the need for individuals to express and fulfill themselves, urging Floralie to find her own voice: "Let the little voice deep down at the bottom of your head start to sing. Sing along with the voice in your head" (F 43). This voice will put her in touch with a river which we associate with the intuitive, the essence of the universe. It contains the elemental waters of an authentic baptism, the promise of rebirth: "Your soul will drown in the river, so it can come to life again" (F 43). The river of which he speaks signifies a fluidity in life that the official church view will not accept.

The beauty of creation and man's enjoyment of it is lost to Nombriillet who, overwhelmed by the presence of sin, can see the world only as "a stinking mudhole" (F 100). His sermon on the eve of the Feast of the Holy Thorn, as well as his insistence on Anthyme's and Floralie's confessions, indicates his belief in the sinfulness of man's body. He also would censor rather than encourage man's use of language, a criticism Carrier might wish to make of all the official clergy. Rather than urging Floralie and Anthyme to find their own voices, as does Néron, he forbids Anthyme's verbal denial that he is a sinner by admonishing him:

"It's wrong to talk like that" (F 98). Father Nombrillet fears drowning in a sea of sin that he is sent to cleanse. For Nombrillet, even water is associated with sin and guilt. According to him, the body is cleansed of its sin by fire that totally destroys it, not by water that is poetically purifying and a source of rebirth.

Finding a voice, a language, when one's own becomes inadequate, misunderstood, or repressed is a special problem in Is It the Sun, Philibert?. The city of Montreal communicates in a language Philibert cannot understand. He is unable to decipher the words which surround him, nor can he clearly articulate his own thoughts.

Philibert's vocabulary as a child is limited because words used to express anything sacriligious or sexual are denied to him. Arsène initiates his son to forbidden language by telling him that if the tongue of the butchered pig could talk, its words would be "dirty: pig's talk" (P 13). Philibert tries to understand the language of the pig's tongue that "spoke dirty words . . . [that] cursed like a man" (P 13). The pig's words, telling of "what men and women do together in their beds at night" or reciting "tremendous oaths" (P 14), are forbidden to him until he becomes a man.

Carrier associates language with power throughout the trilogy. Arsène recognizes that his son is a man in La Guerre, Yes Sir! when Philibert states "every time you kick me I think how I'm itching to dig your grave" (G 108). That profession affirms the eventual overthrow of the father. "These words shook Arsène more than a blow from a fist . . . Arsène was no longer the father of a child, but of a man" (P 108).

The lowly pig's tongue is a symbol of a vital part of life

officially denied to young French Canadians. It speaks with disrespect of the church that has such a hold on its people, and with frankness about the exciting mysteries of sex. Throughout Is It the Sun, Philibert? the protagonist attempts to affirm his stature as a man independent of his once-held religious beliefs and to find someone to love him sexually.

Philibert's quest to find happiness in Montreal is hindered by his inability to speak the language of the dominant group and to read the words on street signs that could metaphorically aid him on his way. He cannot fulfill himself as an individual because he cannot make out the written signs around him or express his thoughts and feelings.

The first attempts Philibert makes at acquiring the basic human needs of food and warmth are met with rejection in a language foreign to him. The man at the first door refuses his offer to shovel his walk for a quarter, saying "'No beggars,' In English" (P 25). Philibert's third attempt meets with another negative response: "'No. No. Sorry.' In English again" (P 26). In his frustration Philibert writes a message by stamping out letters in the snow "spelling out letters, words, a whole sentence" (P 27). Philibert's message, "YOU HAVE AN ASSHOLE INSTEAD OF A HEART" (P 27), may for the moment release some of his frustration, but it, too, sits mutely on the city, utterly incomprehensible to the old English lady who reads it.

Philibert's inability to communicate with language, and the pathetic results of his attempts are poignantly displayed in his encounter with the Englishwoman who befriends him. They are unable to communicate verbally because she speaks no French and Philibert no English, except for his tellingly abject "Yes Sir" (P 30). Ironically, for all her

sympathy, the lady does not recognize Philibert's language as the mother tongue of the majority of the population of Quebec. She laments: "And he couldn't even speak English. What a pity! These immigrants should learn the language before they set off for Canada" (P 28).

Finally finding a human response to his needs, Philibert believes Montreal "should be called Bonheur. Happiness" (P 32) because he experiences such joy with the Englishwoman. However, his renaming of the city is premature. When he attempts to find the "sweet lady's house" (P 33) again, he cannot. He does not understand the pattern the streets make; they "ran right across the city, stretched out, crossed one another, made knots, formed letters that could only be deciphered from the sky, proliferated like jungle vines" (P 33). Philibert is separated from the Englishwoman who offers him warmth, food, and sex because he cannot read the language of the city.

The image of Montreal as a written symbol which Philibert cannot understand is later inverted; Carrier describes the incomprehensible written symbol as being as mystifying as a city. The morning after Philibert quits his job in the boot factory, he picks up a newspaper and finds "the news-print formed a grey mass, like a city seen from a distance, a grey city in a black fog, untidy" (P 47-8). Carrier emphasizes the way in which the city and the language which confront Philibert are both enigmas to him; confusing streets and unintelligible letters serve as symbols for his dilemma.

Philibert's alienation in a strange city is further demonstrated by his inability to understand what he hears and reads. He cannot read the financial section of the newspapers: "It was written in French but for

all he understood it might as well have been Polish" (P 55). Carrier thus shows Philibert's alienation from the political and economic powers of the city. Reading does not clarify his thoughts, "he read how very simple things become inextricably tangled up" (P 67).

The articles Philibert reads offer contrasting, conflicting views on life; they are either unrealistically positive or depressingly negative. When cleaning the skyscrapers of Montreal, he is handed a pamphlet which reads "Men need a reason for living. Life is before us. At the very moment you are reading me, life should be beautiful" (P 43-44). These words become ironic in view of Philibert's occupation. He begins to identify with the negative side of the question, "Am I preparing for success or for failure?" (P 61), that he reads in an article which states "the chief obstacle for the young man from the lower strata of society is his fascination with failure" (P 60). Philibert sees himself as so far being unable to achieve the quest he set for himself when leaving his native village for Montreal.

