

Américanité in translation: Translating *Le Joueur de flûte* by Louis Hamelin

Einar Jullum Leiknes

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

French Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Translation Studies) at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

May 2016

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

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By: Einar Jullum Leiknes

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Translation Studies)

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_____ Chair

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_____ Examiner

Paul Bandia

_____ Examiner

Patrick Leroux

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Américanité in translation: Translating *Le Joueur de flûte* by Louis Hamelin
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Le Joueur de flûte by Louis Hamelin is a modern, ecologically-driven American adaptation of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Clearly American in style, the novel draws from American literary traditions, such as Nature writing, while remaining distinctly French American. My thesis examines the novel through the notion of *américanité*, which acknowledges the American reality of French America while also opening up a space for discussion thereupon, a space comparable to that which post-colonial scholars refer to as “in-between space” or “third space.”

My translation of *Le Joueur de flûte* has attempted to preserve the *américanité* of the original text despite the fact that American English does not have access to the kind of “in-between space” that American French, by virtue of its *américanité*, possesses. I will discuss the challenges of such a translation, including the introduction of foreignizing elements and the reproduction of linguistic hybridity. This discussion will be followed by two excerpts of my translation.

Américanité en traduction: Traduire *Le Joueur de flûte* de Louis Hamelin
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Le Joueur de flûte de Louis Hamelin est une adaptation américaine contemporaine de la légende européen Le Joueur de flûte. Marquée par une préoccupation écologique, le roman, résolument américain, tire des traditions littéraires américaines, tel le « Nature writing », tout en maintenant sa distinction franco-américaine. Mon projet de mémoire étudie le roman à travers la notion d’américanité, un concept qui à la fois assume la réalité américaine de l’Amérique française et crée automatiquement un espace de réflexion sur cette réalité. Cet espace peut être considéré comme un « tiers-espace » décrit dans la théorie post-coloniale.

Dans ma traduction du *Joueur de flûte*, je me suis évertué à préserver l’américanité de l’originale, face au défi du fait que l’anglais américain n’a pas accès au genre de « tiers-espace » que possède le français américain grâce à l’américanité. Je discute les défis de ce genre de traduction, y compris l’introduction des éléments de *foreignization* et la reproduction d’hybridité linguistique. Cette discussion est suivie par deux extraits de ma traduction.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Arnaud Gros-Burdet for his helpful explanations of some tricky passages of
the novel.

Thank you to Sherry Simon for her guidance and patience throughout this project.

A special thanks to my mother for her unwavering support.

A very special thanks to Aimee Wall for her close reading of the translation, her editorial
assistance and more.

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Introduction

This thesis addresses my translation from Canadian¹ French to North-American English of an excerpt of *Le Joueur de flûte* by Louis Hamelin (Boréal 2001). Upon publication critics recognized a clear North-American² quality in the style and storytelling of the book which tells the tale of Ti-Luc Blouin, a young man who leaves his home in Quebec to go out west to British Columbia to save the last virgin trees on the island where he was conceived. In the first section of this thesis, I shall recount Ti-Luc's story so as to have a good overview of the source text. Following the summary, there will be a short introduction of the author and a presentation of the book's reception in Quebec. Tracing Hamelin's Franco-American literary influences, I will consider the novel's place in a Quebec context before discussing the work in a larger American context. From here on, I will analyze the text through the lens of *américanité*, a term which both acknowledges the American reality of Quebec and French America, and opens up a space for discussion of said realities and their influence on the culture, language and world-view. Inherent in the notion is the existence of a space for contemplation of oneself as a French American in comparison (culturally and linguistically) with English America, a space which is unavailable for the uni-cultural and uni-lingual Anglophone American. Translating *Le Joueur de Flûte* into English, as I have done, thus poses a problem, because the author thematizes this uneven relationship in a way that uses language as an object (and not merely a medium) of representation, an approach that Susanne Klinger notes is common to much cross-cultural writing (Klinger 2015, 2). Evoking the notion of hybridity and linguistic hybridity, I will argue that the space for contemplation of oneself in comparison to an Other which *américanité* entails,

¹“Canadian French” and “American French” used interchangeably.

²Used in reference to the United States and Canada only.

is comparable to that which post-colonial scholars describe as a “third space”. In Translation Studies, translation itself is seen as a “model of hybrid textuality when it bears the marks of the relation that brought it into existence” (Simon 2011, 49-53). The following thesis is an attempt to show the ways in which, in *Le Joueur de flûte*, the relationship between English and French in America is perceived and thematized from the perspective of a space where mediation and translation between the two parallel worlds is of the essence. In terms of hybridity, this space might be called a “third space”, but a more precise term would indeed be *américanité*. A translation of *Le Joueur de flûte* into English thus runs the risk of translating *américanité*—an American world-view which constantly questions its own American-ness—into something merely *américain*, as standard American English and English America in general do not have a third space or *américanité* at their disposal. The final section of the thesis will focus on related translation challenges as well as a discussion on my choice of title in translation.

***Le Joueur de flûte* de Louis Hamelin**

*Le Joueur de flûte*³, is, by Hamelin's standards, a somewhat short novel of about 225 pages. The first of the book's four chapters takes place in Montreal, where protagonist and narrator Ti-Luc Blouin, a young man with a bad back and weak personality divides his time between drinking in bars and working on a very futile environmental project for the city, getting paid minimum wage to keep his mouth shut about the ecological atrocities his employer is committing. In one of a few flashbacks to his childhood, Ti-Luc recalls his mother reading him the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Night after night he would request the story which always left him with the unanswered question as to where the Pied Piper disappeared with the children who followed him

³Henceforth referred to as *Le Joueur*.

towards the horizon. Ti-Luc also tells us that at the age of twelve he became a rat-catcher, first with a BB-gun, then with Ritz crackers spread with rat poison. Later he dreams that he's a child again, taming and killing a rat called Gros-Père (Big Daddy in my translation), but the rat gets away, and Ti-Luc confesses it might have been the rat who was taming him. At any rate, he leaves Quebec in search of his biological father, a journey which takes him to Mere Island, B.C., where his recently belated mother had lived in a commune in the late 60s. There she had encountered a certain Forward Fuse, an obscure American writer and inventor of *fuck writing*, a writing technique thanks to which Blouin was conceived. As it happens the island is now the stage of the environmental battle of the hour. The Onani tribe and a motley group of environmentalists and otherwise radical activists and utopians are united in protecting the island and its rainforest against being destroyed at the hands and chainsaws of Westop, a giant logging company and their army of lumberjacks, not to mention the RCMP and the ever looming helicopters. On the bus approaching Virago, close to his goal at the end of the Trans-Canada highway, he observes from his bus window a crowd of people wearing what looks like hospital gowns. His neighbour on board tells him they are the Hamadryads, a sect whose guru no one has ever seen. Arrived on Mere Island, Ti-Luc meets a bouquet of colourful characters at the camp site in Edge Bay, such as Maxence, an anarcho-libinal activist convinced that physical love ought to be rendered mandatory so as to counteract a contemporary culture in which everyone is manipulated into desiring the same thing. As he himself proclaims, Ti-Luc gets along with everybody and especially with Muse, a fellow Quebecker travelling with Raymond, her albino rat. After a stint at tree-planting and cherry-picking, Muse and Ray had come from Vancouver to Mere Island with Arnot Valanti, the famous painter of Plateau Mont-Royal. Valanti had lived in the Love Mountain commune, as it was called in the late 60s, a past he shares with another

known figure on the island, Patrick Westmoreland—the leader of the B.C. Green party. Both Valanti and Westmoreland remember Ti-Luc's mother well and tell him where to find the trail leading to Love Mountain. While out looking for it by the Hanging Garden, an ancient tree, he runs into a certain Sem Coolridge and the Chief Art Watt. Sem tells him about a rehabilitation center in Deep Point, as well as a white friend of the Chief who is living thereabouts, a crazy man known as Big Country that had once involved the Onani tribe in a mad idea of constructing a giant wooden air plane.

At dawn the next day Ti-Luc leaves Edge Bay. Camping at night on the beach, he eats some bad oysters, and in his food-poisoning-induced delirium he hears the most wonderful sound, a saxophone solo. He follows the melody and stumbles upon a house with letters on the pediment saying “House of Love”. Waking up naked in a bed, a middle-aged woman named Irene offers him painkillers and orange juice. Alone in the bedroom, he discovers a worn copy of *Shore Leaves* by Forward Fuse in the bedside table. Ti-Luc stays to recover for a couple of days in the house, and learns that it is Irene who runs the rehab center, which is organized like a reading workshop in which the participants discuss why characters in novels drink, as most of them, she had discovered, do. Ti-Luc participates (as an expert on American literature) in a meeting discussing *A Good Day to Die*. The same night, Irene asks Ti-Luc to help Big Country, saying she's afraid for him. By the time Ti-Luc leaves Edge Bay, he's already run out of postcards to send home to Marie, yet he continues to write them in his head, even imagining the picture on the front. That day he “writes” about Big's big plans for his flying boat, the Spruce Goose II. Big's dream was to carry out the obsession of a man he is obsessed with (and about whom he has been trying to write a screenplay), namely business tycoon, film-maker and aviator Howard Hughes, who had constructed the prototype of a flying boat, the original Spruce Goose. He ends

the imaginary postcard by saying that he intends to confront Big that night so as to make himself a man. Ti-Luc reveals to Big that Jeanne Blouin is his mother hoping for an acknowledgment of his paternity, but Big replies only that he has huge memory gaps from those years. He does tell him, however, to take care of his 30-06 rifle in the closet, saying obscurely that he will need it. The next day they find Big in a tree in the mountains, his shotgun still clenched in his hand, his brains scattered all over the scene. His father dead, Ti-Luc leaves to return to Edge Bay, bringing the rifle along. Camping yet again on the beach where he'd left his tent following his oyster incident, he is awakened by a helicopter and suddenly starts shooting at it. Running away, he finds refuge in a hollow tree trunk back by the Hanging Garden. Asleep inside, he is awakened again by Muse who is out looking for Ray. She is happy to see Ti-Luc, but has bad news: the police have finally turned up in large numbers at the camp site in Edge Bay, arresting everybody. Undaunted, Muse leaves to go fetch food and magic mushrooms, but does not return. Ti-Luc finds Ray the next day while walking back to the tree. Before reaching his refuge, he is spotted by police officers who order him to surrender. Ti-Luc disobeys and adds a death threat in French saying he'll blow the head off of anyone who tries to enter his tree. The authorities decide to send in someone he knows to talk to him. This person is Arnot Valanti, and he tells him that Muse has been arrested and taken to a Big Black Hole under the mountain, saying they're bringing everyone there. Valanti further informs Ti-Luc on behalf of the Police that if he won't come out, they'll cut the tree down. Suddenly the sound of a chainsaw breaks the silence, which prompts Ti-Luc to start climbing to the top of the hollow trunk. As he's getting close to the opening, the wind of the island begins to blow through the tree, creating music as if Mere Island itself was playing flute for him. At the last moment, he realizes the enormous obviousness that he's going to “[s]e casser la gueule” (Hamelin 2001, 218). Lying (dying?) in the branches of the Hanging

Garden, he sees a chimpanzee who asks him in sign language for a cigarette. As he realizes that the primate is in fact the guru Bismégiste Hamadryas, Chief Art Watt suddenly shows up in a boat, brings them both on board, and takes them away.

The book's fourth and last chapter is followed by a four page bibliography—"L'Île Mere: une brève bibliographie commentée"—in which many of the works are purely fictional.

The Author

Louis Hamelin, born in 1959 in Saint-Séverin-de-Proulxville, Quebec, is the author of seven novels. After studying biology and literature at McGill and UQAM respectively, his first book, *La Rage*, was published in 1989. The novel was met with universal praise from Quebec critics, for many of whom the book marked the birth of a new literary generation (Biron et. al. 2007, 558). In his review for *La Presse*, Réginald Martel wrote: "L'entreprise de M. Hamelin est neuve, elle est pour l'instant unique. Elle donne à rêver. À rêver que pour les années 90 un écrivain aussi immense que Jacques Ferron et Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, et qui ne leur doit rien" (quoted in Hamelin 2010, back cover). For his debut novel, Hamelin won the Governor General's Award for French-language fiction, an award he has been nominated for on two other occasions, with *Betsi Larousse, ou l'ineffable eccéité de la loutre* in 1994 which, according to *La Presse*, established Hamelin as "the dominant writer of his generation" (Martel 1994), and for his short story collection *Sauvage* in 2006, which *Le Devoir* simply and grandly deemed to be "[d]u grand art" (Desmaules 2006). With the publication of his fifth novel, *Le Soleil des gouffres* in 1996, Hamelin had, again according to *Le Devoir*, established himself as a major figure in Quebec literature: "Louis Hamelin est l'un des écrivains québécois les plus doués "tout court", c'est-à-dire toutes générations confondues" (Cayouette 1996, D3). His latest novel, *La Constellation du Lynx*

from 2010, an account of the October crisis of 1970, was lauded in *L'actualité* as “le grand roman québécois de notre temps” (Desjardins 2010) and received numerous awards including the Prix Ringuet, Grand prix littéraire de La Presse Québécoise, Prix des libraires du Québec and Prix littéraire des collégiens.

Three of his novels have been translated into English: *Cowboy* from 1992, translated by Jean-Paul Murray as *Cowboy* appeared in 2000 with Dundurn Press; *Betsi Larousse, ou l'ineffable eccéité de la loutre* from 1994, also translated by Jean-Paul Murray as *Betsi Larousse or the Ineffable Essence of the Otter*, published in 2014 with Ekstasis Editions; and *La Constellation du Lynx*, translated by Wayne Grady as *October 1970* which came out in 2013 with House of Anansi. Hamelin has also published essays and short stories and regularly writes criticism of American literature for *Le Devoir*.

Reception of the text in Quebec

Le Joueur de flûte is Hamelin's sixth novel. Unlike most of Hamelin's books, the novel was overlooked by the major literary prizes (though nominated for the 2002 Prix littéraire des collégiens) despite praise from critics, most of whom, like Robert Chartrand in *Le Devoir*, stressed the American nature of the work: “Louis Hamelin, il me semble, à l'oeil américain. Je ne parle pas de son intérêt pour la littérature de nos voisins du Sud, qu'il critique régulièrement dans ces pages, mais (...) d'une certaine acuité du regard sur la nature, (...) tourmenté et frondeur (...)” (Chartrand 2001, D5). Marie-Claude Fortin, in her review for *Voir*, called the book “[une] pièce maîtresse,” “[un] roman résolument américain, qui s'inscrit dans la lignée des Annie Proulx ou Russell Banks, ces auteurs du Nord états-unien pour qui la nature et le climat prédominent et forgent les caractères” (Fortin 2002). Gilles Marcotte, in his critique for *L'actualité*, praised the

novel for being “un livre formidablement intelligent, drôle, émouvant, un des meilleurs qui aient paru au Québec ces dernières années” (Marcotte 2002).

The novel has also been the subject of academic attention from scholars specializing in Quebec literature, some of which I will explore at greater length later in the thesis. In an article published in *Voix Plurielles* in 2009, Élise Lepage from the University of British Columbia analyzed the book in terms of Eden and Utopia, two modes of spacial apprehension which she draws from the book *Entre l'Éden et l'Utopie* (1984) by cultural geographer Luc Bureau, arguing that Mere Island and the west coast represents a sort of Eden and Quebec a Utopia. Utopia is also the theme of a short analyzis by Aurélien Boivin from the Université Laval entitled “*Le Joueur de flûte* ou roman d'utopie” and published in the journal *Québec français* in 2011. Jean Morency of the University of Moncton, who specializes in Quebec literature in relation to American literature, devotes a chapter of his book *La littérature québécoise dans le contexte américain* (2012) to *Le Joueur*, and studies the novel not only in an American context, but also specifically in terms of *américanité*. In his 2015 paper, “Louis Hamelin et la tradition de « Nature writing »,” Morency again discusses Hamelin and *Le Joueur* in the context of American literary tradition, this time with a focus on Nature writing.

***Le Joueur* in a Quebec context**

In an interview about the book, Hamelin stated his ambition to belong to a certain line of Quebec authors: “Quant à moi, mon ambition est d'être une sorte de successeur d'un Hubert Aquin qui a poussé très loin les limites du roman, ou même d'un Réjean Ducharme" (Cloutier 2002, P6).

There certainly are similarities to observe between Hamelin’s literary project and that of Hubert Aquin. In both literary worlds, the protagonist is often a disillusioned Don Quixote fighting the

windmills of his time in some sort of exile, such as Hamelin's Edouard Malarmé in the abandoned Mirabel airport in *La Rage* (2010) as well as our own Ti-Luc Blouin on Mere Island, and Hubert Aquin's semi-autobiographical protagonist in his 1965 novel *Prochain Épisode* (1996), a fictionalized account of his stay in a psychiatric hospital where he'd been transferred following his imprisonment for revolutionary activity.

Hamelin is not alone in having noted Réjean Ducharme's influence on his own work. In *La Narrativité contemporaine au Québec*, Élisabeth Haghebaert remarks that Hamelin's characters “vivent dans une bohème qui les fait ressembler comme des frères à ceux de Ducharme et certains peuvent en avoir la gouaille” (Haghebaert 2004, 204-205). In Ducharme's oeuvre, such as in *L'hiver de force* from 1973, the refusal to be integrated into society is an important theme. The book addresses political issues, such as Quebec independence, but because of the shifting sympathy of the narrator, his political position can be hard to assess, making the indecision to associate oneself with the world a theme in its own right. In *Le Joueur*, there is a similar confusion at play, as most of the ideologies presented appear as caricatures of themselves, a presentation which is not tantamount to ridicule, however, as the author has stated: "L'ironie n'est pas du sarcasme (...) ça donne simplement un ton au récit” (Bourgault-Côté 2001, B3). Common to *L'hiver de force* and *Le Joueur* are protagonists at a loss in a world of contradictions which makes it impossible to subscribe to one version of reality.

It is understandable that one would be at a loss in a world that abuses the earth, especially if one is an author “habité tout entier par des préoccupations écologiques,” (Morency 2015, 90) as Morency aptly describes Hamelin. He traces therein a literary kinship to fellow Quebec authors Félix-Antoine Savard and Brother Marie-Victorin “qui ont manifesté, dès les années 1930, leur angoisse devant les menaces conjuguées de la dépossession du territoire et de la destruction de la

nature” (91). Yet though Hamelin’s Quebecois literary roots should not be overlooked, it is perhaps first and foremost in an American context that Hamelin must be regarded, as Morency points out:

[C]e serait réduire la portée de l’œuvre de Louis Hamelin en se contentant d’inscrire cette dernière dans une tradition canadienne-française ou québécoise où la question du territoire et l’expression de la nature sont intimement liées. Hamelin est en effet un auteur profondément américain, au sens large du terme, puisqu’il se montre extrêmement attentif à décrire les particularités de l’espace et de la nature du continent américain, et aussi parce que son écriture est travaillée par celle d’écrivains dédiés comme lui à l’écriture de ce même continent (92).

