

**Beginning with Ourselves in Second Language Learning
and in the Reading of Literature**

by

Brigitte Roberge

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
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Abstract

This study is a narrative inquiry which explores language learning and reading experiences and reading-responses to short stories by three undergraduates learning French as a second language in Ontario. In the first part of the thesis, I explain how I, a teacher of French as a second language from Québec, came to my subject, following my experience of a letter-exchange with an English-speaking teacher from Québec. I then present a pilot study with Patrick, an English-speaking undergraduate from Ontario, in which I discuss stories dealing with his personal background and language learning. I also reflect upon excerpts from reading-responses to a short story we read together. In the second part of the thesis, through a discussion of excerpts from the letters and conversations I shared with my two other participants about language-learning and reading experiences, I present the linguistic and literate selves of Tasha (a Russian-speaking Canadian of recent immigrant origin now living in Ontario) and John (an English-speaking Ontarian). In the third part of the thesis, I examine Tasha's and John's responses to three short stories. For all responses to the short stories, I discuss how their personal knowledge emmeshes itself in the stories. In the study, I argue for the need for Canadian language educators, other

educators and students to reflect, in a narrative mode, on language-learning and reading experiences. I also argue for the importance of renewing the pedagogy of literature in the second language classroom by using more often students' personal knowledge. On the whole, the study points out the significance of examining how we cross linguistic and cultural boundaries in language learning, and of developing a better understanding of the complexity of learning a second language and of reading literature in the Canadian context.

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Part I: How I started examining linguistic and literate selves

Chapter I Introduction

Meeting my participants

In 1994, after completing my course work for the Ph.D. program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), I was looking for undergraduates, enrolled in a French as a Second Language¹ B.A. program, who would accept to participate in a study that would become the topic of my dissertation. Thanks to professors who allowed me to go to their classrooms, I was able to talk briefly about my project at the end of their classes. I met, for the first time, my participants² on three separate occasions: Patrick, in a spring course in April 1994 (he collaborated with me for the pilot study); John, in a summer course in 1994; as for Tasha, she was introduced to me in the fall of 1994 by a student who had first accepted to participate in my study but had later to drop out of it.

During the first conversation I had with each of them, we talked about our origins, our linguistic backgrounds and study of language(s), our interest in literature, etc. I explained to them that, in the first stage of my study, I was interested in understanding more about these aspects of themselves by

¹ Second language applies here to learners who may be learning French not only as a second, but also as a third, fourth language, etc.

² Throughout the study, I use pseudonyms for my three participants.

means of a correspondence, which I intended to have followed by oral and written responses to literary texts. I told them that everything we would write and talk about in these letters and conversations would be entirely done in French - an exercise which would provide them with an opportunity for the extra language practice that they rarely got since they lived in an English-speaking environment. I pointed out to them that I would not evaluate them in terms of grades: it would be a learning process in which I would also participate as much as them in terms of writing and speaking, the results of which I would later interpret and analyze. I insisted on the idea that our personal ways of understanding and interpreting texts would be of more value to me than those which would be based upon other recognized critics' opinions. I was thus already explaining to them the approach I intended to take for the reading- responses to the short stories: one which was attempting to give them as much latitude as possible in their writing and talking about literature.

The way I would conduct the study depended on the choice of a theoretical framework, i.e., narrative inquiry with elements of reader-response theory, which I have made through discussions with colleagues and readings during my doctoral program. I will now turn to the previous context which induced me to adopt this mode of inquiry, and which can be subsumed under the general heading of qualitative research.

Explaining how and why I arrived at the subject

Before talking about the choice of a theoretical framework *per se*, I have to discuss how I arrived at the subject; in other words, I have to tell the story of the context which led me to do a Ph.D. at OISE. It is not simply a question of discussing the literature relevant to my topic but rather of presenting it from an experiential viewpoint. Later, other stories relating to my personal background and language-learning experiences will also provide another context to the presentation of my study.

Before coming to OISE, I was a chargée de cours (lecturer) in an undergraduate program of French as a second language in a linguistics and languages department in Québec for more than ten years. At the same time, I was a research officer for a project in sociolinguistics investigating, by means of a survey, the demolinguistics of languages spoken throughout the world. Doing these two jobs at the same time was very demanding, personally and professionally and, after all these years, I had reached such a point that I felt that I was running in circles. I had to do something, break the mold, try something new. I therefore decided to do a Ph.D in education, not in linguistics or comparative literature (as my previous M.A. had been), but in a field which would allow me, from an empirical viewpoint, to connect with something I felt strongly about: the teaching and learning of a second language. As to my decision of coming to Toronto instead of staying in Québec, I thought the renewal would thus be stronger and more worthwhile than by doing the program at my

first alma mater. As well, my own experience of doing a B.A. in English as a second language in Québec incited me to study again in the language which I had kept on learning when I did my two-year M.A. in Toronto. As twelve years had elapsed since the last diploma, I felt that my English was rusty. Thus, doing a Ph.D. program and writing a thesis in English, when I wanted to specialize in a subject related to second language pedagogy, made perfect sense in that it allowed me to go through the same process of writing and speaking in a second language that I wanted my own participants to experience.

Regarding the choice of literature as a pedagogical means for the study, it stems from my own love of reading it in my native and second languages. My reading of literature in English - while I lived in an entirely French environment in Québec - has allowed me to retain much of the written language ten years later. As well, my choice of literature is related to the desire to do something new: when I reflect on my past language teaching, I now feel that I tended to regard it as the transmission of linguistic forms. Not that I was not interested in using literary texts but, as a teacher of language courses, I rarely could use them. When I did use one, the context of the course made me discuss it, most often, as a representative example of a text genre which was different from, let us say, an expository or journalistic text. There was no time for an exchange of interpretive and critical views in the classroom. Thus, through the study, there has been a desire to connect with a type of reflection and discussion which I have always found personally enriching, and which

could reveal itself in the same light for participants accepting to join me in the study.

Choosing a theoretical framework

While doing readings for my proposal, I found a theoretical framework which could allow me, the teacher-researcher, to have participants giving responses to a literary text in a personal mode. That is, it could permit them to express understandings and interpretations of a text which would not necessarily depend on the discussion of other critics' opinions. Reader-response theory proposes those ideas (Rosenblatt, 1938/1983, 1969, 1978, 1982, 1985; Probst, 1981, 1986, 1988) in that it encourages readers to make connections between their own experience and the literary text they read. Probst (1988, p. 381) has written that the fundamental literary experience is the encounter of *a reader, a unique individual*, with a text (my italics).

It is at this point that narrative inquiry naturally ties in with reader-response theory. The "unique individual[s]" with whom I would share responses to literary texts needed to be known for themselves from a personal/experiential viewpoint, in the same way as I would later encourage them to link their responses to short stories with their own experiences. By deciding to enroll themselves in a French B.A. program, my participants have elected a course of study which is deeply personal: to achieve a high level of proficiency in a second language, in order to be able to read and write it,

and in an environment where the language is not spoken to boot, requires hard work and determination. So what could there have been in their personal and linguistic pasts which may have induced them to make such a decision? Answering this question implied knowing more about my participants through my sharing with them stories dealing with our personal backgrounds, schooling, language-learning and reading experiences. As someone who grew up in a small francophone town in Québec and learned English at the university level in an entirely francophone environment, I felt entitled to exchange about these topics with them. Indeed, this type of autobiographical reflection appeared to me as a natural first step to be taken before launching ourselves into our reading-responses to literary texts.

Narrative inquiry broadly argues for a study of the ways humans experience the world and, more concretely, for the view that "teachers and learners [can become] storytellers and characters in their own and other stories"³ (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The uses of narrative methodology by second language teacher-researchers have been a source of inspiration for the way I would conduct my research (Bell 1991, 1995; Conle, 1987, 1993; Enns-Connolly, 1986; Vechter, 1988). In her study, Bell (1991) explored her personal experiences as a literacy learner of Chinese and interpreted them as an individual construct which is shaped by societal

³ As we will later see in the reading-responses to the stories, we have also become storytellers and characters in our interpretations of them at times.

attitudes. Conle (1993, Abstract) reflected on the "encounter of differences" [taking place] within perceptions of similarity" which arose out of her "narratives of acculturation in [different settings]: language learning; immigration; graduate studies; male/female interactions; teacher education and multicultural classrooms." Enns-Connolly (1986, Abstract) examined how the dialectic of translators as persons was implicit in their practical work and could lead to "a conceptualization of translation as an artistic-esthetic experience." Vechter (1987, Abstract) [conceptualized] second language learning as "a narrative interpretive process [which engages] the learner...in self-exploration and self-expression." She argued that it was essential to perceive language-learning "as a problem of self-expression, rather than as problem of accumulating information."

In reading the work of these authors, the depth of meaning emerging from the relationships between teacher-researchers and learners struck me, and thus encouraged me to endeavour to reach the same type of understanding with my participants. I decided to situate myself within this mode of inquiry since it offered possibilities of meaning that I could not find in other authors working in second language research or reader-response theory. True, some SL researchers, partly under the influence of reader-response theory, (Brumfit, 1985; Carter & Long, 1991; Davis, 1989; Harper, 1988; Kramsch, 1985, 1993), have understood the importance of relating readers' own experiences to their readings of literary texts but, in my

sense, their discussion did not go far enough in terms of the personal/experiential pasts of individual learners.

Experiencing narrative inquiry

My readings of educators working in narrative inquiry were not solely responsible for convincing me to choose a narrative methodology. What finally led me to adopt it as a framework for my study was my own experience of it. I believe that to become a narrativist, you have to try it out before launching yourself into this type of research. Although I had not foreseen that the collaborative research work I present below would become a "prerequisite" for my study, that is how I feel it has turned out to be in retrospect. And isn't it, after all, the essence of narrative inquiry? Later on when we reflect on our past work, we perceive narrative threads that we had not suspected before with our current work.

One of my first attempts at doing narrative inquiry was with a colleague teacher, JoAnn Phillion, whom I met for the first time in an OISE course given by Dr. Grace Feuerverger, "Language, Identity and the Literary Text." This was one year before the pilot study I did with Patrick (v. Appendix A for a chronology of the study) and as a final requirement for the course, JoAnn and I exchanged letters and presented them in a paper that we entitled *A collaborative reflection on Canada's two solitudes: An exploration of experiences through a letter-exchange* (Roberge & Phillion, 1993). I realize now the extent to which this correspondence helped me define my topic, even though I stopped thinking about the exchange for some time

because of other program requirements and other professional work. In my concluding analysis of the letters, I recently reread with interest the following sentence:

On the whole, exploring the subtexts of our lives provides researchers in narrative inquiry with an original way of looking at personal meanings. It has a definite value that I would like to investigate in relation to literary texts and participants in a future study (ibid.).

And as the present thesis shows, this is what I have ended up doing.

As two language teachers originally from Québec, JoAnn and I, respectively teaching English and French, knew that we could exchange upon common topics. We indeed shared personal reflections about growing up in our home province, being Catholic, going to school, learning language(s), reading books, etc., all memories which were related and discussed in light of excerpts from the books we had read for the class (in particular, we responded to themes in Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* (1982) and Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* (1989). It was the first time that I could write, in such an open manner with an English-speaking Canadian⁴, about topics relating to the particular context of Québec. My growing up in a small francophone town during the 60s was necessarily quite different from the one JoAnn experienced in an English-speaking neighbourhood of Montreal a few years earlier than

⁴ This is certainly an instance of a narrative thread - the fact that JoAnn crossed my path at this particular time in my Ph.D. program.

me. Here are a few edited excerpts⁵ about the linguistic environments we each grew up in and the attitudes and beliefs we had regarding one another's world. I present these excerpts⁶ because they can be related to those I exchanged with my participants as well as with the themes that we discussed in our reading-responses to the short stories. At the same time, it allows me to introduce my personal and cultural background in a more complete way than I later do in the thesis since, in the following chapters, I concentrate on my participants' presentations of themselves and their reading-responses.

Correspondence between two solitudes

Dear JoAnn,

At the age of 14, I made an important discovery: novels, stories and poems written for adults could also become mine. With the enthusiasm characteristic of that age, I felt like I had struck the great and only source of knowledge, and that books were the best teachers I could find. How much I admired the novels of Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens and John Steinbeck! I used to underline my favorite passages and copy meaningful sentences on the first pages of the novel. Sometimes, I even escaped to the school library at recess in order to read a few pages of the novel I was currently reading.

Brigitte

⁵ The excerpts are taken from letters which were written in sequence in the spring of 1993.

⁶ Slight portions of these excerpts have already been published (see Roberge & Phillion, 1997).

Dear Brigitte,

Books have always been important to me, too. I discovered the deep pleasures of reading when I was really young. At 12 years old, I was living in New Brunswick. Even though I lived in a suburb not too far from the center of town (nothing was too far from the center), the Bookmobile would park near my house every two weeks. Did you have those in Lévis? I would return loaded with books. At 13, I discovered French and Russian literature. I lost myself in Anna Karenina, Doctor Zhivago, or Madame Bovary. Years later, I read those same books at university and wondered what I had got out of them at such an early age. Or perhaps many people read them at that age. I read to be carried away to other places, other times, to vicariously live other lives. I read to experience other cultures, something that has stayed with me to this day.

JoAnn

Dear JoAnn,

At the Cégep level, I became much more seriously involved in my studies. Once more, I had the chance of attending a private college at Lévis for men and women, this one run by priests. History, psychology, French and English were my favorite subjects. Unfortunately, my classes of English were taught in a very boring manner by a teacher who was not interested in what he was doing. Still, English remained very attractive to me and I wanted to learn it seriously. I read American and British novels in translation but I knew that they were supposed to be a lot more pleasurable in the original text. Consequently, and also because English was such an important language to know anyway, I was planning to major either in English or in translation in university.

Brigitte

Dear Brigitte,

I want to tell you about my language learning experiences. They were always unhappy and fraught with feelings of low self-esteem. I was born in Montreal, and moved to an all-English neighbourhood in New Brunswick when I

was eight years old. I returned to Montreal when I was fourteen in grade nine. It was March, I felt backward, awkward, behind; somehow it seemed that I had learned nothing at all in N.B. Geometry class filled me with dread, then came French class and Madame Lemieux. For the next fifty minutes I didn't understand one word! Everyone except me seemed to have the capacity to read, write, and most importantly, to speak French. My stomach churned, and continued to churn, for weeks and months after, in every French class.

JoAnn

Dear JoAnn,

You tell your second-language experiences in such a convincing style that I cannot doubt at all that you suffered from language anxiety. As a first-year university student, I also suffered from language anxiety when I took translation courses. Despite my very good grades in French and English at the Cégep level, I realized that my knowledge of English was insufficient. I remember feeling hurt by the negative comments professors wrote on my assignments and papers. Even my French was criticized, which I found very insulting. Still, I decided to major in the program of English studies. I put so much energy and dedication into it that I greatly improved my grades. I regained confidence.

On Tuesday night, I said that I was writing my letters on the computer since I always keep changing words and rewording sentences when I write in English. Last week, I heard a colleague say that the more complex and refined the ideas become, the more challenging and difficult the writing becomes. I agree with him.

Brigitte

Dear Brigitte,

Writing to you has made me think about so many different things. Memories are flooding my mind. My father was bilingual because of early associations with French kids in St. Henri. Sometimes at the dinner table he would insist we speak French.

I was led to believe that to speak more than one language would be economically advantageous. Never was the sentiment expressed that I should learn French because that was the language of the majority of the population in Quebec. It was as if the French did not really exist. We lived in our own world. The safe, unquestioning world of the English.

JoAnn

Dear JoAnn,

You wrote very interestingly about the attitudes of your family towards the French language and the Québécois. Let me now share with you some perceptions my family had of "les Anglais".

Like his father and grandfather, who were also salesmen for American and English-Canadian furniture companies, my father had to speak English in order to succeed in his business. Both my parents encouraged their five children to learn English. They sent us to summer camps in Ontario and Maine; later, I enrolled in ESL summer courses in Toronto, Vancouver and Fredericton. But what was our attitude towards English? Our main perception of it was that you had to learn it if you wanted to make it. Although I grew up in a house full of books of art, music and literature, it was rarely said that I could learn English because of the culture or aesthetic quality of the language. Practical, unemotional. We did not use these adjectives to describe the language, but they were certainly implied in our perceptions of English. Above all, English was the language of those who had economic power to the detriment of the others who did not speak it. In short, we considered it as a tool for mobility and economic gains. I remember a teacher telling the class that French was the most beautiful language in the world. The second one was English.

Brigitte

Dear Brigitte,

Parts of Eva Hoffman's story resonated with me. I was not an immigrant to this country, but an immigrant to the culture

of each new school that I attended. She writes about driving in a car somewhere, not understanding exactly what the other kids were saying, feeling like she would rather not be there. I often felt that way; if I was invited to a party, I would go filled with dread that I wouldn't wear the right clothes, say the right things, know the right music. At the high school that I graduated from, girls were dating with marriage in mind. I never had a date. Much later, after I had finished university and spent a year hitch-hiking around Europe, I ran into one of the girls who had been extremely popular. No exaggeration, she was pushing a baby carriage, and had two toddlers beside her. I was off to adventure in California, she was on her way home to cook dinner. But, in high school, even a glimpse of that picture would not have made me feel better. I don't mean there is anything wrong with having a family, rather it was the look on her face.

JoAnn

Dear JoAnn,

Do you remember a passage where Hoffman mentions that she sometimes relieves her language anxiety by speaking Polish with her family (Hoffman, *ibid.*, p. 262)? In it, she talks about the difficulty of writing her diary in English and offers a perceptive analysis which makes me reflect on writing in a second language. What strikes me the most is the idea of shedding a personal self for an impersonal one, a "cultural negative capability" which may end up becoming the truest thing about a person. Still, this does not mean that Hoffman's first "me," the Polish "me," has completely disappeared. In a sense, this may be revived even more, especially when she talks about Americans' lack of identity as being their number one problem (*ibid.*).

The situation of second-language learners I have taught is, of course, very different from that of Hoffman. Indeed, the great majority of my students I usually teach have chosen to learn French as a second language. They have not been obliged to write an unavoidable "language of the present" (p.

272), except for those who decide to settle down in Québec City. (As for me, I have written English mostly in an academic context and there have rarely been opportunities for writing it on a personal level.) I wonder what my students would think of this creation of a second self. At any rate, reading Hoffman's memoir incites me to ask my students to write, discuss and reflect on the perceptions they have of themselves as second language learners in relation to their language and identity. This letter exchange allows me to put in a new perspective my past experience. I like writing in this personal way which, I think, is more engaging than my usual academic writing. I wonder if this could eventually invent another me... For the moment, I feel it is too early to try to answer this question.

Amitiés,
Brigitte

Dear JoAnn,

While reading Rodriguez's third chapter, titled "Credo", I was stunned by his exact and minute description of the rituals of Catholicism which correspond almost identically with those I knew during my childhood. How mysterious and comforting all of this seemed to have been for him! As for me, when I was not terrorized by images of Hell or the guilt of mortal sins during church sermons, I also admired those religious ceremonies. It soon started to change, however, when I became a teenager. The main difference between Rodriguez's religious experience and mine was that he could compare Catholicism with other religious denominations - that is, Protestant, [including] Methodist, Episcopalian, Unitarian, etc. I was brought up in a Catholic parish where everyone was a Catholic, and had to be a practising one like everyone else. Whereas Rodriguez's memories of his parents are full of tenderness when he describes their pious Catholicism, I am afraid mine would certainly show more mixed feelings towards the institution of the Church. True, the nuns and priests who taught me gave me a valuable education. But their conservative

views were often hard to swallow. Especially when some priests and nuns were warning girls in school against the dangers of too much education. In high school, we were encouraged to become dutiful wives and mothers - maybe we could allow ourselves to work as secretaries, nurses, or teachers before finding a husband. Nothing too daring.

I wrote you before that I attended a private college at the Cégep level in the 70s. A few years earlier, only men were allowed to study there. A brave friend of mine once asked the principal, a priest, if women could attend it. It would be so much cheaper and convenient for the Lévisiennes who did not want to go to a college outside Lévis, she said. His answer was the following: he just laughed in her face and told her to forget it. Two years later, the college started enrolling women. But why did he not give her a little ray of hope? "Because that's the way it is," we were often told. Indeed, changing mentalities is surely the most difficult thing to accomplish in education!

Brigitte

Dear Brigitte,

My experiences in the church paralleled both Richard Rodriguez and yours. He says "Experienced continuously in public and private, Catholicism shaped my whole day" [Rodriguez, 1982, p. 56]. As a child, that is what it was like for me. There was a continual reinforcement of the same values at home and school, by parents and teachers, relatives and friends. I was imbued with a sense of belonging. I was wrapped in cotton wool, sheltered from the uncertainties of life. The Catechism I had to study every day answered all the big questions of life, like "who made us? Why are we here?"

But this uncertainty and resulting comfort came with a huge price tag. You had to be unquestioning, accepting of everything on faith alone. Up to 13 or 14, this did not pose a problem. But as a teenager, just like you this started to change.

My parents were devout Catholics, even to the point of tithing, although they used to debate whether it should be on gross or net income. We had recently moved to La Salle, and attended a very modern church. There were few statues, mass was said in English, and there was often a guitar to accompany the choir which sang folk songs. Another modern concession was that lay people could give the Communion. My mother particularly did not like this new style. One day at Confession, she told the aging parish priest that she simply did not feel the presence of God at that kind of mass. He refused to give her absolution! Can you imagine our shock when my mother told us this? Murderers can be forgiven, but not someone who criticized the Church.

JoAnn

Dear JoAnn,

I read with great interest when you wrote about the incident of the priest who refused to give your mother absolution because of her disapproval of new rites at mass. This reminded me of a similar anecdote concerning my mother. My father, who had a very good baritone voice, used to sing for some services at our parish church. Once, he had promised the parish priest that he would be available for one service but he was not able to make it because of his work. The "curé" was so offended that he retaliated in the following manner: the next time my mother came to church, he simply refused to give her Communion in the presence of two of my sisters! Remember that this took place at the beginning of the 60s... Thus, you can imagine that it was meant as a kind of public punishment which every person present should take notice of.... My parents started bringing the family to mass at the neighbouring parish church in Lauzon because of [the] incident. Like the church you knew in La Salle, it was a very modern one and lacked the special atmosphere of 19th century churches. I missed the statues, paintings, the beautiful nave and majestic sounds of the organ.

Brigitte

Reflecting on the correspondence

In the fall of 1996, I discussed with JoAnn the content of our correspondence in view of writing an article (Roberge & Phillion, 1997). In particular, we reflected on particular excerpts dealing with the personal language learning experiences and how they affected our attitudes and beliefs about language learning. We pointed out the need for both language teachers and learners to ponder their linguistic pasts in a collaborative manner. Under the term "**linguistic pasts**" - which I prefer to rename "**linguistic/literate selves**" for the current study since it can also include aspects from the present and the future as well - we subsumed the **temporal** (including social, historical and political) and **personal** (including emotional and affective) dimensions of language learning. As the preceding passages show, other themes could obviously have been explored (growing up as a Catholic; responses to Rodriguez's and Hoffman's books) but, given the limits we had set ourselves, we concentrated on language learning experiences.

But, for us, addressing teacher research into a second language context from the standpoint of narrative inquiry was an important argument which had to be proposed. We wrote:

Narrative inquiry allows for reflection on language learning as the lived experience of a socially embedded person with a past, present and future; and for an exploration of how social, political and economic contexts, family, friends and school, affect attitudes and beliefs about learning languages. Using a narrative approach enables teachers-researchers to transform their understanding of life experiences through facilitating an understanding of personal practical knowledge by bridging personal and professional

knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) (ibid., p. 111).

Thus, the discussion with JoAnn allowed me to reflect again on the importance of the autobiographical process and the use of a personal experience method such as correspondence for my study. I also realized that our writing about the themes of Catholicism and that of the Anglophone and Francophone solitudes could be connected to letter-exchanges and reading-responses I later had with my participants. Unbeknown to me at the time of this correspondence, narrative threads were thus preparing to weave themselves quite naturally into the content of the writings and conversations I would later have with my participants. Another advantage of the letter-writing was the confidence it gave me to try it out for a pilot study: if teachers could exchange stories, I felt I could do it too with my students-participants.

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) have argued for the need to think of teachers' narratives as metaphors for teaching and learning relationships (p. 3). The new context of the pilot study now makes me regard the previous exchange between JoAnn and me, two teachers from the two solitudes trying to understand their family and religious backgrounds, their language-learning and reading experiences, as a metaphor pointing to open-ended questions which would get further discussion in the pilot. We will see that Patrick's comments echo back some of the issues that JoAnn and I wrote about in that the **temporal** and **personal** dimensions referred to in our

paper reappear in the expression of his **linguistic/literate self.**

Chapter II

The pilot study with Patrick¹

Introduction

When I conducted my correspondence with Patrick between April and June 1994 - one year after the one with JoAnn - the context was, of course, utterly different. I was the one who was seeking his support to help me in my study, and the challenge which was then presenting itself was that it was taking place between me, the teacher-researcher, and him, my student-participant, and we would conduct it in the language that he was learning. Thus, the personal experience method now had a pedagogical context that the previous exchange with JoAnn did not have.

I was however careful to explain to Patrick that my purpose was not the study of his linguistic performance *per se* or the marking of the writing we would do together - although I invited him to ask me for any advice he wanted to get regarding his writing of French. Since I wanted Patrick to understand that we would write about our encounters as unique individuals with a literary text (Probst, 1988, p.381) during the meetings which would follow the letter-exchange, exchanging letters seemed a first step which would eventually facilitate these later personal responses. My assumption was that this preceding reflection upon his family and school backgrounds, his language learning and reading experiences

¹ See Appendix A for a chronology of the pilot study.

would point out to and familiarize him with the value of his personal ways of understanding. And, of course, because of my own language-learning experiences - that of a native French Quebecer who had done a B.A. in English Studies in a Francophone environment in Québec - and because of his - a native English-speaking Canadian who was an undergraduate learning French in an Anglophone environment - we both shared a commonality which could facilitate a relationship between our experiential narratives.

In order to give Patrick a sense of what I expected him to write about, I felt I had to be the one starting the letter-exchange. Another advantage of using the letter-experience method was the knowledge it gave me about his written French. In this way, it would help me determine the type of activity for our following response sessions. For example, would Patrick be able to write fairly long texts in French about a story on short notice? It turned out that he was very much at ease in his second language and responded, through writing and discussing, to the short stories I gave him to read in a highly fluent French².

² At the time, I considered using a similar approach with other participants who did not necessarily have as advanced a knowledge of French as Patrick. In the fall of 1994, I conducted interviews with Anna, a Chinese (Hakka) speaking participant whose knowledge of French was intermediate. She preferred talking about her personal background and linguistic past in an informal manner rather than exchange letters. Unfortunately, she did not have enough time to respond to short stories and, for personal reasons, had to drop out of the study.

The following stories of Patrick are based upon an exchange of four letters, field notes I took after a conversation we had after this correspondence, as well as on two final meetings which took place after our reading-response sessions to two short stories and which I recorded and transcribed verbatim (see Appendix A). The letters were written according to a chronological order stressing family background, schooling, and language-learning and reading experiences. If parts of our later conversations enlarged upon some of the letters, these verbal exchanges mostly served as commentaries upon the short stories we responded to. I start with Patrick's family background, his experience of his native language at home and in school, and then move on to his coming to know French. As I will do from now on with all data excerpts, I present those from the pilot in Patrick's original French, which means I have kept its few "irregular" uses of the language (e.g., peculiar uses of articles or prepositions, gender or conjugation errors). The English translations of these excerpts are mine and may as well reflect some of these irregularities.

Patrick's personal background and stories of language-learning

Born of a mother of English-speaking Canadian origin and of a father of French-Canadian background in 1968, Patrick was adopted, at a very early age, by Scots who emigrated to Canada at the end of the 60s. He was brought up with a younger adopted sister in a suburb of Toronto. His parents' origins are very modest. When they were children in Scotland, in order

to help provide for their respective families, they were obliged to leave school after having completed only their first year in high school. Thus, Patrick's parents were conscious of their lack of education and felt that it was of the utmost importance to push their children to have a better schooling than they did (Letter 1, April 27, 1994).

If he could not clearly remember his first language experiences in primary school - that is, from the viewpoint of starting to read and write in English - he has not forgotten, however, the linguistic discrimination his parents, as Scots, knew in Canada:

Quant à mes premières expériences linguistiques, je ne me rappelle pas trop. Toutefois je peux me souvenir très bien de devoir «traduire» ce que mes parents disaient aux Canadiens anglais qui ne comprenaient ni s'efforçaient de comprendre l'accent écossais de mes parents. Peut-être est-ce la raison pour laquelle je n'ai jamais vraiment réussi à m'identifier avec les Canadiens anglais (ibid.).

Regarding my first linguistic experiences, I cannot remember them very clearly. However, I very well remember having to "translate" what my parents said to English-Canadians who could neither understand nor do their best to understand my parents' Scottish accent. Maybe this is why I have never really been able to identify myself with English-Canadians (ibid.).

In a later conversation (September 16, 1994), he also pointed out being ridiculed by other children for using Scottish expressions in school. He even expressed concern over the fate of Scots Gaelic, now near extinction in Scotland. However, he reiterated his difficulty in defining his identity by saying that he could not regard himself as a Scot either. On our first meeting in April 1994, Patrick had speculated

that his interest in French might be subconsciously related to his French background. When I later reminded him of this, he was as undecided about this connection I was suggesting as the first time he had told me about it. He did comment on this link in the following way, however:

Je pense que c'est un peu conscient de toute façon, je veux me faire une identité quelque part. On peut dire ça aussi parce que je me sens pas tout à fait Canadien de toute façon (16 septembre 1994).

I think it is somewhat conscious anyway, I do want to create an identity for myself somewhere. We can say that too because I do not feel exactly like a Canadian anyhow (September 16, 1994).

In light of Patrick's reflection upon his experience of linguistic discrimination, I consider that it may have played a role in his indifference towards English as a language and school subject. In a conversation we had following our letter-exchange (July 4, 1994), Patrick told me he had rather negative feelings about his first language: for instance, he found the variant of Canadian English to be *pas créatif* (not creative) compared to British English which, in his view, had a richer vocabulary. Furthermore, he expressed in writing his dissatisfaction concerning his experience of English as a school subject:

Je me rappelle également d'avoir été frustré par mes professeurs d'anglais de ne pas pouvoir me faire comprendre la raison pour laquelle ils me sanctionnaient tant de fautes de grammaire. Dès lors je ne crois pas que l'enseignement de la structure de la langue

I still remember with frustration being unable to be understood by my teachers of English - thus, they penalized me with so many grammatical mistakes. I don't think that the teaching of the structure of the English language is part of the curriculum, which is

anglaise fasse partie intégrante du programme scolaire, ce qui est heureusement le contraire dans le cas du français. (Lettre 2, 19 mai 1994).

fortunately the opposite in the case of French. (Letter 2, May 19, 1994).

Patrick's criticism points to the fact that his teachers should not have taken for granted that students would learn and know grammar implicitly. As well, he unwittingly alludes to two different traditions of language teaching, the English and the French.

Concerning his readings in English, he did mostly those which were required in high school. Since he comes from a family in which, in his own words, there was no *tradition de lecture*, he was not read to as a child at home (Conversation of September, 16, 1994). When he reached adolescence, he sometimes borrowed geography or history books from his neighbourhood library which he rarely finished reading. In school, he found Shakespeare's and Dickens' works to be difficult and traditional; he was always under the impression that he would look stupid if he asked his teachers questions about the meaning of words encountered in those texts. In fact, what Patrick preferred doing, at that age, was drawing: he spent hours doing designs of various shapes and even thought of becoming an architect at one time.

A feeling of inferiority thus marked Patrick's view of other students who seemed to him much more sophisticated readers of literature than he was, although he regarded some of their interpretations, based upon the meaning of symbols

and images, as somewhat stretched. He remembered his experience of English in grades 12 and 13 in this way:

J'pouvais pas m'identifier au reste des étudiants en littérature. Mais vraiment pas. Parce que eux y avaient toutes sortes d'idées fantaisistes, ils en dégageaient tous ces symboles. J'me suis dit: «Est-ce que je suis un grand plouc?» (16 septembre 1994).

I couldn't identify myself with the rest of students in literature. Absolutely not. Because they had all kinds of weird ideas, they could see all these symbols. I wondered: "Am I a real moron?" (September, 16 1994).

Canadian literature had little appeal to him (Margaret Atwood's and Margaret Laurence's novels, for instance), except for one work which made a strong impression upon him, Timothy Findley's *The Wars*. Reflecting today on his negative attitude, he realizes that what surely contributed to his lack of interest in the works studied in class was the fact that they were required readings.

But what also prevented him from taking them seriously was that his Grade 12 year was, in his own words, a year of rebellion. He now looks back at this particular year as a turning-point for him: he said it was *la grande remise en question* (he called himself into question) and, in his opinion, had it not been for his parents putting him back on track, he could have turned into a failure. Yet, even if he greatly improved his grades during his Grade 13 year, he never got to appreciate English as a subject. Even at the university level, he did not like the way it was taught when he took a course in his first year. It was after Grade 12 that he

realized that French was a subject that he could pursue seriously beyond high school.

Coming to know French: an early learning experience

Since Patrick lived in an environment where no French was spoken at all, he did not suspect its existence as a language until he went to school. He took Core French at the primary and secondary levels and, contrary to many former students' negative memories of the subject, he has remained positive about the whole experience to this day. He is generally pleased with his former teachers' pedagogical approach but does not hesitate to criticize the rote learning they were asked to do. In his third letter, he thus describes his experience:

Dans l'ensemble, je dois dire que j'ai vécu de bonnes expériences en apprenant le français. En école primaire, mes professeurs nous faisaient chanter et compter en français; ils nous familiarisaient lentement mais sûrement avec la langue.

Au [début du niveau secondaire], on se mettait à nous enseigner la grammaire. A ce stade-là, j'ai l'impression que les enseignants s'intéressaient plutôt à notre mémoire qu'à notre capacité de comprendre. On mémorisait bêtement les verbes irréguliers pour ensuite les reproduire sur du papier lors d'un test, lequel constituait des questions méchantes sur la concordance des temps verbaux. Le français, au niveau

On the whole, I must say that I lived good experiences while learning French. In primary school, my teachers made us sing and count in French; they familiarized us, slowly but surely, with the language.

At [the beginning of high school], they started to teach us grammar. At this stage, I was under the impression that teachers were more interested in our memory than in our ability to understand. We stupidly memorized irregular verbs in order to reproduce them on paper while writing a test, one of which was made of mean questions on the concordance of verbal tenses. French, in high school, became more and more

secondaire, m'importait de plus en plus; je parvenais à le connaître comme la langue de la culture, et non celle de l'utilité. (Lettre 3, 9 juin 1994).

important to me; I was coming to know it as the language of culture, not as a utilitarian language. (Letter 3, June 9, 1994).

The "utilitarian" language Patrick refers to is English, the only language he knew before starting to learn French. At the same time, his comments resonate with what I had written in my preceding letter to him:

Dans ma dernière lettre, je t'ai écrit que l'on ne m'a pas bien enseigné l'anglais avant l'université... Au niveau secondaire, je lisais des textes de manuel, spécialement écrits pour les étudiants d'anglais langue étrangère: tel texte était un passionnant dialogue à la banque; tel autre décrivait l'arrivée de touristes au bureau des douanes d'un pays étranger... Les textes les plus sophistiqués qu'on nous demandait de lire étaient des articles de journaux... Bref, c'est comme si on croyait que l'anglais avait uniquement un rôle de langue utilitaire, un rôle de langue des affaires. Où était l'imagination dans tout ça? Très loin, je crois... (Lettre 3, 2 juin 1994).

In my last letter, I wrote to you that I was not taught English well until university... At the high school level, I was reading texts from handbooks, especially written for students of English as a foreign language: one text was a passionate dialogue at the bank; another described tourists coming into the customs office in a foreign country... The most sophisticated texts I was asked to read were newspaper articles. In short, it was as if one believed that English had only the role of a utilitarian language, the role of a language of business. Where was imagination in all of that? It was miles away [from us], I believe... (Letter 3, June 2, 1994).

Patrick thus weaves a thread into my own narrative web of language-learning experiences: although the context was entirely different for each of us, we were both encouraged to

believe in a cultural or aesthetic³ quality inherent in French, whereas English was supposed to possess a utilitarian quality⁴. True, Patrick does not say it explicitly but his earlier comment upon English as being "not creative" is of the same nature. As for my own story of dissatisfaction regarding the pedagogy of my former teachers of English, could it also point to a belief, on their part, that English was a language devoid of any aesthetic quality?

The two solitudes meet again

The narrative thread of Canada's two solitudes, which had been earlier weaved into JoAnn's web and mine, formed itself again in my writing with Patrick. If Patrick is generally satisfied with his former French teachers' pedagogy, he has however become critical about the curriculum they taught. That is, he felt that he did not learn enough about the Francophones of Canada. Before I even broached the subject, he expressed himself in the following way:

³ See my letter to JoAnn in which I wrote: *I remember a teacher telling the class that French was the most beautiful language in the world. The second one was English* (Chapter I, p. 13).

⁴ I asked JoAnn whether she remembered any positive comments on the part of her teachers regarding English as a language: she said that she could not recall any. The language was something taken for granted; it was simply seen as a tool that you had to use. No affective perceptions seemed to have been encouraged in her experience of learning English by her teachers.

Par ailleurs, si l'on parlait de l'influence qu'avait la culture française plutôt que celle du Québec sur mes études, tu pourrais dire que c'est assez ironique compte tenu de la proximité du Québec.

Mais tous mes professeurs de français étaient soit des Français soit des Canadiens anglais qui n'étaient pas sans préjugés contre le Québec auquel ils ne faisaient pas allusion à moins qu'il ne fasse l'objet de l'une de nos questions. Les réponses qui nous ont été fournies n'étaient guère encourageantes. Ils nous expliquaient qu'un Québécois et un Français pourraient se comprendre mais qu'ils s'expriment différemment.

De toute façon je ne me rappelle pas avoir appris des expressions québécoises avant l'université, peut-être que j'exagère; pourtant je n'en ai pas l'impression. Donc, j'échoue un peu le blâme de ne pas mieux connaître le Québec et sa culture, sur le système scolaire dont je suis quand même le produit....

J'ai du mal à t'expliquer pourquoi je n'ai pas poursuivi la question québécoise un peu plus. En effet je ne pense pas avoir séparé la France du Québec dans mon esprit. Je considérais que l'héritage du Québec se trouvait bel et bien en France, et qu'en étudiant tout ce qui avait trait à la France quelque part j'étudiais le Québec aussi. C'est justement une ironie que mes idées sur le Québec ont radicalement changé en

Besides, if we talked about the influence that French culture had, rather than that of Quebec on my studies, you could say that it is rather ironical given Québec's proximity.

But all my teachers of French were either French or English-Canadians who were not without prejudice against Québec, to which they never alluded, unless we asked a question about it. The answers we were given were less than encouraging. They explained to us that there was understanding between a Quebecer and a French but that they expressed themselves differently.

At any rate, I do not remember learning Québécois expressions until I was in university, maybe I exaggerate; yet, I don't think I do. Therefore, I lay the blame on not knowing more about Québec and its culture on the school system of which I am still the product....

I find it difficult to explain to you why I did not pursue the Québec question a little more. Indeed, I don't think I separated France from Québec in my mind. I believed that Québec's heritage was actually in France, and through studying everything that related to France, I was also studying something from Québec. It was indeed ironical that my views on Québec radically changed when I was in France and met with many friendly

France, où j'ai fait la connaissance de plusieurs Québécois très amicaux. (Lettre 2, 19 mai 1994).

Quebecers.
(Letter 2, May 19, 1994).

I now view Patrick's letter in light of my writing with JoAnn. With her, I had started exchanging about English Canada but I did not expect that both Patrick and I would share similar stories on the same topic. I thus followed up on his disappointment in this manner:

Quant au Canada anglais, je n'en ai jamais entendu parler par aucun de mes professeurs d'anglais. (Évidemment, on nous enseignait les faits élémentaires dans les cours d'histoire et de géographie). Était-ce une marque d'hostilité de la part de mes profs d'anglais? Je ne saurais le dire de façon certaine car ils ne nous disaient rien à ce sujet. Peut-être ce silence est-il dû à un manque de connaissance ou peut-être à la croyance qu'il faut seulement insister sur l'enseignement de la langue? Bien difficile à dire... Cependant, je dois dire que des profs du cégep m'ont encouragée à participer au programme d'été de bourse de langue seconde, programme auquel j'ai participé à trois reprises (à Toronto, à Vancouver et à Frédéricton).

Je te rappelle que j'ai été éduquée dans une petite ville entièrement francophone, bien loin de la grande ville de Montréal, laquelle connaissait une crise linguistique à l'époque de mon cours secondaire. Ces problèmes

As to English Canada, I never heard my teachers of English talk about it. (Of course, we were taught elementary facts in history and geography classes.) Was it a mark of hostility on the part of my English teachers? I would not say it for sure since they said nothing about it. Was this silence maybe due to a lack of knowledge or rather a belief that one has to insist only on the teaching of the language? It's very difficult to say... However, I must say that my cégep teachers encouraged me to enroll in summer second language courses, programs in which I participated three times (in Toronto, Vancouver and Fredericton).

I want to remind you that I was educated in a small town, entirely francophone, very far from the big city of Montreal, which was going through a linguistic crisis when I was in high school. We heard about these linguistic problems, of

linguistiques, on en entendait parler, bien sûr, à la télévision et dans les journaux, mais je ne me souviens pas d'en avoir discuté dans le contexte de ma classe d'anglais. Chose certaine, la plupart des Québécois n'auraient jamais remis en question l'enseignement obligatoire de l'anglais aux niveaux primaire et secondaire dans les écoles pour francophones, à part quelques nationalistes aux préjugés bien ancrés (bien sûr, il y en a). En fait, les Québécois s'opposaient au droit à l'école anglaise pour tous: c'est-à-dire pour tous les immigrants et autres francophones qui voulaient à tout prix que leurs enfants soient scolarisés en anglais. A Montréal, avant l'adoption de la loi 101 en 1976, presque tous les immigrants étaient inscrits à l'école anglaise, ce qui était, bien entendu, une situation aberrante. Pour moi, apprendre l'anglais était une chose qui allait s'accomplir à l'université; je ne voyais pas le bien-fondé d'être inscrite à une école anglaise avant ce niveau. (Lettre 3, 2 juin 1994).

course, on television and in newspapers, but I can't remember talking about them in my English classes. Undoubtedly, the majority of Quebecers would never have questioned the compulsory teaching of English at the primary and secondary levels in French schools, except for a few nationalists with well-rooted prejudices (of course, there are always some of them.) In fact, Quebecers opposed the right to English school for everyone: that is, for all immigrants and other francophones who wanted, at all costs, their children to be educated in English. In Montreal, before Bill 101 was adopted in 1976, nearly all immigrants were registered in English school - which was, of course, an absurd situation. For me, learning English was something which was going to be achieved in university; I could not see any well-founded reason to be enrolled in an English school until this level. (Letter 3, June 2, 1994).

In his next letter, Patrick thus followed up on his critical view of the teaching of French he received:

...on nous encourageait à faire des exposés sur un des pays de la francophonie. Curieusement, personne ne faisait mention du Québec, à part un bref historique fait par le prof. Le seul

...we were encouraged to do presentations on one of the Francophonie countries. Curiously, no one talked about Québec, except for a brief historical account by the teacher. My only reproach to

reproche que j'ai à faire à mes anciens profs de français serait qu'ils nous ont donné une idée négative du fait français au Canada. J'ai des souvenirs d'explications de...certains profs qui allaient jusqu'à dire «qu'au Québec, on ne parle pas le vrai français». Cependant, ils disaient: «Le français écrit est pareil partout.» (Lettre 3, 9 juin 1994).

my former French teachers would be that they presented us with a negative idea about the French factor in Canada. I remember some teachers who went as far as saying that "In Québec, they cannot speak real French." However, they said: "Written French is the same everywhere" (Letter 3, June 9, 1994).

In the above excerpt, Patrick shows once more his sensitiveness to linguistic discrimination. He also reminds me of the ambivalence that I sometimes felt about the variant of French (*français québécois*) I speak: despite the aesthetic quality that some of my teachers inculcated in me about the written language, I have met criticism, on a few occasions, about the fact that a speaker from Québec does not have the "right" accent or does not use the proper French words⁵. I remember being told that my French was incomprehensible by a train attendant in France; as well, one of my former professors of English told me that Pierre Trudeau was right in thinking of Québec French as being substandard French⁶.

⁵ See article by Hume, Lepicq & Bourhis (1993) for a discussion of the results of a study on a group of Ontario undergraduates' negative perceptions regarding the accent *québécois*.

⁶ See Bouchard (1990) for a discussion of the belief that Americans and English Canadians, in the second half of the 19th century, held regarding the French spoken in Canada - i.e., they thought that French Canadians spoke a patois instead of "real" French.

Patrick's comment upon his teachers' devaluing of Québec's French also refers to a problematic issue that urgently needs to be addressed in the curriculum of French as a second/foreign language in Canadian schools, namely the teaching of the appropriate variant of French: should it be le *français québécois* or le *français hexagonal*, standard (i.e., French from France)⁷? As to the passages in which each of us

⁷ See article by Mignault (1992). Mignault argues for the need to recognize the importance and value of the French Canadian language in the development of bilingual Canadians. In order to achieve this, he explains that three myths regarding the language should be got rid of: a) Parisian French is the only good French; 2) Québec French is a lousy French; 3) "Joual" is the language of Québec.

As recently as in May 1997, I read a *Globe & Mail* article about Céline Dion in which a sentence proved that one of these "myths" is still very much alive:

The few French phrases that Ms. Dion reserved for her Québécois fans during her acceptance speech at the Grammy awards in February, uttered in a *joual* inaccessible to almost everyone but her six million French speaking compatriots, validated their unique and enduring culture (v. Yakabuski, 1997, p. D-1).

From an American standpoint, Kaplan, in her book *French Lessons* (1993), recalls the same issue thus in the following narrative:

When we started discussing the problem of what language to teach in at a French civilization conference held in England, everyone got on edge, the whole tenor of the discussion changed (...). I talked about [my student] Edna - my horror at feeling as though we American teachers of French only want to produce our own French fantasy, a kind of Stepord Wife, dressed as a Polytechnicienne. (...) Other French professors attending the conference responded to these questions, sensibly, by invoking the "utility" argument: (...) we do have to teach people to function in the language. Adrian Rifkin, (...), responded passionately that

talked about our respective experiences of not learning anything in school about English and French Canada, they resonate with themes I had touched upon in my exchange with JoAnn and that I would later discuss with John, my other English-speaking Canadian participant.

Coming to literature in French and reflecting on the terms "second" and "foreign" language learning

Patrick started his readings of literary texts in French during one of his last years in high school. He was given to read a classic of modern French literature, St-Exupéry's *Le petit prince* (Letter 2, May 19, 1994). He was enthusiastic about it and discussed it with his French teacher who gave him *Terre des hommes* by the same author. In this novel, the idea which particularly struck him was that someone lacking ambition could become *un Mozart assassiné (a murdered Mozart)* (ibid.). But his best memory of a reading was a short story by Québec's Roch Carrier, *La machine à détecter tout ce qui est américain* (Letter 3, June 9, 1994; Conversation of September, 12, 1994). Thanks to this story, not only did he understand it without looking every word up in the dictionary but he

there is no neutral "utility." Business French? The esthete's French, the kind they teach at the École Normale? Technocrat's French (Polytechnique and Sciences Po)? Street French, the abject argot of a Céline? The zillions of ethnic Frenches - Canadian, Cajun ones (...)? When a class of Duke students tell me that the Québécois have "bad accents" I know we've gone wrong with our utility argument. When they say that they want to speak "just like a real French person," I ask them: "Which one?" (pp. 180-181).

discovered that he could laugh in his second language. Carrier's story was the one he chose to respond to for the second set of our sessions.

At the university level, he found French literature courses particularly difficult during the first year (Conversation of September 12, 1994). In an introduction course, he was taught a few literary theory principles as applying to texts in the three genres, poetry, drama, fiction. It was a difficult course for him and he was at times reproached for reading only for the story and neglecting to link theory with the text. In Patrick's opinion, additional help by a teaching assistant would have made this relationship clearer but he realized that since the teacher gave the course to forty students, she could not possibly address all individual needs. He would also have liked her to encourage the students to pick out their own topics for discussion. In this course, there was a wide variety of readings and he generally enjoyed them. One of his favorite novels was Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe* in which the protagonist keeps travelling through Europe pursuing his love while his father wrote him letters trying to dissuade him from doing so. He also remembered a few works by Québec's authors - in particular, he liked Michel Tremblay and André Langevin.

In France, he took more literature courses, especially those dealing with the classics of the 18th and 19th centuries (Conversation of September 12, 1994). Contrary to many students who did not entirely read the books and relied on

Coles-like booklets summarizing the required works from the viewpoints of plot, characterization or scenery, he conscientiously read through works by Voltaire, Balzac, Stendhal, Zola and Flaubert. If he found the pace somewhat overdemanding, he still managed to do almost all of reading requirements.

Very little initiative was left to students by his French literature instructors. Although students could express their opinions rather freely in the assignments, the instructors monopolized the talk in the classroom. In particular, Patrick was sometimes baffled by the amount of time one instructor could spend analysing the same two or three pages of a specific work. This microscopic view of a literary text was too perplexing for him, too remote from his own experience of reading. Assignments consisted of semimonthly essays based upon a choice of questions prescribed by the instructors and, in his opinion, the marking was more severe than in Canada.

After sharing with me his reflections upon this year of study in France, he started questioning the value of the term *français, langue seconde*. That is, he resented the fact that it allowed the program organization to prevent non-Francophone students from taking other courses where there was a majority of native French speakers. He felt that this kept him from fully integrating into the Francophone community. Here is an excerpt from our conversation:

P: ... et puis même j'en voulais aux profs de nous avoir séparés comme ça des étudiants français... Fina-

P: ... and also I bore my profs a grudge for having separated us like that from the French students... In

lement, je crois, à un certain moment, il faut nous jeter vraiment avec les Français, de nous dire débrouillez-vous le mieux que vous pouvez. Sais pas moi... même si on sort avec de très mauvaises notes, qu'on nous donne une note, sais pas moi, "réussite" ou "échec"... Parce que pour moi français "langue seconde", c'est un gros mot pour moi et je l'aime pas...je le déteste (rire).

B: Pourquoi?

P: C'est parce que, je crois que ce sont des cours pour, ceux... finalement, qu'est-ce que ça prouve? Ça prouve que... non, sais pas c'est difficile à expliquer.

B: Est-ce que ça serait mieux le français, langue étrangère?

P: "Langue étrangère"? Non, non plus, parce que ça nous sépare quand même. Ça nous sépare, pis on arrive jamais à s'intégrer. C'est ça plus ou moins le problème. A un certain moment, i' faut, mais sais pas, en troisième année d'université quoi, quand même. Ça dépend des étudiants, y en a qui n'arrivent jamais, qui n'arriveront jamais non plus parce qu'ils sont encore en train de chercher certaines traductions anglaises de certaines oeuvres en français (rire). Voilà, pour certains, ça ne marche jamais, mais pour d'autres quand même, ils arrivent assez bien. Quand même y a toujours un écart entre leur niveau et le niveau des francophones, mais même essayer de les intégrer avec

the end, I believe, that the time comes when we have to be thrown among the French, we have to be told that we have to work it the best we can. I don't know... even if we have very poor grades, give us a mark, I don't know, "success" or "failure"... Because for me, French, second language, it's foul language and I don't like it... I hate it (laugh).

B: Why?

P: It's because, I believe that these are courses for those... finally, what does it prove? This proves that...no, I don't know, it's difficult to explain.

B: Would it be better to say, French, foreign language?

P: "Foreign language?" No, nor would it be, because it separates us. It separates us and we never succeed in integrating ourselves. More or less, that's what the problem is. At a certain point in time, you have to ...in your third year of university, come on! It depends on the students, there are some who never succeed, who will never succeed because they are still looking for the English translations of some works in French (laugh). That's it, for some, it never works but for others, still, they succeed fairly well. Still, there's always a gap between their level and that of Francophones, but even trying to integrate them with Francophones of second year, first year, why not? I

des francophones, même de deuxième année, de première année. Pourquoi pas? Je sais peut-être pas des francophones de troisième année, ça serait trop haut pour eux, de trop haut niveau. Je sais pas, ils n'essaient pas assez pour les intégrer, je trouve. Ils se sentent toujours à part. (Conversation, 12 septembre 1994).

know, perhaps not Francophones in their third year, that would be too high for them, of too high a level. I don't know, they don't try hard enough to integrate them, I find. They always feel that they are kept apart. (Conversation of September 12, 1994)

Back in Toronto, he took translation courses during his last year of the program, and developed a taste for the translation of English texts into French. Although he was often told that it would make more sense for him to specialize in the translation of French texts into English, he felt much more challenged by and interested in rendering English texts into French. Therefore, it is not surprising that he once said that his ambition was to speak and write perfect French, i.e., "like a native"⁸.