Returning to his village, his past, would defeat his purpose; it does not offer joy or freedom. The letter Philibert receives from his mother; which does not console him, proves as much. He remembers that his village is no longer, if it ever was, an idyllic place, that "the people in the village were crushed beneath their sky" (P 51). His mother's letter, written in language Philibert can understand--the words . . . had the shape of what he knew best, his village" (P 51)--tells him that even his small community cannot escape the English dominance which threatens him in Montreal. He learns of the dishonest Anglais' robbing his uncle of his family farm because he does not

understand the language of business. The situation in his village parallels the one in Montreal where the French Canadians are servants of a master who speaks a foreign language. Philibert tears up the letter; the message reminding him of his past is a painful one, for "In order not to be sad, Philibert had forgotten" (P 54).

Having abandoned his past, Philibert tries to seek happiness and a new life in the present. However, he cannot find words to express his identity and new-found independence. When the old man at the boot factory tells Philibert he could be a real diamond in the rough, Philibert answers "'I'm not a stone, I'm . . . I'm . . . 'The words didn't come to him'" (P 47). Philibert tries to explain to friends that he denies God's existence but affirms his own. He finds the task difficult: "Phil spoke as though he were reading the words, with difficulty, from a blackboard" (P 80). Throughout the book references to language serve as figures for what is difficult to comprehend and express.

Philibert finally realizes that he must abandon his own language and name, parts of his heritage and identity, if he is going to succeed in Montreal. When he becomes the manager of the Ninth Wonder of the World, he uses the name Phil, "Monsieur Phil. Mister Phil" (P 75). This Anglicizing of his name culminates in his abandoning of his native language when he receives his inheritance from the giant Rataploffsky. Philibert then decides he will learn English "because English was the language of business, big business and monkey business" (P 92). Success for Philibert in Montreal is dependent upon his acquiring another language, another name. The language of his childhood is impotent in the modern city.

The happiness Philibert experiences in Montreal stems from a communication based on an intuitive understanding rather than a verbal language. He finds joy with the Englishwoman who does not understand his language and with the Ninth Wonder of the World who remains almost mute throughout their relationship. However, the giant sings on their journeys, and although "Phil didn't understand the worlds of his strange songs that made the roof of his cabin quiver . . . he sensed that they were words of joy" (P 76).

Carrier's references to language in the trilogy effectively demonstrate man's fallen state. His language does not now offer an effective or expressive means of communication. On the contrary, it reflects the conflicts between man and his religion and social order. In Carrier's trilogy, rather than clarifying man's relationships with others, language intensifies the conflict and hinders his search to recover a joy in living.

CHAPTER VI

The Maze

Carrier's characters, limited as they are by the darkness of their world, their maimed bodies and restricted language, still journey in search of joy. In literature, man's search for meaning and fulfilment in life often follows the pattern of the quest; an important part of this pattern is the journey on which the hero embarks.¹ Carrier's characters are placed in a world where hostile forces severely threaten them with dismemberment and death. The world of Carrier's trilogy, the fallen world in which man commonly lives, is one that causes his protagonists to be lost, trapped or engulfed, and to be searching for paths. His characters wander in a labyrinthine universe; Carrier uses the archetypal image of the maze to illustrate how his characters are enmeshed in their environment. This perpetual entrapment is a variation on the usual pattern of the quest where the hero emerges triumphant after his journey.² The triumphs of Carrier's protagonists are limited, for in his universe the life-giving forces are greatly restricted by the huge impersonal forces of church and state. These

¹ Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, pp. 245-6.

² Northrope Frye, "Theory of Myths" in Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 190.

traditional sources of refuge no longer have the vitality or compassion to heal or inspire mankind, and no hero emerges who can restore life to these sterile institutions.

Using the image of the maze, Carrier encloses his characters in spaces that contain darkness and death rather than light and life. The threat of death looms in persistent images of being swallowed by coffins or by the earth itself. The paths that are available to the protagonist do not lead to salvation; instead, they are often obscured and, when found, lead only to further entrapment. In each novel of the trilogy, the image of the maze is present. Bérubé exists in a psychological rather than a physical maze; he struggles internally with the conflict between French and English, finding that he neither belongs to nor is accepted by either group. Anthyme and Floralie get lost in a maze deep in a forest which reflects their subconscious fears of sin and death. Montreal presents a physical maze to Philibert; it is a city of streets that do not lead him to where he wishes to go. Instead of the joy and light for which he searches, it offers him subterranean tunnels representing decay and death.

The image of the maze reflects accurately the situation of characters in La Guerre, Yes Sir!. Bérubé and Henri are both isolated by their environment. Bérubé, a French Canadian soldier serving in World War II, is searching for a path back to his village, accompanied on his journey by his wife Molly, a Newfoundland prostitute. His search for his home is hindered because he embodies a divided self; he is part of a small French Canadian village and part of the English military. Henri, another soldier, returns to his home but is trapped in its attic,

isolated from his family and community, because he does not want to return to the English war.

Just as the maze offers confusing tunnels, the path leading to the dead soldier Corriveau's village is unclear, it is obscured by the snow. To the English soldiers struggling under the weight of the coffin they are carrying, their destination seems unattainable: "at each step the village on the mountain seemed farther away, as though they had changed directions in the snow" (G 28). Any paths that may have existed are obliterated: "The soldiers didn't even suspect that there was a road hidden under the snow" (G 29). When they reach the Corriveau home, their destination, they have difficulty placing the coffin inside, as "The door of the Corriveau's little house had not been built to accommodate a coffin" (G 38). The soldiers bring death to the village and for a time obstacles obstruct their path.