Morency concludes that while Hamelin must chiefly be described as an American writer, he is not estranged from his Franco-American roots:

Comme on peut le constater, les rapports que Louis Hamelin entretient avec la nature sont révélateurs de l’américanité profonde de son écriture, ce qui n’exclut pas que son œuvre s’inscrit aussi dans le sillage d’une tradition canadienne-française et québécoise. Dans cette optique, il convient de parler de la franco-américanité de Louis Hamelin : si ce dernier s’inspire du « Nature Writing » américain, il ne perd jamais de vue la singularité de l’expérience américaine telle que vécue par le peuple auquel il appartient (99-100).

Morency discusses what he describes as Hamelin’s “double lineage” (95), asserting that Hamelin maintains a sense both of *franco-américanité*, in preserving a kinship to a lineage of fellow Franco-American authors, and *américanité*, in pursuing a literary expression in line with certain U.S. American traditions. I would suggest that Hamelin’s success in preserving a Franco-American heritage while achieving an essentially American literary endeavour is a manifestation of the unmistakable *américanité* of French America. In Hamelin’s book, though the influence of both traditions is present, they do not appear like some strange mix. Rather, Hamelin has managed to create a distinctly American work without appearing any less Franco-American for it.

Le Joueur* in an American context—*américanité

From *La Rage* to his four 90's novels to the publication of his sixth novel, *Le Joueur*, Hamelin's writing underwent a transition that in many ways mirrors the one seen in Quebec literature from

the 60s throughout the following decades. Before discussing *Le Joueur* in an American context and how the book could or should be translated into North-American English, I wish to evoke the evolution of American influence on Quebec and Quebec literature and, in turn, how this influence has been discussed and perceived.

Américanité is an important term concerning the French Canadian literary self-image over the last fifty years which came into prominence during the Silent Revolution in the 60s (Biron et. al. 2007: 375, 470). From this time onwards it became clear that “l’imaginaire romanesque [québécois] se fait de moins en moins européen et de plus en plus américain (...) la culture et la contre-culture américain [occupant] une place grandissante” (474). Especially following the 1975 publication of an issue of *Études littéraires* entitled “L’américanité de la littérature québécoise,” the notion of *américanité* has been treated by numerous literary critics (Morency 2012, 21). Indeed, the last three decades have, according to Morency, been marked by such an increased American influence on the sociocultural tissue of Quebec, that a shift in paradigm has taken place:

En fait, l’Amérique, dans ses multiples dimensions, c’est-à-dire en tant que réalité géographique, sociale, culturelle et linguistique, a tellement imprégné ce tissu socioculturel québécois qu’on a pu assister [...] à l’émergence d’un nouveau paradigme critique dans le champ des études québécois, celui d’américanité. [...] [L]a notion d’américanité a contribué à remplacer le paradigme traditionnelle de l’américanisation dans une perspective plus vaste [...] [C]’est en littérature, et plus particulièrement dans les genre les plus intimement liés à la sphère social, tels le roman et le théâtre, que la présence américaine se fait sentir avec la plus grande vigueur et semble la plus intéressant à observer (9-10).

To Joseph-Yvon Thériault, *américanité* relies on two basic premises: “Le premier est un postulat essentialiste, ou tout au moins sociologiste. L’américanité ne serait pas un choix, il s’agirait là de l’être véritable des Québécois francophones” (Thériault 2000, 2). According to this view, French-Americans are, and always have been, essentially American. The second premise touches the

distinction between *américanité* and *américanisation*, and here Thériault quotes Yvan Lamonde who asserts that

l'américanisation du Québec serait un « concept de résistance et de refus [...], processus d'acculturation par lequel la culture étatsunienne influence et domine la culture autant canadienne que québécoise — et mondiale — tandis que l'américanité, qui englobe autant l'Amérique latine que l'Amérique anglo-saxonne, est un concept d'ouverture et de mouvance qui dit le consentement à son appartenance continentale » (Lamonde in Thériault 2000, 2).

The second premise involving the shift from *américanisation* to *américanité* seems thus to involve a change of attitude from lamenting or refusing U.S. American influence to realizing that Quebec and American French culture are not only influenced by but indeed are a part of America. The two terms, by their very presence, reveal a will to reflect on the American experience in a French-language context. *Américanité* thus both refers to the American realities of Quebec (or Franco-American culture) and to the realization and discussion thereof. To speak of the *américanité* of something (e.g. “l'américanité du *Joueur du flûte* de Louis Hamelin”) is then the act of describing something as American while automatically opening a discussion about what that might mean.

In an interview with *Les libraires*, Hamelin spoke about what being “American” means to him:

Géographiquement, nous sommes des Américains; ça fait une vingtaine d'années qu'on le dit, on va peut-être s'en convaincre. Depuis des années, les auteurs qui m'influencent se nomment Don DeLillo, Jim Harrison, Annie Proulx. Parmi mes thèmes, il y a l'éternelle conquête de l'espace. Ce n'est pas innocent si le père du héros du *Joueur de flûte* est un écrivain américain, un vieux « fucké » des années 60 qui a participé aux expérimentations culturelles qui avaient cours à l'époque. Je suis américain sur le plan de l'imaginaire, mais pas au sens politique du terme. Je désire exprimer cette réalité dans un français qui n'est pas celui de Proust ou de Balzac (Hamelin in Péan 2001).

Hamelin's literary allusions in the book can both be said to reveal his literary models and hint at the literary traditions he sees himself in. The first allusion is that of the title, taken from an old German legend. Opening the book we see the two epigraphs; the first one taken from Don Quixote, a work which Hamelin has stated serves as model for his writing (Cloutier 2002, P6);

whereas the second one quotes William Burroughs: “*Le Joueur de Flûte déguisé en Oncle Sam a descendu le ciel de papier...*” (Hamelin 2001, 10). These three epigraphs disclose to some degree the architecture of the novel: a quixotic Pied Piper on mission in Modern America. Throughout the book, the literary allusions are mostly American. After all, the narrator as well as the author of the book are regarded as authorities on American literature in their respective institutions, Hamelin in *Le Devoir* and Ti-Luc in the alcoholic reading group in the House of Love, where he, contrary to doctrine, commits the blunder of suggesting that Jim Harrison’s characters might be drinking for the mere pleasure of it (169). At another point Ti-Luc describes himself as having acted like a Hemingway character as a kid because of his wild way of killing rats with a BB gun (23). Hemingway is evoked on another occasion when Ti-Luc describes the French journalist Pierreau Marchal-Dubond-Dubont as someone “à qui il arrivait de se prendre pour Hemingway” (67).

In *Studies of Classic American Literature*, D.H. Lawrence describes Edgar Allan Poe as a man who “died wanting more love, and love killed him. A ghastly disease, love. Poe telling us of his disease: trying even to make his disease fair and attractive. Even succeeding. Which is the inevitable falseness, duplicity of art, American Art in particular” (Lawrence 1955, 692). In Hamelin's world the disease is not love but is rather of an ecological nature, and in *Le Joueur* Ti-Luc embodies and carries the disease. Ti-Luc's body is often described in natural terms, especially his fragile health, which echo the state of his natural surroundings. Early on, for instance, we learn that his vertebrae “se prenait pour des plaques tectoniques [...] [glissant] l'un contre l'autre avec une patience toute géologique” (Hamelin 2001, 18). Indeed later on we discover that they act like the tectonic plates of Vancouver Island (139) and at the end, climbing through the hollow tree, he realizes that he and the tree share the selfsame fate: “[J]’irais me

briser, plus bas, avec mon arbre, scié comme lui, cassé net, comme ma colonne vertébrale” (217). As one critic aptly noted, “[I]a nature et le climat prédominant et forgent les caractères” (Fortin 2002). No wonder Ti-Luc is sick. As the world of the medieval Hamelin was infested by rats, the world of the 90s in *Le Joueur* suffers, to put it lightly, from its own environmental problems. This time, however, the ecological threat to humans is no infestation of rodents. Now humans are at once perpetrator and victim: humans have, so to speak, become their own rats, their own pest. Ti-Luc embodies this duality, the rat-child he is, lured both as rat and as child by the Pied Piper/Rat-Catcher, his father.

In his analysis of Hamelin's *La Rage* and *Cowboy*, Francois Ouellet points out that the death of a friend “marque une étape essentielle dans le cheminement spirituel des héros, car elle instruit le passage de l'indifférenciation à l'aliénation; c'est-à-dire qu'à travers l'autre, le héros prend conscience du rôle qu'il est appelé à jouer” (Ouellet 1994, 123). No friend of Ti-Luc dies in *Le Joueur*. The matter is much worse as it is his own flesh and blood who die, one after another. By having Ti-Luc embody the doomed world left to him by his forefathers (a biological shadow of a father who shot himself, and a step-father who “auto-guillotined” himself) and a foremother (who is killed by a truck), Hamelin artfully makes the disease “fair and attractive”, to the very end of the story. With all his family dead, Ti-Luc is next in line, and he doesn't waste any time. Before shooting himself, his father hands his son his rifle insisting he will need it. Ti-Luc proves more than ready to play his part, so off he goes to become a sort of martyr for his ecological cause, firing at the helicopters of the authorities and escaping through the hollow tree only to liberate himself from life itself. Yet his ecological disease wouldn't be fair and attractive if Ti-Luc simply died. So at the very end, after Ti-Luc jumps from the tree top, there's what one could

call a *deus ex machina à l'américaine*, as Ti-Luc is miraculously alive and gets to sail away with a monkey guru and an Indian chief somewhere even further west.

Henry David Thoreau is a prominent presence in *Le Joueur*, both implicitly as a clear influence on the writing and explicitly on the page. Patrick Westmoreland, the man in charge of the environmental rebellion that the book is centered around, is in the midst of reading *Civil Obedience* (Hamelin 2001, 78) and Thoreau's *Walden and Other Writings* is, moreover, listed in the bibliography of *Le Joueur*, as is a recommended biography with the following caption: “Le récit de la mort de Thoreau vaut à lui seul le détour. Peut-être le seul saint authentique jamais produit par la culture américaine” (226). Making Thoreau a political hero and bonafide saint in the world of *Le Joueur* contributes to placing the novel and Hamelin in the lineage of American Nature writers, as does Morency:

Sa conscience écologique ne verse toutefois jamais dans un angélisme de bon aloi, elle ne sacralise pas la nature, elle s’y moule plutôt, en tenant compte autant de l’être humain que de son environnement, aussi immédiat soit-il. C’est dans cette perspective qu’elle se rapproche beaucoup de la pensée de Henry David Thoreau et de son *Walden* (1854), qui rêvait moins des grands espaces sauvages que de la nature familière se déployant à proximité de l’espace habité (Morency 2015, 94).

Defining the role of ecology in his writing, Hamelin points out that the Greek root of “eco-” signifies “house”, stressing that “il y a bel et bien un rapport à la maison, à l’habitation dans cette conception du monde. Le rapport au lieu, à la nature, est fondamental pour moi” (Hamelin in Nareau and Pelletier 2015, 21). In other words, Hamelin's approach to nature is to recognize the natural world of one's own immediate surroundings. Humans, too, are seen in this sociobiological light:

Il existe une branche scientifique, la sociobiologie, dont les chercheurs analysent le comportement humain sous l’angle de l’animalité qui subsiste chez l’humain. C’est une vision que je partage. Je vois les humains avec la part d’animalité que l’on conserve sous le vernis de la culture; c’est un de mes points d’intérêt principaux (21).

Characteristic of Thoreau and Hamelin's writing is an ability to regard humans and the world from a non-anthropocentric point of view from which human beings are seen merely as one of many characters at play in the great drama of nature—nature itself performing the role of a kind of super-character who embodies sub-characters such as humans and plants and everything in between. Indeed, non-anthropocentrism can be read, through the epigraph of the second chapter, as an explicit ambition of the book: “Les juges se sont montrés anthropocentrique en ce qu'ils n'ont jamais considéré un arbre de l'intérieur” (Hamelin 2001, 45). Ti-Luc's sickly body is not the only one described in natural terms. Human characters and characteristics are throughout the book portrayed in terms of natural formations, such as the stripper Incredible Sandra whose breasts are described as “deux petites montagnes”, her mouth “comme un volcan” and her reproductive organ “nu en forme de sourire de squalé” (36). Conversely, flora and fauna take on characteristics usually identified with human characters, as do tools. With chilling suspense the saw and the axe are presented as posing an active threat to the virgin trees (the Dulcinea of our tale) who are not only in need of protection themselves but are also ready to offer refuge in return, like the hollow tree hiding Ti-Luc from the authorities.

In his article “The Nature of Nature Writing,” David Rains Wallace writes, “D.H. Lawrence excluded Thoreau from his canon of American classics, regarding him as a coldhearted detailer of biotic mechanisms” (Wallace 1984). *Le Joueur* is in many ways a study of the biotic mechanisms at work in the world, but perhaps unlike Thoreau, Hamelin succeeds in painting a full picture of people in their natural surroundings by viewing human beings and human interaction through a sociobiological lens. Despite environmental realities so dire it might make anyone's heart go cold with misanthropy, Hamelin has written a warmhearted book about the

poor state of the world, thus making the disease of well-founded ecological despair fair and attractive to the reader.

Le Joueur in between languages—*Américanité* as hybridity

As we have seen, *Le Joueur* is a very American novel in many ways, prompting critics to say that Hamelin has “l’oeil américain” (Chartrand 2001, D5). Yet it would perhaps be more precise to say that Hamelin has “l’oeil d’américanité” since a general American eye, seeing the world from its English American point of view, is, as dominant cultures tend to be, too big to compare itself with something smaller. It thus seems safe to say that English America is generally ignorant of French and French America. When translating from French to American English, the translator cannot assume general knowledge of the source language on the part of the target audience, and thus cannot use French words or concepts in the English text. Conversely, Hamelin assumes a certain knowledge of English and English American concepts from his (mostly) Franco-American readers, not more than any Quebecker is familiar with, yet clearly more than what most readers of an American English translation would understand in the reverse case. As I will show in my discussion of translation challenges, Hamelin subtly takes advantage of this space between English and French in which the contemplation of one’s own American-ness is seen in comparison, culturally and linguistically, to an Other America. This indeed poses a challenge for the translator.

The concept of hybridity provides a means to further analyze the space between two opposing cultures and what takes place in that space. This notion has its roots in the work of Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin who used the term to distinguish between texts with a single voice, such as poems, from texts with a double voice, such as novels (Easthope 1998, 146-147). He further

developed the concept to describe how language even in a single utterance can be doubleaccented in that the utterance may contain two styles or world-views. “Organic hybridity,” or on-going mixing, is an essential factor in the evolution of languages, Bahktin claims, whereas “intentional hybridity” is “a politicized process whereby one voice is able to unmask another's authorial one through a language that is double-accented” (Bakrania 2008). The cultural theorist Homi Bhabha extended this conceptual use of hybridity in a post-colonial context. A central notion here is mimicry which Bhabha uses to describe the process by which people of a colonized society mimic the culture of the colonizers. To Bhabha, this process has a liberating potential: “The effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing. For in 'normalizing' the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms,” Bhabha asserts, and identifies therein a new space, an “area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double” (Bhabha 1994, 85-92). Emerging from this hybrid situation is an in-between space, a “third space” which is “a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new *possibility*” (Meredith 1998, 3).

The voices of those who describe Quebec as a colonized culture, either by Canadian federalism or American influence, seems to be in decline. Overlooking the reality of one's own colonial presence and its consequences by victimizing oneself in colonial terms is indeed a difficult position to defend, and has perhaps become a less prevalent position as the shift in paradigm from “américanisation” to “américanité” has taken place, i.e. the realization that Quebec and French American culture is essentially an American phenomenon. If *Le Joueur* is an intercultural text, one has to view French and English America as two distinct cultures and not as two

expressions of essentially the same experiment: European colonization of North America. As an illustrative anecdote of the sameness of French and English America, I think of how Coca-Cola-drinking Anglophones on the Quebec/Ontarian border refer to Quebeckers, whose preferred soft-drink is Pepsi, as “Peppers,” thus displaying a perhaps unintentional insight into the comparatively miniscule historical difference between English-speaking and French-speaking new-world settlers. In a whole world of different figurative drinks, being descendants and living consequences of European colonialism, both are allegorical colas. Still, the neighbourly relationship does create a sort of in-between space which, however, is mostly only manifest on the French side. Quebec, being a smaller entity, well aware of the bigger colonial project next door, has the space to contemplate the differences, however small they may be, between the parallel worlds of French and English America.

In his theoretical terminology, Bhabha draws on the Lacanian concept of "the Other": "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite," Bhabha writes (Bhabha 1994, 85-92). Post-colonial scholars are, of course, generally and essentially describing power dynamics in societies in which there exists a clear distinction between colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha is thus describing a dichotomous reality between two polarized cultural entities. It could therefore be a stretch to use post-colonial terminology to describe the potentially hybrid relationship between Quebec and English America, since these are both expressions of European colonialism. However, critics of Bhabha, such as Anthony Easthope, have argued "that Bhabha's concept of hybridity relies too strongly on presenting hybrid cultures or identities as existing as adversarial to non-hybrid cultures or identities, which Easthope does not see existing in reality" (Cawley 2011). If one considers the make-up of a society, its distinct and diverse elements which forms a distinguishable societal

whole, we might extend the post-colonial definition to suggest that there is always already a kind of hybridity at play within a society whether or not the context in question is strictly speaking a colonial or polarized one or not. The notion of hybridity asserts, as we have seen, the existence of an observable *dynamic*. For hybridity to be a notion of historical significance, it should be observable in contexts different from the contexts in which the theory was originally formulated. We can thus say firstly that the notion of hybridity is relevant to the context of the relationship between French and English America and further that the space inherent in *américanité* can thus be seen as an example of a “Third Space.”

If *Le Joueur* is an intercultural text then the in-between space is not the space between a colonizer and the colonized but rather the space between two different colonizers. Ti-Luc occupies this in-between space, navigating by means of penchant for mimicry, both in English and in French. He even describes himself as a mimic: “Quand j'ai rencontré Marie, j'ai tout de suite compris les avantages du mimétisme de survie” (Hamelin 2001, 19). This way, he says he gets along with everybody, both in English and French, though according to him, his mimicry is a result of his lack of character. One of his drunken habits in Montreal involved mimicking a Montreal Anglophone's French accent by singing *Un Canadien errant* with the accent of Leonard Cohen. Moreover, Ti-Luc has been mimicking American characters since he was a kid playing with guns like a Hemingway character (23), and one could view his final fate as the result of mimicking his father, who indeed shot himself in a tree. Ti-Luc therefore goes off to die his own death in a tree, but does so with mimetic hints both at his mother's death (victim of industrial society) and his stepfather and namesake's death (victim of a failed ideology.)

In the book, the nature of English and French presence in America is presented as two sides of the same coin. Indeed, the representation of cross-culturalism is often almost parodic.

Geographically, Ti-Luc's road trip from Quebec to B.C. is over in two pages (Hamelin 2001, 47-48). Linguistically, Ti-Luc's ease with mimicking those around him, in French and English, leaves the reader with the impression that there cannot be much difference in how these North-Americans are expressing themselves. He thereby illustrates the sameness of the two cultures he is mediating between, and also stands out as the only character in the narrative truly occupying the in-between space.

