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Role of nature in the novels of Ringuet

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THE ROLE OF NATURE IN THE
NOVELS OF RINGUET (DR. PHILIPPE PANNETON)

by

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Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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[Signatures]

Chairman of the Board of Examiners

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INTRODUCTION

Along the banks of the St. Lawrence River stretches the vast province of Quebec, homeland of nearly three million French Canadians who exist next to an English-speaking civilization and yet preserve a separate culture and language. For three hundred years this rapidly increasing race has fought valiantly to maintain a national unity by emphasising the forces which make possible the survival of their race. The rich historical background, the cultural and spiritual tie with France, the preservation of a common language and a common religion, and an extraordinary devotion to la terre¹ are the important unifying elements which have bound these people together during their heroic struggle to become a strong national, economic and cultural family.²

Despite the constant migration of thousands of French Canadians to the United States, particularly to the industrial cities of New England, the population of Quebec has increased steadily due to the unusual fecundity of this race in which the family is the basic social unit. Until

¹La terre has a more general meaning to the French Canadians than just earth or soil; it refers to the farmland and all that belongs to it.

recent years, it was primarily an agricultural society and the long strips of farmland passed from generation to generation, a family inheritance that yielded abundant harvests for those who tilled the soil and remained in constant contact with la terre. Today, however, the traditional rural areas are being transformed into turbulent centres of industry and great urban masses. Quebec has the highest percentage of urban population of any Canadian province due to the wartime industrial development. Greater Montreal, the metropolis of Canada, now includes half of the population of the province.¹

The cultural development of this French-speaking community has not progressed so rapidly as the industrial. However, the provincial government, by encouraging a broader school curriculum and wider horizons of higher education, has augmented the subjects of instruction to an international level in order to meet the problems resulting from industrialization.² Previously, the educational system was designed for members of the clergy and for the professional class who have, consequently, produced the preponderant part of the French-Canadian literature.

After 1850, several notable works appeared in the

²See Wilfred Bovey, The French Canadians To-Day (Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons (Canada), Ltd., 1938), pp. 172-189.
literary field: Garneau's *Histoire du Canada* and the prose and poetic works of Crémazie, Casgrain, and Fréchette, members of the Quebec literary school of 1860. The French-Canadian literature has always had a mission. It has been a true reflection of the life and problems of the race and an instrument of propaganda for those who advocated the cult of the soil, a homogeneous race and a national religion. In this connection, we cannot overlook the influence of Abbé Groulx, an historian who stresses the problem of the defense and survival of the French Canadian people and whose eloquent orations are designed to promote

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1 François-Xavier Garneau, 1809-1866, published the first history of Canada ever to be written by a French Canadian. The entire work consists of three volumes now in their seventh edition. It is considered a literary masterpiece, because, as Ian Forbes Fraser remarks: "the nature of the poetic intensity (of Garneau's history) transforms his account of historical events into an epic of a steadfast people. The clarity of its composition and the excellence and eloquence of its style place it among the distinguished works of Canadian literature." With the publication of this history, French Canadian literature entered an era in which it was to make important contributions to the national culture and spirit.

2 Octave Crémazie, 1827-1879, Quebec poet whose historical works are characterized by their national themes. He began a French-Canadian literary movement which was influenced by the French Romanticists and which was a challenge and inspiration to his successors.

3 Abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, 1831-1904, an historical novelist whose writings reveal his extreme interest in French-Canadian folklore and pioneer life.

4 Louis-Honoré Fréchette, 1839-1908, outstanding historical poet and first French-Canadian man of letters to see his work crowned by the French Academy.
national action. His contemporary, Monsignor Camille Roy, has also been noteworthy in the defense of the old literary traditions through his contributions in the fields of education, religion and literary criticism.

The important unifying forces which have made possible French-Canadian solidarity have been paralleled in literature. After 1900, the novel became a popular literary form, especially the novel of manners, due to the immense success in France and Canada of Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916), a story which idealized the life of the colonial farmer. To advocate the advantages of cultivating the soil and of living close to nature became the self-appointed task of a great many novelists who firmly believed that the preservation of the race depended upon the regionalist movement. A realistic reaction to this movement was inevitable and it began, more or less, with the publication of *30 Arpents*, a novel by Ringuet, which exploded the romantic idealization of rural life.

Other contemporary authors accepted the challenge and French-Canadian literature finally underwent "the

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2Mgr. Camille Roy, 1870—, is a firm believer that French-Canadian literature can become significant only through complete nationalization. As rector of Laval University and as the major French-Canadian literary critic, he has played an influential role in maintaining profound traditionalism and social conservatism in the national literature.
transition from a dogmatic age to a scientific age similar to the change which took place in Europe last century.1 Roger Lemelin, a contemporary of Ringuet, aided the transition with his novel Au Pied de la Pente Douce, a satirical criticism of the social and economic conditions of Quebec. The anti-traditionalist elements in the literary works of Ringuet and Lemelin parallel the recent emergence of Quebec from a state of cultural colonialism and provincialism to one of literary and industrial maturity. The modern trend in French-Canadian literature is to produce works which are distinctively French and Canadian in subject, treatment and style, and is exemplified in the works of Ringuet.

"Ringuet" is the pseudonym of Dr. Philippe Panneton, a member of the Académie Canadienne Française and a physician of Montreal whose forbears came to Canada in 1640, and whose paternal ancestors immigrated in 1686. Philippe was born in 1895 to Eva Ringuet and Ephrem François Panneton, probably people of means since they were able to educate their son at the University of Montreal and send him abroad for further study in the field of medicine. It was during this sojourn in Europe that Panneton developed an interest in the writing of fiction and a year later, in collaboration with Louis Francoeur, he wrote Littératures, à la manière de . . . ., a collection of parodies on the literary works

of several French Canadian men of letters, including Mgr. Roy and Abbé Groulx. In the preface, the authors state that the book was written for the amusement of themselves and perhaps their readers; nevertheless, the seeds of resistance to traditionalism and conservatism were sown and continued to grow throughout the pages of Panneton's later works.

Since a literary career was considered rather a plebian pastime for a respectable physician in pre-war Quebec, Panneton's advent into the literary world fourteen years later was made under the maiden name of his mother, Ringuet. His first novel, *30 Arpents*, appeared in 1938, having been composed over a period of ten years. The slow settling of details into their due order and emphasis during this ten-year period may have had something to do with its immediate success in the French as well as in the English, German and Dutch versions. But two years later, Ringuet was awarded the coveted Prix de l'Académie française, the Prix des Vikings and the Canadian Governor General Award for literature.

Those who expected Ringuet's next work to be a sequel or successor to *30 Arpents* were disillusioned when *L'Héritage, et Autres Contes* appeared in 1946. *L'Héritage*, a collection of short stories very reminiscent of the style of Guy de Maupassant, merited greater success than the public accorded to it. One French-Canadian periodical

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explained the situation thus:

Après 30 Arpents, on attendait un autre 30 arpents. Il ne vint pas, et on eut la naïveté d'être surpris. C'est ainsi que L'Héritage et autres contes fut reçu avec une certaine froideur; on le classa comme inégal, et il n'en fut plus question. Personne ne le lit plus aujourd'hui; donc personne ne sait qu'il contient quelques-uns des plus beaux contes de notre littérature.

Proper recognition was given to the short stories, however, by the Académie française, and again Ringuet was awarded the Prix.

In 1947 Fausse Monnaie was published and this time the public was justifiably disappointed. Ringuet's attempt to write a psychological novel resulted in the production of a mediocre, artificial work which lacked all the charming elements so characteristic of 30 Arpents. He realized the mistake and in order to redeem himself, began to construct a novel which has just recently been published: Le Poids du jour. It is the true successor to his 30 Arpents, but it is not a sequel, nor even an epic of rural life; Le Poids du jour is the story of the city dweller, the French Canadian in an urban and industrial environment.

A variety of themes and backgrounds distinguish the versatile work of Ringuet; however, there is one thread of thought common to all of his novels and that is a preoccupation with nature and the natural forces. He has considered

nature all of those forces which are not artificial and which relate to the physical universe: the soil, the weather, the seasons and all like forces which create the phenomena of the material world. It is this broad definition which is to be used in the following analysis of the rôle of nature in the literary works of Ringuet.
CHAPTER I

THE CHILDREN OF NATURE

The theory which Ringuet used in creating the people of his novels is an animalistic theory which assumes that man, living in a primitive environment, is a creature governed solely by instincts, customs, and natural forces. The habitant\(^1\) of Quebec and the native of the tropic climes have no desire to embellish their environment, no wish to contribute to the development of the arts and sciences; they seek only to satisfy their natural needs, passions and avarice. Ringuet, through the medium of literature, has attempted to counteract the romantic movement of the French Canadian regionalists who advocate the primitive life as the ideal state of man. His approach to the problems of the French Canadian habitant is objective and sympathetic, leading us to believe that at sometime during his life, he has observed people in primitive societies and has made a profound study of the changes imposed upon the traditional

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\(^1\)The French word habitant is usually translated to mean an inhabitant or dweller; however, in Canadian and particularly in French-Canadian literature, the term refers to a farmer or planter. Ringuet explains the colloquial use of the word in the following passage from his novel 30 Arpents: "'Les habitants!' les Canadiens de la petite patrie laurentienne, ceux du pays de Québec."
rustic culture by the impact of a developing urban and industrial civilization. The results of his observations and studies of the French Canadian peasant formed the basis for the novel *30 Arpents*.

It is the story of a habitant and his attachment to thirty *arpents* of Quebec farm land. The earth or terre is the principal actor in this drama portraying the eternal struggle of man to combat and control the elements of his environment in order to earn his livelihood and build a heritage for future generations. The farmer, Éuchariste Moisan, does not succeed in his attempt to dominate the soil, which is a permanent force that yields only temporarily to the caprices of man.