Barriers appear in Bérubé's path to his home as well. He flounders across the landscape carrying Molly, blinded by his desire for her: "He did not know if he was still going in the right direction; he could no longer see the village on the mountain" (G 33). Their desire for each other is tempered by their common prejudices. "Nothing but animals, these French Canadians" (G 34), is Molly's assessment of Bérubé. His response is equally derisive: "I won't let any woman break my jaw; not a whore, not an Anglais" (G 34). As a result, Bérubé leaves Molly in the snow. Just as Bérubé and Molly are separated by their acquired prejudices, Bérubé is isolated from his village, even when he finally reaches it, by his perceived allegiance with the English soldiers.

The snow and forest around the village become parts of the confusing

unmarked maze in which man wanders. The expedition of the soldiers and Bérubé's return journey are hindered by the deep pervasive snow. When the deserter Henri is guarding the body of the dead English soldier, he recalls being lost in a threatening forest: "Trees, big hundred-year old spruce, waved their arms and sang like so many souls in distress" (G 103). No light and warmth could be given him there because, he recalls, "Everything was so damp that it was impossible to build a fire" (G 103). Thus Henri remembers being alone, lost in darkness, a condition he still experiences.

Given the lack of direction on his journey and the obstacles placed in his way, man often finds himself trapped, unable to complete the journey home which is so important to the pattern of the quest. In La Guerre, Yes Sir! the principal causes of entrapment are the war and the church. Henri's attempt to avoid the war causes him to be trapped in his own attic. After his desertion he is forced to hide, isolated from his family and village and from any sight of the world around him: "There isn't even a goddam window in my attic. And the cracks in the ceiling are blocked up with ice. That's how I know it's winter" (G 36). His only communication with the outside world takes place through the trap door which leads to his attic.

Whereas Henri is shut away inside his attic by the war, Sister Esmalda, daughter of Anthyme and Floralie Corriveau, is isolated from her home and people because of what she calls the "blessed rule" of her religious order. She rejects her parents' request to leave the darkness outside and to enter their home for warmth and food. Ironically, the church does not bring comfort to the people; the Corriveau home

provides the compassion and warmth the mourners seek. Her last statement ironically presents the distance of the clergy from the community. She says, "How sweet it is to come back among one's own people" (G 66); however, we see that she is not close to them now, if she ever has been. The other representative of the clergy, the priest, has become so distanced from his people that he does not appear at the wake, only at the formal funeral service.

Left alone, man falls prey to fears of being annihilated by forces more powerful than himself. Fears of being engulfed or swallowed up pervade the trilogy. The monster in the maze waiting to devour man reflects the source of suffering in the fallen world. In La Guerre, Yes Sir! the coffin that becomes an ironic ark in Henri's dream evokes the life-denying forces of church and state. We associate the fire that consumes the rotting earthen chapel in Floralie, Where Are You? with the flames of hell invented by the church. Montreal's trenches and cellars, which threaten to swallow the wandering Philibert, are a symbol for the dehumanizing, decaying modern city in which he lives.

The fear of being swallowed up first appears in the strange dream Henri experiences in which he sees his village disappearing into a huge coffin. The coffin, obviously indicative of death, is the central symbol of the novel. In Henri's dream, he associates the coffin, significantly, with the church: "the people from the village were entering it, one by one, one after the other, just as they entered the church, bent over, submissive, and the last villagers brought their animals with them" (G 87). The coffin, then, becomes grotesquely associated with Noah's ark in the negative sense of a destructive

container rather than a vehicle of salvation.

In Carrier's novel, the coffin/ark finally destroys the whole world rather than gives it new life. The leviathan overpowers the community; life does not emerge renewed, led by a figure like Jonah. In Henri's eschatological dream, life is poured into the coffin: "From the four corners of the earth people came running up, rushing into Corriveau's coffin which was swelling up like a stomach. The sea, too, even the sea had become as gentle as a river and was emptying itself into Corriveau's coffin" (G 88). The last things Henri sees are monstrous and deformed: "fish with eight hands, with three heads, crabs with terrifying teeth, insects too" (G 99). The objects left on earth symbolize death and destruction: "On the whole earth, only Corriveau's coffin under the Anglais flag still existed" (G 88). Henri's dream offers a vision of the total destruction of the world rather than the salvation of even the chosen. His religion, which emphasizes the sinful nature of man, contributes to a dream in which all life on earth is contained in a coffin. Tellingly, the English flag which dominated the political life of the villagers also remains, ascendant even in dreams of annihilation. Even the sea, which could hold the waters of baptism and offer new life, flows into the coffin. Thus, in Henri's mind, the forces of death overcome the life-giving ones.

The other books in Carrier's trilogy continue the theme of loss of direction and imprisonment. Floralie, Where Are You? depicts the wanderings of Anthyme and Floralie during their wedding night spent in the forest. The uncharted forest comes to embody their fears of sin and damnation and their sexual guilt. Figures such as the two priests, Néron

and Nombrillet, and the dramatic company portraying the Seven Deadly Sins appear to the young couple who lose themselves in the web of their imaginations.

Anthyme is the first to discover he is lost. He leaves Floralie alone in the forest believing that she is a dishonest woman. As soon as he separates himself from Floralie, he becomes lost and must search for a path. Thus, his wanderings are precipitated by his doubts of Floralie, thoughts inspired by his belief that "there's a wall you have to break through" (F 23) which he believes is missing the first time he makes love to her. Ironically, it is his flight from Floralie to avoid being "caught like a fly in a spiderweb" (F 33) that precipitates him into a dark forest with elusive paths. He is trapped by the limitations of his upbringing.

Anthyme follows the tracks of "old wheelmarks [that] appeared, then quickly disappeared again under the dark grass of the night" (F 38). He fears losing even the indistinct paths he can find, "Because men just as solid as him . . . had not followed paths, they had been forced to remain in the forest forever and lumberjacks had found their clean white skeletons" (F 34). The woods through which Anthyme journeys not only cause the fear of being lost and dying a lonely death, but also the fear of death by being swallowed up whole. Whereas Henri sees his community being engulfed by Corriveau's coffin, the devouring monster that Anthyme fears is the earth itself. The terrain could be deceptive, he "had heard that a man can be swallowed up in swamps where the ferns, spruce and moss look very much like the kind that grow on solid earth" (F 38). He believes "The earth can swallow a man the way a cat eats up

a mouse" (F 38). Anthyme loses his faith in the solidity and order of the earth and falls prey to superstitious tales of its deceptiveness in much the same way as he doubts the reality of Floralie's love because of stories he has been told about "this curtain or wall" (F 25) that a virgin/wife must have and which Floralie lacks.