However similar the two cultures may be, they will never be similar to each other in the same way. The cultural hegemony is clearly on the English side, Quebec being a much smaller entity than the rest of Canada and the U.S. If we speak of Quebec as essentially *American*, we make a tacit comparison to something else essentially American, most likely the United States. To contend Quebec's *américanité* is thus to contend that Quebec is American *too*. If one were to speak of the unmistakable American reality of the U.S., there would be no automatic comparison with Quebec. Viewed this way, Quebec French is not only American, but *distinctly* American both by virtue of its apparent American realities and the specificity of the perspective from which this American reality is perceived and experienced. Although the differences between Quebec and Anglophone America may be many, the perhaps most essential difference seems paradoxically to reside in their sameness, because the sameness is experienced in radically different ways. The hegemonic cultural expression of the North-American continent clearly being English, French America is inevitably seen in comparison to the mainstream expression of the larger cultural space it is a part of and intimately connected with.

As I will show in my discussion on translation challenges, knowledge of another America is something that clearly distinguishes English and French America, knowledge which is palpable on the linguistic level. It's quite rare to find French (let alone American French) phrases in an American English novel, yet a certain presence of English in a text written in American French is far from an exceptional occurrence. Although there are relatively few English words on the page in *Le Joueur*, English is from the second chapter onwards almost omnipresent yet hidden by means of the translational efforts of the narrator and protagonist, as the reader is explicitly reminded in a footnote informing the reader that dialogue in English will be automatically translated by Ti-Luc as narrator. Discussing how hybridity is used and understood in the field of Translation Studies, Sherry Simon points out that “[t]here are strong affinities between the process of translation and the creation of a cultural or linguistic hybrid. A translation carries aspects of one text into the materiality of another, so any translated text could be considered a hybrid that results from the interpretation of two language systems” (Simon 2011, 49-53). In our case, an interpretation of two language systems is already an important aspect of the source text (ST), as the narrator has done the task of translating most of the English spoken into French, an activity he also accomplishes for others within the action of the story (for example, translating a telegram from Strasbourg). Ti-Luc's translational efforts are not, however, without interruption, as there are instances where Ti-Luc as narrator or protagonist is incapable of performing his role as translator, instances that are of particular interest to us in the following discussion on translation challenges. Simon asserts that

“[h]ybridity should be reserved to describe only certain kinds of translations – those that draw attention to themselves as the products of two separate meaning systems. Hybrid texts are those that display “translation effects”: dissonances, interferences, disparate vocabulary [...] While the hybrid text affirms the dividedness of identity, often becoming an expression of loss and disorientation, it can also become a powerful and emancipatory place for the writer to occupy (49-53).

In translating *Le Joueur* into English, the notion that dialogues in the original text have already been translated by the narrator himself is subject to a strange shift since the language into which I am translating the book happens to be the original language of these dialogues. Instances when English dialogue exceptionally appears on the page bear traces of such “translation effects” described by Simon, which run the risk of being erased in my translation. One example is when the lumberjacks shout out their death-cry “Timber!!...” This small piece of dialogue, but dialogue no less, appears in English in the original, as such the narrator here makes use of a *disparate vocabulary* (English term instead of French equivalent, an occurrence which *interferes* with his prescribed translational task (the automatic translation), creating a *dissonance* on the narrative level (the word standing out not only because it is a foreign word but because the reader was specifically told that dialogue in that particular language would not occur.)

Le Joueur is thus, to a certain extent, a linguistically hybrid text. Translating hybridity is a particularly tricky task for the translator: once he has understood the specific perspective of the source text, his almost impossible task is to make the target language accommodate this specific perspective. Susanne Klinger's 2015 book *Translation and Linguistic Hybridity* deals with this problematic, and her insights will serve as a kind of guide and reminder of what is at stake in my discussion on translation challenges. In her book she makes the case for a perspective on linguistic hybridity that takes into account that language in cross-cultural writing is not merely the medium of representation but often the very object of representation (Klinger 2015, 1-2). Drawing on insights from narratology, a field that has indeed provided a distinction between language as object and language as medium, Klinger further explores the relationship between the two. She claims that the absence of a systematic distinction between medium and object has led scholars to overlook “the way in which linguistic hybridity contributes to the construction of

meaning in the narrative and, hence, how TT shifts in linguistic hybridity can shift the world-view constructed for the narrator and the characters (...)” (1-2). Linguistic hybridity and non-standard language, Klinger asserts, are in general “a feature that is particularly prone to shifts in interlingual translation” because “translators often erase or dilute linguistic hybridity encountered in the ST” and because “interlingual translation often creates linguistic hybridity (...) through the translator’s unconscious calques or through a deliberate attempt at foreignization” (2). Klinger goes on to ask “how TT shifts in linguistic hybridity affect the meaning potential of a text” and how “TT shifts in linguistic hybridity affect the reader’s construction of the narrator’s and the character’s world-view” (2). In the following discussion on translation challenges, I aim to show that in translating *Le Joueur* from American French to American English the distinctness of its American world-view will be lost or at least be prone to shifts in translation which may alter the world-view of the book and its characters as American English does not have the means to be distinctly American.

***Le Joueur* in English—translation challenges**

Generally speaking, *Le Joueur* translates very well into American English. American English, being an American language, obviously does possess the vocabulary and stylistic means to express that which is American, and *Le Joueur* is a distinctly American work. Yet, as I will argue through my examples which will deal with world-view and instances of linguistic hybridity, it is precisely the American *distinctness* of the Franco-American world-view that cannot be fully rendered into American English as American English lacks the means of linguistic hybridity that American French possesses.

The first issue I wish to touch upon, however, does not pose a problem in translation, but will serve to show that the French-American world-view is more similar to a U.S. American world-view than a Canadian one. The issue in question is the expression "chez nous", which the narrator makes use of on a number of occasions. For example, Ti-Luc's step-father and namesake, "le terroriste auto-guillotiné" (177) is described as one of the two or three indisputable victims "de la revolution chez nous" (17). At another point the narrator is discussing the idiom "on travaille pas pour le diable," which he deems to be "une expression bien de chez nous" (193). In these instances "chez nous" implies Quebec and "de chez nous," Quebecois. But as we know, "chez nous" is not only employed to signify the whole Quebec nation, it is also used to refer to one's home. If an Ontarian, say, were to describe one of his people's idioms, instead of "bien de chez nous," he would have no choice but to say "very Canadian," and in so doing name his world. There is a palpable difference in world-view between saying "chez nous" and "in Canada" or "in Quebec." The uses of "chez nous" in the examples above do refer specifically to Quebec yet in such a way and with such a world-view that Quebec *is* the world and not the just a corner of the world one is *in* (Canada, Quebec, etc.) If I were to translate "chez nous" with "in Quebec," I would ascribe to him the world-view of someone (like an Ontarian) who by saying "in Quebec" would tacitly imply that *the* world is not here, but out there. Not wanting to shift Ti-Luc's world-view into that of an Ontarian, I have opted, where possible, for a simple "here" as one might easily hear a U.S. American say talking about his whole country: "one of the two or three indisputable victims of revolution we've had here." The reader will understand that this "here" means Quebec, and the world-view of someone who refers to his country with something like a mere "chez nous" remains.

Upon Ti-Luc's arrival on Mere Island, the reader is informed that conversations held in English will be automatically translated (52). If an automatic translation—whatever that might be—has taken place in *Le Joueur*, this would mean that the fictional dialogue had somehow already occurred in English only to be translated into French, thus the task of an English translator is to translate the conversations back into the language they were originally held in. The ideas or phrases allegedly expressed in English are rendered seamlessly in Hamelin's French, which suggests that these ideas make the same sense in American French, or at least that American French fully possesses the means of expressing American English dialogue and world-view, so much so that we might believe it is happening automatically.

After the automatic translation is put in place, it is often not clear which language is spoken. A conversation between two Quebeckers in B.C., such as Ti-Luc and Muse, is almost certainly held in French, but on no occasion are we aware of characters switching languages. The dialogue of French-speaking and English-speaking characters appears very similarly, and so there's little need to consider the use of an accent or other ways to mark their speech as that of an Anglophone or a Francophone. They all sound American. A distinct exception is the language of the only non-American character in the book, the French journalist PMDD-T whose French is clearly that of a Frenchman, which raises the question of how he should sound in translation. Rendering his speech in European English, i.e. British English, is not a good solution since PMDD-T appears almost as a caricature of an outraged Frenchman:

Au Népal [...] les pauvres types assez fous pour s'enchaîner à des arbres, on les hachait menu, mon vieux. À grands coups de cognée dans le bide! [...] Parce que si on les avait écoutés, tous ces petits pacifistes à la con, on aurait les chars russes sur les Champs-Élysées à l'heure qu'il est. [...] Et puis, j'aurais bien voulu les voir, moi, ces artistes minables sur la Sécu et tous ces grands intellos, encerclés par les Tchetrniks à Sarajevo!!! (68).

My approach to translating PMDD-T's speech has been to leave in certain traces of his Frenchness, while still having his speech appear loud and boastful in North-American English, which should be very possible indeed:

In Nepal (...) some poor guys were mad enough to chain themselves to the trees, and they got cut to pieces, I tell you. They swung the axe straight into their bellies. (...) Because, had we listened to those nitwit pieces of shit pacifists, Russian tanks would be driving down the Champs-Élysée as we speak. (...) And how I'd love to see them, all the pathetic artists living on *Sécu* and all the *grands intellos* surrounded by the Chetniks in Sarajevo!!!

Here the foreign French words do stick out, a texture that does not exist in the original. With such a translation, a new kind of hybridity along the lines of what Klinger describes as the translator's "deliberate attempt at foreignization" (Klinger 2015, 2) is created. Foreignization is, Klinger explains, a textual strategy suggested by Lawrence Venuti "specifically aimed at increasing the reader's awareness of reading a translation" (119). On the other end of Venuti's spectrum is domestication, a strategy which further adapts the text for the target audience. Domesticating Ti-Luc's tone altogether would erase the sense of foreignness present in the original, a foreignness that is almost paradoxical since he is, after all, speaking the language of the book. Another and perhaps easier solution would have been non-translation. This would be along the lines of what translator Per Paulsen chose to do in the most recent Norwegian translation of *Buddenbrooks* by Thomas Mann when confronted with scenes containing local commoners speaking German in broad dialect. The approach was met with both comprehension and criticism from a critic in the Norwegian newspaper *Morgenbladet*, who found the approach "somewhat half-hearted although it does serve to underline an important aspect of the book: its clear polyphonic character" (Jordheim 2005, my translation). In a similar vein, I too could have argued for non-translation by referring to the importance of maintaining the distinction between PMDD-T's French and the contrasting American French of the narrator and the other characters,

claiming that keeping his dialogue in French would stress the presence of multiple language codes in the text. However, I would thereby neglect the principal task of any translator: to make something a reader cannot understand, understandable. My intention in keeping the italicized words in French is a compromise by which his comparative foreignness is underscored yet only with words I believe an English language reader will understand—understanding being, after all, the ultimate goal of translation. It is important that the reader should get a sense of the foreignness of this French character since the hybridity his linguistic presence represents underscores the notion that the hybrid relationship between the (French and English) Americans in the book, is not due to them being foreign to one another, but, on the contrary, because they're, to use Bhabha's words again, “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 1994, 85-92). Another reason to underscore PMDD-T's Frenchness is that he is a character in the oddball sense of the word, and no *metteur en scène*, translators not excluded, can resist playing on the entertainment value of having a Frenchman behave, or appear on paper, distinctly French. My choice in translating PMDD-T's French into American English has therefore been to create a kind of hybridity not present in the original by having the character say words like “Sécu” (instead of *welfare*, which is used elsewhere in the text in English, another good reason to keep it in French in this instance), much like a French character in an English-speaking film is always peppering their English with “Monsieurs” and “Bonjours” and similarly famous French words. English speaking people seem to like their Frenchmen French, and since the chief characteristic of his French—which is the very trait we wish to preserve—is precisely that it's *very French*, there's no reason to deny the English reader the fun of hearing a Frenchman use French terms. I have, however, refrained from adding any Monsieurs or Bonjours, as the book is entertaining enough as it is.

Despite the automatic translation, Ti-Luc does assume some English language knowledge from the reader. In the book, we briefly meet Sam Cooleridge, a man who “faisait l'élevage des moules tout en touchant son chèque du *welfare*” (italics in original) (56). Of course, every French Canadian reader will know what *welfare* is, indeed he might even use it in his French as Ti-Luc does. In translation this borrowed word no longer stands out, and all I can do to gesture towards its original Englishness is to italicize the word⁴, although even this means losing the little reminder that Ti-Luc is mediating between two cultures and languages as the word is already italicized in the original. Two pages later, however, Ti-Luc talks of Maxence being at the Welfare office, this time not in italics but with a capital W: “Au bureau de Welfare, un préposé lui proposa de défrayer, au nom de l'État, son retour au Québec” (58). Although I'm tempted to italicize *Welfare* here—so as to make up for the last lost gesture—such an addition from the translator would draw attention away from the narrator's intention to direct the reader to another orthographical specificity at play: the capital W and E in Welfare and État. If I were to italicize *Welfare* to prove *my* point, the little phrase would have no less than three orthographical details from two different sources, two capital letters from the narrator and one italicized word from the translator. Literary translation being a form of documentary translation, the reader “will usually read referential denotations such as “I think” and “our country” as referring to the ST author, not the translator” (Klinger 2015, 118). In this particular phrase, the reader will and should assume that it is the author and not the translator who has capitalized Welfare and État. Therefore the

⁴Having footnotes from the translator, however tempting that might be, is not a good idea for many reasons. One is that I would be the third to do so: Ti-Luc has his footnote concerning the automatic translation, then there's another from “l'éditeur” naming a bird Ti-Luc is describing (135). Another is that it always makes the reader ask himself unnecessary questions like “where was I?” and “where was he?”

translator should not steal the scene with an orthographical show of his own, as this would draw attention away from Ti-Luc's translational efforts.

The opening greeting of the first postcard Ti-Luc sends to Marie is an English “Hello” (61). Substituting “Hello” with “Bonjour” in my English translation would not make much sense, since the English “Hello” in the original seems to be a simple reference to the fact that he is no longer in Quebec but in English-speaking America. Since Ti-Luc has gone out west, I have opted for an American greeting that an Anglophone who wants to stress the fact that he has left the east to go out west might use, namely “Howdy.” Signing off the letter, he jokingly refers to himself as “Ti-Cul Blouin” (61). As “Cul” is Luc spelled backwards, any attempt to reproduce the subtle joke would inevitably distort it, or worse, (over)explain it, thus ruining it altogether. I have therefore left the scatological wisecrack in French.

As well as the presence of PMDD-T's spoken European French in the book, there is also a French language telegram sent to Patrick Westmoreland from the European Parliament, encouraging the protestors in Edge Bay. The phrase “Indiens américains de l'Amérique amérindienne du Canada” (79) baffles Westmoreland, so when he is visited by Ti-Luc in his cabin he asks what he thinks it might mean, whereupon Ti-Luc answers: “C'est ce qu'on appelle une subtilité de la langue française, monsieur Westmoreland” (80). The subtlety Ti-Luc refers to here comes to light in view of what is lost in my English translation, namely the repetitive suggestion of the continent's *bitter* indigenous people through the prefix *amér*-indien. This subtlety of the French language, as Ti-Luc calls it, is, I believe, the abundance of homophones, i.e. words with different meanings which sound the same in French, which offers an author or speaker the possibility to deliberately confuse the reader or listener. “Donc la confusion est voulue?” Westmoreland then asks. “Tout à fait” Ti-Luc replies (80). In my English translation,

although I have the phrase appear both in English and in French, the suggestive repetition of amér/amèr is lost to the mono-lingual English ear, and a confusion over the intended confusion in the original telegram is created. One might say that Hamelin has anticipated the question this might raise for an English translation of his work, as rendering this passage into English shifts and reproduces the initial confusion of the telegram.

Subtleties deemed to belong uniquely to the English language are also evoked in the book. At one point Muse tells Ti-Luc of a phrase she heard “au tree-planting” that she loves for what she considers its unilingual, untranslatable beauty, namely the phrase “Snowed out” (74). And she is right, if the only languages considered are English and French. For instance, the phrase is perfectly possible, even quite common, in Norwegian, a language which is this author's mother tongue. The characters in the scene live between the two languages in question, and I take Muse's comment to be one of many instances of commentary on the relationship between the only two languages present in the book and the place of French language and culture in a largely English cultural sphere. Muse seems to suggest that some ideas cannot be translated, but Muse does not need to translate it, as both she and Ti-Luc are perfectly capable of understanding the phrase in English.

Although the distinct French American world-view undergoes an inevitable shift in translation, there are also possible gains to observe and highlight. As a novel about North America, *Le Joueur* brings francophone and anglophone ideologies together in one place. Reading the book in its original language, the Quebecois presence might almost be missed, as one would expect a degree of *québécoisité* in a book written in Canadian French. In translation, there is the opportunity to emphasize foreign aspects by simply leaving them in. Susanne Klinger warns that deliberate attempts at foreignization might create a linguistic hybridity not present in the ST. The linguistic

hybridity in *Le Joueur* has to do with Ti-Luc's role as mediator between French and English. Since the latter language happens to be the language into which I'm translating the book, the whole mediation aspect, linguistically speaking perhaps the defining trait of Ti-Luc's world-view, runs the risk of being fully erased, or at least, heavily diluted in translation. Some loss seems inevitable but to simply accept the loss without attempting to compensate for them is to neglect the responsibility of a translator to reproduce, to the best of his ability, the world-view of a text. Although the ecological outlook is clearly a more central aspect of the book's general world-view, the linguistic one is far from insignificant. The occasional deliberate foreignization in the pen of the translator is a gesture toward staying true to Ti-Luc's world-view. The nature of the linguistic hybridity of the ST parallels the changing nature of Ti-Luc's mediation process (i.e. when his mediation breaks down, we see more linguistic hybridity), which means that the translator only has to observe the state of mediation at any time throughout the narrative, and do his best to reproduce or at least point to the hybrid nature of the language used.

When Ti-Luc screams his death threat to the English speaking police towards the end of the book, we're told it's in French: "C'était sorti comme ça, un réflexe. Comme si proférer des menaces de morts dans une autre langue n'aurait pas eu le même sens" (211). The reader isn't presented with the content of the French death threat this time. But a similar situation arises for Arnot shortly thereafter, originally talking to Ti-Luc on behalf of the police but becoming very hostile towards them at the sound of a chainsaw, prompting him to scream: "V'nez me chercher, mes tabernaks!!!" (214). This is perhaps less a death threat than a suicide note. But if a death threat can only be pronounced in one's first language, then this also seems to be the case for Arnot's suicide note, as the phonetic spelling of the phrase indicates that it was indeed pronounced in his mother tongue and not in the language of the local police. In my translation, Arnot's dialogue will obviously

appear in English throughout the book, so a compromise seems to be in order, especially since many English readers might fail to understand the first part of the sentence if kept in French. In context, I believe the italicized second part of “Come get me, *mes tabernaks!!!*” will be understood. My belief is that the curse will sound even stronger than a “motherfuckers!!!” would, because death threats and suicide notes and other announcements regarding the end of life seem to demand, in *Le Joueur* at least, the familiarity of one's native tongue. Additionally, when the lumberjacks pronounce their death-sentence shortly following Arnot's exclamation by shouting “Timber!!!...” they do so in English, thus evading the automatic translation process. The choice of keeping some French in the English translation will also serve to compensate for the presence of English in the original French version, since the book in translation should bear traces of the bilingual nature of the original, as inherent in the presence of two languages is a reflection on their coexistence.