The novel begins with the death of the old uncle, Ephrem Moisan, who wills the thirty-*arpent* farm to his nephew, Éuchariste. The boy finds himself the heir to possessions which are nominally his but which can only be claimed if he devotes his life to the terre. Since farming in itself has few compensations, Éuchariste becomes subservient to the land because of an innate desire to possess and transmit the heritage which has belonged to a Moisan for two hundred years.

Ringuet divides the book into seasons which correspond to the stages in the life of man. During the Spring

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1 Thirty *arpents* is equivalent to about 110 acres, the size of the average farm in Quebec. The farms are long and narrow, usually measuring a little over a mile in depth and with 300 yards frontage along a river or a road.
and Summer of life, Euchariste becomes the master of a productive farm and of a prodigious family, though the reign is superficial and lasts but a short while. The denouement of the drama begins with the disintegration of the family: the departure of the eldest son, Oguinase, for an ill-fated religious life; the death of his wife, Alphonsine; and finally, the repudiation by a younger son, Ephrem, of farm, race and country for city life. Gradually Etienne, the second son, takes over the possession of the land and in the end, completely displaces his father, whom he sends on an extended visit to Ephrem's home in the United States. Diverse circumstances prevent the old man from returning to his farm which embodies all the things he knows and loves; however, there always remains a spark of hope:

Il n'a pas renoncé à retourner là-bas, à Saint-Jacques; renoncer, cela voudrait dire une décision formelle qu'il n'a pas prise, qu'il ne prendra sans doute jamais, qu'il n'aura jamais à prendre. Ce sont les choses qui ont décidé pour lui, et les gens, conduits par les choses.¹

To be uprooted and rejected by the land and family to which Euchariste had devoted his whole lifetime seems pathetic; however, Euchariste accepts the situation without self-pity. The forces of nature have so completely conditioned his way of life that he is no longer able to break the bond:

... avoir vécu toute une vie en communion avec la terre, il en avait pris le rythme et l'avait

¹Ringuet, 30 Arpents, p. 292.
fait sien. Avec l'automne finissant descendait sur lui le repos, une espèce d'engourdissement, comme aux animaux hibernants le sommeil, et aux graines enfouies dans le sol la mystérieuse et annuelle léthargie qui prélude à la germination. Puis comme aux bêtes et aux plantes, le soleil revenu du sud lui injectait un sang nouveau, bouillonnant et insatiable de fatigue. Depuis soixante ans cette cadence naturelle était la sienne, avec quoi avaient rompu les gens des villes. Et voilà que le printemps grandissant faisait en lui germer l'instinct profond.¹

Several of the short stories of Ringuet² are also concerned with the reaction of primitive people to the natural forces. L'Héritage is an episode about a young man, Albert Langelier, who must escape from the city where he has been involved in some illegal business deals, and decides to hide out on the farm left to him by his father. At first, the neighbors accept the presence of this stranger in their midst and willingly sell him the seed and equipment needed to grow tobacco. Nature, however, is not so hospitable. A scorching sun after weeks of drought withers the young plants before Albert is able to irrigate them. As the situation grows worse and the crops are ruined, the peasants begin to suspect that the city man is an ill-omen who has brought about their misfortunes. Albert himself feels that he is a malchanceux fated to be a ne'er-do-well and therefore renounces his heritage and returns to the city.

¹Ibid., p. 267.

²A collection of the short stories of Ringuet is published under the title of L'Héritage et autres contes and includes: L'Héritage, Nocturne, L'Immortel, L'Amant de Venus, La Sentinelle, L'Étranger, Le Sacrilege, Le Bonheur and Sept Jours.
*Sept Jours* is a day by day account of the events in the peaceful town of Saint-Julien, one of the numerous French Canadian villages scattered along the banks of the St. Lawrence and its tributaries. These villages are the centre of community life for the surrounding agricultural districts and are more rural than urban despite their proximity to the metropolitan areas of Montreal or Quebec City. In the story of *Sept Jours*, the monotonous daily routine of the people of Saint-Julien is disrupted by the arrival of a stranger from the city who refuses to impart the reason for his visit and contents himself by wandering around the countryside, completely unaware that he is the object of much consternation and conjecture. The farmers fear that he is a cattle inspector; the local politicians believe him to be a city engineer planning to bid for local construction contracts and those in debt are certain that he is the bank investigator. Every day the tension in the town increases as the people await a catastrophe which never happens. The stranger returns to the city after having spent a peaceful vacation and the villagers, with a sigh of relief, happily resume their humdrum existence:

Que s'était-il passé? Rien que d'ordinaire et de quotidien. Rien que de petits événements mille fois répétés depuis les années et auxquels personne n'eût attaché d'importance si le ciel n'eût ranci l'humeur des gens et si, surtout une présence insolite n'eût jeté sur tout cela le piment de l'extraordinaire. Avec le beau temps venu, chacun reprit son assiette, oubliant le vent et l'orage avec cette facilité.
hour euse propre aux enfants et aux simples. 1

It is probable that Ringuet received inspiration and background material for La Sendinelle, Le Sacrîlêge and L'Étranger during trips to the West Indies, Europe and the Near East. Exotic Nature forms the backdrop for La Sentinelle, a tragic tale of the human and material waste that resulted from the attempt of the French engineer, de Lessups, to conquer the vegetation and fever of the jungle in order to build a Panama Canal. The sentinel is the brave and faithful man who was left behind by the French crew to guard the unfinished ditch and the abandoned machinery. For forty years he watches the gradual process by which the jungle obliterates the man-made scar, refusing to accept defeat by Nature and confident that in the end man will be the conqueror.

La Sentinelle tells of the failure of man to modify Nature; Le Sacrîlêge of Nature's modification of human nature. The theme of the latter story is based on the fact that too often coincidence confirms the superstitious beliefs of ignorant people. Lémann, a white man who prefers the native existence to that of his own race, derides the ancient Tahitian claim that leprosy is the chastisement of the gods for the sacrilege of violating a taboo by touching a native idol. He considers himself living proof that the

1Ringuet, L'Héritage et autres contes, pp. 179-180.
superstitions of the natives are groundless until he discovers that the touch of the tiki is fatal and he has become a living cadaver of decayed flesh.

Most of the characters Ringuet portrays in his short stories are not primarily children of Nature in the same sense as the peasants of 30 Arpents. They are generally people who feel oppressed by civilized life and seek an escape in primitive environments. Robert Lanthier, in the conte entitled L’Etranger, has always dreamed of a nomadic life in the deserts of the Orient even though he is a successful lawyer. When his ambitions are finally realized, he finds the spell of Islam is the magic potion of happiness. So complete is his acceptance of primitive living that he dies in attempting to defend it against those who wish to impose civilization upon his adopted brethren.

In his latest novels, Ringuet has changed his character type from the primitive to the ultra-civilized. Fausse Monnaie concerns a group of young people from the Montreal social set who escape from the mental and physical hazards of urban life during a week-end trip to the Laurentian mountains. The beauty of Nature creates a mysterious atmosphere around them in which everything appears good and virtuous. The charm is broken by fickle Nature, who sends a dismal rain to wash away the illusion. Only one girl, Suzanne Lemersurier, remains enthralled by Nature in all of its benevolent and malevolent aspects. She is grateful for the storm which drives away these week-end intruders whose
Interests and affections are so temporary and superficial. The night is a companion who speaks to her with a thousand friendly voices and who throws a merciful cloak over all that is evil and ugly. Susanne tries to explain her sentiments about Nature to one of her companions:

Pourtant j'y suis venue bien des fois, par tous les temps de l'année, en toutes les saisons. Je croyais tout connaître du lac à l'Aube. Et bien, non! J'ai vu les nuits d'hiver. Elles sont ici coupantes et dures. On se sent pris dans un bloc de glace pure et transparente; tandis qu'en nos cœurs la vie chaleureuse court et proteste. J'ai vu les nuits de mai, légères, où le vent tiède souffle sur les mains de la terre pour les réchauffer. Et d'autres nuits d'été avec, comme ce soir, la lune, et la douceur du lac, et les étoiles.¹

Le Poids du Jour, as the author states in the preface is "l'histoire d'un homme qui, comme tant d'autres, porta longuement le poids du jour et la chaleur."² The man is Robert Michel Garneau, who, in his youth, leaves his hometown to search for happiness through financial success and power only to realize, in his old age, that happiness is found in oneself and not in one's material possessions. Ringuet again traces the rise and fall of a man during the natural cycle of life as in 30 Arpents. As a child, Michel Garneau is spared from hard reality by the protection and devotion of his mother, Hélène, and by the benevolence of his parrain who is more kind and understanding than Michel's own father, Ludovic. After Hélène's death, Michel becomes

¹Ringuet, Fausse Monnaie, pp. 87-88.
²Ringuet, Le Poids du Jour, p. x.
completely disillusioned when he accidentally learns that he was illegitimately conceived. In his despair, Michel feels his only chance for respectability is in the city which represents wealth, power and escape to him.

The second part of the book pictures Garneau as an industrialist who is feared in the business world and respected by his friends and family. Even to himself, Michel refuses to admit that he is not happy and that material success has failed to stamp out the shame of his past:

Ce qu'il désirait vaincre surtout, --il ne s'en rendait point compte-- c'était non pas un monde, ni un pays, ni une capitale, mais bien une petite ville.

Ringuet calls the winter of Garneau's life "La Soumission de l'Homme."