Anthyme finally doubts the "fairy-tale" about the curtain a woman must have, thinking "This curtain you've got to tear is likely something they've invented to make fun of newlyweds" (F 25). He envisions that as punishment for his doubts and mistreatment of Floralie, he might be perpetually lost: "He would have accepted being sentenced to wander among the black trees for the rest of his days" (F 69). He realizes that the paths available are not adequate for him to find his way home: "For the village to come to him a very wide road would have been needed, like the roads in the United States" (F 61). That "very wide road" is no longer available to fallen man.

Néron, the charlatan priest, recognizes Anthyme's lost state and the path he is seeking. Néron possesses a deep understanding of the human soul and contributes to Anthyme's awareness of his mistreatment of Floralie. First, Néron affirms his own ability to point out a path for a wanderer: "In the forest Néron knows which way is north, and which way is south. If you're generous Néron will tell whoever is lost in the woods how to find his way" (F 52). He also identifies Anthyme's sin: "Your heart is so rotten that when you talk a person would think he's standing beside a corpse. Why have you hurt another human being?" (F 53). Néron deplores Anthyme's rejection of Floralie's love, his being dead, a "corpse," to the joy that she offers. This odd priest

becomes Anthyme's beneficent conscience and guide, accusing him of raping Floralie and leaving her under a tree. As a result Anthyme recognizes his guilt for not accepting her love: "I didn't behave like a man: I behaved like a goddam animal"; he also realizes: "I love Floralie" (F 69). Thus, Néron serves as a more humane and enlightening confessor and guide than does the official priest Father Nombriilet. Just as it was the fallen woman, Amélie, who explained to the villagers in La Guerre, Yes Sir! the reason for prayer, so it is the unofficial priest, Néron, who gives Anthyme enlightenment.

Floralie, abandoned by Anthyme, is lost on a path that is unknown to her. She is, however, confident that "a path always leads somewhere" (F 36). Floralie's path leads suddenly and dramatically to Néron who seems to know of her suffering as he knows of Anthyme's. He tells her: "your soul is a desert and your heart is a stone" (F 42). He asks her if she wants "a river, a mighty river of love" (F 42) to flow in her heart. Néron recognizes the importance of love in Floralie's life, whereas Nombriilet stresses repentance for the pleasures of love. However, the path that Néron offers to Floralie, the path leading to the United States "where gold grows like wild strawberries" (F 57), an earthly paradise that appears to be much more concrete and appealing than the one offered by her church after death, in actuality does not lead to a paradise. His vision is blinded by the promise of gold that he imagines coming from the factory chimneys: "When that smoke comes down to earth it falls in a rain of gold" (F 56). The reader realizes that the rain coming down to earth is certainly not gold, but dust, acid, and other forms of pollution that eat away at the modern city. Thus, while

Néron is an astute counsellor in affairs of the heart, even he cannot offer the path to a true paradise.

By rejecting the path to the United States that Néron offers her, Floralie must resume her aimless wanderings. Being lost poses the same threat of annihilation to Floralie as it does to Anthyme. She feels isolated, as if she were "the last woman on earth" (F 58), imagining her world "had been swallowed up by the night . . . Only [she] had escaped being buried alive" (F 59). Because of her sense of guilt, she believes her ultimate destination is hell: "Floralie was lost already in a black sea; perhaps the channel that guided her steps would lead her to Hell" (F 59). Floralie does not hope for divine guidance on her journey, but fears her course is determined by Satan.

During their wanderings Floralie and Anthyme see even natural phenomena as threats. The night, the earth, even snow can be agents of destruction. Anthyme fears being swallowed up by the earth; Floralie sees her world being swallowed up by the night. Snow obscures Anthyme's path through the forest: "Under his feet the road was somewhere beneath the snow, running east and west, but the snow had obliterated east and west" (F 95). The snow next attempts to devour him: "The snow was clinging to his legs, closing its jaws on his ankles . . . He stamped his feet and a big white cloud swallowed him up" (F 95). This cloud of snow does not remain frightening to Anthyme. Rather, it becomes warm and soft, reminding him of his mother and, to Anthyme's surprise, Floralie: "His mother was leaning over him, telling him to sleep well; she pulled the white sheets, moved her lips toward his forehead-but it was Floralie's face that Anthyme saw" (F 95).

Perhaps the perceived warmth of the snow reminds him of his mother while its sometimes dazzling loveliness recalls Floralie to his subconscious. The security Carrier offers his characters often comes from the strength of women, their sexual vitality or their maternal warmth. Women like Amélie, Floralie and Anthyme's mother follow in the tradition of strong matriarchal figures in French Canadian novels begun in Maria Chapdelaine and continued in characters such as Rose-Anna Lacasse of Bonheur d'occasion.

Finally, a chapel literally and symbolically becomes a place of entrapment and houses the cataclysm that reduces its congregation to ashes. Ironically, but appropriately, the "house of God" (F 99) to which Father Nombrillet takes Floralie is a small, enclosed place which itself is dark and decaying. It even becomes a prison for Floralie, trapped there when Father Nombrillet bolts the latch. This chapel, the site of the Mass held on the eve of the Feast of the Holy Thorn, becomes a flaming inferno which devours the pilgrims. The faithful believe this fire sanctifies those who die and allows their souls to enter heaven. Appropriately, the bodies of the victims are completely destroyed: "The red ashes made a shroud" (F 105). This concluding episode emphasizes the influence of the Jansenist belief that the flesh must die in order for the soul to achieve salvation. As it preaches this heretical doctrine, the church here is an instrument of repression rather than a source of renewed life. Again, as in La Guerre, Yes Sir!, the church becomes the devouring monster in the labyrinth.