⁸ Kramsch (1993) has pointed out the "dubious dichotomy" implied in the "native speaker versus non-native speaker" distinction and the wish to approximate this norm. She argues that it is senseless in that language study should be regarded as

initiation into a kind of social practice that is at the boundary of two or more cultures. In fact what is at stake is the creation, in and through the classroom, of a social, linguistic reality that is born from the L1 speech environment of the learners and the social environment of the L2 native speakers, but is a third culture in its own right (p. 9).

Kaplan (1993) makes a point which can be linked with Kramsch's from the standpoint of an experiential narrative:

(...) why [have I] confined myself to teach in this second language, this language which will never be

A few concluding remarks about letter-exchanges and Patrick's experiences of literacy

In my reflection on Patrick's experience of literacy, I can delineate the same aspects that I related to JoAnn and I when I earlier discussed our "**linguistic/literate selves,**" namely the **personal** (including emotional and affective) and **temporal** (including social, historical and political) dimensions of language learning. Under the **personal** dimension, I think of Patrick's memories of linguistic discrimination in which he told me about the rejection his parents experienced - and that he could feel himself as well - because of their use of Scottish English, of his disappointment with the pedagogy of his former teachers of English, and of his sense of exclusion from a group of high school students who, he felt, were better than he was at the interpretations of literary texts in English. All these stories point to the complexity of a person's language-learning and reading experiences and serve

easy as the first one? Why have I chosen to live in not quite-my-own-language, in exile from myself, for so many years-why have I gone through school with a gag on, do I like not really being able to express myself?

Then something will happen, in the classroom, and I'll see this French language essential *in its imperfection*: the fact that we don't have as many words is forcing us to say more. The simplicity of our communication moves us, we're outside of cliché, free of easy eloquence, some deeper ideas and feelings make it through the mistakes and shine all the more through them.

In French class, I feel close, open, willing to risk a language that isn't the language of everyday life. A sacred language (p. 210).

to illustrate, through family and school settings, what shaped Patrick's beliefs and attitudes towards his native tongue. I find it remarkable that, despite his rather negative experiences with his teachers' pedagogy of English and his anger at the linguistic discrimination his parents underwent, he had a passion for the learning of French. In a way, he could have developed a distaste for words. But, then, could not this discomfort in his mother tongue have contributed to his enthusiasm for the learning of a second language? Patrick reminds me of a comment made by Kaplan (1993): "Why do people want to adopt another culture? Because there's something in their own they don't like, that doesn't name them" (p. 209). And I also believe because language learners often feel attracted by the foreign, exotic quality of another language.

As to the **temporal** dimension of Patrick's **linguistic/literate self**, his remembering of his teachers knowingly ignoring the reality of Québec's culture and the use of Québec French, are reminiscent of JoAnn's experience of the socio-political context during the 60s in Montréal. The interweaving of my own story regarding my teachers' silence about the historical, cultural and linguistic reality of English Canada into Patrick's experience, stresses the point that Canada's two solitudes are still a reality that characterizes and sets apart the country's two main linguistic groups. Furthermore, Patrick's critical comment regarding the sense of exclusion that he felt as an undergraduate, in Canada and in France, because of the strict distinction between courses for second/foreign language learners of French and

courses reserved only for native speakers of the language, could also be interpreted as a wish to never allow someone from outside to fully integrate the other's culture.

As we will see in John's letters, the theme of the two solitudes reappears again but in a more distant manner in that his critical view of it does not refer to personal experiences as negative as Patrick's. Tasha also describes a context which can be related to the Canadian one by remembering the story of Russian relatives, as members of a ruling Russian minority living in Lithuania before the collapse of the Communist government in the early 1990s.

All in all, the correspondence gave me the opportunity to establish a solid rapport with Patrick, and enhance my understanding of the multiple influences that shaped and continue to shape the two of us as readers and language learners. As Greene (1978) pointed out, it also made me realize that "[our selves] emerge in human experiences over time as individuals engage with their social realities and as they communicate with others and internalize others' attitudes" (p. 36). Having the letter-exchanges as starting-points has allowed my participants and me to express parts of our **linguistic/literate selves** which will be further explored through our reading-responses.

Chapter III

The reading-response sessions with Patrick

Deciding on a literary genre and choosing stories

After the letter-exchange with Patrick, I expected him to give, in his second language, oral and written responses to literary texts in a fluent manner. Indeed, his positive memories, in his letters and conversations, of doing required literary readings for undergraduate French courses, told me that he would show dedication and commitment to the pedagogical process of the reading-response sessions. Patrick, however, was particularly busy the summer I did the pilot with him - he was working and taking two courses in order to complete his B.A. - he thus preferred having short texts to read and agreed with my finding a choice of stories from which he would make a selection.

Before explaining my choice of texts and discussing the reading-response sessions, I have to consider the advantages I saw in using this literary genre. They are of a practical and pedagogical nature: I could assign more than one short story and thus have my participants react to the depiction of a variety of characters and situations; the length of the stories assured me that they could be read in their entirety on short notice; finally, they could be easily reread (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 196). Thus, the short story seemed to represent a suitable genre for Patrick who, like my later participants, had to juggle the obligations of work and school schedules.

As to the five reasons which guided my selection of short stories, they are more personal in nature rather than practical. The stories I gave my participants to read result from my own meanderings through the library book shelves, which suggests that, firstly, I had to like these texts. I could not imagine myself using stories that I did not truly enjoy or that I felt compelled to use because of some external obligation - e.g., having to meet the requirements of an imposed curriculum, or having to choose a text in light of a body of criticism I would have been told to read in order to make a particular selection. Secondly, I thought it was important to have short stories which were set in Québec since Patrick, like my other participants, expressed interest in knowing more about literature from my cultural background. (Five of the six stories I gave him to read were set in Québec). Besides, the short story is a genre which Québec authors have been particularly good at writing in recent years and, in my searching for texts through anthologies or specific authors' collections, I indeed realized that the choice was easier to make among these authors.

As to the third and fourth reasons, they deal with the ethical nature¹ and the aesthetic quality of a story. I see

¹ I was not aware of the extent to which ethics influenced me at the time of my choice. My later reading of Wayne Booth's (1988) *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* and my analysis of the responses have made me realize more fully the important and unavoidable role it plays in our reading and interpretation of literary texts.

them as closely interrelated. I believe that it is possible for all readers to perceive an ethical concern in a literary text whether they situate it from a personal, social or historical standpoint; consequently, I valued texts with characters, settings, descriptions which would easily bring us in that kind of discussion. Concerning the aesthetic quality, I was guided by a sense of form in a story which, I believe, may appeal to a specific "order of things" in readers for various formal reasons: for instance, the simplicity (linearity) or complexity (open-endedness) of its plot, the use of language which conveys a characterization in a forceful or subdued manner, evocative descriptions of characters and places, etc. Furthermore, a story may please readers because it presents a new and totally unique world they may never have imagined before, and their immersion into it will offer to them a powerful way of reconsidering their lives in light of the one proposed by the author.

The fifth reason which also guided my selection has to do with my curiosity in responding to stories for which there was no literary criticism done (except, I guess, for the one which may have been written on Chekhov's story but that I never consulted). In this way, we would not feel tempted or obliged to refer to criticism or interpretations already written.

As I pointed out earlier, I was interested in my participant's personal responses. Responding to stories that are rarely read also brings up the point of always renewing the literature curriculum, which I regard as an important educational issue. After my selection, I was glad to find out

that most of the stories that I selected were written by women and that one of those had even been written in French by a writer of Chilean immigrant origin living in Québec². Maxine Greene (1995) argues it is important "to allow the voices we realize were long silenced to sound: the voices of women, of ethnic minorities, of poets and musicians recognized outside the Western world, and we *must make way for the untried and the unexpected*" (p. 136) (italics mine). She goes on to assert that "it is by selecting out what they themselves have come to prize that teachers can offer their students opportunities for transformation of experiences" (p. 136).

Explaining my choice of stories

The stories I chose for the pilot study were the following: *B...comme dans bucolique* and *Le temps des Caramilk* by Esther Croft (1991); *How Are You?* by Marilu Mallet (1981/in Gallays, Ed., 1993); *La laide* by Madeleine Gagnon-Mahoney (1969/in Gallays, Ed., 1993); *La maladroite serveuse du café* by Hugues Corriveau (1991) and *Les riens de la vie* by Anton Tchekhov (1964)³. Except for Tchekhov, they were all written

² The story is *How Are You?* by Marilu Mallet (1981/in Gallays, Ed., 1993).

³ Tasha and John read all those stories, except for Croft's *Le temps des Caramilk* and Corriveau's *La maladroite serveuse du café*. At the beginning of Chapters VII, VIII and IX, there is, respectively, a detailed summary for each of the three stories I chose for the analysis of Tasha's and John's responses. They are: Croft's *B...comme dans bucolique* (Chapter VII), Mallet's *How are you?* (Chapter VIII) and Gagnon-Mahoney's

by Québécois authors. In my view, one quality common to all stories was the use of language; I liked the style of each of them and the connotations they evoked in my mind.

In the case of Croft's story, *B...comme dans bucolique* (1988), I valued, in a moral sense, the rebellion and courage that the narrator/little girl displayed in response to the nun-teacher's narrow-mindedness; besides, I knew that everyone could relate to the first-person narrator in some way through memories of similar or different school experiences. At the same time, I wanted to make them understand part of my background since the context of the story is one I knew myself, that is, that of a Catholic school for girls in Québec in the 60s.

Croft's second story *Le temps des Caramilk* (1988) was a powerful memory on the part of the first-person narrator who had once been sexually abused as a child by her grandfather. On a tone alternating between submission and assertion, I liked hearing the narrator express her emotions and reflections from two standpoints: her voice could be that of

La laide (Chapter IX). The only additional story I gave my two other participants to read is Paul Zumthor's *Interview* (1994), which I found interesting because of the representation of the following theme: even if one individual attains the highest achievements - whether they be artistic or scientific - one may think of the possibility of having become someone else. Would one have achieved more if, instead of the quest for glory, one had spent more time trying to make one's kith and kin feel happy? As well, I liked the fact that the story was set in Brazil and that I could discuss it with a Brazilian friend.

the little girl who was victimized and that of the adult remembering the event years later.

Marilu Mallet's *How are you?* (1981/in Gallays, Ed., 1993) represented, in a touching way, the difficulty of the immigrant experience through the story of a doomed love relationship between a Polish and a Chilean refugee who meet at a language class in Montreal at the beginning of the 70s. I was curious to see how participants who had lived through the immigrant experience would react to it and how the theme of language learning would be discussed.

In Gagnon-Mahoney's *La laide* (1969, in Gallays, Ed., 1993), I liked the intensity of rebellion in the first-person narrator's voice; her interior monologue seemed so powerful and she defended her viewpoint so well, even though it was full of hatred. To me, there was a moral basis behind her eloquent rage: she did not deserve to suffer so much because of her physical appearance. As well, I saw that the theme of rebellion could be linked with the situation which was depicted in *B...comme dans bucolique*.

As to Corriveau's *La maladroite serveuse du café* (1991), I liked that a theme, similar to that of *La laide*, was expressed from a different viewpoint, by an omniscient narrator. In a strangely detached language which seemed to reflect everyone's indifference towards the main character, the narrator told the sad and dead-end story of a homely waitress working in a railway station coffee-shop.

Tchekhov's *Les riens de la vie* (1964) evoked the memory of a broken promise or disappointment that everyone had once

experienced in one's childhood because of an adult; the omniscient narrator vividly portrayed the theme through the story of a little boy who was lied to by his mother's lover. I thought that most readers would make some connections with it through some childhood story⁴.

Preparing for the reading-response sessions and Patrick's comments on the stories

My intention here is to explain how I came to the preparation of the reading-response sessions, and to present the oral comments Patrick made for each of the five other stories he read, as well as his justification for his choice of *La laide* - a story that I also responded to in writing with John and Tasha in the subsequent part of my study.

In a letter, I had already written Patrick about my previous experience of literature courses as an undergraduate learning ESL, and my interest in a rethinking of pedagogical activities for the literature curriculum of SL learners:

On s'attendait donc à répondre à des questions écrites par le professeur qui portaient soit sur l'action ou la phrase d'un personnage; une opinion qui avait déjà été émise par un critique, etc.... Ce genre de question n'est pas mauvais en soi mais il fallait y répondre de façon à rejoindre l'opinion du prof ou

We expected to answer questions written by the teacher which dealt either with the plot or one sentence said by a character; an opinion which had already been discussed by a critic, etc... There is nothing wrong with that kind of question but the answers had to agree with the teacher's opinion or that of a re-

⁴ As we will see later, the participants' responses did not always contain a personal memory. Yet, this does not prevent them from being deeply personal on another level.

celle d'un critique reconnu. Pour tout dire, on n'encourageait pas beaucoup les réponses personnelles des étudiants... Les lectures que je fais maintenant sur l'enseignement de la littérature me font réaliser que j'aurais pu écrire des choses fort intéressantes: je pense à des entrées de journal sur un aspect d'une nouvelle, d'un poème ou d'une pièce, à échanger avec le prof ou d'autres étudiants; à une lettre sur un aspect du texte qu'on a aimé ou détesté; à un personnage, un événement, un mot, une phrase qui nous rappelle quelque chose, quelqu'un que l'on a connu; à des jeux de rôles; à des réactions immédiates à un texte, faites à haute voix, de façon à faciliter la compréhension d'un texte, etc. Bien sûr, on aurait pu faire seulement quelques-uns de ces exercices, ce qui ne nous aurait pas empêché d'étudier aussi le contexte historique et culturel de l'époque ou les opinions de critiques reconnus. En fait, ce qu'on ne m'a pas très bien enseigné lors de mon bac, c'est qu'un texte pouvait, [de façon légitime], avoir des sens différents d'un lecteur à l'autre. (Lettre 4, 14 juin 1994).

nowned critic. To tell the truth, one did not often encourage personal responses from students.... My current readings on the teaching of literature make me [also] realize that I could have written very interesting pieces: I think of journal entries on one aspect of a short story, a poem or a play to be exchanged with the professor or other students; [I think] of a letter on a textual aspect that we liked or disliked; of a character, an event, a word, a sentence, which reminds us of something, of someone that we knew; [I think] of role-playing; of immediate reactions to a text, thought aloud in order to facilitate the understanding of a text, etc. Of course, we could have done only some of these exercises, which would not have prevented us from studying the historical and cultural context of the times or the opinions of renowned critics. In fact, what I was not taught very well during my undergraduate program was that a text could [legitimately] have a different meaning from one reader to the other. (Letter 4, June 14, 1994).

Through the sharing of my personal experience, I was thus expressing to him my underlying philosophy concerning the reading of literature.

I mentioned earlier that Patrick was a particularly busy student that summer and that the only available time period for his writing was to be during our one-to-one sessions.

Thus, for our first meeting, the only preparation he was able to do was read the stories and be ready to say why he had chosen that particular one among others; for the following meetings, he reread the responses each of us had written during the preceding session. I gave him to read all six short stories and asked him to pick out the one he found the most interesting for the purpose of preparing a response. I pointed out that the story chosen could be the one he liked or disliked the most. As to my own participation, I decided to come as "unprepared" as he was going to be, which meant I only reread the stories. I wanted to react in writing to the text only at the same time as Patrick would do, that is, during our meetings. My idea was that I did not want to influence him, at least in his first perception. I would show him my response only at the end of each session and then, if he wished, he could comment on mine, positively or negatively. I also decided I would not tell him which story I would have preferred to discuss and not give him any list of questions to guide him in his response, whatever the choice of his story would be. In short, Patrick and I were free to write the way we wanted and our responses ended up being similar to journal entries we would have written at home.

On the whole, my approach implied that I wanted Patrick's responses to be as personal and spontaneous as could be, and I now realize that what I was particularly interested in knowing about was the incipient stage of his understanding and interpretation of a story. However, as the context was that of a second language classroom, this could not exclude my giving

him explanations in order to clarify some vocabulary or passages that he did not understand or felt unable to interpret.

We had four meetings⁵ of about two hours each (July 16, 24, 28, August 4, 1994) which, except for that of July 16, were all devoted to written responses. The first one consisted of Patrick's oral justification for his choice of *La laide*, comments on *La maladroite serveuse du café* and *How Are You?*, as well as of a first oral reaction to *La laide* before writing about it. After the writing sessions, we met twice in September, on the 12th and the 16th, and had conversations of about two hours each, during which Patrick gave me comments about each story (he had commented only on three on July 16), reflected once more on his language-learning and reading experiences, as well as on his overall participation in the pilot. The first four meetings took place in my department at the university, and those in September took place at my home.

Before the first meeting of July 16, I felt nervous. Because of my lack of experience with the teaching of literature, I was wary about the way this minimal preparation would influence the process. I now relate it to a comment by Probst (1988) upon the value of the absence of preparation for the reading-response session of a poem:

... coming to [the works] cold, as their students do, enables teachers to think matters through with their classes, modeling for the process of speculating and probing, examining memories and finding associations, tentatively proposing

⁵ See Appendix A for a Chronology of the pilot study.

interpretations or assessments and then revising them (p. 37).

Thus, I felt curious about the possibilities of reflection that the approach could yield even if Patrick could reject, in theory, all stories as uninteresting (such a negative response to the texts would have been as interesting as a positive one).

Patrick started the conversation by pointing out that what spoke most to him, in his choice of Gagon-Mahoney's *La laide* (1969, in Gallays, Ed., 1993), was Philipa's "intriguing" relationship with Pierre. He thus explained his choice:

P: Je m'y rapportais plus que les autres, je crois... bon, c'est pas la laideur en particulier, comme tel, mais c'était plutôt sa relation avec Pierre. J'ai trouvé ça intéressant quand même... elle disait plusieurs fois dans le texte: «Lui, il joue à l'homme!» (rire). Et puis, je me suis dit: «Quelle horreur! Qu'est-ce qu'elle pense des hommes?» Et pis, je voulais en savoir en plus...

B: C'est ça qui t'intriguait?

P: Oui, oui, c'est ça qui m'intriguait le plus.

B: Alors, c'est pas la laideur, hein?

P: C'est pas la laideur en tant que tel. Ça m'intrigue un peu, mais je trouve ça un peu trop tragique. Quand je trouve quelque chose trop

P: I related more to it than to the others, I think... well, it's not ugliness in particular, as such, but it was rather her relationship with Pierre. I found that interesting, still... she said several times in the text: "Him, he is playing man!" (laugh). So, I said to myself: "That's horrible! What does she think of men?" Then, I wanted to know more about it...

B: That's what you found intriguing...

P: Yeah, yeah, that's what I found the most intriguing.

B: So, it's not ugliness, then?

P: It's not ugliness as such. I find that a little intriguing, but I find that too tragic. When I find something too tragic...too

tragique...trop tragique...
Ah! j'arriverai pas! [Rire
parce que P a de la diffi-
culté à prononcer] (16
juillet 1994).

tragic... Ha! I'll never get
it! [Laugh because P has
difficulty pronouncing "trop
tragique"] (July 16, 1994).

Patrick's commenting on Corriveau's *La maladroite serveuse du café* (1991) came right after his justification for the choice of *La laide*. He mentioned being troubled by the use of the pronoun *on* (*one*) in the story. He wondered who stood behind this use: was it the author or someone else? He thus criticized the third person narrator:

Quand même ce sont les
observations vues de l'exté-
rieur. On ne sait pas ce
qu'elle pense, elle. On sait
qu'elle se désespère mais on
ne sait pas vraiment... (16
juillet 1994).

Still these observations
are seen from outside. We
don't know what she, her-
self, thinks. We know that
she is despairing but we
really don't know... (July
16, 1994).

He felt it was judgmental - which suggests that he found it an unacceptable contrast after the *je* of *La laide*. During one of our last sessions (September 12, 1994), he mentioned finding the narrator mean and said that he could not identify with the character he portrayed.

Although he found the theme of incest between a grandfather and his granddaughter in Esther Croft's *Le temps des Caramilk* (1988) too depressing to be discussed, he preferred it to Corriveau's short story. He appreciated that the first-person narrator could express her viewpoint in it:

Et bien, non, je n'ai pas
choisi [Le temps des Cara-
milk] non plus parce que je
suis une âme sensible

Well, no. I haven't
picked out [Le temps des
Caramilk] either because I
have a sensitive heart

(rire). Ça me faisait de la peine également, voir cette fille, agressée par son grand-père....C'était bien conté par contre, pis ce n'était pas méchant non plus... C'était quand même la fille qui raconte son mauvais souvenir d'enfance, et ce n'était pas comme La maladroite serveuse de café qui ne pouvait pas du tout exprimer son opinion. C'était tout à fait différent, mais la victime avait la chance de s'exprimer et de raconter son histoire... (Conversation du 12 septembre 1994).

(laugh). It hurt me too, to see this [young] girl abused by her grandfather... It was however well told and there was no meanness in it... Still, it was the girl who tells her sad childhood memory and it was not like in La maladroite serveuse de café who could not express her opinion at all. It was totally different, but the victim had the chance to state her mind and tell her side of the story... (Conversation of September 12, 1994).

In short, Patrick perceived the therapeutic value that writing about the past held for the narrator.

As to Croft's *B...comme dans bucolique* (1988) - this would have been Patrick's second choice had we not decided on his own selection of a second story for the following reading-response sessions - he liked its language and style (in particular, he loved the expression used to describe the nun teacher's facial expression *avoir le bec en cul-de-poule* (to purse one's lips)). As well, he could identify with the character of the young girl who, in order to please the teacher, had to write once more a composition about "a nice summer day" at the beginning of the school year. Interestingly, he associated it with the way undergraduates interact with their professors:

...ça se passe à tous les niveaux, j'imagine, parce que même à l'université parfois (rire), c'est pas la peine de se mettre en désac-

...it happens at all levels, I guess, because even in university sometimes (laugh), it's not worth disagreeing with your profes-

cord avec son prof. Et pis voilà! on écrit n'importe quoi même si on n'y croit plus. J'ai beaucoup aimé quand même. Mais je l'avais pas choisie parce que y avait pas... c'était intéressant mais y avait pas d'autre personnage [que j'aimais assez]. Il n'y avait qu'elle et, finalement, la bonne soeur. Bon, c'était quand même un peu morbide (rire) (12 septembre 1994).

sor. And that's it! we write anything even if we don't believe in it. Still, I liked the story a lot. But I hadn't picked it out because there was no... it was interesting but there was no other character [that I liked enough]. There was only her and, finally, "la bonne soeur." Well, it still was somewhat morbid (laugh) (September 12, 1994).

In his comments upon Mallet's *How Are You* (1981, in Gallays, Ed., 1993) Patrick's first reaction to it was that it was humorous as well as tragic. Although he disapproved of Casimir's behaviour towards Marcia, he found amusing his portrayal as an opportunist who goes to Toronto to make money (July 16, 1994). This kind of remark offers an example of an ethical viewpoint which, as I earlier mentioned, readers always end up taking. Later, he mentioned liking it since he could sympathize with the immigrants who were language learners of English. He found that they were treated *comme des bêtes* (like beasts). He then had these very interesting observations about learning a language,

P:...quand on apprend une langue (rire), faut tout recommencer. Recommencer comme si on était un enfant. Pourtant on est des adultes... quand même on peut s'exprimer très bien dans notre langue à nous mais c'est difficile de trouver des mots dans une langue étrangère...

P:...when we learn a language (laugh), we have to start all over again. Start all over as if we were children. Yet, we are adults... still we can express ourselves in our own language very well but it is difficult to find your words in a foreign language...

B: Surtout au début.

B: Especially at the beginning.

P: Pis, on nous encourage pas tellement parce que c'est difficile à prononcer, c'est difficile à articuler sa pensée, et on a l'impression qu'on ne se fait pas comprendre... Ça le rend tellement frustrant... (12 septembre 1994).

P: And we are not encouraged very much because it is difficult to pronounce, it's difficult to articulate our thoughts, and we have the impression that we don't make ourselves understood...It makes the whole thing so frustrating... (September 12, 1994).

Regarding Chekhov's *Les riens de la vie* (1964), he said he liked the story very much, especially because of the way it was written, but found it somewhat "moralizing" towards adults. I then asked him to explain his view. He thus commented:

A l'égard des adultes parce que... quand les enfants découvrent le mensonge... quand ils découvrent l'insincérité, [la] malhonnêteté et, tout le reste, ils se rendent compte, bon, que les adultes ne sont pas les héros qu'ils étaient pour eux avant... Pour un enfant de découvrir toutes les fautes, contre ses parents, c'est dur. Quand même de se rendre compte que nos parents ne sont pas parfaits et...quand on commence à leur demander, à leur poser des questions durant l'enfance, ils nous répondent du mieux qu'ils peuvent mais ce ne sont pas toujours les meilleures réponses... (12 septembre 1994).

Concerning adults because when children discover that lies exist...when they discover insincerity, dishonesty and, everything else, they realize, well, that adults are not the heroes they used to be for them before... For a child, to discover all these shortcomings in his parents, it's tough. Indeed, realizing that our parents are not perfect... and when we start asking them questions during our childhood, they answer us the best way they can but it is not always the best answers... (September 12, 1994).

As this comment shows, Patrick's not liking the "moralizing" tone in a story⁶ ironically reveals a moral or ethical appreciation on his part. He summed up his feelings about it by referring to its sadness because it reminded him of the fact that his parents were divorced.

Finally, I conclude with Patrick's comments on Roch Carrier's *La machine à détecter tout ce qui est américain* (1971), the second story he chose for the reading-response sessions which followed those after *La laide*. He liked the idea of going back to the first "real" story in French he was ever given to read in high school and that he remembered truly enjoying. He found humorous the picaresque narrative of two little boys on a fishing expedition in Québec and said that he strongly identified with the joys and sorrows they encountered. While reading the transcription, it now strikes me that Patrick represents the example of the dedicated language learner par excellence: ...à ce moment-là, j'étais en train de découvrir le français, je le suis toujours d'ailleurs (at that time, I was discovering French and, besides, I am still doing it). Patrick also mentioned wanting to respond to Carrier's story because it was set in Québec.

⁶ As in Corriveau's *La maladroite serveuse du café* (1991), the narrator's voice is in the third person. Although Patrick does not mention it, this probably has contributed to his finding a "moralizing" tone in it.

Discussion of some aspects of our responses

I will now discuss some excerpts of our written and oral responses⁷ to Madeleine Gagnon-Mahoney's *La laide* (1969, in Gallays, Ed., 1993), consider my way of handling the sessions, and explain the pedagogical reorientation the process incited me to take for our other sessions on Carrier's story and the following study with Tasha and John.

In his previous oral justification for the choice of *La laide* (July 16, 1994), Patrick had mentioned his fascination with the nature of Philipa's relationship with Pierre. He expressed it anew through writing during our second session:

On sent que Pierre dépend d'elle beaucoup plus qu'on n'aurait pensé. Peut-être que Pierre a besoin de se rassurer qu'il est beau, ou qu'il est un homme désirable, en étant avec Philipa. Aussi se demande-t-on si Pierre aime faire ressentir sa domination sur une femme, car il faut dire qu'il se comporte comme un homme des cavernes avec Philipa, lui ordonnant qu'elle lui fasse des toasts et du café... Je me suis demandé également pourquoi Pierre n'a des relations avec des femmes que de courte durée. De toute façon il semble assez léger, et

One senses that Pierre is much more dependent upon her than one would have first thought. Maybe Pierre needs to reassure himself that he is good-looking, attractive, while spending his time with Philipa. Thus, one could ask whether Pierre likes playing a domineering role over a woman since it is obvious that he behaves like a prehistoric man with Philipa, ordering her to prepare toast and coffee for him... I also wondered why Pierre has only short-term relationships with women. At any rate, he is rather care-free, not too serious as a character, with the greatest

⁷ It is more relevant to discuss these responses instead of those we gave on Carrier's story, *La machine à détecter tout ce qui est américain*, since I did not give it to read to Tasha and John. *La laide* allows me to look at commonalities and differences between four sets of responses (Patrick's, John's, Tasha's and mine).

pas trop sérieux comme personnage avec la plus grande insensibilité envers les femmes en général (24 juillet 1994).

insensitivity towards women in general (July 24, 1994).

This quote proves to what extent the relationship aspect between the two main characters, of two opposite sexes, was significant to him. Patrick carefully imagines the nature of Pierre's motives lurking behind his interest in Philipa and he does not hesitate to be judgmental about his behaviour. To my question asking Patrick whether the story reminded him of things he knew, he mentioned that everyone had felt ugly at one time or the other during one's adolescence. During one of our last meetings (September 12, 1994), he explained that he liked the story because he could identify, sympathize with her since he had also experienced a sense of isolation, in school, somewhat similar to Philipa's during his "difficult year" in Grade 12.

In my written response, I insisted on Philipa's deep sense of revolt over her own physical appearance as well as on the recurring contradictions pervading her use of language:

Ce qui m'a frappé le plus après la première lecture de cette nouvelle: la révolte, la hargne de Philipa. Mais, après notre discussion de la semaine dernière, et après l'avoir relue et annotée, je me suis rendu compte du rôle important que jouent les autres personnages, Pierre et Hélène. Pierre, représenterait-il ce ils du début: «Ils m'ont faite laide, qu'ils payent!» (p.214). Quant à Hélène, je crois

What struck me the most during my first reading of the story was Philipa's revolt, her surliness. But, after our discussion of last week, and after rereading it and taking notes, I realized how important were other characters' roles, Pierre et Hélène. Would Pierre represent this "ils" of the beginning: "They made me ugly, let them pay for it!" (p. 214). As for Hélène, I believe that one can under-

qu'on peut comprendre son rôle comme un moyen qui révèle davantage les contradictions de Philipa. Ainsi, Philipa dit d'Hélène: «Elle pourrait quand même partager ma révolte. A quoi pense-t-elle? Que se passe-t-il dans la tête de quelqu'un qui est beau et qui le sait? Elle me jette des coups d'oeil furtifs. On dirait qu'elle voudrait me parler. Qu'elle aille ouvrir son petit coeur perdu ailleurs!» (p. 222) Et voilà bien Philipa tout crachée: elle voudrait bien qu'Hélène partage son sens de la révolte mais elle ne veut surtout pas qu'Hélène s'ouvre à elle.

Il y a, bien sûr, plusieurs autres exemples qui révèlent les contradictions de Philipa. Ainsi annonce-t-elle au lecteur, au tout début de la nouvelle, qu'elle se fiche de sa laideur «comme de l'an quarante» (p. 214). Mais elle enchaîne immédiatement en disant: «Puis je me dégoûte parce que si je m'en fichais, je ne serais pas enfermée ici. Merde. Salauds» (ibid.). (24 juillet 1994).

stand her role as a means which further reveals Philipa's contradictions. Thus, Philipa says about Hélène: "She could at least share my sense of revolt. What is she thinking about? What is going through the head of someone who is beautiful and knows it? She stealthily glances at me. It seems that she would like to talk to me. Let her open her confused little heart somewhere else!" (p. 222). And that's the spitting image of Philipa: she would like Hélène to share her sense of revolt but she especially does not want Hélène to open up to her.

There are, of course, several other examples which reveal Philipa's contradictions. Thus, she announces to the reader, at the beginning of the story, that "she couldn't care less about her ugliness" (p. 214). But she immediately goes on saying: "But I feel disgusted at myself because if I didn't give a damn, I would not stay locked up in here. Shit! Bastards!" (ibid.) (July 24, 1994)

Another different aspect between Patrick's response and mine was his optimistic view of Philipa's situation. Although I wrote that it was understandable for her to feel despair in such a world (July 24, 1994), Patrick then argued that despite all of Philipa's negative comments about Pierre and Hélène, he was convinced that she longed to be loved (July 28, 1994). He perceived as a positive sign the help that some people offered her (as an example, he mentioned her father). During his

second justification for his choice of *La laide* (September 12, 1994), he gave a further reason for liking it: he saw a ray of hope in it. He argued that, contrary to Hélène, Philipa did not commit suicide, and he found that under her veneer of toughness and cynicism - he called it *son humour un peu noir* (*her rather sick sense of humour*) - she could act generously towards Pierre. He also saw there was a possibility for her to redeem herself through a betterment of her relationships with others. He thus wrote:

Pense-t-elle que tous les hommes sont tels que Pierre? Ce qui me surprend est qu'elle ne réfléchit jamais à la possibilité à ce qu'il y ait d'autres hommes à part Pierre qui pourrait la trouver belle à leur façon (28 juillet 1994).

Does she think that all men are like Pierre? What surprises me is that she never thinks about the possibility of other men than Pierre who, in their own way, would find her beautiful. (July 28, 1994).

In short, Patrick's view of Philipa offered a more optimistic view than mine. As we will later see, John's and Tasha's responses also contained remarks as to possibilities for Philipa to transform herself through her relationships with others.

An important point of discussion which also emerged from the sessions was the one pertaining to language. For a SL learner, the awareness of new words, expressions and syntactical turns is highly developed, and these points may be more lengthily discussed than in a literature class with native speakers. To quote just one example from the sessions with Patrick, he was curious about the use of the adjective *fine* applying to a person in Québec's sense which means

"kind," a quite different meaning from the most common one in "standard" French, which means "who is excellent at an activity requiring tact and judgment." This kind of discussion was also addressed during reading-response sessions with Tasha and John.

Finally, another important aspect which surfaced in the response-sessions to *La laide* was my linking the story with an Italian film, *Passion d'amour*⁸. By making this point, I was expressing my interest in relating elements of passages from literary texts to texts or films I had previously experienced. In the later part of the study, this notion of "intertextuality" became even more significant as I encouraged my participants to develop it in their responses to short stories. I believe that references of this kind are a way of expanding the value of their literacies. As Greene writes "film art, particularly, may be of special relevance today because of the importance of the visual in our lives and people's growing familiarity with the language of visual images" (1995, p. 101).

Reflection on the pilot study's reading-response sessions

I would now like to sum up the experience of responding to a short story in the undirected manner we chose to do it. As I mentioned earlier, I was nervous about trying it out, but as we were progressing, I felt encouraged by Patrick's easiness in writing. He did not have the blank page anxiety;

⁸ See Chapter 9 for a synopsis of the film.

he wrote two substantial texts which each amounted to about 1400 words during two meetings of an hour and a half each on July 24 and 28. For someone whose French is a second language, it is impressive. Still, during our meeting of August 4, he told me he felt he had written enough about characters and had neglected other aspects of the story such as dreams, metaphors. He thought *qu'il tournait en rond* (that he was running in circles). Why he felt unsure - as I did - of what he was doing may be related to the novelty of the exercise or the lack of suggested questions before writing about the story. Anyhow, I gave him a list of questions⁹ from which he picked out the following (*Is there an aspect of language which strikes you, whether words or sentences that you like or dislike. Can you explain your choice?*)¹⁰ Yet, I felt the need to write him this letter, in which I discussed again my approach:

Cher Patrick,

J'aimerais faire une mise au point au sujet d'une inquiétude que tu m'as exprimée lors de notre conversation du 4 août. Tu m'as dit que tu te demandais si

Dear Patrick,

I would like to clarify a point regarding a concern you expressed to me during our conversation of August 4. You told me that you wondered whether you were

⁹ See Appendix A.

¹⁰ Interestingly, Patrick picked out the only question from the list I had worded myself. It is also remarkable that it is precisely the one dealing with language, which further confirms my earlier point on second language learners' strongly developed sense of language awareness. The other questions were slightly adapted from Probst (1988, 35-36).

tu ne tournais pas en rond» dans tes textes. Je comprends ta réaction puisque nous n'avons pas écrit à partir de questions ou d'un plan prédéterminé. Pourquoi ai-je choisi cette façon de travailler? C'est qu'elle me permettra de réfléchir sur notre façon personnelle de recréer, par écrit, le sens d'un texte littéraire, à partir d'une compréhension qui est la tienne et la mienne respectivement. D'aucuns me diraient que c'est une façon naïve de travailler: je leur répondrais qu'une première création de sens spontanée peut être aussi riche de sens que les textes savants que nous aurions pu écrire après avoir lu maintes critiques par des spécialistes de la sémiotique ou du post-structuralisme. (En effet, je crois qu'il peut y avoir d'autres façons tout aussi valables de parler et d'écrire au sujet des textes littéraires, en particulier dans le contexte pédagogique qui est le nôtre.) Ainsi, si je te demandais pourquoi tu as aimé tel film ou tel livre, c'est que tu y as trouvé un sens. Et, après y avoir réfléchi, tu pourrais me donner plusieurs raisons pour justifier ta réponse positive (langue, personnages, décors, etc.), des raisons que tu relieras aussi à ta façon de voir la vie, les êtres, les événements, ou encore à des personnes ou à des événements que tu as connus.

Mon intérêt dans la réponse spontanée ne signifie pas que tu ne peux pas revenir sur ce que tu as écrit lors des séances: en

not running in circles in your writings. I can understand your reaction since we did not write from questions or a predetermined plan. Why did I choose this way of working? That's because it will help me reflect upon our personal way of recreating, through writing, the meaning of a literary text, from an understanding which is yours and mine respectively. Some people would tell me that it is a naïve way of working: I would answer them that a first spontaneous reaction may be as richly meaningful as the erudite texts that we could have written after reading many a criticism of semioticians or post-structuralists. (Indeed, I do think that there can be other ways of talking and writing about literary texts which are as worthwhile, especially in the pedagogical context which is ours). Thus, if I asked you why you liked such a book or film, it would be because you found something meaningful in it. And, after reflecting upon it, you could give me several reasons for the justification of your positive response (use of language, characters, setting, etc.), reasons that you would link with your way of seeing life, human beings, events, or with persons and events that you have known.

My interest in spontaneous response does not mean that you cannot go back on what you wrote during the sessions: I do encourage you

effet, je t'invite à relire tous tes textes et à faire les changements que tu trouves nécessaires. (Par exemple, si tu n'es plus d'accord avec une phrase ou un passage que tu as écrit, tu pourrais y apporter une modification. Y aurait-il, par ailleurs, des questions de langue que tu aimerais éclaircir?) Serait-ce réaliste de ma part de te demander de faire ce travail avant ton départ pour Québec? (Si tu ne peux pas, tu pourrais me les poster de Québec?) Je te demande cela puisque j'aurai à faire un résumé narratif de ces textes, lequel je devrais être en mesure de te faire relire pour commentaires quand j'irai à Québec vers la mi-septembre. Pour conclure cette mise au point, j'ai hâte de voir comment sera l'expérience d'écrire des textes à partir de la liste de questions que je t'ai remise. En quoi sera-t-elle différente de celle que nous avons utilisée pour «La laide»? (Lettre du 12 août 1994).

to reread your texts and make changes that you feel are necessary. (For instance, if you do not agree any longer with a sentence or a passage that you wrote, you could change it. Besides, would there be points that you would like to clear up?) Would it be realistic on my part to ask you to do this work before your departure for Québec? (If you are unable to do it, could you mail them to me from Québec?) I am asking you to do this since I will have to write a narrative summary that I should be able to have you read in order to get your comments when I am in Québec around mid-September. To conclude this clarification, I am looking forward to experiencing how the writing of responses from the question lists that I gave you will be. In what way will it be different from the one we used for "La laide?" (Letter of August 1994).

The above letter reflects some of the self-doubts and certainties which accompanied me throughout the process, as well as expressing the teacher's traditional will to adopt an authoritative stance when a student asks for help. When I think now about my resorting to a question list for the second story, *La machine à détecter tout ce qui est américain*, I feel that there might have been a more original way of approaching it. Yet, the questions, coming from a reader-response theorist (Probst, 1988), have a quality of open-endedness which can

elicit the same type of free response as in the preceding series of sessions. Patrick told me he preferred responding in that way and, during our wrap-up meeting, he even said that he felt that his responses to *La laide* had been unstructured and less meaningful compared to those he gave for Carrier's story (Conversation of September 16, 1994). I answered him that I felt that his responses were significant to me, that I could perceive important differences between his and mine in that we were of opposite sexes. True, in the case of the second story, he was now going to write about a text of his choice, and he diligently answered all questions in a nearly perfect consecutive way, thus proving the sincerity of his comment. As I had done in the responses to *La laide*, I also participated in the same process and answered the same questions. Although I did not really like writing in this chronological order, I found that the questions had the advantage of guiding us more precisely in our responses and, in the case of Patrick, of diminishing feelings of confusion or anxiety. (Each question is indeed clearly preceded by a heading (e.g., "first reaction," "feelings," "memories," etc.), which suggests the kind of meaning that could emerge from the response.)

Concluding remarks about the pilot study and the ensuing reorientation for the following study

When I asked Patrick what he thought about the whole pedagogical process, he said that it had offered him a very good language experience in terms of writing and speaking. He found that my writing along with him and then my sharing

responses with him had allowed him to be more critical of his own reading, something he had not been given the chance to do during undergraduate literature courses. He particularly appreciated my long written comment of 16 pages in which I compared each of our responses to Probst's questions regarding Carrier's short story (Conversation of September 16, 1994).

Encouraged by Patrick's overall positive reaction to his participation in the pilot study, I was thus confident that a similar pedagogical approach would be of value for the study with Tasha and John. Yet, after the wrap-up session in September, I felt that the reading-response sessions would have to be organized differently. I had then already started my letter-exchanges with John and Tasha and I knew, from the start, that they had less experience in reading literature in French than Patrick (see Appendix B for a Chronology of the study). In our first brief conversation (July 23, 1994), John had told me that he had not yet taken a literature course in his B.A. program; as for Tasha, she had already taken two half-courses in French literature. But at that time, I had not yet found the format which I would adopt for the reading-response sessions since I was still writing my proposal and writing letter-exchanges with my participants.

It was in January 1995 that I decided to adapt, in French, Spack's detailed guidelines for my own reading-response sessions (1994)¹¹ (see Appendix B). I found them

¹¹ It is in Spack's book, which is also an anthology of stories, that I discovered Chekhov's *A Trifle from Real Life* or *Les riens de la vie*, the fifth story we used for our

suitable to my context since they were written for advanced English as a Second Language students (which also meant that they could be adapted for advanced learners of French), and focussed on the possible connections between the reading of and writing about short stories. What I further learned from Patrick was that writing responses during our meetings was certainly not the ideal thing to do. It was fortunate that my new participants had enough time to prepare in advance their responses, which we then photocopied and used as a starting-point for our discussion. As well, I made a point of writing as lengthy and detailed responses as I could to each story in order to show Tasha and John my utter commitment in doing exactly the same writing as they would do. Not that I wanted to win them over to my points of interpretation. What ensued is that not only did we read and listen to each other's responses carefully but we also criticized and expanded upon them. Yet, as the discussion will later show, each of my participants' set of reading-responses has overall retained a very personal flavour in spite of our being often influenced by each other's opinion.

I already pointed out above that the aspect of *intertextuality* was one, in my pedagogical reorientation, I wanted to examine more closely. This implied that Tasha's and John's memory would work in that sense and, in view of helping trigger these connections, I had them read, before the sessions, chapters from Michel Tremblay *Un ange cornu avec des*

reading-response sessions.

ailles de tôle (1994). I explained to them that these texts were, among others, examples of the way that one could remember one's past readings. They both greatly enjoyed Tremblay's accounts of his childhood readings and, in their responses, they tried to enlarge upon the experiences of books and films they had previously read and seen¹².

Finally, a different aspect in this reorientation of their reading-response sessions is that, this time, I gave them to read the stories one by one. Thus, they did not have any choice or justification to make as Patrick had done. It seemed to me that the logistics of a group discussion required me to impose my selection upon them, which they told me they preferred me doing anyway because of their complicated

¹² In *Releasing the Imagination* (1995), Maxine Greene thus wrote about the significance of remembering past literary experiences:

One of the ways of beginning the reflection that may enable us to create a narrative and to start understanding imagination in our lives is through *the recovery of literary experiences that have been significant at various times in our lives* [my italics]. The reading of literature may nurture all kinds of understanding of lived structures of meaning, although not chronologically necessarily, not in any particular logical order. But imagination may be released through the reading, and when it is, meanings derived from previous experiences often find their way through the gateway of imagination (as Dewey saw it) to interact with present-day experiences (p. 76).

My reading of Greene came after the reading-response sessions but I find it remarkable to see how well it fits my intuitive way of conducting the study at the time.

schedules. As the two of them worked and studied, they felt that they did not have enough time to find stories on their own. We will see later that my choice of a teacher's authoritative stance can be questioned through interesting comments they made in their final appreciation of the reading-response sessions¹³.

But before turning to the content of the reading-responses with Tasha and John, I will first discuss the stories of their personal backgrounds, and literacies or language-learning and reading experiences. I will first

¹³ Prior to my assigning them the five stories that we would respond to for the sessions, as an example of what a reading-response could be, I had given Tasha and John my spontaneous written reaction to a story by Brownwen Wallace, *Puzzled in Wisconsin* (1990). They then gave me written reactions to a literary text of their choice which consisted of well-thought and meaningful responses: Tasha wrote about Anne Hébert's novel *Les fous de Bassan* (1982) and distinctions she made between her first and second readings; as for John, he wrote about two chapters in Gabrielle Roy's autobiography *La détresse et l'enchantement* (1984) and the relationship between Gabrielle and her mother. True, there were four participants at the beginning of the study, which presented a complication in adapting this kind of free format for our reading-response sessions. But because of the second language context as well as of time constraints, I thought that it was necessary for all of us to respond to a common text in order to have the best possible collaborative setting for the sessions. It would have been interesting to see whether Tasha's and John's responses to a text of their own choice could have given a collaborative and significant creation of meaning as well.

present those of Tasha before John's because she is the only participant whose background is not Canadian and thus sheds a new light upon the **linguistic/literate selves** - including the **temporal** (social, historical and political) and **personal** (emotional and affective) dimensions of language learning. Being a recent immigrant to Canada, Tasha has a relationship to the country which necessarily differs from the one that JoAnn, Patrick, John and I have. Yet, we will see that this does not prevent her Russian narrative from naturally interweaving itself into some aspects of ours. In short, Tasha's stories remain in the continuity of the narrative of the study even though she brings an experience from a different cultural and linguistic background.

Part II The linguistic and literate selves of Tasha and John

Introduction to Chapters IV and V

The pedagogical context for the correspondence with Tasha and John was about the same as with Patrick (see "Introduction" to Chapter II). We agreed that every letter would be in French and that it would be a preliminary stage before the reading-response sessions. They were both enthusiastic about writing letters in French: for Tasha, then 25, it was the first time she would correspond in her third language¹; for John, then 34, he had already written some letters in his second language to a friend in Québec. Once more, my assumption was that exchanging upon our personal backgrounds and experiences of literacy would familiarize them with the value of their personal ways of understanding. I also initiated the letter exchanges and invited them to ask me any questions they might have should they experience difficulties in their writing.

My presentation of Tasha's and John's personal backgrounds and stories of language-learning relies on letters, field notes of two meetings with Tina² and Anna, as well as on a Journal I started writing in September 1994 and that I kept till November 1997 (see Appendix B for a chronology of the study). In addition to sessions directly

¹ Tasha's second language is English.

² Tina is the Canadian-Greek participant who, like Anna, the Chinese-Hakka participant, had to drop out of the study for personal reasons.

related to the project, the journal entries are based upon informal conversations. Tasha and I, as was the case with John, developed a friendship together. We often went out to see films (French movies as often as possible) and had coffee or dinner afterwards. During these conversations, I sometimes asked them clarification questions regarding their backgrounds or about their responses to the short stories; but, at times, they made remarks about language-learning or reading experiences on their own which I found important to enter into my journal. Finally, for reasons of authenticity, as I did for Patrick in the chapter on the pilot study, I have kept Tasha's and John's original French - that is, with some syntactic or semantic irregularities - and have translated into English the chosen excerpts from our letters, conversations and reading-responses.

Chapter IV

The linguistic and literate self of Tasha

Tasha's personal background and stories of language-learning

Tasha was born in a small town in Russia in 1970 and grew up in a large city in Central Russia. She comes from a highly educated and tightly knit family of two children whose parents and grandparents were university-educated. As she wrote in her first letter (Letter of September 28, 1994), she could not imagine herself not doing any post-secondary studies. During her childhood and adolescence, her grandparents (particularly her grandmother) were important in her emotional and intellectual development. At home, the family read the classics of Russian literature (Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Lermontov). Her father taught in a university science program; before the Second World War, her grandmother once taught Hebrew in university but had to switch to teaching Russian because of the antisemitism which was becoming even more prevalent at the time. Even though Tasha is Jewish, which I learned about during one of our informal conversations (Journal Entry, November 10, 1994), she considered herself to be Russian first since it was the only language spoken at home and the medium of school, as well as that of her cultural environment. She moved to Toronto with her family at the beginning of the 90s and, since then, they have felt closer to their Jewish heritage in that they will celebrate Jewish holidays, something that they did not do when they lived in the Soviet Union. However, even today Tasha feels first

Russian and still speaks the language with her family although they will often intersperse their use of Russian with English words and phrases.

Before presenting Tasha's letter of her first memorable language experience, I would like to quote an excerpt from the one I wrote to her in which I remembered one of my first days in Grade 1 when I tried to write my name and was fascinated with the idea that those drawings were meant to represent myself. (At the same time, the excerpt illustrates how, through my letters, I prompted my participants to write about these experiences):

Comme bien des enfants, je savais écrire mon nom avant même de commencer la première année. J'en étais tellement fière que l'institutrice, pour me faire plaisir, m'avait demandé de l'écrire au tableau. Je me souviens encore de cette scène: sans comprendre le lien entre les sons et les lettres, j'expliquais avec fierté au reste de la classe comment j'écrivais mon nom. (Lettre du 23 septembre 1994).

Like many children, I knew how to write my name before starting grade 1. I was so proud about it that the teacher, in order to make me feel happy, asked me to write it on the blackboard. I still remember the scene: without understanding the link between sounds and letters, I proudly explained to the class how I wrote my name. (Letter of September 23, 1994).

As for my first memory of hearing the sounds of English - I explained to Tasha that my father sometimes spoke to my mother in that language in order to keep something secret from the children -they were like intriguing sounds which seemed to

have been invented by adults for the purpose of confusing children¹.

In response to my letter, Tasha was able to offer me this very detailed account of her very first language experiences in Russian, as well as of her first memories of French:

Je pense que c'est à travers des livres que j'ai commencé à apprécier et à aimer tout ce qui est relatif à une langue. Mes parents et mes instituteurs dans un jardin d'enfants et dans une école primaire et

I think it is through books that I started appreciating everything that is related to a language. My parents and teachers in nursery school and in a primary and secondary school always encouraged me to read a lot.

¹ The French-American author Julien Green (1985), who grew up speaking in French and English, and later wrote in these two languages, made the following interesting observations upon his first memories of language-learning. I quote them because I believe that they complete our narratives in a very pointed manner.

The mystery of words is one of the most fascinating in the world. How many among us, in our childhood, have painstakingly repeated certain words the sound of which fell strangely on our ear, and because it fell so strangely, we never tired of hearing it, as if some kind of magic had been connected with it. I remember that, when I was extremely young, I was fascinated by the name of Paris. I wondered why my native city was called by that name and not by another. And the more I repeated that name, the more extraordinary it seemed to me. (...)

My own name would also cause me to lose myself in endless reveries. I found it extremely curious that a certain combination of sounds should designate me in such a way that, by making those sounds, one could reasonably see me appear. I hope not to sound too childish if I say that to this day the designation of objects and beings has lost nothing of its old fascination for me (p. 220).

secondaire m'ont toujours encouragée à lire beaucoup.

Je ne me souviens pas des premières fois quand j'ai essayé de parler, je ne peux même pas me rappeler les premiers mots que j'ai prononcés. J'ai retenu dans mes souvenirs les quelques mots drôles que mon petit frère utilisait pour dire "petit", "grand", "bonbon", "képhir" mais ce n'est pas important pour notre discussion, car tous ces mots étaient prononcés en russe et d'une façon inconsciente. La seule chose dont je me souviens est comment j'ai pu lier des lettres dans une seule unité, lire un mot des yeux et le comprendre. C'était dans un jardin d'enfants quand j'avais cinq ans, pendant notre repos après le dîner quant tous les enfants devaient dormir ou faire semblant de dormir. Mon lit était placé à côté d'une petite bibliothèque et il y avait un tableau en haut avec le mot "BIBLIOTHEQUE" (ce mot se prononce de la même manière en russe et désigne un ensemble de livres). Alors, c'était ce mot que j'ai pu lire et comprendre pour la première fois.

Maintenant, à propos du français. Je l'ai entendu pour la première fois quand j'avais cinq ou six ans dans les chansons françaises. C'étaient les chansons d'Édith Piaf, de Mireille Mathieu et plus tard de Joe Dassin. Ce qui me paraît amusant maintenant, c'est que j'ai essayé d'imiter le "Milord" de Piaf et le "Tango parisien" de Mathieu en répétant des séquences

I cannot remember the first times I tried to speak, I cannot even remember the first words I pronounced. I have retained in my memory some of the funny words that my little brother used to say "little," "tall," "candy," "képhir," but it is not important for our discussion because all these words were pronounced in Russian and in an unconscious manner. The only thing I can remember is the way I could link letters in a single unit, read one word with my eyes and understand it. It was in a kindergarten when I was five years old, during our break after lunch when all children were supposed to be sleeping or pretend to be sleeping. My bed was close to a small bookcase and there was a small sign with the word "LIBRARY" (this word is pronounced in the same way in Russian [as in French] and refers to a collection of books. It was this word that I was able to read and understand for the first time.