The edifice which represents the work of an entire lifetime begins to crumble and Michel is rejected by his environment in much the same manner as Buchariste Moisan was rejected by his farm and family. One by one the foundations crumble: his wife Hortense dies, leaving him to care for their two children; his son Lionel, in whom Garneau had hoped to see his greatest ambitions realized, must leave the country in disgrace; and finally, Michel's own untimely sale of his factory and poor investments reduce the structure to ruins. In a last attempt to find happiness, the old man turns to his daughter Jocelyne, whose gentle manners and physical features are a painful re-

\[1\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 157-158.}\]

\[2\text{Ibid.}, \text{Title of the third part of the book.}\]
minder of his indiscreet mother. However, it is through Jocelyne that Garneau finds the peaceful atmosphere of his childhood and is able to reconcile himself to the memories of the past:

Toute sa vie, sa vie d'homme surtout, ses quarante ans de vie d'homme, il n'avait rien trouvé de ce qu'il cherchait. Et vraiment, qu'avait-il cherché? Une victoire? Il n'avait point vaincu. Une vengeance? Elle ne lui avait pas été donnée. Pourtant, il avait ce soir le sentiment que ce qu'il avait si longtemps cherché, il l'avait enfin trouvé.

There is a gradual progression in the fiction of Ringuet from the preoccupation with primitive people to the analysis of the ultra-civilized man. The real children of Nature in his works are those who are completely subjected to an environment in which the natural phenomena determine the pattern of life. In this category there is the French Canadian peasant, exemplified by Euchariste Moisan, who through ignorance and fear has become a serf to his land and a prisoner to the forces of Nature over which he exerts little or no control. In the second category of social progression there is the villager. Ringuet describes small town life in Sept Jours and more extensively in the first and last parts of Le Poids du jour. Since the villager lives in close proximity to the rural districts, his cultural development closely parallels that of the farmer. The third group of Nature's children includes the urban dweller who finds a temporary or permanent escape by abandoning the

1Ibid., p. 410.
complex life of the city and adopting the ways of his more primitive brethren. Numerous examples of these escapist are to be found in the novels and short stories of Ringuet. Albert Langelier, the heir in L'Héritage; Robert Lanthier, the nomadic lawyer in L'Étranger; Lémann, the leper in Le Sacrilege; Susanne, a débutante in Fausse Monnaie; and finally, Michel Garneau in Le Poids du jour are the outstanding protagonists who were able to find a more satisfactory life in a primitive environment.

Ringuet does not advocate that the ideal state of man can be found in the French Canadian rural areas or in the tropical islands of the West Indies. If anything, he discloses the frustrations and fears of those who make no attempt to control the natural forces or to contribute to the development of the arts and sciences which would make possible even greater control over the environment.
CHAPTER II

NATURE AS A MALEVOLENT FORCE

Man, and especially the man of the fields, encounters nature in the role of a bitter enemy with whom he must constantly struggle in order to wrest a living from the soil. Ringuet emphasizes this aspect of nature in the following passage of 30 Arpents:

La terre, impassible et exigeante, suzeraine impérieuse dont ils étaient les serfs, payant aux intempéries l'avenage des moissons gâtées, assujettis aux corvées de drainage et de défrichement, soumis toute l'année longue au cens de la sueur. Ils s'étaient regroupés sur et presque contre la dure glèbe dont on ne tire rien qui ne lui soit arraché à force de bras.1

Malevolent nature is the fate which, in many ways, determines the destiny of the peasant by destroying his crops with flood waters and drought, by killing the buds on the trees with frost, by pervading the human race with sickness and disease and finally, by extinguishing the spark of life.

The earliest recollections of the farmer are usually of the evil aspects of natural forces which clouded his life with fear, anxiety and despair. The only memory which Euchariste Moisan has of his childhood, for example, is of the terrible fire which started on the farm after weeks of

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130 Arpents, p. 18.
drought, burning his family in their beds and reducing the ancestral farm into a charred ruins. During his lifetime, Moisan is thwarted time and again by this unconquerable opponent, nature, who wields absolute control over the birth, life and death of both his family and his crops.

Among the French Canadian peasants, the birth rate is very high, but the infant mortality rate is equally high, due to the primitive living conditions and the dearth of proper medical treatment. Those who do survive through childhood have better than average chance of being decimated by epidemics of croup, typhus and smallpox.¹ Ringuet, being a doctor himself, naturally tends to emphasize the evils of disease and conditions which are favorable to the contagion of disease. In 30 Arpents Oguinase dies of consumption, and in Le Poids du Jour Jocelyne's betrothed spends several months in a sanatarium recovering from tuberculosis. Jocelyne herself is a victim of infantile paralysis which weakens her left arm permanently. Her mother, later in the story, is stricken with a fatal heart disorder. Ringuet devotes an entire short story to the fear and ignorance of the natives concerning the causes of leprosy and the concluding chapters of his two major novels² deal with the decline of the human body through the infirmities of old age.

¹Ibid., p. 218.
²Le Poids du Jour and 30 Arpents.
The farmer's fear of death is matched only by his anxiety about the weather and his despair when the crops are destroyed by the inclement forces over which he has little or no control. He must stand helpless and watch the swollen river carry away the fertile soil, or the August rain rot the meager harvest already impoverished by an early summer drought. No human effort seems great enough or pleon loud enough to appease angry nature. Such calamities and reversals of fortune would probably cause the urban dweller to abandon the land; but, Moisan, like all French Canadian peasants, accepts his lot with a fatalistic philosophy:

L'habitude lui était venue rapidement, et la passivité dont sont imbues ceux, hommes et bêtes, dont les décisions ne sauraient jamais être conditionnées que conditionnées par la pluie et le vent et la neige, pour les hommes; par les mêmes choses plus les caprices des hommes pour les bêtes.1

The newcomer to the land, like Albert Langelier in L'Héritage, is often unable to face catastrophe so placidly. After an earnest attempt to accept the hard and unrewarding rural life, Albert realizes that he is not equipped with the necessary attitude towards and feeling for the earth which constantly opposed his efforts:

Albert s'étonna de se trouver encore dans ce décor qu'il avait l'impression d'avoir déjà quitté; il se retrouvait devant ses champs à lui comme au jour de sa venue: un étranger. Il lui semblait qu'il ne les connaissait point et qu'eux non plus ne le reconnaissaient pas; et que la sécheresse avait

130 Arpents, p. 30.
détruit leur alliance temporaire après avoir bu avidement ses sueurs vaines. Il lui parut que son ombre même n'adhérait point à ce sol.¹

Nature appears more evil and destructive to the peasant than to the city dweller in the novels of Ringuet because the people of primitive societies have not yet devised methods of controlling the environment to the same extent as have more civilized groups. Urban life is complicated more often by the complexities of human nature than by those of Mother Nature. However, even the ultra-modern structure of civilization is not completely fortified against the forces of nature despite the advancements of scientific and medical research. The modern miracles of science and medicine are constantly solving the problems which face humanity, but what invention can spare man, rural or urban, from the certainty of old age and death?

Nature is sometimes the malicious deceiver who creates an illusion momentarily, then derides those who fall under her spell. In Fausse Monnaie, the petulant Suzanne is actually spoiled and artificial, but, bathed in the moonlight of the Laurentian mountains, she appears a simple and lovely child. Ringuet compares her dual-personality to the difference between a wild meadow and a well-kept garden:

Le premier semblait un champ balayé de soleil et de vent; le second, un parc, enclos d'un mur de pierre, que l'on devinait magnifique et quelque peu apprêté.²

¹L'Héritage, p. 34.
²Fausse Monnaie, p. 19.
So perfect is the illusion created by nature that Suzanne's friends feel that their former impression of her was wrong and that "elle se fût enfin révélée, à la faveur de circonstances dont l'agencement imprévu et délicat pouvait seul se prêter à l'élosion d'un pareil secret."\(^1\)

The effects of the magic potion of nature fade again against the garish lights of the city and Suzanne again dons her cold and impenetrable shell. André, who had become a victim of Suzanne's charms, wonders if, "tout cela, qu'il avait connu, était-ce bien réel? . . . cet air magique dans lequel il avait vécu une griserie qu'à regret il sentait se dissiper?"\(^2\) The atmosphere in which his love for Suzanne was born has suddenly disappeared and in his disillusionment, he concludes that all women, despite superficial appearances, are alike: "Eve, toujours."\(^3\)

The children of nature seldom appreciate the poetic aspects of rural life which are enjoyed only by those for whom the monotonous tasks of farming are not a part of the daily round. It never occurs to the peasant, for example, to think of the satisfaction of working one's own land, the stimulus of broad horizons, the thrill of a good harvest—all compensations which exist in theory but of which the farmer is hardly, if ever, aware. The things the habitant

\(^{1}\)Ibid., p. 91.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., p. 193.

\(^{3}\)Ibid., p. 95.
remembers best are the storms, the frosts and the anxiety over a harvest threatened by hail or drought. He does appreciate the grandeur of nature, perhaps, but this grandeur overwhelms him by its immensity and reduces human effort to near impotence. The despair and frustration felt in the face of vast nature is expressed by a Moisan who has abandoned his farm for city life:

Jamais il ne songeait à ces satisfactions que sont la joie de soigner un bien qui est à soi, la stimulation des espaces larges, le triomphe des récoltes réussies; tous agréments qui sont théoriquement vrais mais que, en fait, le paysan perçoit bien rarement, si jamais. Et moins encore à la beauté claironnante des matins sur les prés humides de rosée, à toute cette poésie agreste que seuls goûtent ceux pour qui rien de tout cela n’est quotidien. Il ne lui restait mémoire que de la fatigue des bras aiguillonnés par l’orage ou les gelées prochaines; du souci de la moisson menacée par un nuage gonflé de grêle. Certes la nature champêtre lui paraissait grande, si grande, en vérité qu’il se sentait annihilé par son immensité même. Il aimait mieux dépendre d’un homme. Et de tout cela il ne regrettait parfois que les longues flâneries de l’hiver. Sa boutique lui donnait un sentiment que son cousin ne pouvait connaître; celui d’être le maître des choses. Non, pas un instant il n’avait regretté la terre.  