The central motifs in Is It the Sun, Philibert?, of being lost, searching and being buried, are present in the dream the young Philibert,

son of the butcher-gravedigger Arsène, experiences:

Philibert trembling, afraid. He got up, staggering with sleep. The earth beneath his feet was eternally still. He moved his hand toward some tall plants, but the stems and flowers and bushes and thorns slipped away as though they had turned to night. He looked for his village . . . His village was no longer there . . . The child was searching in the tall grasses of night as though he had lost a ball (P 10).

What Philibert finds after his search is not the security of his home, but the burial of his village; "In the place where all the houses of the village came together there was only his father, tall and strong, throwing the last shovelfuls of dirt onto a coffin . . . His father had buried the whole village" (P 10-11). Philibert's father buries the homes of the villagers just as God the Father denies man his original home, Eden.

This dream-vision of searching in darkness for a security which eludes him occurs in reality during Philibert's stay in Montreal. In his dream, his village, symbolic of a nurturing home, escapes him and is finally destroyed by his father, the authoritarian, life-denying patriarch. In Montreal, joy, symbolized by the sun, is kept from him by masculine authoritarian figures, such as the "big guys" (P 46), of whom the old man in the boot factory speaks; and by the corrupt restaurant owner, Papakatos, whose surname evokes a paternal role. Montreal becomes a lifeless place where Philibert gets lost in a series of mazes and where his wish for happiness is in danger of being suffocated.

Philibert loses the paths that in his childhood were charming and

undeceiving. The path to his grandparents, once a "secret path" (P 14) which wound "under the canopy of fragrant leaves that sang softly for him" (P 15), becomes less comforting, even less available, as he grows older. Once, when more mature, as he journeys to their home, "He recognized the road, the pebbles. The tracks of passing cars in the mud were a writing he knew. But the willows had disappeared" (P 15). By contrast to the writing that Philibert understands, he cannot read the script of the intricate streets once he arrives in Montreal.

An industrialized society and the passage of time change the mysterious path Philibert knows to only a mud road with lifeless grass leading to his grandparents' decaying home. After the willows are cut down, "The grass was pale, deprived of their green shade, at the end of the denuded lane his grandparents' house seemed ashamed of its poor peeling wood. Rats gnawed around the base of the house. One day it would tumble down" (P 15). Just as the grass cannot stand the direct sunlight, neither can mankind. The sun's shadows mark the passing of time, the agent which leaves the grandparents with only the memory of the family circle that once existed within the now rotting house. His grandmother asks, "What's the good of living?" (P 17). Later, English businessmen swindle the son who buys the farm; the trees are removed, and the land mortgaged. The birthright of the French Canadian is easily taken from him by agents of the big guys. Philibert flees the small village trying to erase his troubled memories and to forge a path to a new life: "His memory was a white plain that stretched as far as the eye could see and his footprints were the first marks of a new life" (P 21).

When Philibert arrives in the city, he is almost at once caught in the doors of a city bus. Philibert hesitates in boarding the bus because it promises him warmth yet threatens him with loss: "A bit of warmth caressed his face. He would go in. He didn't dare. Where would this bus take him, anyway?" (P 22). When the driver impatiently closes the door, "The bus shot forward with Philibert wedged between the two halves of the door, his head inside and his feet, kicking, on the outside. The bus moved on, smug as a cat with a mouse in its jaws" (P 22). Finally, Philibert is spewed into the muddy streets, alone and abandoned. This image of his being helplessly trapped by a death-bringing force foreshadows many of his later experiences in Montreal. He cannot free himself from the dehumanizing aspects of the city that thwart his quest for happiness, just as the mouse cannot free itself from the jaws of the cat.

The paths that should assist Philibert achieve his quest are indecipherable to him or lead him to homes that reject him. He optimistically begins clearing the snow from sidewalks, believing his task will be simple: "When he had finished digging the passage through the snow he would ask for what he had coming to him and go find something to eat" (P 24). But his efforts only lead him to the homes of people who do not understand his language or do not wish to acknowledge him. When Philibert is rebuffed in English by a homeowner, he returns the snow to the walk. The path that Philibert thinks will lead to warmth and food, essential to life, proves to be a fruitless one.

Philibert, through ignorance, loses the mother-lover figure that he meets in one of the homes in Montreal just as he deliberately tries

to lose the memory of his own mother. The absence of maternal warmth increases the loneliness of Philibert's journey. This woman, whose walk he shovels, lets him into her home because of pity, because he reminds her of her dead son. In turn, Philibert sees his own mother in the woman's eyes. Appropriately, when she seduces Philibert, he feels like a child again. Finally, he loses the woman because he cannot trace a path back to her sheltering, nurturing home. The streets themselves certainly do not point the way back to "the sweet lady's house" (P 33); rather, they threaten to crush him: "All at once a street had moved imperceptibly, another had twisted, trembling gently, and it seemed to Philibert that the immense hand of the city was closing up. He would be crushed between these streets that looked so much alike" (P 33). A hostile force with the power to annihilate him presents a new threat to Philibert.

The subterranean spaces in which Philibert increasingly finds himself represent the tunnels in the maze through which the hero must journey in order to find the object of his quest. These underground, dark places recall to the reader the graves Philibert's father dug and are thus associated with decay and death rather than the light and life Philibert seeks. His journey emphasizes the death-like atmosphere of the city and the absence of any life-giving vitality. The trench Philibert digs down the middle of Sainte-Catherine Street reminds him of death, as all that he sees around him is "this dead city earth" (P 41). Philibert fears being engulfed in the trench he is digging: "The gash in the street might close back up and Ste. Catherine Street would come together like the Red Sea. It could swallow up Philibert" (P 41). Instead of preserving the lives of the chosen as did the parting of the Red Sea,

the streets of the modern city threaten man with annihilation. In this novel the monster in the maze is the city itself which encloses man in darkness and can devour him.