Now, regarding French. I heard it for the first time when I was five or six in French songs. These were the songs of Édith Piaf, of Mireille Mathieu and, later, of Joe Dassin. What I now find amusing is that I tried to imitate the song "Milord" of Piaf, and "Tango parisien" of Mathieu while repeating sonorous sequences which, in my opinion, sounded like French sound se-

sonores qui, à mon avis, ressemblaient aux séquences sonores françaises. Je me rappelle que j'étais absolument fascinée par le son "R" et par "la musique du français" qui me paraît très agréable. (Lettre du 28 septembre 1994).

quences. I remember being utterly fascinated by the sound "R" and by "the music of French" which seems very pleasant to me. (Letter of September 28, 1994).

In my second letter (October 4, 1994), I told Tasha about the social context surrounding my adolescence while I was a student in a private Catholic school: the early 70s was a rebellious era in Québec which, as in Europe and in America, saw the young take part in protests touching all sorts of issues, among which the language question was an important one. I also wrote her about my high school years when, to the detriment of my studies, I preferred to see my friends or read books (I felt that books could replace teachers). In her answer, Tasha thus conveyed the school atmosphere she knew during her childhood and adolescence:

Qu'est-ce que je me rappelle à propos de cette période de ma vie? Maintenant, je comprends que l'école n'était rien d'autre qu'une prison mais une prison avec des élèves favoris qui étaient toujours donnés en exemple. Il existait une compétition parmi les étudiants pour obtenir la meilleure note et l'envie était la chose bien normale. Pourquoi ai-je dit que l'école était une prison? Parce que, malgré tout, tous les étudiants étaient identiques, par exemple, tous devenaient pionniers (c'est une sorte de scout) quand ils étaient dans la première année de

What do I remember regarding that period of my life? I can understand now that school was only a prison but a prison with favorite pupils who were always cited as examples. There was competition between students for the best mark and envy was thus a normal thing. But why did I say that school was a prison? Because, in spite of everything, all students were identical, for instance, all became "pioneers" (it's a kind of scout) when they were in their first year of school. All had to wear the pioneer's red scarf and pro-

l'école. Tous devaient porter le foulard rouge de pionnier et prononcer la devise: «Toujours prêt!» Après, dans un certain moment de la vie, tous les pionniers devaient devenir membres des jeunesses communistes, etc. etc. Nous étions, si je peux dire cela, "pressés" par l'Idéologie. Mais ce qui est intéressant et peut-être un peu effrayant, ce que je pensais être heureuse. La vie était très facile car je n'avais pas besoin de lutter ou même de réfléchir, j'étais dirigée par les autres. (Lettre du 12 octobre 1994).

nounce the motto: "Always ready!" After, at a certain moment in life, all pioneers had to become members of Communist Youth, etc. We were, if I can put it that way, "pressured" by Ideology. But what is interesting and perhaps a little frightening was that I believed I was happy. Life was very easy because I did not need to fight or even to think, I was led by others. (Letter of October 12, 1994).

After reading this passage, my impression was one of déjà vu. It seemed to corroborate assertions which have often been made by Western critics of the Communist régime. Bearing this point in mind and thinking that this passage did point to a serious dissatisfaction with the Communist ideology she had known in school, I asked her to give further explanations when we met with John (January 19, 1995). She insisted on the fact that she did not feel Communism had played that authoritarian a role in her school experience after all.

In the same letter, except for her teachers' pedagogical approach that she criticized, her tone was mostly positive about their helping her acquire knowledge of school subjects. She also offered vivid recollections of her English teacher, and her experience of the language she started learning from grade 2, since she attended a special school offering the intensive teaching of English:

Bien sûr, c'est à mes professeurs dans l'école primaire et secondaire que je dois mes connaissances. Tout ce qui m'était enseigné pendant les années dans une école était d'une profondeur extraordinaire si l'on fait la comparaison avec les études en Ontario. Mais la méthode d'enseignement dans beaucoup de cas était archaïque: nous devions apprendre par coeur les chapitres dans nos manuels de géographie, d'histoire, de biologie et c'était très rare quand nous pouvions faire part de notre point de vue dans le cours de littérature, par exemple. Néanmoins, dans nos compositions, nous devions imprimer des idées du professeur.

En ce qui concerne l'anglais, c'était la même situation, surtout au début - l'apprentissage par coeur. Je me rappelle qu'il y avait beaucoup de dictées de mots qui faisaient très peur à toutes et à tous parce que notre prof utilisait seulement deux notes: "2" ("très mauvais" - c'est moins de 50%) et "5" ("excellent" - c'est 100%). Si tu avait une seule erreur, la note était automatiquement "2". Et je me souviens que je n'arrivais absolument pas à écrire le mot anglais "friend" sans erreur. J'ai écrit "freind" et j'ai reçu une mauvaise note et c'était une tragédie pour toute la journée. Mais, heureusement pour tous, notre professeure a beaucoup changé après avoir eu un enfant. Elle est devenue plus raisonnable et a cessé d'utiliser sa méthode terrible. En outre, elle est devenue notre prof préférée

Of course, it is thanks to my teachers in primary and secondary school that I owe my knowledge. Everything that was taught to me during my years in school was of an extraordinary depth if one makes a comparison with school programs in Ontario. But the teaching method was very often archaic: we had to learn by heart chapters in our geography, history, biology textbooks, and it was very rare that we could share our viewpoint in the literature class, for instance. Nevertheless, in our compositions, we had to reproduce ideas coming from the teacher.

Regarding English, it was the same situation, especially at the beginning - learning by heart. I remember that there were many dictations of words which scared all of us because our teacher used only two grades: "2" ("very bad" - it is less than 50%) and "5" ("excellent" - it is 100%). If you had a single error, the grade was automatically "2." And I remember that I was totally unable to write the English word "friend" without making a mistake. I wrote "freind" and I received a poor grade, and that was the end of the world for the entire day. But, fortunately for everyone, our teacher changed a lot after having a child. She became more reasonable and stopped using her terrible method. Besides, she became our favorite teacher since she seemed to understand a pupil's interests.

car elle semblait comprendre
les intérêts d'un élève.
(Lettre du 12 octobre 1994).

(Letter of October 12,
1994).

She also had a lot to say about the very advanced level of her Russian classes in another letter. Her much detailed account reveals her interest in everything that relates to language, her highly developed sense of language awareness. Once more, she points out the importance of rote learning in her Russian school and modestly plays down her capacity for memorization:

Je me souviens que pendant la première moitié de la première année, de septembre (le commencement des études) jusqu'à janvier, nous avons étudié l'alphabet sur l'abécédaire et l'institutrice nous faisait lire à haute voix en articulant toutes les syllabes, ce qui était un effort supplémentaire pour ceux qui savais déjà lire normalement. A partir de la deuxième année jusqu'à la fin de la huitième, nous avons eu le cours du russe presque tous les jours de semaine. C'était le cours de grammaire avec un nombre énorme d'exercices. Je peux même dire que l'enseignement était si profond qu'il peut être comparé à la linguistique, car effectivement nous avons suivi toute la phonétique, toute la morphologie et la syntaxe du russe. Chaque semaine nous avons eu un contrôle quelconque, soit une dictée, soit une composition. Encore une fois, ce genre d'enseignement demandait de retenir beaucoup d'information en forme de différentes règles et d'exceptions, ce qui n'é-

I remember during the first half of the first year, from September (at the beginning of the school year), up to January, we studied the alphabet in the primer and the teacher had us read and pronounce all syllables, which was an additional effort for those who already knew how to read normally. From grade 2 up to the end of grade 8, we had a class of Russian on almost every day. That was a grammar class with an enormous amount of exercises. I can even say that it was at such an in-depth level that it can be compared with that of linguistics, because we actually studied all of the phonetics, morphology and syntax of Russian. Each week, we had a control test of some sort, either a dictation or a composition. Once more this kind of teaching required retaining a lot of information in the way of rules and exceptions, which was not difficult at all for me in those days. Why? Because the more you use your memory, the more it can retain information.
(Letter of October 25,

tait pas du tout difficile pour moi dans cette époque. Pourquoi? Parce que plus tu utilise ta mémoire, plus elle peut retenir d'information. (Lettre du 25 octobre 1994).

1994).

Personal readings and literature in school

Tasha shared with me these vivid recollections of her personal readings in her mother tongue during her childhood and adolescence:

Maintenant, à propos des lectures que j'ai faites à l'adolescence. Tous mes livres préférés (et ce sont des livres que j'ai lus tant de fois que je les sais par coeur) ne sont pas, si étrange que cela puisse paraître, de la littérature russe, sauf "Le Crime et Châtiment" de Dostoïevski. Quand j'étais toute petite, j'aimais les contes de H.C. Andersen, surtout "Une Reine de Neige" et les contes de Charles Perrault. C'étaient, bien sûr, les traductions et ce qui est intéressant, ce que dans "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge" - version russe, tout finissait bien à la différence du conte original. Après, quand j'avais sept ans, mon livre préféré était "Sans Famille" de Hector Malot. Connais-tu cet écrivain français? Ce que j'aimais faire, c'est de m'identifier à un des personnages et d'imaginer ce que je pourrais faire à sa place. Parfois j'avais des rêves magnifiques, comme si j'étais au cinéma. Plus tard, vers l'âge de 8, 9 ans, j'ai découvert Jules Verne et

Now, regarding the readings during my adolescence. All my favorite books (and these are books that I read so many times that I remember them by heart) are not, however strange it may seem, Russian literature, except for Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment." When I was a little girl, I liked Andersen's tales, especially "The Snow Queen" and Charles Perrault's tales. They were, of course, translations and what is interesting is that in the Russian version of "Little Red Riding Hood," all ended well, unlike the original story. Later, when I was seven years old, my favorite book was "Sans famille" by Hector Malot. Do you know this French writer? What I liked doing was identifying myself with one of the characters and imagine what I could do if I were him [or her]. At times, I had wonderful dreams, as if I were watching a film. Later, when I was 8 or 9 years old, I discovered Jules Verne and read "Un Capitaine de Quinze Ans," "L'Ile mystérieuse,"

j'ai lu "Un Capitaine de Quinze Ans", "L'île Mystérieuse", "Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant", "Vingt Mille Lieues sous les Mers", "Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras". J'aimais les personnages de ces livres, je les dessinais, j'imitais leurs paroles. Mais, à l'âge de 10 ans, j'ai lu "Les Trois Mousquetaires" de Dumas et je peux dire que c'est un livre que j'aime le plus. Je l'ai lu en russe, en anglais et en français et j'ai vu si je ne me trompe pas 5 interprétations de ce livre sur l'écran du cinéma. J'ai lu aussi "Le Comte de Monte-Cristo" de Dumas, cette fois en français seulement, mais je préfère "Les Trois Mousquetaires", à cause des personnages qui me plaisent beaucoup, surtout d'Artagnan et Athos. Ensuite, pendant mes dernières années à l'école j'ai lu les romans des écrivains anglais J. Galsworthy, A. Cronin et W. Somerset Maugham et j'aimais beaucoup des contes de l'écrivain autrichien S. Zweig. Je me souviens que toutes mes amies adoraient des contes de Maupassant mais je les trouvais détestables. Maintenant, après avoir lu ses romans "Bel-ami", "Une vie", "Pierre et Jean" en français, je les trouve magnifiques. Peut-être, y a-t-il un effet d'une langue (en russe, les oeuvres de Maupassant me semblent affreuses). Ou encore, il faut être à certain âge pour apprécier ses livres. (Lettre du 25 octobre 1994).

"Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant," "Vingt Mille Lieues sous les Mers," "Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras." I loved the characters in these books, I did drawings of them, I imitated their ways of speaking. When I was 10, I read "Les Trois Mousquetaires" of Dumas and I can say that it is the book I like best. I have read it in Russian, in English and in French, and I've seen, if I not mistaken, five interpretations of the book on the screen. I have also read "Le Comte de Monte-Cristo" of Dumas, this time in French only, but I prefer "Les Trois Mousquetaires," because of its characters which I like, especially D'Artagnan and Athos. Then during my last years [in secondary school], I read novels by English authors, J. Galsworthy, A. Cronin and W. Somerset Maugham, and I liked the stories by the Austrian author, S. Zweig, a lot. I remember that all my friends loved Maupassant's stories but I found them very bad. Now, after reading his novels, "Bel-ami," "Une vie," "Pierre et Jean" in French, I find them magnificent. Perhaps there is a language factor (in Russian, Maupassant's works seem horrible to me). Or still, one must reach a certain age in order to appreciate his books. (Letter of October 25, 1994).

I find Tasha's desire for identification with some characters a reminder of how intimate, as well as remote from oneself, the reading experience can be when one starts appreciating the "fictional world"² of books.

Tasha then wrote about the literature curriculum which was organized in a chronological order, something that I also experienced during my high school years (Letter of October 4, 1994). Her criticism of it is perceptive and, once more, she demonstrates her fascination with words, her highly developed sense of language awareness, by referring to a linguistic problem in a Russian/English translation:

Les dernières années à l'école étaient consacrées à la littérature russe. Comme dans ton école, le programme était divisé de façon chronologique et je trouve que cela n'est pas juste. Par exemple, les oeuvres des grands écrivains russes (qui datent presque toutes du XIX siècle) étaient enseignées avant les oeuvres de la littérature soviétique c'est-à-dire du XX siècle) qui est, à mon avis, plus facile à étudier. Il faut avoir une certaine expérience dans la

The last years in school were devoted to Russian literature. As in your school, the program was divided in a chronological manner and I don't think it is correct. For instance, the works of the great Russian authors (which almost all date back to the 19th century) were taught before the works of Soviet literature, that is, those of the 20th century, which is, in my opinion, easier to study. One must have some life experience to appre-

² From a phenomenological viewpoint, Tasha's experience of the transformation of consciousness during reading - "once it is absorbed in the work and freed from the bonds of concrete reality" (Ray, 1984, pp.9-10) - is thus described by Georges Poulet: "because of the strange invasion of my person by the thoughts of another, I am a self who is granted the experience of thinking thoughts foreign to him [/her]. I am the subject of thoughts other than my own" (Poulet, in Ray, *ibid.*).

vie pour apprécier, par exemple, "La Guerre et la Paix" de Tolstoï ou "Le Crime et le Châtiment" de Dostoïevski. A propos, il y a des problèmes de traduction dans le titre de l'oeuvre de Tolstoï que j'ai mentionnée. En russe, le deuxième mot dans le titre veut dire "le monde", "la paix" ou "la communauté paysanne" qui s'appelle "mir" et je pense que Tolstoï sous-entendait toutes les significations de ce mot à plusieurs sens. En anglais, ce titre est traduit comme "War and Peace", ce qui n'est pas tout à fait correct. (Lettre du 25 octobre 1994).

ciate, for instance Tolstoy's "War and Peace" or Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment." By the way, there are translation problems in the title of Tolstoy's work I mentioned. In Russian, the second word in the title means "the world," "peace" or "the peasant community" which is called "mir" and I think that Tolstoy implied all the meanings of this word with several senses. In English, the title is translated into "War and Peace," which is not really right. (Letter of October 25, 1994).

Her remark on the importance for readers to have some life experience, in order to truly appreciate the classics of Russian literature, echoes JoAnn's own musings on her readings when she asked herself what she could have got from French and Russian classics during her early adolescence in New Brunswick (see Chapter I).

During her first year in university in Canada, Tasha encountered difficulties in her essay writing in English. She associated them with her tendency to follow, back in her native country, the teacher's viewpoint too much. In this excerpt, she reminds me of Patrick's comment upon Croft's story *B...comme dans bucolique* about undergraduates who never bothered to express their own views in order to get the credits for the course (see Chapter III):

Notre prof aimait écouter
les points de vue différents

Our teacher liked listening
to different view-

et même lire quelque chose de frais dans nos compositions. Mais dans la plupart du temps, il était facile de suivre son raisonnement, à elle, dans des essais ou dans des tests. En outre, rien ne nous incitait à faire part de notre propre raisonnement, car la prof n'attribuait pas une note plus élevée pour cela. Et par conséquent, je choisissais toujours la voie la plus facile et mes compositions ressemblaient beaucoup à un montage pour l'interprétation sur la scène. Je présentais quelque idée que j'ai entendue dans la classe suivie d'une citation qui la confirmait, après une autre idée, etc. jusqu'à la fin. Un autre aspect intéressant de mes compositions: je n'avait jamais de plan, pas même de brouillon quelconque, j'écrivais seulement une fois et c'était ma version finale. Si la prof demandait un plan de composition, j'écrivais d'abord une composition et après un plan basé sur cette composition. Tu peux donc imaginer combien de problèmes j'avais ici, à l'université quand je devais écrire un essai pour un cours d'histoire que j'ai suivi il y a deux ans! (Lettre du 25 octobre 1994).

Two other solitudes

When I described to Tasha the linguistic situation in Montreal, as we perceived it from Lévis (Letter of November 2, 1994, see also my letter of June 2, 1994, to Patrick), she could connect with it an interesting story from her life in the Soviet Union:

points and even reading something fresh in our compositions. But most of the time, it was easy to follow her own reasoning, in essays or tests. Besides, nothing incited us to share our own viewpoints, since the teacher did not give a higher mark for that. And consequently, I always chose the easiest path and my compositions often looked like the setting for stage acting. I presented some idea that I had heard in class which was then followed by a quote confirming it, another idea afterwards, etc., up to the end. Another interesting aspect of my compositions: I never had a plan, not even some draft, I wrote only once and that was my final version. If the teacher asked for my composition plan, I wrote the composition at first and after a plan based upon that composition. You can imagine how many problems I had in university here, when I had to write an essay for a history course I took two years ago! (Letter of October 25, 1994).

La partie de ta dernière lettre dans laquelle tu racontes un peu l'histoire de la crise linguistique à Montréal m'a fort intéressée. Je connaissais le problème mais assez vaguement et tes élaborations sur le sujet m'ont donnée une idée plus claire. Je peux dire que tout cela me paraît inhabituel et même étrange, car je n'ai jamais lutté pour préserver ma langue maternelle qui était la langue de la majorité. Mais je pense que dans les républiques soviétiques la situation était presque la même qu'au Québec, c'est-à-dire que les gens faisaient face au danger de la russification. Et je connais un fait réel avec la Lituanie qui est maintenant un pays indépendant. Quand j'étais petite, je faisais des visites à Vilnius (c'est la capitale de la Lituanie) chez le frère de mon grand-père qui y vivait depuis la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale. C'est qui est intéressant, ce que ne lui ni sa femme n'ont jamais appris le lituanien parce que la connaissance du russe était suffisante pour communiquer au niveau du travail ou dans les magasins. Et les autres familles dans lesquelles les gens parlaient russe seulement ne faisaient aucun effort pour apprendre le lituanien qui était la langue de la majorité dans la république. Donc, après que la Lituanie était devenue un pays indépendant, le russe a été interdit et les russes se sont retrouvés dans une position désagréable. Plusieurs ont été forcés de quitter la Lituanie. (Lettre du 8 novembre 1994).

The part of your last letter in which you tell a little about the linguistic crisis in Montreal interested me a lot. I knew about the problem but vaguely rather, and your explanations on the topic have given me a clearer idea. I can say that all of this seems unusual and even strange to me, since I have never fought to preserve my mother tongue which was that of the majority. But I think that in the Soviet republics the situation was about the same as in Québec, that is, people had to face the danger of Russification. And I know an example of Lithuania which is now an independent country. When I was a little girl, I paid visits to my grandfather's brother in Vilnius (that's Lithuania capital) who had been living there since the end of the Second World War. What is interesting is that neither him nor his wife ever learnt Lithuanian because the knowledge of Russian was sufficient in order to communicate at work or in stores. And the other families, in which people spoke Russian only, made no effort to learn Lithuanian, which was the majority language in the republic. Thus, after the independence of Lithuania, Russian was forbidden and the Russians found themselves in an unpleasant situation. Many were forced to leave Lithuania. (Letter of November 8, 1994).

Despite the high degree of difference between the Russian context and the Canadian one, what I gather from the lines is the sense of continuity that Tasha brings to the language-learning stories Joann, Patrick, myself, and as we will later see with John, shared in letters and conversations about Canada's two solitudes.

Preferring language over science studies at the university level

Another interesting point that Tasha also brought up was her decision to enrol in the French program instead of computer science, a program she had already started in the Soviet Union and could have finished in Canada.

Maintenant, je change le thème de ma lettre et je vais parler de mes études au niveau universitaire. Tu me demande ce qui m'a amenée à préférer l'étude des langues à celle des sciences. Je ne peux pas trouver la réponse très facilement. Je me souviens maintenant qu'à l'école je réussissais plus facilement dans les sciences humaines comme les langues, l'Histoire, la littérature et aussi dans la géographie, la biologie et la chimie que dans la physique, les maths et l'informatique. Mais cela ne veut pas dire que je recevais de mauvaises notes. Pas du tout! Toutes mes notes finales étaient excellentes et j'ai reçu une médaille d'or mais avec ça je ne savais pas quel type d'études au niveau universitaire je dois choisir!

I am now changing my letter topic and I am going to talk about my studies in university. You ask me what led me to my preference for the study of languages to that of sciences. I cannot find the answer very easily. I remember that in school, I was succeeding more easily in humanities such as languages, history, literature, and also in geography, biology and chemistry, than in physics, maths and computer science. But that does not mean that I did not get good grades. Not at all! All my grades were excellent and I received a gold medal but [even] with it, I did not know what kind of university program to choose!

Tous les gens autour de moi m'a dissuadèrent d'aller étudier les langues parce qu'il n'avait aucun avenir pour les spécialistes des langues en URSS des années 70-80 sauf être une institutrice à une école de la campagne.

La profession avec avenir était celle de programmeur. Et c'est cela que j'ai enfin choisi et j'ai commencé à étudier dans le département des mathématiques appliquées. A propos de l'enseignement à l'Université dans ma ville là-bas, je dirais très court que dans la plupart du temps je mourais d'ennui surtout pendant les cours théoriques quand tout ce que nous devaient faire c'était d'écrire les dictées des lectures. C'est incroyable mais c'est vrai que presque tous nos professeurs nous dictaient les lectures et tout ce que nous devions faire pour nous préparer pour les examens, c'était d'apprendre par coeur nos notes. La situation modifiait un peu dans les cours de maths, de philosophie, d'histoire du Parti Communiste et d'anglais qui tous étaient des cours obligatoires dans le programme. Ici, au moins nous pouvions faire les débats et défendre notre point de vue. En tout cas, juste avant d'immigrer au Canada, j'ai réussi à finir les trois années à l'Université et quand j'ai commencé à étudier ici, ma première intention était celle de continuer à étudier l'informatique et les maths. Mais ça ne pouvait pas marcher comme ça. Après avoir passé les trois demi-cours d'informatique et avoir

Everyone around me talked me out of studying languages because there was no future for language specialists in the 70s and 80s in the USSR, except for [someone who wanted to] become a school-teacher in the country.

The profession with a future was that of a programmer. And that is what I finally chose and [thus] started to study in the Applied Maths Department. Regarding the university teaching in my city back home, I will say briefly that I was bored stiff, especially during theory courses when all we had to do was write the lectures down. It's incredible but true that all our professors dictated the lectures to us and that all we had to do in order to prepare for exams was to learn our notes by heart. The situation was slightly different in our classes of philosophy, history of the Communist Party and English, which were all required courses in the program. Here, we could at least debate and defend our viewpoint. In any case, just before immigrating to Canada, I succeeded in completing three years in university, and when I started to study here, my first intention was to keep on studying computer science and maths. But it could not work out that way. After having done three courses in computer science and having tried two or three others, I came to understand that I did not really like these sciences and that I would be unable to sit in front of a computer screen for the rest

essayé deux ou trois autres, j'ai compris qu'en réalité je n'aime pas ses sciences et que je ne pourrais pas rester devant l'ordinateur toute ma vie. Alors, j'ai changé la direction de mes études complètement en faveur du français que j'admirais depuis longtemps et je me sens bien heureuse. Finalement, il faut faire ce qu'on aime faire! Je t'ai déjà mentionné que mon professeur du français ici était excellent et que c'est grâce à lui que j'étudie cette langue plus profondément. (Lettre du 8 novembre 1994).

of my life. I thus totally reoriented my studies in favor of French that I had been admiring for so long, and I [now] feel very happy. In the end, one must do what one likes doing! I once mentioned to you that my teacher of French [in Toronto] was excellent and that it is thanks to him that I am studying this language more in depth. (Letter of November 8, 1994).

Tasha's comments upon the choice of a scientific subject - deemed more worthy of study than any other at the university level because of future career opportunities - reveal a commonality with our current North American perceptions of the importance of technology in undergraduate programs. Furthermore, her ongoing criticism of her instructors' pedagogy points to a real dissatisfaction with this aspect of her Russian education. We will see how the theme of science vs. humanities is also subtly discussed in John's appreciation of his school experience.

Reflective summary of Tasha's experiences of literacy

Concerning the **personal** (including emotional and affective) and **temporal** (including social, historical and political) dimensions of language learning which make up Tasha's "**linguistic/literate self,**" the following points emerge from the letters and conversations.

Under the **personal** dimension, the main point which comes across is that Tasha feels that she has always known a very stable and supportive environment for the development of her literacy both at home and in school. She regards as generally fruitful the years she spent in a school specializing in the intensive teaching of English as well as those at the university level. Most of her language-learning and reading experiences have also been positive, except for a few that her adult eyes now make her see in a critical light.

From a very early age, she showed a real passion for books, and the eloquent rendering of her childhood readings is convincing in that regard:

What I liked doing was to identify myself with one of the characters and imagine what I could do if I were him [or her]. At times I had wonderful dreams, as if I were watching a film (...) I loved the characters in these books, I did drawings of them, I imitated their ways of speaking (Letter of October 25, 1994).

Her love of D'Artagnan and Athos in Dumas's *The Three Musketeers* is particularly well expressed (ibid.). As to her first memories of French, her vivid retelling of her discovery of the French "r", through the popular songs of Piaf, Dassin and Mathieu, also rings with the same enthusiasm as the one she had for her childhood readings (Letter of September 28, 1994).

Tasha's less positive comments were about her experience of the rote learning pervading the education system in the former Soviet Union. Although she is now critical of it - she refers to her teachers' methods as *archaic* - she remains mostly grateful for the knowledge that her teachers imparted

to her not only in Russian and in English but in all subjects (Letter of October 12, 1994). When she writes about the Russian language curriculum, she mentions its distinct areas of language learning (phonetics, morphology and syntax) that primary school children learned about (Letter of October 25, 1994). As well, she points out its depth in comparison to the Ontario language curriculum. In a one-on-one conversation (Journal Entry, November 7, 1997), she reiterated to me this emphasis on language in the Russian education system through her memory of having been asked, to her dismay, to write a composition about a Russian literary text when she applied for admission into the department of mathematics of her alma mater in Russia. She also remembered that, as early as grade 9, students were required to read and write about Tolstoy's *War and Peace* in its original version.

Another important point, under the **personal** dimension, is that she has finally come to assert a stronger natural affinity with words than with numbers or figures. Although it was not clear to her during her adolescence, since her excellent grades in all school subjects made it hard for her to make up her mind, she finally came to realize, after having taken undergraduate courses in mathematics and computer science, that: *...[she] did not really like these sciences and that [she would be unable to sit in front of a computer screen for the rest of [her] life* (Letter of November 8, 1994.) The decisive moment for her change of program to French was her initiation into the language with an excellent teacher in Toronto.

Throughout Tasha's letters and conversations, the emotional and affective aspects making up the **personal** dimension of her language learning have been strongly expressed. Even in our conversations which do not pertain to the study, she often comes up with examples of books that she is currently reading or asks me language questions relating to French. In short, Tasha is a dedicated language learner and reader, functioning at a very advanced level.

In regard to the **temporal** dimension (with its social, historical and political aspects), Tasha brings her Russian and Jewish experience, in the former Soviet Union, to the narratives of Patrick, John and myself. If the differences are obvious between each of our social and political systems - Communist as opposed to Capitalist - I find it more worthwhile, in spite of the interest these distinctions may hold, to examine, through Tasha's stories, points in which I perceive a similarity to our Canadian context. For instance, the language situation in Montreal reminded Tasha of the Russification of the Soviet republics, as well as of the language status of the Russian minority vis-à-vis the Lithuanian majority in the Republic of Lithuania (Letter of November 8, 1994). This similarity between the English and Russian speaking minorities brings a new perspective to the sense of victimization that Francophones in Québec have and that they tend to see as unique to them. Learning more about the language stories of other individuals coming from other countries which interact with those from other linguistic groups seems to me to be a narrative that all students should

learn about in high school. Another point of similarity that I find in Tasha's stories is the aspect of competition in the Soviet education system. The one she describes does not appear to be more based upon competition than ours is (Letter of October 12, 1994). Finally, the sense of conformity that Tasha now sees in her school experience at the primary level is what I perceive to be another element of similarity. The concept of "pioneer" which, she said, made all schoolchildren "identical" from grade 1 and had them pronounce the motto "Always ready!", reminds me of the conformity that the Québec Catholic school system also tried to instil in its students (ibid.) as well of the classroom context which is depicted in Croft's *B...comme dans bucolique* (1988) (see Chapter VII).

To conclude, in anticipation of the following reading-response sessions, I would now like to make a few remarks of a practical nature. In the letter-exchange, Tasha revealed herself to be a very fluent and regular writer who demonstrated a sophisticated level in the writing of the language although her spoken French was slightly more hesitant than Patrick's and John's - which was understandable since she had never stayed in a French-speaking environment for a long period. Yet, my conversations with her told me that she would be at ease during the reading-response sessions. Even though her experience of literature courses was more limited than Patrick's (she was taking, in the fall of 1994, her second half-course in literature, as part of her B.A. in French with a specialization in linguistics), I found exciting the idea of having a student who did not specialize in literature. In

short, the experience of the study to that stage was very encouraging in terms of the readings and writings she would have to prepare for the ensuing sessions.

Chapter V

The linguistic and literate self of John

John's personal background and stories of language-learning

John was born in 1961 and grew up in an English-speaking Canadian family in a suburb of Toronto. He is the youngest of three children. His parents separated when he was still a young child. Through his letters and conversations, I learned that his mother had been particularly important to his intellectual and emotional development. She raised him as a single parent throughout his childhood and adolescence. Although he was a good student during all of his years in primary and secondary school, it is somewhat ironic that his relationship to school life was a rather difficult one. At one point, he describes his high school period thus: *je n'étais pas du tout d'un tempérament scolaire. (I was not at all the school type.)* (Letter of September 1, 1994). He now regards his personal readings in the humanities, as well as his filmgoing during his adolescent period, as components which were as important in his intellectual development as the scientific subjects that he found easier to study for in school. Today, John still reads a lot and often goes to see films. He lives in Toronto and works full-time for a charity organization.

In his first letter, he wrote me about his troubled family life. He poignantly described this dramatic period of his childhood:

Ils [ma mère et mon père] se sont séparés quand je n'avais qu'un an, mettant fin à un mariage chargé de querelles. Après cela mon mère, mon frère Tom et moi vivions ensemble (l'aîné de mes deux frères, Rick, était déjà parti pour s'enrôler dans une école militaire). Ma mère venait de commencer à travailler comme infirmière. Faute de soutien financier de la part de mon père, on a dû d'abord s'installer dans un appartement en sous-sol chez deux amies de ma mère. En '64 la maison a brûlé complètement, et par la suite on s'est retrouvés dans un projet de logements sociaux.

Durant cette période les conflits entre mes parents se poursuivaient. Un jour en '66, j'ai vu mon père venir chez nous et enlever mon frère, l'arracher des bras de ma mère. Tom et moi ne nous reverrons pas avant 6 ans.

Je dirais que la rupture de ma vie familiale avait pour effet de me rendre plus introspectif, plus méfiant des gens inconnus. Lorsqu'est venue l'heure de commencer à l'école, je refusais avec acharnement, "Je reste ici!", "criais-je sans cesse, m'attendant à d'autres malheurs. (Lettre du 2 août 1994).

In light of these early misgivings about school, it is not surprising that he described a positive language-learning experience which was set at home. The first which came to his mind was that of his mother reading to him:

They [my mother and father] separated when I was only one year old, thus putting an end to a marriage filled with quarrels. After that, my mother, my brother Tom and I lived together (the eldest of my two brothers, Rick, had already left home to enrol in military school). My mother had just started working as a nurse. Lacking financial support from my father, we had first to take an apartment in a basement with two of my mother's friends. In '64, the house burnt down, and we then found ourselves in a social housing project.

During this period, the conflict between my parents continued. One day, in '66, I saw my father come to our place and abduct my brother, snatching him from my mother's arms. Tom and I would not see each other for six years.

I would say that the break-up of my family life had the effect of making me more introspective, more distrustful of strangers. When time came for the first day in school, I stubbornly refused to go. "I'm staying here!" I kept on shouting, expecting more trouble. (Letter of August 2, 1994).

J'avais très tôt montré un intérêt pour la lecture, pour les livres en général. Maman me lisait toutes sortes de choses et m'encourageait à lire moi-même. Lire, c'était mon "refuge". Une fois capable de demander ce qu'elle me lirait, mes préférences devenaient claires: tout ce qui traitait des animaux, surtout des insectes! Et non pas généralement des histoires fictives ("Winnie the Pooh" étant une exception notable), mais plutôt des ouvrages scientifiques, qui décrivaient ces bêtes -- leurs habitats, leurs moeurs, etc. Maman me lisait, pendant des heures et des heures, des articles de l'Encyclopédie Audubon, et des livres de biologie destinés aux élèves du secondaire! Elle le supportait -- je ne sais trop comment -- et je me demande maintenant pourquoi je trouvais de telles choses si fascinantes. Certes, je n'étais guère en mesure de les comprendre.

Quant aux ouvrages fictifs, maman m'a lu, de la première à la dernière page, et maintes fois sans doute, le roman qui reste aujourd'hui le plus gravé dans ma mémoire, "Huckleberry Finn" de Mark Twain. Il y avait bien sûr quelque chose d'attirant dans le thème: de petits garçons allant à la dérive, soumis à toutes sortes d'événements imprévisibles. Mais au fond, c'était le don qu'avait Twain pour le vernaculaire américain qui me tenait. (Lettre du 2 août 1994).

I had shown an interest in reading very early, in books in general. Mother read to me all sorts of things and encouraged me to read by myself. Reading was my "refuge." As soon as I was able to ask her what she would read to me, my favorites became clear: everything that related to animals, especially to insects! And not, in general, fictional stories ("Winnie the Pooh" was a notable exception) but, rather scientific works which described these animals - their habitats and habits, etc. Mother read to me, for hours and hours, articles from the Audubon Encyclopaedia, and biology books intended for high school students! She put up with it -- I don't know how -- and I am now wondering why I found such things so fascinating. To be sure, I was hardly in a position to be able to understand them.

As to fictional works, Mother read to me, from the first to the last page, and many times undoubtedly, the novel which remains today the most engraved in my memory, "Huckleberry Finn" by Mark Twain. Of course, there was something attractive in the theme: little boys drifting, experiencing all sorts of unpredictable events. But, most of all, it was Twain's gift for the American vernacular which held my interest. (Letter of August 2, 1994).

Even through memories of watching television, he expressed an admiration of his mother tongue in all the richness of its dialects:

En général, je n'étais guère attiré par la télé, mais il n'y a aucun doute quant à mon émission favorite: les dessins animés de Warner Brothers, mettant en vedette Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, et Foghorn Leghorn, entre autres. Encore du vernaculaire scintillant, cette fois mis en oeuvre par des voix inoubliables. Que je souhaitais voyager dans l'Ouest et le sud de l'Amérique pour rencontrer ces gens curieux. Ces autres "parlers" me fascinaient. (Lettre du 2 août 1994).

In general, I was very little attracted to TV, but there was no doubt regarding my favorite program: Warner Brothers' cartoons, starring Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and Foghorn Leghorn, among others. It was again a sparkling vernacular, this time spoken by unforgettable voices. How I wished to travel to the American West and South to meet these strange people. These other "dialects" fascinated me.

(Letter of August 2, 1994).

Interestingly, John's positive view of English differs from the more utilitarian connotation (although not in an exclusive manner) that Patrick and JoAnn insisted on attaching to it. Furthermore, his desire to meet the "strange people" who talked in such an exotic manner reminds me of Tasha's expressing her love for self-identification with the characters of Verne's and Dumas's novels.

As to his encounter with French, the feeling of a real commitment to the learning of the language did not occur until university. Yet, he expressed interesting memories of his Core French classes in elementary school, which he related to a larger historical context in Ontario as well as to his first trip to Québec:

Je n'étais pas exposé très jeune à d'autres langues. En 1970, avec le peu d'argent dont on disposait, on a fait notre premier grand voyage-- à Montréal. Et ainsi ai-je fait mon premier contact avec des francophones. Je me souviens d'être dans un café à Terre des hommes, entouré de gens qui se parlaient dans cette langue mystérieuse. Maman m'a signalé l'homme assis à la table voisine: il s'agissait du chef péquiste, M. Lévesque.

En Ontario à cette époque, l'instruction française débutait en 6e. Ce n'était pas de bonne qualité: des séances de 20 minutes, parsemés de la gymnastique et de "snacks," étaient typiques. En fait la province n'était pas encore sorti de l'ère "orangiste." Le français ne jouissait pas d'un bon prestige comme langue seconde. On était bien avant la montée des cours d'immersion, et la première école secondaire depuis le Règlement 17 venait tout juste de s'ouvrir à Sudbury. (Lettre du 2 août 1994).

I was not exposed to other languages at a very young age. In 1970, with what little money we could amass, we did our first big trip--to Montreal. And thus I made my first contact with Francophones. I remember being in a café at Man and His World, surrounded by people who talked to each other in this mysterious language. Mom indicated to me the man sitting at the table next to ours: it was the Péquiste leader René Lévesque.

In Ontario at the time, the teaching of French started in grade 6. It was not of a good quality: 20 minute classes which were interspersed with gymnastics and "snacks" were typical. In fact, the province was not yet out of the "Orangist" era. French did not have prestige as a second language. We were well before the rise of immersion classes, and the first French high school since Regulation 17 had just opened in Sudbury. (Letter of August 2, 1994).

What holds my attention here is the way John associates his first awareness of the French language, as it is spoken in a natural context, with the memory of the sighting of Québec's most famous political figure of the last thirty-five years¹.

¹ I would like to add here to his letter excerpt the following historical clarification regarding his mention of Regulation 17. The regulation was issued by the Ontario

As we will see, he is very keen to discuss historical relations between Francophones and Anglophones in the Canadian context.

John also remembered an experience similar to the one I had with English: putting up with conventional classroom exercises which were devoid of any social or cultural reference to English Canada. I give here an excerpt first from my letter and then from his:

Quant aux cours d'anglais, je dois dire que, malgré l'intérêt que je portais à la langue en soi (par exemple, j'aimais bien fouiller dans le dictionnaire bilingue pour apprendre de nouveaux mots), mes professeurs d'anglais, mauvais pour la plupart, n'ont pas été bien stimulants dans leur enseignement. Ils reconnaissaient pourtant l'importance de l'anglais - je me souviens même d'une soeur qui nous avait dit que l'anglais était «la deuxième plus belle langue au monde après le français» (sic) - mais, malheureusement, ces enseignants manquaient le plus souvent de motivation ou du sens pédagogique le plus élémentaire. Nous étions toujours censés apprendre docilement la langue à partir d'un livre qui était d'une platitude à en déses-

Regarding my English classes, I must say that, despite the interest I had for the language per se (for instance, I liked browsing through the French-English dictionary in order to learn new words), my teachers of English, bad for the most part, were not very stimulating in their teaching. They nevertheless recognized the importance of English - I even remember a nun who had told us that English was "the second most beautiful language in the world" (sic) - but, unfortunately these teachers most often lacked motivation or the most elementary pedagogical sense. We were always supposed to learn, in a docile way, the language from a book whose total lack of imagination would have despaired the most motivated of all students. Imagine a handbook with ten lines or so taken

Conservative government in 1912 and "limited the use of French as the language of instruction and communication to the first two years in elementary schools. Regulation 17 was amended again in 1913 to permit French as a subject of study for one hour per day" (Barber, 1988, p. 1578).

pérer l'étudiant le plus motivé. Imagine un manuel avec une dizaine de lignes d'un texte trop court pour être intéressant, des questions de compréhension et quelques mots de vocabulaire, le tout enseigné, dans une grande indifférence à une classe d'environ trente adolescentes. Nous n'apprenions rien au sujet de la culture, de la littérature d'expression anglaise (qu'elle soit canadienne-anglaise, américaine ou britannique). Je n'ai jamais entendu un prof d'anglais me parler du Canada anglais, non pas parce qu'ils avaient décidé consciemment de faire cette omission mais, je crois bien, plutôt parce qu'ils connaissaient très peu de choses à ce sujet. Bien sûr, on nous enseignait les faits essentiels dans les cours de géographie et d'histoire. (Je te rappelle que Lévis était francophone à 99,8%. Ce pourcentage doit être encore le même aujourd'hui.) Mais est-ce que ça a quelque chose à voir avec cette méconnaissance? Peut-être. A mon sens, voilà qui devrait inciter davantage les profs de langue à la curiosité! Chose certaine, ils ne semblaient pas avides d'en savoir plus long sur ce qui se passait à l'extérieur du Québec. (Lettre du 14 août 1994).

John wrote me back:

Je dois dire que j'ai trouvé une symétrie considérable entre ton expérience d'apprentissage de langue seconde et la mienne - en ce que mes cours (de français)

from a text too short to be interesting, followed by comprehension questions and a few vocabulary words - all of this taught, with a great lack of concern, to a classroom of about thirty adolescent schoolgirls. We did not learn anything regarding culture, literature in English (whether it be English-Canadian, American or British). I have never heard a teacher of English talk to me about English Canada, not because they had consciously made the decision of omitting the topic but, I believe, because they knew very little about the subject. Of course, they taught us essential facts in geography and history classes. (I want to remind you that Lévis was 99,8% francophone. This percentage must be the same today.) But does it have something to do with this ignorance? Maybe. In my opinion, this is precisely what should incite language teachers to be more curious! For sure, they did not seem to be eager to know more more about what was going on outside Québec. (Letter of August 14, 1994).

I must say that I found a considerable symmetry between your experience of acquiring a second language and mine - in that my courses of French were also

étaient, eux aussi, assez plats, axés sur des exercices grammaticaux stériles, et vides de références intéressantes de nature géographique ou culturelle. Sauf que toi, tu as quand même montré un intérêt précoce pour la langue en question. Je ne pourrais pas en dire autant, malheureusement. Je regrette souvent de ne pas avoir continué le français au-delà de la 11e secondaire. Mais, étant donné la qualité de l'instruction, ce n'est pas clair quel en aurait été le résultat. De plus, j'étais toujours encombré par une timidité, par une véritable phobie de parler en groupe. Une telle personnalité se prête difficilement à l'apprentissage langagier, je pense. En effet, j'essaie toujours de surmonter ce problème. De toute façon, je trouverai plus tard, à l'université, que mon entraînement en maths/science me servira pas mal en linguistique - ma matière principale aujourd'hui). (Lettre du 1er septembre 1994).

quite boring, based on sterile grammatical exercises, which were devoid of interesting references of a geographical or cultural nature. Except that you, you still showed a precocious interest in this language. I cannot say the same thing unfortunately. I often regret not having kept on learning French after grade 11. But, given the poor quality of instruction, it is not clear what the result would have been. Moreover, I was always burdened with a shyness; I was really terrified of speaking in a group. Such a personality does not lend itself easily to language learning, I think. Indeed, I still try to overcome this problem. At any rate, I would later discover, at the university level, that my training in maths / science can serve me well in linguistics - my main topic today. (Letter of September 1, 1994).

John thus differed from Patrick and Tasha who evoked generally positive school memories of their second language learning, respectively in French and English. It is also interesting to see how John perceives his personality as being not really suited to language learning. Given the excellence of his writing and speaking of French throughout the study, he reveals here a paradox between his perception of himself as a language learner and his capacity to perform.

Personal readings, literature in school, cinema and theater

John expressed the following thoughts about his high school period and the personal readings which marked him the most:

À partir de la 11e, j'ai fréquenté une école alternative, où les élèves étaient en général plus cultivés et décidément plus contestataires. En matière de lecture, je me tournais de plus en plus vers l'histoire moderne, les essais politiques, la satire et la critique sociale. C'était à cette époque que je découvrais le délirant journalisme "gonzo" de Hunter S. Thompson (ex "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas"). J'ai lu aussi Tom Wolfe, Ken Kesey, la satire de Terry Southern ("The Magic Christian", "Flash and Filigree") et de Joseph Heller ("Catch-22", "Good as Gold"). Je devorais des ouvrages d'histoire: R.V. Daniels et Trotsky sur la Russie, Herbert Matthews sur Cuba, les récits de Mark Twain sur l'ouest Américain ("Roughing It") et sur le Mississippi ("Life on the Mississippi"). En effet, je n'ai jamais perdu ma passion de l'oeuvre de Twain. Non seulement était-il un humoriste cinglant, mais aussi, à mon sens, un polémiste politique du premier rang. Je me souviens d'avoir lu la collection d'essais intitulée "A Pen Warmed Up in Hell: Mark Twain in Protest". Il y en avait un qui m'a particulièrement frappé: une dénonciation de la guerre contre les Philippines qui anticipe d'une manière remarquable,

From grade 11, I attended an alternative school, where students were generally more well-read and certainly more rebellious. Concerning reading, I turned more and more towards modern history, political essays, satire and social criticism. It was in those days that I discovered the raving "gonzo" journalism of Hunter S. Thompson (ex: "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas"). I also read Tom Wolfe, Ken Kesey, the satire of Terry Southern ("The Magic Christian," "Flash and Filigree") and of Joseph Heller ("Catch-22, "Good as Gold"). I devoured historic works: R.V. Daniels and Trotsky on Russia, Herbert Matthews on Cuba, the writings of Mark Twain on the American West ("Roughing It") and on the Mississippi ("Life on the Mississippi"). Indeed, I have always kept my passion for Twain's works. Not only was he a cutting humorist, but also, in my view, a political polemicist of the first order. I remember reading a collection of essays entitled "A Pen Warmed up in Hell: Mark Twain in Protest." There was one thing which particularly struck me: a denunciation of the war against the Philippines which, in a remarkable manner, anticipates the tone and content of the criticism that the new Left would advance regarding Vietnam and Latin America.

le ton et le contenu des critiques qu'avancera la nouvelle gauche au sujet du Vietnam et de l'Amérique latine. (Lettre du 1er septembre 1994).

(Letter of September 1, 1994).

We will see that John's preoccupation with everything which is social, political and historical asserts itself again in his responses to and conversations about short stories. To this day, although he is now more interested in literature than during his adolescence, he has remained a more avid reader of non-fiction books.

He also wrote a letter dealing with his high school readings and literature classes, about which he thought he had forgotten a lot. It is interesting to see how successful he is in conveying meaningful thoughts and feelings about the content of the literature curriculum and a pivotal event that made him appreciate Shakespeare. As he writes in his letter, it is *the way he remembers [events]* which ultimately matters and gives narrative meaning² to his retelling of events. His

² Critics of narrative inquiry might say that I am dangerously playing with factual truth. But if I want to reflect in depth on how my participants give meaning to their own personal experiences, the aspects of the story they have chosen to tell are, despite an absence of accuracy, as importantly meaningful as any factual information about themselves. Other narrative researchers, taking as a starting-point the reality of past experiences as expressed by their participants, also examine from different angles this reflection on the process of creating narrative meaning. DeCarion (1998) explores the imaginative aspects emerging from the narratives that participants told and recreated out of an

worry about not providing me with the most precise of factual information (cf. his first paragraph below) is compensated by his personal reconstruction of the pedagogical context he knew.

Et bien j'ai réfléchi quelque temps sur mes cours de langue et de littérature au secondaire et, à vrai dire, très peu de choses me sont venues à l'esprit, soit à l'égard des lectures qu'on a faites, soit concernant les techniques d'enseignement. Désolé! Mais je vais essayer quand même de reconstruire le cadre pédagogique ainsi que d'autres détails, tels que je me les remémore.

Tu as mentionné qu'au Québec, au secondaire, on divisait les études littéraires de façon chronologique, de sorte que le découpage s'est fait en époques consécutives. Autant que je m'en souviens, ce n'était pas le cas chez nous. On n'a eu à lire aucun ouvrage remontant au moyen âge, c'est sûr (néanmoins, en 13e je choisis de lire les "Canterbury Tales" de Chaucer, et de les commenter

Well, I reflected some time upon my language and literature classes at the secondary level and, to tell you the truth, I could recall very little, either concerning the readings we did or the teaching techniques. Sorry! But I will still try to reconstruct the pedagogical context as well as other details, the way I remember them.

You mentioned that in Québec, at the secondary level, literary studies, organized from a chronological viewpoint, were presented in such a way that periods were consecutively presented. To the best of my recollection, it was not the case here. We certainly did not have to read any work from the Middle Ages, (nevertheless, for an assignment in my grade 13 English class, I selected

observation of photographs and argues that fiction should exist as a legitimated mode of research. Fang He (1998, p. 39) used a composite "auto/biographic" method to discuss three Chinese women teachers' acculturation and enculturation experiences in China and Canada. For political reasons, she switched the voices, fictionalized the backgrounds of all participants involved in her study, and yet maintained the essential narrative truths of these women teachers.

pour un devoir dans mon cours d'anglais...) De tous les ouvrages "obligatoires", les plus anciens étaient sans doute ceux de Shakespeare, remontant au début de l'époque "moderne". Et ce n'était qu'en 9e qu'on a commencé à lire "The Bard". On eut à lire "The Merchant of Venice". Je dois dire qu'à cette époque, je n'étais pas un fervent de Shakespeare. Mais plus tard dans mes années dix, je vis l'adaptation filmique de "Romeo and Juliet" de Franco Zeffirelli, et je l'ai adorée. Ce fut le vrai tournant quant à mon interprétation du Bard. Je lus la pièce "Romeo and Juliet" plus tard au secondaire, ainsi que "Julius Caesar" (je l'avais choisie pour un devoir en anglais) et ce qui est généralement considéré comme le pire de ses oeuvres, "Titus Andronicus". (J'étais conscient de la mauvaise estime critique, mais curieux de trouver comment était le "16th century schlock").

Mais avant de lire Shakespeare, on lisait des auteurs plus récents, et le plus souvent britanniques, je pense. C'était soit en 8e ou en 7e, je pense, qu'on a lu "A Tale of Two Cities" de Dickens, et aussi quelque chose de Walter Scott - je pense qu'il s'agissait de "Ivanhoe". De toute façon je me souviens d'avoir aimé Scott beaucoup mieux que Shakespeare au début de mes années secondaires. De même, on a lu "The Prince and the Pauper" de Twain... Quelques auteurs canadiens anglais figuraient aussi dans le curriculum - Farley Mowat,

Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" for a reading and a commentary...). Of all "required" works, the oldest were undoubtedly those of Shakespeare, from the "Early Modern" period. And it was only in grade 9 that we started reading "the Bard." We were given to read "The Merchant of Venice." I must say that at this time I was not an admirer of Shakespeare. But later, during my teenage years, I saw the film adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet" by Franco Zeffirelli, and I just loved it. That was the true turning point regarding my interpretation of the Bard. I read the play "Romeo and Juliet" later in high school, as well as "Julius Caesar" (I had selected it for an assignment in English), as well as what is regarded as the worst of his works, "Titus Andronicus." (I was conscious of negative criticisms, but curious about finding out what "16th century schlock" was like.)

But before Shakespeare, we read more recent authors, who were most often British, I think. It was either in grade 8 or 7 that we read Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities," and also something from Walter Scott - I think it was "Ivanhoe." Anyway, I remember liking Walter Scott, a lot more than Shakespeare at the beginning of high school. As well, we read Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper"... A few Canadian authors were also part of the curriculum - Farley Mowat, I know for sure... (Letter of October 10, 1994).

je sais pour certain...
(Lettre du 10 octobre 1994).

In a previous letter, John had also written about his love of films during adolescence and, given the convincing tone of the following passage, it is not surprising that cinema became the element which helped him appreciate Shakespeare:

*Moi et mon cercle d'amis, ...on était tous des ciné-
philes acharnés. C'était du-
rant cette période qu'on a
découvert de "vrais films"
films de vérité et d'art qui
n'étaient pas formulés dans
un bureau de "marketing"
hollywoodais -- Altman, An-
tonioni, Malle -- et on les
voyait généralement dans un
réseau de cinémas avant-
garde, à bas prix. On y
jouait des films toute la
nuit. Nos "cinéthons", je me
les rémémore plus affec-
tueusement que n'importe
quoi d'autre de mon adoles-
cence. (Lettre du 1er
septembre 1994).*

*Myself and my circle of
friends, ...we were all ci-
nema buffs. It was during
that time that we discovered
"true films," films of truth
and art which were not for-
mulated in a Hollywood "mar-
keting" office -- Altman,
Antonioni, Malle -- and we
generally saw them in an
avant-garde theater network,
at a low price. Films were
played there during the
entire night. Our "cine-
thons," I recall them more
affectionately than any-
thing else from my adoles-
cence. (Letter of September
1, 1994).*

This passion is also expressed in his responses through intertextual links he makes between films and his responses to the stories.