Albert, in the conte L’Héritage, realizes his incompetence to cope with the oppressive forces of nature when he is unable to irrigate his tobacco plants adequately during the long season of drought. The moment arrives when the crops can no longer survive without moisture and the sky is filled with the heavy storm clouds which mean rain to

130 Arpents, pp. 94-95.
thirsty fields, but evil nature again dupes the farmer and the showers fall on another area. Albert's reaction is one of despair and disgust:

Albert s'abandonnait à une voluptueuse lâcheté. Au début lui aussi, comme les autres, avait tenté le sauvetage, hissant vers ses champs, sous les coups de massue du soleil, cette eau que refusaient les célestes fontaines; puis il avait renoncé. Chez les voisins, on était six, huit, dix; il était seul. Et surtout, un dégoût s'était emparé de lui, un dégoût paisible et fort, né de son impuissance. Il se rendait compte maintenant que la nature n'était point simple et que pour lui le livre était illisible.

It was this same feeling of helplessness which Alphonsine Moisan experiences as she watches the gradual disintegration of the family group. The children have made bearable for her the humdrum existence of farm life and now they are being taken away from her by marriage, school and other natural causes. She accepts these events as the inevitable pattern of life over which she has no control:

La mère est un peu triste, d'une tristesse lourde et profonde qui engourdit, comme ces longs moments d'été lourds de vent et d'orage qui ne s'abattront point. Sur elle non plus ne crèvera pas l'averse des larmes, que rendrait futile, par comparaison, la grandeur de ce qui les entoure: l'immensité indifférente des éléments dont les passions s'expriment en convulsions profondes qui sont les tempêtes, les incendies, les inondations.

The power of nature to defeat and overwhelm human effort is a universal force which affects urban and rural

1 L'Héritage, p. 29.
230 30  Arpents, pp. 87-88.
dwellers alike. The greatest creations of man are dwarfed when compared to those of nature. Robert Garneau, even after having successfully mastered the complex industrial world, realizes the futility of trying to equal the magnificence of nature or attempting to make major changes of one's environment. In the business world, money gave him the power to create. However, when faced with the task of constructing a home in the wilderness, his efforts to alter the course of nature are almost futile:

It is likely that de Lessups, after making a valiant attempt to build the Panama Canal, felt that nature was making fun of the impuissant human race and of its insolent behavior. Ringuet describes the awe-inspiring forces of nature which defeated the French engineer as they appear to

1In the second part of Le Poids du jour, Garneau uses the name Robert instead of Michel.

2Le Poids du jour, p. 305.
a tourist several years later:

Sous mes yeux, le soleil mitraillait la fosse immense où le projet titanique du grand ingénieur pourrissait depuis... je ne savais plus combien d'années, depuis combien d'âges. Moi aussi, je vacillais un peu. Il y avait cette avalanche effroyable de la jungle, en suspens, prête à dévaler, à engloutir tout cela au moindre signe de résurrection; il y avait les moignons noircis des grues, tendant vers le ciel, comme des mains, les restes de leurs godets calcinés. Par moment cela me semblait bouger, s'animer, esquisser des gestes noueux et forts: tout droit, pour ensuite descendre virilement vers la terre et la mordre, mordre et déchirer le linceul morbide.1

Many aspects of nature and the natural forces appear evil to man because he is subjected to them. Nature in her malevolent role opposes, deceives, thwarts, over­whelms and in other ways shapes the destiny of the human race. However, Ringuet does not suggest that nature is evil in itself. The ignorance of man breeds suspicion of all that is unfamiliar; suspicion of the unfamiliar breeds fear; and fear makes possible the enslavement of man by his environment. Man, therefore, is the relative factor that makes nature appear evil. For example, during the spring of the year when moisture is needed to make the seeds in the field sprout, rain is considered by man as a blessing. If, however, the August rains rot the crops before they can be harvested, nature becomes a thief who robs man of his livelihood.

Civilization is man's attempt to conquer nature by

1"La Sentinelle", L'Héritage et autres contes, pp. 90-91.
protecting himself from the conditions which thwart social, intellectual and spiritual development. The ideal state of man should not be an eternal serfdom spent trying to obtain the bare necessities for survival; it should be one in which man contributes to the happiness of his fellow men by embellishing his environment through the arts and sciences. It is not necessary to live in an urban and industrial environment in order to strive to attain the perfect state of existence, but it is not to be found among the ignorant and superstitious inhabitants of rural areas such as they are today, despite the claims of the advocates of a regionalist movement.
CHAPTER III

THE PERSONIFICATION OF NATURE

Des âges lointains, restait en lui un sentiment obscur qui personnifiait la terre; elle était toujours la fille du Ciel et l'épouse du Temps, la Bonne et féconde Déesse à qui l'on offrait les prémices des troupeaux et des moissons.

The most serious criticism of the literary works of Ringuet has not been of ideas which he expounds but of his style of exposition. Several critics have commented on the inordinate use of similes and metaphors and the excessive description which characterize his novels. One reviewer makes the following observation concerning the literary style in which Arpents is written:

On aura pu trouver l'action trop lente, à cause précisément de l'abondance de la description; . . . L'écriture est sans doute le point faible du roman; on lui a reproché avec raison certaines négligences à l'égard de la grammaire, le dévergondage des images, la lourdeur et l'embarras de bien des phrases. . . . Il n'a pas cette qualité éminemment classique du choix; il jettera sur le papier des paquets d'images et de mots sans s'inquiéter toujours de leur concordance et de l'équilibre du tout.2

It is likely that Ringuet had significant reasons for interspersing his writing with profuse descriptions of

120 Arpents, p. 72.
nature. In the first place, the characters created by Ringuet, especially those in primitive environments, are concerned primarily with nature and the natural forces; therefore, the major portion of the narrative is devoted to this subject. In 30 Arpents, la terre is the leading personage in the drama and the habitants are the supporting actors who, without la terre, could not exist at all. The last words of the book illustrate the deliberate intention of Ringuet to emphasize nature as the protagonist of the story and to relegate man to a secondary place:

... chaque année la terre laurentienne, endormie pendant quatre mois sous la neige, offrit aux hommes ses champs à labourer, herser, fumer, semer, moissonner...;... à des hommes différents...;... une terre toujours la même.1

The survival of the French Canadian farmer depends upon his perseverance in tilling the land and maintaining a "constant watchfulness over nature's changing moods."2 To the habitant, the land is more real and more human than the flesh and blood people who surround him. Each year the farmer forms a greater attachment to the thirty-acre farm, which means more to him than his family or his own person:

... il ne cherchait qu'une alliance, mais qui se réaliserait absolue; l'alliance avec la terre, la vieille terre des Moisan dont chacun de ses gestes prenait possession, que chaque sillon tracé par lui marquait de son signe, que chaque clôture refaite de sa main barrait aux autres. Qui chaque année devenait

130 Arpents, p. 292.
2Ian P. Fraser, op. cit., p. 153.
The earth is constantly referred to as a person who influences the habitant throughout the entire cycle of his life. In the Spring of life, Euchariste Moisan accepts the earth as a bride whose dowry is the heritage passed down from the preceding generation. According to the rigid customs and traditions of the French Canadians, Euchariste is forbidden to desert la terre just as strictly as he is forbidden by the laws of the Church to divorce his wife, Alphonseine. Death alone can sever the bond between the farmer and his land.

Il était mort sur sa terre, poitrine contre poitrine, sur sa terre qui n'avait pas consenti au divorce.

Euchariste looks upon sa terre as a wife who is changeless and unfeeling, without tenderness nor compassion who demands life-long devotion of the habitant and in return yields abundant fruit although indifferent to the sower of the seed. Being naturally avaricious, Euchariste often feels that the impartiality of the earth is unjust and that she should protect him, her faithful servant, and punish those who seek to do him harm. When Etienne gradually takes possession of the Moisan farm, and again when Phydime Raymond cheats him in a business deal, Euchariste pleads with

1 Arpents, p. 173.
2 Ibid., p. 30.
3 Ibid., p. 206.
Nature to chastise these oppressors:

Et chaque fois qu'Etienne l'emportait sur lui, il se laissait aller une fois de plus à espérer que la terre se prononcerait enfin, prendrait parti contre son fils, lui donnerait enfin raison. Mais la terre et la ciel restaient sourds à leurs disputes. Le champ qu'Etienne avait voulu, contre l'avis de son père, semer de trefle, donnait pleine récolte. Tout comme il ne pouvait pleuvoir sur la terre d'Euchariste sans qu'il plût aussi généreusement sur celle de Raymond, les sauterelles ne connaissaient point de frontière entre la domaine du volé et celui de voleur. Cela semblait injuste, monstrueux.

Si bien qu'il en était venu à souhaiter que la sécheresse brûlât sa récolte en même temps que celle de Phydime plutôt que de les voir toutes également riches.

Ringuet portrays la terre as a woman who allows the plow to penetrate her fertile womb in the Spring, swells with promise during the long months of Summer and becomes a generous mother by Autumn. Sleeping under the frost-trimmed blanket of Winter snows, the earth recovers her fertility which would otherwise become impoverished.

La terre plays yet another role in the pageant of rural life. She is a stately sovereign whose serfs must pay their dues in the form of ruined harvests, who must be subjected to the forced labor of clearing away forests and the tilling of endless furrows, compelled day by day to pay their tithe in sweat. The thirty arpents of Moisan, though nominally his, in reality possess him still more completely, never allowing freedom from their tyranny, their whims and their stern law.

Et cela suivant l'ordre établi depuis les millénaires, depuis que l'homme abdiquant la liberté que lui permettait une vie de chasse et de pêche, a accepté le joug des saisons et soumis sa vie au rythme annuel de la terre à laquelle il est désormais accouplé. Euchariste: les champs; Alphonse: la maison et l'enfant. La vie passait de la terre à l'homme, de l'homme à la femme, et de la femme à l'enfant qui était le terme temporaire.