Philibert associates the indecipherable maze that Montreal presents with his sense of failure. When he is peeling potatoes in the cellar of Chez Papa restaurant, "the rotten night . . . recalled to Philibert the muddy earth his father dug in the spring" (P 61). His world is now filled with the decay and death he left his village to avoid. He asks himself, "Am I preparing for failure?" (P 61). His fear of failure is vividly expressed in the image of paths that lead nowhere:

Then all the streets of Montreal were leading him to failure. When he had travelled all the roads that lay in wait for him and all the streets that appeared before him, Philibert would drop from exhaustion and he would have to say 'It was all useless' (P 61).

Meditating after leaving his job with Papakatos, Philibert sees futility in everything he does: "it was for nothing that he had left his village where people died for nothing like dry trees . . . The long road that had brought Philibert to Montreal had led him to nothing" (P 66).

The paths available to Philibert do not lead him to a source of vitality that would restore himself and his community to health. The maze that threatens Philibert is no labyrinth built by an architect; it is a jungle-like city with no apparent logical plan. His minotaur is the huge impersonal city itself. Philibert is no modern Theseus; there is no Ariadne with a thread to secure his escape from the twisting tunnels, and by himself he cannot defeat the forces that oppose him.

The journey that Carrier's characters undertake is impeded by their having to cope with forces which would rob them of their vitality and that are not countered by equally powerful benevolent ones. Despite the odds against them, some men and women do survive their passage through the tortuous maze. They remain true to their search for the light of the sun and to their desire to enjoy the pleasures offered on this earth.

CHAPTER VII

Salvation

The final phase of the pattern of the Fall deals with man's recovery of a lost state of grace or innocence, or his transcendence of his fallen state in order to live a life of some fulfilment and meaning. In Carrier's fiction, as in the quest myth more generally, man's enhanced existence, indeed his survival, may depend upon his success in coping with and triumphing over the hostile forces which threaten him and hinder the fulfilling of his quest. According to the quest myth, aid may be granted to the hero on his journey to gain some enlightenment or to recover his lost paradisaal state. Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces discusses the significance of the guide who often appears in the guise of an old crone or old man:

What such a figure represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny. The fantasy is a reassurance—a promise that the peace of Paradise, which was first known within the mother's womb, is not to be lost . . . that though omnipotence may seem to be endangered by the threshold passages and life awakenings, protective power is always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart and even immanent within, or just behind, the unfamiliar features of the world. One has only to know and trust, and the ageless

guardians will appear.¹

Carrier dramatically illustrates attitudes that would lift from his protagonists and their communities the bonds that deny them joyous, fulfilled lives. The mortification that the church demands of its adherents is most vividly countered by the revelations of the Seven Deadly Sins in the dream-vision of Floralie, Where Are You?. Each sin reveals its necessary presence and significance for the people listening to them. For instance, Envy tells them "without me you would be obliged to accept life in all its unfairness, all its inequality" (F 90); Wrath roars at them "It's thanks to me life hasn't squashed you like insects" (F 91). Lust, who most reminds the audience of the devil (perhaps because he is the most tempting of the sins), informs them that: "I live in your heads and your hearts . . . It's through me you'll be damned but I'm a very pleasant companion on the road to Hell" (F 92). The audience must admit that the Seven Deadly Sins, speaking for life fully lived, serve as an essential part of their own lives. Although, according to their church, these sins are the cause of damnation, the men and women secretly disagree with their priests: "The actors were telling the truth. None could have lived without the deadly sins, but at evening prayers or at confession they had to say they were guilty of acting under their influence" (F 90). Carrier's characters must reject church doctrine before they can enjoy their human nature.

Those characters, other than the Seven Deadly Sins, who offer a

¹ Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, pp. 71-72.

glimpse at what is necessary for salvation, all recognize the body's essential role in man's happiness. Néron, the eccentric priest in Floralie, Where Are You?, counters the teachings of the official church in the importance he places on man's enjoyment of his physical nature. He informs Floralie: "Your heart is a sterile land because your body wills it to be. The plant of love will never flower, because your heart says no to it. The plant of love is sick" (F 41-2). Néron astutely sees this denied or diseased love as the cause of Floralie's distress, while Nombrillet, the official priest, insists she must confess and put aside her affair with the Italian, which he identifies as a sin. True to his convictions about the importance of human love, Néron condemns Anthyme's denial of Floralie's love, a denial precipitated by his church's teachings that brand Floralie a fallen woman. Néron's seduction of Floralie recalls to her the delightful experience with the Italian railway worker, the very act Nombrillet condemns, even as he relives it vicariously while listening to her confession. Nombrillet thus inadvertently reveals the deep need for love and passion in his own austere life. The equal importance of body and spirit is stressed by Néron who wishes to bring both back to health, to melt the "white frost" (F 85) of denial that covers man's life. Néron's belief in enjoying life is soon reinforced in this same novel by an old man, in romance a traditional figure of wisdom,² who sanely assures Floralie after the conflagration which destroys the chapel that "it's better to be a flesh and blood girl than a saint of smoke and ashes" (F 106). Sainthood of

² Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 69.

the orthodox sort involves a denial of earthly pleasures; the old man, perhaps speaking for Carrier, stresses the importance of flesh and blood in living men and women.

Carrier also presents characters who identify the secular source of man's predominantly joyless existence. Throughout the trilogy, characters acting as wise old men identify the "big guys" (G 23) as the ones who dominate the political and economic lives of the French Canadians. A thin man at Bralington Station, one of the characters in La Guerre, Yes Sir!, blames the "big guys" for Corriveau's death and for the war itself; he is convinced that "this war, it's the war of the big guys against the little ones, Corriveau's dead. The little guys are dying. The big guys last forever" (G 23). In La Guerre, Yes Sir! the "big guys" are clearly identified with the English military. The thin man sees the "good Lord" as being "even bigger than the big guys" (G 23), but still one of them.