The Title

According to David Homel “Tin-fluting” is “the practice whereby a translator makes a drastic change to the title of the original because of its uncomfortable nature” or its “untranslability” (Homel 1995, 47). The practice is named after Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*, which according to Homel “was wisely not translated as “Used Happiness,” but instead became The Tin Flute” (47). I would question the wisdom of this choice, especially if one considers another option that Homel conveniently ignores: “Secondhand Happiness.” This title would, in my view, render the meaning, rhythm and flare of the original as much as any translator could hope for. If *Le Joueur de flûte* could be translated into English as well and easily as *Bonheur d'occasion* can be translated into “Secondhand Happiness,” I wouldn't hesitate. But in the case of *Le Joueur de*

flûte, there is a French pun at play since one would refer to the book as “*Le Joueur de flûte de Hamelin*,” which is the exact French title of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. This particularity is inevitably lost in English because of differing prepositions (of Hamelin vs. by Hamelin). Also, “*Le Joueur de flûte*” has a more generic and subtle feel and none of the archaic quality of the “Pied Piper.” However, this legend has other titles in English to consider as well: the Pan Piper (of Hamelin), the Piper (of Hamelin) and The Rat-Catcher (of Hamelin.)

Ti-Luc's estranged father is quite literally, among other things, a flute and saxophone player. If I opted for *The Piper* or *Pan Piper*, it might be strange to suddenly bring up the flute yet quite archaic to talk about piping. In comparison to The Piper or Pan Piper, “The Rat-Catcher” does the work of evoking the Pied Piper while avoiding archaic language. Ti-Luc himself does not play the flute, but he was once a non-musical rat-catcher, so we see a kind of symbolic and legendary bond between father and son.

Unlike the title of Gabrielle Roy's novel which would lose nothing with a good literal translation, a literal translation of *Le Joueur* as “The Piper” entails inevitable losses. The pun is lost due to the differing prepositions in English (of Hamelin vs. by Hamelin), as is the generic feel of the original. However, tin-fluting the title entails the loss of the intertextuality of the original. One of the two epigraphs is taken from *Last Words: The Final Journals of William Burroughs*: “*Le Joueur de Flûte déguisé en oncle Sam a descendu le ciel de papier...*” The original reads: “The Piper in Uncle Sam drag, pulled down the paper sky (...)”, Burroughs alluding to the legend the novel is named for. The epigraph thus builds on the intertextual reference already established by the title. The famous German legend can also be seen as a piece of common heritage for the two languages involved, an aspect that might as well be preserved in translation rather than omitted through tin-fluting.

The title might be considered the first words of a book: it creates associations and expectations. Yet in translation novels' titles are often as different from the original title as the new cover is from the original cover; thus title and cover are both treated more as an adaptable sales pitch than an integral part of the book itself. A publisher might therefore prefer a tin-fluted title such as "Love Mountain" or even "The Tree Flute." A recent example of shifts in translation of titles from the publishing world, is Karl Ove Knausgård's *My Struggle*, a six-part autobiographical work which in English features a close-up of the handsome author and has alluring titles for the individual volumes such as "Boyhood Island" and "A Man in Love." In the original Norwegian edition, the cover features minimalistic photos of things like empty roads and electric wires, and the books are simply numbered 1 through 6. Perhaps the author photo and added subtitles in the English edition also contributed to a larger attempt at avoiding too strong of an association with Adolf Hitler's autobiography, although the title was clearly meant and understood as an intentionally controversial title in the original, and moreover, was the main object of attention on the cover.

Following the wish to keep the important allusion, "The Piper" is perhaps the most logical choice. One might even claim that the translation of the title into English is suggested by the Burroughs epigraph in which his wording is "The Piper." The word play on Hamelin's name, however, is all but lost with "The Piper" and without the fun pun, the title seems to lack some of the allure required of books in the English language publishing world. For this reason I feel that "The Rat-Catcher" is the best choice, as it is both alluring and preserves the allusion to the legend. When hearing "The Piper," a reader is not enticed to ask why the Piper pipes, but hearing "The Rat-Catcher," all kinds of questions arise, perhaps more than the original title provokes, however this seems to be a good way to compensate for the half-missing pun.

Conclusion

As I have shown, *Le Joueur de flûte* is a very American tale, and perhaps even more American than any English-language story can be, as its French Americanness allows for a clearer view of what it is to be American, and in fact creates a space for contemplation of this fact—therein lies the *américanité* of the text. Hamelin doesn't exaggerate the differences between French and English America, but he does draw attention to essential particularities of a French American world-view which have to do with an awareness of being American that stems from an inevitable comparison with English America, its larger parallel reality. The linguistic consequence of this cross-cultural environment as it appears in *Le Joueur* is that Hamelin's American French is an object of representation (and not just a medium) in the way it interacts with American English. In other words, the French American world-view is one in which mediation with English America and translation of American English is of the essence. Although post-colonial scholars usually employ the terms “third space” or “in-between space” to describe that which emerges between fundamentally polarized entities, even between two historically speaking similar entities such as French America and English America, there is a space for contemplation and mimicry on the non-hegemonic French side. Translating *Le Joueur* into American English, it becomes clear that such a space does not exist within English as, for example, an English translator cannot assume knowledge of a second language on the part of his audience. With no such space for linguistic and cultural contemplation at hand, the risk I run in translating *Le Joueur* from American French to American English is that the *américanité* of the original is reduced to something merely American. In an effort to keep as much as possible of the world-view of the text intact, some deliberate foreignization has been necessary. The use of foreignization is not to draw attention to

the fact that my translation is a translation, but instead to the fact that the original book is already a product of Ti-Luc's translational efforts. Ti-Luc sees the world—America—from a space in-between English and French America. He is well aware he is all American, and his perspective from the space between these two parallel American worlds makes him distinctly American: distinctly both because he is clearly American and because he is American in a distinct way. Hamelin has said that it is “[c]e paradoxe d’être des écrivains américains de langue française fait peut-être la richesse de notre littérature” (Péan 2001). Perhaps it is even “la richesse” of their world-view. It thus seems true to say that Quebec is a distinct society as some have said of Quebec's political place within Canada. National political realities notwithstanding, it would be more to the point I'm making to say that Quebec, or French America, is a distinctly American society with a distinctly American world-view. In conclusion, it would never be possible fully to reproduce a French American world-view in American English, since American English lacks the means to be distinctly American, it does not have *américanité*. And yet to translate *Le Joueur* is, in a sense, to carry on Ti-Luc's translation and mediation project and so a translator is thus, in a way, encouraged to take up the challenges posed by the text's *américanité* and tell Ti-Luc's American story in his story's second language.

Part II: *The Rat-catcher* by Louis Hamelin, translated by Einar Jullum Leiknes.

Excerpt 1: (p. 13-84)

Hamelin

*Why do people see rats? These are the sort of questions that ought
to concern the world (...)*

Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*

O.K., let's go. My name is Ti-Luc Blouin and I was conceived in a west coast commune in the late 60s. The *Ti* comes from my mother. She hung on to it until the day a tank truck crossed a line it shouldn't have. The truck was carrying ammonia. The driver fell asleep at the wheel, suddenly the vehicle was in the wrong lane. After the head-on collision, the truck overturned in the ditch, and the ammonia spilled into the Ottawa River. As a precautionary measure the authorities had the people living in the neighboring residential area evacuated. My mother was driving back from a conference she had attended in Ottawa (she worked for the Canada Council for the Arts at the time.) Instead of taking the 40, she had chosen the route passing through Montebello on the Quebec side of the river. Indulging her taste for the pastoral, I reckon. It was autumn and the light had begun to change. I imagine Canada geese in flight searching for water sources around the corn fields. Skunk flesh smeared all over the asphalt. And nearby, in the foothills of the Laurentian Mountains, the dark red glow of the radiant oak trees. Blue sky, a beautiful day. Nature-wise she must have gotten her money's worth at least.

The smell coming from the truck could have brought the dead of an entire cemetery back to life, but not my mother, her car now lying in the field, shriveled like an accordion that has

exhaled its last note. She didn't feel any pain. The truck driver, however, suffered a violent nervous shock, which is to say that he walked away without a scratch. The next day, the local suburbanites, accompanied by a psychologist, were able to return to the comfort of their homes. Everything was O.K. In the bay, fish floated in the calm water, their white bellies in the air.

My mother would occasionally talk about my father, an obscure American writer who'd been famous in San Francisco in the early 60s. A tall, blond man, and former college basketball champion. She had long since lost track of him. Forward Fuse (that's his name) is the inventor of *fuck writing*, an experimental writing technique thanks to which I was conceived. One evening when she had overindulged in Muscadet, she told me how Fuse had sat her down on the keys of his typewriter and asked her to lift up her skirt. If this family legend is true, my genetic code should look something like this:

dmf

m lfvfb,dC;`VD;`svv,f fav,favmmmmmmmmmmmfD

And all that on an old Underwood, as there was no electricity in the commune. The story doesn't specify how the procreator of my days could prevent the keys from getting jammed. Fuse was perhaps a most gentle lover.

What's more, he said his intention was to write a whole book using the revolutionary method he had developed, and not necessarily always with the same girl. My mother, by the way, never got any credit for her contribution to the birth of a new literary form. She was pregnant when she left British Columbia for the Gaspé to raise chickens. There she lived at the end of a back country lane, beneath a dome built by a group of her friends. It was at that time she decided to consider me a collective creation of the 60s. Needless to say, there was plenty of replacement dads around back then. My family name she took from the nationalist lover she had lived with

before leaving for Vancouver. The homage was posthumous. Jesse Blouin and my mother were still sharing an apartment when he got hit square in the face (an instant return to sender) with metal pieces from the modified alarm clock he'd placed in a Westmount mail box with a few sticks of dynamite. The metal lid of the box slit his throat with the precision of a guillotine, and thus he became one of the two or three indisputable victims of revolution we've had here. My mother met him at Maison du Pêcheur in Percé. Jesse was fighting to liberate his country and emancipate the proletariat, and had the historic decency not to survive his misplaced dreams of glory. For my part, through the magic of baptism, I grew up in the shadow of this illustrious terrorist, who was as impressive as he was incompetent.

Not to brag, but I'm all alone in the world. My last girlfriend left me because she felt I lacked character. She thought of me as someone rather poorly defined. It's true, I don't have much identity to speak of. I also have spine issues. A doctor has told me that I'll need a major operation soon, if not he says I could snap like a dry twig any day, the marrow quickly escaping from my bones. Fragile, handle with care, that's me, 5' 2" in shoes. I learned early on to stick out my chest to seem taller. Sometimes that's not enough though. So you compensate. You try to fit in. I'm a person without taste. At a restaurant, if they tell me the wine is good, I agree right away, but I would never have recognized it on my own. I model my judgments after other people's and distrust the experience of my own senses. Having strong tastes tires me. For the most part, my needs leave me rather skeptical. The same goes for a cooked meal, women and movies, and paintings hanging from picture rails in museums. I wait until the verdict has been reached, then I subscribe to it. I'm lenient as an eel, accommodating of anything.

That's what I admired about Marie. Either she liked something, or she didn't. Her appreciation was instant and came without hesitation. She had opinions and viewpoints—in short, weapons that allowed her to cut into reality, to carve her way through that obscure and opaque mass. I was the complete opposite, always threatened by indifference and dissolution. Since my personality was no fortified castle, like everyone else's, I ventured into the world without protection, leaving my most vulnerable flank exposed. When I met Marie, I immediately understood I had to imitate in order to survive, so I clung to her like remora to the belly of a shark.

Back then we both worked at the Community Health Department (CHD). Her job consisted of visiting women in disadvantaged areas and convincing them to lay off the sauce at least during pregnancy. At the end of every month, she'd put in extra unpaid hours, dragging pregnant single mothers by the ear out of neighborhood dive bars. Her beat included Pointe-St-Charles and a few other equally sketchy areas where she'd walk the streets preaching the right of embryos not to get hammered. To alcoholics beyond repair, she'd propose contraception and a good abortion ASAP. She had become friends with many of them.

Then she found a better paying job in a bar on St. Laurent Boulevard. The waitresses were mostly failed models whose portfolios had been passed on to the owner by some agency. Actors and musicians hung out there, fashionable people with clearly defined needs. I would arrive early to avoid standing in line. Later I'd have fits of jealousy after drinking heavily all night, keeping a close eye on smiling customers who'd take her forearm and look her up and down as they ordered. They wound up putting me on the black list after I smashed the cigarette machine. Our relationship started going bad after that. She began having hallucinations that flashed like strobe lights, seeing deformed fetuses twisting in pain through the generously

exposed navels of the girls that had come to drink and dance. Fetuses bathing in Daiquiris, shrieking and shriveled, silently beseeching her for help. One night she told me she was sick of being my social worker, said my case was jeopardizing her professional integrity, that I was ready to go live out my maladjusted childhood alone.

She is riding me loudly in a deserted orchard, close to the American border. It's late afternoon and around us the trees are drooping, overloaded with impeccable specimens of McIntosh, Lobo and Spartan. The undergrowth of the neighboring forest stands out clearly, gnawing deer having opened up the space. I come with a loud cry, squeezing her breasts, round and cool and hard like the barely ripe apples, still sour. As she rests against my side, I make a joke, inevitable perhaps, about the Edenic connotations of the situation. She laughs.

As the darkness tightens its embrace around the stocky silhouettes of the apple trees, she stands. A mauve haze moves just above the ground, between the drooping grass, already wet with dew. Clothes scattered around us.

– Are you coming? she asked with a shiver as she bent to slip on her panties.

Turning my head, I could see big goose bumps prickling her white thighs, muscles playing beneath her skin, wrinkles asking to be caressed. I reached out a hand, then felt an urge to get up. My body didn't follow.

– What are you doing?

– I ... can't move.

– Are you joking?

– No.

Leaning towards me, she stretched out her hand like a soccer player helping out a teammate tackled to the ground.

– Stop joking around.

I could tell by her look that she was afraid, so I smiled hoping it would lull my own fear. I had seen this disturbing light charged with discomfort and incomprehension once before, on the day, in an outfitter camp, I had collapsed and fallen under the table, victim of a vasovagal attack following a suffocation episode. The attentive circle of faces wanting both to reassure and be reassured, then me sitting on the floor amid the crowd, opening my astonished eyes: the beginning of a worry waiting to be named.

With Marie's help, I managed to get up from the cold ground. I was already doing a lot better.

– What happened to you?

– Dunno. Something got stuck in my back.

We gathered our things in four white plastic bags. Laden and serious, we walked down the slope of the orchard now covered by the near night shade. In the store I bought a small bottle of cider vinegar that the owner claimed to be a good cough syrup of sorts. On the way back, driving towards the horizon on a very straight road sunk in between the endless cornfields furrowed by the wind, we didn't exchange a single word. A raccoon seemed to be sleeping on the roadside. Further away a crow settling. Marie, her hands on the wheel, lost in thought.

A week later I learned that I suffered from *spondylolisthesis*. Roughly speaking, two of my vertebrates were acting like tectonic plates, slipping against each other with an almost geological patience. My spondylolisthesis had already advanced by a good centimeter, and—what's more—was now situated below the L2 level, the vertebrates having slipped down and

causing pressure to the bundle of nerves called the “horse's tail.” What I had experienced in the orchard was called a *motor symptom*. For the time being, the consoling medic added, there was nothing to do but wait. In his opinion, an operation could potentially be avoided. In my head, however, the damage was already done. Suffering from hypochondria, I felt I had fallen apart for good, ready to break in the middle any minute. When I left the clinic, I walked cautiously, with a straight torso trying to avoid any abrupt movement. The X-ray of my skeleton danced before my eyes. My mental state adjusted itself easily to the new situation: I was now a reprieved paraplegic. The evening I had intended to reveal to her my condition, Marie beat me to the punch, announcing she was leaving me. She then started dividing her time between a singer and a TV host.

* * *

I'm six years old. My mother is reading the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin to me in my room. Her voice becomes a magical instrument, I fall asleep and under my eyelids I see the cortege of children and rats marching. My mother likes that story a lot. I demand to hear it night after night. And when she closes the book, I ask her where the Pied Piper has gone with all the children who followed him towards the horizon. I'd really like to know where they went when they disappeared. She answers that she doesn't know. In her version of the story, no destination is given. My mother stands up, turns the light off and leaves.

At twelve, I quite naturally transformed into a rat killer. Because the solar energy system had collapsed, the inhabitants of the dome had disappeared, sick and tired of having to chop fifteen cords of wood by hand each year. After having inherited a small sum, my mother left the

Gaspésien hinterland and rented a cottage by the sea. Gulls in chaotic flight, nose-diving into the sea on windy days. Dead crabs flipped upside down after the storm, their shells looking like pale rust. The gelatinous purple of the jellyfish washed up on the shingle. The smell of iodine and rotting seaweed still lingers in my nostrils after all these years. As for neighbors, on one side we had a creamery, on the other an abandoned house. The rats inhabited the abandoned house. Every day they would go to the end of the plot, enormous, fat and unpunished, heading for the creamery.

My mother bought me a pellet gun and named me the rat-catcher. I would open fire on them as they attempted to cross, recharging my weapon as fast as I could, like a Hemingway character. My mother read André Breton and would stride along the beach looking for agates.

The first time I brought her home a trophy, she almost had a fit. To my big surprise, I had hit the large rodent straight in the head, it was lying all crushed on the turf, its scaly and naked tail whipping the grass. I turned back and tossed it into the bay.

After that I developed my own rat poison recipe: a Ritz cracker with peanut butter combined with a piece of cheddar covered by another peanut buttered Ritz, and everything generously accompanied by my rodenticide. I delivered my sandwiches every place I knew to be frequented by the enemy.

After we moved to Laval things went downhill fast. Over the years I was a grass cutter, shrub planter, rockery stone assembler, cement carrier, then swimming pool cleaner and tennis court maintainer. On the last two jobs, I would sometimes run into Mike Bossy in short sleeves and Rocket Richard wearing a white polo shirt with matching shorts. I was also a part of a standby housekeeping team, scrubbing suburban houses, repainting cabins, sometimes receiving royal treatment from a neglected wife, a fake blond with cellulite and an excessive suntan

squeezed into a ravishing white bikini. That's how I lost my innocence, slumped down in a deck-chair, a well-dosed cocktail well within reach, on a pink paved patio by the in-ground pool.