The French Canadian peasant subjects himself to the fundamental laws of nature more readily than to the laws of God. Fatalistically, he accepts the fact that there is a predestined order of things imposed by nature which can not be changed:

Projecter des années à l'avance? A quoi bon! Puisque au gré du sort peut vivre ou mourir le petit des hommes comme au gré du temps une récolte peut pourrir ou sécher sur pied.

Nature, therefore becomes a demi-god to whom the habitant offers not only the fruits of his life but the most perfect sacrifice, life itself. This attitude of the peasants does not conflict with the teachings of their religion or is it sacrilegious for they feel that, "un homme qui aime la terre, c'est quasiment comme aimer le Bon Dieu qui l'a faite."

To the children of the habitant, nature is the teacher whose blackboard is the face of the earth, whose classroom is the great outdoors and whose textbooks contain all of the knowledge of the natural world. The process of learning

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1Ibid., p. 50.
2Ibid., p. 84.
3Ibid., p. 127.
begins as soon as the child leaves the house to wander in the fields. Here he learns that he must obey the laws of nature and be able to profit by them through his own experience and that of his forefathers.

The protagonists in the works of Ringuet, other than in 22 Arpents, are human beings; consequently, nature plays only a minor role. Still Ringuet has a tendency to impregnate his writings with colorful similes and metaphors which produce vivid backgrounds for his stories about Quebec and the other places in which he is interested. In the conte Sept Jours, the sun is described as a magician who hides the coolness and shade, dissolves the wind and the storm and pulls a lovely summer day from its endless bag of tricks.\(^1\) The wind of evening in Le Sacrilège rustling the fronds of the palm trees sounds like the "respiration des étoiles,"\(^2\) and the waves of the tide breaking on the coral reefs beat like "le pouls de l'infini."\(^3\) In the story of La Sentinelle, Ringuet compares the humidity of the fetid jungle to "une poisse brûlante, sirupeuse, qui coulait . . . de la jungle prochaine."\(^4\)

Night is one of the elements of nature which has been constantly personified in all of the novels of Ringuet but

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\(^1\) *L'Héritage et autres contes*, p. 178.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 123.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 125.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 83.
especially in *Fausse Monnaie*. La nuit is a companion with whom Suzanne Lemesurier converses more freely than with young people of her own age. The shroud of the darkness obliterates the artificial world and guards the secrets confided to it by human souls. André Courville feels the night is the accomplice who helped Suzanne to capture his love:

Cette solitude de la nuit! Cette complicité de la nuit! Ce silence de la nuit! Cet appel de la nuit! Suzanne et la Nuit, mains jointes comme deux sœurs éternelles et toutes attendant, toutes deux espérantes!  

The peasants of Ringuet are often compared to the lower forms of plant and animal life. As a child, Euchariste is contrasted to a sapling surrounded by the older trees which interlace their branches around him in order to protect him until he matures. When Uncle Ephrem dies, Euchariste is alone in the family thicket, standing amid the thirty acres, surrounded in spring by furrows, in summer by golden waves of grain, and in the winter struggling with the north wind and the blizzards. And like a tree, he will be a shelter and a refuge to the harvesters who will be his own sons, until the day when the lightning strikes him down and dries up the sap of life.  

In the summer of his life, Euchariste is pictured as looking with satisfaction along the road of his life which is long and monotonous and marked with the deep ruts of habit:

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1 *Fausse Monnaie*, pp. 94-95.
2 *See 30 Arpents*, pp. 43-44.
Euchariste Moisan pouvait désormais contempler placidement sa route; tout droit derrière, tout droit devant; à travers les champs ingénous des années, l'une blonde du souvenir de récoltes heureuses, l'autre lourde de paître un plus beau troupeau. Un chemin calme creusé d'ornières profondes par l'usure continue des mêmes gestes; parfois coupé de ressauts ou de flaques troubles; souvent ombragé; rarement brûlé de soleils cuisants. Un chemin paisible et long, monotone peut-être, mais qui se traçait droit comme un bon sillon; une douce montée vers le terme de l'horizon où il viendrait à disparaître en un cassure brusque et nette, en plein azur, un jour, plus tard.¹

Ringuet describes another road of life in *Le Poids du jour* --the peaceful pathway carefully chosen by Hélène Garneau which detoured around the shadows of sorrow and the hills of hardship in order to pass through the sunny meadows of contentment:

Elle avait une façon confiante, ... de chercher la voie facile, d'éviter les montées qui s'offraient un peu dures; préférant faire une détour, pourvu que ce chemin de côté eût un peu de soleil, qu'il fût en le même temps ombragé et qu'elle pût s'arrêter à cueillir un brin de foin d'odeur ou à regarder un écureuil faire de l'équilibre sur une branche de frêne.²

The people of urban environments are not so concerned with the forces of nature, therefore, *Le Poids du jour, Fausse Monnaie* and the short stories about civilized societies contain relatively few passages of descriptive narrative in comparison with *30 Arpents*. It is evident that Ringuet emphasizes nature to set the mood for the story

¹Ibid., p. 155.
²*Le Poids du jour*, p. 76.
and not merely to over-burden his writing with prose poetry. To the French Canadian farmer nature is a real person; sometimes a benevolent mother; often a strict teacher; and always the powerful sovereign who is the source of life and death. To the city dweller, nature is only a distant relative whose infrequent visits are marked by earthquakes, raging floods and destructive hurricanes which reduce man-made structures to heaps of rubble. She is also the generous country cousin whose fresh and pure house welcomes the sick, the tired and the failure of the city, giving them temporary or permanent refuge from their travail.
CHAPTER IV

HUMAN NATURE AS A REFLECTION
OF PHYSICAL NATURE

As man develops from the primitive to the more highly civilized stages of society, he exercises greater control over his moods and emotions as well as over his environment. The absolute control of one's environment, if possible, would presuppose a state of human perfection inasmuch as there would no longer exist any external impediments to complete happiness. At present, however, society is still in a puerile stage and the degree of human happiness is conditioned by the amount of frustration encountered in everyday life.

The peasant, because he is generally more the servant of nature than its master, reflects the earth's changing fortunes in his moods; he is confident and satisfied during periods of prosperity and despairs when floods, hail and other elements of nature destroy the fruits of his labor. There is a deep sympathy between the farmer and his land due to the complete dependence of each upon the other. Ringuet stresses the relationship of flesh and soil in the story of Euchariste Moisan and his trente arpents:

Euchariste . . . se penchait machinalement pour prendre une poignée de cette terre in-
Moisan develops a strong attachment for and sympathy with nature because he owes his existence to the generosity of the earth and he repays this debt by his subservience and devotion to the land. An ill suffered by the farm is a personal affront to the owner, which is exemplified when the vicious neighbor Phydime Raymond excavates and sells the red ocher from a piece of land that was formerly a part of the Moisan farm. Euchariste is enraged; partly because of the bad business transaction which he has made, but above all because it is "his" land that is being carted away. The wound being made in the earth is like a wound in his own flesh:

Tout au fond, en arrivant, il vit un trou béant à flanc de côte, une plaie vive où saignait la terre chargée d'ocre rouge. Il resta ainsi un moment, figé, son coeur reflétant la blessure de sa terre, de la vieille terre des Moisan violentée par un autre, par Phydime Raymond.2

The peasant attitude toward life is a reflection of the permanent nature of the land, which, though fickle at times, remains a solid and enduring force. The city dweller does not have a similar force with which to form a stable


2Ibid., p. 178.
attachment and his life is, therefore, characterized by a constant restlessness, a shifting about in transitory surroundings, which are built up, torn down and rebuilt. It is often a more precarious existence than that of the farmer and explains why the inhabitants of more civilized societies are apt to be more unstable emotionally than their rural counterparts. The two ways of life and the effects of each on man are described in the following passage:

Il le savait, car la terre lui en était témoin; et que planté en plein terreau, à la merci des vents et des saisons, il n'entrait dans la succession des choses que passivement, pour les subir ou en tirer profit. Car il sentait, obscurément, que toutes ces vicissitudes n'étaient que les expressions fugitives d'un persistant visage. . . . Et là-dessous, toujours, la terre constante, éternellement virginale et chaque année maternelle. Cela lui donnait comme une certitude de durer, dans la continuité des générations qui sont les années des hommes du sol. Tandis que l'homme des villes, sans cesse mobile et passager au milieu des choses passagères et mobiles qu'il crée, détruit, recrée, ne saurait vivre que d'une vie précaire et momentanée. ¹

Man in every society is subjected to a certain yearly cycle which corresponds to the cycle of nature. With each advent of spring there comes a new awakening, greater hope and a willingness to shoulder the tasks of every-day living. Winter is the period of hibernation when the blood seems to course more sluggishly through the veins and the body rests in preparation for its work during the rest of the year. This cycle is not so definite in the tropical areas where the natural seasons are less well-defined nor in the areas

¹Ibid., pp. 155-156.
where industrialization demands the unnatural operation of its component parts year in and year out. Perhaps this is the reason why there is a common desire among the characters of Ringuet to remain in, or return to a primitive state in which the human body is able to attune itself to the rhythm of nature.

The men and animals of the forest and field live harmoniously in a natural environment, regulating their existences to correspond with the seasons of the year. The winter respite following the hectic period of harvesting allows the farm and farmer to regain the strength and virility necessary to produce future harvests of wheat and humanity.

