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## Re-imagining Trauma: Montréal Under Siege in Michel Basilières' *Black Bird*

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### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel analysiert die Überschneidungen zwischen Verkörperung nationaler Identität, linguistischer Zugehörigkeit und Diskursen in der Repräsentation Montréal im Roman *Black Bird* von Michel Basilières (2004). Der Roman fiktionalisiert eine traumatische Periode in der Geschichte Québecs – die Oktoberkrise 1970 – und verdeutlicht über die Formen des „Gothic“ und des Karnevalesken die linguistischen und politischen Brüche, die diese geteilte Stadt charakterisieren.

### Abstract

This article addresses the intersections between embodiment, language, and discourses of nationhood in the representation of Montréal in Michel Basilières' 2004 *Black Bird*. The novel revisits a particularly traumatic period in Québec history – the October crisis of 1970, showing, through the gothic and the carnivalesque modes, the linguistic and political fractures that characterize the divided city.

### Résumé

Cet article se propose d'analyser les intersections entre la corporalité, l'appartenance linguistique et les discours sur l'identité nationale dans la représentation de Montréal dans le roman *Black Bird* (2004) de Michel Basilières. Le roman fictionnalise une période traumatique dans l'histoire du Québec, à savoir la crise d'octobre de 1970, et démontre, en s'inspirant à la fois du gothique et du carnivalesque, les fractures linguistiques et politiques qui caractérisent la ville divisée.

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Recent interest in literary criticism on the representation of cities and urban spaces in Canadian and Québec literatures has shifted the ways in which we think about, imagine, and construct the nation. Garrison mentalities and survival thematics have given way to more pointed critical work on the ways in which most Canadians live their lives: primarily in cities rather than rural areas, as Edwards/Iverson contend in *Downtown Canada: Writing the Canadian City* (2005). Canadian cities are increasingly transnational, as Dobson argues in *Transnational Canadas: Anglo-Canadian Literature*

and *Globalization* (2011), and “glocal,” as Ana Fraile-Marcos argues in *Literature and the Glocal City: Reshaping the English Canadian Imaginary* (2014) – locations that combine the local with the global networks of capital, information, technology, resources, and the populations that give them shape. Current scholarship in Canada in critical geographies (Razack), racialization, diaspora studies (Kamboureli), post-coloniality (Moss, Sugars), and aboriginal studies (Peters/Andersen), has also changed the way we construct and understand the various types of bodies that occupy Canadian cities, and have “engendered new ways of seeing spatialization and the textual practices that contribute to an understanding of positionality and the locatedness of the subject” (Edwards/Iverson, 5). This recent critical work engages with a diversity of subject positions, lived experiences, and communities in relation to space, be it in terms of ethnic or immigrant writing, native and indigenous studies, or feminist critique, and have shown how the city itself is experienced in vastly different ways according to one’s gender, racial or ethnic background, and social class. It is crucial to note, however, that while studies in Canadian and Québec literatures have examined marginalized subjects very little attention has been paid to representations of the material, corporeal body itself in all of its physical, psychological, symbolic, discursive, and cultural complexity. Bodies may be understood as the meeting of flesh and social space – as a locus of affect through agency is performed, demonstrating that the body is the result of a complex interface between the built environment and subjectivity, thus recognizing the need, as feminist critic Elizabeth Grosz puts it, to “explore the constitutive and mutually defining relations between corporeality and the metropolis” (243):

The body must be considered active in the production and transformation of the city ... what I am suggesting is a model of the relations between bodies and cities that sees them, not as monolithic total entities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or micro-groupings. Bodies, even and especially marginalized ones, do not simply occupy urban spaces, but constitute and are constituted by them (108).