When I was twenty five years old, on account of the obscure studies I was supposedly pursuing, I showed up at an interview revealing all the signs of a blazing hangover, only to be catapulted on board as *project manager*. They even had business cards printed up for me! They might as well have made me President of the United States! The first five months I was going to be paid through a government program called Youth at Work, established to give a handful of people rejected by the system access to the dignity of Official Unemployment. In accordance with this conjuncture, I acquired two concurrent democratic rights: being paid minimum wage, and keeping my mouth shut.

At DSC my job roughly consisted of mapping pollution sources that affect the whole territory of the Island of Montreal, a surface area as big as half of Belgium. I had a mission. In the field I inhaled styrene while listening to the Public Relations Manager of Monsanto, a qualified moron wearing a safety helmet on his head and big plastic glasses on his nose, reeling off his statistics in a petrochemical frenzy. Back at the office I picked up the phone and asked to talk to the Director General of Sanitation Services of the Montreal Urban Community, a highly available man who must have been bored a lot, since his secretary would always put him through without any shillyshallying. And so we'd chew the fat. I avoided talking to him about the new giant water treatment plant, recently put into operation, which, for lack of a proper storage space, was discharging, as we had just discovered, the toxic sludge accumulated in its reservoirs directly into the St. Lawrence River (or was it the Rivière des Prairies?) With my habitual tact I thought the subject would aggravate the good man. The demands of decorum instinctively evoked my malleable morals and great flexibility. Like any skill, it's one you have to cultivate.

You've embarked upon something which is practically impossible, my young friend, he said in a fatherly way. He promised to send me the general map of the Montreal sewer system and then I hung up the phone, somewhat touched. We important people always found a way to understand each other.

Just another month of this soft aura of uselessness and I could finally tap into my Unemployment Insurance. When someone walked by my door, I would instinctively stare into space and start moving papers around. Or I'd pick up the phone and start talking to some imaginary interlocutor, scribbling nonsense on a pad of paper. The public servants treated me as if I was an errand boy, giving me phone numbers to call, public documents to deliver. Anything to get rid of me. The Pied Piper received only one insulting coin instead of the thousand gold pieces he'd been promised. At least the Mayor of my Hamelin offered me minimum wage. I was afloat in a pleasant feeling of vulnerability. I had no future and wanted nothing more. But things were a lot less fun now that Marie was gone.

Everything between us had started in the dark and narrow alcove where the miserable papers of our predecessors sat gathering dust on the shelves. They bore titles such as *Prevalence of asthma caused by exposure to allergens among preschoolers* and *Structural organization of recreational areas for disengaged young people in working class neighbourhoods*. Marie gave me an emphatic look before disappearing into the room. A bit earlier, by the coffee machine, her hand had lingered pointedly on my upper arm. When I joined her in the closet, she was standing in the dark pretending to be reviewing a tome entitled *Woman's shelters for single parents suffering from abuse and/or alcohol dependency in underprivileged areas: a provisional report*. My breath stirred the red curls at the nape of her neck. The expectation born out of her silence

and stillness became unbearable. I felt a great urge to wrap my arms around her, which I did. If I hadn't, I would have been carrying around a regret like an unquenchable thirst for the next twenty five years. I slipped the tip of my index finger into her belly botton, and she called me *baby*.

After that we got down to the business of organizing our boredom. Between closet visits we'd exchange notes, yawning and reading out loud passages with particularly juicy jargon. The logic was simple: *The less you work, the better you're paid*. According to Marie, it was a question of perspective and also one of adaptation.

On some afternoons we'd slip away on our bikes, riding down to the canal to feel the fresh breeze off the rapids on our faces in the humid heat. That summer the water of the Lachine Canal was a biblical red. An impervious cormorant, a nuclear war survivor by the looks of it, was fishing. Further down, a one-legged night heron perched on a block of cement. Marie wore light dresses revealing her thighs. I rode behind her, paying close attention to the alternating movements of her calves. We'd squeeze our eyes shut and speed through crazy clouds of mayflies. Sitting in the grass at the edge of the point, she talked about lack of love, which explains everything, about misery that's ready for you from birth. The blue and brown and foamy water was surging upwards, whirling iridescent hems in the pockets of the stream. At night, we'd go to Old Montreal and listen to jazz, drinking cocktails or beer.

When Marie quit her job at the DSC, around Labour Day, I was reduced to passing my time exploring the halls of the adjacent hospital which occupied one of the wings of the complex. I'd push a door open, and instantly find myself in a continuous hallucination: a world of wheelchairs and gowns, invalids rolling towards death, docile as dogs, each attached to an IV pole. A line of stretchers abandoned along the wall, frozen and patient bodies bound up in their

covers lay looking at the ceiling. I threw a glance into the rooms where I'd meet their obscenely white gazes, and see their tense, absent hands. Catching a whisper around me, like bubbles shooting to the surface. Grey skin all gnawed up from the inside, and the waiting, the solitude of each breath, and everywhere that aseptic smell, worse than the living stench of shit. Toothless old women called silently to me, I saw myself lying on one of their gurneys, heading for the evisceration room. At the end of the hall, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath before turning around and walking away.

* * *

Donald Gren was a big shot shit disturber. When I first met him, at a conference on hazardous waste organized by the Université de Montréal, he had just lost his funding from the Ministry of Environment, forcing him to sell his photocopier and dismiss his only full-time employee, none other than Donald himself. He was president for life of the *Brigade de lutte antitoxique*, the BLAT, engaged in the fight against toxic waste. We knew each other from peeing side by side in the university urinals.

Early in the fall, Gren was busy with the Hole affair, an old toxic waste dump that had recently been discovered beneath a residential area close to the hospital where I worked. Heavy industry had been dumping trash onto that wasteland for years before developers covered it up with a bit of earth and built pretty bungalows there. That evening I was supposed to attend a press conference held by the minister in the gym of the school nearby, so I decided I would head over right after work.

My day had begun like any other. The 24 bus on Sherbrooke. The sport section of the paper folded in quarters: thanks to the strike, the Expos would virtually win their first World Series. The poor Torontonians, always so pitifully down to earth, had landed their second real title the year before. In basketball, Jordan's early retirement promised a new era for the Houston Rockets. In Parc La Fontaine, a group of French tourists on a photo safari had managed to surround a squirrel. The heat wave seemed to be back. Everywhere I looked, carefree, self-absorbed girls were showing off their charms. My heart was aching as I rushed into the metro.

I spent the whole day working on data gathered by the Taiga 3000, a supercomputer installed in a mobile unit at the Ministry of Environment in order to reassure the population. If you think you're breathing air when you stick your nose out the door, I got news for you: On the same sidewalk, the Taiga 3000 is inhaling benzene, toluene, aniline, trimethylbenzene and trichloroethylene. Of course, there's occasionally some oxygen in there too.

Since I started working at DSC, I had given up the traditional mixture of nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen and carbon dioxide. My nasal mucous membrane was now filtering sulfur dioxide, ozone, hydrogen sulfide, sulfates, lead, nitrates, atmospheric particulate matter and ragweed pollen. According to Dr. Ledocil, my supervisor, the local residents could sleep soundly knowing that thanks to the Taiga 3000, no undesirable molecule would land on their hamburger without being duly classified first.

The heat in the room was suffocating. Men in shirt sleeves were wiping their foreheads with the back of their hands. Journalists fanned themselves with the press release announcing a whole series of spectacular measures including a government buyout of houses situated within the immediate boundaries of the old dump, the complete destruction thereof, the erection of a tall

protective fence surrounding the site, and the excavation of contaminated soil to be transported in thoroughly disinfected trucks to premises deemed less problematic for the time being. The families who were most directly endangered had already been expropriated. The minister had come by to ask them and their neighbors to start breathing through their noses.

He made his way to the platform, spindly and dry like a bone, his long face wrinkled like a mummy floating over a gray striped suit. He picked up a bottle of mineral water in front of him and drank demonstratively. He put the bottle down with a calculated movement as he stared at the crowd with a serious and reassuring gaze. He cleared his throat, and began.

– I've made it my duty to be here with you in person this evening.

– Liar!

The minister barely batted an eyelash.

– It was important for me to show you...

– Liar!

All around people started shouting, with increasing force. Some were lifting their children high up in the air. Will we have to keep sending our kids to play in the basement? And is the sandbox at daycare really as safe as the experts claim?

The minister looked around him frantically. Gathering his strength, he struck back, though his voice was cracking:

– Friends, I admit the situation is a serious one. But let's not panic, everything is going to be all right.

– The rats will soon be leaving, I said under my breath.

Under the pressure of the sauna-like heat reigning inside the gym, the lid seemed just then to blow off the pot. The press conference fell into chaos and cacophony. A voice I

recognized was shouting at the minister from the back of the room. I turned around and saw Don Gren jump in front of a microphone set up for the public. Screaming to make himself heard (the mic was turned off), he waved a pile of papers in the direction of the platform.

– I have in my hand, Mr. Minister, proof that oil has already infiltrated the water table.

On the platform, one of the minister's assistants was pointing at a screen and whispering to his boss. The mayor, almost apoplectic, banged his fist on the table to call for silence.

After twenty minutes I'd had enough. I elbowed my way through the crowd towards the door.

Having made a little detour to the bathroom, I saw Gren rush into the hall in front of me. Without slowing down, he threw himself against the double door, elbows up high like a halfback fighting his way through the scrum. Instead of an oval ball, he pressed his leather briefcase against his side.

Rushing out, I caught up with him down the street where he was unlocking his bike.

– If it isn't Ti-Luc! How's the inventory of the great Montreal bilge going?

– Very bad, Don. You're leaving already?

– Yup, I've seen enough. I just wanted to let them know that I got a copy of the Coquetell study. A friendly civil servant slipped it to me.

– Another plan to make yourself popular I take it.

He shook his Kryptonite bike lock at me.

– So, Blouin! Seems it's not going too well, champ?

– A little downturn, all of a sudden.

– Listen. How about we go for a drink?

– If you want.

He told me to meet him at a strip club in Verdun.

* * *

In his glory days, Gren had been a one-man-show capable of intimidating big companies and their lackeys in the government. But ever since the environmental question had been picked up by the professionals of petty politics, he often seemed out of his depth. He still carried a BLAT newsletter around, and was shouting as loudly as ever, yet his voice didn't seem to echo anymore. He was cheerful and paranoid and forty years old. In his thick rebellious hair there were only a few hints of gray.

– Did you notice the bottle of water? A public relations masterpiece. The metaphor is subliminal: your minister drinks bottled water instead of tap water, so he must know something. Shut up and listen to what he has to say.

– That seems a bit exaggerated.

– The belugas in the St. Lawrence river have become so toxic that when they're beached, scientists have to bury them in a toxic waste dump, and that's the same water we're drinking right here, minus a couple of microbes and suspended particles. Speaking of which, were you aware that the Hole is situated 400 meters from the water intake of the aqueduct serving the Montreal Urban Community?

– Of course. I've seen all that on my maps.

Ten feet in front of me, a naked girl was holding her purple, gold-embroidered satin panties between two long, curved red fingernails. Her thighs, as smooth as a finish of varnish,

were wrapped around a metal pole. She was rubbing her slim, shiny, fleshy calf against it, then repeating the movement with her clean shaven pussy.

On the other side of the stage, an obese, bearded man, his face partly hidden by his gangster-like glasses, was sniffing the bushy pubic mound of a very fat girl perched on a stool.

– You see the fat guy over there? He's a semiology professor. He's a regular here. I first met him on a fishing trip. A nature lover, in his way.

– You don't say. Well, I never thought I'd ever find myself in a strip club with Donald Gren of the BLAT.

– I come here once a month, in honor of my late father. He worked as a bartender during the golden age of the Red Light district, dwindling his paycheck away at the race track. Even before shrinks had gotten around to the question, my father had understood that it was not a good idea to let children hang onto their mother's skirts for too long. The first time he brought me here, he said: This is just so that you'll visually recognize the terrain, after that it's up to you.

In the harsh light of the blue and pink spotlights, the Incredible Sandra had gotten down on her back in order to spread both of her graceful legs in the air. The loud music was slowly destroying my eardrums, the voice of the DJ extremely annoying, and the combination of the two was rattling our bones with a force strong enough to disconnect the vertebrae.

Gren leaned towards me.

– And your father, what did he do?

– He was a writer, a writer fucked up on acid.

– Oh really?

– Yup. He came to Canada to escape Nixon and Vietnam. He met my mom in a commune, on an island off the Pacific coast. Mere Island, it was called.

– I've heard of it. It's opposite Virago on Vancouver Island.

– That's right. My mom always said it's the very end of the road: there's the ocean, the island, and then Siberia and Japan. I always wanted to go on a pilgrimage there.

– In that case you'd better hurry, buddy.

– Why is that?

With a grand gesture and a princely pout, Gren ordered us two more beers. The waitress was wearing nothing but tiny leather panties.

– Because they're going to demolish that island of yours. It's the environmental battle of the hour! The giant logging company responsible is called Westop-Pacific and they have a file this big of infractions, abusive practices and brazen squandering. But they don't give a shit. They pay the fine, move away and start again. At Mere Island, they're dealing with a handful of Natives supported by the environmentalists. The island is a part of the pluvial ecosystem of the north-eastern Pacific and is covered by one of the last virgin forests in the region that is still untouched. Temperate zone wetlands, as they're called.

Spread out on the floor with one leg stretched vertically, the other horizontally, Sandra was revealing her stark slit. She slowly raised the other leg, then spread them fully. From where I sat I could see the two little mountains of her breasts stand out, enveloping the conical shape of her chin (the mouth like a volcano whose crater is invisible to the observer looking up) and at the perpendicular of her thighs, coming to the fore as if drawn by a compass, her genitals naked like a shark's smile.

Then Don and I, like two normal guys having a beer, put the world to rights.

– They did us in, Ti-Luc. They're doing us in as we speak. You see, the great victory of power is having succeeded in privatizing Utopia. Today, people who plant a hedge to hide their

new barbeques from their neighbors tell themselves they live in a green space. They've substituted the cliché about the old English cat lady who feeds the birds with a new and infernally more effective one: the fascist anti-smoking activist! Now people think they're polluting themselves. Meanwhile, with the help of civil servants, companies can make new norms that fit their agenda. I just read *Immortality* by Kundera. At one point, a character talks about how green activists who, after having protested against the construction of a new nuclear power plant for four months, had *destroyed a quantity of trees and left behind an insufferable stench*. Reagan said that a tree polluted more than a car. The image of the damned environmentalist, at best naïve and harmless, at worst a dangerous ayatollah, has clearly been established by now. I've already talked to you about the Three Great Diversions? Animal rights, health fanaticism and New Age. In Vancouver I went to an exhibition put on by the Green Party where you could have a picture taken of your aura. And then they started talking about a lab rat's legitimate aspirations to happiness and freedom! The baby seal campaign was just heartbreaking. In public opinion, that's where you'll feel the winds change. And with that, environmentalism has become a plaything for the Rhinoceros Party and the concerns of *citizens* have been turned into pretty governmental promises. Do you recall the seven billion dollars for the cleaning of wastewater? The Archipelago project? Oh, I'd say they fucked us over good.

He fell silent, worn out. On stage another girl had replaced Sandra. She had a young, jumpy body and the look of a beaten dog.

– So what can we do, Don?

– We will start by ordering two more beers.

The next day, at the office, I spread out a big map of the country in front of me. I looked at Canada, looking like a giant sperm whale, the nose made up by the Pacific shoreline, Quebec and Labrador forming the tail (in this vision, the Northwest Territories, Yukon and the Arctic would represent the monstrous cloud of ice spraying out of the blowhole of the cetacean.) How can it be that every last fruit-picking Quebecker arriving in the Okanagan still today has the impression of entering a magical land where life is easy and pleasant, where milk comes flowing down the hill and honey drips from the trees? Newfoundland is not big enough to hold such reveries. The quest for Utopia has always been a westward journey. Vancouver Island was a paradise where a person had the right to kill five deer a year, where any young adult could show up at the office of a forest company and one hour later find himself tying hocked steel wires around the enormous trunks of B.C. firs. Also, anyone at all could go there and make five hundred dollars a day planting trees.

Glen had informed me that a handful of environmental activists, allied with the local Native Americans, had set up a provisional camp at a place called Edge Bay on the shore of the island. There they were steadfastly waiting for the company. And what about me, what was I doing in this fucking office anyway? Why wasn't I already there in the land where the sacred sperm of my father had once hit his target right on the mark?

Suddenly Dr. Ledocil burst in the door and interrupted my train of thought. He had a nice, mild face with blotchy cheeks and a soft chin.

- So, the press conference?
- It got pretty heated. Donald Gren was there.
- Oh, exclaimed Ledocil with disdain. The Shit Disturber.
- Yup, the Shit Disturber in person. True to his reputation as well!

Ledocil stepped toward me, placed the palms of his hands on my desk, and leaned slightly forward.

– As you know, the approach we've chosen is less rowdy. Sure, the BLAT is a good watchdog, but a watchdog that barks too often will, as you might know, appear less credible in the long run. And there he is, shouting himself hoarse all alone in the night, whereas those of us whose sleep he's disturbing, we know very well there are no thieves in sight.

I followed the development of his metaphor with interest.

– Our course is less media-centered, less spectacular than your friend's. And above all, less alarmist. At DSC, we're all about the long term, you understand?

– Absolutely.

It seemed his little monologue had come to an end. Before leaving, Ledocil cast a glance at the map spread out on my desk.

– Eh, mister! The Island of Montreal can't be very big on that thing!

His gibe delivered, he had already reached the doorstep.

– By the way, Doctor.

– Yes?

He turned around curtly, his amiable air intact.

– There was one thing I wanted to ask you: *where are they going to put the earth?*

– What do you mean? What earth, Ti-Luc?

– The earth of the Hole. Where are they bringing it?

* * *

The guy sitting next to me at the bar was telling me that he had been working on a screenplay for six years. He was tired of the *small-mindedness* of Quebec institutions, so he had decided to go big: he was going to send it to the United States!

– I'm going to get an agent. I think that's the best thing to do.

I was barely listening to him. I had spread out a map of British Columbia on the counter. Between two sips of beer, I lost myself in contemplation of those great spaces in miniature, asking myself which one among the myriad of islands dancing before my eyes in the poor light was the land of my interest. On the other side of Virago (an isolated point on the tip of a peninsula next to the strait of Cloaquat, on the western shore of Vancouver Island) I discerned an island big enough to appear on the map but too small to be named. It was vaguely V-shaped, and judging by the scale, about 15 km long.

– Yeah, that's it. I'm going to get myself an agent.

The Den was one of those ambivalent bars that in the afternoon put on the nonchalant air of a neighborhood cafe only to transform at ten o'clock into a trendy, stroboscopic bar so as to attract good-looking bimbos. Marie worked mostly nights there, but still had to do some day shifts, considerably less lucrative, atoning for her newcomer status in the organizational chart of the club. In an idle moment she lit a cigarette and sat down in front of me. It was the first time I had seen her since she left me.

– You're going away?

– I think so.

– Ah, yeah? And where are you going?