Et cela parce que d'avoir vécu toute une vie en communion avec la terre, il (Euchariste Moisan) en avait pris le rythme et l'avait fait sien. Avec l'automne finissant descendait sur lui le repos, une espèce d'engourdissement, comme aux animaux hibernants le sommeil, et aux graines enfouies dans le sol la mystérieuse et annuelle léthargie que prélude à la germination. Puis comme aux bêtes et aux plantes, le soleil revenu du sud lui injectait un sang nouveau, bouillonnant et insatiable de fatigue. Depuis soixante ans cette cadence naturelle était la sienne, avec quoi avaient rompu les gens des villes. Et voilà que le printemps grandissant faisait en lui germer l'instinct profond. 1

The four seasons of the year are used symbolically by Ringuet to correspond to two different cycles of human life. In the first place, the day-by-day existence of the

1 Ibid., p. 267.
peasant must be regulated by the annual life of the soil. The habitant plows the newly thawed earth and sows it with seed which will grow during the summer months and will yield a bountiful crop in the autumn, ready to repeat the same performance after the short rest of winter. The second natural cycle is on a larger scale and embodies the entire span of the life of man. The spring and summer of life represent the development from infancy through early manhood as in the natural cycle it represents the growth from seed to sapling. The next stage is maturity, during which time man reaches the peak of physical and mental perfection unless thwarted by the antagonistic forces of disease as the fields of summer are sometimes thwarted by malevolent nature. When the autumn of life approaches, man becomes more and more a bystander who muses joyfully over the memory of his own attainments and who dubiously observes the course followed by the younger generation who have taken over "le poids du jour." Old age is the twilight of the human day when man is no longer a part of the struggle for existence and must, therefore, content himself with spending his final hours in retirement as an observer. The compensation during this period is the satisfaction that dreams and desires have been realized and

1 The life span of Éuchariste Moisan is divided into four epochs corresponding to the four seasons. The divisions of the book 30 Arpents are thus entitled: Printemps, Été, Automne and Hiver. Ringuet has divided the life of Robert Garneau in Le Poids du Jour in a similar manner.

2 Title of Ringuet's novel is taken from the Bible, Matthew 20:12.
that a place is being made for those who will receive an inheritance enriched by the generations which preceded them.

Jocelyne Garneau, standing on the threshold of her own maturity, symbolizes the passivity with which the personnages of Ringuet view nature's rejection of human life when she gazes upon her infant son:

Parlant de printemps et d'été, s'est à son fils qu'elle était revenue. Qu'importait l'hiver de la nature quand dans le berceau le printemps était là, vivant.2

The attachment between man and nature is a physical as well as a spiritual bond. The anxious hours spent watching the changing moods of nature are imprinted in deep lines on the human countenance as the plow imprints the face of the earth with long furrows. The arms and hands of the farmer are gnarled and deformed from their constant struggle to wrest a living from the soil. The whole physical frame of the habitant is bent towards his master, the earth, who too often burdens the human shoulders with a weight too heavy to bear.

Car leurs bras et non leur yeux les reliaient à la grande nourricière, leur bras trapus que le dimanche paralysait et faisait pendre inutiles le long des montants de leur chaise. Les mains seules apparaissaient hors les manches de grosse étoffe, des mains brutes et cal­leuses, semblables chez ces deux hommes d'âge

1 Jocelyne was the only daughter of Robert Garneau in Ringuet's latest novel, Le Poïdes du jour. She married Adrien Léger, a writer, and they had a son whom they named Michel after his maternal grandfather.

2 Le Poïdes du jour, p. 409.
Ringuet has a tendency to emphasize the expression of emotions in his characters by paralleling human moods with natural phenomena. This correlation of physical and human nature is especially evident in *Fausse Monnaie*, the plot of which stresses the reflection of nature in human nature and vice versa. For example, André Courville contemplates a very dull weekend as the group of young people set out on the trip to the mountains. His sullen mood is reflected in nature by an unduly warm and humid September day. As André's animosity fades, the smothering heat is cooled by the mountain breezes. The climax of the story is a perfect night filled with starlight, mystery and solitude which casts the spell of love on André and Suzanne and makes them wonder if their former antagonism is not the result of a hasty judgement:

Se pouvait-il qu'entre lui et les autres, tous les autres, Suzanne, pourtant si hautaine, eût fait une différence? Qu'elle se fût enfin révélée, à la faveur des circonstances dont l'agacement imprévu et délicat pouvait seul se prêter à l'élosion d'un pareil secret? Qu'elle eût involontairement attendu ce moment présent pour verser, à son intention à lui, André, dans la coupe de cette nuit magique la liqueur précieuse de sa tendresse qui, si longtemps oubliée et méconnue, dormait au fond du calice virginal de son cœur?

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1 *Arpents*, p. 8.
2 *Fausse Monnaie*, p. 91.
Upon returning to the city, however, Suzanne loses her simplicity and charm which, it seems, was only a reflection of the enchanted night. André, his despair deepened by the dreary autumn rain, searches in vain for the love which was only an illusion:

The complete harmony between the moods of man and those of nature is one of the most dominant traits of the novels and contes of Ringuet. So different are the social settings and the people about whom he writes that it is difficult to find a thread of thought which passes from one story to another and therefore characterizes the work of the author. In most of his works, however, Ringuet correlates happiness with the warm days of spring and the sunny months of summer; despair and dejection with the gloomy seasons of autumn and winter. The successes and failures in the lives

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1 Ibid., p. 198.
of his characters can be predicted by the descriptive passages which precede them.

Rain sets the mood for every major catastrophe in the life of Robert Garneau in the story of *Le Poids du jour*. There is rain the day his father smashes his violin, the night his first-love rejects him and again the evening of the death of his wife, Hortense. Rain is the element which is symbolic of the tragedy of Garneau's life just as warmth and sunshine are the symbols of the happy dispositions of Hélène and Jocelyne Garneau. Even though there is a cloudy sky and a wicked north wind blowing on the day of her wedding, Jocelyne's spirit is not dampened by the adverse weather, "Le temps est jaloux de moi," explains the lovely bride, "J'ai toujours aimé le gris. C'est ma couleur préférée."¹ Here again the author makes arbitrary use of the natural forces in order to reflect the emotional atmosphere of the joyous occasion:

Enfin, juste au moment où la noce descendait le trottoir du parvis sous les hauts érables bruissants, le soleil parvint à s'ouvrir un œil entre les nuées. Un rayon illumina le cortège et fit scintiller les eaux douces du Richelieu.²

Ringuet states in *Sept Jours* that "le temps s'était mis du concert,"³ with the feeling of anxiety and fear which pervaded the small village of Saint-Julien during the week-

¹*Le Poids du jour*, p. 351.
²Loc. cit.
long visit of the stranger from the city. Not only is the monotonous routine of the people disrupted but the wind begins to howl through the streets and the "douce Rivière-aux-Sangaues, profitant des averses, gonflait ses eaux et se donnait de faux airs de torrent."¹

Man preserves his reflection of nature by means of art, music and literature, making it possible for everybody to enjoy the scenes and sounds of far-off lands. The people which Ringuet creates are not primarily interested in embellishing their environment or pursuing intellectual pastimes. There are, however, a few characters who stand out in Le Poids du jour because of their artistic reflection of nature. The first is Garneau as a child whose love of music inspires him to learn to imitate the sounds of nature on his violin:

Il jouerait les airs qu'il connaissait, ceux qu'autour de lui tout le monde chantait. Il jouerait aussi les airs qu'il entendait, lui, et que les autres ne semblaient pas entendre: les chants des oiseaux et des bêtes; les chants des arbres et des collines; les chants du vent et de l'eau. Il jouerait surtout les chants que personne n'avait jamais entendus que lui, parce que ces chants étaient en lui, naissaient en lui, en réponse à ceux qui lui venaient de tout ce qui vibre et vit par le monde. . . . Les airs nouveaux, captivants, magiques, qui sourdaient du tréfonds de son être comme jaillit une source entre les herbes folles et les iris sauvages.²

The same natural talent for music is possessed by the

¹Loc. cit., p. 48.
²Le Poids du jour, p. 19.
Garneau's hired man, Louis-Joseph, whose songs seem to be "la rumeur même de la nature." As he works in the fruit trees of the orchard, he sings the traditional folk-songs of the hillside people, the hymns which he learned in church and also the songs which are an imitation of the sounds of the forests and the fields.

The effect of nature on human nature is universal and wind and weather produce the same states of mind and the same emotions in rich and poor, civilized and primitive, American and European. Man naturally loses his exuberant attitude toward life as the summer ends and winter approaches. Like the insects and animals, the human body instinctively tends to seek a period of hibernation in order to regain its natural vigor. Ringuet has used fire and wind to accompany the tragic events in his novels in much the same way as the artist uses browns and greys in his paintings to suggest sadness and gloom. Benevolent nature casts the same spell of solitude on the desert nomad of L'Etranger as it does on the villagers of Sept Jours, the habitants of L'Héritage and the urban dwellers of Fausse Monnaie.

1Ibid., p. 369.
CHAPTER V

NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Natural forces govern the conscious and material life of the human being and supernatural forces control the subconscious existence. The supernatural refers to that which is immaterial and superior to the recognized forces and laws of nature. Almost every society, primitive and civilized, recognizes the existence of a Supreme Being who is a supernatural force controlling man's spiritual and physical life and whom we worship through religion and its rites. Religion, according to the Christian concept, is man's acceptance of God's revelation. Religion, therefore, must be at the base of all our conscious living and must form the goal of our thinking. All that is to be learned in the created universe, and in the mind of man, is a revelation of the purpose, the Being, and the character of God, the Creator of all things. To be religious, therefore, is to be natural. That is to say, it is natural and it is human to be aware of God.

Ringuet, since he is himself a Catholic and because the people about whom he writes are predominantly members of

1See E. A. Burroughs, Education and Religion, pp. 172-173.
the Roman Catholic Church, holds a theocratic viewpoint concerning the supernatural. God is recognized as the omnipotent power, creator of all human and physical nature, which is, therefore, subject to Him. The organized church under the direction of the clergy represents the divine government on earth and is responsible for the spiritual welfare of the members.