This article will address the intersections between embodiment, language, history and discourses of nationhood in the representation of Montréal in Michel Basilières’ 2004 novel titled, *Black Bird*, which re-imagines a particularly traumatic period in Québec history – the October crisis of 1970 in which the city was placed under military control through the Canadian War Measures Act in response to the *Front de libération du Québec (FLQ)* bombings and kidnapping of Pierre Laporte, Québec’s Minister of Labour, and James Cross, the British Trade Commissioner at the time. Basilières’ *Black Bird* deconstructs the pervasive image of Montréal as a city divided by its two linguistic solitudes in showing the uneasy alliances, and troubled familial

bonds of English and French communities, but also imagines a spectral city haunted by its own religious and political past. The emergence of the supernatural on the streets of the city may be read as evidence of the unresolved social, political and linguistic conflicts in Québec society during the Quiet Revolution, but also in a larger historical sweep, of the manner in which religious and political ideologies resurface and re-emerge in the present-day city, refusing to die. It is a form of haunting that suggests Québec's ambiguous desire to shed itself of the skin of its former colonial subjectivity, yet also its obstinate refusal to do so completely in its engagements with the language, culture, and body of the colonizers, the English. As Turcotte/Sugars claim in *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*:

In Canadian literature, the postcolonial gothic has been put to multiple uses, above all to convey experiences of ambivalence and/or split subjectivity resulting from the inherent incommensurability of conflicted subject positions that have emerged from a colonial context and persisted into the present. In many instances, the postcolonial Gothic involves a transposition of conventional gothic and colonialist metaphors, turning gothic conventions on their head by converting the unfamiliar or ghostly into nonthreatening-even sustaining-objects of desire (xi).

Indeed, the primary haunting that takes place in Basilières' novel is that of Hubert, leader of a cell of the FLQ who most completely represents Québec's political dream of separation from the rest of Canada, but he is, as Turcott/Sugars, both the object of desire and of repulsion, a sympathetic figure who is repeatedly victimized by outside forces and by his own family.

In the preface to the novel, the author points out that "as with all of the best fiction, here the facts of our history do not get in the way of the truth, or of telling a good story." While *Black Bird* remains faithfully unfaithful to historical accuracy, its gothic re-figuring of the events of October 1970 offer an uncannily accurate portrait of Montréal's texture as a city haunted by its religious past, its linguistic tensions and obsessions, and its socio-political complexities. The novel shows a city in which English and French live parallel yet separate lives, as the "Desouche" family (a pun on the French expression – "de souche" or having French-Canadian roots) is either unable or unwilling to speak or listen to the language of the other. The urban landscape is thus seen through an eccentric, warped lens (quite literally, at one point through the character of Grandfather, who loses an eye when it is plucked out by Grace, the crow, who prevails over the whole of unfolding gothic drama, and has it replaced by a glass eye that acts as a lens that diffracts light, thus offering up a dual vision of the city: "He discovered that although both his eyes functioned, they seemed to be out of synchronization or parallax or something. If he left his new one in and didn't cover his own real eye, his vision was occluded. They seemed to conflict" (157). This

“parallax vision” becomes a moment of recognition at the end of the novel that offers a biting criticism of the short-sightedness of rigid political and religious dogma. Grandfather’s parallax vision rejects the binarisms that lead to territorial, cultural, and linguistic conflict and in losing his eye, Grandfather is ironically able to see more clearly that: “opposites have no meaning” (223).

If, indeed, history in this novel is off-kilter in the liberties which the author takes with historical accuracy, it accurately portrays the messy yet intimately intertwined antagonistic discourses of Canadian and Québec nationalism, symbolized by the strained relationships between members of the Desouche family and by the haunted city. Ironically, Francophone members only speak in English while the Anglophones only speak French, and neither particularly understand each other, in a ludic reversal of the linguistic battlefield that is Montréal.