– I think I'm going to save a virgin forest to clear my mind. Have you ever been out West, Marie?

She exhaled a cloud of smoke.

– Yeah, tree planting two summers ago. I've already told you about that but you've obviously forgotten. They promised I would make a hundred bucks a week. After that, I tried cherries. At night I'd read *Grapes of Wrath*, and it was just like that. All things considered, I still prefer working in bars.

I looked at her. She was cute, her red strands of hair kept falling across her eyes. I wanted to seduce her. It's not as dangerous with an ex-girlfriend. You know exactly where to stop. (But what am I saying? It's a lot more dangerous and when you do stop, you run even more of a risk of getting your heart crushed.) I was almost relieved to see the screenwriter have a go at it. That the treatment of his film had basically already been accepted by Hollywood served as a good argument in his favor. Marie, like a great magician, didn't tarry in making him disappear behind a screen of smoke. It was this guy here she wanted to talk to.

– You really mean to go through with this trip?

– Sure. Actually, I made up my mind just now, while you were asking me the question. Of course I'm going away. Or can you think of another solution for me?

– The usual one. Chug fifteen beers, then go home singing *Un Canadien errant* with the accent of Leonard Cohen.

I turned triumphantly towards my neighbor with a look saying *in your face*. He could not have failed to see that this girl knew me better than anyone.

– Speaking of that, Marie, I'm happy the sad story about the cigarette machine has been erased from my file. I'm gonna re-establish my reputation, old girl. I actually just met him not far from here, I said spinning my stool towards my neighbor.

– Who?

– Cohen. I'll take another Boréal, whenever you have a moment, Marie.

– What are you doing tonight?

– In bed by nine o'clock. Departing at dawn, rucksack on my back. Just like in the good old days.

– So, just like that, it's for real?

– More and more so.

– And what about your job at DSC?

– I'm quitting my job at DSC.

– Have you told Ledocil?

– No. I always dread goodbyes.

Now Marie looked at me with real interest.

– As irresponsible as ever, as far as I can tell.

– That's one way of seeing things.

– Will you never grow up?

– That's because I have a lot of catching up to do.

– Yes.

Marie put out her cigarette and looked me straight in the eyes.

– You're going to try and look for your father. Is that it?

I turned and nodded at the screenwriter.

– Don't let me stop you from taking notes.

– The famous... What did you call him again?

– The Pied Piper. A nickname my mother gave him.

– Some kind of genius?

– Yes, but a genius of what exactly, that we never knew. He might be dead, for all I know.

– Those were dangerous years.

– Yeah, so they say.

– That'd be too bad for you, to be condemned to an eternal adolescence.

– Adolescence, I explained to the screenwriter, is a concept Marie has invented to describe my emotional situation.

– The day you turned twenty-five you said to me: Starting tomorrow, I'm gonna be serious. I remember it very well.

– Yes. And one year later, here I am. Still getting paid minimum wage, having become an anti-social outcast, terrified of starting a family in a bungalow.

– You're not even funny.

As she was turning away to serve another client, I ordered two shots of Jack Daniels and started telling the screenwriter the legend of the Pied Piper, adding, for form's sake, that the rights were probably still available, perhaps the story had even been in the public domain for a long while. The rats, so they say, all went and drowned themselves in the Waser, the river surrounding the town. According to another version, they plunged into a giant sun-shaped cheese. The children, amounting to about a hundred and thirty, had all disappeared into a dark cave at the slope of a mountain, never to be seen again. The money-grubbing bourgeoisie of Hamelin soon got their revenge on account of all the money they made on the story, for instance selling chocolate rats to tourists. Legend also has it, thus keeping the story alive, that on clear nights you can still hear the cries and laughter of the young ones who followed the rat-catcher to that mysterious mountain behind the horizon, where they continue to dance and sing and celebrate.

Marie was right, I had gotten a good start and was almost about to spend the first part of the night in this halfway swanky bar, boozing and reeling off bigger and bigger nonsense. She kissed me on the cheek before she left, alone, at least I think so.

– Send me postcards! she exclaimed, seemingly cheerful.

She turned back then and held me for a long time in her arms. But in this world, nothing ever lasts.

I went home singing *Un Canadien errant* with the accent of Leonard Cohen.

Edge Bay

The judges revealed themselves to be anthropocentric in that they never considered the tree from the inside out (...)

Jean-Denis Archambault, “L’arbre reconsideré”, in McGill Law Journal, 1977

As the day broke on a gray October morning, dressed in my finest attire (padded army jacket, my best pair of Levi's and hiking boots complete with Vibram soles,) equipped with my tent and sleeping bag and having emptied my bank account thirty-six hours earlier, I wrapped a brand new car around a white spruce by the roadside of the Trans-Canada highway just west of Petawawa around five o'clock. The main driver, engaged by the Allô-Stop agency, was curled up

in the backseat attempting to get some shut eye. He had been hired to bring the car to Calgary in three days. He acted as if it was my fault that a fine layer of wet snow fell on this damned white spruce forest on a 10th of October. You should have seen his murderous look as they rolled him into the ambulance. Before they were able to clarify to general satisfaction the inevitable questions concerning insurance and responsibility (none in my case, as I respectfully submitted to the police officer who had invited me to chat, unharmed and comfortable in his warm car,) I found myself standing on the platform of the small train station in Chalk River, close to a nuclear plant, waiting for the train.

From Calgary I took the bus to Banff where, after hitting on a Belgian tourist in Black Bear, I saw her slip through my fingers at the youth hostel accompanied by a bald American man from Alaska. The next day I broke the handle of the ax belonging to the owner of the hostel while attempting to chop wood.

In Jasper, I slept in a big dormitory where I met a girl from Laval who had participated, as a victim, in the famous Osoyoos beating in the mid-80s. The local rednecks, armed with baseball bats, called her a *frog*, grabbed her by her arms and legs and threw her into the pond.

I arrived in B.C not far from a place called Tête Jaune Cache. A plump and squat policeman with a weird grin allowed me to seek refuge from the rain in his service vehicle while he conducted a routine check of my identity. Then I caught a ride in a nearly new race car (53 km on the odometer), driven by a turbaned Sikh wearing a ritual saber on his chest. If he hadn't broken the transmission, I would've reached Pacific shores by nightfall. Following an amazing adventure involving the smoking of a good deal of genetically modified weed, I eventually got dropped off by a heavy duty vehicle in the deserted parking lot of a Richmond shopping mall in the middle of the night.

* * *

In Vancouver, loads of wet shit left behind by wild geese was enriching the soil of Stanley Park. Cargo ships were anchored at the entrance of the bay. In the pond, blue-beaked tufted ducks were sleeping and drifting with the stream, their heads tucked under their wings. A jogger in a bright red tracksuit passed, huffing and puffing. The last three days I had slept about two and a half hours. I lay down on a bench to try and bag a few Z's.

I dreamed the following dream: a man was standing still by a big boat hauled ashore. He was very tall, I couldn't see his face. Turning towards me, he watched me approach him as if he'd been expecting me. But before I reached him, he gave the boat a push and got in as it slid effortlessly into the sea. The man kept looking my way, yet I couldn't distinguish his features. In a final effort to catch him, I ran through an increasingly thick fog that I was still struggling to escape from when I opened my eyes.

I walked through the city as it was just waking up: business men, beggars, hedonists of every hue, harbingers of joy, prophets of doom and skateboarders. In East Hastings, rucksack on my back, I stepped over two or three sleeping Natives, and took a seat at the bus station cafeteria in front of a bacon-and-eggs breakfast and a tabloid newspaper purchased from a vending machine.

In the paper, they were talking about the bombing perpetrated the previous week against a small community bookstore in Kitsilano, the old hippie neighborhood. Responsibility for the crime had been officially claimed by Hope Four, an *eco-terrorist* organization professing to having acted, as it were, in the name of the fight against pornography. Journalists had consulted

eminent scholars inquiring whether *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Les Onze Mille Verges* and the novels of Henry Miller could still today be considered works of fiction that are “insulting the female body”.

The story got more complicated when you learned that the bookstore had been at the center of a virulent controversy a year earlier for having displayed in the shop window a publication with a cover showing two naked men embracing each other in a strange position with an unobstructed view of their erections. The municipal authorities had tried to seize the incriminating object, provoking gay rights advocacy groups to take to the streets. A fund-raising was organized to help the gay bookseller who soon bolted with a portion of the money raised. Last they'd heard, he was living in Puerto Vallarta.

The idea of an anti-gay attack didn't rhyme well with the progressive ideology of Hope Four. Some voices were raised claiming that the exaltation of homoerotic sexuality for artistic purposes was in fact exploitation of the male body for commercial use. The result: lesbian feminists, with their pro-gay and anti-porn platform, didn't know what to think. That morning Dr. Helen Cacklenut, founder of the Department of Gynology (Anthropology of Womyn (sic)) at the University of British Columbia, had come to their rescue suggesting in an open letter that Hope Four's bomb aimed at denouncing the passive attitude of the bookseller suspected in this matter of having thrown in the towel a little too soon. “It is my opinion,” Cacklenut concluded in an ardent finale, “that this monstrous contraption was indeed a pro-gay bomb, something which does not prevent it from also being pro-women and pro-environment.”

I was about to hit the sport section when they announced the departure of my bus to Nanaimo.

* * *

The bus had slowed down. Slanted beams of golden, greenish light were shining between the furrowed trunks of the pine trees. Ferns and bushes were crowned with a fine halo of sunlit dust. A big redhead in a plaid shirt sat snoring softly in the seat next to me. Peering out, I noticed a gathering on the roadway. A police car was driving slowly around with blue-red lights flashing. People were walking barefoot on the asphalt. They were all dressed in the same green toga open at the back like a hospital gown. Most of them were wearing necklaces and flower crowns. Hopping about on their toes, they sang, shook tambourines and showed their asses to people in passing cars. The display was greeted with approving honks.

– Hamadryads, my now awakened neighbor informed me. The Church of the Second Reign. You hear all kinds of things about them. They're only allowed to copulate with vegetables and no one has ever seen their guru. Only specially selected aides are authorized to approach him to collect his excrement*.⁵

– And what do they do with it?

– A big pile of sacred compost. Because, you see, everything they eat has to have been fertilized by the shit of their beloved leader. As you can see, there's not many among them carrying any extra weight.

My neighbor was right. He seemed pretty well informed.

– I have a sister who spent three years with those lunatics. I got together three of my friends and went to get her at gunpoint. When we brought her back, she was nothing but skin and bones. It wasn't pretty.

⁵ Author's note: Conversations held in English will be automatically translated.

– So where are they heading like that?

– To Virago. The entire way on foot. Seems they want to go hang from the trees to save them. They make love with watermelons. Nothing but a gang of dirty perverts if you want my opinion.

I asked him what he did.

– Lumberjack. Unemployed. You?

– Ecologist. Unemployed as well.

He fell silent. Meanwhile, the bus rolled past the long white majestic limousine leading the procession. In vain I tried to get a look at the spiritual leader through the tinted windows. My neighbor flashed a ferocious grin.

– We're preparing a little reception for them in Port Alberni, with axes and crowbars.

As I dozed off, my thoughts took a lewd turn, lingering on the spectacle of co-eds I had observed on the ferry boat between Horseshoe bay and Nanaimo: girl scouts letting loose, or members of the local Farrah Fawcett lookalike club. When I opened my eyes, my neighbor was gone. The coastal mountain landscape rolled by the window, punctuated by clear-cut areas as if we were moving through some infernal chessboard. Clouds were hovering over the bare, rocky mountain tops. I fell asleep again. Just before Virago, my eyes opened to the gray and radiant ocean. On the other side of the road, the forest had become an alignment of twisted resinous trees, their branches deformed by the salty wind. In the distance, the snowy profile of the coastal mountain chain covered the horizon. A handmade sign was nailed to the trunk of a cedar on the roadside:

WE STOP WESTOP

Virago was an old fishing village that was changing rapidly into a mass tourist destination. Restaurants. Hotels. Bed and breakfasts. Souvenir shops. Whale-watching. I had no intention of contributing to the prosperity of the local economy. For dinner I wolfed down two date squares while skimming through old issues of the journal *Équinoxe*, sitting by the window of a Cafe Grano on the main street. Only two tables fit in the tiny place, one of varnished wood, the other blue mosaic. Two long benches with tall backs were leaning against the walls, with some stools standing here and there. Climbing plants seized the light of the bay shining over my head. On the counter there was a tray of complimentary pastries next to the inevitable petition (against clear-cutting) and a tin in which a couple of coins were already clinking together for Sudan. The manager was a pretty brunette in a sky-blue dress. Pinned up on the walls were newspaper clippings of incidents relating to the *Battle of Mere Island*. I heard the name of the island pronounced in a quiet conversation between two young men in jeans and a local fisherman, but I was too exhausted to listen in. The journey from Montreal seemed unreal to me now, as if things had happened too fast for my memory to keep up. In a shop across the street, I bought half a dozen postcards of Mere Island, then walked down the main street, bent beneath the weight of my bag. On the other side, hiding the open sea, was my goal, black like the fur of an animal. Mere Island, like some luxury breakwater, lay protecting Virago with its big thick body, shielding it from the disturbance of the open waters. The rolling of the tree tops only ceased at the edge of the water, one could scarcely identify a threshold worthy of being called a shoreline. The sun was still shining over there, while dusk was already creeping up on Virago. Finally the

dark surge of the forest appeared to absorb the last glow of day. On the shore, about a kilometer away, a couple of pale-colored shacks stood up. The Native reservation, I reckoned. In the distance, two mountains plump like paunches were about to dissolve into obscurity.

A guy with a full head of white hair was scratching something into the deck of a yacht. Further away, an old dinghy stranded on an islet was anchored onshore by blocs of cement. I also noticed a floating home at anchor with two rowboats tied to the balcony.

I didn't know what to do next. There was a bench, so I sat down. I started rubbed my aching shoulders. The road came to an end here, there was even a sign saying:

TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY

TERMINUS

As darkness took hold, I rolled out my sleeping bag on the bench and lay down.

I closed my eyes.

Big Daddy returns to visit me in my dreams, crouched on the gravel between blocks of concrete at the far end of a damp cave. It was always there he would wait for me, in the summer of the rats. Slowly I knelt down, placing my offering before him. He looked at me closely, his small keen eyes glowing in the half-light. He looked like he knew he was swallowing poison, even seemed to be enjoying it. I tiptoed out the way you exit a church. Next visit, I found him sitting in the same place, brushing his mustache, waiting for me. A patient deity and never satiated. I handed him another arsenic sandwich. None of my gestures escaped him. In the gaze he gave me, there seemed to be some dark approval, a black flash of gratitude.

I was taming Big Daddy and I was killing him. Or perhaps it was he who was taming me? No matter how much I increased the dosage, or how often I'd bring him these meals, he remained right there, always huddled up in the shadows at the entrance of his grotto, waiting. When I returned after an hour, Ritz cracker crumbs were sparkling in the curls of his mustache.

One day, I found a poisoned cracker intact. So I left a second ration. The next day, both crackers were still there.

* * *

The land opened up in front of the rowboat. Like a deep wound swallowing the bow of the boat bouncing on the foam. Edge Bay. While having breakfast at Cafe Grano, I'd met Sam Cooleridge who offered to bring me over for 10 dollars. He lived in his boat somewhere along the coast, mussel farming while still cashing his *welfare* check every month. He had worked as a lumberjack before he joined the protestors. The forest was quickly closing in on us, sliding along an indigo hollow in the direction of the campsite. Seals were plunging towards us as we passed, bald eagles were watching us, perched up high on age-old tree stumps.

The campsite appeared between the narrow banks: a white tarp shielding the shed, the fire feeding on huge logs burning in the middle of the clearing. Tents were spread around the surrounding underbrush, spots of bright colors in the misty darkness. To the right, looming rocks, gray and naked. Further up, the headquarters, a small gabled cabin. A multicolored Buswolks was parked close to the shore, an odd presence in the full absence of roads. We docked next to a guy in orange underpants caught in t'ai chi ecstasy.

The communal dining area was made up of two awkwardly squared-off tables adjoined by benches that were tree trunks sawn off lengthwise and equipped with legs. I had just set my Campfire camp stove down on the spongy foam mattress a little away from the others when I met Maxence Moutou, a Francophone from Kapuskasing, Ontario. He had also lived in Ottawa, Quebec and Montreal. Blond and coarse, with small round glasses, he looked like a chick fresh out of the shell. In Montreal he had been chief editor of *Provigain-Express*, the indispensable retailer magazine.

– The only writer too, of course. I disguise information as advertisement and vice versa. At least things are nice and simple at *Provigain-Express*!

When I met him, he was about to thrust a handful of tea bags into a big beat-up teapot, as black as an oven. He told me the mixture was already famous all over the campsite. After one cup, your eyes grow wide. After three you'll be running across the clearing beating your chest.

– Green tea, let's leave that to the fairies. Why should the Chinese be right? Just because there's a billion of them?

This creosote extract constituted the essential ingredient of a never-ending soliloquy. There were regularly up to two dozen old bags marinating in the pot, looking like drowned bodies floating up to the surface or the residual sludge from a water treatment plant.

After an attempted suicide (Jacques Cartier Bridge in Montreal), Max ended up in Vancouver where he had to steal bread crumbs from the ducks to survive. Standing in front of an electronic shop downtown, he saw for the first time images of Mere Island, multiplied by the screens of two dozen TVs. Having slipped discreetly in, he heard Moses Boile, chief of the Onani Nation, solemnly declare:

- If there's going to be a blood bath, it will be the white man's fault.
- Finally someone's talking!

Then a salesman, troubled by his poor appearance, chased him out of the store. At the Welfare office, they offered, in the name of the State, to cover his return to Quebec, or even to Kapuskasing if he really wanted. Maxence then flogged this gift of charity half-price at the black market by the bus station. The next day he got on a bus heading in the opposite direction, towards Lion's Gate Bridge, then at Horseshoe Bay he took the ferry with a prominent portrait of Queen Elizabeth hanging in the stairway, landing in Nanaimo (a sound like a war cry, he thought) on Vancouver Island, finally arriving in Virago at night. At Edge Bay a guy who had just landed a girlfriend lent him his doghouse-looking tent.

In Montreal, he has also served as the editor of the monthly newsletter of the League of Anarcho-Libidinous Associations of America (the LALAM, of Lacanian observance).

- What's that?

– Article 1: Sexual heritage shall be considered public property and requisitioned to the benefit of society as a whole. The sexual revolution has neglected and abandoned far too many orphans. Like any revolution, it has mainly benefited the bourgeoisie. It is doctors and lawyers who get together in small groups and get off with each other in the basements of Outremont and Brossard. Meanwhile you don't see many homeless people in the sex shops.

- That's true.

– The first injustice is that of desire. This is the fundamental injustice which explains all the others. A French farmer wasn't even able to imagine the pomp of the Sun King's court. Today, any old goof-off dreams of banging Julia Roberts. For the first time in history, desire has gained the magnitude of a grassroots movement: people today are unable to avoid desiring the same

thing as everybody else. They have found the definitive weapon to oppress the masses: the destructive force of their own desire! The eternal sex carrot drives you onward, my friend, and in the meantime, they got their stick up your ass.