In French Canada, and especially in the rural parishes, the priest or *curé* is not only responsible for the spiritual life but has also assumed the role of director of educational, political and medical matters. The reason for the extraordinary power of the clergy in Quebec is twofold. In the first place, at the time when the French settled in Canada, there was religious upheaval in Europe and those people who immigrated to new lands carried with them an antagonistic attitude toward the Protestant Reformation and a hope of founding a new Catholic nation devoid of corruption and persecution. Catholicism is still the national religion of the French Canadian race due to the devout nature of the people, the strength of the clergy and the emphasis given to religion in French Canadian literature. Secondly, the clergy for many years were the only educated class; consequently, they established the schools, dominated political opinion and controlled the literary field. The only libraries to be found in Quebec until recently, were those belonging to the churches and religious schools.¹

¹See Ian Forbes Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-122.
Every possible effort has been made to maintain the power and prestige of the clergy. It is considered a great honor for the French Canadian families to dedicate their sons and daughters to the service of God. In the eyes of the habitant, the priest is a superior being endowed with special powers of intercession to the Throne of Heaven. In 10 Arpents, Ringuet emphasizes the attitude of the peasant towards the sanctity and superiority of the religious life when Euchariste Moisan sacrifices his eldest son and two daughters to the service of God hoping that he will be rewarded by material prosperity and social prestige in the community:

Deux religieuses et un prêtre, le Bon Dieu n’aurait pas à se plaigndre et saurait en retour se montrer généreux. Tout ce qu’Euchariste lui demandait, à part les petites choses précises de tel ou tel moment, un peu de pluie, ou la guérison d’une bête, c’était que la vie continuât pour lui telle quelle, avec de belles moissons se vendent bien.

After his ordination, Oguinase feels that he is set apart from his brothers and sisters and that they should no longer treat him as one of them. He encourages vocations to the religious life, as his beliefs are confirmed that material things should be renounced in order to attain the perfect state of goodness and virtue:

Longtemps le âme d’Oguinase avait espéré l’entraîner à la suite de Malvina, sa soeur aînée, qui depuis six ans bientôt portait le bure moniale des Franciscaines; Eve l’avait suivie sur cette route bienheureuse et douce. Ne connaissait-on pas des familles qui mourraient au

120 Arpents, p. 152.
monde pour refleurir tout entières à Dieu.¹

It is, perhaps, the nature of man to think that he is self-sufficient when fortune smiles upon him and to be dependent upon supernatural powers only during adverse times. The peasant of Ringuet, is a firm believer that there is a Divine Power who is the source of good weather and bad, of wealth and poverty, life and death. However, it is when the crops are dying in the fields from lack or rain or when death threatens a loved one, that man attempts to find solace in God. If his prayers are not answered, and when even the prayers of the priest do not appease the wrath of the supernatural forces, primitive man tries to solve his problems through superstitious practices. The belief in ill-omens arises from ignorance and fear about all things related to the mysterious world of supernatural forces which include almost all that is incomprehensible to the peasant.

In L'Héritage, the tobacco farmers believe that some evil obstacle in their environment is the cause of the drought and the displeasure of God. They are suspicious of all that is strange or extraordinary, assuming that only the familiar is good and can be trusted. Since Albert Langelier is a city man and has confessed to them that he has never been lucky, they blame him for the misfortunes which they suffer:

C'était Albert qui avait apporté ce temps de malheur! . . . Et l'absurde croyance en la

¹Ibid., p. 157.
magie qui dort partout dans les campagnes,
au creux des ravin de la nuit, au fond des
bosquets secrets, au cœur des hommes souc-
connex, se montra comme toujours en les
temps de calamité. On avait prié; rien n'était
venu. On avait chanté l'office spécial
contre le sécheresse, on avait payé messe
sur messe, rien n'était venu. Quelque chose
faisait obstacle au ciel, que de tels moyens
n'avaient rien donné.

The primitive natives of Tahiti, in the story of Le
Sacrilege, have the same superstitious beliefs concerning
disease as the farmers have about the weather. Their ig-
norance and fear of leprosy is embodied in the form of an
idol known as the tiki. Even though partially civilized,
the Tahitians continued to conform to the taboos of their
ancestral religion which taught them that human contact with
a fetish was sacrilegious and evoked the anger of the idol.
The punishment for committing a sacrilege was to be stricken
by the dread disease of leprosy:

Ils sont convaincus que la lèpre est le châti-
ment qui frappe ceux qui n'ont pas respecté le
tapou, qui se sont rendus, même malgré eux,
coupables de sacrilège.

The native and the peasant base their belief in many
superstitious practices on tradition and custom rather than
scientific fact or reasoning. Some of the superstitions com-
bine the elements of both religion and nature; for example,
the folk prophecies which seem to hold a particular interest
for Ringuet. In 30 Arpents, the farmers make predictions for
the future, expressing them in terms of the supernatural

1'Heritage, p. 30.

2Ibid., "Le Sacrilege," p. 130.
powers that regulate the natural forces:

Quant à l'avenir, il s'exprime par les prophéties de la terre, et du ciel qui fait et défaît les moissons terrestres. . . toutes les prophéties populaires sur la température, et les inductions basées sur les signes observés par les vieux et les lois vérifiées depuis toujours: "Il a mouillé à siaux le jour de l'Ascension, on en a pour quarante jours." "I'a qué'qu'on qu'a vu un pur' avant-hier; le printemps est à main."

The weather prophet in Le Poids du jour is père Gladu, a very old man who belongs to the orchard district of Saint-Hilaire and whose advanced age seems to give him the privilege of predicting the condition of the crops and the weather:

Mais pour prendre les auspices, sa tête tournait raide ment sur la jointure rouillée de son cou. Il regardait d'abord vers le sud-est, . . . puis vers le nord, . . . et enfin vers l'ouest. . . "Il pourrait ben arriver qu'il pleuve, ma fille . . . "

Some of the peasant superstitions are passed from generation to generation especially those concerning cures for common diseases. The French Canadian habitant is still suspicious of the doctor who takes hard-earned dollars and gives a little slip of paper or a small box of pills in return. The cure, in order to be effective, must be a tangible thing before the peasant will accept it:

Car la vieille en profitait pour tirer chaque fois de son expérience quelque nouveau remède traditionel; c'est elle qui le guérit de la coqueluche en lui suspendant au cou, par une ficelle rouge, une coquille de noix où était enfermée une chenille. Dès que la chenille

1 Arpents, p. 34.
2 Le Poids du jour, pp. 292-293.
fut désséchée, le mal disparut.¹

Superstitions, as described by Ringuet, are concerned not only with disease and weather which are tangible forces, but with religion which is almost wholly an intangible element. Civilized society has, to some degree, been able to control and defeat disease; therefore, it is primarily the primitive people who live in constant fear of epidemics. However, neither urban nor rural dwellers understand the supernatural, therefore, all mankind has sought an answer in religion and religious practices. To illustrate that human beings are imbued with superstitions to some extent, despite education and scientific development, comparison may be made between two completely different social groups in Ringuet's *Le Poids du jour*. Hélène Garneau is symbolic of the average French Canadian villager whose religious beliefs are inherited as a part of the tradition and the culture of the society. Her credulous attitude towards God and the church is illustrated in the following passage:

Pour elle, il y avait de par le monde d'une part les catholiques, tous pratiquants comme elle et sa façon, avec les mêmes petites superstitions . . . et l'autre part, . . . les gens qui ne croient à rien, . . . qui se livrent à toutes les débauches et glissent sans recours droit en enfer.²

Jocelyne Garneau, Hélène's granddaughter, has been raised and educated in a large, industrial city where reli-

¹30 Arpents, p. 50.
²*Le Poids du jour*, pp. 110-111.
region is not emphasized as it is in the small town; nevertheless, Jocelyne instinctively believes in certain supernatural charms and signs. Upon learning that she is to give birth to a child, she looks for a special star to appear in the evening sky which will announce the event to the world:


The attitude of the characters in the novels of Ringuet towards natural and supernatural forces is generally one of calm acceptance, though somewhat fatalistic. The farmers of 30 Arpents fail to understand that, "on n'acceptat point l'état de choses éternel et fatal et qu'on pût vouloir lutter contre ... la nature ou la coutume." To these simple people there is but one pattern of life which has been foreordained and can not be altered. This fatalistic attitude is exemplified by the French Canadian women who know that they must bear their allotted number of children even though it may cost their own lives as it did Alphonsine Moisan's.

Albert Langelier in L'Héritage is so certain that he is destined to be a ne'er-do-well that he abandons his farm during a prolonged drought rather than wage a hopeless battle against nature. He does not despair because of his misfortunes nor does he make more than a half-hearted attempt to remedy the situations which seem to him to be inevitable.

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1Ibid., p. 410.
230 Arpents, p. 117.
His childhood has been spent in an orphanage which he deserted at an early age to become a stevedore. After escaping punishment for an illegal investment deal, he comes to the farm left to him by his father. Again luck is not with him and he deserts the farm to search for another job, hoping the some day Providence will favor him and remove the curse that plagued him.

In the story of L'Étranger, the man who forfeits social prestige, family, and name to become a Mohammedan nomad in the deserts of Persia, has the same fatalistic attitude. With blind faith he resigns himself to his earthly existence, accepting the doctrine of his adopted religion that his fate is "écrit au livre d'allah le Miséricordieux!"\(^1\)

Does Ringuet himself accept the passive attitude of the fatalist toward life? It is not likely. For one thing, he is a physician who constantly contributes to scientific research. He is also a member of the Association Canadienne Française pour l'Avancement des Sciences, which precludes the possibility that he would advocate or even tolerate unnecessary ignorance in the field of medicine. It would probably be closer to the truth to surmise that Dr. Panneton has, at some time during his life, closely observed peasant and primitive societies and was so overwhelmed by the ignorance and backwardness of these peoples that he felt the necessity to combat the regionalist movement in Quebec which was encouraging

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1 L'Étranger, p. 107.