Basilières’ novel evokes the trauma of the FLQ crisis in an urban landscape scarred by politicized ideologies and languages, but also, symbolically, through bodies that are traumatized and victimized by terrorist violence; for instance, the grim and reimagined enactment of the torture and execution of James Cross in a violent revenge fantasy enacted upon a representative of the English crown, or the missing fingers of the character of “Uncle,” alluding to real historical events in which an FLQ member blew up his own hand in a failed terrorist attempt. Furthermore, bodies resurrected from the dead, such as those of Hubert, who is killed in a car accident when he is run over by a fictionalized René Lévesque, the first separatist Premier of Québec, and resurrected by a mad Dr. Hyde, the silent comatosed body of Aline, or the disembodied spirit of Angus who floats through the novel, haunts the present-day city and represents the return of the repressed political desires of a failed Québec nationalism. This article explores Montréal as a space of broken bodies, broken languages, and broken nationalist rhetoric, a city given to the violence of political divisions, to the tensions of untranslatability between English and French, and of uneasy “border-crossings,” as Sherry Simon puts it, into the habitat and language of the other. The novel shows various moments of “poaching,” (Harel) between English and French linguistic, cultural, and spatial practices, which is characteristic of contemporary Québec literature, particularly in Montréal where urban space is continually contested, identities constantly fractured, de-naturalized, and haunted by unreliable historical memory and ambiguous political and cultural filiations. As Lianne Moyes argues, “acts of trespassing and poaching [...] characterize Québec post-colonial space (and) expose the violence, the encroachments, that mark the contiguous cultural spaces of Québec [...] yet poaching [...] does not allow one to escape the violence of proper space; it makes that violence legible” (13).

*Black Bird* unfolds in the ramshackle home of the Desouche family, headed by Grandfather, the eccentric patriarch who robs graves for a living, and his second wife Aline, who felt that she had “landed in a foreign country” (8) because the francophone family she marries into insisted on speaking English in the home. Grandfather’s twins from a previous marriage, referred to only as Father and Uncle, can only

be distinguished by the fact that Uncle is missing a finger on his left hand. Father and Mother are the parents of Jean-Baptiste & Marie, the seemingly incestuous twins who occupy opposite sides of the linguistic and nationalist divide. As a poet and artist, Jean-Baptiste refuses to speak French, while Marie, raised to be bilingual but "unable to distinguish between the languages" (70) refuses to speak English and becomes an active member of a terrorist organization intent on bringing about the secession of Québec from the rest of Canada. Her boyfriend, Hubert, the eloquent and impassioned leader of a terrorist cell, is inadvertently run over and killed by the provincial premier's speeding car one night while he is stumbling around in the city drunk. This episode mirrors the actual historical event in which the first separatist leader of the province, René Lévesque, fatally struck a drunken homeless man in 1977.<sup>1</sup> When Hubert disappears, Marie takes up the separatist cause and kidnaps, tortures, and eventually kills James Cross, the British Trade Commissioner, in a hidden section of the family's basement. Resurrected by the mad Dr. Hyde, Hubert becomes a lumbering Frankenstein-monster that can neither speak nor remember his own identity, symbolizing the "monstrous" extremes of political orthodoxy and nationalist fervor, and the ironic re-casting of the province's motto: *Je me souviens*. At the end of the novel, Hubert returns to the Desouche household and in Grandfather's attempt to kill him again with a shovel, a gas pipe is struck which eventually causes an explosion that destroys the entire home. The symbolism of the end of the novel could not be more blunt.

### **Proximate Strangeness and Dialogical Utterance**

Basilières' novel shows Montréal as a city in which the sacred and profane are in close proximity, abutting one another in the same way as its dual linguistic and cultural heritage. Various spaces are represented in the novel, from the top of Mount Royal to its cemeteries, from the underground spaces of the hidden and the repressed, to the "non-space" of Angus' disembodiment. Montréal is, as the opening line reveals, an island city that "placed a cemetery atop its mountain, capped the mountain with a giant illuminated cross and wove streets along its slopes like a skirt spreading down to the water. In this way, its ancestors hovered over the city just as the Church did, and death was always at the center of everything." (1)

The Desouche home is tellingly located in the "no-man's land" between East and West, French and English parts of the city, in a "forgotten blue-collar neighbourhood" in the "contact zone" between the mythical "two solitudes." The home itself, symbol of Québec society, reflects the eccentricity of the family it houses (9): constantly unfinished, under-construction, in tatters, but also self-sufficient, enclosed, and secretive. Indeed, the description of the Desouche household as a domestic space that is constantly under construction may be read as a symbol of the lack of