He was talking at top speed, filling his cup of tea every three minutes.

Carnal beauty is capital, O.K.? So for people to be really free, love has to become mandatory. They didn't get that back in the sixties. Sex must be nationalized. After the revolution, if you want to get with a girl, you'll have to fill out a form!

– And that's an anarchist platform is it?

– More Marxist-reformist, I'd say. Moreover, Lenin's mistake was to neglect the sexual matter. Monogamy is a typically deviant and reactionary behavior.

– So we'll need some reeducation camps somewhere. How about Cuba?

– Sade and Fourier were the Marx and Engels of coital-communism, Moutou affirmed solemnly. But it's an idea that still awaits its Stalin!

– And who is Herbert Marcuse in all this? Trotsky?

– Mao, Tito, Castro and Hoxha can all go and get undressed! In fact, the only thing to retain from Marx is that he got off with his maids in a paradise of surplus value.

– O.K. So instead of talking about the New Dawn we should all be getting ready for the New Night!

– Now you got it. Have some more tea, comrade.

At noon, a pot of fresh clam chowder was simmering on the fire. Most of the provisions were brought to the island by boat. For meals a voluntary contribution was suggested. Upon my arrival the campsite counted about thirty occupants with many other protesters commuting daily

between Virago and Edge Bay. At the evening meal you could choose from different menus: vegetarian, vegan, lacto-vegetarian and pescetarian. Red meat was completely out of the question.

That afternoon I took out of one the cards I'd bought the day before. You could see a giant tree with a trunk as wide as a highway. The caption specified that the tree in question was a certain Pacific redcedar, known in the region as the Hanging garden. Sitting cross-legged by my tent, sipping a cup of tea, I started to write.

Howdy. As you can see, I've reached my destination. Edge Bay is a very deep bay, from here you can't see the open sea. On both sides the forest rises towards the horizon. There are big rocks on the shores. The trees are gigantic, as expected. You feel so small (and me more than others I imagine). I've met a girl called Muse who walks around with a white rat on her shoulder. At first it bothered me a bit. I had the feeling that the rat (called Raymond) was looking at me in a strange way. Nonetheless, I thought it was a good sign (particularly for someone looking for a pried piper, right?) I've also met an American guy from California. He says you can heal cancer with chlorophyll because the chlorophyll cell resembles blood cells. You can obtain your chlorophyll by stuffing sod into a special mincer that costs 60 dollars. Well, I seem to be running out of space. Your forever friend, Ti-Cul Blouin xxx

Muse was feeding Ray a commercial bird seed mixture. Nearby someone was playing a guitar. There were tam-tams, a couple of people in sympathetic spirits singing off-key. *We shall overcome* they announced as we drank beer by the fire.

Muse described herself as *multidysfunctional*. She had turned up at Edge Bay in company of Arnot Valanti, the famous painter of Plateau Mont-Royal. Before that she had been tree planting in the Revelstoke area along the Columbia Valley. There, at the heart of the Selkirk

Mountains, the scenery was like a post card. Lake Arrow (in reality a hydroelectric dam fed by the river) was of a fabulous ice-blue color, surrounded by the backdrop mountains wearing a snow capped crown. They camped nearby a small village called Nakusp. At night after work they boiled bones in a natural stone pond filled with steaming hot water.

She had seen a grizzly. Now that makes for a good story. The work was hard. At night, exhausted in her tent, she would fall asleep with her head buried in a Dostoyevsky novel.

Westop, she said, cuts everything down but only collects the biggest trees and sets fire to the rest because of non-profitability. Then, to preserve public image, it prevents smaller subcontracting companies from coming and collecting the remainders. For every exploited acre, wood enough to build a house was left to rot.

After two weeks of stones, soot, dust and chemical products, she sat her ass down on a tree stump to catch her breath and light a cigarette. In the distance she could see tiny human shapes weaving in and out between the bushes. She put out her burning cigarette on a scorched foam panel. Suddenly a hummingbird landed on a twig about three inches from her nose. His face was black, a streak of purple lava shining on his neck. Muse held her breath. Just there beside her, his tiny heart was beating at a speed infinitely faster than her own. In a flash, the bird was gone. The same night, Muse handed in her resignation.

– In Vancouver I stayed with a friend who teaches French immersion. She lived in the West End. Plenty of good-looking guys around, all gay. And people are so tall there it's scary. You walk outside and you feel you shrunk by a foot. I spent the summer carrying cappuccinos in cafes on Denman Street, trying out new ice cream flavors and making up letters for my friends. My friend lived on the seventh floor. In the morning, Canada geese would fly screaming past the French windows. Jeff turned up in August. I knew him from Lake Arrow. He soon left for Blue

Lake to do a second contract. He arrived with a pirate shawl tied to a shaved coconut saying he had to go to Columbia in search of raw emeralds. You reduce them to powder, apparently there's a market for it. Some stones can heal the spine, others the liver, or the pancreas. Jeff's big dream is to own a donkey.

– Then Arnot appeared. I met him in Montreal, at Les Foufounes Électriques. We'd been coupled for an event called Live Painting and Poetry. I was doing strip poetry. A man had invented that, Ginsberg. When Valanti saw me getting undressed, he approached me. He kept giving me big brushstrokes on stage, mostly on my body. He was as if in a trance. So, that's how it began. Hey, we even have a festival in Belgium!

– Arnot showed up in Vancouver. When he drove up in his war-painted Buswolks, honking the horn like a mad-man in the sleepy streets, we stepped out on the balcony with our coffee cups to witness his arrival. He had hoisted a Mohawk flag on the radio antenna. His latest creation had been painted on the sheet metal of the BW at a rest stop the day before. It said something like: OH POLITICIANS! STOP STEALING FROM US! AND YOU, REACTIONARY HENCHMEN, SUSPEND YOUR DISCOURSE! It was him all right. The finishing touch of his decoration was made up of armloads of fir branches, leaving the impression of a duck hunter's ambush on wheels.

– When he burst through the door of the apartment wearing a red bandana around his white-haired, paint-stained head, he cried: Come with me, Muse! We're going to go fight the dirty bastards!

This motorized acid trip of tomorrow was now in Edge Bay, prominently parked on a rocky overhang looking out over the bay. The operation had not been without its risks. When the

environmentalists saw this honking piece of psychedelic art approaching the Virago dock, their first reaction was to scratch their heads. Then they wandered over and circled Valanti, already busy unloading his array of weights and dumbbells while Muse was stretching her legs nearby.

– I hope you don't intend to bring the weights?

Now it was Valanti's turn to scratch his head.

– Yeah, you're right, guys. It would be much easier to bring the whole Buswolks over. Do you have a pontoon?

It was almost evening when Muse started in on another story:

– I had just gotten off the bus from Revelstoke and was walking around Vancouver in the middle of rush hour carrying all my stuff, my iron shovel on my shoulder and two hundred dollars in my pockets. As I walked by, a man in a suit did a double-take and said: Are you looking for gold?

I thought that was pretty.

* * *

One of the camp leaders was a fat and furry, curly-haired guy by the name of Paul Watchcock whose reputation was not unknown to me. He had been a part of the initial core group of Greenpeace at the time when the movement wasn't much more than a merry bunch of lunatics on an old raft playing flute and saxophone hoping to establish contact with the whales. At night, in the simple sauna fashioned with plastic tarps, Watchcock would gladly tell stories of the good old days that featured him at the helm of his vessel charging full steam into a Soviet whaler, a barge carrying radioactive waste, or one of those Japanese tuna boats dragging driftnets

two kilometers wide, indiscriminately killing birds, dolphins and sea turtles. Ever since he'd been shot in the thigh by a .300 while trying to block the road from big game hunters in the mountains around Prince George, he had walked with a slight limp. In '84, he had gone on snowshoes and snowmobile to the frozen lakes of the northern part of the province to stop hit men in helicopters hired by the government as a part of a controversial campaign aiming to exterminate wolves. The following year he had sea kayaked through the Aleutian Islands with the intention of chaining himself to a Soviet missile silo on the Kamtchatka peninsula, coming close to sparking a diplomatic incident. In Quebec in the early 80s, he made a name for himself by launching an expedition made up of well-known artists (including Valanti) heading for the ice floes to produce a series of pictorial pieces straight on the fur of the whitecoats. That time around, Watchcock was lucky enough only to get hit with a snowball in the neck. A close look revealed that he had a glass eye, having lost the original in the South Pacific during his second campaign against French nuclear testing in the early 70s. After ramming his sailboat, a navy officer with the special marine forces had enucleated his oculus with the blow of a rubber club.

More recently, Watchcock had put into practice a concept of what he called *limited* violent action (for example: snatch the bludgeon off a seal hunter, hit him hard in the leg with it, then cut and run towards the horizon.)

The steaming hot stove of the sauna was falling apart so bad that you could see flames dancing inside. Nudity was mandatory. On my first night, Moutou had invited me along.

– A small voyeurism session, Ti-Luc. Just to acclimatize yourself to the atmosphere here.

We had crept over the fir branch floor in search of the least suffocating spot. In one corner, Watchcock was being interviewed by a reporter from *Libération*, Pierreau Marchal-

Dubond-Dubont, formerly of Beirut and Sarajevo, who took himself for Hemingway. The reporter would constantly interrupt himself to wipe off his glasses with a huge colorful handkerchief.

– The lumberjacks have just announced that they will lower their saws if they see an individual within 100 meters of the tree they're supposed to cut down. They're awfully cute, no?

– ...

– That makes me think of those Abos in the Australian desert who buried themselves up to the neck in the sand to block bulldozers. Wouldn't have taken more than a bit of honey to attract the ants and settle the situation, don't you think?

– What's the question exactly?

– In Nepal, not too long ago, some poor fellows were mad enough to chain themselves to the trees, and they got cut to pieces, I tell you. They swung their axes straight into their bellies!

– I see.

– Because, had we listened to the pacifists, those nitwit pieces of shit, Russian tanks would be driving down the Champs-Élysée as we speak.

– Yeah, O.K.

– Oh how I'd love to see that! All the pathetic artists living on *Sécu* and all the *grands intellos* surrounded by the Chetniks in Sarajevo!!! Speaking of which, Watchcock. Are you a member of Hope Four?

– Sorry. This interview is over, buddy.

– I bet you they haven't even read *Bataille*, the bastards!

A girl came over and sat down next to Maxence and started to breath heavily, then in intervals. One long, four short. One long, four short. Etc.

– Ti-Luc, let me present Flora Corbeil, a cousin of mine from New Hampshire. Her grandfather spoke French.

– What's she doing, Max?

– Well, she's rebirthing, can't you tell?

Flora's diaphragm was indeed moving like an inflatable raft on a raging sea. Suddenly, she put her head on the shoulder of the little guy from Kapuskasing and started to sob.

– Nothing to worry about, Maxence announced to no one in particular. Nothing but a little self-induced abreaction, that's all.

He wedged an elbow between my ribs. A sculptural German girl had just made her entrance, moving the steam curtains aside like a rock star diving through carbonic gas. Her perfect ass and self-supporting chest, enlivened by a movement almost disturbingly pendular, filled the sauna. And everything swinging there right in front of our noses.

– You were right, Max. Good atmosphere here.

– I think it's Woody Allen who said that you never saw a blind man in a nudist camp.

As he spoke, he patted Flora's shoulder who was still sniffing loudly.

Soon after, a big smooth-chested Native American entered, already glistening with a greasy coating of sweat. After a brief exchange of greetings, he sat down on the other side of the stove and crossed his arms.

– That's Chief Boile, Max whispered to me. Wagging tongues say that he has an arsenal

stashed away somewhere.

I noticed that Boile was the only one in the room not stark naked. He was wearing huge purple Bermuda shorts that reached below his knees, their silver stripes flashing like shiny new basketball shorts.

Meanwhile, PMDD-T had struck up a conversation with the German girl. Her name was Gretsch Goffman and she had just the day before been made official spokesperson, responsible for contact with the media. Her voice was a sexy mix of guttural and cooing sounds.

– The company contends that not being able to land on the island is currently costing them two thousand dollars a day, or two hundred dollars a day for the lumberjacks. They claim they're capable of creating 240 jobs, and that they're considering demanding 25 million dollars in compensation from the government. A doctor from Vancouver has gone on hunger strike. Another says he's prepared to lie down in front of the bulldozers with all his patients: we're talking about a whole new form of group therapy.

– Do we know what those people are suffering from, Gretsch?

– Not really. It's a part of a global campaign.

Boile suddenly got up, as if he'd heard enough. As he was bending down to lift up the flap of the canvas, his belly loomed in a spectacular string of skin folds before he slipped out, showing us his big behind. We could still see him, the simple shape of his body, a silhouette veiled by the thickness of the plastic, as he went to fetch the heavy bear-skin pelisse that he'd left on a cedar stump. According to Maxence, that was the traditional apparel worn by whale hunters of his nation. We could hear Boile breath forcefully, moving away and crushing twigs with each step. For a good while after he'd left, all we could hear was the crackling of the flames and the

breathing of those who were still around.

PMDD-T suddenly broke the silence.

– I've heard that the Onanis themselves are cutting trees on the north side of the island. Is that true?

– No comment.

Meanwhile, using as pretext the excessive heat of my spot close to the oven, I sat down next to Watchcock. There was only a handful of people left inside the sauna. Opposite me, my Californian friend Jeff was telling a girl that for breakfast every day he extracted nut milk by use of a grinder. The grinder cost 80 dollars and ran on batteries. I eventually managed to catch Watchcock's eye.

– I've been told there was a commune on this island once. Love Mountain. Do you happen to know where it is?

He rubbed his glass eye with a bored look.

– Are you talking to me?

– Actually, yes.

– Listen, I just got here less than two weeks ago. I've never set foot on the north side of the island. I have no intention of going there, I don't even want to know what goes on there.

He fiddled his eye a little more.

– Quebecois?

– Yeah. I'm a friend of Don Gren. You know him?

– I've met him. How is he doing, old Don?

– He's lost his copy machine. Also, the BLAT has had some major setbacks recently.

Back home, people put their bad news in green bins for the government to recycle it into good news. They call that encouraging civic responsibility.

Watchcock grinned.

– In Quebec, you certainly do things like nobody else. Cowering before aluminum plants and promoting asbestos use, is that it, the distinct society? So Don has lost his copy machine, eh? He's too fond of paper, that's his problem.

– I will tell him that.

– About your commune story, you should talk to Patrick Westmoreland. He's lived here before, with a gang of nudists. That was before he became a great intellectual. After that he did something even worse. He entered politics.

– Where can I find him?

He made a vague gesture through the canvas in the direction of the lodge.

– I don't think he's stepped outside once since he got here.

* * *

At noon the next day I sat down to write my second postcard. The photo showed a waterfall hurtling down a mountain slope in a cloud of white steam. “Sulfur spring,” a hot water source situated somewhere further up the island.

Dear Marie, today I received my baptism of fire. Everybody was running in the same direction, so I only had to follow the movement. In a cove, a dozen lumberjacks got on board a big rowboat. RCMP officers disembarked with them. About 40 protestors were waiting for them in the rain. The officer in charge said something like: In the name of the law, withdraw from the premises. Then Chief Moses Boile responded: This is our garden, these trees belong to us. An old native guy was singing in a nasal voice while banging on a big, round and flat drum. Insults were thrown. After that the lumberjacks were beaten into retreat. A helicopter filmed the whole scene. The police officers had a camera, some of the protestors too, not to mention the journalists. Everyone was filming each other as if the damn thing was a war of images. As they started out again, there were cheers of joy and some tears. They told me that the same scene had occurred every day for a week. P.-S: I've started asking around about the Love Mountain commune. xxx

Raymond, Ray to his friends, decorticated a sunflower seed as he stared me straight in the eye. I was sitting with his mistress on a rock by the sea. The round nose of a seal rose to the surface about twenty meters away from us. I could hear the sound of the rodent's small teeth going crick-crack in the silence enlivened by the strumming of a guitar from the bonfire.

– Big spaces make Raymond anxious. You see, before he used to live in a closet.

A cold sun was shining on the sea. Stooping on the rock, I examined all the miniscule green and pink explosions and crimson stars taking shape between our legs in this subdued and glaucous light, the lichen colonies.

– The woods I played in when I was a kid, Muse said, were bulldozed to make room for a penitentiary. That's where we had our tree house, just a little platform. I knew all the squirrels by

name. Actually, I was the one who gave them their names. I've always loved giving names to things.

– Is that where you'd go to play doctor? In the tree house?

– Sometimes, yes. One night, though, I'd gone on my little Mustang bike, and the bulldozers were already there, with no one inside. It looked like they were waiting, ready for the next day. That's where I hugged a tree for the first time. It was the only way of saying goodbye to them, you know? I think I have a score to settle with prisons.

Without thinking, I reached out my arm, as if to touch her shoulder. Raymond stood up and let out a long hiss. His teeth started to clatter and chatter at full throttle.

– No, please don't touch me. I have a lot of issues.

She spoke in a soft voice.

– I'm sorry, I just wanted to...

– Don't worry. It's nothing. Listen, one morning, when I was tree planting, we reached the top of the mountain. It was snowing heavily and the ground was already covered in snow. So we couldn't work. Our team leader used an expression that stuck with me. He said: *Snowed out*. That meant we were being chased off by the snow. I thought that was pretty. I wrote it down in a notebook.

– *Snowed out*.

– You can't translate it. I've tried. It's uni-lingual English poetry.

Maxence had spotted us on our rocky overhang and was steering towards us, swinging his teapot like an incense burner. In his other hand, he had three cups.

– Hello, you two. Do you know why the Hamadryads wear a tunic that's open at the back like a hospital gown?

– The rat got my tongue.

– It's because their diet is so rich in fiber that they always have to be prepared and ready, like scouts.

– Hey, guys!

PMDD-T appeared, slashing his cane violently through the air (his habitual use of it rather than simply leaning on it.) A plastic bullet had screwed up his knee in the occupied territories during the First Intifada. Maxence tilted his head backwards like a coyote howling at the moon.

– Fee-fa-fo-fum! I smell the blood of a Frenchman!

– What's that nonsense about?

– Jack and the Beanstalk. A story my grandmother told me.

– Tell your grand-mother to go fuck herself.

– It tells the story, Maxence went on, of a giant who lives in a giant beanstalk who, every time there's a Frenchman around...

– Stop that bullshit, won't you?

– O.K., I won't.

– Speaking of giants, Pierreau went on, turning towards us, whose leg do you have to hump to get something decent to peck at in this shit-hole of a country when you're not fortunate enough to be a macro-bio-sado-masochist? Not that I haven't experienced worse. Christmas '93

in Sarajevo, do you know what I had for Christmas Eve dinner?

– Canned tuna washed down with some Moët & Chandon, Moutou recited like a choirboy.

We've heard the story before, Pierreau.

PMDD-T started rubbing the fat of his calf with the tip of his cane.

– So there's these bigwig Hollywood actors coming here to hold a press conference. You see what I'm getting at? Attention, heavy hitters allowed only!

