

Unable to judge the significance or even the effect of her work, she does recognize that "in a sense, it did not matter. The necessary doing of the thing—that mattered" (p. 369).

For those who know Margaret Laurence's work, *The Diviners* will seem a summing up, a return to familiar territory in the crowded, vital world of Manawaka, and a fresh appraisal of that world in which various characters from the earlier novels are seen in new perspective. It is also a more consciously Canadian novel than the others, with the legends of Piper Gunn and Jules' tales of Rider Tonnerre and the days of Métis glory providing the curious amalgam of fiction and history that make cultural myth. The spirit of place is caught and crystallized too, perhaps best when Morag recognizes the coming of winter in the time-honored Canadian way: "Sitting on the dock, Morag became aware of an unmistakable sound overhead. Very far up, they flew in their V-formation, the few leaders out front, the flock sounding the deep long-drawn-out resonant raucous cry that no words could ever catch but which no one who ever heard it could ever forget. A sound and a sight with such a splendour in it that the only true response was silence. When these birds left, the winter was about to happen. When they returned, you would know it was spring. The Canada geese were flying south" (p. 336).

As the novel draws to a close, Morag ponders the fate of her friend Royland, a water diviner who loses his gift, and wonders about the future course of her own talent. It is tempting to speculate on whether she is echoing Margaret Laurence's own present uncertainty: Mrs. Laurence has said recently that she may never write another novel. However that may be, one must certainly see *The Diviners* marking the end of the Manawaka cycle in her work; at the same time it assures her reputation as one of Canada's most competent novelists.

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### "Martin": A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Hydrocephalic

In "Martin," from the collection *La Fièvre*<sup>1</sup> by J. M. G. Le Clézio, a constant irony bears witness to the author's fascination with adventures of the mind, while mercilessly condemning the gifts which make those intellectual explorations possible. The ironic mode permits him to assert and at the same time refuse all acquiescence in the assertion. "Martin" derides, and thereby negates, but also renews and develops ideas which infuse Le Clézio's entire canon.

Central characters in Le Clézio's other writings can often be linked onomastically with an allegorical Everyman. Martin's family name, on the contrary, is Torjmann, which, through its Germanic roots, marks him as the Fool-man, the exception. The juxtaposition of his two dominant traits transcribes his uniqueness: he is a genius; he is hydrocephalic. Thus, even Martin's basic nature pushes to absurdity Le Clézio's underlying antiaristotelian philosophy that unity derives from reconciled opposites, and from the beginning the reader is made aware of the author's autoparodistic intentions.

The most superficial, but accordingly most evident, parallel between Le Clézio and Martin is their youthful celebrity. The 23-year old Le Clézio had been catapulted to fame by the success of his first novel, *Le Procès-verbal* (1963). Martin, at the age of twelve, is the object of similar, though greatly exaggerated, adulation. He is seen and heard on television and radio; famous professors seek him out; he gives interviews in all languages; the public eagerly awaits his lectures, and he has been invited for a two-month tour of the United States.

Le Clézio aspires constantly towards a condition whereby art as individual creativity will be abandoned in favor of art as mystical communion with the universe. Martin has indeed transcended his own stage of literary production. Like Le Clézio, he began to write at the age of seven. The chaotic pace of his words was similar to that of life and of matter, but as soon as he attempted to impose a technique onto the act of writing the pleasure ceased. He invented Elmen, a language in which words were never twice the same. Given the impossibility of rereading works which used this idiom, Martin soon abandoned it. At the age of ten, he renounced all his attempts at authorship, though even now he retains a nostalgic fondness for the days when "writing signified nothing, when it was only a succession of approximations" (p. 144).

There are striking analogies between these pronouncements by Martin and some of Le Clézio's own preoccupations. For example, a chapter of "Incomprehensible Words" is presented in *Terra Amata* as one among many efforts to express the ineffable. "Martin" provides the proof, however, of Le Clézio's awareness that to yield totally to the temptation of words leads only to isolation, whereas his major concern as an author is to find a means of communication.

All Le Clézio's heroes are essentially passive spectators of life, all representing thus one aspect of the writer. Their only consistent action is to walk or to ride—actions which may indicate fleeing, but more commonly serve simply as a means of changing perspective. Martin once again represents a case exaggerated to the extreme. He sits for hours lost in thought and declares that he will do nothing with his accumulated knowledge (p. 143). Even his intellectuality results from his parents' decision rather than his own: the opening sentence states that the Torjmanns "had consecrated all their efforts and a great deal of money to make a sort of genius of their son" (p. 132).

The story's central episode recounts the character's one attempt to act, to project his thought onto exterior reality. This effort at veritable creation furnishes the subtlest of all analogies between Martin and Le Clézio the writer. Martin, like numerous other Le Clézian personages, yearns for divinity. Among Martin's ideas, two in particular motivate the subsequent development of the story: "God is creation" and "I am God" (p. 148).

Martin as creator is a mere buffoon, the embodiment of only those aspects of Le Clézio's self-image which lend themselves to caricature. In a news conference, Martin speaks of man's spiritual strivings "to be closer and closer to the center," to approach "the first truth, the initial will, the center of radiance and of warmth, reaching thought in concrete form, similar to action, to total existence" (p. 149). This philosophical center finds its objective correlative in the sandbox. On the day following the news conference, Martin leaves his parents' apartment and goes into the courtyard, "in the center" of which stands a sandpile for children. Circling the area, Martin finally climbs into the sandbox, where he continues to reduce the size of his circles. "When he arrived in the center, he stood for a moment, motionless. Then he lifted his head towards the sky" (p. 150).