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1 It should be noted that the acting Premier during the October crisis of 1970 was Robert Bourassa, not René Lévesque.

political cohesion in Québec society – a dream of a separate nation forever under construction: “Doors were moved, walls were struck down or created, windows bricked up, staircases added, balconies enlarged or destroyed ... of course, though each project began with a burst of enthusiasm, as soon as inspiration had lost its novelty, work slowed to a crawl. Jobs that should have taken a few days stretched into weeks – even months” (9). According to Gaston Bachelard, the home is the locus of memory and narrative in which the values of intimacy are scattered (14), constituting “a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability” (17). The home represents the psychological rootedness of the individual, a “vital space” where the “unconscious is housed,” one that we inhabit both physically and psychologically for solace and protection, but one that is never fully secure from a threatening outside. If the home is an extension of the psychological self and the space in which memories both accumulate and are embedded, it is also a microcosm of the social space in which we all dwell. The home – as the ostensibly inviolable and privileged site of private identity, memory, and the accumulation of material possessions – is in fact an extension of nation; the way we talk about the home, much like the way we talk about nation, reveals, as Erin Manning has argued, a “visceral ... desire for attachment and belonging” (2003, xvii). In the image of the Desouche family who is forever unable to keep its house in order, Basilières suggests the larger societal unease within Québec society around questions of belonging, inclusivity, identity, and the socio-political uncertainties of the future.

If Montréal has traditionally been represented as a divided city coming together at the seam or point of rupture represented by Boulevard St. Laurent, mythologized street of immigrants and the space of encounter of ethnic and linguistic difference, Basilières’ novel blurs these boundaries in showing how the linguistic other also inhabits the self. Language in the novel figures as a form of compulsion, impasse, rupture, and refusal or inability to communicate, whether in the unexpected speech acts of certain characters or in the frequent moments of mis-translation and linguistic play. It is in this sense akin to what Sherry Simon refers to as the “moments of silence” or of untranslatability in the politicized language practices of Québec. In *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, she argues that in a city in which English and French live side by side, “communities live in relations of proximate strangeness or intimate otherness” (xiii). I would argue that this produces a distancing effect vis-à-vis one’s own identity, and we can see many instances in *Black Bird* in which that occurs. The intermixing of English and French in Basilières’ novel both divides and conjoins individuals and communities in moments of “proximate strangeness.”

If the name of the Desouche family suggests Québécois “authenticity” it is undermined by the fact many refuse to speak French. Jean-Baptiste, for example, only reads French and only writes his plays in English, and the interplay of languages evokes a troubled dual identity expressed in and through the body: “English was feminine, welcoming, mothering – but also guttural, Germanic, a precise and at the

same time crude language full of words and phrases stolen from others to shore up its own metaphorical poverty. French was the father: always disappointing, always driving, always stern, always ambiguous, always fighting to beat down the Oedipus in the son – but at the same time, French was fluid, so romantic so Latin and Mediterranean” (75). Jean-Baptiste is a French-Canadian poet who becomes the traitorous translator between his Mother and Aline:

he resented this position immediately, this extra burden imposed on him by their ignorance of each other’s language, he took to translating quite freely indeed. Usually he would deliver intact the general idea of their statements, but often in a way in which he knew would incense them unexpectedly (40).

Translation becomes a moment of rupture in the fabric of the novel, just as language in the city of Montréal is a monstrous combination of disparate parts conjoined as one. Expected linguistic and political positions, ideologies, and affiliations in the novel are “unmoored” from their expected locations, are reversed, or occupy the position of the other. These border-crossings, fractured identities and abject locations de-naturalize the languages and communities of the city at the “faultlines” between them, in the “zones of tension” (Harel) between East and West, French and English, and past and present.