As Tasha and I had experienced in our native tongues, John remembered the pedagogy of his English classes as being mostly teacher-centred. He could recall very few details of the kind of written assignment he did for his literature classes. However, he criticized his teachers' pedagogical approach to Shakespeare and wrote about his interest in the theater:

Et à propos de l'étude de Shakespeare au secondaire, je dirais ceci: Je trouve vraiment regrettable qu'on lisât le Bard, à cet âge, sans assister à aucune performance de ces oeuvres, ni au théâtre, ni à l'écran. A mon sens, l'un devrait se faire conjointement avec l'autre dans un programme scolaire. Après tout, ses pièces furent conçues pour être jouées, et jouées, faut-il noter, pour un auditoire du milieu populaire à cette époque. La plupart d'entre nous trouvaient ces lectures plates, point intéressantes. Et le langage, même s'il ne pose pas de vrais problèmes de compréhension, représentait quand même une barrière affective importante, ce dont les enseignants auraient dû tenir compte. Et en voyant, en écoutant le Shakespeare "vivant", mis en scène, est-ce qu'on aurait pu mieux saisir son pouvoir de véhiculer la tragédie, son don pour l'ironie, son sens de justice? Ce fut certainement le cas chez moi.

Et toujours au sujet du théâtre: J'ai suivi quelques cours de théâtre en élémentaire et au secondaire. On jouait, entre autres, "Mother Courage" de Brecht et Rossum's "Universal Robots". Ce dernier m'a assez impressionné comme pièce. Le dramaturge, (Karol Kapek, je pense?) exalte le rôle du travail dans l'évolution morale de l'humanité et la robotisation vauntée (?) de Rossum ne mène qu'à un paradis chimérique, à l'aliénation ultime de l'homme ... (Lettre du 10 octobre 1994).

Regarding the study of Shakespeare in high school, I would make this point: I find it truly unfortunate that we read the Bard, at this age, without attending any performance of his works, either on the stage or the screen. In my view, these two ways of presenting Shakespeare should be together part of a school program. After all, his plays were conceived to be acted on a stage, and acted, one should note, for the popular audience of the times. Most of us found these readings boring, not at all interesting. And the language, if it does not pose true problems of understanding, nevertheless represented an important affective barrier, which teachers should have taken into account. And while seeing and listening to "live" Shakespeare, performed on a stage, would one have better grasped his power of expressing tragedy, his gift for irony, his sense of justice? That was certainly the case for me.

And also regarding theater: I took some theater courses in elementary and high school. We performed, among others, Brecht's "Mother Courage" and Rossum's "Universal Robots." The latter impressed me as a play. The dramatist (Karol Kapek, I think?) extols the role of work in the moral evolution of humanity and the vaunted robotization of Rossum only leads to a chimerical paradise, the ultimate alienation of man... (Letter of October 10, 1994).

The two solitudes meet again

I have already pointed out John's interest in the relationship between Canada's two main linguistic groups. He was especially passionate about the topic of the language question and expressed strong views regarding the Quebec/Canada question in that letter:

Je viens de lire ta lettre, et je dois dire que tes commentaires sur la question linguistique au Québec m'ont beaucoup intéressé. Oui, j'ai entendu parler de ces événements. Et, depuis que j'ai commencé à étudier le français, j'ai lu un certain nombre d'historiens et de sociologues/politicologues québécois à ces sujets, dont Marcel Rioux, Jean Provencher, Daniel Latouche. A la suite de mon accident l'année dernière, pendant que j'étais dans le plâtre (donc disposant du temps libre!), j'ai lu "Attendez que je me rappelle!", l'autobiographie de René Lévesque. Tes commentaires m'ont rappelé ce livre, dans lequel Lévesque se remémore la situation linguistique à Montréal (et ailleurs au Québec) au moment de l'arrivée du PQ au pouvoir. Il commente beaucoup aussi la Crise d'octobre, exposant les manœuvres cyniques du fédéral, de Bourassa, et de Drapeau.

De notre côté, (c.a.d. celui du Canada anglais), eh bien, je n'avais que neuf ans lorsque la crise s'est éclatée -- trop jeune pour être politisé -- mais je me souviens très bien que

I have just read your letter, and I must say that your comments on the linguistic question in Québec interested me a lot. Yes, I heard about these events. And, since I started studying French, I have read a number of historians and Québec sociologists/political scientists on these matters - among them, Marcel Rioux, Jean Provencher, Daniel Latouche. Following my car accident of last year, while I had my cast on (thus having available time!), I read "Attendez que je me rappelle!", René Lévesque's autobiography. Your comments reminded me of this book, in which Lévesque recalls the linguistic situation in Montreal (and elsewhere in Québec) when the PQ took power. He also comments a lot on the October Crisis, thus exposing the cynical maneuvers of the federal [government], of Bourassa, and of Drapeau.

In our world, (that is, that of English-speaking Canada), well, I was only nine years old when the crisis broke out -- too young to be politicized -- but I very well remember

presque tous les "adultes" autour de moi ont appuyé Trudeau et le fédéral sans réserve. Et ce fut sans doute une réaction représentative. En fait, je ne peux imaginer rien de plus révélateur de la mentalité colonialiste qui régnait chez nous (et qui règne toujours?) Imagines-toi que le fédéral songerait un seul instant à je faire subir aux Canadiens hors Québec une telle répression? Que, en réponse à telle(s) acte(s) criminelle(s) très isolée(s), la population entière serait soumise à la loi martiale? Moi, je pense pas.

Malheureusement, je dirais que les Canadiens anglais restent majoritairement bien ignorants de l'histoire du Québec et de la réalité linguistique là-bas. Ils n'ont pas l'impression que le français était dévalorisé dans les "good old days" (pour reprendre la caractérisation de Richler), et comme tu le sais, c'est l'anglais et les anglophones qui sont dépeints dans nos médias comme étant dévalorisés et "menacés" au Québec. Les préjugés et idées reçues des gens peu instruits, ça c'est une chose - mais quant à nos faiseurs d'opinions - journalistes, intellectuels, universitaires, etc., eux qui devraient réfléchir - ça c'est moins pardonnable. Ils prétendent, avec beaucoup de suffisance, que le fait français en Amérique a survécu grâce au "berceau protecteur" de l'Empire britannique et à la confédération canadienne qui en est issue. Or comment expliquer, dans

that almost all "adults" in my environment unconditionally supported Trudeau and the federal [government]. And that was undoubtedly a representative reaction. In fact, I cannot imagine anything more revealing of the colonial mentality which prevailed here (and still prevails?) Can you imagine that the federal [government] would think, for a single moment, to have other Canadians outside Québec undergo such a repression? That, in answer to such very isolated criminal acts, the entire population would be submitted to martial law? I don't think so.

Unfortunately, I would say that the majority of English-Canadians are ignorant of Québec history and of the linguistic reality there. They don't have the impression that French was devalued in the good "old days" (to use Richler's characterization), and as you know, it is English and Anglophones who are represented in our media as being devalued and "threatened" in Québec. The prejudices and preconceived ideas of people who have little education, that's one thing -- but regarding our opinion-makers - - journalists, intellectuals, academics, etc. those who should know better - this is less easy to forgive. They pretend, with much conceit, that the French fact in North America has survived thanks to the "protective cradle" of the British Empire and to the Canadian Confederation which issued from it. How explain, in this analysis, the many projects of linguistic geno-

cette optique, les divers projets de génocide linguistique entrepris partout au Canada hors Québec sous l'oeil de cet empire bienveillant -- la décimation de la population métisse, les lois interdisant l'enseignement public en français, dont le Règlement 17, etc. On n'apprend rien de tout ça dans nos écoles. Ainsi peut-on, dans nos journaux et revues, se flatter de notre "tolérance" envers notre "minorité" francophone. Et notons bien qu'il s'agit d'une minorité et une majorité, et non pas de deux majorités, car ce dernier concept entraînerait un discours entre deux nations, le Canada (s'il y en a) et le Québec (le vrai et seul "berceau protecteur" du fait français). (Lettre du 23 septembre 1994).

cide begun everywhere in Canada outside Québec under the aegis of this benevolent empire -- the decimation of the Métis population, the laws forbidding teaching of French in public schools, including Regulation 17, etc. We learn nothing about this in our schools. And this permits us, in our papers and magazines, to flatter ourselves about our "tolerance" towards our francophone "minority." And note that we speak of a minority and a majority, and not of two majorities, for the latter concept would lead to a discourse between two nations, Canada (if there is one) and Québec (which is the only "protective cradle" of the French fact). (Letter of September 23, 1994).

John's tone leaves no doubt regarding the group towards which his sympathy leans. As Tasha reminded me when she wrote about the relationship between the Russian minority and the Lithuanian majority in the former Soviet Union, John's point concerning what should be included in the school curriculum (e.g., the assimilation of the Métis and restrictions impinging upon the teaching of French) enhances the importance of not forgetting to teach historical narratives of a linguistic nature.

Discussing a preference for sciences over humanities in high school

John's preference for everything scientific in high school is all the more interesting since he has elected to become an undergraduate in a French studies program. He thus shares with Tasha the revealing commonality of having preferred language learning over the study of sciences for his university studies. He now looks back upon his scientific background as an experience which can be advantageous to his decision to major in French linguistics. Yet, in his letters, John thus offered this critical reflection on his adolescent preference for mathematics and sciences:

Quant à mes études: au début, mes cours étaient très variés, comme l'exigeait le programme. (Je suppose qu'il en va de même au Québec?) J'étais fort en maths et en science, et chaque année, je me suis spécialisé dans ces sujets dans la mesure du possible, au dépens des humanités. Je lisais des livres de nature scientifique, mais je m'intéressais de plus en plus à des thèmes où la science et la société se croisent, tels l'écologie et la course aux armements. Les écrits de Rudolph Bahro et de Susan George en sont des exemples. Je dirais qu'en général, pendant mes loisirs, je me sentais attiré par les humanités, alors qu'à l'école, je me concentrais sur la chimie et le calcul. Je pense que ce tiraillement s'explique ainsi: Je n'étais pas du tout d'un tempérament scolaire. Si l'on avait à

As for my studies, at the beginning, my courses were varied, as required by the program. (I suppose that it was the same thing in Québec?) I was good at mathematics and sciences and, each year, I specialized in those subjects as much as I could, at the expense of humanities. I read books of a scientific type, but I became more and more interested in themes where science and society met, such as ecology and the arms race. The writings of Rudolph Bahro and Susan George are examples. I would say that in general, during my leisure hours, I was attracted by humanities, whereas in school, I concentrated on chemistry and arithmetic. I think that this tension [between the two subjects] can be explained as follows: I was not at all the school type. If someone had to teach me

m'enseigner des choses, que cet enseignement soit en maths, en chimie, pensais-je. De telles matières semblaient se prêter plus facilement à être "testées", "évaluées", bref, à des réponses nettement fausses ou justes. Mais, être soumis à des tests sur la réalité sociale, avoir à me prononcer là-dessus "avec justesse" -- l'idée me répugnait, m'effrayait même. Je préférais donc faire ces découvertes dans ce domaine en dehors de l'école, à ma façon, et surtout, à partir des sources de mon choix. (Pour être juste, je me suis rendu compte, depuis lors, que le vrai but de l'enseignement des humanités, c'est d'exposer les élèves à des idées, de les stimuler, et non pas le "testing", comme tel. Mais ce n'était moins évident à cette époque). (Lettre du 1er septembre 1994).

something, let that teaching be in maths, in chemistry, I thought. Such subjects seemed to lend themselves to "testing," "evaluation" more easily - in short, to answers clearly false or true. But, being submitted to tests on social reality, having to speak my mind on such a topic "correctly" -- I felt reluctant to do, I was even frightened by the idea. So I preferred to make my discoveries in that field outside school, in my own way, and, most importantly, from sources of my choosing. (To be fair, I have realized since then that the real aim of teaching humanities is exposing students to ideas, arousing their minds, and not "testing" as such. But it was less obvious at the time). (Letter of September 1, 1994).

It is significant that John writes about a "tiraillement" (a word which, from my French viewpoint, loses most of its emotional and colloquial flavour through the English translation of "tension"), and that he associates the teaching of humanities with an intellectual freedom which, in his opinion, was absent in the "testing" of sciences he knew. From these lines, I gather that he derived a sense of safety from the pedagogy of sciences (e.g., give a "true" or "false" answer to that algebraic formula), whereas the humanities opened up a world seemingly more diffuse, with endless interpretations and descriptions from which it was much more difficult to fit the standards of "justesse" ("correctness")

used in scientific subjects. Thus, his love of books dealing with subjects in the humanities exercised itself outside school.

I was so intrigued by John's comments that I asked him to expand again on the sciences/humanities dichotomy (Letter of September 19, 1994). Here are excerpts from two of his letters which further describe his feelings about the subject:

J'ai déjà fait mention du tiraillement qui me touchait au secondaire, et que cela s'est résolu quelque peu en études universitaires, car la linguistique me permet de me servir de mon entraînement analytique en sciences tout en m'intéressant comme une étude sociale polyvalente. Quant à mes commentaires sur ces questions dans la lettre précédente: je ne voulais pas te donner l'impression que je n'éprouvais pas un intérêt pour la littérature, ou une curiosité pour la philosophie.

Mais je maintiendrais qu'il y a quelque chose d'inné à ces matières qui les rend difficiles à situer dans un cadre scolaire axé sur "l'évaluation", le "testing" et ainsi de suite. Après tout, en chimie, en calcul, on est censé travailler à l'intérieur de tel paradigme analytique comportant des règles. Ce paradigme étant une abstraction "exacte" et schématique, l'analyse que l'on fait est généralement objective, menant à des résultats exacts ou fautifs. Alors que la littérature, et la philosophie nous appellent de réfléchir: sur nos valeurs,

I already mentioned the struggle which concerned me in high school, and that it somewhat worked itself out in [my] studies at university, since linguistics allows me to use my analytical training in sciences while interesting me as a very polyvalent social science. As to my comments on these questions in the preceding letter: I did not mean to give you the impression that I did not have any interest in literature or curiosity for philosophy.

But I would maintain that there is something innate to these subjects that makes them difficult to be situated within a school context aimed at "evaluation," "testing" and so forth. After all, in chemistry and arithmetic, we are supposed to work within a specific analytical paradigm made up of rules. This paradigm being an "exact" and schematic abstraction, the analysis one does is generally objective, leading to correct or faulty results. Whereas literature, and philosophy invite us to reflect on our values, our means of expression, our fate. It is

nos moyens d'expression, notre sort. Fascinant, bien sûr, mais j'avais peur que les épreuves (examens, colloques, présentations) dans ces matières à l'école auraient pour effet de diminuer le plaisir de lire dans ces domaines. De plus, on n'avait pas toujours le choix de ce qu'on lirait. Bref, c'était comme si j'avais, d'une certaine manière, approprié les ouvrages et les auteurs que j'ai lus. (Lettre du 23 septembre 1994).

Je t'ai déjà parlé de ma réticence de me situer dans un cadre scolaire d'études littéraires et philosophiques. Était-il question d'un manque de tempérament/ aptitude scolaire dans ce domaine ou bien d'une simple paresse intellectuelle? Je pense que les deux jouaient un rôle. Je me souviens que la prof de l'anglais à l'école alternative était très patiente, cultivée et plutôt progressiste à l'égard de la politique. Dans ces cours, j'ai lu un assortiment de genres et d'époques, allant de Chaucer à Shakespeare de Graham Greene (en passant par Jonathan Millington Synge, "The Playboy of the Western World"). Mais, je n'ai pas sérieusement travaillé à maîtriser les techniques d'analyse littéraires (j'étais particulièrement faible quant à l'analyse de la poésie). Je suis d'accord avec tes commentaires sur l'importance, et le potentiel, d'études littéraires en école, et je regrette profondément cette lacune dans ma formation

of course fascinating, but I was afraid that the tests (exams, seminars, presentations) in these subjects in school would have the effect of diminishing the pleasure of reading in these [subjects]. Furthermore, we did not always have the choice of what one would read. In short, it is as if I had, in a certain way, appropriated the works and authors that I had read. (Letter of September 23, 1994).

I once talked to you about my reserve as to situating myself within the school context of literature and philosophy programs. Was it because of my lack of temperament/ aptitude in this subject or was it simply intellectual laziness? I think that the two played a role. I remember that the English teacher at the alternative school was very patient, cultivated and rather progressive regarding politics. For my courses, I read an assortment of genres and periods, from Chaucer to Shakespeare, as well as Graham Greene - along with Jonathan Millington Synge, "The Playboy of the Western World." But I did not seriously work at mastering the techniques of literary analysis (I was particularly weak at the analysis of poetry). I agree with your comments on the importance and the potential of literary studies in school, and I deeply regret this gap in my school education all the more as I am not a sciences specialist now. After all,

scolaire, d'autant plus que je ne suis pas spécialiste en sciences actuellement. Après tout, la mémoire d'un merveilleux roman, qu'on a relu et approfondi, peut rester toute sa vie. Est-ce que je pourrais en dire autant de mes livres de chimie? Et c'est évident que la capacité d'analyse peut enrichir le plaisir de lire; peut amplifier ce qu'on tire d'un roman, de l'esprit de l'écrivain, surtout lorsqu'il y a éloignement culturel ou historique. (Lettre du 10 octobre 1994).

the memory of a marvelous novel, that one has read and reread, can last a lifetime. Could I say as much of my chemistry school books? And it is obvious that the ability to analyze can enrich the pleasure of reading; can amplify what one gets from the novel, the author's mind, especially when there is a cultural or historical remoteness. (Letter of October 10, 1994).

John points out one of the issues that often comes up in discussions relating to the teaching of literature: how can we fairly evaluate the writings of students in those classes? Are not "tests," "quizzes," "exams," particularly unsuitable for the kind of thinking and writing that a literary text demands from students? As John points out, does it not diminish our pleasure of reading a novel when we know that through grades we will be assessed about it when we feel that it should invite us, first and foremost, to reflect "on our values, our means of expression, our fate?" To me, one of the questions that he thus raises also concerns our way of grading the writings which are done about literary works by undergraduate students. In most literature courses - and this is the experience that I knew as an undergraduate and a graduate student - marking is based on essay form topics which have to be done either in class or at home. The incipient thoughts that students may have about a text are not considered as a possible written assignment. Bogdan (1990) pointed out that

reader-response journals, which are nowadays widely used in junior and senior high schools, should also be regarded as valuable assignments at the graduate [and undergraduate] levels (p. 70). As we will see in the next section, it is my belief that the suggestion can also be a fruitful one in the second language classroom. In the second part of the thesis, I will illustrate that a reflection on the musings of my participants about literary texts can inform us, in a valuable manner, on ways of coming to know and understand who our students are.

Reflective summary of John's experiences of literacy

From the letters and conversations, I can think of the following points emerging from the **personal** (including emotional and affective) and **temporal** (including social, historical and political) dimensions of language learning which make up John's "**linguistic/literate self**".

The main point I perceive, under John's **personal** dimension, is a sense of ambiguity towards the development of his literacy at home and in school. He is very straightforward and positive about the love of his own language he developed at home: for instance, he fondly remembers listening to characters in Bugs Bunny's cartoons expressing themselves in many English dialectal varieties (Letter of August 2, 1994). As well, his fascination with the books his mother used to read to him is also telling: about Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, John mentions the use of the vernacular as the source of his admiration for the book (ibid.); regarding the science

textbooks, I can easily imagine that the insects' names must have sounded wonderfully exotic to a little boy's ears (ibid.). At the same time, this reminds me that the very first thing we ever come to know about a language are its sounds. Indirectly, I am also reminded of Tasha's fascination with the French "r" as it was pronounced by popular French singers that she loved imitating without even understanding them (v. Tasha's Letter of September 28, 1994)

Yet, these happy memories of reading and language learning contrast with the sad one of his troubled family life, which he decided to tell me about in his very first letter. He feels that the whole turmoil made him more introspective, more distrustful of strangers and he linked it with his stubborn refusal to go to school on the first day (ibid.)

John's rebellious tendency, perceptible from these first lines, did not prevent him from adapting to school very well. The sense of ambiguity I see in his evolving literacy has to do with his perception of himself, especially in that school context. That is, I see many meanings stemming from his letters and conversations and pointing to the meanderings of his experience. For instance, he wrote that, as a child and adolescent, he was not particularly interested in learning French and found his classes generally boring (Letter of September 1, 1994). Partly attributing his decision to a dislike of speaking in a group, John did not take it beyond Grade 11 (ibid.). Interestingly, he pointed out that he still has a dislike of public speaking (ibid.).

Also revealing of this sense of ambiguity is John's discussion of the study of the humanities versus the sciences: leisure hours are associated with the former whereas school is linked with the latter. And he explains *this tension [between the two subjects]* by asserting that *[he] was not at all the school type*. (Letter of September 1, 1994). He therefore preferred doing readings in the humanities on his own and now feels that he wrongly assumed that the same scientific standard of "correctness" also applied to them in the evaluation process. He now understands that the study of the humanities aimed more at exposing him to ideas than "testing" (ibid.). In another letter, he talked about his reserve about situating himself within the school context of literature and philosophy programs. About that period, he now asks this question: *Was it because of the lack of temperament/aptitude in this subject or was it simply intellectual laziness?* (Letter of October 10, 1994). About his years at an alternative school, he read a variety of literary genres but, in his view, did not study the techniques of literary analysis seriously enough. Given that John has not become a science specialist, he also regrets this *gap in [his] school education (...)*. And he now realizes that *the memory of a marvelous novel, that one has read and reread, can last a lifetime. [Therefore,] could [he] say as much of [his] chemistry school books?* (ibid).

Thus, in letters and conversations, I find that John expressed a sense of ambiguity in the emotional and affective aspects making up his **personal** dimension of language learning.

In his detailed writing about his regrets and own conflicting views, a critical and self-questioning stance emerges from this retrospective look at his past school experience.

In the **temporal** dimension, John adopts a similar position that he directs at more general issues. It is his narrative as an English-speaking Ontarian which, linguistically and culturally, easily interweaves itself with those of Patrick, JoAnn and mine that John brings to the **temporal** dimension of language learning (including social, historical and political aspects). He showed a great deal of passion in his discussion of relations between English and French-speaking Canadians. From Regulation 17 to the 1970 War Measures Act, to the way media pundits in English-speaking Canada express their views about Québec, John is very well-informed and critical of contemporary Canada/Québec relations (Letter of September 23, 1994). The issue still reappears in his reading-responses.

As to his numerous personal readings of modern history, political essays, satire and social criticism, they further confirm his thirst for learning more about different issues or periods. John's reading of writers like Trotsky, Matthews and Twain on the social and political turmoils which shook Cuba, Russia, or the Philippines, shows, for a teenager, a remarkable curiosity about matters taking place outside his country and time (Letter of September 1, 1994).

About his literature classes, he had good memories, mostly of the staging of plays - e.g., by Brecht, Kapek - in primary and high school. Regarding Shakespeare, his discovery of Zeffirelli's film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* outside

school struck a chord in him and made him aware of the social context surrounding Shakespeare's plays. Once more, in that letter (October 10, 1994), John expressed his interest in social and historical matters.

Regarding his burgeoning love of cinema during adolescence and his fond memory of *cinethons with friends*, he wrote that Altman, Antonioni, Malle were those who made *films of truth and art which were not formulated in a Hollywood "marketing" office* (Letter of September 1, 1994). Interestingly, this much-valued experience also took place outside school.

To conclude, in anticipation of the following reading-response sessions, I would now like to make a few remarks from a practical viewpoint. My letter-exchange and other conversations with John showed that he was at a very advanced and sophisticated level in his command of spoken and written French. I thus expected him to respond easily to the stories even though he had a tendency to play down his capacity in interpreting literature in the context of a university course. Like Tasha, John was studying part-time to obtain a B.A. in French with a specialization in linguistics and was between his second and third year at the time. To my way of thinking, the fact that my two participants were not literature specialists in their B.A. programs could make the reading-response process more challenging and open to personal views which would not be influenced by some a priori literary criticism.

Part III The reading-response sessions with Tasha and John

Chapter VI

Discussion preliminary to the reading-response sessions with Tasha and John

Introduction

One of the main purposes of this study has been to know my participants as language learners, as readers, as persons. I wanted to go beyond my past teacher experience of knowing students in an undergraduate program, i.e., individuals sitting in a language classroom who had to be assessed according to traditional guidelines. Since the letter-exchanges had been fruitful and collaborative learning experiences for all of us, I wanted to share with them responses to stories and learn more with Tasha and John about this meaning-making process. Although I had tried it out once with Patrick for the pilot study, I knew it was still going to be an original enterprise simply because I was now working with two other persons with different experiences.

As I discussed in Chapter I, what led me to conduct this type of study was my decision of choosing and experiencing inquiry which would be set in a narrative framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1990), as well as my readings of reader-response theorists (Rosenblatt, 1938/ 1983, 1969, 1978, 1982, 1985; Probst, 1981, 1986, 1988). These theoretical and practical choices allowed me to use personal experience as the starting-

point for an exploration of our linguistic/literate selves and of our responses to short stories.

A narrative framework also permits a reflection upon my previous experience as a literature student, a period that I merely alluded to in my presentation of the reading-response sessions relating to the pilot study (see Chapter III). I have already observed that my teaching experience and my love of literature - both in my first and second language - encouraged me to attempt to try something I could not do as a language teacher. But it is also my student experience in undergraduate and graduate literature courses which led me to believe that narrative inquiry and reader-response theory would be interesting and preferable alternatives for my experiment with literature teaching.

A reflection on my experience as a student of literature and on writings by women educators

My experience of taking literature courses during my English B.A. in Québec (1975-1978) was similar to the one that most undergraduates still know today in a second language program. I sat in a classroom of twenty to thirty students and listened to a professor voicing his/her comments and interpretations, or those of renowned critics, about the required books. Since most students were supposed to have already taken English language courses at the advanced level, the pedagogical approach of my professors often seemed to imply that we would understand literary texts as if we had

been native speakers of the language¹. We had little time to express our personal reactions to the assigned readings during the class; only the bravest of us (and I was rarely one of them) would comment upon or ask questions in English about the works we were reading. We mostly had to write sit-in exams, which I hated because I always worried whether I would have enough time to write, in correct English, lengthy and intelligent answers to all questions. (Rarely did we have the opportunity to write essays.) Some of the exam questions might deal with our personal responses to one aspect or excerpt from the work, although I do not remember answering one of that type. Questions mostly revolved around the professor's comments or interpretations of critics which had been previously discussed in class. I remember finding insulting a professor's questions pertaining to factual information in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (e.g., What character did this? What happened in this scene?). In short, they were simply questions aimed at verifying whether or not we had read the play. Since we had read the texts in our second language, perhaps he assumed that this type of exam could be pedagogically justified. Nevertheless, I have retained some good memories about these undergraduate courses even today. I enjoyed some of the classics we studied - e.g., Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* - and was

¹ Native speakers of English were in fact allowed to take literature courses with other second language students. In Ontario, native French speakers can also take literature courses which are part of French undergraduate programs.

especially interested in one of my professor's lively presentations of the social and historical contexts surrounding these novels. Learning more about other people's lives in another century was fascinating to me.

During my MA program in Comparative Literature in Toronto (1978-1980), I took optional courses on the French and British novels of the 18th century, as well as a general course on American literature of the 19th century. These were my favorite classes, not the ones which initiated me to literary theory. The pedagogical approach was basically the same as during my undergraduate literature courses, except that the classes (mostly with native speakers of English) were much smaller, and we thus had more time to discuss the texts. Furthermore, for the first time, I regularly wrote full-length essays instead of sit-in exams. I remember being enchanted with my discovery of Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*, Emily Dickinson's poetry (I wrote a paper entitled "Intensity and Dramatization in Emily Dickinson's poetry"). I also explored my taste for the 18th century British novel, which I had started developing as an undergraduate, through the writing of a paper "Three Eighteenth-Century Heroines and Marriage." In it, I discussed the theme of marriage through the characterization of Pamela in Richardson's *Pamela or Virtue rewarded*, Sophia in Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Roxana in Daniel Defoe's *Roxana*.

Another positive point in my MA program was that, for the first time, I lived in an Anglophone environment and took courses with students who were mostly native English speakers.

All in all, the experience was a challenging one and I am glad to have gone through it with success. It made me feel much more comfortable in English. I acquired a command of the language I would not have reached if I had done such a program in Québec.

Yet, I pointed out above my lesser interest in literary theory. My experience of these courses actually left me somewhat disenchanted with it in that I felt that we often took a tortuous road in order to understand and interpret literary texts. Let me explain.

In those courses, I found there was too much emphasis on the theory *per se*, and not enough on practical examples from literature. Professors spent most of their time explaining and discussing the required readings (New Critics, Formalists, Structuralists, etc.). I remember finding the writings of structuralist theorists (Jakobson, Barthes, etc.) especially dry with all their references to linguistics. During the classes, if we sometimes discussed concrete examples - e.g, stories, novels or poems - we always did it in light of the theorists we had just read. They were supposed to be our only guides; we had to rely on them, along with our professors, as being the ultimate authorities for our writing². I felt it had

² Rosenblatt offers an interesting discussion of the teaching that students usually experience during literature classes (1938/1983). Although it applies to students in American high schools and colleges, it describes, on a different level, the standpoint most often taken by my professors of literary theory. In her discussion, Rosenblatt explains how students function on two different planes: on one

a rather paralyzing effect upon me, and I still have a clear memory of being bored with my writing of a final paper on Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables* because I was trying so hard to fit it in a theory of self-referentiality and the romance genre.

At the beginning of my doctoral program at OISE, I read an article by Barbara Christian (1987) entitled "The Race for Theory." In it, she argued there was an obsession with theory in literature departments and that this "academic hegemony" (ibid., p. 53) had been engendered by the "New Philosophers" (or "neutral humanists") who had "changed literary critical language to suit their own purposes as philosophers, and...[had] reinvented the meaning of theory" (ibid., p. 51). She was especially critical of their use of a "metaphysical language" (ibid., p. 56), one which mystified rather than clarified: for instance, she wondered about the use of words

plane, they learn accepted ideas about literature and, on the other, they react to it personally but never express that reaction. She pursues the point that literature has been made for students "too much something to know about, something to analyze or define." Although she recognizes the value of literary history and the various approaches developed by literary critics and scholars, all this knowledge, she argues, is useless if, first and foremost, students are not led to search for "a vital personal experience" in literature. Unfortunately, literature teaching mostly turns students away from that kind of experience (pp. 58-59).

such as *discourse, canon, text, center, periphery, minority*, and recognized in this vocabulary "the split between the abstract and the emotional in which Western philosophy inevitably indulged" (*ibid.*, pp. 55-6). As a Black literary critic, Christian felt - along with others (*i.e.*, "people of color, feminists, radical critics, creative writers") who were also concerned with the hegemony of literary theory - that literature had become "an occasion for discourse among critics... [rather than] one way by which they come to understand their lives better" (*ibid.*, p. 53). In short, this emphasis on theory had the effect of rendering critics too prescriptive in their discussion of literature. She also criticized Black critics who, because of the obligation they felt in creating a Black literary theory, had also succumbed to that prescriptiveness. For instance, some deemed the works of Southern writers as "non-Black since the black talk of Georgia does not sound like the black talk of Philadelphia" (*ibid.*, p. 58); writers like Ellison and Baldwin were dismissed because they saw an intersection between Western and African influences which could result in a new Afro-American culture (*ibid.*, p. 58). She also criticized French feminist theorists for similar reasons: she saw in them a "tendency towards monolithism" (*ibid.*, p. 59) and questioned their view of "the female body as the means to creating a female language, since language, they say is male and necessarily conceives of woman as other" (*ibid.*, p. 59). For her, the French feminists, by "positing the body as the source of everything," were returning to "the old myth that biology

determines everything [and were thus ignoring] the fact that gender is a social rather than a biological construct" (ibid., p. 60). She thus came to the conclusion that they were also trying to gain an "authoritative discourse" (ibid.), as much as the White male critics had previously done.

Judging whether or not Christian is fair in her critique of all these theorists is beyond the boundaries of my discussion and is not necessarily relevant to the point I want to make here. Apart from offering a plausible explanation of my rather negative experience of literary theory as a MA student, Christian's article struck me because of her defiance of a widely accepted "authoritative discourse" (ibid.), and of her "repeating" of what she considered to be important "clichés" in the reading of literature, such as one reads it "to understand [our] lives better" (ibid., p. 53). As well, her saying that she preferred literature to the metaphysical language of the New Philosophers because it had "the possibilities of rendering the world as large and as complicated as I experienced it, as sensual as I knew it was. In literature I sensed the possibility of the integration of feeling/knowledge..." (ibid., p. 56). These sentences expressed for me one of my strong beliefs about literature. In short, I liked her personal style and found her voice to be truly convincing. Yet, Christian is certainly not against theory as such - whether women or men conceptualize it - but rather the extent to which the language has become opaque and the way it has been put to use in academic circles and literature courses.

A recent book by I. Sodr , a noted Brazilian psychoanalyst and A.S. Byatt (1995), a major British woman novelist and university teacher of literature, illustrates what an approach to literature without referring to literary theory can become. After reading and rereading the novels of six women writers (Austen, Bront , Eliot, Cather, Murdoch and Morrison), the book presents Sodr 's and Byatt's recorded conversations about these works. One of the topics they discussed was "the individuality of each work - what effect it has on the reader and...how it achieves that effect" (p. xii). As Rebecca Swift writes in the Preface, the book points out the value of discussing literary works without referring to complex literary theories such as deconstruction and structuralism (p. xii). Byatt's and Sodr 's approach can be related to the philosophy that guided me in my approach for the reading-response sessions in that they decided to conduct a close and personal reading of literary texts which did not seek any confirmation through a priori theoretical discourse³.

³ In the final chapter of the book, there is a revealing exchange between the two authors about the whole experience which, to some extent, I can relate to the one I shared with my participants:

Byatt: When we began these conversations, I said that novelists are good gossips, they love noticing little things about people and chattering about them. (...) I feel we've discovered or reintroduced conversation as a form of shared reading. (...) We have allowed ourselves to talk about the characters in the novels as though they were real people - which is an almost primitive mode of discourse which literary criticism has eschewed for a long time. We know so well that they are not real. We are constantly told that they are hypotheses, narrative functions. (...) I feel what you and I

Louise Rosenblatt was the theorist who proposed a framework for the reading-response sessions that I could relate to the narrative one I had used for the letter exchanges. For the first time, I could reflect upon the ideas of a literary theorist who clearly situated her discussion of literature in an educational perspective. *Literature as Exploration* (1938/1983) and *The reader, the Text, the Poem*

have had is a sort of conversation which is sophisticated at one level and very deliberately primitive and natural at another....

Sodré: Yes. (...). We can pretend, which I think is intensely pleasurable that we are talking about people who are real, because that's how we feel about them. (...) One of the pleasures of doing this book is that we are talking about them, our characters, and we are also talking about each other, and how we react to these different experiences - learning different ways of reading, and therefore different "stories within the story" (pp. 253-254).

I believe I have achieved having a similar type of conversation - that is, sophisticated and natural - through oral and written responses with my participants precisely because we trusted our own capacities in creating a meaningful reading of the text by ourselves. One could point out that responding to a literary text without the help of any criticism or theory, or in other words, creating one's own judgment and understanding by means of the primary source only, is certainly not a new approach to a text. I agree. However, as I discussed above, this was not part of my experience as an undergraduate and, to my knowledge, encouraging students to share, in a systematic and organized manner, their personal responses to a text in the way I did it with Tasha and John, is generally not encouraged in undergraduate literature classes in second language programs.

(1978), offered thoughts that I could practically investigate with my participants from the viewpoint of their personal experiences. For instance, in the pedagogical process she discussed, she stressed the importance of having an ongoing reflection between teachers and students in the classroom. She thus suggested the value of a heuristic approach as they both progressed through the exchange of their reading-responses. Therefore, an important idea stemming from my study is that we all have become readers and learners together.

Even though my participants had little (Tasha's case) or no experience (John's) with literature courses as undergraduates, and even though they relied on my authority as the experienced teacher of French who had been a literature student at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and who would help them in their use of the language or in understanding difficult passages in the stories, I believe that their responses to and interpretations of stories have an irreplaceable quality. As Rosenblatt stresses, there is a unique work of personal involvement in any individual reading act:

No one else can read a literary work for us. The benefits of literature can emerge only from creative activity on the part of the reader himself. He responds to the little black marks on the page, or to the sounds of the words in his ear, and he "makes something of them." The verbal symbols enable him to draw on his past experiences with what the words point to in life and literature. The text presents these words in a new and unique pattern. Out of these he is actually

able to mold a new and unique experience, the literary work (1966/1983, p. 278)⁴.

I believe it is a point of departure which remains the same for any reader (even if he/she reads in a second or third language) and is one which is too often neglected in the pedagogical approach of undergraduate second language literature classrooms. If John and Tasha responded in a way which could have been more revealing of the texts at times, I attempted to have them reconsider the work from a new angle. Yet, something I could not do is read the story for them. All in all, as the next chapters will show, I am interested in discussing how their responses to the stories are a reflection of a *vital personal experience* (Rosenblatt, 1938/1983, p. 59).

Concluding theoretical thoughts

In the next three chapters, I will discuss, respectively, Tasha's and John's responses⁵. Although I am much indebted to Rosenblatt's thoughts and some of her comments may still illuminate aspects of their responses, I have not attempted to follow closely the suggestions contained in her seminal book,

⁴ The quote is from an essay that was originally published in *The English Journal*, November 1966, and which was reprinted in *Literature as exploration* (1938/1983) with the title "Coda: A performing art."

⁵ The reader will refer to the last section of Chapter III, for my explanations regarding the setting up of the reading-response sessions with Tasha and John. See also Appendix B for a chronology of the sessions and the question lists I suggested to Tasha and John.

Literature As Exploration. I intend to build on her theory, using narrative inquiry in order to create my own theoretical standpoint.

As I wrote earlier, I am trying to get a knowledge of who John and Tasha are as language learners, as readers, as persons. In the two preceding chapters, I presented Tasha's and John's **linguistic/literate selves** through a discussion of the letters and conversations we shared together. In this chapter, my discussion situates my particular theoretical standpoint in light of my recent readings and of my previous experience as a literature student in French and English. Apart from being situated, this particular theoretical standpoint also has to be created in its own right - which means that I want it to emerge from what I have done with my participants, from my own praxis. It is a standpoint which needs to be created in order to convey the most meaningful interpretations of Tasha's and John's responses, of the ways *they experienced* their readings of the stories, of *what the stories did to them*. It is one that I do not necessarily want to limit to the categories that I previously created, these **linguistic/literate selves** under which the **temporal** (including social, historical and political) and **personal** (including emotional and affective) dimensions of language learning have been subsumed.

If passages from Tasha's and John's letters can resonate in their responses to the stories, it is not a question for me, in the next chapters, of only juxtaposing excerpts from the latter with the former in order to establish some "truth"

about them. Resonant biographical meanings can emerge from a connection between these two parts in this way but it is also possible to perceive other personal meanings from other relationships as well. That is, I want to reflect upon their different ways of going to themselves, of drawing on their own resources, their experiences in order to respond to the stories. For instance, I will explore the various ways they chose to imagine things about the stories: at times, they would give the impression of wanting to talk directly to the characters, of trying to make events happen differently⁶. They also linked passages from the stories to larger social or historical contexts which either could relate or not even relate to the texts as such. Their ways of discussing language uses are also important in that their curiosity in their second language often had them make interesting linguistic comments. Furthermore, their ways of creating *intertextuality* through their memories of other stories, novels or films which have been triggered by the stories they responded to, are also meaningful aspects. And this recovery of past reading and viewing experiences will obviously reveal, in a distinct manner, the interaction between different cultures - i.e., Russian, English-speaking Canadian and French-speaking Quebecer - evolving from the reading of texts in a second language in the Canadian context.

⁶ In that regard, the passage I quoted from Byatt and Sodr  provides an example of other readers who also had this relationship with fictional characters.

Overall, what makes my theoretical framework distinct from others is my trying to present, in all its complexity, a narrative account of who Tasha and John are as language learners, as readers, as persons between two types of texts: a) letters and conversations - which appear to be more personal than the second kind - and b) oral and written responses to stories which, because of the discussion closely revolving around the texts, may not always appear to reveal something personal about Tasha and John. Yet, I believe that their responses remain intensely personal, that they bear their signatures.

The thesis should make clear that a reflection on language-learning and reading experiences, as well as on reading-responses in the way I encouraged Tasha and John to do them, can reveal complexities of language learning and reading literature in a second language in a manner which has never been addressed before. It is my belief that we first learn language and read literature in the context of our lives, which implies a reflection on the cultural, linguistic, social and historical aspects which have shaped us. Furthermore, my participation in the entire process also shows how it is important to start from the idea that we all become teachers and learners in a teaching context, whatever one may be, and that it is enriching to experience the same process as one's students. Thus, a further implication of the study is that it provides an example of an innovative literature classroom for undergraduates learning a second language.

Introduction to Chapters VII, VIII and IX

In the following three chapters, I discuss my participants' responses¹ to three stories out of the five² I gave them to prepare for the reading-sessions. The stories share commonalities pertaining to narrator, theme and place. They are: 1) Croft's *B...comme dans bucolique* (Chapter VII); 2) Mallet's *How Are You?* (Chapter VIII); 3) Gagnon-Mahoney's *La laide* (Chapter IX). They all take place in Québec in the late 60s and early 70s and have a female narrator as the main character. In *B...comme dans bucolique* and *La laide*, the narrator experiences rejection and revolt, and the theme of Catholicism is also addressed.

Each chapter is organized in the following manner: at the beginning of each one, there is a short Introduction linking my perception of the story with questions (or assumptions) I have regarding Tasha's and John's responses. (Some of the questions (or assumptions) were not clearly enunciated in my mind before I gave them the stories to read: rather, I thought of them as I read and reread the transcriptions and field texts, as I did the analysis and writing, and after I wrote

¹ See Appendix B for the question lists that were suggested to Tasha and John for the preparation of the reading-response sessions. As well, there is a discussion of the way the pilot study reoriented the organization of these sessions at the end of Chapter III.

² The two other stories they read and responded to were Paul Zumthor's *Interview* (1994) and Anton Chekhov's *Les riens de la vie* (1964). See Chapter III for my justification of the choice of these five stories.

the three chapters.) After the short Introduction, I give a detailed summary of each story. The written responses of Tasha and John, respectively, are then presented in their entirety in the following order: a) for *B...comme dans bucolique*, first come the Annotations and Journal I followed by a discussion; then, Journal II is presented and separately discussed; b) for *How are you?*, only the Annotations and Journal I are presented and discussed³; c) for *La laide*, each written response is followed by a discussion: that is, Annotations, discussion; Journal I, discussion; Journal II discussion. Tasha's and John's responses to the film *Passion of Love* are presented in that order: a synopsis of the film is given, then, a brief comment introducing their written responses to the film which are quoted in their entirety). Throughout my discussions of the responses, I rely on additional points and reactions that we made orally during the reading-response sessions⁴ and which clearly show that the setting of the sessions was collaborative and that the sharing of our ideas often led us to change some of our interpretations. Each chapter ends with a conclusion in which I reflect on the main points emerging from the experience of sharing our responses to the story. Finally, I do not present any portion of the written responses to the stories I had myself prepared for each of them. I

³ As Tasha could not write her Journal II and participate in the session John and I conducted on that Journal, I decided not to include it since elements of interaction between her response and ours would have been missing.

⁴ See Appendix B for a chronology of the sessions.

sometimes refer to points I made in them, or paraphrase comments I made during the sessions, in order to contrast them with some of Tasha's and John's ideas. For me, what really matters is that readers know how *their* voices expressed themselves in their second language throughout their responses to the short stories.

Chapter VII

Tasha's and John's responses to *B...comme dans bucolique*

Introduction

I was really curious about the responses that Tasha and John would bring to Croft's *B...comme dans bucolique*. How would a young Russian female, who had recently immigrated to Canada, respond to a story set in the particular context of a Catholic school for girls in Québec at the end of the 60s, in which a despotic nun-teacher terrorizes her pupils, including inflicting on them a traditional composition subject at the beginning of the school year? As we saw in Chapter IV, although Tasha's school experience had generally been an excellent one, she could however be somewhat critical of the Russian education system. As for John, an English-speaking Torontonion who had been educated in public and alternative schools, and had acquired a good knowledge of Québec through his readings and his experience of staying there for a summer language course, what would he bring to the story? From his letters, I knew him as someone who had had a very good school experience but could also be critical of the system he knew.

Thus, I anticipated their responses and the ways their personal, cultural and linguistic backgrounds would make them perceive the story. I already mentioned that one of the reasons why I had given them *B...comme dans bucolique* was that it could also help them understand a context I had known myself, that of a Catholic school for girls in Québec in the 60s (see Chapter III). On the whole, Tasha's and John's

responses¹ indeed helped me better understand their own backgrounds and my participation in the responding process also allowed them to comprehend the one I brought to the story.

Summary of *B...comme dans bucolique* (Croft, 1988)

The story is set in a Québec Catholic school for girls on the first day of school in September. The third person narrator mentions that it is not important to know the year when this day occurs since all first days in schools for girls are the same anyway.

An atmosphere evoking fear and conformity pervades the descriptions relating to the classroom and its pupils. Indeed, the girls have to abide by the rules of their new *maîtresse d'école* (schoolmistress), Mère Marie-Rose, who inspires fear in her pupils by doing a thorough inspection of each pupil's uniform. (At that point in the story, there is a switch from the third person to the first person narrator which tells readers that the main character of the story will be the narrator who will appear to readers as a little girl of about 10.) The little girl tells us right away that she has failed this first examination by wearing inappropriate shoes, that is, *espadrilles*.

The teacher gives the class the first composition of the year to write: *raconter dans votre meilleur style une belle*

¹ All page numbers in Tasha's and John's Annotations and Journals I and II refer to Croft's book of stories, *La mémoire à deux faces* (1988).

journée d'été (tell, in your best style, the story of a beautiful summer day). The little girl tells us what the telling, in writing, of a nice vacation day has always meant for her: hiding from the teacher what actually happens between herself and her brother during their precious summer days (e.g., playing cowboys and Indians, playing "doctor," saying a mock mass with barbecue chips and ginger ale). But for Mère Marie-Rose, the telling of a nice vacation day means that the 33 little schoolgirls will repeat phrases she has always been used to reading in their compositions: *le bleu infini de la mer, la couleur sacrée du blé et le chant limpide des petits oiseaux* (the infinite blue of the sea, the sacred hue of the wheat and the limpid song of little birds). Thus, in the girl's mind, this exercise amounts to the imposition of the same hypocritical request upon her and her classmates year after year.

But this time, a particular event prevents her from writing the traditional composition: she witnessed an old man having an epileptic seizure while she was riding her bicycle on July 15, on an ordinary summer day, in an ordinary suburb of Québec City. Still deeply disturbed by this accident, she is unable to write the same type of composition as her other 32 classmates. So, instead of using *un ton faussement bucolique* (a phony bucolic tone), she describes, in a particularly raw style, what she witnessed: the old man emitting a piercing cry and falling like a tree which has just been cut down; her paralysis at seeing such a disturbing event, her cry which has people get out of their houses to

come to the rescue of the old man. Then, when she comes closer to the scene, she is horrified by the sight of a man putting a stick in the old man's mouth in order to prevent him from swallowing his tongue. Getting back on her bicycle, she obsessively remembers the scene and the old man's physical appearance by repeating to herself, like a mantra, the following words: *le regard blanc, la bave, les spasmes* (the empty look, the drooling, the spasms).

A week later, Mère Marie-Rose announces to the class that she will read the best and worst compositions. The best are full of clichés; as to the worst - it is the little girl's, only hers and no one else's. Mère Marie-Rose, before reading the infamous composition, glances at the girl's espadrilles (this disapproving look has the latter decide to keep on wearing them for the rest of the year). The way Mère Marie-Rose reads her composition ridicules her in front of her other classmates. She is particularly disdainful of the passage where the old man is described with the phrases *le regard blanc, la bave, les spasmes*. At this moment, the little girl feels like jumping on the nun, putting a stick in her mouth in order to block her tongue. After the teacher has done her little number, the girl comes up to her and asks her, after class, whether it is possible to find the *BEAUX mots pour raconter la langue en train de s'engloutir* (the NICE words to tell the story of a tongue which is swallowing itself). She cannot understand the sounds that come out of Mère Marie-Rose's mouth while the nun is holding her crucifix in her hands.

Tasha's responses to B...comme dans bucolique

Annotations

P. 65, par. 1 - Je pense que tous les jours de classe de tous les mois de septembre se ressemblent dans toutes les écoles. Pour éviter le purgatoire! - c'est une école qui ressemble bien à une prison!

p. 66, par. 1 - les filles obéissantes veulent donc ressembler à leur institutrice pour avoir de bonnes notes. Elles doivent aussi lui plaire. Il faut toujours s'habituer aux caprices des institutrices différentes.

Par. 2 - la description de mère Marie-Rose. L'expression intéressante: voix blanche - c'est-à-dire sans émotion?

Par. 3 - Cela me rappelle ma propre école. Tous et toutes venaient avec les vêtements propres le premier jour des classes. Mais ce n'était pas l'exigence de la part de l'école! Il n'y avait pas de punition pour les vieux vêtements.

p. 67 - C'est encore une fois le souvenir de l'école primaire. Mais dans notre école, on pouvait raconter n'importe quel événement à condition que l'écriture soit grammaticalement et stylistiquement correcte.

Pourtant, je me souviens que beaucoup d'élèves décrivaient leurs vacances à la mer ou à la campagne et c'était la vérité. Moi, par exemple, je suis allée plusieurs fois à la campagne et les journées d'été étaient

p. 65, par. 1 - I think that all schooldays of all months of September are all the same in all schools. To avoid purgatory! Here's a school that looks like a jail!

p. 66, par. 1 - obedient girls want to look like their school teacher in order to get good grades. They must also please her. One has to get used to different teachers' whims.

Par. 2 - the description of Mother Marie-Rose. An interesting expression: "voix blanche" - that is, without emotion?

Par. 3 - This reminds me of my own school. All of us came to school with (new) clothes on the first day. But it was not a requirement on the part of the school. There was no punishment for old clothes.

p. 67 - It is once more a memory from primary school. But in our school one could tell any event provided that the writing was grammatically and stylistically correct.

Yet, I remember that many pupils described their seaside or countryside vacation, and that was the truth. I, for one, often went to the country and the summer days were truly beautiful. Thus, I did not

vraiment "belles". Donc, je n'inventais rien quand j'écrivais.

p. 68 - On peut se demander pourquoi le sujet des compositions était-il toujours le même? Est-ce que c'était plus facile pour les institutrices ou est-ce que cela prouve la médiocrité de l'enseignement?

p. 69 - Comment la petite fille se débrouillait. Je ne trouve pas que ce soit terrible. Si elle n'avait pas de soeur, pourquoi ne pouvait-elle pas l'imaginer? On ne doit pas décrire toujours les choses telles qu'elles sont, ce serait ennuyeux!

p. 70 - Pourquoi la petite fille n'a-t-elle pas écrit comme toujours? Elle savait pourtant qu'elle n'obtiendrait pas de bonne note. Est-ce que c'était une forme de révolte?

p. 70-71 - la composition de la petite fille.

p. 70, par. 3 - pourquoi en sens inverse? A propos de l'histoire racontée, cela me fait penser à ma propre expérience (une histoire pareille s'est passé avec moi en 1985 quand j'avais 15 ans).

p. 73, par. 2 - J'ai aimé l'ironie de ce paragraphe.

p. 74 - Encore une fois une expérience personnelle: notre prof lisait aussi les meilleures et les pires compositions de la classe et faisait des remarques. Comme cela, on savait les notes de chacun et de chacune.

make anything up when I wrote.

p. 68 - We can wonder why the composition topics were always the same? Was it easier for teachers or does that prove the mediocrity of the pedagogy?

p. 69 - How the little girl managed on her own. I do not find it outrageous. If she did not have a sister, why not imagine one? We should not always describe things as they are, that would be boring!

p. 70 - Why did the little girl not write the way she always did it? Still, she knew that it would not get her a good grade. Was it a kind of revolt?

p. 70-71 - the little girl's composition.

p. 70 - par. 3 - why the opposite direction? Regarding the story which is told, this reminds me of my own experience (I experienced a similar one when I was 15 in 1985).

p. 73 - par. 2 - I liked the irony in the paragraph.

p. 74 - Once more, a personal experience; our teacher always read the best and the worst compositions and always made critical remarks. In that way, we knew everyone's grade.