After undergoing a mystical trance the boy contemplates the advancing afternoon shadows. As the shade envelops him, Martin realizes through his meditation that for years he has longed "to live only in and of himself" (p. 154), to have the absolute self-sufficiency of godhood. Obeying some inner compulsion, he digs in the sand, where eventually he finds a weevil. In Martin's hand the weevil plays dead, provoking within the boy "a ferocious will to make the animal move . . . . It seemed to Martin . . . . that his will . . . . was unfurling with implacable violence onto the little dry ball. Something like words, pure verbs, MOVE MOVE MOVE MOVE. Projectiles falling into the center of its abdomen which were going to animate the body of the insect, dispel this apparent death." Nothing happens, and Martin grows desperate. "He had been for a moment so close to being a veritable god; he had reached the limits of a state of sublimity."

But just as Martin's created language resulted in utter non-communication, his attempt to create life verges on a similar culmination in total failure. Resorting to a last stratagem, Martin blows on the weevil and fraudulently attains his divinity: "His stinking breath enveloped . . . . the insect, which held out for a few seconds, then, suffocating, turned over onto its stomach and began to walk. Martin had triumphed . . . . Martin murmured: 'Anima . . . Anima . . . ' and he began to laugh" (pp. 157-158).

Twelve days later, one of Martin's lectures is so successful that the newspapers proclaim him a significant new religious leader, and the word "torjmannism" enters the national vocabulary. The next day Martin returns to the sandbox. This time, he is set upon by a band of children, who make fun of his hydrocephaly and snatch away his glasses, pelting him with sand while he is forced to crawl and dig for the glasses. After he collapses, his tormentors place the glasses beside him and leave. Martin regains consciousness and finds the glasses. The story closes as he weeps, crying out: "God, oh God! Too greatly have I blasphemed thee" (p. 173).

"Martin" can thus be seen not only as a caricature of intellectual prowess and the creative process, but also as a burlesque denunciation of the world of literary commentators, graphically illustrating the dangers threatening any artist who gives too great credence to his critics. Martin exists almost exclusively in terms of his looking glass personality, reacting wholly in accord with the expectations of others. Idolized by his parents, he sits like a speechless god, carefully preserving the mystery which they sense in his presence. Adulated by the press, he pontificates pedantically in his interview, as expansive before these worshipers of the word as he is reticent before his awe-struck mother and father. But without believers there is no god. Surrounded by the group of children, who see him in terms of his immediate presence rather than as a function of his contrived mystique, Martin can only grope abjectly in the sand; his vision, in the tangible form of his glasses, deserts him; and by his anguished confession of blasphemy, he repudiates all his earlier assumption of creative powers.

The distance, marked by derision, from which Le Clézio views this travestied image of himself measures the freedom to which he lays claim in his ever-expanding quest to discover the nature of fiction, and of reality. He refuses to be bound by genres or to be characterized by a single style; his personages exceed the limits which definition in naturalistic terms would impose, and his fictional universe refuses no aspect of the exterior world which impinges upon

his perception. Repeatedly, like Martin, he denies what he has created. Unlike Martin, he continues to create. The negations, incorporated into the finished constructs, serve to enrich them. "Martin," with ridicule as its weapon, destruction as its aim, attacks the author, his critics and admirers, and his achievements. But the aesthetic expression of these negative goals remains as one of Le Clézio's most felicitous fictions.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Paris: Gallimard, 1965. All page references are to this edition; the translations are our own.

### On Lino Novás Calvo and His *Maneras de contar*

Lino Novás Calvo is Cuba's most distinguished writer of short stories. He began his literary career in the twenties by publishing in the Cuban vanguardist journal the *Revista de Avance* (1927-1930) and he still is actively writing. Novas Calvo is mainly responsible for the formation of a modern tradition in the Cuban short story, and his works reveal the universal characteristics that exist behind the masks of regionalistic peculiarities. Novas Calvo also has proven to be a perceptive critic and readers of *The International Fiction Review* may be interested in knowing that he was among the first to recognize the merits of William Faulkner's works. An article of his on Faulkner appeared in the January 1933 issue of Spain's prestigious journal the *Revista de Occidente* which was edited by Ortega y Gasset. It is the earliest study of Faulkner that this writer knows of in Spanish. Novas Calvo has maintained an active interest in U. S. fiction throughout his career and he has been on cordial terms with writers such as Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway. Recently he has been fascinated by the works of Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

Novás Calvo was the first Cuban writer to incorporate popular language into his work successfully. In his hands everyday language achieves a creative dimension that transcends any regionalistic peculiarities. One can see in Cuban fiction of the early nineteen-thirties a movement away from regionalistic preoccupations and a noticeable increase of interest in experimental fiction. Novás Calvo's publication of three major stories in 1932 in the *Revista de Occidente* and the appearance of novels by Alejo Carpentier and Enrique Labrador Ruiz in 1933 mark this significant change. This did not signal an abandonment of their own culture but rather an attempt to identify characteristics common to all men. In this respect, the works of these writers represent a movement away from the limitations of time and space.