Similar language games are enacted in the novel. For instance, when Marie decides to give her brother Jean-Baptiste a book as a gift, she walks into an English language bookstore whose outdoor sign reads “Livres,” as mandated by Bill 101, Québec’s language law that stipulates that all commercial signs must be predominantly in French. This is “a lovely French word” she notes, and is “soothing and familiar”, not “like the harsh, alien English word Books.” Furthermore, each section in the English bookstore is indicated with French signs, creating an uncanny space in which the words and ideas contained in books on the shelf do not correspond to their French categorization:

In here you couldn’t buy a mystery novel, you had to settle for a Roman Policier. There was no science fiction, but there were Anticipations; no health, but Santé; no fiction, but Romans; no travel, but Voyages; and no humour at all. This method made it so much easier for the French to buy English books.

Because of her separatist political convictions, Marie refuses to buy any English books for her brother at all, settling instead on a book which contains no words: “There was a display of diaries, calendars, notepads and blank books [...] and she reflected, here was the perfect symbol: a book that was not a book. Empty, meaningless.” (119–120)

Language is also a form of compulsion or irrational irruption in *Black Bird*. Mrs. Pangloss, a neighbour of the Desouche family who was “proudly Irish and cultivated her temper to prove it” and who has “decidedly mixed feelings about the French” (206) decides to go to Jean-Baptiste’s first poetry reading in a bar on Boulevard St. Laurent, or “the Main” – a street that “represented to her all the things she disliked about the world: foreigners, jews, students, artists [...] a babel of tongues [...] unreadable signage, inscrutable others” (204). As she becomes increasingly drunk, she does not realize that the pamphlet that was handed to her was not Jean-Baptiste’s poetry but in fact the FLQ manifesto, and she stands to recite the words to a shocked audience: “Here was a drunken, aging anglo woman, publicly declaring, in a highly accented but perfect joul, a revolutionary separatist manifesto” (209). Again, here, the proximate strangeness of Montréal makes it such that the utterances of the French are in the mouths of the English, and vice versa. Basilières is here showing the confluence of political discourses, cultural positionings, borrowings, and poachings possible in everyday Montréal. Similarly, the relationship between Aline and Mother, for instance, is freighted by the linguistic divide despite the fact that they are both subservient to male members of the household: “Although each felt the possibility of a real friendship, comforting and fun, lying just beyond that linguistic horizon, neither could overcome the feeling that learning the other’s tongue was a task too hard for her” (12).

The silences between Mother and Aline extend out from the familial home to the public space of the street, suggesting that the political and linguistic engagements and conflicts in Québec society, especially at this time of heightened political tensions, become personal, and is expressed in spatialized terms: “the barrier of language kept them apart at home, just as it would have if they’d met on the street or in some shop” (Basilières 11). The irreconcilable language divide in the Desouche household is mirrored in the larger linguistic divides in Montréal where St-Laurent Boulevard is seen as the “safety zone between English and French.” Indeed, Jean-Baptiste, who one may interpret as the stand-in for Basilières himself, reads the following line from a Kundera novel: “Our lives may be separate but they run in the same direction, like parallel lines” (Basilières 23).

### **Bodily Grotesqueries**

It goes without saying that *Black Bird* engages in a ludic immersion into the carnivalesque and even the grotesque in its eccentric retelling of a particularly violent episode in Québec history, one that has recently been the object of much historical re-evaluation. In “The Carnavalesque as Quiet Revolution” David Leahy argues that the carnivalesque in a number of Québécois novels of the period “enunciates parodic isotopes which can be identified with the totalizing notion of the ‘Quiet Revolution’, despite awareness of social hybridity and heterogeneity in such discourses” (66). More relevant for my argument here is Leahy’s contention that the “ritual inversions” of the carnivalesque mode, as delineated by Stallybrass and White, can be



productive in thinking about fictionalizations of the Quiet Revolution in terms of the reversal of social status and hierarchies, in the *mise en scène* of "exorbitant exaggeration" in the "comic privileging of the bodily lower stratum, or grotesque body, over the rational and spiritual control of the head" (66).