Journal I

J'ai bien aimé la petite nouvelle d'Esther Croft parce qu'elle était assez touchante comme histoire et pas difficile à comprendre. Elle a aussi invoqué mes propres souvenirs et j'ai été en mesure de comparer ma propre expérience avec celle de cette petite fille. Premièrement, à l'époque où j'allais à l'école primaire, le premier jour des classes, tout le monde venait en vêtements propres, mais pas pour plaire à une nouvelle institutrice. C'était, je pense, le cas de tradition et aussi le désir de marquer le premier jour d'études comme le commencement de quelque chose de nouveau.

Deuxièmement, pendant le premier cours de langue, surtout à l'école primaire, on avait des petites compositions à écrire que devaient raconter quelque chose à propos de nos vacances d'été. Cela ne devait pas être "une belle journée d'été" comme dans le cas ici. On était libre de raconter ce qui s'est passé en réalité ou d'imaginer une histoire. Je suis sûre que personne ne serait pénalisée, si elle écrivait une histoire pareille à celle de la petite fille.

J'ai aussi pensé aux raisons pour lesquelles la petite fille a écrit cette histoire de l'homme malade. Peut-être, a-t-elle fait cela involontairement. Mais, d'un autre côté, cela pourrait être une révolte de la part de la petite fille contre l'enseignement primitif de cette école.

I really liked Esther Croft's short story because it was rather moving as a story and not too difficult to understand. It also evoked my own memories and I was able to compare my own experience with that of the little girl. Firstly, when I went to school, on the first day, everyone came dressed in new clothes, but not in order to please the teacher. That was, I think, a question of tradition and (it showed) the desire of marking the first day of school as the beginning of something new.

Secondly, during the first language class, especially in primary school, we had little compositions to write which had to tell something about our summer vacation. This did not need to be "a beautiful summer day" as it is the case in the story. We were free to tell whatever had really happened or make up a story. I am sure that no one would have been penalized if she had written a story similar to the one (which is written) by the little girl.

I also thought of the reasons which led the little girl to write about that event about the man who is ill. Perhaps she did it in an involuntary way. But, from another viewpoint, it could be a sign of revolt against the primitive teaching in that school.

Discussion of Tasha's Annotations and Journal I

I have already discussed how Tasha, through letters and conversations, could strongly express her *personal* dimension of language learning (see Chapter IV). My analysis of the transcription of the meeting and field notes made me, once more, aware of her dedication in language learning and reading. Right at the beginning, Tasha referred to a play she was studying for her literature class, Michel Tremblay's *À toi pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou (Forever Yours, Marie-Lou)*, and asked me a question about the colloquial Québec use of *pantoute (pas du tout or not at all)*, which made me explain other uses of Québec French in the story: *bleuet*² (*blueberry*), *se coltiller (scuffle)*. I also shared some of my personal knowledge of Catholicism by giving details about the distinction between *purgatoire (purgatory)* and *enfer (hell)*, as well as what the metaphor *chapelet de règlements (rosary of regulations)* meant. Tasha was curious about and amazed at these notions since she had been taught in school that science (especially physics and biology) could explain everything. So dedicated was I in my explanations of words pertaining to Catholicism, as well as intent on having Tasha express her cultural background in relation to words, that I thought that she would link the phrase *champ de blé (wheat field)*, which I associated with the Eucharist, to the idea of work since she came from a Communist country. Perhaps I subconsciously thought of the hammer and the sickle! My assumption was

² In France, a *bleuet* is called a *myrtille*.

crushed when Tasha simply answered me that for her a wheat field was beautiful, and that it simply evoked the idea of freedom in the country.

As to her Annotations, from the start, she readily expressed an emotional tone by writing that the school looked like a jail (p. 65, par. 1) and, later on, that there was nothing outrageous about the little girl inventing herself a sister in her composition. How boring it would be if we did not use imagination in our ways of describing things (p. 69). She also criticized the teacher's authority in limiting composition subjects (p. 67), sense of discipline (p. 66, par. 3) and pedagogical approach (p. 68). Yet, ironically, she suggested a feeling of compliance with school authority when she alluded to the fact that one must get used to a teacher's whims (p. 66, par. 1). In her questioning (p. 70), she wondered why the little girl ended up writing her controversial composition, and associated it with the memory of an inebriated man whom, as a teenager, she had once seen fall down on the street (p. 70. par. 3). Direct references to her own school experience concerned her memory of first school days (par. 3), of compositions about the vacation period (p. 67), as well as of her teacher's reading of the best and worst among those (p. 74).

Her Journal I contained an even more direct relationship with her school experience and the way that tradition was followed at her school. In fact, so direct is her link with the story that she attempts to make it parallel with points which are depicted in it -for instance, she remembers the

clothes children had to wear at her school, as well as the composition subjects they were assigned to write about on the first day of school. During the session, she also gave further details about the concept of *pionniers* (*pioneers*), and the *pioneer's* scarf that all children had to wear. Curious about this concept of *pionniers* - I bore in mind the emotion she had expressed when, in a previous letter, she explained who the "pioneers" were and wrote that they were "*pressés*" *par l'Idéologie* ("*pressured by Ideology*") (v. her Letter of October 12, 1994, in Chapter IV) - I asked her whether it meant for them a greater involvement in Communist ideology. She answered that the *pionniers* simply took part in extra-curricular activities. She did not attach anything negative to it. In a later conversation, she also insisted on the fact that she felt there was no exaggeration regarding the teaching of Communist ideology in school. At first, I found all of this intriguing since, in light of her previous letter, Tasha seemed to be making a statement contrary to a previous one. My point here is not to try to indicate when she contradicted herself and then assert that there was something wrong about any of her earlier or later comments. Rather, if there appears to be some sort of denying on her part about what she had already written, I perceive it as an example of one of the complexities entailed in the purpose of knowing her as a language learner, as a reader, as a person from a narrative viewpoint.

Her wondering about the reasons which led the little girl to write her composition about the man she had seen having an

epileptic seizure is also interesting: she tries to rationalize it, in a cautious manner, as a way of perhaps expressing a sense of revolt against the school's *primitive pedagogy*. (During the session, John agreed with Tasha's point and felt there was ambivalence in the little girl's rebellion.) As for myself, I had heavily insisted on the idea of revolt in my written responses as well as during our discussion. But Tasha's response made me see in a new light, as more important than I first thought, an Annotation that I had previously written. In it, I had written that the experience of seeing this old man having an epileptic seizure had traumatized the little girl so much that her only choice was to write about it in her composition. So powerful was the shock of witnessing such a violent incident that it could not be erased from her memory. According to Tasha's suggestion, it was credible that, at the moment of writing the composition, the little girl did not consciously think of it as an act of revolt which would go against traditionally implied composition rules. The memory of the whole incident was so emotionally disturbing that it was cathartic for her to write about it. Tasha's prudence in her interpretation suggests that the idea of thinking too much of only one theme (e.g., revolt) when we interpret a text can be a pitfall.

Regarding her Journal II, Tasha wrote it but was unable to participate in the session that John and I conducted on March 1st. Therefore, my comment upon it is shorter than it would probably have been if she had taken part in the session. Still, her written response offers very interesting points

concerning her understanding of the narrator's viewpoint:

Journal II

La nouvelle m'a fait pensé au personnage principal, la petite fille qui, à mon avis, est très intelligente pour son âge. Puisque la nouvelle est racontée à la première personne, on comprend que tous les jugements sont présentés du point de vue de la personne qui la raconte et je crois que les observations et les descriptions (par exemple, celle de Mère Marie-Rose) sont vraiment bonnes.

J'ai aimé particulièrement la description du premier jour de classe et ça m'a rappelé les premiers jours de classe dans mon école. Le portrait de Mère Marie-Rose est aussi frappant, surtout les comparaisons avec le cierge pascal et la poule. Ensuite, j'ai remarqué le caractère plutôt rebelle du personnage principal: premièrement, la petite fille a agi contre l'habitude en écrivant une histoire de l'homme malade à la place de celle d'une belle journée d'été. Deuxièmement, après avoir compris qu'elle avait reçu une mauvaise note pour sa composition, elle a décidé de porter ces vieilles espadrilles toute l'année et enfin, elle a eu du courage d'aller voir Mère Marie-Rose et de lui poser des questions à propos de son travail.

Par ailleurs, on comprend que le personnage principal est une enfant sans expérience (elle n'a jamais vu de crise d'apoplexie et ne

The story had me reflect on the main character, the little girl who, in my opinion, is highly intelligent for her age. Since the story is told in the first person, we understand that all judgments are presented from the viewpoint of the person who tells the story and I think that the observations and descriptions (for instance, the ones of Mother Marie-Rose) are really good.

I particularly liked the description of the first day in class and it reminded me of the first days at my school. Mother Marie-Rose's portrait is also striking, especially the comparisons with the Easter candle and the hen. Furthermore, I also noticed the rebellious aspect of the main character: firstly, the little girl reacted against the [traditional composition topics] by writing this story about the ill man instead of one about a beautiful summer day. Secondly, after having understood that she had received a poor grade on her composition, she decided to wear these old espadrilles throughout the year and, finally, she had the courage to go and see Mother Marie-Rose and ask her questions about her work.

Moreover, we understand that the main character is a child without experience (she has never seen an apopleptic fit and does not know

sait pas quoi faire pour porter l'aide) et pour qui les images jouent un rôle important dans le proces de compréhension (par exemple, elle compare l'homme qui s'écroule avec un arbre qu'on vient d'abattre ou les traces du stylo de Mère Marie-Rose dans son cahier - avec des méduses).

how to bring assistance) and for whom images play an important role in the comprehension process (e.g., she compares the man who collapses with a tree that has just fallen down or Mother Marie-Rose's pen marks in her copybook - with medusas).

Discussion of Tasha's Journal II

In her comments upon the narrator, Tasha interestingly showed her way of coming to understand the narrator's viewpoint. When she saw me in order to give me her Journal II, she made an interesting comment in that regard (Roberge, Journal entry of March 6, 1995). She thought that there could be a weakness on the author's part since one felt it was the child's voice and that of the adult at the same time, and that the narrator did not explicitly make a distinction between the two. She thus concluded that the narrator said things which were not very credible on the part of a child in that they actually reflected those of an adult who had more judgment. I found her remark quite interesting and pointed out that it was the adult narrator who was telling the story of her childhood incident and that her voice could sometimes be that of the child. It was up to the reader to perceive this implied transition between the two since the narrator (author) had chosen not to say that she was the adult now telling her story of this school memory. In my Journal I, I had written about the first person narrator and argued that readers should feel her presence even in the use of a third-person narrator.

As to Tasha's written response in her Journal II, in her comment upon the portrait of Mère Marie Rose, she is struck by the comparisons (once more, she expresses her love of learning new words in her third language), as well as the rebellious side of the little girl which is demonstrated in her decision to write her composition and complain about her poor grade to the nun-teacher. By still pointing out the [traditional composition topics] and by insisting that the main character is a child without experience - e.g., Tasha points out that the use of images tells us about the little girl's comprehension process - she seems to rationalize again the view she expressed in her Journal I as to the mixed feelings which have probably led her to write the composition. On the whole, Tasha seems to play down the rebellious side of the little girl.

John's responses to *B...comme dans bucolique*

Annotations

p. 66: 3e-4e par.
atmosphère scolaire stricte,
voire militaire inconnue
dans mon expérience person-
nelle; me rappelle celle du
film "If", s'agissant d'une
"English boarding school" et
celle aussi évoquée dans
"Amarcord" de Fellini - ère
fasciste en Italie.

p. 67: 6e par.
bien aimé l'ironie là-dedans
--c'est en articulant BELLE
qu'elle fait preuve de son
caractère méchant, imposant.

p. 66: par. 3-4
strict school atmosphere, e-
ven military, which is un-
known to my personal expe-
rience; reminds me of the
one in the film "If," which
was that of an English
boarding school, as well as
the one which was evoked in
Fellini's "Amarcord" - Fas-
cist era in Italy.

p. 67: par. 6
I loved the irony in this
paragraph - it is when she
pronounces BELLES that she
reveals her mean, domineer-
ing character.

p. 68: 10e par.
lacune de compréhension --
coltailer = faire une
espèce de jeu? se taquiner?
En tout cas, bien aimé la
dernière phrase: "...ton
faussement bucolique...qui
savait séduire". Les élèves
sont-elles en train d'être
formées, conditionnées ou
bien, le conditionnement se
fait en sens inverse? c.a.d.
c'est nous qui nous occupons
d'elle (enseignante)? en lui
donnant ce qui lui plaît,
question d'apaisement?

p. 70-71: 14e-15e par.
fillette ne peut imaginer
que de tels malheurs ar-
rivent aux gens - aux hu-
mains - d'où l'évocation
d'un arbre abattu (14, p.
71), d'un cheval abattu (17,
p. 71)?

p.71-72: 16e par.
bien aimé la façon dont
cette phrase tourne: "Je
n'étais que regard inutile,
qu'impuissance immobile et
impardonnablement igno-
rante".

p.72-73: 18e par.
"puisque ma main avait été
si parfaitement inutile de-
vant la douleur, il fal-
lait...que ma plume sache en
rendre compte". Ironique, je
trouve en ce que ce passage
rappelle une impulsion émi-
nemment catholique -- la
confession, mais le récit
suscite la désapprobation de
Mère Marie-Rose.

p. 74: 22e par.
j'aime bien comment les
espadrilles signifient
l'humilité de la fillette et
le dédain de Mère Marie-
Rose, et que celle-là finit

p. 68: par. 10
a gap in my understanding --
coltailer = play a kind of
game? tease each other? At
any rate, I really liked the
last sentence: "...tone
falsely bucolic... which
could seduce." Are pupils
being trained, conditioned,
or rather the conditioning
is occurring in the opposite
direction? That is, we are
those who are looking after
her (the teacher)? By giving
her whatever pleases her, a
matter of appeasing her?

p. 70-71; par. 14-15
the little girl cannot
imagine that such misfor-
tunes can happen to people -
to humans - hence her evo-
cation of a tree being cut
down (14, p. 71), of a horse
shot down (17, p. 71)?

p. 71-72: par. 16
I really liked the way this
sentence is crafted: "I was
nothing more than a useless
stare, an immobile power,
unforgivably ignorant."

p. 72-73: par. 18
"since my hand had been so
powerless, I had to take it
into account in my writing."
Ironic passage in that it
reminds me of an eminently
Catholic impulse, confess-
ion, but the story arouses
Mother Marie-Rose's
disapproval.

p.74: par. 22
I really like how the espa-
drilles signify the little
girl's humility and Mother
Marie-Rose's scorn, and that
the former holds on to them.

par y tenir.

p. 75: 24e par.
autre lacune de compréhension: "son numéro de chien savant" = "When she finished doing her little number"?

p. 75: 25e par.
"longues traces visqueuses... comme des méduses" comparaison apte...je me demande si c'est ironique aussi - personnage méchant d'une foi païenne?

p. 75: 26e par.
je souhaite avoir eu de tel courage.

Journal I

Cette nouvelle évoque une atmosphère stricte, voire militaire, dont je n'ai aucune expérience personnelle. Pourtant, elle me rappelle le film "If", s'agissant d'un pensionnat anglais, et surtout "Amarcord" de Fellini, qui traite de son enfance à l'époque fasciste. En lisant le 10e paragraphe, où l'auteure parle de son "ton bucolique...qui savait séduire", je me demandais si l'on "conditionne" les élèves dans un tel environnement. Ou bien ce conditionnement se fait-il en sens inverse? A savoir, c'est les élèves qui "s'occupent" de l'enseignante en lui donnant ce qui lui plaît. Question d'apaisement, de s'habituer à la bêtise de l'institution.

C'est le portrait de Mère Marie-Rose qui m'a marqué le plus dans cette nouvelle. J'aime particulièrement que l'on trouve au 6e para-

p. 75: par. 24
another gap in my understanding: "son numéro de chien savant" = "when she finished doing her little number?"

p. 75: par. 25
"long viscous marks...like medusa" appropriate comparison... I am wondering whether it is also ironical -- a mean character with a pagan faith?

p. 75: par. 26
I wish I had such courage.

This story evokes a strict atmosphere, even military, of which I do not have any personal experience at all. Yet, it reminds me of the film "If," which concerns an English boarding school. And especially Fellini's "Amarcord," which treats of his childhood during the Fascist era. Reading the 10th paragraph, in which the author talks about a "bucolic tone...which could seduce," I wondered whether we were conditioning pupils in such an environment. Or rather this conditioning is done in the opposite direction? That is to say, these are the students who "look after" the teacher by giving her what pleases her. A matter of appeasing her, of getting used to the stupidity of the school.

It is the portrait of Mother Marie-Rose which marked me the most in the story. I particularly like the part in the 6th para-

graphe-- c'est en articulant BELLE qu'elle fait preuve de son caractère méchant et imposant. Ironique aussi l'emploi que fait l'auteure de notions et de symboles religieux: au 18e paragraphe (p. 72-73), elle semble ressentir une impulsion éminemment "catholique", de confesser: "Puisque ma main avait été si parfaitement inutile devant la douleur, il fallait...que ma plume sache en rendre compte". Geste qui ne suscite que désapprobation de la part de "Mère" Marie-Rose. J'aime bien la façon dont les espadrilles signifient l'humilité de la fillette et font l'objet du dédain de Mère Marie-Rose, et que celle-là finit justement par y tenir (par. 22 p. 74). Et l'oeil "interrogateur" que la petite fille pose sur "le Christ agonisant" lors de sa propre épreuve--la lecture de son récit.

Quant aux lacunes de compréhension, j'en ai deux: coltaller (par. 10). Est-ce une espèce de jeu? d'activité en plein air? de même, au 24e paragraphe (p. 75). J'arrive pas encore à saisir le sens de "son numéro de chien savant". S'agit-il d'un idiomatisme, au sens de "her little number"?

En tout cas, je comprend mieux maintenant comment tellement de gens instruits finissent par devenir des anti-cléricaux.

Discussion of John's Annotations and Journal I

Right from the start (p. 66, par. 3 & 4; Journal I) even though John claims that he never had a personal experience

graph -- it is when she pronounces the word BELLE that she proves her mean and domineering character. The author also ironically uses religious symbols and notions: in the 18th paragraph (p. 72-73), she seems to feel an eminently "Catholic" impulse to confess: "since my hand had been so powerless in front of pain, I had to...to take it into account in my writing." A gesture which provokes only disapproval on the part of "Mother" Marie-Rose. I like the way the espadrilles signify humility for the girl and are subject to the scorn of Mother Marie-Rose, and that the former finally holds on to them (par. 22, p. 74). And the "questioning" eye with which the little girl looks at "the agonizing Christ" during her own ordeal -- the reading of her story.

As to the gaps in my understanding, I have two: coltaller (par. 10). Is it a kind of game? an outdoor activity? as well in the 24th paragraph (p. 75). I still cannot grasp the meaning of "son numéro de chien savant." Is it an idiomatic expression in the sense of "her little number"?

At any rate, I, now, better understand why so many educated people end up being anticlerical.

similar to the one depicted in the story, he however makes use of his personal knowledge, his sense of intertextuality, by relating the story context to Fellini's *Amarcord* and Anderson's *If*, two films in which stories of school authority are depicted. In particular, Mère Marie-Rose reminded him of the math teacher who used to terrorize the young Fellini in *Amarcord* (February 21, 1995). John thus clearly shows, through his memory of films, that he is a film buff (see his Letter of September 1, 1994). When he commented upon the phrase "...tone falsely bucolic...which could seduce," he went further than his written interpretation of the girl simply appeasing the teacher, and suggested that the other schoolgirls thus showed their superiority to the teacher by the use of that tone (February 21, 1995). In his Journal I, he had pointed out that it was also a matter...of getting used to the stupidity of the school. (In his responses to Gagnon-Mahoney's *La laide*, John also opposes children's wisdom to adult authority which, in his view, is often unfairly used.)

His pointing out of irony, three times in the Annotations (p. 67, par. 6; p. 72-73, par. 18; p. 75, par. 25), indicates his ability to find double meaning in language. In his responses to other stories, John's mention of ironical uses has been frequent and thus reflects his personal interest in the writings of political satirists. His insistence on Mère Marie-Rose's way of articulating the word BELLES, his mentioning of the *long viscous marks...like medusa* had him perceive, through this ironical tone, meanness in the nun-teacher's character. But it is his interpretation of the

little girl's decision to write about the incident which, although he was not educated as a Catholic, is revealing of the influence that religion has exerted over him through other mediums like books, films or television. Even though John was educated in a public school and often told me that he did not know much about Catholic rituals, he felt that the impulse which led the little girl to write her subversive composition was *eminently "Catholic"* in that the composition amounted to expressing a desire to confess³ (Journal I).

Contrary to my view that it was rebellion which incited the little girl to write her composition, John attached to this act a meaning of humility. He thus insisted on it during the session: *...c'était une tentative de faire quelque chose de très humble, de très, avec beaucoup d'humilité, et beaucoup d'honnêteté (...it was an attempt to do something very humble, with a lot of humility and honesty)* (February 21, 1995). And for him it was all the more ironical as this humble attempt was cruelly spurned by the nun-teacher in the very Catholic context of the school (*ibid.*). Not only did John see humility in the little girl's writing of the composition (or

³ This gave me the opportunity, during the session, to launch myself into an explanation of confession and of my own experience of it as a child. (As I already said, my assumption was that Tasha knew nothing about it.) Furthermore, I linked the metaphor of confession to a chapter - "Bug-Jargal" - I had given them to read in Michel Tremblay *Un ange cornu avec des ailes de tôle* (1994). Thus, John's metaphor about the composition led me to talk about my personal experience of Catholicism as well as to make an intertextual reference.

"confession") but also in her wearing of the espadrilles. (This comment surprised me much more than the previous one in that, in my view, the wearing of the shoes clearly amounted to an act of rebellion.) For John, the espadrilles were the target of Mother Marie-Rose's disdain and he found that wearing them, instead of "official" (patent leather) shoes was a religious symbol expressing humility. However, as I already pointed out, after my reading aloud of Tasha's comment, at the end of her Journal I, regarding her ambivalence towards the little girl's act of writing the composition he concurred with Tasha's view. The following exchange between myself, John and Tasha is interesting and shows the kind of positive interaction that could result from the sharing of our reading-responses during the sessions:

B: [Lisant le Journal I de Tasha]: «...J'ai aussi pensé aux raisons pour lesquelles la petite fille a écrit cette histoire de l'homme malade. Peut-être, a-t-elle fait cela involontairement. Mais, d'un autre côté, cela pourrait être une révolte de la part de la petite fille contre l'enseignement primitif de cette école.»

J: Ouais. J'pense que c'était les deux.

T: En même temps.

J: J'pense. Moi, j'avais l'impression qu'il y avait les deux choses; il y avait quelque chose qui la, qui la portait...

T et B: Hhm, hhm...

B: [Reading from Tasha's Journal I]: "...I also thought of the reasons which led the little girl to write about that event about the man who is ill. Perhaps she did it in an involuntary way. But, from another viewpoint, it could be a sign of revolt against the primitive teaching in that school."

J: Yeah. I think that was the two.

T: At the same time.

J: I think so. I had the impression that there were two things; there was something which pushed her...

T and B: Hhm, hhm...

J: ...de façon involontaire
mais aussi, euh, y avait une
espèce de rébellion plus ou
moins...

J: ...in an involuntary way
but also, uh, there was a
kind of rebellion more or
less...

T: A la fin...

T: At the end...

J: ...inconsciente...

J:...unconscious...

B: Oui...

B: Yeah...

J: ...qui s'intensifiait à
la mesure que, euh, la re-
ligieuse faisait...

J: ...which intensified it-
self as, uh, the nun was
doing...

T: ...la lecture.

T:... the reading.

J: ...faisait preuve de son
dédain. Oui, oui, de son mé-
pris.

J:...was proving her scorn.
Yes, yes, proved her con-
tempt.

B: Ouais, parce que, moi,
je, à la fin, quand elle
dit, euh, j'aime bien l'i-
dée, toi, quand tu as dit:
«Elle se confesse un peu,
c'est une confession qu'elle
fait dans sa composition».
Parce que j'ai pas pensé,
j'ai pas pensé...

B: Yeah, because, at the
end, I do like it when she
says, uh, you, when you
said: "She confesses some-
what, it is a confession
which is done through her
composition". Because I
didn't think, I didn't
think...

J: Mais j'aimerais demander
à l'écrivaine...

J: But I would like to ask
the author...

B: Oui...

B: Yes...

J: ...s'il s'agit vraiment
de ça ou non. Parce que...

J:...whether or not it is
about that. Because...

B: Mais peut-être que...

B: But perhaps...

J: ...c'est une notion,
c'est une intuition.

J: ...it is a notion, some
intuition.

B: Ça serait bien de faire
venir Esther Croft. [Rire de
T]. (21 février 1995).

B: It would be good to have
Esther Croft come. [Laugh of
T]. (February 21, 1995).

Yet, all this discussion about humility did not prevent John from admiring the character of the little girl and even from asking himself whether he would have been courageous enough to do the same thing as she did (see his last Annotation, p. 75, par. 26). But John's suggestion of having the author with us in order to make sure whether she did have in mind the idea of confession at the moment of writing had struck me and, when I touched upon the subject during our second meeting (March 1st, 1995), he still insisted on his interpretation of the composition as confession and had this to say about the author's intention:

J: Oui, mais l'auteure n'avait pas en esprit l'idée: «Bon, je vais faire une confession, je vais masquer la confession sous forme de récit». Je pense que ce qui compte, c'est que la volonté de la fillette d'avouer quelque chose qui l'a troublée, et le fait que ça a été rejeté avec tellement de dédain par la religieuse, c'est en ça que se trouve l'ironie et une certaine inversion des valeurs religieuses. (1er mars 1995).

J: But the author did not have in mind the idea: "Well, I am going to make a confession, I will mask the confession in the shape of a story." I think that what matters is the little girl's will to confess something which troubled her, and the fact that it was rejected with such disdain by the nun, therein lies irony and a certain inversion of religious values. (March 1st, 1995).

John suggests that Croft could not write with the clear intention of having readers understand that the little girl was doing a confession or, in other words, of having them interpret it the way he had done it himself. Which led me to make the following comment: *In other words, when authors write, they [first] write for themselves* (March 1st, 1995). I

added that they knew they were going to be read but did not necessarily think that everyone would think the same way as them. In fact, it would be terrible if writers believed that readers should think in a way traced by them in advance. Thus, even if Esther Croft had been in the flesh when we responded to *B...comme dans bucolique*, even if we had heard her personal interpretation of her own story (she would perhaps have come to the same interpretation as John), she would not have changed the fact that what personally mattered to John was this idea of confession.

As to John's last sentence of Journal I, which concludes with a strong assertion that he now understands more clearly *why so many educated people end up being anticlerical*, he demonstrates, as we will see in my analysis of his Journal II and our session of March 1st, his interest in our discussing a historical aspect relating to the story, that is, the power that the Catholic church held over Québec before the Quiet Revolution of the mid-60s and which led many Quebecers to express anticlerical feelings. Yet, it is John's interest in the author's use of an *effective stylistic tool* (that, is, through the use of pronouns) which emerges as the main point of his Journal II⁴:

⁴ What he actually wrote about relates to a question that was suggested among those I gave them in order to help them write Journal II: *What are the narrator's perspectives? (What do they suggest to you, what do they teach you as a reader? Reflect on the use of pronouns)* (see Appendix B for the suggested question list). At the end of the preceding session, answering a question by Tasha, I had explained what I meant by

Journal II

J'ai relu cette nouvelle d'un oeil plus attentif à l'emploi des pronoms et à la perspective dans la narration. Il me semble que l'auteure opère un "glissement" entre la première et la troisième personne qui, encore que subtil, s'avère quand même un outil stylistique efficace et important. Lorsqu'elle parle d'elle et des autres étudiantes comme un ensemble, tout ce qui a trait à la conformité, à la façade de révérence, se met à la troisième personne:

"derrière les trente-trois pupitres...se dressaient trente-trois filles modèles." p. 65

"elles étaient...toutes à l'image..." p. 66

Espèce de dépersonnalisation, ou d'extériorisation, poussée encore plus loin dans les nombreuses synecdoques:

"les trente-trois têtes...et trente-trois sourires..." p.66

"trente-deux crayons...s'appliquaient...à faire surgir...une journée plus que parfaite." p. 69

"les trente-deux crayons s'affairaient scrupuleusement." p.73

I reread this story with a closer look at the pronouns and the narrative viewpoint. It seems to me that the author makes a "shift" between the first and third persons which, although subtle, reveals itself to be an important and effective stylistic tool. When she talks about herself and the other students and refers to them as a group, everything which deals with conformity, with the façade of reverence, everything is told in the third person:

"behind the thirty-three desks... stood up thirty-three model schoolgirls." p. 65

"They were...all in the image of..." p. 66

A type of depersonalization, or exteriorization, which is pushed even further in the numerous synecdoches:

"the thirty-three heads...and thirty-three smiles..." p. 66

"thirty-two pencils...were applying themselves...to the creation...of a more than perfect day." p. 69

"the thirty-two pencils were scrupulously busying themselves." p. 73

perspectives de la narration. Yet, I was careful to tell them that it was a suggested question among others, that they were free to respond about any aspect they intended to even though it might not be in the list.

Alors que la première personne semble consacrée aux "trucs," aux tromperies, bref, aux gestes qui font preuve de la génie et du raisonnement des fillettes: "nous connaissions déjà parfaitement la chanson" p. 68

"c'est...cette indiscretion... que les formules toutes faites nous permettaient de contourner." p. 68

Ainsi s'opère une polarité de perspective grammaticale parallèle à une polarité de réglementation (façade) versus circonvension (réalité). L'emploi itératif de je lorsqu'elle raconte la crise épileptique semble avoir pour effet de filtrer la perspective; c'est l'horreur grandissante du jeune témoin, et non pas la suite d'événements comme telle, qui est mise de l'avant:

"Je le voyais à peine..."

"Je tombai..."

"J'étais totalement hypnotisée..."

"J'étais figée..."

"Je le voyais se tordre..."

"Je voyais ses membres...ses reins..." pp. 70-71

J'aime bien l'emploi de celle à la page 66. En retardant ainsi l'introduction "propre" du personnage de Mère Marie Rose, on en donne un sinistre présage:

"Car celle qui posait devant le tableau..."

Whereas the first person pronoun seems to be devoted to "tricks," to deceitfulness, in short, to acts which confirm the genius and reasoning of the little girls: "we already knew the story perfectly well" p. 68

"that was...that indiscreetness...that ready-made phrases allowed us to circumvent." p.68

A polarity in the grammatical perspective is thus made which is parallel to a polarity between ruling (façade) and circumventing (reality). The iterative use of I when she tells the epileptic fit seems to have the effect of filtering the narrative viewpoint; it is the growing sense of horror of the young witness, and not what follows as such, which is put to the forefront:

"I could barely see him..."

"I fell off (my bicycle)..."

"I was totally hypnotized..."

"I was rooted to the spot..."

"I could see him twisting in pain..."

"I could see his members...his loins..." pp. 70-71

I really like the use of celles on p. 66. By putting off the "per se" introduction of Mother Marie-Rose, a sinister fore-warning is thus given:

"For she who posed in front of the blackboard..."

Même si ce n'est pas un reflet du style personnel de l'auteure, je suis toujours fasciné, en tant qu'anglophone, par les beaux "animismes" de perspective dans l'écriture française. Beaux à mon sens peut-être, parce que ma langue les admet si peu souvent? A titre d'exemple:

"un ton faussement bucolique qui ne faisait jamais de tache sur le papier mais qui savait séduire." p. 69

De même, les synecdoques et abstractions auxquelles le français se prête si librement, et ce, sans effet prétentieux. Voici ma phrase favorite: "Je n'étais que regard inutile, qu'impuissance immobile et impardonnablement ignorante." p. 71

Even if it is not a reflection of the author's personal style, I am always fascinated as an Anglophone, with the way of "animating" (things or abstract ideas) in the writing of French. I find it beautiful perhaps because it is rarely allowed in my language? For example:

"a tone falsely bucolic which never blotched the paper but knew how to be pleasant." p. 69

As well, synecdoches and abstractions which French uses so freely, and this, without pretentiousness. Here is my favorite sentence: "I was nothing more than a useless stare, an immobile weariness, unforgivably ignorant." p. 71

Discussion of John's Journal II

John's response, in his Journal II, may seem somewhat technical after those he gave in his Annotations and Journal I. Yet, I believe that he expresses something personal despite the fact that his responses may seem to be only textually oriented⁵. His keenness to interpret aspects of the story,

⁵ Bomer, (1995), a teacher who wrote about his classroom experience of teaching English, made the following comment which is very relevant to the view I express above:

I once heard... say that all writing is autobiographical, regardless of its genre. What that means about truth is that a writer has always learned the things to be true from some life experience that can be told in a story. We should always read expository prose by adding to the beginning of each sentence, "I have become persuaded from my particular experience that..." We could add to the end of each sentence, "...and I'm

through stylistic uses - which he understands as being specific to French - is reminiscent of his earlier letter in which he had written about his passion for the vernacular in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, as well as for the different accents with which characters from Warner Brothers cartoons spoke (see Letter of August 2, 1994 in Chapter V). In other words, it is his love of language that he thus demonstrates in his Journal II (see his comments on his admiration of French because it naturally makes things or abstract ideas animate).

trying now to persuade you that this is so, too."
Though it would be tiresome, we could then begin to
imagine the restoration of time and location to
what is masked as objective truth (p. 186).

The last sentence: "...the restoration of time and location to what is masked as objective truth" is particularly relevant here. It suggests the possibility of experience, what we call "a story" in narrative inquiry, even behind the most positivistic assertion. Indeed, why do we make the choice of an assertion over another? Because, at this moment in time, it corresponds to our perceiving what we believe to be a point which appears to us to be most truthful. But why are we convinced of its value? Because this could answer something in our past experience of, let us say, computational linguistics if, for instance, that happens to be our field of research. And this can apply for any other subject, whether it be literature or mathematics... Thus, from that viewpoint, my above comment regarding John's stylistic analysis of Croft's story makes sense: the flip side of his response is that it shows his passion for the learning of French, especially when he lauds its characteristic use of "animismes". In short, it is very personal in this sense even if he does not comment on passages from the story with his own personal experiences.

Furthermore, John's way of finding meaning in specific passages shows an interest in language patterns which is also reminiscent of his comments upon his interest in the value of the scientific approach for the study of a second language in his undergraduate program: *...linguistics allows me to use my analytical training in sciences while interesting me as a very polyvalent social science* (See Letter of September 23, 1994 in Chapter V). Although John made this comment regarding his choice of a linguistics major within the French program, it is significant that he applies the same analytical and scientific spirit to a literary text in the responses of his Journal II⁶. For instance, when he points out that *everything which deals with conformity, with the façade of reverence, everything is told in the third person* and compares it with the use of the *first person pronoun [which] seems to be devoted to "tricks," to deceitfulness*, he infers from the different use of the pronouns that *the polarity in the grammatical perspective [is] parallel to a polarity between ruling (façade) and circumventing (reality)* (see his examples and comments above applying to excerpts from the story on pp. 66, 69, 73 in opposition to those on p. 68). As well, the same scientific spirit is present when he writes that the repetition of the je

⁶ Rosenblatt would find value in John's way of responding. According to her, "the spirit of scientific method and its application to human affairs is the most fundamental social concept that the teacher of literature should possess" (1938/1983, p. 134). Rosenblatt's idea could, of course, also extend to students of literature.

seems to have the effect of filtering the narrative viewpoint of the little girl's growing sense of horror when she writes in her composition about her fear of seeing the old man's epileptic seizure.

But, as my discussion above of his textually oriented responses demonstrates that he can also be personal in them (see footnote 5), personal meanings can also be perceived from different angles in John's responses to the use of pronouns. (As I already explained (see Chapter VI), they are not simply to be established by a kind of causal connection between letter excerpts and written responses.) When John talks about the "shift" between pronouns, he describes it as an *important and effective tool*. The way he attributes values to this "shift" is meaningful (and also in the continuity of his preceding comments upon ironical passages): he refers to *conformity, reverence* (words, in my opinion, evoking respect and obedience) in the use of the third person whereas the *"tricks," deceitfulness* of the little girls (words which make him think of their *genius* and *power of reasoning*) is expressed in the use of the first-person plural pronoun. He also points out a *depersonalization, an exteriorization* in the use of synecdoches. I believe there is something very ethical emerging from these stylistically oriented responses and John's choice of loaded, significant words. Indeed, through his opposition between the wisdom of the schoolgirls and the adult's (nun's) abusive authority, John offers again an ethical comment when he points out differences between the world of the adult and that of the child.

After this discussion of John's response in his Journal II, I now want to examine points of our one-on-one session of March 1st, 1994, which are more explicitly related to our personal experiences. For instance, after telling me that he regarded the symbolism (e.g., the composition-confession) as a criticism of religious faith which had been imposed, John asked me whether the story, because of its *sentiment anti-clérical (anti-clerical feeling)* was representative of what *children of the Quiet Revolution in Québec* had known. I answered him that it [could help] have a reflection of the era but, as far as my experience went, I was careful to point out that I did not suffer from abusive power -except for a few tiffs - on the part of teachers. (Although I wanted to communicate about my social and historical background, I was actually wary of not giving the impression that Québec was exclusively "the priest-ridden province.") I then asked John whether he had any memories of students being persecuted on the part of teachers. He said he could not remember any and attributed his lack of memory to his studying in a large Toronto public school. To my question asking him how he perceived Catholic schools in Ontario, he answered that school discipline was more severe in Catholic schools and he felt that they, the public school students, were somewhat lucky not to have to be enrolled in them.

He also remarked that he did not see any logic in imposing a system based on guilt and shame. In his view, guilt was already present enough in a child's mind; he referred to his own feelings of guilt when he experienced the breakdown of

his family as a child. Thus, he found cruel if a system had children believe they were responsible for the world's unhappiness. He added that he saw the story as the reflection of feelings that his mother often expressed. As a lapsed Catholic, she felt she had been inculcated with too much hypocrisy through this religion.

In short, as my discussion shows, our oral responses during the session often went beyond the text and allowed us to connect, differently but in a natural way, the story with our personal backgrounds. Towards the end of the session, I asked him why, on the whole, he liked the story and what had struck him when I first read it aloud to them, at the end of the preceding session, before giving it to them to read⁷. He told me that, right away, what was interesting to him was its irony: there was an amusing incongruity in the fact that a little schoolgirl wanted to do something to her teacher (put

⁷ This extemporaneous type of reading was done once since I felt we had sufficient time left for it only at the end of one session (February 14, 1995). Even though my reading was done on a rather neutral tone, everyone had reacted positively to it, laughing at many passages of *B...comme dans bucolique*. But because of time restrictions, I could not afford repeating again the process for the other stories during the following sessions. I have always found it fascinating to watch for listeners' reactions when a story is first read out aloud before the listeners read it on their own.

a stick in the nun's mouth). Interestingly, he pointed out that he could not see anything reminding him of his own childhood, that it was a childhood from another world. In terms of atmosphere, however, he was reminded of films he had seen (see his Journal I).

Before turning to my discussion of John's and Tasha's responses to *How are you?*, here are some summarizing reflections on the experience of responding to *B...comme dans bucolique*.

Conclusion

I find interesting that the "theme" of the little girl's sense of revolt, which I had seen as a particularly significant point before giving them the story and that I wrote about in my responses, was not perceived as such by Tasha and John. Tasha understood the rebellious side of the narrator-little girl in a cautious manner and saw ambivalence in the writing of the composition as if it were a set of circumstances which had forced her into it and not her unique will power. As for John, his interest in pointing out the narrator/little girl's ironical uses of language and the narrator's use of pronouns were related to the idea of opposing the child's morally superior intelligence to the nun's abusive adult authority. Yet, as the excerpt from our conversation shows, he could concur with Tasha's view regarding the ambivalence that the little girl may have felt in the writing of the composition. And John also played down the importance that I saw in the "theme" of rebellion when he

interpreted the little girl's wearing of espadrilles and writing of the composition as an act of humility, not as one of revolt as I thought of it. Thus, thanks to my participants' reflections, the kind of interaction which resulted from the sharing of our reading-responses could positively lead me to have new interpretive views regarding characters' motives.

As to elements pertaining to Tasha's and John's cultural backgrounds, they are obviously expressed in a distinct manner. In the case of Tasha, her writing about how her school experience had been different from the one which is depicted in the story allowed me to reflect on the assumptions I had concerning her cultural background (e.g., see my discussion of the *pionniers* above). As for John, although he stated clearly not having personally known a school context with that strictness, he expressed an aspect of his personal and cultural knowledge by linking the story with films and by interpreting the little girl's composition as a confession. It is interesting to see how his cultural background has been influenced by religious elements from Catholicism - in a way that Tasha could not have been in her Russian school - even though he is not a Catholic and was educated in the Ontario public school system. At the same time, the discussion revolving around Catholicism made me realize that I had some assumptions about what John could think of my Québec background.

In short, I believe that John's and Tasha's exchanged responses about the little girl's character and situation which demonstrate their imaginative ways of thinking as

readers. It is clear that, through writings and conversations, she became for them a real person whom they connected with their backgrounds and the author's uses of language. If the ways they talked about the narrator's viewpoint could seem at times to be only textually oriented, there was still, as I argued in my discussion, something very personal emerging from their responses despite the distance they seem to have taken in those comments.

Chapter VIII

Tasha's and John's responses to *How are you?*

Introduction

In explaining my choice of *How are you?* (see Chapter III), I pointed out that I liked the way the difficulty of the immigrant experience was depicted through the story of a doomed love relationship between two refugees meeting at a language class in Montreal. I looked forward to reading and discussing it with my participants, and I was curious to see how Tasha, in particular, who had lived through the immigrant experience, would react to the story which I felt was the most related to her personally.

Tasha indeed felt personally touched but she found it difficult to express that aspect of her experience in relationship with Mallet's story. As she explained at the end of the only session in which she was able to participate¹ (April 12, 1995) and during our wrap-up session (December 11, 1995), she felt that the writing of the Annotations and

¹ This was the end of the academic year for Tasha and, because of her busy schedule, she was able to write only the Annotations and Journal I as written responses and participate only in one of the two sessions relating to the story (March 26, 1995; April 12, 1995). Therefore, for that story only, I have decided, for both Tasha and John, to present only these two pieces of writing and then discuss them, even though John wrote a Journal II. If I had also done a reflection upon John's Journal II, elements of interaction with Tasha's response would have been missing.

Journal I² was more difficult to do for *How are you?* than for other stories because of the feelings and emotions it called for her to share. Before the wrap-up meeting (December 11, 1995), she reread the five stories we had responded to and mentioned that *How are you?* still touched her even more this time (that is, eight months later). I invited her to write again about it but she answered that she could not find the words since it always touched her emotionally, thus implying that it was still too recent an experience for her. Therefore, in the personal points she makes in her Annotations and Journal I, there is a carefulness which makes her appear somewhat distant. Could it be that trying to do this in her third language further complicated the whole matter for her? She never mentioned language as an obstacle for the writing of her responses but I believe it probably contributed to her difficulties.

As for John, as he mentioned during our one-to-one session (March 26, 1995), he knew he could not respond to the story from a personal viewpoint as Tasha did regarding the aspect of the immigrant experience. However, his personal interest in readings on social and historical subjects certainly emerges from the tone of some of his comments. At the end of our session, he explained liking *How are you?* because he felt it was a real eye-opener on Canadians' pretensions regarding the luck they think refugees have when

² All page numbers in Tasha's and John's Annotations and Journals I refer to Gallays, F. (ed.) (1993), *Anthologie de la nouvelle au Québec*.

they come to Canada, and showed as well how hard and depressing the immigrant experience could be in some cases. Thus, he indirectly suggested that the story could fill an ethical void for Canadian readers' perspective on a social issue. But John also commented on the nature of the relationship between Marcia and Casimir and some aspects of their characterizations. He also wrote and talked about passages which dealt with language-learning as well as about others which represented the immigrant experience.

Summary of *How are you?*³ by Mallet (In Gallays, Ed., 1993)

The story is about Marcia, a Chilean refugee, who meets, at a language school for immigrants in Montreal, another refugee, Casimir, a Jew from Poland. Marcia narrates their relationship both in the first person singular and plural. She starts by saying that the two of them arrived alone in Canada without passports and were respectively taken care of by a Jewish Association and a Latin American Priest Association. The two look very different: Casimir is tall, blond and blue-eyed; Marcia is short, thin, with curly black hair. They are dressed in coats rescued from the garbage. The first scene is set in the métro while the two of them have been waiting for some time for the next train. After one of them (we do not

³ There is an English translation of the story from the Spanish by Alan Brown, which helped me translate and summarize a few passages. V. Mallet (1985). We responded to the French version that Mallet wrote and published in *Les compagnons de l'horloge-pointeuse* (1981).

know which one) has said that he found Montrealers to be very simple, uncurious people, the reader learns that the train is not coming because someone has committed suicide by jumping on the track. Probably thinking that winter has something to do with this tragedy, Casimir exclaims: *Ah! février... (Ah! February...)*.

Casimir and Marcia are paid 45 dollars a week for attending English language classes. Casimir left Poland because he is a Jew; Marcia left Chile because of the military junta. The teaching method is *simple mais efficace (simple but effective)*. It consists mainly of repeating sentences the teacher has just said: for instance, on the first day, they endlessly parrot *How are you?* At the cafeteria, Casimir suggests to Marcia, who feels exhausted, that this kind of course can erase the faculty of reasoning. Marcia then mentions where each of them lives: in two run-down apartments, which are both infested with cockroaches coming from the restaurants below. Hers is often noisy and she is often woken up by the son of the owner (a Greek woman) who violently hammers on every tenant's door in order to find out who is the one drawing the obscene sign of a giant penis on the elevator door each Monday morning.

Marcia then introduces the eleven students of her class (each coming from a different country: Bulgaria, Lebanon, Greece, Portugal, Colombia, Spain, etc.); she explains how classes go: for instance, on each Monday, they answer the question: *What did you do during the weekend?* Casimir answers that he is the only Jew who eats smoked herring seven days a

week; Marcia does not talk much. During recess time, students chat together about the news in their respective countries, which generally deal with economic crises, floods, etc. At noon, Casimir and Marcia go outside; he explains to her how to protect herself from the intense cold, which is a totally new thing for Marcia. Marcia is not very interested in knowing other students: she finds them shy, distant, rather boring. Sometimes, Casimir and Marcia go skating: he used to be a champion on Polish lakes; as for her, she can barely stand up on her skates. Marcia starts perceiving, through little gestures (Casimir helping her bundle up with her scarf), how he is getting closer to her. She reflects on the reasons for this growing intimacy; she thinks that their university education may play a role. Once, during a role play of Romeo and Juliet, Casimir kisses her on the mouth. She would have avoided him but it happened so suddenly that she could do nothing. She does not worry though since Casimir calls her on the same night to explain his behaviour. The course is nearing its end and students are shown *une série de films optimistes sur les joies du travail productif [au Canada]* (optimistic films which deal with the joys of productive labour [in Canada]).

One day, Casimir invites Marcia to his apartment for dinner. On their way, she is embarrassed by the way he tries to skimp on money by travelling on métro tickets which have been rejected by the machine. She thus reflects: *C'était juif jusqu'aux tripes* (He was Jewish through and through). Once, at Casimir's, they have some food and wine and then start talking

about politics. Casimir asks Marcia questions about the coup in Chile: she explains it by referring to multinationals, imperialism, etc. Marcia then listens to him talk about Poland, a country which was occupied for centuries, divided, etc. He attacks her by saying that socialism amounts to fighting for daily paranoia, for power given to civil servants. Fed up with this kind of discussion, Marcia does not answer anything. He then stops, kisses her hand and tries to come closer to her. Frightened, Marcia withdraws from him but he finally convinces her to let herself go. Crying, Marcia tells him that she is unable to make love with him. In the dark, she then starts telling him about her arrest in Chile, the interrogation and torture she went through. Casimir turns on the light and sees the cigarette burns on her breasts; Marcia notices that he has huge scars on his shoulder and arm. He then tells her a secret from his past: he is not a Jew and had to learn Yiddish to pass himself off as one. It took him years before finding an organization that helped Jews leave Poland. Thus, he had to lie for seven years and had authorities believe that he was the son of a Jewish lover his mother had had during the Nazi occupation. In case his secret was disclosed, he always carried a capsule of cyanide on him. Casimir then turns off the light and they go to sleep, *l'un à côté de l'autre, tout seuls dans le même piège (side by side, together and alone, two prisoners in a single trap)*.

The morning after, Casimir, while preparing coffee, asks Marcia what she is going to do once the classes are finished, how she will pay for her rent. Marcia answers she does not

really know: she will work either at a restaurant or a factory. Casimir then asks her whether she would like him to introduce her, at the synagogue, to men in their fifties who would be delighted to marry her. He then shows her the picture of his fiancée - *une femme affreuse (a very ugly woman)*, in Marcia's words, whose father owns a factory in Toronto. He contacted her through the same synagogue, he explains to Marcia. He then tells her that he is leaving for Toronto since he does not see any future in Québec. Flabbergasted, Marcia leaves without having any coffee. Smiling, Casimir asks her whether she would come skating on the following Monday. She answers yes. As he does not call her on Monday, she phones him and does not get any answer. One month later, she receives a postcard from Toronto in which Casimir says he is going to change his name to Henry Davis because of antisemitism. The card bears no return address and finishes with *How are you?*

Tasha's responses to *How are you?*

Annotations

p. 380

Jusqu'au IV par. on ne sait pas s'il s'agit de 2 hommes ou d'un homme et d'une femme.

p. 380, IV par.

La description physique est assez brève.

p. 380, le dernier par.

On comprend que la ville que les personnages habitent est une ville avec beaucoup d'immigrants + on apprend l'anglais, donc c'est le Canada (le Québec, Montréal). Continuation de

p. 380

Up to par. IV we don't know whether the story is about two men or a man and a woman.

p. 380, IV par.

The physical description is rather brief.

p. 380, last par.

We come to understand that the city in which the characters live is one with a lot of immigrants + one learns English, it is thus Canada (Québec, Montréal). The description of the main

la description des personnages principaux (d'où ils viennent). Cette description interrompue est bien naturelle parce qu'elle rappelle la vie réelle: on ne peut pas savoir tout à propos d'une personne inconnue en une seule fois, pendant une rencontre.

p. 381, II par.

La description de la méthode des cours n'est pas nouvelle pour moi. J'ai entendu ma tante raconter les histoires à propos de ses études à l'école comme celle décrite dans la nouvelle. Mais j'ai connu personnellement l'atmosphère de l'enseignement "simple mais efficace" pendant 2 mois de mes études qui m'ont préparée au test d'anglais nécessaire pour s'inscrire à l'Université.

p. 381, avant le dernier par. Les familles des 2 personnages principaux ne sont pas nombreuses.

p. 382, en haut

La description du lieu où habitent les personnages. L'auteure indique que son demeure est près de tous les endroits nécessaires (la poste, la banque, etc.). Évidemment elle habite une rue bruyante et sale.

p. 382, le dernier par.

La première indication négative du caractère des juifs: économiser partout. (Le propriétaire de Casimir économise l'huile à chauffage).

p. 383, le par. au milieu de la page + le dernier par. Cette description des étudiants me rappelle ma

characters continues (where they come from). This interrupted description is very natural since it brings real life to mind: one cannot know everything of an unknown person in one time only, during one meeting.

p. 381, par. II

The description of the course method is not new for me. I heard my aunt tell all the stories regarding her (language) study at a school like the one described in the story. But I have personally known the atmosphere of the "simple but effective" teaching during the two months of the studies which prepared me for the test of English required for university admission.

p. 381, before the last par. The two main characters' families are not large.

p. 382, top

The description of the place where the characters live. The author points out that she lives close to all necessary services (mail, bank, etc.). She obviously lives on a dirty and noisy street.

p. 382, last par.

The first negative remark on the character of Jews: skimp on everything. (Casimir's landlord saves on oil).

p. 383, the middle par. + the last one

The students' description reminds me of my own

propre expérience. Quand j'ai commencé à travailler dans un restaurant, il y avait à peu près 20 gens qui y travaillaient et chacun était d'un pays différent. Notre gérant a calculé le nombre de langues que nous pouvions parler. C'était 26! Casimir mange du hareng fumé toute la semaine - est-ce pour économiser?

p. 384, I par.

La description ironique de Félix, un ex-curé espagnol. L'indication importante: en allant vivre dans un autre pays, on peut changer tout: sa mode de vie, son nom, sa profession, ses manières, etc.

p. 384, II par.

Les gens des pays différents ont tendance à parler de leur passé, de la situation de leur pays d'origine.

p. 384, III par.

On indique pour la première fois qu'il s'agit de Montréal.

La description intéressante:

"les stalactites dans la moustache des enrhumés." Casimir a beaucoup plus d'expérience en ce qui concerne la vie que Marcia. Il partage son expérience avec elle.

p. 385, I par.