2 Ringuet is the pseudonym of Dr. Philippe Panneton.
retrogression to the rural state.

Ringuet's primary desire in writing seems to be to transmit a faithful picture of life as he sees it and as it is, rather than as he would like it to be. For this reason, his novels can not be classed as romans à thèse since no solutions have been offered to the problems which are described. The underlying idea is that man should constantly struggle to overcome the natural and the supernatural forces which inhibit his development and thus strive to attain a better life for all even if it means sacrificing many of the national ideals which are so highly esteemed by those who wish to preserve a French Canadian race.
CONCLUSION

Ringuet is an artist whose work has admirable objectivity. His portraits of man and man's environment are imbued with a realism that is in direct opposition to the traditional romanticism of much contemporary French Canadian literature. There are many of the elements of seventeenth century French classicism\(^1\) in his work besides objectivity and anti-romanticism. In the first place, he is a writer who has carefully studied his subjects in order to find general and universal truths. The characters he creates are not exceptional or outstanding personages but are the kind of human beings who are typical of French Canada. Ringuet opposes the idealistic concept of rural life which is part of the doctrine of the traditionalists; however, he is as strongly opposed to the artificiality of modern urban life. He aspires to a life near nature.

\(^1\)Gilbert Ghinard in Petite Histoire des Lettres Françaises describes the classicist as: "un écrivain qui a atteint un équilibre parfait de ses facultés, qui refuse de laisser prédominer l'imagination dans son oeuvre et se fier à l'inspiration du moment. C'est aussi un écrivain qui, tout en s'étudiant lui-même et en étudiant ses contemporains, s'efforce d'atteindre à une vérité générale et universelle et qui s'attache à peindre non des exceptions mais des types qui appartiennent à tous les temps et à tous les pays. De plus, les classiques sont conduits par là même à rejeter une imitation servile et trop étroite soit de l'antiquité, soit des modèles étrangers. Ils ne refusent pas de chercher des motifs d'inspiration en dehors de leur temps et de leur pays, mais ils s'efforcent d'assimiler les éléments qu'ils empruntent."
observing, learning and reflecting, thus attaining a higher degree of cultural and social knowledge. To accomplish this, man must look objectively at nature and avoid the realms of imagination and fantasy which eventually lead only to disillusionment.

In the novels of Ringuet can be found almost every situation, character type, and trend that exists in the social atmosphere of Quebec. The peasant of 30 Arpents is not a unique figure created by Ringuet; he is the typical Quebec farmer of two decades ago. He is typical because he lives on thirty arpents of land which have been a family possession for three hundred years. He is typical because he marries a farm girl of his own race, religion and locality and because they have a large family. Their life, like that of every other habitant, is monotonous; it is a constant struggle against adverse weather conditions, sickness, and poverty. However, the Quebec peasant rarely thinks of leaving his terre to go in search of richer possibilities.

Should Ringuet be accused of pessimism because his picture of rural life is so bleak and dreary? Not at all. His emphasis on the static nature of the last generation is balanced by his stress on the progressive attitude of the youth of French Canada. He does not condemn the young people who abandon the farms which cannot support the prodigious families, much less finance education, develop the arts and sciences or raise standards of living to equal those in the urban districts of Canada and of the United States. Ringuet
is opposed to forces—religious, literary or political—which suppress the truth and thereby tolerate ignorance.

In *Le Poids du Jour* Ringuet condemns the literary regionalists who advocate a retrogression to the traditional rural life. It is probable that Ringuet expresses his own ambitions in the literary field when he writes:

It y auro de la littérature, de la vraie. Pas de *Conquête du sol*, de l'abbé Grandin, ou de roman pour petites filles comme le *Jardin désert* de ce pauvre Edouard Crevier. Mon, je te le garantis. Et pas de terroir ni de Bon Fridolin. Mais des contes, des essais, des poèmes, des articles sérieux, quelque chose qui remue et même qui fasse hurler un peu. J'ai en tête un série de papiers sur notre système d'éducation. Et sur nos gouvernements. Il y a tant à dire et tant à faire.¹

Ringuet does not condemn the natural life that is free of all artificiality but rather the primitive life which prevents man from realizing his potential development and from contributing to his own satisfaction and happiness as well as to that of future generations. Only a tragic human being is completely self-satisfied and contributes nothing towards the happiness of his fellow men. The protagonists in *30 Arpents* and *Le Poids du Jour* are tragic characters who are so obsessed with the acquisition of the material things of life that they are unable to appreciate that which is worthwhile, hence their enslavement to their environment, a blind and irresistible force.

Ringuet's idea of living in close harmony with nature

¹*Le Poids du Jour*, p. 328.
is expressed in Fausse Monnaie and in the third part of Le Poids du jour. Here the superficial veneer of civilized man is peeled off and the true self revealed. Man no longer feels the need to be acquisitive, to be artificial or to subject himself to factory or farm. Nature inspires him and awakens a latent desire to create. Man must free himself from the bonds of custom and tradition which smother the spark of originality and individuality and which make him a robot. Ringuet is opposed to traditionalism, to regionalism and to all other forces which rob man of his individuality.

Ringuet has not pointed out the defects of man's existence through romans à thèse nor through oratorical denouncements. He has observed his characters in their environments and these observations are a realistic evaluation of the imperfections of society. The evaluation of the French Canadian habitant is made with sympathy and understanding, for Ringuet has faith in the eventual rise of these primitive peasants from their present state of social and intellectual ignorance to the level of more advanced societies. The hope of the French Canadian race lies in the present generation who are no longer willing to lean on the traditions of their ancestors and are already making dynamic changes.

Sur la jeunesse de Québec si longtemps contrainte, si longtemps satisfaite de sommeiller dans le dortoir collectif aux lits tous de même mesure, sur cette jeunesse éblouie une Pentecôte semblait être descendue. Quelques-
uns déjà aspiraient à mettre le feu aux quatre coins de ce petit monde qu'ils aimaient; mais que, justement parce qu'ils l'aimaient, ils voulaient sublimer fût-ce par la torche.

L'étroit cadre de village qui avait été celui de leurs aînés, où les pôles étaient église et marchand de tabac, ce cadre ne leur suffisait plus. Il leur fallait pour carrière rien moins que l'univers entier avec ses images, ses jeux et ses triomphes.

The animalistic child of nature differs from the reasoning human being who lives in harmony with nature. All mankind is concerned with satisfying the needs of the animal self; the psychological needs of eating, sleeping and breathing which are necessary functions but ones which require no exercise of the mental powers. Primitive man is so preoccupied with satisfying his physical needs and with the making of a livelihood that he ignores the cultural, intellectual and spiritual development. He neglects to use his mental faculties, his power to reason, his free will which differentiates man from the lower animal forms and gives him power to control his instincts, his emotions and his environment so that he may live a full and happy life.

If man lives only the animalistic life, he subjects himself to his environment and becomes oppressed by the natural forces. In this state of subservience, man often considers nature as an evil force which he fears rather than appreciates. The peasants of Ringuet, accepting their destiny with a fatalistic attitude, do not seek freedom from their enslavement by nature.

\(^1\text{Ibid.}, p. 327.\)
Nature is not always a malevolent force. It is a source of beauty which inspires man to create music, art and literature. Primitive man considers nature evil because he has not learned to protect himself against the natural forces of disease, drought, fire, insect pests and floods which destroy his land and his crops. Why have the habitants not taken advantage of the inventions of science and medicine and modern methods which would raise their standard of living and give them leisure time to devote to pastimes other than farming? First, because generation after generation of French Canadians have clung to the motto: "Il faut aimer qa la terre." They have been told by controlling factions that to love the land is to love God who created it and to desert one's farm means almost certain damnation. In the second place, the peasants, being an uneducated and primitive people, are fearful of all things which are foreign to their own community and way of life. They are reluctant to venture beyond the petite patrie in search of a more satisfying existence.

Despite the national movements which have attempted to keep the French Canadian habitant in a state of ignorance in order to preserve the race, Quebec is gradually becoming modernized; schools are being built and libraries are being made available to the public. Those who prefer farming as an occupation have the advantages of state-supported agricultural colleges, farm improvement agencies and government

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1Bovey, The French Canadians To-Day, p. 329.
loans which help to take the drudgery and risk out of farming. It is progress of this sort which encourages man to find a more satisfactory way of life as a reasoning human being that Ringuet advocates.

Ringuet describes exotic nature in several of his short stories, particularly in *La Sentinelle*. It is not the exotic nature which is found in Chateaubriand's *Atala* or *Les Natchez*, where the simplicity of the savage is compared to the complexity of civilized man. The nineteenth-century French author has portrayed deep passions in a spectacular setting in the tropics. Ringuet's conception of the jungle shows man's defeat in the face of overwhelming nature. Ringuet does not consider his understanding of life in close harmony with nature to be similar to that of Pierre Loti. In the conte, *L'Etranger*, Ringuet criticizes Loti's acceptance of the primitive life:

> Non pas comme votre Loti, orgueilleusement, prétentieusement, se croyant Oriental de coeur parce qu'il l'était de vêtement.

The super-abundance of descriptive narrative in the works of Ringuet attests to his appreciation of the natural environment in which man exists. He also emphasizes the fact that primitive groups are seldom aware of the beauty of their surroundings and are dwellers of the land because of tradition or ignorance and usually both. In order to appreciate nature, Ringuet feels that one must be conscious

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that it exists. After reaching this awareness, man will be able to take advantage of the wealth of nature in order to attain greater self-realization.

The rôle of nature in the literary works of Ringuet has many aspects. The children of nature—the peasant, the desert nomad and the native—do not lead a satisfying or productive life because they are subservient to natural forces which completely regulate their existences. Ringuet's conception of the ideal state of man is not necessarily urban life, but life in which he is the master of his fate, an individual living in close harmony with his environment and contributing to the welfare of his fellow men.
WORKS OF RINGUET


WORKS CONSULTED


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