Historically, the monstrous and the grotesque are associated with the odd, the peculiar, with bodily deformity (Edwards/Graulund), and, from its earliest representations in medieval European art to the present-day grotesqueries of the horror and gore film genre, the grotesque signals either an externalization of some form of inner corruption or evil, or some spiritual or psychological affliction inscribed upon the body. The grotesque emerges in the unsettling ruptures of the body and in the dissections and recombinations of its parts. The deformed and the abject may contain, symbolize, or represent monstrous or grotesque desires and are therefore kept at arm's length and excised from public view, for their incongruent, troubling corporeality calls into question the fantasy of social cohesion and political closure. Monstrosity writ upon the body, whether it be in the form of bodily illness, of scarring, or in mutilations of the flesh, may be read as critiques of the very social structures that allows for its emergence as public body. In this way, body and city do and undo each other. The grotesque body shocks by its incongruity and, as Edwards and Graulund suggest, "the grotesque lies in juxtaposition to the common conceptions of classical aesthetics, which focus on symmetrical representations of bodies and figures that are unified, harmonious and well-proportioned" (37). Mother's and Father's mutual disgust of each other's corporeal physical decrepitude, deformities, and idiosyncrasies, for instance, where "making love was the only time they forgot each other's ugliness" (Basilières 16) suggest that the novel's attention to the bodily disenfranchised, dispossessed, and abject in the context of marriage stands in for the uneasy marriage between English and French communities.

If Basilières' novel revels in the gothic convention of describing the horrors, mutilations, and transformations exacted upon the human body, it also suggests a more subtle discourse on the transgressions exacted upon the collective body by dogmatic religious and political ideologies. The presence of corpses, of an undead Hubert who walks amongst the living, of the dis-embodied consciousness of Angus, of the various body-parts violently separated from their owners – such as Uncle's missing fingers or Grandfather's missing eye – of the stolen heart of the sanctified Father André that bleeds again, and finally, of the comatosed body of Mother that lies silently in the Desouche living room throughout much of the novel – these bodies point to a society haunted by its past traumas, one that is unable to find social cohesion in the public sphere.

Jean-Baptiste, for instance, is fascinated with the shrunken heads of the desiccated mummies he finds at the McGill University museum (96-7): "balls of chocolate-brown leather misshapen from misuse, topped with tufts of silky black hair like tassels hung from the handlebars of a child's bicycle [...] which always led Jean-Baptiste to wonder at the status and fate of people who lost their lives, or pieces of

them. Where were their bodies now? What had happened to them?" (97). This leads him to wonder about the circumstances by which Uncle lost his fingers (also alluded to in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, where an FLQ terrorist loses a thumb in a bombing attempt): "Whatever had happened to Uncle's thumb? Was it still in some way Uncle, or had it instantly, on the point of separation from the rest of him, become something else? A mere thing?" (98). Does the thumb here symbolize Québec's desire to break away from the body politic of Canada?

Another body part that figures prominently in the novel is the heart of Father André, which is stolen from Saint Joseph's Oratory by Grandfather and Uncle: "it looks, Grandfather thought, like a potato, a big unwashed baking potato" (172). When Uncle brings the heart back to the Desouche home, he discovers that it had started to bleed. The overflowing blood of Father André's heart, symbol of the religious faith of a modern Québec society, spills its miraculous blood all over the floor of the Desouche home. Uncle's black Labrador, which evokes the mythological Cerberus, laps up the sacred blood, thereby turning paler and paler until it turns into "a mere shade of its former self: a ghost" (178), as it disappears completely. Dr. Hyde, who both re-animates Hubert into a walking-dead monster and tends to a comatosed Mother as she lays inert on her bed, describes the human body as "both fascinating and disgusting [...] it is the "sum of our existence" but also an "adjunct" separate from our "existential selves": "We have mapped them, inside and out; we have charted their histories and divined their workings [...] yet we are forever stumbling across exceptions, aberrations and inexplicable circumstances" (109).