La description plutôt triste des activités des réfugiés.

p. 385, II par.

Le rapprochement entre les 2 personnages.

p. 385, III par.

Casimir sait économiser partout.

experience. When I started working in a restaurant, there were about 20 people who worked there and each person came from a different country. Our manager counted the number of languages that we could speak: 26! Casimir eats smoked herring all week long - is it to economize?

p. 384, par. I

The ironic description of Félix, a Spanish ex-priest. The important remark: when one goes to live to another country, one can change everything: one's way of living, one's name, one's profession, one's manner, etc.

p. 384, par. II

People from different countries tend to talk about their pasts, the situation in their countries of origin.

p. 384, par. III

For the first time, it is pointed out that it is Montreal.

The interesting description:

"the stalactites hanging from the moustaches of people with colds." Casimir has a lot more life experience than Marcia. He shares his experience with her.

p. 385, par. I

The rather sad description of the refugees' activities.

p. 385, par. II

The coming closer of the two characters.

p. 385 par. III

Casimir knows how to save on everything.

p. 386, I par.
L'amitié se transforme en
sentiment plus profond.

p. 386, fin du II par.
La méthode d'enseignement
n'a pas changé. Mon père a
fait la même chose en 1992.

p. 387, au milieu de la page
Les petites économies de
Casimir. Ce trait de son
caractère ne plaît pas à
Marcia.

p. 387-389
Les moments de l'intimité.
Ce qui m'a frappé dans la
description de cette scène
entre Casimir et Marcia: p.
389, la fin: "tous les deux
solitaires..."

p. 390-391
L'attitude vers la vie est
différente chez Casimir et
Marcia. La seule chose com-
mune: tous les deux ils a-
vaient des cafards, c'était
tout.

Journal I

Voici ma réaction à la
nouvelle de Marilu Mallet
"How Are You?" que j'ai
écrite après la quatrième
lecture. Premièrement, j'ai
beaucoup aimé cette histoire
touchante des deux immi-
grants solitaires bien que
la nouvelle suscite le
sentiment de tristesse. J'ai
trouvé beaucoup d'éléments
qui me rappellent ma propre
expérience. Ma famille et
moi, nous n'étions pas les
réfugiés mais nous savons ce
que veut dire économiser,
utiliser les vieux meubles,
étudier à l'école de
langues, être entouré des
gens de toutes les nationa-

p. 386, par. I
Friendship is turning into a
deeper feeling.

p. 386, end of par. II
The teaching method has not
changed. My father did the
same thing in 1992.

p. 387, middle of the page
Casimir's ways of
economizing.
This trait of character does
not please Marcia.

p. 387-389
Intimate moments. What
struck me in the description
of this scene between
Casimir and Marcia: p. 389,
the end: "together and
alone..."

p. 390-391
Both Casimir and Marcia have
a different attitude towards
life. The only common thing:
both had cockroaches, that
was all.

Here is my reaction to
Marilu Mallet's short story
"How Are You?" that I wrote
after my fourth reading.
Firstly, I loved this touch-
ing story of two lonesome
immigrants even though the
story elicits feelings of
sadness. I found that many
elements reminded me of my
own experience. My family
and I, we were not refugees
but we knew what it meant to
economize, use old furni-
ture, study at the language
school, be surrounded with
people from all nationali-
ties, listen to English pro-
nounced in 100 different
manners, etc. In my opinion,

lités, entendre l'anglais - prononcé de 100 façons différentes, etc. A mon avis, la nouvelle "How Are You?" présentera plus d'intérêt aux gens qui étaient des immigrants eux-mêmes qu'à ceux qui n'ont jamais eu cette expérience. Un problème particulier m'a intéressé dans cette nouvelle. Nous savons que Casimir était polonais et Marcia - chilienne, donc des cultures complètement différentes. Pourtant, ils se sont rapprochés et semblaient avoir de l'affection l'un pour l'autre. Est-ce que cette affection peut durer longtemps? Et, en général, est-ce que les gens des cultures différentes peuvent vivre ensemble, se marier? Deuxièmement, j'ai trouvé la façon dont la nouvelle est écrite correspond beaucoup au contenu. Par exemple, l'auteure ne donne pas toute l'information à propos des personnages principaux à la fois. C'est comme on est à la place de Marcia et on fait la connaissance de Casimir avec elle. On commence par sa description physique et après peu à peu on apprend d'où il vient, quelle est sa famille, où il habite, ses manières, ses habitudes, ses défauts...

the story "How Are You?" will be more interesting to people who are immigrant themselves than to those who have never had this experience. A particular problem has interested me in this story. We know that Casimir is Polish and Marcia, Chilean - thus from two totally different cultures. Still, they got together and seemed to feel affection towards each other. Can this affection last long? And, in general, can people from different cultures live together, get married? Secondly, I found that the way that the story was written corresponded a lot with the content. For instance, the author does not give all the information regarding the characters at the same time. It is as if we were in Marcia's place and we get to know Casimir with her. One starts with his physical description and, little by little, one learns about where he comes from, who his family is, where he lives, his manners, his habits, his faults...

Discussion of Tasha's Annotations and Journal I

As she does at the beginning of her Journal, one of the first things that Tasha pointed out, during the session, was the feeling of sadness which was created, in her sense, by the alienation in the story (April 12, 1995). She then changed subject and drew our attention to passages which dealt with

language-learning aspects of the immigrant experience. For instance, she recalled the classes she had taken in order to prepare for the TOEFL test which had allowed her to be admitted into a Canadian university (see her Annotation on p. 381, par. II); she mentioned students' different accents when they spoke English, the multilingual composition (about twenty-five languages) of the work staff at the fast food restaurant where she worked part-time (p. 383, middle par. and last one). She added that she found interesting that English could unite so many different people. Another Annotation that she did not bring up during the session also relating to an aspect of language-learning is the following: her mentioning that her father had also known an experience similar to the one described at the end of par. II on p. 386, namely when students are taught how to talk on the phone and fill out application forms in order to find work. But, during the session, she did not further elaborate on those comments regarding the language-learning aspect of her immigrant experience. In light of the chapter I wrote on her personal background and stories of language-learning (see Chapter IV), perfecting her English in Toronto was, despite a few difficulties encountered in academic writing, a relatively easy thing to do for Tasha. (In her opinion, her years spent in a Soviet school where English was intensively taught had clearly benefited her language adaptation into the Canadian system.)

Tasha then explained that what she regarded as an important "theme" in the story was the way Marcia and Casimir

talked about the situation in their respective countries (Chile and Poland), which led her to wonder about the possibility for two persons of different cultures of being able to live together (see her Journal). She explained that difference is an attractive point at the beginning. Thus, curiosity plays a role in a relationship of this kind and - although Tasha had first recognized it as a characteristic permeating the atmosphere of the story - it is not only alienation which brings the characters of Marcia and Casimir together. Tasha then went back to her personal experience and recalled having also been attracted by someone from a culture different from hers but with whom she shared - like Marcia and Casimir - the same level of education. Although this relationship did not work out, she considered that the same type of education could become a common language between two persons.

Not expanding more upon the subject of that relationship, Tasha went back to the way the story was written. She liked the progressive manner the two characters were introduced and developed; she found it gave a realistic tone to the first meeting between Marcia and Casimir. In her Annotations, she thus pointed out the fact that readers first did not even know what the sex of the two protagonists was (p. 380, up to par. IV); then we had a brief physical description (p. 380, IV par., p. 380, last par.); there was a passage on the two protagonists' families (p. 381, before the last par.); a description of the place where they live (top of p. 382). In short, through these examples, Tasha thus expressed a positive

perception of Marcia as a first person narrator (see the end of her Journal).

A point that she had not responded to in writing, but that she felt compelled to discuss, was the one relating to Casimir's scars on his shoulder. She did not understand how he had got them. I told Tasha that John and I had discussed it during our previous meeting (March 26, 1995) (John mentioned that he still felt obsessed with that question). Tasha then started imagining possible reasons: maybe Casimir had inflicted these scars upon himself in order to pass himself off as a Jew, or simply as someone who is being pursued, someone who is running away from danger... (I went back to the hypotheses I had shared with John: how Casimir had managed his prison escape, why he was in prison in the first place, etc.) I then wondered how Casimir could have obtained cyanide, a poison which is especially hard to get. John mentioned that perhaps it meant that he was the son of a Nazi or a collaborator - a supposition which made us laugh, given all the hypotheses that we had already been through together.

How do I perceive now this discussion revolving about what could or could not have happened to a character? Of course, the three of us naturally felt the need to try to solve a point which seemed unresolved in the plot. Our hypotheses implied that we found there was something unsatisfying in it, and that we were trying to bring

interesting closures to this gap⁴. Our laughing at our own suggestions also implied an awareness of having assumptions which may be related to our own cultural backgrounds. We know that the text does not say that Casimir was the son of a Nazi - in fact, he says he pretended to be the son of a Jewish lover his mother had during the Nazi occupation. (I guess we could have also hypothesized that his own mother was a Nazi...) But it seemed that we enjoyed going back to these cultural clichés associated with Casimir's story, which come from books we read and films we saw on World War II.

To my surprise, Tasha then pointed out, regarding Casimir's characterization, that it really was a Jewish trait to skimp on everything. She was thus suggesting that he was good at passing himself off as a Jew. Knowing that Tasha was Jewish, I felt that it was a rather indifferent reaction to the repetition of a prejudiced view regarding her ethnic background. (Before giving the story, I actually thought that she would respond negatively to the author's use of such a stereotype.) To my mentioning that this behaviour did not reflect only a Jewish characteristic, that I had relatives who could economize in a way that seemed exaggerated to me, Tasha further insisted on Casimir's stinginess by giving the example of his taking vegetables out of the garbage can.

⁴ Tasha suggested the same kind of discomfort regarding a passage that she saw as a gap in the plot of Gagnon-Mahoney's story, *La laide* (see Chapter IX).

Tasha's reaction thus reminded me of Tina's, the Greek-Canadian participant's⁵. She was very much amused at the passage in which the owner of the building, where Marcia rents her apartment, is described as a *Greek dressmaker with a blond wig* whose son violently hammers on every tenant's door in an attempt to find out the guilty one who draws the obscene sign of a giant penis on the elevator door each Monday morning. Tina found that the depiction of the whole situation was truly faithful to her own perception of Greek attitudes.

Should I dismiss the assumptions I had, before giving the story to read, about possible negative reactions on the part of my participants towards cultural stereotypes as a somewhat politically correct concern of mine? Or would reactions have been different with other participants and brought us to a critical discussion of the use of stereotypes in literature? But then would such a discussion not have us reflect over an aspect of reality, namely the use of stereotypes, which an author may choose to work from for characterization?

Regarding Tasha's point about Marcia's perception of Jewish traits in Casimir, John provided us with a new interpretive comment which made us see the passage in a different light. Basing himself on a point previously made by Tasha regarding the *slowing down in the narration* (April 12, 1995) (that is, we come to know about Casimir's traits of

⁵ Tina, as I previously mentioned, was one of the four initial participants who dropped out of the study. She did manage, however, to respond to the first two stories, Croft's *B...comme dans bucolique* and Mallet's *How are you?*

character slowly and progressively: see above my comment on Tasha's Annotations in that respect), he pointed out that Marcia first judged Casimir's behaviour as reflecting a Jewish trait and that it took her some time to perceive that his opportunism and obsession with success actually demonstrated an *aberrant* trait of character which was not necessarily a Jewish trait. John thus suggests that Marcia first falls back on stereotypes in order to form a first impression of Casimir however erroneous it could be, and then, following her negative experience with him, she finally realizes how he really is. Thus, what Casimir's behaviour reflects is his *aberrant* trait of character, not a Jewish trait. I believe that John's comment is important in one respect: it demonstrates to what extent the collaborative setting of our sessions, through the discussion of our responses, could positively lead us to reconsider and interpret characters' situations.

But if Tasha did not perceive in a negative light that particular excerpt about Casimir's Jewish traits, she adopted an ethical viewpoint and was critical of allusions which were contained in other passages regarding his relationship with Marcia. For instance, she found cruel the way Casimir went back to his old self after the scene of the aborted sexual relationship. As an example, she quoted the narrator's (Marcia's) voice: *Casimir a préparé du café et a dit de sa voix habituelle... (Casimir made coffee, and said in his usual tone...)* (p.390). As well, she did not like that Casimir asked Marcia what she was going to do after the course while he knew

only too well that she had not found any work yet. I indicated to Tasha that there was cruelty also in the passage where Casimir revealed his planned marriage of convenience to Marcia and then asked her *avec son sourire de cinéma et l'accent yiddish plein d'enthousiasme (with his movie star smile and Yiddish accent, brimming with enthusiasm)* to go skating with him the following Monday. Tasha empathized with Marcia's acceptance by pointing out that life anyway was so cruel and lonely for her that it was natural to give in to Casimir's invitation. All those passages made Tasha feel that it was, overall, a very sad story.

Finally, before turning to John's Annotations and Journal I, I want to discuss a point in which Tasha responded to an aspect of the immigrant experience (that is, the work aspect) in a critical light, something, as my previous discussion shows, she had not really done regarding the immigrant language-learning aspect. Tasha felt suspicious as to the values, dealing with work opportunities, which were expressed in the short films presented to the immigrants' class in the story. (In Marcia's words, *[they] were optimistic and dealt with the joys of productive labour.*) Tasha also expressed doubts, concerning the teacher's enthusiasm about the possibilities for immigrants to find a job, in a very convincing manner: *C'est que le professeur est enthousiaste, comme la vie est rose, vous allez trouver le travail bientôt. Demain... (But the point is that the teacher is enthusiastic, how rosy life is, you will soon find work. Tomorrow...)*. Tasha then explained that perhaps Canada was the country of chance;

that we had more freedom here than in war-torn countries. But she insisted on not needing to be told these words:

Mais je pense qu'il ne faut pas dire que tout est...de rose et tout ça. Je sais parce que je suis venue ici; j'essaie de changer ma vie et...je n'ai pas besoin de ces mots. (12 avril 1995).

But I think that they should not say that everything is rosy...and all that jazz. I know that for a fact because I have come here; I am trying to change my life and I don't need these words. (April 12, 1995).

Tasha's comments reflect a lot of pride and emotion as to her viewpoint towards the immigrant experience whether she expresses it in a direct or indirect manner in her responses. Since John and I have never lived the immigrant experience, I am grateful to her for having brought these new meanings to our responses.

John's responses to How are you?

Annotations

*p. 380, par 1
véhicule une atmosphère d'aliénation des nouveaux arrivés dans le pays. Images lugubres. Ça m'a rappelé les images d'immigrants au début du siècle, et durant la période d'entre les guerres, que j'ai vues dans des livres et des films.*

*p. 380, par. 7-8
ton de torpeur... l'indifférence devant le suicide. On s'habitue au fait que les autres autour de soi sont aliénés aussi.*

*p. 381, par. 2
ironique qu'on se soit fixé sur cette banalité comme objet de pratique et de*

*p. 380, par. 1
renders an atmosphere of alienation (characteristic of) those who just arrived in the country. Gloomy images. It reminded me of the images of immigrants at the turn of the century, and of the period between the wars, that I saw in books and films.*

*p. 380, par. 7-8
a tone of torpor... indifference towards suicide. One gets used to the fact that others around us are alienated too.*

*p. 381, par. 2
ironical that one became fixated on that banality as something worth practicing*

répétition. Est-ce que
quelqu'un se soucie d'eux,
se demande comment ils vont?

p. 381, par. 5

Mais oui, phrase bien tour-
née, car elle signale que
cet "enseignement" a plutôt
le caractère d'une program-
mation, d'un doublage.

p. 382, par. 4-6

les cafards sont-ils l'in-
dice du peu qui a changé
matériellement pour ces deux
dans le pays des "rêves"?
Car ces bêtes sont les com-
pagnons des pauvres par-
tout?

p. 384, par. 2

encore un ton de tor-
peur...les crises/ tragédies
qui figuraient si intégra-
lement dans leurs vies au-
trefois ne sont maintenant
que des sujets propices aux
"récréations".

=

symbole? leur pays d'accueil
n'est pas vraiment à eux/ le
leur. Mais leurs pays natals
ne sont plus les leurs non
plus? Ils sont à la dérive,
donc.

p. 384, par. 3

et maintenant le ton
d'engourdissement prend une
forme nettement physique
"l'anesthésie et la congéla-
tion, c'est pareille."

p. 384, par. 3

je me demande si j'inter-
prète le passage en bas de
façon juste. Casimir semble
suggérer que même un acci-
dent menant à une infirmité
permanente serait une "réus-
site" de quelque sorte si
l'accidenté était accordé
une pension. Est-ce que des

and repeating. Does anyone
care about them, ask them
how they are coping?

p. 381, par. 5

But yes, a well-turned
sentence since it points out
that the "teaching" has
rather the character of
programming, of dubbing.

p. 382, par. 4-6

do the cockroaches indicate
how little things have
changed regarding the two's
material needs in the
"dreamland"? After all, are
not these insects the compa-
nions of the poor every-
where?

p. 384, par. 2

once more, a tone of
torpor... the crises/
tragedies which were so much
part of their daily lives
before have now become only
topics suitable for the
"breaks."

=

symbol? their welcoming
country is not really
theirs. But their native
countries is not theirs
anymore? They are thus
drifting.

p. 384, par. 3

and now the tone of getting
numb clearly takes a phy-
sical form "the cold acts as
a local anesthetic."

p. 384, par. 3

I am wondering whether I am
interpreting the passage at
the bottom in a correct way.
Casimir seems to suggest
that even an accident
leading to a permanent
handicap would be a "suc-
cess" in that the victim
would have been given a

gens pensent vraiment ainsi?
Drole d'espèce d'avidité.

p. 386, par. 2
non seulement la notion de
l'accueil chaleureux accordé
aux réfugiés est-elle déman-
telée mais aussi celle de la
vie canadienne. Les films
optimistes sont notés d'un
ton moqueur.

p. 387, dernier par. - p. 388
passages intéressants car il
semble que le grand écart
entre expériences politiques
ne suffit pas pour dégoûter
l'un de l'autre...tels sont
leur aliénation et leur
besoin de contact humain.

p. 388

l'intimité physique fait
sentir la vérité, leurs
passés et leurs douleurs. La
solitude / besoin d'amitié
peut faire se cacher cer-
taines choses, mais pas
toutes. Comme si on doit
dépasser un certain seuil
d'intimité pour vraiment
connaître quelqu'un.

p. 390
j'ai réalisé que Marcia et
Casimir vont suivre des
trajectoires différents.
Elle tient à certains idé-
aux, alors que lui, il ne
pense qu'à la réussite
matérielle, ou bien à la
sécurité matérielle.

Journal I

Je pense que les
Canadiens nés sur place ont
tendance à se flatter du
traitement accordé aux
nouveaux arrivés; on ne se
rend pas compte souvent de
l'aliénation que ressentent

pension. Are there people
who really think in that
way? Funny kind of greed.

p. 386, par. 2
not only is the notion of a
warm welcome to the refugees
torn apart but also that of
the Canadian way of life.
The optimistic films are
described in a mocking tone.

p. 387, last par. - p. 388
interesting passages since
it seems that the big rift
between their political ex-
periences does not seem to
disgust either one...such is
their alienation and their
need for human contact.

p. 388

physical intimacy makes them
feel the truth, their pasts
and their woes. Solitude /
the need for friendship can
hide certain things, but not
all of them. It is as if one
must go beyond some thre-
shold of intimacy in order
to really know someone.

p. 390
I realize that Marcia and
Casimir will follow
different paths. She holds
on to some ideals dearly,
whereas he thinks only of
material success, or
material security.

I think that Canadians
who were born here tend to
flatter themselves with the
treatment which is reserved
for the newly arrived; we do
not often realize that
people who come here on

des gens qui arrivent ici seuls, et qui doivent rebattre leurs vies. Cette nouvelle brosse un tableau intéressant de cette alienation, qui peut connaître des formes et des trajectoires très différents selon l'individu. Chez la narratrice par exemple, elle s'exprime par une espèce de torpeur émotionnelle devant les durs et les épreuves de son quotidien. Marcia raconte avec ironie la répétition incessante de la banalité "how are you?" dans le cours d'anglais. Dans cette société si atomisée, est-ce que quelqu'un se soucie vraiment de ces nouveaux arrivés, se demande comment ils vont? Son ami Casimir se sent aussi engourdi par sa situation, mais il semble y être moins résigné. A la différence de Marcia, qui tient à certains idéaux, Casimir fait montre d'un opportunisme et d'une avidité presque aberrants.

Comment se fait-il que ces deux se lient d'amitié, en dépit de l'écart entre leurs ambitions et leurs expériences politiques? Ils se trouvent tous les deux à la dérive: leurs pays natals ne sont plus vraiment à eux, et ce nouveau pays "rêve" ne l'est pas non plus, du moins pas encore. Les crises et la violence dans leurs pays d'origine ne sont maintenant que l'objet de "récréations" dans le cours de langue. C'est devant cette vide qu'ils se réconfortent -- ils partagent les mêmes ennuis, la même aliénation, les mêmes cafards.

their own and who must rebuild their lives feel alienation. This story offers an interesting image of this alienation which can vary according to the very different forms and journeys of each individual. For the narrator, for instance, it expresses itself through a kind of emotional torpor in front of the hardships of daily life. Marcia tells with irony the endless repetition of the banality "How are you?" in the English class. In this atomized society, does anyone really care about the newly arrived people, ask oneself how they are doing? Her friend Casimir also feels numb about his situation, but he seems to be less resigned to it. Contrary to Marcia, who believes in some ideals, Casimir demonstrates an almost aberrant opportunism and greediness.

Why is it these two strike up a friendship, despite the divide between their ambitions and political experiences? They are both adrift: they don't really belong to their native countries anymore, and this newly "dreamed about" country is not theirs either, at least for the time being. The crises and violence in their countries of origin are now only the object of discussion during the language class break. Facing this void, they take comfort in each other --- they share the same boredom, the same alienation, the same cockroaches.

Le moment d'intimité sexuelle initié par Casimir -- puis avorté -- semble faire soulever les contradictions entre les personnages, et à l'intérieur de chacun -- leurs douleurs, leurs passés. C'est comme si l'on dépasse un certain seuil, de sorte que l'aliénation seule ne suffit plus comme le fondement d'une relation. Certaines vérités ne peuvent plus se cacher.

En general, j'ai trouvé cette nouvelle moins élégante en termes de style que celle d'Esther Croft. D'autre part, les thèmes explorés là-dedans sont fascinants. La curieuse instrumentalité de la relation entre êtres très différents, relation éphémère mais importante et révélatrice pour chacun d'eux. L'atomisation sociale dans leur monde est bien véhiculée -- je pense par exemple à la page 381, où l'on apprend que tous les étudiants apportent leurs propres "petits plats de chez eux," au lieu de manger ce que la cafétéria leur offre. Le sentiment d'engourdissement et de froideur est toujours présent dans la narration -- ex. l'indifférent" qui les informe du suicide (p.380), le manque d'intérêt de la part de Marcia à l'égard des autres étudiants (p. 385 par. 1) -- et se symbolise très physiquement à la page 384, par. 3: "Casimir soutient que l'anesthésie et la congélation, c'est pareil: on ne sent absolument pas que les cartilages durcissent..."

The moment of sexual intimacy, initiated by Casimir -- then aborted -- seems to bring up the contradictions between the characters, and in each of them -- their woes, their pasts. It is as if one goes beyond some threshold, in such a way that alienation alone cannot suffice anymore for the basis of a relationship. Some truths cannot remain hidden anymore.

In general, I found this story less elegant in terms of style than the one by Esther Croft. On the other hand, the themes which are explored in it are fascinating. The strange instrumentality between two very different beings, an ephemeral relation which is however important and revealing for each of them. The social atomization of their world is well rendered -- I think, for instance, on p. 381 where one learns that all students bring their own "little specialty dishes from their country's cooking," instead of eating what the cafeteria offers them. The feeling of numbness and coldness is always present in the narration -- e.g., the "indifferent [man]" who informs them of the suicide (p. 380), the lack of interest on the part of Marcia regarding the other students (p. 385, par. 1) -- which symbolizes itself very physically on p. 384, par. 3: "Casimir says the cold acts as a local anesthetic. You feel nothing but your cartilage is solidifying..."

Discussion of John's Annotations and Journal I

Alienation, banality, torpor, numbness, freezing, coldness, anesthesia, indifference, boredom, these words, all evoking inaction or paralysis, used in John's Annotations (p. 380, par. 1; p. 380, par. 7-8; p. 384, par. 2; p. 384, par. 3) and in his Journal I, describe an underlying pessimistic atmosphere in the story. This use of language would seem to imply that John interpreted only a general idea of alienation, even stagnation, in the situation depicted in many passages. Yet, as my analysis of his responses and of our discussions reveals, he could also attribute different meanings to other excerpts. He indeed perceived complexity in Marcia's relationship with Casimir, as well as an implicit social criticism in the story which went beyond these ideas.

John started writing about *the atmosphere of alienation* and *gloomy images* in his Annotation relating to the very first paragraph which introduces Marcia and Casimir (p. 380, par. 1). I assume this must have been pervasive in his experience of books and films on immigrants since he did not give the example of any from a particular book or film. In our discussion, I told John that I could see these images (old black and white photographs of poorly dressed immigrants arriving to the new country and waiting in line to be interviewed by the "authorities" resurfaced in my mind). Which made him remark that since we could not recall any direct experience as Tasha could, we did have to rely on images. This was a way of acknowledging that both John and I could be

limited by stereotypes since we had never lived the immigrant experience.

From his viewpoint on *alienation*, John came to understand the character of Marcia in a complex manner (see his Journal I). While he interpreted her as being ironical or even mocking at times, he mostly perceived torpor or indifference in her attitude towards her classmates and others in general. But first let us look at how he understood the ironical side of Marcia. He rightly indicated it in her comment on the language class which made the phrase *How are you?* banal through mere repetition. (As he pointed out, this is normally asked between friends but, in the language class context, it has lost its real meaning (see his Annotation on p. 381, par. 2). In the following Annotation (p. 381, par. 5), the well-turned sentence [which] points out that the "teaching" has rather the character of programming, of dubbing is the following in the story: *It's as if [it] erased your power of reason, the way you wipe out a tape when you record on top of the message*⁶.

⁶ I was also interested in another remark about language learning made by the narrator (or Marcia) that John, as well as Tasha, left out in their responses. It was contained in the following sentence, and I was curious to know how John would understand it: *Dans une autre langue, on a l'impression que les mots retrouvent leur véritable signification. (In another language, one has the impression that words find again their true meaning)*. (The preceding is my translation and probably sounds awkward to the English reader but, interestingly, Alan Brown gives the following from the Spanish: *When the conversation is in a new language, you feel as if you're rediscovering words*). John perceived the sense of the French

sentence (and, at the same time, the sense of discovery that Brown gives in his translation) in that manner:

C'est vrai qu'on devient plus conscient des mots. On est plus, euh, soigneux dans l'usage des mots, et j'imagine que l'effet c'est de...c'est de mettre les mots plus en relief. (True, we become more conscious of words. We are more careful in word usage and I think that the effect is of emphasizing words) (March 26, 1995).

He then wondered what the meaning of this sentence was in the context of the story and why the narrator said it. I then suggested that it was an a posteriori comment on the part of the narrator who wrote the story after the events in it took place.

In retrospect, an important aspect to remember regarding the viewpoint in the narration is not only the narrator's voice expressing itself for the characters who have to take English classes in order to get paid 45 dollars a week, but the author's voice which resonates as well in that Mallet tells the story of her characters in French, a language that is not hers but that she has chosen for the writing of her story. In a conversation I had with Tasha just before the recording of our second session (April 12, 1995), she asked me why immigrants in the story were paid to learn English in Montréal, which led me to talk about the language situation in Québec prior to the enactment of Law 101. We had had an exchange about it in our correspondence but she felt curious about it again. I also discussed this aspect once more with John during our one-on-one session (March 26, 1995).

From a specific viewpoint, what is contained in Mallet's story could be understood as a kind of microcosm of the language situation in Montréal from the beginning of the 70s (the time the story takes place and before the enactment of Law 101) to the beginning of the 80s (when the story is published in French): on the one hand, there is a representation of immigrants who are paid to learn English (such was the reality in Montreal at the time); on the other

Regarding Marcia's remark on *the optimistic films* presenting to immigrants *the joys of productive labor*, he found she had a *mocking tone* in her description (p. 386, par. 2). In his comment on this Annotation, he argued that not only the notion of warm welcome to refugees coming to Canada was destroyed but also the one presenting Canadian life. This remark is similar in content to the opening sentence of his Journal I in which he also pointed out that Canadians very often did not realize that immigrants felt alienation when they first came here to rebuild their lives. (And it also reminds me of John's mention of a refugee Tamil friend from Sri Lanka who came to Canada as a refugee and was reduced to taking low-paying jobs even though he was an accountant in his country.) Thus, John understood that Marcia could have a critical eye regarding some aspects of social reality despite her tendency to passivity.

As to Marcia's indifference or passivity, he wrote, in his Journal I, that the feeling of alienation that she felt towards *the hardships of daily life* expressed itself through an *emotional torpor*. He had already used the word *torpor* in two of his preceding Annotations first to describe the indifference which was used regarding the person who had committed suicide in the métro (p. 380, par.7-8), and second to describe the tone in which the immigrants held conversations about the *crises/tragedies* which were *so much*

hand, you later have the author who has chosen to write about the experience in French.

part of their lives before (p. 384, par. 2). John thus found that they were drifting (ibid.). Regarding *le ton d'engourdissement* (the tone of getting numb) that he interpreted in the words that Marcia reported Casimir saying *l'anesthésie et la congélation, c'est pareil* (the cold acts as a local anesthetic), the getting numb (or what could be also translated into *torpor*) was now physical. In different passages, through the same interpretive link of *torpor*, John brought a new meaning to it by adding a physical dimension to one he had previously seen from a psychological viewpoint.

He pushed the idea of *emotional torpor* further in his interpretation of Marcia's relationship with Casimir. Even though John felt that Casimir *felt numb about his situation* (that is, his current state as a language student in Montreal), he perceived him as far less resigned to it than Marcia. In an ethical interpretation of the characters, John pointed out that Marcia was the one who had *ideals* whereas Casimir showed *opportunism and an almost aberrant avidity*. John saw Casimir's moral flaws in a remark that may first have appeared as rather innocuous to the reader: for instance, he found there was a *funny kind of greed* in a remark in which Casimir suggested that any person, even though he has become permanently disabled by a fall on a sidewalk, should be comforted by the possibility of suing municipal authorities (see his Annotation on p. 384, par. 3). But what particularly puzzled John as a reader was that Marcia's and Casimir's differing views regarding their political experiences did not suffice to disgust either one (see his Annotation on p. 387,

par. 12 - p. 388, and the second par. of his Journal I). Yet, only alienation is not enough to make them bond together and their aborted sexual relationship brings up the truth that the contradictions between the two cannot be surmounted (see his Annotation on p. 388 and the third par. of his Journal I). In his comment on his last Annotation (p. 390), in which he contrasted Marcia's ideals with Casimir's obsession with material success, he added finding him *sans principes* (unprincipled) and (despite his comments on Marcia's torpor) he was the character that he had first judged. In another comment, John explained that Marcia's passivity made the polarity⁷ between the two characters stand out: Marcia is

⁷ This an important word in the vocabulary of John's responses. At the beginning of the session, the very first point on which he commented did not address the first paragraph of the story (p. 380, par. 1), but one just below in which he found that *the physical priority [was] established from the start and that the narrator thus insisted on a physical and psychological polarity*. He mentioned liking the way Mallet achieved this effect. For instance, he found this polarity in the following phrases: *Lui, grand blond, les yeux bleus, le nez busqué...Moi, petite et mince avec des cheveux noirs frisés* (He is tall, blond and blue-eyed, with an aquiline nose...I'm short, thin and pale with black, curly hair). John was resorting here to the same type of stylistic interpretation that he had used for Croft's story *B...comme dans bucolique* when he pointed out that the narration contained a polarity which he further interpreted as a *processus of externalization vs. polarization* (see Chapter VII). But, for that session, he did not further develop comments on these passages and actually did it in his Journal II. Still, I believe that it is a point worth mentioning as it

acquiescent, resigned whereas Casimir is wily and opportunist. He thus concluded, in his Journal, that there was a *strange instrumentality between two very different beings*. Hence, he suggested that Marcia's torpor or indifference could play into the hands of Casimir.

Thus, John's responses mostly centered around the nature of the relationship between Marcia and Casimir and some aspects of their characterization. He also wrote and talked about passages which dealt with language-learning as well as about others which represented the immigrant experience.

Conclusion

In Tasha's responses, aspects of the immigrant experience were addressed in a careful manner. She briefly commented upon the passages dealing with language-learning and related them to her own experience and that of her family. Her main response to the immigrant experience - she mentioned that it was an important "theme" in the story - was about Marcia's and Casimir's conversation about the situation in Chile and Poland and the possibility of creating a relationship with a person from a different country and culture. Interestingly, Tasha was the only one among us who thought of commenting upon this aspect whereas John, for instance, preferred wondering why the difference of political opinions between Marcia and Casimir was not enough to dissuade them from having a relationship.

shows that he is consistent in his scientific interest in the language patterns of literary texts.

For John, Marcia was the character who had ideals while Casimir was the greedy opportunist. His view of the relationship was - although Tasha also commented on Casimir's cruelty - expressed from a stronger ethical standpoint than her. In his responses, (similarly to the ones I wrote), he perceived the reality of the immigrant experience from a more general stance (e.g., John reproached Canadians with ignoring the difficult life of refugees - a view that I concurred with during our one-to-one session.)

A point that captured both Tasha's and John's imaginations was the possible reasons for Casimir's scars and escape from prison. The various suppositions that the three of us made together about the character often went beyond what the text simply said. These hypotheses expressed assumptions which related to our cultural backgrounds (e.g., saying that Casimir was the son of a Nazi). In that regard, I believe that our conversation was comparable to the kind that Byatt and Sodré explained having when they said they had simply imagined things, possibilities about the characters in the books they had shared together (see Note 2 in Chapter VI).

Other assumptions that Tasha made me aware of were those concerning her reactions to Marcia's remarks about the Jews. She did not respond negatively to them, thus implying that stereotypes were part of life anyway and that it was not surprising for a character to speak like that. As for John, I understand his explanation for Marcia's remarks as a defence of her as a character who is morally superior to Casimir. Overall, (except for his Journal II in which he commented on

stylistic uses in a manner similar to what he had done in his Journal II for *B...comme dans bucolique*) John gave a more ethical flavor to his responses to *How are you?* than Tasha did, especially in the case of the relationship between Marcia and Casimir - which was also the case for my responses. Not having lived the experience ourselves made us adopt an ethical and general stance that could not be emotionally related to the situation as it had been for Tasha who had already been through a similar experience.

Chapter IX

Tasha's and John's responses to *La laide*

Introduction

Madeleine Gagnon-Mahoney's *La laide*, the story I had already shared with Patrick for the pilot study, was highly appreciated by Tasha and John. Tasha found it the best one out of the five I had given them to read; John, who related very personally to the story, found it was his third preferred choice (he placed before it *B...comme dans bucolique* and Chekov's *Les riens de la vie* to *La laide*). The point of mentioning their ranking - which was initially brought up by Tasha during the wrap-up meeting (December 11, 1995) - is that I find remarkable that the stories which involved them the most personally are not those they preferred. As Tasha explained for *How are you?*, expressing your emotions in your responses to the story, from the standpoint of a recent personal experience, is not always an easy thing to do.

Among the responses¹ to the three stories that I present in the thesis, Tasha's and John's are longer in the case of *La laide* than of the others². (For that reason, there is a discussion following each written response.) I also have their

¹ All page numbers in Tasha's and John's Annotations and Journals refer to Gallays, F. (ed.) 1993, *Anthologie de la nouvelle au Québec*.

² We also conducted three sessions for *La laide* (May 24, May 31 and June 12, 1995), instead of the two that we usually had for the other stories.

responses followed by those they gave after the viewing of Ettore Scola's film, *Passion of Love* (1982). (The film had earlier come to mind, in relation to the story, during the pilot study with Patrick.)

Both Tasha and John found *La laide* more difficult to respond to than the other stories because of the interior monologue and the way Philipa, the main character, mixed up her ideas. But as Tasha pointed out (December 11, 1995), it was one of the reasons that made her prefer the story over the others. What emerges from her responses and my discussions is a sense of her fascination with Philipa's use of language and images as well as with her emotional complexity as a character. Although she understands Philipa's plight, she feels, contrary to John, personally detached from it. When Tasha refers to her personal experience, it is thanks to her own use of intertextuality by references to Russian literature.

For John, responding to Gagnon-Mahoney's story allowed him to find it as being the closest to his personal experience among the five stories. In his responses, he strongly identifies with the character of Philipa but is cautious in expressing his sympathy towards her. Even though he admires her, he thinks that she ought to try creating better relationships with others. During the wrap-up session of December 11, 1995, he mentioned putting aside for *La laide* his comments of a stylistic nature, such as those he had given in his responses to *B...comme dans bucolique* and *How Are You?* Expressing a personal experience mattered the most in his

responses to *La laide*, something that - like Tasha in the case of *How are you?* - he felt was more difficult to do since it involved him emotionally.

As I did in the preceding chapters, I enrich my discussion of their responses by drawing on other comments which we made during the three sessions that each of us participated in regarding *La laide*.

Summary of *La laide* by Madeleine Gagnon-Mahoney (in Gallays, Ed., 1993)

La laide de Madeleine Gagnon-Mahoney consists entirely of an interior monologue told by a young woman, Philipa Cornemuse, who has serious problems in coming to terms with her own physical appearance and others. She lives like a recluse in a windowless room. She has a friend, the beautiful Hélène, who attracts all men. Philipa does not envy her: in fact, she despises her. Philipa says that she is playing at irony and is the only one to laugh at herself and the others. She does not want to talk to them since they have made her ugly. They should pay for this. The first time she realized her *crime*, she was ten years old. She heard people whisper: *It's a pity...she is kind but ugly as sin*. She thus wondered what she could have done to deserve this ugliness. Had she committed a secret, mysterious Sin? As a child, she blamed everything on God, the Great Accountant. She then knew that the rest of her life would be spent looking for a fault which would correspond to her atrocious ugliness.

Now, she is carrying on a five-year platonic relationship

with Pierre. She deeply resents his going out with her since he calls her only after feeling guilty about his too numerous affairs. Still, she goes to see films and art galleries with him. One night, they see *Belle de jour*³. She returns home with him, lets him sleep in her own bed while she lies on the floor wondering why *Belle de jour* prostitutes herself. She then has a dream about having her own house. It is made of glass, with a roof made of orchids. But children come, pull out the flowers, throw rocks, and destroy her house. Pierre wakes her up and orders her to prepare toast and coffee. She complies but thinks of poisoning his coffee. She imagines a *famous revenge*. But, then, she justifies seeing him by thinking that *he is handsome and has a penis*. After all, *he remains the only being who comes to relieve her of her boredom*.

Philipa remembers the ten years she lived at a boarding school run by nuns. There, she learned quickly that little girls were divided into two types: the good (that is, the rich, beautiful and intelligent) and the bad (the poor, ugly and stupid). Philipa thus became the ideal scapegoat and suffered all sorts of indignities. One day, she was thrown from the top of a staircase by *Mère Sainte-Mouton*. Her head bumped against a suitcase at the bottom of the stairs. Realizing that she was lying between two lines of suitcases, she started thinking that they looked like coffins and decided

³ *Belle de jour* (1967) is a film by Luis Bunuel in which Séverine, a young married woman, makes the decision of prostituting herself on the sly, during daytime, while her doctor husband is away at work.

to hide in one of them. It smelt like death and felt like the cemetery in it. Philipa tells Pierre about the suitcases and what they meant for her but he remains indifferent. Enraged, Philipa wonders why she has such an ass as a friend.

Her father and mother visit Philipa. Thinking that his daughter will never get married, her father announces to her that he has named her in his will. Philipa knows too well that an ugly woman cannot get married. Yet, she does not give a damn about her father's fortune. She flippantly thinks of squandering it by burning or making soup with his dollar bills. While her father was talking, Philipa was infuriated by her mother, the beautiful Hortense, the charmer. As to her father's wish of having a window put in her room, Philipa refuses his offer and derides it by saying that her room is not a car which could risk hitting someone.

On their way to a film, Philipa and Pierre meet the beautiful H el ene, Philipa's friend. Philipa closely observes her and wonders about the difference between herself and H el ene: just a few centimeters between their noses and waistlines? True, their shapes and curves differ from one another. But, contrary to the Greeks, Philipa believes that beauty is not in geometry or proportions. Ancient Greece, Helen of Troy, Cleopatra's nose, all of these references infuriate Philipa. After the film, Pierre flirts with H el ene at the caf e. Philipa wonders why H el ene does not share her sense of revolt. She notices that H el ene, casting furtive glances at her, wants to confide something in her. She can go

open up her little broken heart somewhere else, thinks Philipa.

About the film they saw, *Marat-Sade*, Philipa asserts that she understands sadists, revolutions. Pierre tries to convince her to join their revolution for the liberation of Québec. He confides to her all the details of their secret organization. Philipa tells him that she questions all of this since she doubts anyone's sincere *engagement* with her. *Would they actually be ready to make her revolution if she made theirs?* For Philipa, it is doubtful since she feels that she has been first *colonisée* in her mother's belly and then *capitalisée* by her father. Bored by Philipa's arguments, Pierre decides to go to sleep in her bed. Philipa lies down beside him and has another dream: first, she is on a little boat on the sea; then she finds herself on the top of a train winding through towns and villages. Young revolutionaries throw a flag at her which she proudly hoists up to the clouds. They do not like her heroic gesture and launch an attack, snatch the flag from her and destroy her train. On waking up, Pierre finds Philipa in what he calls *his* bed. He orders her again to prepare toast and coffee for him. Philipa complies once more, thinks again of poisoning his coffee, and becomes so distracted over this thought that she ends up wondering whether she actually did it.

One week later, Pierre comes back and tells Philipa that Hélène took her own life because of an unhappy love affair. Philipa cannot understand why a beautiful woman would commit suicide over such a trifle. She thinks of Hélène who will end

up in a coffin, a big suitcase, which will be soon worm-eaten. Poor beautiful Helen of Troy! But, no, Philipa does not give a damn about her. Pierre announces to her that he will not see her for some time since he is now going out with another woman. Who does he think he is? Philipa asks herself. Will she ever need him? As far as she is concerned, he can die from this new flame.

Tasha's responses to *La laide*

Annotations

p. 214: *Je ne suis pas sûre que la narratrice dise la vérité dans la phrase: "J'ai une amie qui attire tous les hommes à elle. Je n'envie pas son sort". Je pense qu'au contraire elle a besoin de quelqu'un qui puisse l'aimer et la caresser. Mais quand une personne est rejetée par tout le monde, elle finit par se révolter, par s'imaginer qu'elle n'a pas besoin d'une personne, par haïr tout ce qui est beau autour d'elle.*

p. 214: *Qu'est-ce que "l'an quarante" signifie ici?*

p. 214: *La discussion intérieure à propos de la beauté fait réfléchir. En fait, qu'est-ce une beauté réelle? Quelle beauté est la plus importante: la beauté physique ou la beauté spirituelle, car il est très rare d'observer les deux en même temps.*

fin de la p. 214: La narratrice réalise qu'elle est laide pour la première fois quand elle a 10 ans. Si je

p. 214: *I am not sure that the narrator tells the truth in the sentence: "I have a friend who is a magnet for all men. I do not envy her at all." On the contrary, I believe that she needs someone who can love and caress her. But when a person is rejected by everybody, she will end up revolting, imagining that she does not need anyone, hating everything that is beautiful around her.*

p. 214: *What does "l'an quarante" mean here?*

p. 214: *The interior discussion of beauty leads to reflection. Indeed, what is a real beauty? What kind of beauty is the most important: physical or spiritual beauty for it is very rare to observe the two at the same time.*

end of p. 214: The narrator [Philipa] realizes for the first time that she is ugly when she is 10 years old. If

la comprends correctement, elle se sent libre de commettre une faute terrible parce qu'elle est déjà punie d'avance par la laideur.

p. 216, 1e par.: L'introduction de Pierre dans la narration. La narratrice a donc quelqu'un qui partage sa vie solitaire mais Pierre peut-il la comprendre?

p. 216, 2e par.: Le rêve de la narratrice se finit toujours par un désastre (comparer avec le rêve à la page 223). La continuation du rêve: "une main sur le bras, sur l'épaule" - la narratrice a besoin d'être touchée, d'être aimée. Mais la réalité est bien triste: Pierre la traite comme un objet, comme une servante.

p. 217: Comment Philipa peut-elle vivre avec Pierre si elle le déteste à tel point qu'elle veut empoisonner son café?

p. 217, 2e par.: Philipa me fait pitié quand elle décrit sa vie avec Pierre. La narratrice utilise les images surréalistes: "il remplit ma chambre. Quand il s'étire, ses bras dépassent les murs et touchent les deux horizons... il chatouille les horizons avec ses longs doigts et l'univers entier s'éclate toujours de rire".

p. 218: Le souvenir de la vie chez les soeurs. Je suis entièrement d'accord avec l'idée qu'il est "plus facile de s'attaquer aux plus faibles, à celles qui ne sauraient se défendre, aux vaincues, aux pauvres, laides ou stupides".

I understand her rightly, she feels free to commit a terrible fault since she has already been punished in advance by her ugliness.

p. 216, par. 1: Pierre's introduction in the narration. The narrator thus has someone who shares her solitary life but can Pierre understand her?

p. 216, par. 2: The narrator's dream always ends up with a disaster (compare it with the dream on p. 223). The dream is still continuing: "a hand on my arm, my shoulder" - the narrator needs to be touched, to be loved. But reality is very sad: Pierre treats her as an object, a servant.

p. 217: How can Philipa live with Pierre if she hates him to the extent that she wants to poison his coffee?

p. 217: par. 2: I feel sorry for Philipa when she describes her life with Pierre. The narrator uses surrealist images: "he fills up my room. When he stretches out, his arms go above the walls and touch the two horizons...he tickles horizons with his long fingers and the whole universe bursts out laughing."

p. 218: The memory of her life with the nuns. I totally concur with her view that it is easier to "attack the weakest, those who cannot defend themselves, the defeated, the poor, the ugly or stupid."

p. 219: La continuation de la description de la vie de la narratrice avec Pierre. Maintenant je me demande pourquoi Pierre a-t-il besoin de Philpa? On sait qu'il ne l'aime pas, qu'il l'utilise comme un objet, un vêtement, une machine. Pourquoi demande-t-il à elle des conseils à propos de l'amour?

p. 220: Philpa déteste ses parents et je comprends son sentiment. Tout ce qu'ils font, c'est de lui rappeler sa laideur et, par conséquent, de la faire sentir plus misérable encore.

p. 221: La narratrice fait la comparaison avec la belle Hélène. En fait, elle est envieuse d'elle et c'est pourquoi elle la déteste.

p. 221, 2e par.: De quelle révolution parle-t-elle quand elle dit "ma révolution"? L'image qui persiste, c'est la valise avec le couvercle (aussi à la page 218, 219, 221, 224 - 2 fois).

p. 223, 2e par.: Encore une description du rêve qui finit par un désastre. Toujours le besoin d'aimer, de caresser quelqu'un. Les mêmes mots de la part de Pierre: "Fais-moi des toasts et du café".

p. 224, 1e par.: La même idée d'empoisonner le café de Pierre mais cette fois on sent que l'envie est plus forte: la narratrice ne se souvient plus si elle a mis du poison.

p. 219: Philpa's description of [her relationship] with Pierre continues. I am now wondering why Pierre needs Philpa? We know that he does not love her, that he uses her as an object, a garment, a machine. Why does he ask her advice on matters of love?

p. 220: Philpa hates her parents and I understand her feelings. All they do is to remind her of her ugliness and, consequently, make her feel even more miserable.

p. 221: The narrator draws a comparison with beautiful Hélène. In fact, she is jealous of her and that is why she hates her.

p. 221, par. 2: Of what revolution is she talking about when she mentions "my revolution"? The image which persists is that of the suitcase with the lid (also on pp. 218, 219, 221, 224 - twice).

p. 223, par. 2: Once more, the description of a dream which ends up with a disaster. There is always the need to love, to caress someone. The same words on Pierre's part: "Prepare me some coffee and toast."

p. 224, par. 1: Again, the idea of poisoning Pierre's coffee but this time we can sense that the desire of doing it is stronger: the narrator cannot remember whether she put poison in the coffee.

p. 224, 2e par.: Une des
vengeances de Philipa: la
belle Hélène s'est suicidée
et ne sera plus belle.

p. 224, par. 2: One of
Philipa's revenges: beauti-
ful Hélène committed suicide
and will not be beautiful
anymore.

Discussion of Tasha's Annotations

Right from the start in her Annotations, Tasha perceives ambivalence in the main character and questions Philipa's assertion as to her pretending not to envy her friend's beauty (p. 214). In fact, Tasha sees that Philipa does need someone to love her (ibid.). In her Annotation, Tasha suggests a possibility for Philipa to escape from her sense of isolation and thus expresses an opinion of an ethical nature concerning the character. But Tasha understands her sense of revolt because of the rejection from which the character suffers (ibid.). Her reflection regarding Philipa's remarks about beauty expresses a stereotype (*...physical or spiritual beauty for it is very rare to observe the two at the same time*), which she came to perceive as such during one of the sessions, and accompanied with an intertextual reference to a folktale she had read in her native Russian which told the story of two sisters, one beautiful but stupid, the other, ugly but intelligent (May 31, 1995). Interestingly, her reference opposes, in an ethical way, Philipa's view of her life at the convent where she experienced that the good girls were the rich, beautiful and intelligent, and the bad girls were the poor, ugly and stupid. Yet, in her annotation (p. 218), she agreed with Philipa's point as to the easiness for nuns to attack the weakest, the poorest and the ugliest schoolgirls.

Her annotation on the sense of freedom that Philipa feels in committing a terrible fault, as a way of making up for the sin of her ugliness, establishes a motivation for the character (p. 214). Through that remark, Tasha suggests a wish to create an order, one which can be compared to the one of finding a plot in a story: for instance, she understands that the envious Philipa has found revenge through H el ene's suicide. In that way, she will never be beautiful again (p. 224).

In her annotations (p. 217; p. 219) about the relationship between Pierre and Philipa, Tasha expresses her wonder at their keeping it alive when they seem so much to despise one another. Yet, during one of our sessions (May 31, 1995), she pointed out that something positive could be built in the relationship if only Philipa seriously asked herself the question as to Pierre's desire to see her so regularly. These points, also of an ethical nature, suggest to me that Tasha's response is somewhat detached from the character. Yet, she does not hesitate to engage emotionally with her by concurring with some of her remarks: first, she agreed with Philipa's idea of finding it easier to attack the weak, the ugly and the stupid, and was truly horrified by the life she knew at the convent (p. 218); second, Tasha understands Philipa's hatred of her own parents since they only remind her of her own ugliness (p. 220).

Despite her initial comment regarding the difficulty of the story during the first session (May 24, 1995), Tasha could easily establish patterns of repetition in the text. She pointed out the one of the suitcase image (p. 221). As well,

she remarked that the two dreams ended with a disaster and with Pierre treating her as a servant by ordering her to prepare coffee for him (p. 216; p. 223). In the second one, she perceived the image of the boat on the sea as expressing something fragile which could be [*brisé*] *en miettes* (smashed to pieces) (May 24, 1995) but, in some way, could also be free since it had the freedom to go anywhere. In short, she emphasized the fragility of Philipa's dreams but, at the same time, interpreted a possibility for happiness in the image.

Let us now turn to Tasha's response in her Journal I:

Journal I

Dans mon premier journal, j'ai décidé de parler de ce qui m'a intéressé le plus dans la nouvelle. C'est le personnage principal, Philipa Cornemuse qui est la narratrice. Ce qui m'a paru le plus intéressant et le plus touchant dans son caractère, c'est le fait qu'elle vit dans les "deux mondes". Le premier est le monde intérieur. Il est comme une chambre sans fenêtres. Personne ne peut y pénétrer et Philipa peut y être elle-même, elle n'a pas peur d'être entendue par personne et, par conséquent, peut parler de toutes ses douleurs. Ce monde intérieur est riche de souvenirs pénibles du couvent et des images désagréables des valises avec des couvercles. Mais, en même temps, c'est là que le travail intellectuel de Philipa se produit, c'est là qu'elle "rumine" ses vengeances contre Pierre, Hélène, le monde entier.

In my first journal, I decided to talk about what interested me the most in that story. It is the main character, Philipa Cornemuse who is the narrator. What has struck me as the most interesting and touching in her character is the fact that she lives in two worlds. The first is the interior world. It is like a room without windows. No one can enter it and Philipa can be there herself, she is not afraid of being heard by anyone and, consequently, can express all of her woes. This interior world is rich with painful memories from the convent and unpleasant images of suitcases with lids. But at the same time, and it is at that point that Philipa's intellectual work is occurring, it is at that moment that she is "ruminating" on ways to avenge herself against Pierre, Hélène and the entire world.