Is It the Sun, Philibert? further explores the theme of the conflict between the powerful and the enslaved. The old man at the boot factory, another wise old man who can aid the hero, answers Philibert's question about who is responsible for his misery: "'The guy that's responsible,' said the old man, 'is the good Lord. He made the world the way he wanted, with rich guys and poor guys, with little guys like us and big guys'" (P 46). Philibert's attempts to remove himself from his bosses' claws meet with the old man's approval; he tells Philibert he could have been "a real diamond in the rough. You could be a Prime Minister" (P 47). In this last novel of the trilogy, the big guys emerge as unnamed powers--the Anglais businessmen who rob Philibert's uncle of his

inheritance and the superiors of the foremen on Philibert's various jobs who keep the workers in tow.

Communication between those in authority and those without power is hindered by their not speaking the same language. In La Guerre, Yes Sir! the person who can, to some degree, lessen the gap between the rural French Canadians and the English soldiers is Molly, the Newfoundland prostitute whose name evokes the memory of another lover of life--Molly Bloom in Joyce's Ulysses. Carrier's Molly, too, is a sensuous figure who affirms her sexuality in a culture, much like that of Joyce's Ireland, that believes sex is sinful. Significantly, Molly is the one who can translate the requests of the French Canadian parents to the Anglais soldiers. Her limited knowledge of French comes from the French Canadian soldiers she meets professionally. She sympathizes with the "young soldiers who used to come to her bed to forget that no one loved them" (G 73). Thus, not only is she able to communicate with both groups, but Carrier also allies her with the young soldiers, with the little guys. Molly tries to ward off the threat of death that the war brings by asking Bérubé, now her husband, to make love to her. In her eyes, triumph over death, however tenuous, will come from human sexual love. By communicating both with her body and her speech, Molly represents a life force that struggles against those who would deny it, and demonstrates the possibility for a bridge between the two warring groups. However, Molly is soon lost to the community. In the funeral cortege of the Anglais soldier leaving the village, Molly, in her white dress, is the first to disappear into the horizon.

According to Campbell, the hero, with the help of the enlightening,

benevolent figures who aid him on his way, may obtain the object of his quest and return to his ultimate destination--his home. In Carrier's trilogy homes illustrate both the sources of man's suffering and his salvation; his protagonists encounter homes on their travels or return to ones that reflect the powers that threaten them or that offer nurture and solace. A joyful home may only exist in memory, as does the grandparents' home in Is It the Sun, Philibert?. Philibert's grandparents recall a time when their now decaying home was filled with children and when their house "got younger because we were young" (P 16). For a time their house could defy the effects of age; however, the house is now a "pigsty" (P 16), in the words of Philibert's grandfather. In the grandfather's eyes the family unit, broken by the children's leaving and then by their greed, can no longer keep the home intact. Later, the English businessmen are to gain control of the farm and the home is to become altogether lost to the family.

Some homes do offer comfort and a nurturing atmosphere to Carrier's wandering protagonists. The Corriveau home in La Guerre, Yes Sir!, to which, in a grotesque parody of the quest for restoration, the dead son returns in his coffin, houses the riotous wake. The home, even while in mourning, contains an active charity and vitality which lessen the presence of death. The grieving parents offer nourishment even to the stoic Anglais soldiers to dispel the atmosphere of mourning. The food and drink they offer, the tourtière and cider, contain fruit that symbolize the fulfilment of nature's promise, affirmation of the hoped for coming of spring. The Corriveau feast counters the church's communion service; thus, it is the home, not the church, that offers a

source of renewed life.

In general in Carrier's trilogy, homes in which there are strong maternal figures offer the most compassion, fulfilment and promise of joy. Maternal warmth and affection are necessary for comfort and security in a fallen world. Amélie's home in La Guerre, Yes Sir!, filled with her numerous children and two husbands, is dominated by her voluptuous presence and frank desire. Both Henri and Arthur, dazzled by her body, remain in her home, which offers refuge from the war they are fleeing. Amélie does not want the two men quarreling over her in her home so she offers a compromise: "both of you gets his turn in my bed, that's the rule" (G 12). In her simple directness she thus manages to limit the war's disruption of her life. Similarly, the Englishwoman Philibert meets in Montreal tries to overcome the class and language barriers separating them by her sensuality and warmth. She shows a compassion for the youth who appears at her doorstep and first offers him food. It is true that the nourishment available at her home does not measure up to the feast offered by the Corriveau (she abstemiously serves tea and buns). Sexually, she brings joy to Philibert; she initiates him "Between her perfumed, embroidered sheets . . . sheets softer than her hands on his body" (P 31). However, she is soon lost to him, for in his ignorance he cannot find the way back to her home-- thus putting himself back into a destitute position without the mothering and voluptuous warmth of her house.

At one time Philibert's home in his small village offered warmth in the presence of his mother. He once ran to kiss her and to show the toy car in the Christmas present he opened prematurely. At that time

his mother's warmth overcame his father's harshness, whereas later Philibert's memory of her is tainted by the image of her body marred by repeated childbearing. He thus tries to forget his unsatisfying home.

As in Philibert's home, paternal figures are often authoritarian and deny the protagonist the nurturing love of a mother, much as God the Father expelled Adam and Eve from Eden. Later this estrangement from a life-enhancing security is reinforced by the male dominated society in which the protagonist lives. The warmth, love and compassion that the mother might offer in the home thus is dispelled by fathers who know how to communicate only with harsh words and deeds. Philibert's father, the butcher/gravedigger, Arsène, throws Philibert's toy car into the snow to teach him a cruel lesson that Philibert learns all too well by his later disappointments. In the first novel where the father and son appear, La Guerre, Yes Sir!, Arsène wishes to teach Philibert not to blaspheme: "He would have liked his son to understand, but he knew that gentleness is never effective. So he buried his boot in Philibert's behind and repeated the action until his leg was tired" (G 15). Arsène is so incapable of showing affection for his children that on days he butchers "His favorite would receive as a gift the animal's frozen tail, slipped into his shirt by a cold red hand" (P 12). Frozen into his society's code of masculinity, Philibert's father associates affection only with femininity. After the game where Arsène leaves the child Philibert in a grave, Arsène assesses his son's delight and display of affection upon being rescued as being effeminate: "A real female, this little baptême" (G 107). Thus, the father is portrayed as a kind of tyrant whose communication with his children is limited to blows and more subtle

torments.