– Is that true? Moutou inquired.

– Sure it's true, pal. Brett Gore, the man who instead of chasing girls is now lusting after giant Hawaiian pizzas. And then there's the other one, Borneo. Old Skin, to her friends. I'm also hearing talk of Gloria Grace Greenaway, do you see what I mean?

– Is Brett Gore coming *here*? Muse asked, astonished.

– That's what I'm telling you! Speaking of which, have you heard the rumor circulating about Greenaway? They say she has three G-spots, no joke. Seems a bit much, PMDD-T snorted.

– Yeah. Pretty weird.

– Anyway, that's not all. I got to get back to the mainland and write the shit out of my piece. That's right, I happen to have a job to do, if you can believe that. I'm not here to...

– Fi-fa-fo-fum! To joke around! Max completed.

He seized the teapot and leaned forward to fill the three cups with what little was left. It looked like soot diluted in an acid solution. I looked around for the seal, but he had disappeared.

* * *

Shortly after his arrival on the island, Patrick Westmoreland (no less than the leader of the Green Party of British Columbia, official party representative at Edge Bay) had shut himself away in the garret of a small cabin standing at the edge of the forest, and apparently hadn't moved since then. Through a skylight, he had a view of the clearing, and further off, the boulders and the bay veiled in a pale fog.

A spokesperson of the Ministry of Forests had declared that the building, occupying an illegal site, should be demolished at the earliest opportunity. The Onani's had therefore retaliated by proclaiming Edge Bay *tribal park* and announcing that the cabin was a part of it.

Upon entering, the first thing I noticed was a long knotty table on which stood a typewriter among piles of incoming and outgoing communiqués, dirty dishes and some greasy sheets of paper. At one end, a topographic map lay spread out, held in place by a pocket lamp and a full ashtray.

The other half of the ground floor was cluttered up by a genuine jumble: life jackets, oars, floor mats, duvets, outboard motors, toolboxes, boots, axes, fishing tackle, chainsaws, binoculars, steel wires, ropes, work gloves, shovels, machetes, hunting knives, rolls of duct tape, halogen lamps, gas tanks, cans of motor oil, containers of liquid naphta, propane gas cylinders. Waterproof clothes were drying on the chairs, their wet smell blending with the sweet odor of resin exuding from the walls. Equipment belonging to a television channel had been tucked away in a corner. Further away, a telescopic rifle completed the picture. A fire was crackling in the oven. Not a soul in sight.

A ladder and a hatch gave access to the attic. After having knocked and vainly awaiting a

response, I started climbing the steps.

– Ah, Patrick Westmoreland exclaimed, looking up.

He was holding the last touch of a cigarette butt, which he then stubbed in the lid of a jam jar on the floor beside him. He was laying on a single mattress, wearing an indigo plaid shirt and faded jeans. The pale toes of his long naked feet were moving slowly. Deeper in the room, a high frequency receiver was placed on an old box turned upside down. The protesters had spies spread out all along the coast, and I later learned that Westmoreland maintained a contact network that reached as far as inside Westop itself. Distant, choppy voices could occasionally be heard amidst the whistling of strange creatures. I noticed a cheap edition of *Civil Disobedience* gathering dust on the floor, with a sheet of Zig Zag rolling paper marking the page. The floor around him was covered with books and newspapers, loose-leaves, old scraps of paper and empty tobacco packages.

Westmoreland looked at me, sitting up in his bed. He was skinny and grizzled, pushing fifty or so.

– Is there something I can do for you, my man?

– Perhaps.

– Francophone?

– That's right.

– O.K. Maybe you can help me then. Where did I put the damn...

He started rummaging through the stack of paper piled up by his bed.

– Ah.

He smoothed out the telegram before handing it to me. The text had been retranscribed in big capital letters. The sheet was softly shaking between my fingers.

– Boile just brought me that. He said it was all Greek to him.

WE WISH TO SHOW TOTAL SUPPORT TO PEOPLE IN EDGE BAY STOP WE ARE ABOUT TO VOTE RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT STOP SENDING DELEGATION OF OBSERVERS STOP ENTHUSIASTIC PARLIAMENT STOP REITERATE FULL AND UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM UNITED EUROPE TO AMERICAN INDIANS OF AMERINDIAN AMERICA OF CANADA STOP STAND FIRM STOP

The telegram was signed: The European Parliament Committee on the Environment. The document came from Strasbourg.

– See, the part I'm fussing over is: *Indiens américains de l'Amérique amérindienne du Canada*. What is that supposed to mean, in your opinion?

– Oh, that? That's what you call a subtlety of the French language, Monsieur Westmoreland.

– So the confusion is intended?

– Absolutely.

– And the fact that they're sending us a French-only version, is that normal too?

– No, that must be an administrative error.

He leaned forward and stubbed out his cigarette butt in the jam jar lid already containing

about forty, most of which were carefully extinguished, forming a smoking mass that continued to burn thoroughly.

Westmoreland suddenly jumped up, turned his back on me and started peeing into an empty old tobacco tin on the floor. The stream traveled a considerable distance, producing a thin yet powerful sound.

– There's nothing like a chamber pot, he said looking at the skylight. Climbing a ladder at night can be quite reckless. The old man Kant had a cord installed connecting his bed to the privies. Handy indeed. The question of fluid loss haunted him. They say he even avoided sweating. At the smallest exposure to the sun, he would run and seek refuge in the shade.

– Ah?

– Yes. He was very preoccupied by hygiene.

Westmoreland buttoned up as he turned around. The expression on his face was at once peaceful and utterly tense. The penetrating acuteness of his gray eyes almost intrusive. He spoke in a voice hoarse from tobacco, punctuated by a persistent dry cough. His nervous system, I thought, must be a real ticking time bomb.

He looked at me attentively.

– So?

– I've heard that you lived in a commune here on Mere Island.

– Yes, what about it?

– A quarter of a century ago, and...

– Thanks for rejuvenating me, buddy. You want to talk about Love Mountain?

– Yeah.

– And why is that of interest to you?

– I'm trying to get in touch with someone.

– Who?

– Fuse. Forward Fuse. An old friend of my mother's!

He smiled, or rather put a funny face.

– Hear, hear! An old friend of your mother's?! I knew Forward Fuse. It's a pseudonym, by the way. His real name is Tom Kelvin. I was twenty years old when I went there. Fuse showed up later. This part of the coast was a lot wilder back then. When I saw that Fuse wanted to take control, I decided to leave. You see, I'd smoke a joint from time to time, but acid I couldn't handle.

– What about him? Did he stay?

– No idea, buddy. Later I found out that everyone left eventually. I'd burned my bridges a long time before that.

He was sitting on the mattress again, a rolled cigarette between his lips, absently rummaging with one hand through a heap of newspaper clippings.

– I have this really clear image of him climbing onto the roof of the shack to play the flute, standing on one leg like the guy from Jethro Tull. His audience was the surrounding mountains and the sea behind the trees. He was just playing for the echo. He'd spend hours up there, all alone.

He pushed aside the cigarette butts to stub out the one in his hand.

– When he turned up at Love Mountain, Fuse had just crossed the States on board that legendary bus, you know, the Autobuzz. A bunch of fucked up freaks playing music on top of a bus. From San Francisco to New York, their mission was to mesmerize the audience of onlookers, convinced that even rednecks would get on board with their trip in the end. Today the old thingy they called the Autobuzz is considered an artifact of the Counterculture and is preserved at the Smithsonian Institution.

– And do you know what happened to him, Fuse?

He looked up, studying my expression.

– How would I know? Listen, at least two things are certain: Forward Fuse hasn't published anything for thirty years. And Forward Fuse has become something other than Forward Fuse. Do you think your mother was the only one he succeeded in inseminating? He was an expert.

– My mother is dead.

– Sorry to hear that.

He rolled himself another cigarette.

– I'd like to help you. But let us talk about something else. Here, look.

He handed me a newspaper clipping with some passages highlighted in yellow. It quoted a certain Paul Bunyan, divisional manager for Westop-Pacific in Port Alberni.

In this matter, the company has done everything possible to find an accommodation within the limits of our good faith. I can't see what more you could ask for. The controversy that

surrounds this island concerns the future of employment in our societies. In addition to jobs which the economical well-being of an entire region is dependent on, the controversy calls into question the very will to maintain an industrial society.

– The island is about to become a symbol, Westmoreland continued. 28,000 jobs potentially threatened throughout the province. In total, the Natives claim 90% of British Columbia. At the moment, the eyes of three hundred Indian bands are turned towards us. If the company yields here at Mere Island, they'll find themselves dealing with a bunch of other rebellions. So you can imagine that in Victoria, they're paying close attention to what's happening here.

– It is kinda funny, though, a senior executive of a forestry company called Paul Bunyan, don't you think?

– Yes. Like the legendary lumberjack. It's funny, like you say.

– I once knew an ornithologist called Bird. Maybe we're really shaped by our names?

– And you? What's your name?

– Ti-Luc Blouin.

– That's really your name?

– Well, yeah. Maybe you knew my mother. She used to live in the commune too. Janine Blouin.

Blowing out smoke, he smiled to himself, knowingly.

– La petite Québécoise.

– So you knew her then?

– Very little. I... left not long after she arrived. She was rather naïve. I think she was, anyway.

He got up to go peek through the skylight, nearly stepping into the old pot full of piss on the floor on his way.

He turned his back to me. The receiver station gave out a whistling sound, then started to crackle. A remote voice was fighting its way through the static, like a dream that immediately vanishes. Westmoreland seemed lost in thought.

– About Forward, you could always ask your compatriot, the painter. I know he was a part of his gang of junkies back in San Francisco.

– Valanti?

– Yes. I even think he was on board the Autobuzz too.

– O.K. Thanks a lot, Patrick.

– No problem. What wouldn't I do for the son of Janine Blouin. Otherwise, do you like it here? You get along well with the others?

– Yes. But that doesn't mean anything. I always get along well with everybody.

Excerpt 2: (p. 210-218)

I found Ray the next day lying in a puddle along the freshwater pipeline. His coat, still full of neon red spots, had caught my eye and drawn my attention to the muddy depression filled with brown, stagnant water. I was heading back to the hemlock, holding the rat at arm's length by the tail, when I heard voices coming from the Hanging Garden. Before I could get to my shelter, I'd been seen. Soon there were people walking around my tree. They told me they were the police and that it was in my interest to leave without causing any trouble. They had noticed the rifle and advised me to listen carefully: I was to leave my hole slowly with my hands in the air. I answered that I wasn't going anywhere and that I'd blow the head off of anyone trying to get in.

I had spoken in French. It had just come out like that, a reflex. As if uttering death threats wouldn't have had the same meaning in another language.

A long moment went by. Then an officer spoke to me again, telling me not to lose my temper: they were going to bring in someone I knew. The noise of their chatter sounded softer. Before I could react, Arnot Valanti slid in through the slit and was standing in front of me. He

was in a strange state. He was breathing heavily, and I could see his white eyes shining in the dark. Terror seemed to fill them and ooze out of each pore of his skin.

– What's happening, Arnot?

He scratched his beard with a distraught look.

– They want you to come out.

– Yeah, that I had understood.

– They want you to hand me your rifle.

– Hands off. Step back a bit.

I held the grip of the Flash Serpent tightly, the barrel pointing upwards. My palms were clammy and my heart was beating fast. I was shaking lightly.

– Is Muse there?

– Muse?

He looked at me at a loss.

– Yo-ho, Arnot! Wake up! I asked you a question!

I wanted to grab him by the ears and headbutt him in the forehead.

– Muse, he finally said. Muse, they've arrested Muse.

He burst into tears. Through his sobbing and sniffing, he told me that Muse, the day before, hadn't been able to prevent herself from mocking the police officers making arrests. She had given one of them a good tongue-lashing straight to his face, almost making him retreat underground like rotten wood. So they took her in.

– They've taken her to the big black hole, over there. That's where they are bringing them. And the police, they sing as they go.

– What black hole, Arnot?

– Beneath the mountain, there's a black hole there. I've seen it.

He hid his eyes and started sobbing again.

– Right.

Arnot stood up again in the darkness, sniffing and drying his eyes.

– But we'll hold down the fort, you and me, Ti-Luc.

– For sure, Arnot.

On the outside, voices were raised. A cop was shouting in a megaphone, coming through the concentric density of the trunk. They were ordering us to get out. Leaning against the wall of the hollow room, I was breathing heavily.

– Arnot, go tell them I got plenty of provisions and water here. And also tell them I don't intend to die at the bottom of my hole like a rat. Please.

I fiddled with the trigger of the 30-06 in the darkness.

– Go give them my message.

He was staring at the rifle with a stupid look on his face, then he softly shook his head and fumbled out, struck by the daylight.

I shouldered my rifle. I could practically only aim upwards. In the lens of the telescope, I saw the sky appear.

Big had said: *the day when...* When what exactly? This was it in any case. Yes, this was it alright.

Valanti came back after a minute. I could hear him panting as his breath slid towards me.

– They're saying they're going to cut down the tree.

– What do you mean?

– They're saying that if you won't come out, they're going to cut the tree down, Arnot repeated.

His mouth was gaping. His expression was as distraught as ever.

I was watching him closely.

– You can leave if you want to, Arnot. I'm not holding you back.

– The dirty bastards. They've fetched a guy from Westop. He's out there, with his chain saw.

I tried to think. Valanti sank down on his knees and buried his face in his hollow hands. He had already started to snap.

– The bastards. They have a saw. A saw! You should see the saw. The dirty bastards.

The cop on the megaphone started shouting again, just outside the breach. First he asked Arnot if he still felt free to leave the tree. Valanti's frenzied reply still rings in my ears:

– Come get me, mes tabarnaks!!!

After a moment, the cop on the bullhorn added that they were giving us thirty seconds to get out and surrender. After which they would proceed. I had to admit that they'd found a pretty good tactic to force us out of our hole. By the time the tree fell to the ground, they would already be at a safe distance, ready to pick us up. The structure of the breach made it too risky to fire a smoke grenade. In order to get it in, they would have to step into the dent, thus exposing themselves needlessly. Of course, they paid no attention to the presence of a large, round hole at the top of the hemlock. So why wait till we had starved to death when everything could be resolved with a few strokes of the chainsaw? In their place, I probably would've had the same idea.

The guy on the megaphone, bawling at the top of his lungs, specified that they were going to cut at breast height, so as to limit the risks as much as possible. In other words, all we had to do was shrink to the ground, push our knees against our chests and cover our heads with our arms—everyone in the fetal position, if you'd be so kind.

– Listen to them, Arnot. To hear them talk, you'd think there was going to be a plane crash.

The interval was coming to an end. Arnot slid slowly onto his side and curled up on the ground. I crouched down next to him.

– Hey, buddy! What's the matter?

His only reply was a stifled groaning. It was even darker on the ground. I fumbled for his shoulder, just to shake him a bit. What my hand encountered was of an unexpected material: a smooth texture, cold to touch. Muse's boots.

I slowly stood up.

– You can take the rifle, Arnot. I'm getting the hell out of here.

From the depths of the darkness, his milk-white eyes were searching for me.

– You... You what, Ti-Luc?

– I'm clearing out. Stay here. They're right: nothing can happen to you.

– Wait! Out?

I'd had just about enough of his whiny, confused tone when Arnot rose up on one elbow and said, in a strangely imploring manner:

– Clearing out? But out how?

Casually, I pointed up at the blue circle far above our heads.

– That way.

He rolled over on his back and looked up.

– No. You're kidding.

The chainsaw suddenly destroyed the silence. Valanti flinched as if its blade had cut him. He then shrank and curled up again, puppy-sounding whines escaping from his chest.

– Nooooo!

I removed my shoes and started fumbling for Muse's big boots with metal studs in the soles. I slid my feet into them, almost without rushing and with a certain tenderness, taking my time to make sure my laces were well tied.

Then I drove my left foot right in the gut of the great resinous tree. Satisfied with my grip, and supporting myself with my wide-stretched arms, I started hauling myself upwards without looking down. My palms and my back were molding intimate curves. I was climbing.

Outside the blade was attacking the fiber, digging a wound into the tree. The lumberjack was standing as far away from the breach as he could. A policeman was probably pointing his weapon at the opening, to cover him.

The vociferation of the saw kept getting shriller. A threatening euphoria arose and aroused a strange feeling in me, the song of the toil of man.

I stuck my boots in place and shimmied myself upwards, with bare hands. My nails had to take advantage of every last bump. I could no longer see Arnot beneath me, my body was blocking the opening, preventing any light from reaching down to him. Suddenly, the saw fell silent. They were probably putting a wedge in, to control the direction of the fall.

I was fifty meters above the ground inside a tunnel standing in midair.

The roaring of the saw began again. With bloody nails and eyes burning from sweat, I was getting closer to my goal. As the diameter diminished, my technique became easier. But my

body wasn't keeping up any more, I was trembling like a leaf. After every advance, I had to stop for breath. The light remained the only possible direction. I pushed on, feeling the tree swinging. I could hear creaking sounds rising from the depths of the wood. There was no time to lose.

I was one meter from the outlet when my body seized up. No way to make it obey. It was really too dumb. I saw myself again laying in the orchard with Marie unable to get up without her help. The same thing was happening now except this time I was stretched out vertically. I started to cry. I was breaking down so close to my target, a forever unattainable ring of blue sky. By now the tree was swinging like a mast in a storm. The top was tracing a circular arc of an increasing amplitude of sixty meters in the air. To hell with my goddamn motor symptom. It felt good to give in. I was soon to be thrown into the void, I would shatter along with my tree down there, sawn like him, broken like my backbone. It was then that I heard a familiar sound, first thinking that I recognized the love song of the dusky grouse, but no, I was hallucinating. I raised my eyes.

One meter from my face, the wind was blowing in hard through the opening, producing a kind of music. Like a giant blowing into the neck of giant bottle. Yes, it was the island itself, Mere Island playing the flute for me. If the island was able to rise up from underneath itself driven by the dark momentum of telluric forces, I would too, centimeter by centimeter.

I kicked my boots into the darkness, planting my studs. I was climbing again. With both hands I finally dragged myself up to the hole. It was too small, I realized. I would never fit through. Panicking, I started to undress myself with one hand while clinging fast with the other, starting with those goddamn boots, really tied all too well, then the rest of it, pulling and wriggling, snatching and tearing, dropping one useless layer after the other to the bottom of the hole.

The tree kept swinging with the majestic calm of a giant metronome.

And then the scream, like a howl or some very ancient lamentation, followed by the unbearable racket of fibers tearing:

Tiiiiiiiiimbeeeeeeeer!

I do not know how I got through the hole. As I slid into the opening, I could see the darkly dense island all around me: its shores, the green and purplish hillocks of Love Mountain and its distant twin, the Deep Point lighthouse, Edge Bay furrowed by skiffs, and the endless sea, the remote coastlines, the Indian reserve, and not far away, the cove sheltering Virago. Seeing this for the first time, encompassing and embracing the island, seeing the great motionless peace of its magnitude for the first time. At the last moment, I was struck by a fact so huge it left me stiff as a board: I was going to fall from a great height, and break my neck.

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