Le deuxième monde extérieur est le monde extérieur qui est complètement séparé du premier. Ce monde extérieur comporte un portrait de Philpa telle que la voient les autres. Pour Pierre, par exemple, elle ne représente qu'une personne obéissante, prête à tout faire pour lui: à prêter l'argent, à copier ses notes des cours, à faire des toasts et du café, à écouter ses histoires à propos de ses problèmes, à lui céder son lit... Pierre comprend-il que Philpa rêve d'avoir des relations sexuelles? Pas vraiment. Mais, peut-être, il sent qu'elle a besoin de lui.

Je dirais pour moi que c'était beaucoup plus intéressant de lire et d'essayer de comprendre ce qui se passait dans le monde intérieur de Philpa. Dans la vie réelle il est impossible de lire des pensées des gens qui nous entourent, d'entrer dans leur monde intérieur. "La Laide" m'a rappelé les romans de Dostoïevski, surtout le roman "Crime et Châtiment" dans lequel le personnage principal Raskolnikov est aussi tourmenté par les idées de son "monde intérieur" mais à la différence de Philpa, il n'a personne à qui il puisse dire un mot, qui puisse le distraire et, en conséquence, il accomplit un acte qui est un produit de son monde intérieur (il tue une vieille femme pour vérifier sa théorie que les gens sont divisés en 2 groupes: ceux qui ont le droit de tuer parce qu'ils sont forts et ceux qui sont les faibles, les esclaves).

The second exterior world is the exterior one which is totally separate from the first one. This exterior world contains a portrait of Philpa as she is seen by others. For Pierre, for instance, she only represents an obedient person, ready to do anything for him: to lend him money, to copy down his class' notes, to prepare coffee and toast for him, to let him sleep in her bed... Does Pierre understand that Philpa dreams of having a sexual relationship? Not really. But perhaps he feels that she needs him.

I would say that it was more interesting for me to read and try to understand what was taking place in Philpa's interior world. In real life, it is impossible to read the minds of people around us, to enter their interior worlds. "La laide" reminded me of Dostoevsky's novels, especially "Crime and Punishment" in which the main character, Raskolnikov, is also tormented with the demons from his "interior world" but, contrary to Philpa, he has no one to talk to, no one who can entertain him. Consequently, he commits an act which is the product of his interior world (he kills an old woman in order to verify his theory that people are divided into two groups: those who have the right to kill because they are strong and those who are weak, the slaves.)

Je crois que le plus grand malheur pour un être humain est de vivre seul, d'être envahi par ses pensées et de n'avoir personne qui puisse l'écouter. Et même si Philipa dit qu'elle ne veut personne dans sa vie qu'elle veut "garder et remplir jusqu'au couvercle à sa façon", on comprend que cette fille malheureuse meurt d'avoir quelqu'un qui puisse la comprendre, la soulager, l'aider à faire sa propre révolution (d'oublier sa laideur?)

I think that the greatest misfortune for a human being consists of living alone, to be overcome with one's own thoughts and of having nobody who can listen to you. And even though Philipa says that she does not want anyone in her life which she wants to keep "in order to fill it to the lid the way she wants to," we can see that this unhappy girl dies to have someone who can understand her, comfort her, help her make her own revolution ([that is,] forget her own ugliness?)

Discussion of Tasha's Journal I

In her Journal I, Tasha writes that she is struck by Philipa's life in two worlds, the interior and the exterior. By comparing the former to a windowless room, she reuses an important textual metaphor and thus offers a convincing interpretation of Philipa's claustrophobic universe³. As to the latter world, she saw that it [was] completely separate from the first one and that it [contained] a portrait of [Philipa] as she is seen by others. Her perception of the narrator may sound similar to the one she had of the narrator in Croft's story⁴ in that Tasha would appear to fail to see

³ At the same time, Tasha demonstrates, in her third language, the integration of language learning and literature interpretation from her own viewpoint as a reader.

⁴ See my comments upon her Journal II in Chapter VII in which I discuss how Tasha could not perceive the implied transition between the voice of the adult narrator (formerly the little girl) who was telling the story of a childhood incident and the child's voice she pretended to have recovered

that, as the narrator's voice is always in the first person, it is actually a portrait that Philipa - and not Pierre or others from the exterior world - makes of herself through her interior monologue. But during one of the sessions, she came to perceive the unreliable narrator who was behind Philipa's characterization, when she pointed out that readers could not really know in a certain way what Philipa's relationship with Pierre truly was since we saw it only through her eyes (May 31, 1995).

As for Tasha's explanation of her preference for responding to Philipa's interior world over the exterior one, she refers to the interest of entering a person's thoughts, something we never have the chance of doing in real life. Tasha thus expresses one of the most commonly cited reasons by readers for the love of fiction, that is, going beyond borders which are not usually crossed in their daily lives. For her, reading through Philipa's interior monologue, feeling the bitterness which coloured it, gave her the experience of an unknown world. Even though as a reader she comes to know, through Philipa's personal thoughts, the meanders of a unique imagination, Tasha feels that the situation depicted in the story - the isolation, the difficulty of communicating ideas to others - could happen to many other persons (March 24, 1995). Once more, she thus attributes an ethical quality to the story.

in the telling of that story.

Tasha's personal connection between Philipa and the character of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is an interesting example of an intertextual link with a reading experience in her mother tongue⁵. But it is how Tasha further explains the relationship of Raskolnikov to Philipa's character which is revealing in another manner. In *Crime and Punishment*, we see the main character commit a murder because, according to Tasha, he has no one who can listen to him, understand him. As for Philipa, she has Pierre's presence and only thinks of committing something wrong (that is, poisoning his coffee) but, as Tasha explained during one of the sessions (May 31, 1995), one never sees the end of her thoughts. Tasha then continued by saying that Philipa has nearly reached *les limites de ses pensées, ses actions* (*the limits of her thoughts, her actions*) (*ibid.*), but that we do not know whether she really wants to murder Pierre or not. From my reading of the transcriptions and the field notes I wrote about this session, I could infer from them (although we never used these terms) that Tasha appears to feel uncomfortable with these unfinished thoughts in the sense that they lead to an unsatisfying end for a story which would thus contain an "incomplete plot." But I prefer to interpret her comments as a way of alluding to Philipa's general state of indecision,

⁵ I could further textually relate it to the world of the convent depicted by Philipa where she thinks there is a strict division between the intelligent and the beautiful, and the stupid and the ugly, and that of Raskolnikov where he feels the strong have the right to kill the weak.

her hesitations. Tasha rather expresses her own unease with Philipa's state of mind. Later, during the session, when I pointed out that Philipa resisted, in her own manner, and thus acquired some freedom by the violence of her language, Tasha said that the question was how Philipa saw her own life: *Est-ce que c'est la mort, est-ce qu'elle est finie déjà, ou est-ce qu'elle veut faire quelque chose? (Is it death, is it already finished, or does she want to do something?)* Tasha's first question (how Philipa sees her life) is revealing in that, by asking it, she suggests an underlying ethical dilemma for the story. She thus goes beyond the simple need of having a "completed plot".

Finally, there is also an ethical quality in Tasha's remark regarding solitude as being *the greatest misfortune for a human being*. Without referring explicitly to the metaphor of the suitcase for her life, Tasha perceives the importance for Philipa *to fill it to the lid the way she wants to*. Despite her desire for solitude, she can also imagine Philipa as a person having a relationship with someone who would make her forget her physical appearance. This idea of creating a relationship is further developed in Tasha's conclusion to Journal II (and as we will see in my discussion of John's responses). But first let me present and then discuss her Journal II:

Journal II

Cette fois je voudrais parler de l'image principale dans la nouvelle "La Laide". C'est la valise avec le

This time I would like to talk about the main image in the story "La laide." It is that of the suitcase with

couvercle. Cette image domine à travers la nouvelle et représente pour moi une façon de vie de Philipa. La valise avec le couvercle rapporte très bien une idée de la vie solitaire, du monde intérieur où personne ne peut pénétrer. Je pense que cette image peut bien avoir des connotations négatives et des connotations positives. D'une part, une valise ressemble à un cercueil et c'est donc une connotation négative menant à la mort (voir pp. 218-219, 224). Et Philipa mentionne dans son monologue intérieur que "fermer le couvercle" veut dire "mourir". De l'autre part, un isolement contribue à la formation de ses propres idées, lui permet de réfléchir. Mais cet isolement est dangereux car Philipa devient prisonnière de ses propres pensées, elle est obsédée par l'idée de la Faute mystérieuse qui va correspondre à l'atrocité de sa laideur. Elle n'essaie même pas de sortir de cette situation, par exemple, dans la scène avec Hélène au cinéma, même quand elle sent que son amie veut lui parler, elle repousse cette possibilité et se ferme dans sa valise de vie. Est-ce que Philipa veut changer sa façon de vie? Je pense que si elle trouve quelqu'un que puisse partager ses douleurs, sa peur, bref la comprendre, elle fera "sa propre révolution". Mais sans ami, sans aucun appui elle sera incapable de changer sa façon de vie.

the lid. This image is prevalent throughout the story and represents for me Philipa's way of life. The suitcase with the lid expresses the idea of solitary life very well, of an interior world that no one can enter. I think that this image can have either positive or negative connotations. On the one hand, a suitcase looks like a coffin and it is thus a negative connotation leading to death (see pp. 218-219, 224). And Philipa mentions in her interior monologue that "shutting the suitcase" means "dying." On the other hand, isolation contributes to the shaping of her own ideas, allows her to reflect. But this isolation is dangerous since Philipa becomes a prisoner of her own ideas; she is obsessed with the idea of the Mysterious Sin which will be tantamount to her atrocious ugliness. She does not even try to get out of that situation; for instance, in the scene with Hélène at the cinema, even when she feels that her friend wants to talk to her, she rejects this possibility and shuts herself inside the suitcase of her life. Does Philipa want to change her [own] way of life? I think that if she finds someone who can share her pains and fears, in short, understand her, she will make "her own revolution." But without friends, without any support, she will be unable to change her life.

Discussion of Tasha's Journal II

In her Journal II, the image of the suitcase mostly retains Tasha's attention and it becomes for her a central metaphor which helps her perceive Philipa's interior world. So keen was Tasha on discussing the image of the suitcase again that she came up with another intertextual link with a reading she had done in her native Russian during the session of June 12. She evoked her memory of Chekhov's strange story, *L'homme à l'étui*, in which a man mostly lives in a case which is placed in a room. He refuses to go out and see anybody and fears everything that could bring a change to his life. But in *La laide*, Tasha does not find only negative connotations implied by the metaphor of the suitcase (death, isolation); she also sees a positive one which is, in fact, not suggested by the negative tone of Philipa's reflections. By maintaining that isolation (solitude would probably be a more appropriate word) can be a fruitful thing for Philipa in the building of her own ideas, Tasha proves her ability to read between the lines of a complex interior monologue. Her style is also highly evocative as she reuses the metaphor of the suitcase to describe Philipa's attitude towards Hélène⁶: *elle repousse cette possibilité et se ferme dans sa valise de vie (she rejects this possibility and shuts herself inside the suitcase of her life)*. During the session, as she had done for one of her Annotations (p. 224, par. 2), she insisted again on the

⁶ Once more, Tasha demonstrates, through the use of a metaphor in her third language, the integration of language learning and literature interpretation.

idea that Philipa found revenge in the death of Hélène in that she could finally see a beauty having problems too. As we will see in John's response, this point provoked him into an interesting counterargument in that he found the passage aberrant.

In her conclusion, Tasha ends on a positive note by suggesting the possibility for Philipa to save her own life, to make her own revolution, if only she would attempt to have a relationship. On that point, her response is similar to Patrick's (see Chapter III) as well as to John's. But her previous insistence on the *Mysterious Fault* and what she sees as a real desire for revenge on the part of Philipa, makes her perceive the difficulty of Philipa's problems in a different (and maybe more cynical way) than John's.

John's responses to *La laide*

Annotations

par. 1, p. 214

Je ressens de la sympathie à l'égard du personnage, et j'aime bien la façon dont elle décrit ses conflits internes: «Je ne veux pas leur parler. Ils m'ont fait laide, qu'ils payent. Je m'en fiche»...Puis je me dégoûte parce que si je m'en fichais, je ne serais pas enfermée ici».

p. 215

lorsqu'elle s'interroge sur le "péché" qu'elle avait dû commis, je pense au fait que les enfants se sentent coupables de tout. Ses réminiscences me rappellent aussi le fait que comme enfant, j'assumais qu'il y avait une

par. 1., p. 214

I feel sympathy towards the character, and I like the way she describes her internal conflicts: "I don't want to talk to them. They have made me ugly, let them pay for it. I don't give a damn...Then, I am disgusted with myself because if I really didn't give a damn, I wouldn't be locked up here."

p. 215

when she wonders about the sin that she must have committed, I think of the fact that children feel guilty about everything. Her memories remind me of the fact that, as a child, I assumed that there was a kind

espèce de justice qui opérait dans le monde. Et maintenant, comme elle, je pense, je suis convaincu que c'est le contraire. Voilà au fond peut-être ma sympathie envers elle.

p. 215-216

Ce qui me frappe le plus chez la narratrice, c'est sa capacité d'intellectualiser sa situation... «Il n'y eut pas pour moi d'âge d'or à reconstituer. Le paradis, je le perdis d'avance», en bas de p. 215

par. 1, p. 216

«A ma vue même, les gens refont facilement leur Ego» et le fait que je me trouve persuadé moi même par ces intellectualisations. Je pense que les gens qui sont marginalisés sur le plan social sont souvent portés à ce genre d'introspection. Cela me rappelle mes propres sentiments à la suite de l'accident. Blessé et amer, je recourais à des intellectualisations semblables, et ressentais des conflits internes également: d'une part un mépris pour la race humaine mais un besoin élémental de contact.

p. 216-217

Sa relation avec Pierre me rappelle un peu celle entre Casimir et Marcia dans "How Are You?" en ce qu'on est frappé par l'instrumentalité des deux côtés. Elle semble se voir comme supérieure à Pierre sur le plan moral, et encore une fois je me trouve en accord avec elle: il est vain mais en plus, il l'exploite. Mais elle supporte tout ça; tel est son besoin du contact. Et comme ailleurs, elle se rend compte

of justice which could work in the world. And now, like her, I think I am convinced of the opposite. That is perhaps my sympathy for her fundamentally.

p. 215-216

What strikes me the most in the narrator is her capacity to intellectualize about her situation... "There were no golden days for me to reconstruct. Paradise was lost for me in advance," at the bottom of p. 215

par. 1, p. 216

"On just seeing me, people easily rebuild their ego," and the fact that I find myself convinced of those intellectualizations. I think that people who are socially marginalized are often prone to that kind of introspection. This reminds me of my own feelings following the accident. Wounded and bitter, I resorted to similar intellectualizations, and also felt internal conflicts: on the one hand, I had contempt for the human race but still felt a basic need for contact.

p. 216-217

Her relationship with Pierre reminds me of the one between Casimir and Marcia in "How Are You?" in that one is struck by the "instrumentality" on the two sides. She seems to think of herself as superior to Pierre from a moral viewpoint, and, once more, I agree with her: he is vain and, furthermore, he exploits her. But she puts up with all of this - such is her basic need for contact. And like for every-

de cette anomalie qu'est sa vie: «C'est quand même le seul être qui vienne me désennuyer» «Mais il est beau».

par. 1, p. 218-19

J'ai lu ce paragraphe et je me suis dit au sujet de l'auteure: voilà une autre enfant de la Révolution tranquille, qui expose l'hypocrisie de l'Église. Est-ce que c'est vrai? Je suis un peu confus quant à ses observations sur l'instinct. Parce qu'à mon sens la cruauté des religieuses s'expliquerait justement par un instinct bas.

par. 2 p. 221

Encore une fois elle fait montre d'une tendance très précise à intellectualiser sa douleur psychique et sa situation, lorsqu'elle [se met à] déconstruire ce qu'est la beauté.

p. 222-23

Les passages ironiques sur l'engagement politique m'ont fait réfléchir. J'ai encore un fort sentiment d'accord avec elle. Est-ce qu'elle dit -- et si oui, je suis d'accord -- que ça prend une certaine vanité (comme celle de Pierre et des religieuses) de vanter telle religion, tel grand mouvement. Est-ce que ça prend certaines illusions sur soi-même sur sa nature humaine? Car si l'on affectionne tellement le nez ou les seins de quelqu'un, et en fait la mesure de leur valeur, comment est-ce qu'on peut refaire notre société? C'est comme si le sort de la narratrice lui avait permis de mieux approfondir les li-

thing else, she realizes the kind of anomaly her life has been: "He is still the only being who comes to pull me out of my boredom." "But he is handsome."

par.1, p. 218-219

I read this paragraph and said to myself about the author: here is another child from the Quiet Revolution, who exposes the Church's hypocrisy. Is it true? I feel confused about her observations on instinct. Because, in my opinion, the nuns' cruelty would easily be explained by a low instinct.

par.2 p. 221

Once more she shows a very precise tendency to intellectualize her psychic pain and her situation, when she [starts] deconstructing what beauty is.

p. 222-223

The ironical passages on political engagement have made me think. I still have a strong sense of agreement with her. Is she saying - and, if she is, I agree with her - that it takes a certain vanity (as Pierre's and the nuns') to boast about a religion or movement. Do you need to have delusions about yourself, about one's own human nature? Because if one loves so much someone's nose or breasts, and measures him/her up according to that worth, how can one rebuild our society? It is as if the narrator's fate had allowed her to reflect more deeply on the moral boundaries of our species. I find in that passage a personal parallel.

mites (morales) de notre espèce. Je trouve là-dedans un parallèle personnel. Ayant été récemment la victime d'une injustice considérable je me trouve moins "engagé" que jamais pour l'avenir de notre espèce. Dans le fonds je partage son amertume.

p. 224

Le dernier paragraphe me frappe car je ne l'aurais pas pensée capables de pensées si macabres. Et pour une raison quelconque, je suis étonné de sa réaction au suicide d'Hélène car celle-ci me semblait assez innocente d'après la description que donnait la narratrice. Est-ce que sa négativité a pris son propre momentum, est devenu aveugle? Et maintenant je m'inquiète d'avoir eu un si fort sentiment d'accord avec elle. Cette nouvelle est la plus provoquante, au plan personnel, que j'ai lue jusqu'à maintenant dans notre groupe, et les sentiments qu'elle suscite en moi vont au coeur des dilemmes personnels auxquels je fais face actuellement. C'est donc avec un certain effroi que j'entreprends mon journal...

Having been lately the victim of a considerable injustice, I find myself less "engaged" in the future of our species. Fundamentally, I share her bitterness.

p. 224

The last paragraph strikes me because I would not have thought her capable of entertaining such macabre thoughts. And for some reason, I am surprised at her reaction towards Hélène's suicide since [Helen] seemed rather innocent according to the narrator's [Philipa's] description. Has her negativity taken its own momentum, become blind? And now I am worrying about having felt such agreement with her. This story is the most provocative, from a personal viewpoint, that I have read up to now in our group, and the feelings that it evokes in me speak to dilemmas that I am now facing. It is thus with some fear that I am starting my journal...

Discussion of John's Annotations

Like Tasha, John mentioned finding somewhat difficult the analysis of the story in terms of discrete units (May 24, 1995). Yet, this apparent difficulty does not prevent him from knowing how to carefully select textual passages corresponding to the right expression of his thoughts. In John's Annotations, there is generally a strong sense of empathy on

his part towards the character of Philipa. Indeed, in his very first Annotation (par. 1, p. 214), he unequivocally asserts it with her way of describing her inner turmoil. As to his interpretation of the way Philipa questions herself regarding the meaning of *péché* (or sin), he remembers the assumption that he once had, as a child, regarding the idea that a kind of justice operates in the world. (In *B... comme dans bucolique* John had already pointed out the moral superiority of the schoolgirls in his opposition to the authoritarian figure of the nun teacher). His concurring with Philipa's view that justice does not actually exist is a strong (and pessimistic) point that he seems somewhat reluctant to endorse totally: *That is perhaps my sympathy for her, fundamentally* (p. 215). Yet, his sense of identification with her is convincing as he rationalizes that Philipa's thoughts are powerful intellectualizations (par. 1, p. 216; par. 2, p. 221) about her situation which, in the latter Annotation, reminds him of the sense of marginalization and contradictory feelings he went through after a bicycle accident he had in 1994. His intertextual link (p. 216-217), between the two characters of Marcia and Casimir in *How are you?* and those of Philipa and Pierre in *La laide*, refers to the *instrumentality* between characters: it leads John to remark that Philipa seems to find herself superior to Pierre from a moral viewpoint and, in an ethical way, he agrees with her by pointing out that Pierre is indeed vain and manipulative. John's remark on the author being a *child of the Quiet Revolution* denouncing the Catholic church's hypocrisy is in the same vein as the

responses he had given to the composition (or confession) of the little girl in *B...comme dans bucolique*. During the session (May 24, 1995), I pointed out that it was an omnipresent theme in Québec literature but, once more, tried to nuance the negative side of the passage about Philipa's life in the convent by referring to my not so negative experience of Catholicism as a child and adolescent⁷.

John's last Annotation (p. 222-223) on what he calls the *ironical passages* on political engagement are the most telling as to the strong ethical stance he can adopt with regard to the story. By assenting to Philipa's ironic view of political salvation, John creates an ethical dilemma out of the passage and finds in it a personal resonance with the sense of

⁷ Following an explanation that I had given Tasha regarding the life of nuns and the three vows that they had to take when they entered upon religious life (poverty, chastity and obedience), I recommended to her and John the reading of Michel Tremblay's *Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Ange*s (1982/1986) for a portrayal of both sympathetic and unsympathetic nuns. I had previously given to them an excerpt of the novel in which the mother of a schoolgirl was giving an eloquent earful to Mother Superior because I felt that it was a good way of answering back Mère Marie-Rose's arrogant behaviour towards the little girl in *B...comme dans bucolique*. (So much was I taken by the unfair treatment that the little girl had at the hands of Mère Marie-Rose in the story that I felt the need to do something about it...) Among the many pleasures of conducting the study were exchanges we often had about other books or films which were not part of our "agenda." That was the point of encouraging us to use intertextuality: to make us see the story we were responding to in a new light from the angle of another story.

injustice and bitterness he experienced following his accident. During the session (ibid.), John never expanded on his personal experience and he seemed to prefer to give an interpretation of Philipa's motives regarding her lack of engagement. In an exchange with Tasha, he explained that Philipa, because of the rejection she suffers from, aims at an internal kind of revolution, not one which attempts to change the system but one which would allow to get a better treatment on the part of others.

His last Annotation (p. 224) is very revealing again of John's strong sense of identification with Philipa in that he expresses a view as if he felt let down by her remarks on H el ene's suicide: why would Philipa scoff at her death since H el ene is such an innocent person? Interestingly, John differs from Tasha who invokes envy as a primary feeling underlying Philipa's relationship with H el ene. During the session (ibid.), he explained that, before that scene, he felt that Philipa had a certain moral code. He was surprised by her negative thoughts since she had such a convincing ability for intellectualizing her own rage. So why would she not be able to understand that H el ene's suicide meant that she could suffer as much as herself? Yet, despite this slight disagreement with Philipa's character, we will see that John generally shows an ethically strong endorsement of her in his other responses. Let us now consider this aspect and others in his Journal II:

Journal I

En relisant cette nouvelle je me trouve encore incapable de porter un jugement sur le personnage de Philippa. Elle parvient vraiment à justifier et à analyser son amertume et son mépris envers ceux autour d'elle. Cependant, avec chaque lecture je deviens plus conscient de la punition qu'elle inflige à elle-même, punition qui reflète justement ses intellectualisations et son besoin de situer ses expériences dans une chaîne de cause-effet. Cette notion s'exprime d'abord durant son enfance: ex: «Je passerai le reste de ma vie à chercher une faute qui corresponde à l'atrocité de ma laideur» p. 215.

Comme je l'ai écrit dans mes annotations, je pense que ce mécanisme est commun à tous les enfants. Ils sont comme des éponges qui absorbent la responsabilité de tout qui va mal autour d'eux. C'est naturel donc que la jeune Philippa tente de trouver des explications "logiques" pour sa situation. Même si l'on se rend compte, à mesure que l'on vieillit, que la vie est manifestement injuste, je me demande si cette notion de cause-effet, d'une justice innée, reste inculquée à tel niveau psychique. Cela semble être le cas avec Philippa et les douleurs spirituelles qui en découlent sont déchirantes à lire. D'une part, elle fait montre d'une intelligence impressionnante: elle déconstruit éloquemment la notion de beauté physique,

While rereading the short story, I still find myself unable to make a judgment about Philippa's character. She really succeeds in justifying and analyzing her bitterness and her contempt of those surrounding her. However, with each rereading I am becoming more and more conscious of the punishment she is inflicting upon herself, a punishment which fairly reflects her intellectualizations and her need to situate her experiences within a cause-effect relationship. This notion is first expressed during her childhood: e.g., "I will spend the rest of my life looking for a fault which is equivalent to my atrocious ugliness" p. 215.

As I wrote in my annotations, I think that this mechanism is common to all children. They are like sponges [which absorb] a responsibility for everything that can go awry around them. It is thus natural that young Philippa tries to find "logical" explanations for her situation. Even though we realize, as we grow older, that life is obviously unjust, I am wondering whether this cause-effect notion of an innate justice remains inculcated at a psychic level. This seems to be the case with Philippa and the spiritual woes which stem from it are heart-wrenching to read. On the one hand, she shows an impressive intelligence: she eloquently deconstructs the notion of physical beauty, and rightly comes up against her

et se heurte à juste titre contre l'insensibilité de son père, l'égoïsme de Pierre, l'hypocratie et la méchanceté des religieuses. Mais elle reste la prisonnière d'une mystification enfantine selon laquelle sa laideur est le résultat d'un péché quelconque -- soit déjà commis, soit à venir.-

Ce fatalisme, cette détermination d'imposer aux faits un ordre karmique, s'avère vraiment destructif: La "laideur" de Philippa s'explique dans "l'ordre des choses". D'où sa culpabilité et son dégoût pour elle-même, qui la rendent impuissante à négocier des relations avec d'autres. Après tout, on négocie vraiment sa relation avec une autre personne, question de se faire respecter, d'insister sur un certain traitement, etc. Je me suis rendu compte du caractère monovalent de ses rapports avec les gens. Ses entretiens, qu'ils soient avec Pierre ou la Mère Ste-Mouton ne sont jamais négociés, mais sont plutôt imposés, infligés si vous voulez, et ceci est bien mis en relief par la forme que prend la narration, celle d'un dialogue interne. Elle n'ose jamais reprocher à Pierre son manque de considération, du moins ouvertement, et il en va de même pour son père. Bref, elle ne négocie jamais, mais réagit sous forme de fantasmes, car c'est là que l'on peut vraiment faire sa "propre comptabilité." Ses cauchemars me semblaient en quelque sorte la distillation pure de ses rapports en sens unique: la méchanceté du monde est nette et gratuite. Est-ce

father's insensitivity, Pierre's egoism, the nuns' meanness and hypocrisy. But she remains imprisoned inside a childhood delusion according to which her ugliness results from some sin - which was either or will be committed.

This fatalism, this determination to impose a karmic order, reveals itself to be truly destructive: Philippa's ugliness can be explained within "the order of things." Hence her sense of guilt and self-loathing, which makes her feel powerless to negotiate relationships with others. After all, one truly negotiates one's relationship with another person - in order to gain respect and insist on a certain way to be treated, etc. I have become conscious of the monovalent nature of her relationships with people. Her exchanges, whether they are with Pierre or Mère St-Mouton are never negotiated, but rather, are imposed, inflicted if you will - and this is clearly made prominent by the narrative form, which is that of an internal dialogue. She never dares reproach Pierre for his lack of consideration, at least openly, and it is the same thing for her father. In short, she never negotiates, but reacts in the form of delusions, since it is at this point that one can do one's "own accountability." Her nightmares seemed to me to be somewhat the pure concentration of her one-way relationships: the evil in the world is clearly gratuitous. Do these

que ces cauchemars lui signalent -- de peur qu'elle ne l'oublie (!) --qu'il ne faut absolument pas investir dans quelque relation que ce soit? Est-ce qu'ils lui rappellent son "sort"? En tout cas, ce qui suscite la pitié chez moi, ce n'est pas ses convictions sur le monde, mais plutôt celles qu'elle tient sur elle-même.

nightmares indicate - lest she forget it (!) - that one must absolutely not invest in whatever relationship? Do they remind her of her "fate"? At any rate, what arouses my pity is not her convictions about the world but those that she entertains about herself.

Discussion of John's Journal I

The way John starts his Journal I reminds me of Booth's main argument in his book *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988) that readers cannot escape from adopting some ethical stance in their responses to a story even when they think that they are doing so. John affirms his inability to pass a judgment on Philipa as a character and, in the next sentence, writes that she really succeeds in justifying and analyzing her bitterness and her contempt of those surrounding her. The fact that John considers Philipa to be right in her self-analysis obviously consists in a positive judgment of her on his part. During our discussion, even when he recognized that her negative self-absorption, her misanthropy was fuel that could not work for a long time he still made a similar comment: he maintained not judging her because he felt that her sense of marginalization, of rejection was so strong that it could not be otherwise for her (May 24, 1995). Thus, as I pointed out above, John gives an ethically strong endorsement of Philipa as a character.

In the second paragraph, he further interprets her situation through a psychological generalization that he had

expressed in light of his personal experience in his earlier Annotation (p. 215): Philipa will forever look for the fault which corresponds to her atrocious ugliness because children assume responsibility for every misfortune happening to them; the notion of innate justice remains inculcated in us as adults despite our awareness that life is unjust.

If these generalizations also indicate John's sympathy for the character, they also lead him to make a criticism which, although negative, in no way diminishes his support for her. Through his explanations about her *fatalism*, *determination to impose a karmic order*, which he regards as self-destructive, his remarks about *the monovalent nature⁸ of her relationships with people* and the fact that she never negotiates with anyone, he suggests, as Tasha and Patrick did, that there are possibilities for Philipa to improve her situation. But the fact that she never negotiates openly with anyone the state of her relationships means for John that she never exteriorizes any angry feelings towards others, never behaves towards others in an outwardly mean manner.

⁸ This may sound like a psychological categorization on the part of John but it is not what he means here: during our discussion, I pointed out that Philipa could be developing some form of "mental disease," and he told me that the term could be used only to characterize, classify in order not to analyze Philipa's character not for too long (May 31, 1995). In John's wish for not classifying Philipa "as belonging to a category or a concept" - to use Polkinghorne's words (pp. 9-11, 1995) in his discussion of a paradigmatic way of reasoning - he thus shows a narrative way of thinking.

(Interestingly. John uses the expression *internal dialogue* instead of *interior monologue*, which is very evocative of his interpretation: Philipa talks about others in her head not to them.) Because of that, John could not perceive any real malice in her character (May 24, 1995). Hence his reaction as finding aberrant Philipa's reaction towards H el ene's suicide: for him, she is an individual with solid principles but who does not know how to use her power with others. During the second session (May 31, 1995), he argued, in a very convincing way, that it is a normal thing to put an amount of negotiation, according to everyone's interest, in all human relationships. As examples, John pointed out that Pierre and H el ene are attracted by her intelligence. So Philipa is a woman who should recognize her own power and try to use it in a better way. Instead, she isolates herself through delusions and dreams of revenge. To my saying that she achieved some kind of freedom by means of her violent language, he answered that he had also first admired it but then wondered whether she could ever truly become free since she kept on circumscribing herself so much in her dealings with others (ibid.). Hence, John shared a view similar to Tasha's and Patrick's regarding Philipa's need to build better relationships. In the concluding sentence of his Journal I, John shows his faith in the moral value of Philipa as a character by saying that he feels pity for her not because of the convictions she holds regarding the world, but about those she has regarding herself. This endorsement of Philipa's

pessimistic view of the world was finally developed in his Journal II from a more personal viewpoint:

Journal II

Brigitte suggérait dans son premier journal sur cette nouvelle que la laideur qui obsède Philippa serait peut-être une métaphore. Je pense que l'isolement, quelle que soit la cause, et surtout lorsqu'elle a une dimension involontaire, entraîne très souvent ce genre d'amertume et d'introspection pénible. En fait, les sentiments de Philippa m'ont rappelé ceux que j'éprouvais moi-même durant une période de ma vie et, à un certain degré, à l'heure actuelle.

Je pense par exemple au tiraillement émotionnelle que Philippa décrit vers le début: "Puis je me dégoûte parce que si je m'en fichais, je ne serais pas ici." C'est curieux, le mécanisme par lequel on réagit à une injustice ou à une tragédie, lorsqu'on se rend compte qu'elle sera pas vengée -- la colère se généralise. Je me remémore des émotions semblables que j'avais à la suite de l'accident, dans l'hôpital bien sûr mais aussi durant les interminables mois qui ont suivi. Je passais des jours et des jours déprimé, enragé, me disant "si c'est ainsi qu'on traite des accidentés innocents, je me fous de ce monde." Puis j'avais hâte de voir mes amis et de leur parler. Et comme je l'ai indiqué dans mes annotations, je pense que ce tiraillement est entre les

Brigitte suggested in her first journal on this story that the ugliness which obsesses Philippa could be a metaphor. I think that isolation, whatever the cause, and especially when it has an involuntary aspect, often causes this kind of bitterness and painful introspection. In fact, Philippa's feelings reminded me of those I had myself during a period in my life and, to some extent, of those I still have.

I think, for instance, of the emotional conflict that Philippa describes near the beginning: "Then I am disgusted with myself because if I didn't care, I would not be here." It is strange the mechanism whereby one reacts to an injustice or a tragedy, when one realizes that it will not be avenged - anger becomes generalized. I can remember that I had similar emotions after the accident, in the hospital obviously, but also during the endless months which followed. For days, I was depressed, enraged, saying to myself: "If that's how one treats innocent accident victims, I don't give a damn about this world." The moment after, I was looking forward to seeing my friends and talking to them. And as I mentioned in my annotations, I think that this conflict is located between

aspects enfantin et adulte de l'individu. Car c'est l'enfant qui insiste pour que les événements s'expliquent, pour qu'une injustice soit vengée et que le responsable soit puni. Des fois, tout comme Philippa, je me sentais "en grève" contre la vie que m'avait laissée l'accident -- ("pour que les conditions s'améliorent!") et puis "l'adulte", résigné, épuisé, prenait les choses en main et j'engageais le monde encore, sans enthousiasme. Victoire creuse, donc, pour le raisonnement adulte. Je trouve que ce conflit, entre un monde juste auquel tient l'enfant, et le monde tel qu'il est, est admirablement capté dans cette nouvelle.

Je me suis identifié aussi avec ses réflexions sur l'engagement politique. Je trouve bien fondé son cynisme quant au potentiel de refaire le monde. Lorsqu'on rencontre, d'une manière cinglante, les limites de la compassion humaine, et notre capacité d'assumer la responsabilité de nos actions, il reste peu d'espoir. A cet égard, je trouve aussi que l'accident a été un point tournant. Car depuis, je vois les politiciens, même ceux pour qui j'éprouvais une certaine sympathie avant, dans à peu près la même optique -- comme des mercénaires et des poseurs qui incarnent nos instincts les plus bas. A quoi bon donc s'occuper de notre avenir social? D'autre part, si l'on porte un tel jugement sur toute notre espèce, est-ce qu'on le porte aussi forcément sur

the child and adult aspects of an individual. For it is the child who insists on having events explained, an injustice avenged, and that the responsible person be punished. At times, like Philippa, I felt "on strike" against the life that the accident had me suffer -- ("in order to have better conditions!") and the "adult," resigned and exhausted, pulled himself together and, without enthusiasm, engaged himself with the world once more. It was thus a shallow victory for the reasoning of an adult. I find that this conflict, between a just world which a child looks to, and the world, as it really is, is admirably rendered in the story.

I also identified myself with her reflections on political commitment. I find well-founded her cynicism regarding the possibility to change the world. When one meets, in a cutting manner, the limits of human compassion and of our capacity to assume the responsibility for our actions, there is little hope left. In that regard, I find that the accident was a turning-point. Since then, I see politicians, even those for whom I felt some sympathy before, in the same light - like mercenaries and show-offs who incarnate our lowest instincts. What is the point of taking care of our social future? On the other hand, if one passes this kind of judgment on the whole human species, does not one also pass it about oneself? And it is at this point that I am worrying about my iden-

soi-même? Et là j'arrive à ce qui m'inquiète dans mon identification avec Philippa: c'est que les traits qu'elle décrit semblent en train de se développer chez elle. Nombreuses sont les victimes d'injustice qui finissent par militer et lutter sur le plan social, mais à la condition que ces injustices - la pauvreté, la ségrégation raciale - sont reconnues comme telles quelque part. Mais la notion de laideur - sûrement une injustice en ce qui a trait aux êtres humains - ça se discute nulle part. Est-ce c'est à quoi elle fait référence en parlant de "ma révolution"? Dommage, aucune révolution pour elle, pour la libérer de son fardeau?

Tanya parlait des deux mondes parallèles dans la vie de Philippa. J'ai trouvé intéressant à cet égard, que Philippa se dit cinéophile (autre point de rapprochement pour moi). Elle me semblait beaucoup plus intéressée par les personnages cinématographiques que par ceux dans sa vie réelle, car elle a passé la nuit à essayer de comprendre ce qu'aurait pu motiver le personnage dans Belle de Jour de se prostituer. Jamais je ne pourrais imaginer qu'elle éprouve un intérêt semblable pour une personne dans sa vie. Est-ce que c'est un indice de son retrait dans son monde intérieur, ou plutôt parallèle?

tification with Philippa: that is, the traits that she is describing seem to be developing inside herself. Many are the victims of injustice who end up fighting and militating from a social viewpoint, but on the condition that these injustices - poverty, segregationism - be recognized for what they really are by someone somewhere. But the notion of ugliness - surely an injustice regarding human beings - it is not discussed anywhere. Is it what she is referring to when she is talking about "my revolution"? Pity, so there will be no revolution made for her, to free her from her burden?

Tasha talked about two parallel worlds in Philippa's life. In that respect, I found interesting that Philippa regards herself as a film buff (another point of similarity with myself). She seemed to be more interested in film characters than in those of real life, since she spent the night trying to understand what could have motivated Belle de Jour's character to prostitute herself. Never could I have thought that [Philippa] felt such an interest in a person's life. Is it an indication of the extent to which she has retired into her interior, or, rather, parallel world?

Discussion of John's Journal II

In this written response, John finally clearly expresses a personal relationship with *La laide*. He had already done so by making a reference to his childhood in one of his Annotations (p. 215) but had also mentioned that adopting a personal tone was a difficult thing to do (see his last Annotation, p. 224). He admitted having the same fear during the last of the three sessions (June 12, 1995): he explained that his discussion in his Journal I seemed then easier to do in light of Philipa's character than of his own experience. (In that sense, his feelings about the act of responding in a personal manner are similar to those expressed by Tasha regarding Mallet's story *How are You?*).

John starts his Journal II by making a link between my idea of ugliness as a metaphor and the sense of isolation he suffered from after his bicycle accident. He differs from my response in that he does not talk about *contradictions* in Philipa's use of language but rather of a *tiraillement émotionnelle* (an emotional conflict) that he strongly empathizes with because of his own ordeal as an accident victim. During the session (*ibid.*), he explained that his conflicting wishes alternating between his desire for solitude and his friends' company proved that there remained in him a *more social, practical person who took the situation in hand*. Then, in his Journal II, in order to further explain this conflict, he resorts to a psychological generalization, similar to the ones he already made in the second paragraph of his Journal I: *...it is the child who insists on having events*

explained, an injustice avenged, and that the responsible person be punished. Yet, as the following sentences make clear, John personalizes this general comment by referring to his experience and mentioning his memory of having felt, like Philipa, "on strike" against life as an accident victim. He was thus like a child, looking for justice, but his adult side made him feel resigned to his situation and pushed him to engage himself with the world once more. As he sums it up, the conflict between the adult's and child's perception of the world is admirably expressed in the story.

As to his responses to Philipa's reflections on political commitment, if he appears categorical and as he says himself, *cynical*, in his judgment of politicians, he still manages to express misgivings about his own views. Indeed, he expands upon his strong assertions by asking questions: could my indifference towards the uselessness of any kind of social commitment be also a judgment that I pass about myself? But then, he argues that the big issues have first to be recognized somewhere by someone, which leads him to express the idea that *the notion of ugliness - surely an injustice regarding human beings - ... is not discussed anywhere.* With these questions, John shows that he knows how to create ethical dilemmas for himself as a reader.

In the last paragraph of Journal II, following up on Tasha's idea of two parallel worlds, John wonders about Philipa's musings regarding the motivations of Séverine, the character played by Catherine Deneuve in *Belle de jour* (1967). He identifies with Philipa as to her interest in a film

character but asks himself where all this questioning about a fictional life can lead her. As he commented, he tried to imagine how different her relationship with H el ene would have been if she had spent as much time on it as on her musings about S everine in *Belle de jour*. This is an important question as to the power that fiction can exert over a reader's or viewer's life.

In the next section, I present Tasha's and John's responses to Ettore Scola's film *Passion of Love*⁹ (1982). (I had first thought that the film contained a theme similar to *La laide* in my discussions of our responses with Patrick.) I was curious to see how my two participants would create a reading out of a film set in 19th century Italy and a story taking place in 20th century Qu ebec.

Tasha's and John's responses to the film *Passion of Love* (1982)

Before presenting Tasha's and John's responses to the film of Scola, *Passion of Love*, I want to give, preceded by a synopsis of the film, a brief comment based on an entry in my Journal (June 12, 1995). I do not intend to have - as I did for the responses to *La laide* - their reactions to the film followed by a lengthy discussion. Indeed, I find that their responses speak for themselves enough as to the different ways the film, in the case of Tasha, make her reconsider the two

⁹ We saw the original Italian version subtitled into English but responded to it in French.

main characters of *La laide*, and in that of John, have him reflect over the meaning of love.

Synopsis¹⁰ of the film *Passion of Love* by Ettore Scola (1982)

The film is set in 19th century Italy and tells the story of Giorgio, a handsome cavalry captain, who is having an affair with Laura, a beautiful (and married) woman. Giorgio is sent to a border garrison where, through the outpost, he can hear the haunting screams of Fosca, a recluse woman that he cannot see. When he finally meets her, Giorgio is shocked by her incredible ugliness. He finds her as ugly as Clara is beautiful. But Fosca has fallen in love with him from the first day she spied on Giorgio. She pursues him, harasses him until she is near death for want of him. Giorgio is thus faced with a dilemma: between the love of the beautiful Laura who lives for his love and that of Fosca who is willing to die from it. Giorgio finally consents to a relationship with Fosca who dies following the experience. Fosca has left Giorgio broken, even in love with her. The film ends with Giorgio telling his love story to a dwarf who, after hearing it, just laughs it off. It is clear that Giorgio remains strongly obsessed with Fosca and will forever be scarred by his relationship with her.

¹⁰ The synopsis is an adaptation which extends the one on the videocassette.

A brief comment

Tasha, John and I viewed the videocassette of *Passion of Love* (June 12, 1995), after the two previous sessions we had taken for the discussion of the story (May 24 and May 31, 1995). Although I noticed that they both seemed to find the dialogue somewhat exaggerated during the first minutes of viewing, they still adapted to it quickly. Their first reactions, which I immediately recorded after the viewing, were generally positive. Tasha found that it was not like a Hollywood movie - which was an allusion to the absence of a happy ending. She also mentioned not liking the military atmosphere that was represented through the cavalrymen of 19th century Italy. As to John, he was fascinated by the character of the doctor who played the role of a go-between for Giorgio and Philipa.

As I wrote (June 12, 1995), the film's dialogues must have sounded somewhat naive after responding in detail to Philipa Cornemuse's elaborate and morbid interior monologue. As *Passion of Love* is set in the 19th century, it definitely has a romantic flavor (for instance, I think of the way Giorgio ends up expressing the love he has for Fosca). As to the character of the dwarf, listening to Giorgio tell his love story with Fosca at the end, I found, contrary to Tasha, that he was the character who, in his own feelings for his ugliness and solitude, was the closest in character to Philipa in *La laide*. But, enough said, and here are the responses which show how Tasha establishes links between the characters of *La laide* and those of *Passion of Love*, and how John comes to a

philosophical reflection on love through his interpretation of the relationship between Fosca and Giorgio.

Tasha's response to the film *Passion of Love*

Pendant notre dernière rencontre, Brigitte nous a fait voir le film "Passion d'Amour" qui raconte une histoire tragique d'une femme laide et qui a, à mon avis, les points communs avec la nouvelle "La Laide". J'ai beaucoup aimé le film parce qu'il essaie de traiter les problèmes assez importants concernant les relations entre un homme et une femme. J'ai été particulièrement frappée par le personnage de Fosca. Parfois je pensais qu'elle était tellement malheureuse, tellement obsédée par l'idée de sa laideur qu'elle devenait cruelle vers les autres, par exemple, vers Giorgio. Pour moi le personnage de Philipa est plus fort parce qu'elle garde ses propres malheurs, ses propres idées dans son monde intérieur, tandis que Fosca exprime explicitement son besoin d'être aimée. L'autre personnage féminin, celui de la maîtresse de Giorgio est aussi moins convaincant que celui de Philipa. Bien qu'elle dise qu'elle aime son amant, elle n'essaie pas de le retenir, de l'aider. La seule phrase remarquable de sa part est "La pitié est parfois plus forte que l'amour". Si on compare les personnages masculins du film et de la nouvelle, on peut remarquer que chacun est beau, chacun est le centre d'attention d'une femme laide, mais le personnage de Giorgio est beaucoup plus élaboré, beau-

During our last meeting, Brigitte had us view the film "Passion of Love" which tells the tragic story of an ugly woman which, in my opinion, has common points with those in "La laide." I liked the film a lot because it tries to deal with rather important problems between a man and a woman. I was particularly struck by Fosca's character. At times, I thought that she was so unhappy, so obsessed with the idea of her ugliness that she became cruel towards others, e.g., towards Giorgio. For me Philipa's character is stronger since she keeps her own woes to herself, her own ideas in her interior world, whereas Fosca expresses her need to be loved explicitly. The other female character, that of Giorgio's mistress, is also less convincing than that of Philipa. Although she says that she loves her lover, she does not try to hold him back, to help him. The only remarkable sentence on her part is "Pity is sometimes stronger than love." If one compares the film's male character with that of the story, we notice that each is handsome, each is the focus of attention of an ugly woman, but Giorgio's character is much more developed, much more complex than that of Pierre [in the story]. I pitied Giorgio since I understood his hesitations, his twinges of conscience. But there was a

coup plus complexe que celui de Pierre. J'avais pitié de Giorgio, car je comprenais ses hésitations, ses remords de conscience. Mais il y avait une phrase qui ne m'a plu du tout: "Le respect n'a rien à faire avec l'a-mour". Je n'aimais pas non plus l'idée que les relations entre les femmes et les hommes étaient basées seulement sur les rapports physiques et que les femmes étaient perçues comme les objets sexuelles sans âme.

John's response to the film *Passion of Love*

J'ai bien aimé ce film. A mon sens l'observation la plus percutante là-dedans a été celle de Fosca lorsqu'elle parlait du fardeau que représentait la laideur pour les femmes de l'époque. Elle affirmait qu'un homme laid était peu limité dans la vie et qu'il avait toutes les chances de réussir, alors qu'une femme était toujours un objet de pitié, et se trouvait complètement isolée. Pour une femme donc, la laideur signifiait la fin du monde -- de la liberté, de la mobilité sociale, de tout espoir de se marier. J'ai cru tous ses propos et j'ai réalisé que dans une société aussi patriarcale que celle de l'Italie du 19e siècle, les hommes tenaient tous les pouvoirs et de ce fait pouvaient vraiment déterminer le sort d'une femme selon leurs critères esthétiques, entre autres. Pour elle donc, il n'était pas question que de la vanité, ou de l'exagération.

J'étais vraiment intrigué par l'amour entre Giorgio et

sentence that I did not like at all: "Respect does not have anything to do with love." I did not like either the idea that relationships between men and women were based only on physical relations and that women were perceived as soulless sexual objects.

I really liked this film. In my opinion, the most revealing observation in it was made by Fosca when she talked about what the burden of ugliness represented for women at that time. She asserted that an ugly man was not limited in life, and that he had all chances for success, whereas a woman was always an object of pity, and found herself totally isolated. Thus, for a woman, ugliness meant the end of the world - of freedom, of social mobility, of hope for marriage. I believed everything she said and I realized that in a society as patriarchal as the one of 19th century Italy, men held all the power and could, among other things, determine a woman's fate according to their aesthetic criteria. Thus, for her, it was not a question only of vanity or of exaggeration.

I was really intrigued by the love relationship

Fosca. Le fait que celle-ci ait tenu à leur relation d'une manière si désespérée s'explique sans doute par ses circonstances. Mais puisque sa désespoir l'avait conduite à tourmenter Giorgio -- ainsi qu'elle même, fait qu'elle analysait d'une manière presque clinique -- je pensais que Giorgio ne pourrait jamais sentir un vrai amour pour elle. Je me demande si Giorgio a fini -- comme Fosca -- par assimiler le besoin à l'amour. C'est que son autre amante, [qui est] mariée à un autre homme, n'éprouvait pas le même besoin désespéré de lui, et ceci me semblait un point tournant quant à sa relation avec Fosca. Ou bien le fait qu'elle soit mariée, et que la divorce soit impensable, est-ce que cela l'avait rendue résignée? En tout cas, on a tellement de notions romantiques de l'amour, on veut que l'amour soit le désir, des émotions à la fois folles, saines et magique. J'ai vu ce film et me suis dit que pour bon nombre d'entre nous, l'amour est qqch de beaucoup plus troublant, et que derrière lui se trouve souvent un simple besoin, un effroi pur et simple, de faire face à ce monde seul.

between Giorgio and Fosca. The fact that the latter clung to it in such a desperate manner can be surely explained through circumstances. But since her despair had led her to torment Giorgio - as well as herself, a fact that she analyzed in an almost clinical manner - I thought that Giorgio would never be able to feel a real love for her. I am wondering whether Giorgio - like Fosca - ends up thinking that the need for someone is love because his other lover, [who was] married to another man, did not feel the same desperate need for him, and this seemed to me to be the turning point in his relationship with Fosca. Or rather the fact that she is married, and that divorce is unthinkable, is it this that had made her feel resigned? At any rate, we have such romantic notions about love, we want love to be desire, emotions which are crazy, sane and magic at the same time. I saw this film and told myself that for many of us it is something much more troubling, and that behind it, one can find the simple need, the pure and simple fear of facing the world by oneself.

Conclusion

The main difference that stands out between Tasha's and John's responses is the degree of emotional and personal involvement with the character of Philipa. Tasha understood Philipa's unhappiness and sense of revolt and she even endorsed some of her views (e.g., both Philipa's negative

remarks against her parents and the cruelty of nuns); yet, she remained aware of her revengeful attitude when she pointed out that Philipa derived satisfaction from the suicide of beautiful Hélène. In short, there was a mixture of emotion and detachment in Tasha's way of seeing Philipa's character.

For John, his response to Philipa's plight was more visceral from a personal viewpoint than Tasha's. He indeed related Philipa's state of mind with the one he experienced when he was hospitalized following his accident: rage, despair over his "status" as an accident victim and a sudden desire to see friends (thus, similar to Philipa's feelings alternating between her wish to be alone and a sudden desire to see Pierre). John further associated the conflict to the one residing in the individual's child and adult aspects. He also linked Philipa's sense of guilt over her ugliness during her childhood to his own assumption as a child that justice could work in the world.

It is through intertextual references coming from her cultural background that Tasha expressed her personal experience more directly. For instance, when she related Philipa's state of mind to the one of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and to the character in Chekhov's *Un homme encroûté*. Her intertextual reference to the Russian fairy tale - in which ugliness was equated with intelligence and stupidity with beauty - brought an interesting ethical counterargument to Philipa's view of her life at the convent where the ugly were considered stupid and the beautiful intelligent.

Through her interpretation of images and dreams, Tasha also brought ethical nuances to her responses. For instance, her interpretation of Philipa's dreams in which there was an image of the boat on the sea suggested to her the possibility of freedom, thus implying that she ought to get herself out of her miserable situation. In the case of the image of the suitcase, she criticized Philipa for shutting herself inside one and thus hampering all her possibilities of developing positive relationships with someone. But her most ethical point, I believe, was expressed through a question that she made in reaction to one of my arguments in which I had asserted that Philipa, through the violence of her language, resisted, in her own manner, and thus acquired some freedom. Tasha then suggested that the question (or dilemma) was how Philipa saw her own life: *Est-ce que c'est la mort, est-ce qu'elle est finie déjà, ou est-ce qu'elle veut faire quelque chose?* (Is it death, is it already finished, or does she want to do something?) In other words, she was suggesting that she ought to do something about her plight.