Floralie's father, too, cannot demonstrate his love for his daughter; he resorts to a bullying behavior, which only widens the gap between them. When her father does desire to show her affection as a child, his approach is unpleasant to Floralie because of his bearded roughness. Floralie recalls her father's bearded face: the "black ball would turn the child upside down and crush her, rubbing her face, scratching her cheeks, crushing her nose, grating her ears . . . her face would be all scratched and bruised until it looked like a skinned knee" (F 78). To punish her for not wishing to kiss him, her father perversely tears apart "the scribbler in which she had traced her first words" (F 79). His gesture of breaking up her words stops any real communication between them. From then on Floralie comes to hate her father and he in turn cannot bring himself to speak to her even on her wedding day. Throughout Carrier's novels the fathers, who know only authoritarian strength rather than warmth and affection, characteristically make their homes intolerable.

If the world in which Carrier's characters live is so damaged and darkened by the Fall, and if they themselves suffer from maimed bodies and fragmented language, it may seem their quest for happiness in a maze that threatens to engulf them can offer little or no hope. It might be doubtful whether the figures who illuminate their journeys, or the homes they encounter and to which they return, promise a recovery of grace and a chance for an enriched existence. It appears that Carrier's hope, and it is a tempered hope in view of its rarity, lies in man's enjoyment of his physical nature and commitment to living as spontaneously and

joyously as possible despite the life-denying self-righteous powers that threaten him. Carrier speaks of resisting this force against which people have little, if any, control, in an interview published in the journal Nord. He identifies such defiance as

un thème qui résume tout ce que j'ai écrit, une force contre laquelle chacun doit lutter, mais avec la dignité de celui qui sait qu'il ne peut rien contre elle. Prenez, par exemple, la mort. On ne peut rien contre elle, mais il faut lutter, non pas désespérément, mais avec beaucoup d'espoir, de joie, de plaisir, même s'il n'y a rien à faire.³

Carrier presents to his readers figures who embody his philosophy, such as Amélie and Joseph, who affirm their vitality and love of life in a community that is oppressed with the suffering and death inflicted by World War II and repressed by the denial of the flesh demanded by their church. Amélie's sensuality and wisdom, like Joseph's courage and will to live, are pitted against the dehumanizing military powers which are personified by Corriveau's coffin, the robot-like behavior of the Anglais soldiers, and the paralysed Bérubé. Carrier most strongly affirms that the pleasures of the flesh are not to be denied, but enjoyed, in the dream-vision of Floralie and Anthyme. The Seven Deadly Sins testify to the damaging effect of denying man's instincts. Nombriquet personifies the defeated, tormented psyche that results from such denial. Néron espouses a unity of body and spirit which does not deny, but encourages,

³ Line Gingras, Rodrigue Gignac, and France Verreault, "Entrevue avec Roch Carrier," Nord, No. 6 (Autumn, 1976), p. 16.

the satisfaction of the body's desires. Philibert's formidable quest to enjoy the light of the sun in the dehumanizing, decaying city of Montreal meets with failure, but his desire for light and joy is not quenched.

The chances of recovering a state of innocence and grace are severely limited in Carrier's fiction, but it is useful to know that Carrier set his trilogy in what he calls "the last third of Quebec's dark ages,"⁴ presumably with some hope for deliverance. Carrier explains in an interview with Donald Cameron that when he returned from Europe in 1964 at the beginning of the quiet revolution, he wished to understand the feelings of his separatist friends:

I told myself that maybe by writing I could really live what people had lived before, some years before. I thought that taking a little village, which is a microcosm, would be a good place for me to let live all those forces which were in the French Canadian.⁵

While La Guerre, Yes Sir! explores the political feelings of French Canadians and their resistance toward English Canada, Carrier in Floralie, Where Are You? depicts the workings of the French Catholic conscience. Is It the Sun, Philibert? questions the possibility of success for a young ill-prepared French Canadian moving from a rural to an urban environment. Carrier relives the time when repressive political, religious and social institutions dominated the lives of Quebeckers. The reader may identify

⁴ Fischman, "Translator's Forward" to Is It the Sun, Philibert?, p. 3.

⁵ Donald Cameron, Conversations with Canadian Novelists (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1973), p. 15.

these powers as embodiments of universal life-denying forces that thwart man's instinctive vitality.

As well as identifying the powers against which man should struggle, Carrier also advocates positive values for which they could strive. For example, in that same interview in Nord, he speaks of a need for a religious viewpoint different from the prevailing one:

La religion, c'est autre chose, une autre attitude, une autre forme d'amour, de générosité, de volonté de vivre que ce qui a été officialisé. Il faut se dépouiller le plus totalement possible pour arriver à une autre forme de regard vers les frontières de la vie, puis vers l'absolu.⁶

Carrier certainly indicates this belief in his portrayal of religion in the trilogy. The theme of the struggle against an insurmountable force Carrier sees as a universal one: "A un niveau plus profond, c'est le sort de tout homme, même dans des sociétés dont on peut rêver, d'être plus faible que le système dont il fait partie, plus faible que des forces comme la mort, le vieillissement ou l'exploitation. . . ."⁷ Just as man's plight is universal, his desire to overcome his suffering is part of his humanity.

In his trilogy Carrier affirms that in a fallen world, man must give his own existence meaning by being true to the sustaining human desire for joy on this earth. Deliverance from a fallen state will not come from

⁶ Gingras, Gignac, and Verreault, "Entrevue avec Roch Carrier," p. 13.

⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

repressive, life-denying political or religious systems, it will come from the simple joys of the body, and especially from the powerful sexual love that exists between men and women.

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