The "monstrous" body in the urban space of Basilières' novel evokes psychic and physical trauma – a symbol of the divided body-politic, particularly in Québec where such a body is constantly inflected with its linguistic other. The character of Mother, who remains inert and in a coma for the entire duration of the novel, may be read as one example of the ways in which Basilières evokes the political realities of Québec through a monstrous form of embodiment. The "asymmetry" of her sleep habits and her comatosed state become symbols of the Québécois people "sleeping through political and economic oppression" in a life made bearable by "intoxication and slumber" (240). We see this monstrous figuration of colonization also, for instance, in Jacques Godbout's two-headed protagonist in *Les Têtes à Papineau*, where each twin speaks a different language where the English eventually survives the French. The body under duress, the injured body, the walking cadaver or zombie – each show moments of rupture in the discourses and political engagements of the individual and collective bodies of the nation.

The grotesque mode is also used in describing troubling and troubled motherhood linked to the female body as site of a failed separatist enterprise, where the "revenge of the cradle" (262) – the official policy of the Catholic Church that encouraged French-Canadian women to have as many infants as possible in order to assure the survival of the Québécois in North America – is transformed into a horror-filled and trauma inducing scene of abortion in which the promise of a future Québécois

progeny (and presumably, separate nation) is extinguished (159). When Marie decides to abort Hubert's unborn child, she undergoes the procedure in the offices of Dr. Hyde. The pain which she feels traversing through her body evokes an earlier suppressed memory of childhood sexual abuse: "He leaned in close between her legs and pushed her thighs apart, and touched her. She shut her eyes and suddenly remembered. Father Pheley. The last time she'd been in a church" (161). This inability to remember, this moment of suppressed bodily victimization that suddenly erupts unexpectedly, is linked to the larger socio-political logic of decolonization in the novel.

Grave-robbing, which is the Desouche family's primary source of income, suggests the profanation of the body and memory of the dead, but also suggests the larger socio-political gesture of reanimating the past for one's own ideological or purposes. By implying that Québec nationalism is a force that poaches and profanes the bodies and memories of the dead, who, like Hubert, are unable to speak for themselves, Basilières' novel engages the subversive potential of the grotesque to destabilize hegemonic discourses. The "Je me souviens" of Jean-Baptiste's play is thus unmoored from its social and historical context and expectations, as it becomes a playful questioning of who is remembered in Québec history and how that history is remembered. It is no accident, for instance, that Hubert is unable to recall who he is in the novel, pointing once again to Basilières' critique of the short-sightedness of political orthodoxy.

I have brought consideration of the body in all of its physical, affective, emotional, and symbolic complexity to bear upon critical analysis of how the urban space of Montréal is experienced, imagined, elided, forgotten, managed, and monumentalized in *Black Bird*. Corporeality is here, and in all urban literatures, imbricated in discourses of individual and collective identities, in social and political ideologies and practices, in socio-economic processes of place-making, and in symbolic meanings and values attributed to individuals and their embodied practices of everyday life. The linguistic and cultural reversals and borrowings in *Black Bird* de-naturalize the languages and spaces of the city, and its "eccentric" view of history in which actual historical events are borrowed, alluded to, transformed, and perverted, creates a magical realist and gothic tone that restages the city as a space in which the discourses of the past haunt the present, and in the return of Hubert as an undead corpse, in the re-animation of the desiccated heart of Father André, in the return of Aline's wedding ring from her dead predecessor, we may see a return of the cultural and political repressed of Québec nationalism, and more specifically, a return of the traumatic memories of the FLQ for Québec and for Basilières himself as a young child.

In *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, Richard Sennett has argued that the body has served as a symbol of social and political collectivities since Hobbes' *Leviathan*, where the social contract is viewed as a political body whose parts are conjoined under the rule of law. Excesses of the flesh, the unsightly,

the abject body traversing the boundaries of normalized social space may be read as examples of the “body troubles” that emerge in the worried boundaries of city and nation, in the lack of social closure and social cohesion that linguistic, cultural, or class difference make legible. Bodies that are troubling or troubled in Basilières’ novel signal how Québec society, and Montréal in particular, has difficulty defining the borders of its own collective body, for it is and always has been traversed by conflicting histories, languages, collective memories, and political affiliations. It is a city of divided loyalties and contested terrain.

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