The ethical aspect of John's responses was expressed very strongly. He agreed with Philipa's view of herself as morally superior to Pierre and was very impressed with her intelligence in *deconstructing* the meaning of beauty. He also made remarks denouncing the hypocrisy of the Catholic church which were in the same vein as those he had made regarding *B... comme dans bucolique*. Not only are these comments similar to other responses he made for *B... comme dans bucolique*, they also point to his interest in the story's social and

historical aspects. By mentioning that the notion of ugliness was not discussed anywhere, John recognized there was an important underlying ethical value in the story. Unlike Tasha, in the ethical nuances of his responses, his sense of identification with and sympathy for Philipa was so strong that he could feel let down, from a moral viewpoint, when she rejoiced over Hélène's suicide. (Previously, he had defended her by saying that she never said anything harmful about anyone: all her hard feelings may have been bottled up inside her but she never expressed them to anyone.)

Like Tasha and Patrick, John expressed the view that Philipa had the capacity to create better relationships with others if only she had a strong will to do it. For instance, he suggested that a good start for her would be to recognize the power that she exerted over some persons (in the case of Pierre, even though he treated her cruelly). Patrick's, Tasha's and John's views about Philipa's possibilities for the creation of better relationships made me reconsider some aspects of my own responses.

Finally, regarding the film *Passion of Love*, Tasha established a relationship between the film and the story in that she explained that Philipa, as a character, appeared much stronger than Fosca. As for John, he only responded to the film and did not link aspects of the story with it. An important interpretation for him was that everyone could be touched by it if only one could understand that love was often an answer, for many of us, to the fear of facing the world alone. As for myself, I thought that the film brought an

interesting visual complement to Philipa's violent interior monologue and could help remind us and discuss that woman's situation, regarding physical beauty, had not changed that much over a century.

Chapter X

Conclusion

Introduction

The conclusion to my study is divided into four parts: in the first part, I discuss the main points or "themes" of significance that emerge from its three parts as well as briefly consider them in a pedagogical and educational context; in the second, I address Tasha's and John's reactions to the study; in the third, I reflect upon the study's educational relevance, its curricular implications and a few pedagogical suggestions for language learning and the reading of literature in a second language context; in the fourth, I present concluding thoughts about the study and directions for further inquiry.

Points or "themes" of significance emerging from the study and some of its pedagogical and educational implications

Throughout the chapters making up the three parts of the thesis, I have discussed points or "themes" which, by means of letters, conversations and reading-responses, have emerged as significant from the spoken and written words of my participants and myself. I want to recall here the main ones and briefly consider them in a pedagogical and educational context.

The stories of our language-learning and reading experiences are situated within three different cultural environments: English-speaking Quebecer and Ontarian in Québec

and Ontario, French-speaking Quebecer in Québec and Ontario, Russian-speaking, with a Jewish ethnic background, in the former Soviet Union and in Ontario. Regarding the language-learning experiences, all voices in the thesis - JoAnn's, Patrick's, John's, Tasha's and mine - told stories about language discrimination, unequal relationships between languages in a social context, whether it concerned French and English in Québec and Ontario, Scottish English in Ontario, or Russian and Lithuanian in Russia and Lithuania.

All voices also had to tell particular and significant stories of language-learning in school and at home: for instance, the distinction between French from Québec and French from France in Ontario schools, and the lack of cultural or historical references to "English Canada" in the English curriculum of French schools in Québec. As to the stories of reading-experiences we shared, they were revealing of everyone's personal, cultural and social backgrounds. In conversations and letters, the amount of references to books and films that Patrick, John and Tasha made, the ways they could relate them to the stories in their responses reveals that, contrary to some literature professors' opinions that nowadays undergraduates tend to be tabula rasa on the subject of literary works, they can actually contribute a lot to the literature classroom by helping us get a better understanding of what they bring to it regarding their own intertextuality and of who they are as language learners and readers. As Maxine Greene (1995) pointed out in her book *Releasing the Imagination*:

(...) imagination may be released through the reading, and when it is, meanings derived from previous experiences often find their way through the gateway of imagination (as Dewey saw it) to interact with present-day experiences. When aspects of the present are infused by materials originating in the past, there is always a re-viewing of the past, even as the new experience (enriched now) comes to consciousness. (p. 76)

In the reading-response sessions, I encouraged Patrick, John and Tasha to exert their authority over their readings, to forget about critics and theorists, and regard themselves as the first meaning-makers of the stories. Perhaps this sense of authority would even have been greater if I had allowed them to discuss texts of their own choice¹ (e.g., if I had let John write and talk more about Gabrielle Roy's *La détresse et l'enchantement*, 1984). Nevertheless I believe the study process gave them confidence, ensuring that they could truly express their voices in the situation I had initiated.

An important point which emerges is that personal experience was never expressed in a unidimensional manner throughout their oral and written responses. For the five stories, their personal ways of understanding specific situations, characters or uses of language were varied. Their responses often reflected a certain amount of distance, thus perhaps suggesting a lack of emotional involvement on their part. For instance, their emotions regarding a particular aspect in the story were not always linked with an event or a

¹ This can be related to Breen's view, a SL educator who firmly advocates the participation of learners in the design of their own curriculum (see Enns-Connolly, 1990, for a discussion of this author).

situation they had been through themselves. John's stylistic analysis of the use of pronouns in *B...comme dans bucolique* or Tasha's reflection on the use of images in *La laide* could serve as examples where their emotions seemed to be controlled by the text. And, from the viewpoint of teaching literature, I also wanted them to be able to conduct a reflection which would be faithful to the text in order to help them develop and trust their own interpretive and critical abilities (e.g., I was the one who suggested that they could write on the use of pronouns by the narrator in *B...comme dans bucolique*). Yet, even in his stylistic analysis, John clearly showed a very personal contempt for the abusive adult authority of Mère Marie-Rose when he opposed her intelligence to that of the schoolgirls. As well, expressing pity, sadness, ambivalence or admiration over the fate and character of Philipa in *La laide*, on the part of readers (e.g., Tasha and me) who do not necessarily identify with the character, may still give an authentically personal response. I believe that in our responses to Philipa, we both gave strong personal views of the character. Yet, the same feelings will certainly not resonate in the same manner if they are rendered by a reader like John who has been through an ordeal of revolt and isolation similar to Philipa's. And the same can be said of Tasha who, in her responses to *How are you?*, shared feelings about the immigrant situation and the difficulties in creating relationships between persons of different cultural groups.

A second significant point arising from the study is the reflection on the cultural assumptions that I was led to

consider in the analysis of my reactions during the reading-response sessions. For instance, I sometimes anticipated the way Tasha would react because of her Russian cultural background (e.g., my discussion of her reference to the *pionniers* in Chapter VII comes to mind), and also had a priori thinking about what John and Tasha might think about my Catholic background when we discussed our responses to *B...comme dans bucolique* (see Chapter VII) and *La laide* (see Chapter IX).

A third important point also emerging is the ethical stance that we always ended up adopting in all responses to the stories, even though in some of them we thought that we did not pass any judgment over characters. Either because of our feelings of personal involvement in a fictional representation or of detachment regarding a situation that only the author could imagine for us, many parts of our responses showed a moral commitment of some sort to aspects of plot or characterization.

A fourth point of significance is the place of imagination in our responses to the stories. The ways Patrick, Tasha and John imagined new twists in the plot, endings which were not contained in the "official" end by the author, motivations and resolutions that they imagined in order to understand or even try to save characters from their hapless situations, all of these offered different possibilities for the creation of meaning. For instance, the fate of Philipa in *La laide* had to be resolved in some way: once one stopped admiring the expression of her sense of revolt, Patrick, Tasha

and John found her despair and isolation so unbearable that they all felt that she should try to build relationships with others if she wanted to save her own life. As well, imagination also played an important role when, in our discussions, aspects of the stories became pretexts to tell more stories about other situations in a larger cultural or social context. Those connections, often dealing with the real world, our lives or those of other people, did not necessarily pertain to the text as such but led us to an enriching reflection on different subjects, from language to politics, social or historical issues. In short, in Christian's words about the purpose of reading literature, our discussions provided us with "an occasion...to understand our lives better" (1987, p. 53) as they are situated in our world and that of others - whether they be fictional or not.

Tasha's and John's reactions to the study

The wrap-up meeting I had with Tasha and John took place on December 11, 1995, after all the reading-response sessions had been conducted on the five stories (see Appendix B). I wanted it to be a conversation in which they would express their reactions to whatever aspect of the study they wished to comment upon. They had also prepared a written text for the meeting that served for them as a basis of their conversation and from which I will quote occasionally.

Tasha was the first to offer comments. The first point she made regarded my choice of texts: she liked reading contemporary literary texts, in French, by authors who were

not from France. For her, it was the first time she was reading writers from Québec and the Francophonie. She named Michel Tremblay as her favorite author - even though he was not among the short story writers I had selected for the reading-response sessions - explaining that she liked his frankness, his use of language. During the letter-exchanges, I had given Tasha and John selected chapters to read from Tremblay's book, *Un ange cornu avec des ailes de tôle* (1994). (Each chapter dealt with his recollection of a book he had read during his childhood and adolescence, and the impact it had exerted upon him as a child and an adult.) As well, the excerpt from his novel *Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Anges* (1986) - which I had given them to read in light of Croft's story *B...comme dans bucolique* - pleased her so much that she read the entire novel. Tasha's point on Tremblay made me ask her whether she felt that I had sufficiently talked about Québec French as a language - I was thus reiterating my concern with the issue of Québec French and the importance I attached to its teaching in the Canadian context (see Chapter II). She answered yes, saying she found it really useful for a course she was currently taking on Canadian French.

John also made a point similar to Tasha's in that he remarked that his favorite writer was Gabrielle Roy (also an author who was not among those who had written the five short stories). He explained that the response he had given to two chapters from her autobiography *La détresse et l'enchantement* (1984) - before responding to the other five short stories -

was the one with which he felt the most satisfied. In that response, John had discussed how moved he was by the capacity for maternal love and the inability of a child to return to the parent what he called this "devotion." Thus, already in his very first response, he expressed an idea which he also later wrote about, that is, the relationship between children and parents.

Both Tasha and John liked the way the reading-response sessions were conducted. From her written comment, here is Tasha's view on our way of exchanging our responses:

J'ai aimé aussi nos discussions, surtout quand nous n'étions pas d'accord et quand nous essayions de soutenir notre point de vue. J'ai remarqué que souvent je finissais par changer de point de vue lors de nos discussions. C'était le cas avec "Interview" (à propos du personnage de Santana) et avec "Les Riens de la Vie" (à propos de la qualité de cette nouvelle). Je peux expliquer ces changements par la raisonnement convaincant de John et de Brigitte. (11 décembre 1995).

I also liked our discussions, especially when we did not agree together and when we defended our own viewpoint. I noticed that I often ended up by changing mine during our discussions. That was the case with "Interview" (regarding Santana's character) and "A Trifle from Real Life" (concerning the quality of the story). I can explain these changes by the convincing argument of John and Brigitte. (December 11, 1995).

I was happy to have this positive comment from Tasha since I remembered her being particularly silent when John and I gave responses which were different from hers on Zumthor's and Chekov's short stories. I had wondered whether she felt uncomfortable with the ways we opposed her views. She was simply interested in carefully listening to responses she had not thought of and which could become convincing once they

were discussed. As to the personal connections I encouraged them to make in their responses, Tasha had this to say:

J'ai aimé le fait que nous essayions de comparer les situations décrites dans les nouvelles avec nos propres expériences ou avec quelque chose de ressemblant que nous avons vu dans les films ou lu dans d'autres nouvelles ou romans. Je pense qu'en faisant les comparaisons, nous comprenions plus facilement ce qui se passait avec des personnages ou quels pourraient être leurs sentiments. (11 décembre 1995).

I liked the fact that we tried to compare the situations which were described in the stories with our own experiences or with something which resembles what we had seen in films or read in other stories or novels. I think that through the comparisons, we understood more easily what took place with the characters or what their feelings could be. (December 11, 1995).

As an example, she referred to Mallet's *How Are You?* (in Gallays, Ed., 1993) but did not expand much more on that point.

As for John, the very first point he mentioned was the chance the reading-response sessions gave him of trying some literary analysis in a non-formal context, that is, outside a traditional undergraduate literature course. Up to my study, he explained he had avoided *[la] réflexion littéraire ou philosophique parce que je ne me sentais pas à l'aise là-dedans (literary or philosophical reflection since I did not feel at ease with it)* (December 11, 1995). He even referred to his anxiety about an undergraduate literature course as a "phobia." In his written comments, he offered these thoughts about the reading-response sessions and the freedom it gave him as a language experience:

Dans l'ensemble, j'ai bien aimé le format de nos réunions de travail que l'on a fait en groupe. J'ai trouvé l'atmosphère informelle et encourageante, malgré que j'ai commencé avec pas mal d'appréhension quant au sérieux et au bien fondé de mes commentaires et analyses. Mais comme Brigitte m'a souvent souligné, il ne faut pas penser en termes de vrai ou de faux dans ce champs d'analyse, car la création fictive, de par sa nature même, se prête à de multiples interprétations et sentiments. L'auteur fait déclencher un processus sur lequel il n'a pas tout le contrôle, ni devrait-il l'avoir non plus. Force est donc au lecteur d'interpréter et de savourer l'ouvrage dans l'optique de ses propres expériences et croyances. (...)

En fait, ce qui ressort de toutes ces lectures et de nos discussions là-dessus, c'est la multitude de moyens dont on peut affectionner la littérature: identification viscérale et émotive, points de repère dans l'histoire ou sa vie personnelle, emplois ingénieux de style ou d'ironie, manipulation des éléments grammaticaux, éclairage sur un sujet, tel une culture ou un pays, bref, la littérature s'adresse à toutes nos expériences et à toutes nos ressources de cognition et d'émotion. Voilà pourquoi, je suppose, il n'y a pas lieu de parler de vrai ou de faux. (11 décembre 1995).

On the whole, I liked the way our group meetings were set up very much. I found the informal atmosphere to be encouraging, in spite of the fact that I was fairly apprehensive about the seriousness and value of my comments and analyses. But as Brigitte often emphasized, one should not think in terms of true or false in this field of analysis, since the creation of fiction, by its very nature, lends itself to various interpretations and feelings. The author provokes a process that he does not entirely control, nor should he have it either. The reader is thus led to interpret and savor the work in light of his own experiences and beliefs. (...)

In fact, what emerges from all these readings and discussions is that there exist numerous ways of appreciating literature: visceral and emotional identification, reference points in the story or your personal life, ingenious uses of style or irony, of grammatical uses, shedding light on a subject (e.g., a culture or a country) - in short, literature addresses all of our experiences and cognitive and emotional resources. That's why there is no reason to talk about something true or false in it. (December 11, 1995).

I was also curious to know more about the types of links Tasha and John could perceive between the processes of letter-writing and responding, and to learn whether or not the former had helped them in the latter. (I made clear to them that I was excluding the obvious benefit of knowing each other personally which could be derived from the correspondence).

For Tasha, she explained that this kind of personal relationship with the text was for her the easiest thing to do, that it was the beginning of the analysis for her. She further explained that it helped her understand and feel what had taken place [in the story]. I believe that Tasha was expanding here on the second passage from her written comment (see above) in that the ease she saw in the making of personal connections referred to the books and films she had read and seen and related to the stories. When John explained that *La laide* had been the most challenging story for him to respond to, from a personal and emotional viewpoint, Tasha added that a recent rereading of *How are you?* had touched her even more than the first time and that it was difficult for her to use the right words in order to express her emotions.

John answered that he would now feel much more confident, in a formal written work, to bring a personal experience to the discussion of a literary text, and that he could now see this type of connection as a legitimate way of discussing literature. He pointed out, however, that he did not necessarily find it easy to do (*La laide* was his example). Doing a technical analysis of a story, something more "linear" [e.g., such as his stylistic analyses] made him feel more at

ease. But he still found that relating personally to literature was *une chose souhaitable* (a desirable thing) in the analysis of a literary work.

In a reflection on the correspondence, John pointed out that my letters had first given him a knowledge of how the linguistic realities of an English-speaking Canadian and a French-speaking Quebecer could be different. Furthermore, this knowledge about myself helped him think about the writer of a story in a different light. As an example, he cited Esther Croft (1988), the author of *B...comme dans bucolique*, and pointed out that the two of us had gone through similar experiences of Catholicism in Québec during the 60s. If he had not known these details about me before responding to the text, he would not have understood in the same manner the responses I offered for Croft's story.

For Tasha, she summed up her thoughts about the correspondence with a single sentence: *On peut pas se jeter à des discussions de nouvelles au début sans se connaître* (We cannot at first throw ourselves into the discussion of short stories without knowing one another). She thus suggested that we would not have achieved what we did in our responses had we not written to each other previously.

In short, Tasha's and John's reactions to the study were very positive. Before the other section, I will end with John's final written comment and the way he saw the whole study as an *expérience langagière* (a language experience):

*Je n'aimerais surtout pas
terminer sans dire quelques*

*I especially would not
like to end without saying a*

mots sur mon travail avec Brigitte et notre groupe en tant qu'expérience langagière. Comme je l'ai dit dans une correspondance précédente, je trouve les cours et activités de type FLS en milieu universitaire insatisfaisants comme expérience langagière. On est toujours censés fabriquer des conversations banales, sur des sujets banals, en groupes et dans des situations artificielles, ce qui n'est point intéressant, à mon sens. Mais de travailler sur quelque chose de bien intéressant, de développer des commentaires et de les défendre, d'exprimer en détail des points de vue auxquels on tient véritablement, et ce, dans un milieu tout à fait libre, sans compétition ni visées évaluatives, et avec un francophone qui est manifestement autant intéressé par le travail que moi - c'est ça qui m'incite à mieux écrire et à mieux parler. (11 décembre 1995).

few words on my work with Brigitte and our group as a language experience. As I said in the preceding correspondence, I find that courses and activities of the FSL type, at the university level, are unsatisfactory as a language experience. We are always supposed to make banal conversations up, on banal topics, in groups and in artificial situations which, in my view, is rather dull. But working on something which is very interesting, developing comments and defending them, expressing, in a detailed way, viewpoints which we really hold on to, and this, in a totally free environment, without competition or evaluation, and with a Francophone who is manifestly as interested in the work as I am - this is what incites me to write and speak better. (December 11, 1995).

John's qualification of topics in FSL conversation classes as being banal is paradoxical since topics are chosen in order to reflect a reality which should be interesting to second language learners. But in his view, they end up creating an artificial situation in the classroom. In light of my own experience of these classes, as a learner and teacher, John expresses this opinion probably because behind the very quality of reality these topics are supposed to have there is a utilitarian purpose which precisely makes them banal, ordinary. Hence, the discussion of a fictional text may lead

to more satisfaction than one which would be based on more everyday topics.

Bourdet (1988, p. 146) makes a related argument when he questions what is left of the authenticity of the so-called *documents authentiques* such as advertisements, newspapers, radio programs, etc. which are used in the French as a foreign language classroom with students who do not live in a French-speaking environment. He explains that these *documents authentiques*, because they are intentionally written to be read or heard in a specific context by native speakers of the language, lose much of their meaning when they are deprived of that original context. In comparison, a well-chosen literary text, has the advantage of already containing much of its context because it offers readers tools for its own meaning, *un mode d'emploi (directions for use)* in other words. For Bourdet, it is easier and more authentic to use a literary text than one, such as a newspaper article, which actually requires a long experience of French-speaking life. He pursues,

(...) ce qui est en cause ici n'est rien moins qu'une essence du texte littéraire que l'on peut définir comme sens se contruisant dans et avec la participation du lecteur (ibid.).

What is at stake is nothing less than the essence of the literary text that can be defined as meaning which is built into and with the reader's participation (ibid.).

Educational relevance of the study, curricular implications and a few pedagogical suggestions for language learning and the reading of literature in a second language context

It is in the narrative process of engaging ourselves as whole persons that I see the prime educational relevance of the study. My previous discussion of the points of significance emerging from the study shows how the process has been educationally enriching for each individual involved in it. By coming to know one another as persons, language learners and literature readers, we demonstrated, as others had already done before us (Conle, 1987; Enns-Connolly, 1986; Vechter, 1988) that the approach could be meaningful in a second language context involving a particular pedagogical situation - that is, an exchange of letters and a sharing of reading-responses to literary texts. Furthermore, since our first reflections on our language-learning and reading experiences in our respective mother tongues were also fruitful, it is my belief that they would be beneficial to teachers and learners in a first language context and for anyone involved in teacher education programs since language is the vehicle of expression of human thoughts.

From a curricular viewpoint, the study is an exploration of language learning and literature reading in the contexts of persons' lives, to try to go beyond the usual boundaries that are set in second language programs when aspects of the language such as grammar, morphology, vocabulary, syntax and literature are taught in isolation through separate courses. In their letters and reading-responses, entirely written in

French, Patrick, Tasha and John have shown that it is possible to integrate language learning into the reading and interpretation of literature through a narrative approach in a second language. My participants engaged themselves, but in a much more in-depth and personal manner, in what some second language educators, advocating the integration of literature to the language classroom, have proposed through detailed activities in resource books (Carter and Long, 1987, 1991; Collie & Slater, 1987; Duff and Maley, 1990; Maley and Duff, 1989; McRae, 1991). These books, although full of imaginative suggestions which could be adapted to French literary texts², do not, in my view, sufficiently allow students to explore the meaning and develop a fully personal interpretation of literary texts.

University second language programs are directed by linguists, on one side, and literary theorists and critics, on the other, who usually make a strict distinction between literature and language courses. The two camps are thus entrenched in a divisive educational view (Enns-Connolly, 1990) and, consequently, according to that author:

Language is seen as the "means" to the "end" of literature. [But] for dialectic curriculum development to become a reality there, the hierarchies of authority which have evolved as a result of such a view need to be dismantled. Only then can an harmonious curricular vision begin to emerge (p. 513).

² To my knowledge, there is no equivalent resource book for the integration of literary texts in the French language classroom.

And, I would add, a more educationally relevant vision of language learning and literature reading would thus become possible.

My study illustrates the possibility for both second language teachers and students to reflect on language learning and literature reading in a unified and meaningful manner which takes into consideration their personal knowledge and experience. Although my participants could function at an advanced and sophisticated language level and were slightly older than undergraduates who are generally enrolled in French as a second language program, I believe that elements of the study can be adapted to other classroom contexts (e.g., in conversation or composition courses) with students of a high intermediate level as well. In order to create a fruitful second language learning experience for students, I do not think, however, it is possible to go below that level.

The first and probably most important pedagogical suggestion is the development of a collaborative setting right at the beginning. In order to obtain it, a good interpersonal relationship should be created between the teacher and students, and between the students themselves during the first classes. This implies that the teacher will share stories of his / her personal background, language-learning and reading experiences with students (either through written texts or oral presentations, according to the type of course). These stories will serve as cues to students. If students do not feel confident enough to talk or write about them in the

second language, then they could sometimes express themselves in their native language.

Once the teacher knows about these language-learning and reading experiences of all members of the class, a choice of literary texts could be established. I would encourage students to bring texts they may have read and would like to share with the class. For the teacher, it is important to have a wide variety of short texts in different genres (stories, poems or novel excerpts), preferably from French authors from different countries - I would not exclude good translations - which can relate to student's interests and awaken their curiosity. Most of these texts will probably be contemporary (although classics or texts from the "canon" should also be considered). As to the level of linguistic or literary difficulty of the text, I would try to vary it as much as possible and would not hesitate to give one which may seem too difficult.

I would also recommend reading, annotating the text, writing logs or journals according to Spack's guidelines (1994, see appendix B), with modifications according to each classroom context. I would carefully explain why I approach the literary text in that manner and the advantages I see in it, namely that they need to build their confidence in their personal interpretations of a literary text and the relationships with the text they can establish through connections with their personal experiences. (If these connections appear difficult to make, the teacher could prepare a series of questions about the reader's personal

experience which relates to the content of the selected story (see Smith and White, 1993, for suggestions). And, most importantly, I would make them understand that it is of prime importance for them to develop at first a knowledge of literature, rather than *about* literature (Rosenblatt, 1938/1983, pp. 58-59; Brumfit, 1985, p. 123). It is an experience of "genuine reading" that they should work on at the beginning. After this, it would make much more sense to acquire an understanding of particular historical traditions or genres if some of them were asked to do so in other specialist courses (Brumfit, *ibid.*).

Concluding thoughts about the study and directions for further inquiry

I hope that the study will lead second language practitioners, educators and researchers to adopt a teaching and do more in-depth studies which consider the personal knowledge of learners (and teachers) as it is expressed through personal voices from the viewpoint of narrative inquiry. A narrative approach permits to do teacher research and empathize with participants in ways that second language research - usually informed by applied linguistics, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics - does not permit since it is situated within a scientific paradigm which by and large ignores the interpretive aspects of language learning. In the particular context of my study, narrative inquiry focuses on the importance of having an ongoing dialogue between teachers and students which, through talking and writing, can

illuminate the complexity of learning a second language and of reading literature. I also hope that my participants' letters and responses, by shedding light on their personal language learning and reading experiences and on their incipient ways of coming to understand a literary text (an aspect which is rarely considered in the pedagogy of the second language literature classroom at the university level) can further encourage the use of this teaching approach both in the language and literature classroom.

In our increasingly multicultural world, the study illustrates the need to consider the personal, cultural and experiential backgrounds of learners when they learn a second (or foreign) language and read literary texts in that language. As well, it points out the significance of examining how teachers and students cross linguistic and cultural boundaries in language learning, and of developing a better understanding of the complexity of learning a second language and of reading literature in the Canadian context. More broadly, it is also my belief that this type of reflection on language learning and reading could be enriching for anyone (not only second language educators or students) who is engaged in teacher education programs since language is the vehicle of expression of human thoughts for all of us.

Afterword

In this Afterword, I would like to discuss the conceptualization and interpretation of the whole study as part of my own narrative as a language/literature learner and teacher in the Québec/Ontario context.

Before doing so, I address how my study - which points to further possibilities of interpretation given the varied excerpts from conversations and responses I quoted - can be viewed as a part of my unfolding personal narrative of inquiry. Although I earlier explained that an important purpose of my study was "to know my participants as language learners, readers and persons" (see Chapter VI) and that in order to achieve this it was important to give their voices as much space as I could, the reconstruction of the whole study experience undeniably reflects part of my narrative¹. For

¹ And this is my belief even though my participants were always informed of the research process. For instance, they were given verbatim transcriptions of nearly all conversations and reading-response sessions we had together (see Appendices A and B). I explained to Tasha and John the way I was using these transcriptions in order to have field texts which would help me in the writing in English of the study: first, I summarized in English the points that were made during these conversations and sessions; second, I added a layer of interpretive comments, always in English, to those which appeared the most important. I did it that way because I felt unable to write in English from a text which was written in French. As to the written responses, instead of summarizing them, I first annotated them with reflections in English and then decided to translate them into English. As well, Tasha

instance, my decision to introduce the thesis with my correspondence with JoAnn was a kind of setting of the stage that I knew would prepare the following scenes well (at the same time, it was a way of introducing my own story to readers). My ordering, my arranging of ideas and themes, reflects my view of doing narrative research in that particular experience of having met and known my participants, read and shared with them short stories at that time in my life.

I came slowly to the actual writing of this thesis. I remember being puzzled for a long time on the ways I could pull significant threads out of the letters, conversations and responses which would help me present a meaningful whole. Even though the unifying ideas of language-learning and reading experiences at home and in school allowed me to discuss "the linguistic and literate selves" in the first two parts of the thesis, it was not always clear how I would relate them to the third part dealing with the responses to the short stories. And if I did make some connections between ideas in the preceding chapters on Tasha's and John's "linguistic and literate selves" and others that were explored in their reading-responses, the short stories, with their doors opening on so many different meanings, could easily have led to other narratives making up the pages of another study.

and John read all preceding chapters as I was writing them along, made comments and approved of them, and even helped me edit them. As for Patrick and JoAnn, they read the first three chapters and also agreed with my writing.

The linear, organized and analytical character that I deliberately gave to the reading-response chapters - surely a reflection of my own education as a language and literature student - perhaps could have been replaced with a more fragmented presentation of the responses which would have been as significant as the type of narrative unity it now offers.

It may appear surprising and certainly contradictory to the common way of presenting a thesis that I discuss this methodological aspect in the conclusion. Although there are no precisely defined rules regarding the ways of conducting a narrative inquiry, I believe that the preceding reflection upon my methodology represents a very narrative way of doing the research in that first you have to do it, experience it, think about the way you did it and try to explain why you did it in that manner.

When I say that I regard the study as part of my unfolding personal narrative as a language and literature learner and teacher in the Canadian context, this view has obviously been created thanks to my participants, despite my interpretation of all stages in the whole process, and my final writing on the experience. I would never have achieved recreating it without Patrick's, Tasha's and John's generosity and sense of involvement in the study. In my exchanges with them they have taught me about the complexity of each learner's personal knowledge regarding stories of language-learning and reading and their responses to literary texts. More broadly, the Canadian sociocultural and historical context has also shaped my philosophy of the learning and

teaching of a second language, which consists in thinking that language learners are first and foremost individuals who are personally, historically and socially situated. It is my belief that the personal experiences that individuals - whether they are teachers and students - bring to a learning context, should always be considered in the teaching of a language and its literature.

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Appendix A

Chronology of the pilot study (including letters, conversations and reading-response sessions)¹.

- 1- April 21, 1994. First meeting with Patrick after one of his translation classes.
- 2- Brigitte's Letter 1 (April 25, 1994) - Patrick's Letter 1 (April 27, 1994).
- 3- Brigitte's Letter 2 (May 6, 1994) - Patrick's Letter 2 (May 19, 1994).
- 4- Brigitte's Letter 3 (June 2, 1994) - Patrick's Letter 3 (June 9, 1994).
- 5- Brigitte's Letter 4 (June 14, 1994) - Patrick's Letter 4 (June 25, 1994).
- 6- Conversation of July 16, 1994 - Patrick's justification of the choice of and first oral response to *La laide*.
- 7- Reading-response session of July 24, 1994 - Writing of our first reading-responses to *La laide* (Duration: app. 1h30).
- 8- Reading-response session of July 28, 1994 - Writing of our second reading-responses to *La laide*.
- 9- Reading-response session of August 4, 1994 - Patrick's oral reflection on his previous reading-responses July 24 and 28 - Patrick's decision of responding, in writing, to question 17 regarding *La laide* (v. question 17 of the following question

¹ Most conversations and reading-response sessions took place at a university department between April and September 1994.

list). Brigitte's writing of a commentary on Patrick's previous reading-responses.

10- Reading-response session of August 7, 1994 - Patrick's writing of responses to *La machine à détecter tout ce qui est américain* according to questions 1 to 3 of the following list. Brigitte's writing of a commentary on Patrick's reading-response of August 4.

11- Reading-response session of August 12, 1994 - Brigitte's letter in which I discussed again my interest in encouraging spontaneous oral and written responses to literary texts. Given to Patrick at the following meeting.

12- Reading-response session of August 14, 1994 - Patrick's writing of responses to *La machine...* according to questions 4 to 6 of the following list. Brigitte's writing of responses to the same story according to questions 1 to 5 of the same list.

13- Reading-response session of August 16, 1994 - Patrick's writing of responses to *La machine...* according to questions 7 to 9 of the following list. Brigitte's writing of responses to the same story according to questions 6 and 7 of the same list.

14- Reading-response session of August 18, 1994 - Patrick's writing of responses to *La machine...* according to questions 10, 11 and 16 of the following list. Brigitte's writing of responses to the same story according to questions 8 to 11, 14 and 15 of the same list. I wrote, on my own on August 19, the remaining responses to questions 16 and 19.

15- Reading-response session of August 28, 1994 - Patrick's writing of responses to *La machine...* to questions 14, 15 and 18 of the following list.

16- Conversation of September, 12, 1994 - Patrick's second justification for his choice of stories for our previous reading-response sessions. We also shared personal stories about language-learning and reading experiences. We also exchanged our already written responses to questions 12 & 13 of the following list. (Patrick had prepared an answer to question 13 only.)

17- Conversation of September, 16, 1994 - We discussed question 12, i.e., the written comparison I had made of our responses to all other questions (1 to 19, excl. 12). We also discussed the way I conducted the whole study regarding our letter-exchange and previous sessions.

Question list² suggested to Patrick

1- First reaction - What is your first reaction or response after a first reading of the text? Describe or explain.

2- Feelings - What feelings did the text awaken in you? What emotions did you feel as you read the text?

² Except for question 17 on language which is my own addition, the following questions are adapted from Robert Probst's article (1988): Dialogue with a text. *English Journal*, 77, 32-38. They were adapted into French for the pilot study with Patrick (see translation below). We both answered all questions. Question no. 12 was answered separately, after all others were done.

- 3- Perceptions - What happens in the text? Retell the major events briefly.
- 4- Images, metaphors - What is the image or metaphor you find the most striking?
- 5- Memories - What memory does the text call to mind? Does it remind you of people, places, events, smells, etc.?
- 6- Thoughts, ideas - In your opinion, is there an idea or thought that was suggested by the text?
- 7- Selection of textual elements - During the reading, what were the textual elements upon which you focused most intently - what word, phrase, image, idea?
- 8- Judgments of importance - What is the most important word or phrase which would be the most important in the text? What is the most important passage? Explain.
- 9- Identification of problems - What is the most difficult word or passage in the text? Which word or passage in the text or in your reading that you have had the most trouble understanding?
- 10- Author - Do you think the author is trying to transmit a particular meaning of the story? Or do you think this meaning may be for him/her only, and that, in fact, it is impossible to identify this particular meaning since it may evolve from one reader to the other? What sort of person do you imagine the author to be, i.e., his character, his personality?
- 11- Patterns of response - How did you respond to the text - emotionally or intellectually? Did you feel involved with the text, or distant from it?

12- Other readings - How did your response to the text differ from that of your discussion partner? In what ways were they similar?

13- Evolution of your reading - How did your understanding of the text or feelings progress? Has it become clearer after rereading it? In what ways did the discussion and exchange of written texts help you?

14- Evaluations - Do you think the text is a good one - why, or why not?

15- Literary associations - Does this text call to mind any other literary work (poem, play, film, story-any genre)? If it does, what is the work and what is the connection you see between the two?

16- Writing - If you were to be asked to write about your reading of this text, upon what would you focus? Would you write about some association or memory, some aspect of the text itself, about the author, or about some other matter you consider to be important?

17- Language - Is there an aspect in the language of the text, i.e., words or sentences that you like or dislike? Can you explain your choice?

1- Première réaction: Quelle est ma première réaction après ma première lecture? Décrire et expliquer.

2- Sentiments: Pendant la lecture, quels sentiments, quelles émotions le texte m'a-t-il fait sentir?

3- Perceptions: Qu'est-ce qui se passe dans le texte? Rapporter brièvement les faits principaux.

4- Images: Y a-t-il une image, une métaphore dans le texte qui me frappe particulièrement? Expliquer le choix.

4 b)-: Y a-t-il une image particulière qui m'est venue à l'esprit en lisant le texte? Décrire brièvement.

5- Souvenirs: Est-ce que le texte me rappelle des souvenirs? C'est-à-dire des souvenirs se rapportant soit à des personnes, endroits, événements, odeurs, etc.

6- Réflexions, idées: A mon avis, y a-t-il une idée ou réflexion principale qui est suggérée par le texte?

7- Choix d'éléments textuels: Pendant la lecture, sur quels éléments du texte me suis-je le plus attardé(e) - quel mot, quelle expression, image, idée?

8- Jugement d'importance - A mon avis, y aurait-il un mot ou une expression qui serait plus important que tout autre dans le texte? Quel serait le passage le plus important dans le texte? Expliquer.

9- Identification des difficultés: Y a-t-il un mot ou des mots que j'ai trouvé(s) difficile(s) dans le texte? Quel passage dans le texte ai-je eu le plus de difficulté à comprendre?

10- Auteur(e): Est-ce que l'auteur essaie de nous transmettre un "message" particulier? Ou plutôt est-ce que l'auteur a un "message" pour lui seul et, qu'en fait, il est impossible d'identifier ce "message" puisqu'il évoluera d'un/d'une lecteur/lectrice à l'autre? Comment puis-je imaginer l'auteur? C'est-à-dire son caractère, sa personnalité?

11- Types de réponses: Comment ai-je répondu au texte, sur les plans émotif et intellectuel? Me suis-je senti(e), pris(e), captivé(e) par le texte ou m'en suis-je senti(e) détaché(e)?

12- En quoi ma lecture diffère-t-elle de celle de mon partenaire?

13- Évaluation: Ai-je (beaucoup, un peu, pas du tout) aimé lire ce texte?

14- Associations littéraires: Est-ce que le texte me rappelle un autre texte (un film, poème, une pièce de théâtre, peinture, nouvelle, émission de télévision, etc.)? Si oui, quel est ce texte et quel est le lien que j'étais entre les deux?

15- Écriture: Si on me demandait d'écrire un texte au sujet de la lecture, sur quoi me concentrerais-je? Est-ce que j'écrirais au sujet d'une association, d'un souvenir, d'un aspect du texte (ex.: contexte historique, langue, images, etc.) de l'auteur(e) ou de tout autre aspect que je considère important?

16- Langue: Y a-t-il un aspect de la langue qui me frappe, soit des mots qui me plaisent ou me déplaisent? Expliquer le choix.

Appendix B

Chronology of the study with John and Tasha (including letters, conversations and reading-response sessions¹).

- 1- July 23, 1994. First meeting with John after one of his linguistics classes.
- 2- Brigitte's letter (July 25, 1994) - John's letter (August 2, 1994).
- 3- Brigitte's letter (August 14, 1994) - John's letter (September 1st, 1994).
- 4- Brigitte's letter (September 19, 1994) - John's letter (September 23, 1994).
- 5- September 23, 1994. First meeting with Tasha after one of her linguistics classes.
- 6- Brigitte's letter (September 23, 1994) - Tasha's letter (September 28, 1994).
- 7- Brigitte's letter (October 4, 1994) - Tasha's letter (October 12, 1994),
- 8- Brigitte's letter (October 5, 1994) - John's letter (October 10, 1994).
- 9- Brigitte's letter (October 19, 1994) - John's letter (October 25, 1994).
- 10- Brigitte's letter (October 22, 1994) - John's letter (October 27, 1994).

¹ Conversations and reading-response sessions, including the wrap-up session, took place at a university department between December 1994 and December 1995.

- 11- Brigitte's letter (November 2, 1994) - John's letter (November 8, 1994).
- 12- Brigitte's letter (November 20, 1994) - Brigitte's letter (November 27, 1994).
- 13) Conversation of December 15, 1994 (with Tasha, John and Anna). Participants' introductions to one another².
- 14) Conversation of January 19, 1995, with Tasha, John, Anna and Tina, about language-learning and reading experiences at home and in school.
- 15) Conversation of February 14, 1995, with Tasha, John and Tina. Follow-up on the conversation of January 19; I read to them Croft's short story *B...comme dans bucolique*; they gave a first oral reaction to it.)
- 16) Reading-response session of February 21, 1995, with John and Tasha, on *B...comme dans bucolique*. Discussion of Annotations and Journal I.
- 17) Reading-response session of March 1, 1995, with John, on *B...comme dans bucolique*. Discussion of Journal II.
- 18) Reading-response session of March 25, 1995, with John, on *How are you?* Discussion of Annotations and Journal I.

² Tina (Greek-Canadian) & Anna (Chinese-Hakka) participated during the first introductory sessions of December 15, January 19 and February 14. Anna could attend only the first two ones; as for Tina, she participated in only two reading-response sessions.

- 19) Reading-response session of April 12, 1995, with John, Tasha and Tina, on *How are you?*. Discussion of Annotations and Journal I.
- 20) Reading-response session of April 24, 1995, with Tasha and John, on *Interview*. Discussion of Annotations and Journal I.
- 21) Reading-response session of April 29, 1995, with Tasha and John, on *Interview*. Discussion of Journal II.
- 22) Reading-response session of May 24, 1995, with Tasha and John, on *Interview*. Follow-up on the discussion of April 29. Beginning of the reading-response session on *La laide*. Discussion of Annotations and Journal I.
- 23) Reading-response session of May 31, 1995, with Tasha and John, on *La laide*. Discussion of Journal I and II.
- 24) Reading-response session of June 12, 1995, with Tasha and John, on *La laide*. End of discussion concerning Journal II. Viewing of Scola's film *Passion d'amour*.
- 25) Session of June 19, 1995, with Tasha and John. Viewing of Jutras's film *Kamouraska*. Discussion of their written responses to the film seen during the previous session, *Passion d'amour*.
- 26) Reading-response session of September 1, 1995, with Tasha and John, on *Les riens de la vie*. Discussion of Annotations and Journal I.
- 27) Session of September 22, 1995, with Tasha and John. Viewing of the film *Mon oncle Antoine*. Brief reactions to the

short stories *L'opération* de Naïm Kattan et *Pays perdu* de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska³.

28) Session of December 11, 1995, with Tasha and John. Wrap-up meeting on their experience of the study.

Reading-response guidelines suggested to Tasha and John

The following steps and strategies were suggested to Tasha and John in order to prepare for the first meeting. They were adapted and translated into French (see below). I insisted on their respecting the order of the readings, but left them free to answer any suggested questions. The source of these guidelines is Spack (1994), *The International Story. An Anthology with Guidelines for Reading and Writing about Fiction* (pp. 5-16).

1) You read through the story once to get the gist (please do not use the dictionary).

Any rereading of a text, whether it be literary or not, always brings a new understanding, sheds light on meanings, connotations that one would not have thought of after an only reading. Thus, for the other readings, I would like you to follow these steps:

2) During the second reading, if it is necessary, underline words and expressions that you find difficult to understand.

³ We decided not to respond to these stories because of a lack of time. The stories are both published in Gallays (Ed.. 1993).

Try to infer the meaning of words by means of this contextualization exercise:

- you look at what precedes and follows the word or expression (e.g., ask yourself what grammatical function the word plays: noun, verb or adverb);
- you try to determine whether the word has a positive or negative connotation;
- how does the word fit into the whole story?

If you cannot understand the meaning of words, consult a unilingual dictionary or ask me the question.

3) During the third reading, you *annotate* the text, i.e., you write down your very first reactions to the story. For instance, you write words or sentences - that is, you write brief notes - relating to each paragraph or larger chunks of the story. These first reactions could consist of one or several following possibilities:

- express any emotion or feeling in response to what you have just read (e.g., surprise, pleasure, anger, confusion, etc.);
- recall personal associations with actions or conversations that take place in the story;
- make connections with passages in the story with others you have known through your readings, movies, television programs, etc.) you have read, heard, or seen;
- create headings to identify different scenes (e.g., "sister," "father," "the accident on the road," etc.);
- write a sentence summarizing a scene or passage that you consider to be particularly significant;

- make a brief comment about a certain passage or scene that you think is particularly significant;
- ask questions about things you do not understand or would like to see in the story (questions can be addressed to the author, to other students, the teacher, etc.).

(For all the above cases, identify the concerned passages clearly). 4) After the fourth reading, you write a *Journal*. This activity further develops the one that has been started through the *Annotations* of the text. You can write one or two paragraphs (150 to 200 words) in which you express, from a personal and sincere viewpoint, your thoughts and feelings about the story. This writing also provides you with the opportunity to express any confusion you have regarding the text. The possibilities are the following:

- explore what you like or interests you the most;
- explore what you don't like or don't understand about the story (it can be about a character, a linguistic or narrative aspect, etc.);
- relate your own experience (it can be an event, a memory) or your background knowledge (memory of a book, a movie, etc.) to the story;
- write about what you find the most significant aspect about the story;
- raise questions regarding words or passages of the story which seem unclear.

(As in the case of *Annotations*, identify the concerned passages clearly.)

During our next meeting, we will each discuss the content of our *Journal I*. Our discussion should make you think about new aspects that you will take note of. After this meeting, you will write a *Journal II* which will be more structured than the preceding, i.e., the subject will be more circumscribed.

A - Pour notre première rencontre, j'ai suggéré à Tasha et à John les étapes et stratégies suivantes. Elles ont été adaptées et traduites de l'anglais (v. ci-dessus). J'ai insisté pour qu'ils respectent l'ordre des lectures mais les ai laissés libres de répondre à n'importe laquelle des questions suggérées. La source de ces directives est Spack (1994), *The International Story. An Anthology with Guidelines for Reading and Writing about Fiction* (pp. 5-16).

Voici ce que je vous propose de faire pour notre prochaine rencontre:

1) vous lisez la nouvelle une première fois, du début à la fin, de façon à en saisir l'essentiel. (Prière de ne pas utiliser le dictionnaire!)

Toute relecture d'un texte, qu'il soit littéraire ou non, apporte toujours une nouvelle compréhension, met en lumière des sens, des connotations auxquels on n'aurait pu penser après une seule lecture. Ainsi, pour les autres lectures, j'aimerais que vous suiviez les consignes suivantes:

2) Pendant la 2e lecture, si c'est nécessaire, soulignez les mots et expressions que vous avez de la difficulté à

comprendre. Essayez de saisir le sens de ces mots en faisant ce petit exercice de contextualisation:

- vous regardez ce qui précède et suit le mot (par ex.: demandez-vous quelle est la catégorie grammaticale du mot (un nom, un verbe, un adverbe)

- vous essayez de déterminer si le mot a une connotation positive ou négative;

- comment le mot s'inscrit-il dans toute l'histoire?

Si vous n'arrivez pas à saisir le sens des mots, consultez le dictionnaire unilingue ou bien posez-moi la question!

3) Pendant la 3e lecture, vous faites l'annotation du texte, c'est-à-dire que vous mettez par écrit vos toutes premières réactions à la nouvelle. Par exemple, vous écrivez des mots ou des phrases - bref, vous écrivez des notes brèves - se rapportant à chaque paragraphe ou bien à un ensemble de paragraphes. Ces premières réactions pourraient inclure une ou plusieurs des possibilités suivantes:

- vous exprimez vos émotions ou sentiments à la suite de ce que vous venez de lire (par exemple, ce peut être la surprise, le plaisir, la colère, la confusion, etc.);

- vous faites des associations personnelles à partir des actions, mots ou paroles de la nouvelle;

- vous établissez un lien entre des éléments de la nouvelles avec ceux que vous avez connus dans d'autres lectures, films, émissions de télévision, oeuvres d'art, etc.;

- vous créez des titres de façon à identifier certaines scènes (par ex.: «L'accident sur la route»; «la soeur»; «le rôle du père», etc.)

- vous écrivez une phrase qui résume, ou bien encore une phrase qui commente une scène ou un passage que vous jugez particulièrement important;

- vous posez des questions au sujet d'éléments que vous ne comprenez pas ou encore au sujet d'éléments que vous aimeriez voir dans la nouvelle (par ex., vous pourriez adresser vos questions à l'auteur(e)).

(Dans tous les cas énumérés ci-dessus, n'oubliez pas d'identifier clairement les passages concernés.)

4) A la suite de la 4e lecture, vous écrivez un *Journal*. Cette activité développe davantage l'activité d'annotation précédente. Ainsi, vous pouvez écrire un ou deux paragraphes (150 à 200 mots) dans lesquels vous exprimez, d'un point de vue personnel et sincère, vos pensées et sentiments au sujet de la nouvelle. C'est aussi l'occasion de parler de toute confusion que vous ressentez à l'égard du texte. Les possibilités sont les suivantes:

- vous exprimez ce que vous aimez ou ce qui vous intéresse le plus;

- vous exprimez ce que vous n'aimez ou ne comprenez pas dans la nouvelle (ce peut être au sujet d'un personnage, de la langue, de la narration, etc.) ;

- vous reliez votre expérience personnelle (ce peut être un fait, un souvenir) ou vos connaissances (souvenir d'un livre, d'un film, etc.) à la nouvelle;

- vous écrivez au sujet de ce qui vous paraît le plus important dans la nouvelle;

- vous soulevez des questions au sujet des mots ou passages qui vous paraissent obscurs. etc.

(Comme dans le cas d'activité d'annotation, identifiez clairement les passages concernés.) Lors de notre prochaine rencontre, chacun de nous discutera du contenu de son Journal I. Notre discussion devrait vous faire penser à de nouveaux aspects dont vous prendrez note. A la suite de cette rencontre, vous écrirez un *Journal II* qui sera plus structuré que le précédent, c'est-à-dire que le sujet sera plus circonscrit.

B - For our second meeting, I suggested Tasha and John to take the following steps. The source is Spack (1994, pp. 25-40).

For Journal II that we will discuss in class, I would like you to answer one of the following questions. If our discussion of the last meeting has raised a point which interests you more than those suggested by these questions, write about it instead.

1- What are the narrator's perspectives? (What do they suggest to you, what do they teach you as a reader? Reflect on the use of pronouns).

2- What do you think of the story setting? (If that reminds you of something that you have known, in what way is it similar or different?)

3- What do you think of physical details in the story? (What do they evoke for you? Do they bring back memories? What do all physical details make you understand regarding the characters, situations of the story?)

4- What do you think of the characters? (Do you like the main character? What do you think of other characters? What are their roles in the story? Do they remind you of persons you know or of other characters in books, movies or television programs?)

5- What do you think of the use of images? (Do they teach you something new regarding your experience, or readings or movies that you know? Do they awake feelings? Do they resort to senses (sight, hearing, taste, smelling, touching)? Is there a type of image that predominates? If that is so, to what feeling or state of mind this image is related to? If you see many types of images, how does this blend create meaning?)

6- What do you think of the author's use of objects or events which represent something abstract or invisible? (In other words, do you perceive the use of symbols in the text? What do they teach you?)

Pour le Journal II à discuter en classe, j'aimerais que vous répondiez à l'une des questions suivantes. Si notre discussion de la dernière rencontre a soulevé un point ou des points qui vous intéresse plus que ceux qui sont suggérés dans ces questions, et bien, parlez-en!

1- Quelles perspectives retrouve-t-on dans la narration de la nouvelle? (Qu'est-ce qu'elles vous suggèrent, qu'est-ce qu'elles vous enseignent en tant que lecteur/lectrice? Réfléchissez sur l'emploi des pronoms.)

2 - Que pensez-vous du lieu de la nouvelle? (Si ça vous rappelle quelque chose que vous avez connu, en quoi est-ce semblable ou différent?)

3 - Que pensez-vous des détails physiques de la nouvelle? (Qu'est-ce qu'ils évoquent pour vous? Est-ce qu'ils vous rappellent des souvenirs? Qu'est-ce que tous les détails physiques vous font comprendre au sujet des personnages, de la situation de la nouvelle?)

4 - Que pensez-vous des personnages? (Aimez-vous le personnage principal? Que pensez-vous des autres personnages? Quels rôles jouent-ils? Vous font-ils penser à des personnes que vous connaissez ou bien à des personnages de livres, de films ou d'émissions de télévision?)

5 - Que pensez-vous de l'emploi de images? (Vous apprennent-elles quelque chose de nouveau par rapport à votre expérience, à des lectures ou films que vous connaissez? Eveillent-elles des sentiments? Font-elles appel aux sens (la vue, l'ouïe, le goût, l'odorat, le toucher)? Y a-t-il un type d'image qui prédomine? Si oui, à quel sentiment ou état d'esprit ce type d'image est-il relié? Si vous voyez plusieurs types d'images, comment ce mélange crée-t-il de la signification?)

6 - Que pensez-vous de l'utilisation par l'auteur d'objets ou d'événements qui représentent quelque chose d'invisible ou d'abstrait? (En d'autres termes, voyez-vous l'emploi de symboles dans le texte? Que vous apprennent-ils de nouveau?)

Appendix C

Letter of agreement and consent

Dear participant,

I am writing this letter in order to obtain your agreement and consent for a study which will allow me to complete my Ph.D thesis. You will find below a summary of the study which should clarify its purposes, your role in it, as well as the conditions that, as the initiator of the study, I will have to respect.

Summary

The main purpose of the study is to carry out a reflection on the oral and written reading responses to literary texts by non Francophone undergraduates enrolled in French Studies programs. Before having you respond to these texts, I intend to explore, by means of letters and conversations, stories concerning parts of your personal background, as well as the reading and language-learning experiences you have known over the years at home and in school. This will allow a reflection on the way your literacy has evolved over the years and also prepare you for the following individual and/or group sessions which will mostly consist of discussions and writings about literary texts.

The above summary means I will have to:

* keep you fully informed of the purpose and procedure of the study;

- * obtain your consent for the tape-recording of our meetings and discussions;
- * keep in a secure place all materials gathered during this study and make them available to you for consultation;
- * present to you for your response, verification and approval a final descriptive summary of our work;
- * allow you to discontinue participation in the study if it is overly demanding of your time or causing undue stress or anxiety which is affecting your studies;
- * obtain your permission for any information gained through my efforts to result in a publishable document, including articles and/or books;
- * keep your identity anonymous by means of a pseudonym in the thesis and other documents concerning the study which could be published.

In short, I hope my study will provide you with an opportunity to express your voice and identity in relation to your cultural background, prior knowledge and experience. At the same time, it will give you an additional opportunity for oral, reading and writing practice in French in an innovative context.

Researcher's signature: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date : _____

Thank you very much for your invaluable participation.