The Burden of Choice: The Marriage Plot in Rosanna Leprohon’s Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing (1864) and Louis Hémon’s Maria Chapdelaine (1916)

Le fardeau du choix: L’intrigue de mariage dans les romans Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing (1864) de Rosanna Leprohon et Maria Chapdelaine (1916) de Louis Hémon

PAR: Michelle Amy Lepitre

Travail présenté à:

Dr. Roxanne Rimstead, directrice de recherche
Dr. Gregory Reid, membre du jury
Dr. Sophie Boyer, membre du jury

Dans le cadre des exigences du

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Michelle Amy Lepitre

Ce mémoire a été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes:

Dr. Roxanne Rimstead, directrice de recherche
Département des lettres et communications, Faculté de lettres et sciences humaines

Dr. Gregory Reid, membre du jury
Département des lettres et communications, Faculté de lettres et sciences humaines,
Université de Sherbrooke

Dr. Sophie Boyer, membre du jury
German Studies, Modern Languages Department, Bishop’s University
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This thesis is dedicated to my late grandmother, Laura Gill Lepitre, and my late grandfather, Chester Nugent, both of whom contributed greatly to my love of learning. I love (and miss) you both!
Summary:

The Burden of Choice: The Marriage Plot in Rosanna Leprohon’s Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing (1864) and Louis Hémon’s Maria Chapdelaine (1916)

This study examines how novels that employ a marriage plot can be understood as didactic tales by readers, both personally on the surface level of the romance and on a deeper level as well, one that tackles questions of identity, gender roles and cultural values in ways that are neither simple nor superficial. The two Canadian novels which form the basis of this study are: Rosanna Leprohon’s Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing: A Canadian Tale (1864) and Louis Hémon’s Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français (1916).

In order to accomplish this study of one English-Canadian and one French-Canadian novel – both written in Quebec – I begin my analysis by briefly examining a particular type of social didacticism in literature, starting with conduct literature and focusing particularly on the genres of the courtesy novel (as an example, I examine Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice [1813] and how it functions didactically in the tradition of the courtesy novel), sentimental fiction and, finally, the French-Canadian roman de la terre.

Since the symbolic messages of Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, A Canadian Tale and Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français are very different, it is difficult to compare these works on an allegorical level. Even so, it is possible to compare them on a surface level, in terms of the marriage plot, the character triangle (which includes a heroine, a hero and a counter-hero) and the four-part structure of place (composed of the heroine’s home, the counter-hero’s home, an
establishment representative of society and, finally, nature). By comparing these novels in terms of the marriage plot and the similar literary conventions present in them, my analysis demonstrates how the actions and decisions of the characters in *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing (A Canadian Tale)* and *Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français* could have helped an observant reader, especially a female reader, cultivate important insights about her own prescribed social role and burden of choice.

**Keywords:**

1. Courtship and Marriage  
2. Courtesy Novel  
3. Early Canadian Literature  
4. Roman de la Terre  
5. Hémon, Louis  
6. Leprohon, Rosanna  
7. Women in Literature  
8. Comparative Canadian Literature
Résumé :

Le fardeau du choix : L'intrigue du mariage dans les romans Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing (1864) de Rosanna Leprohon et Maria Chapdelaine (1916) de Louis Hémon

Ce projet analyse le rôle didactique, joué par les romans centrés sur une intrigue de mariage, auprès des lectrices. Ce rôle didactique concerne non seulement le plan personnel (au sens propre de l'intrigue amoureuse), mais aborde aussi des questions de fond telles que l'identité, les rôles sexuels et les valeurs culturelles. Les deux romans canadiens qui sont à la base de cette étude sont: Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing: A Canadian Tale (1864) de Rosanna Leprohon et Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français (1916) de Louis Hémon. Malgré que, à première vue, ces deux romans ne semblent pas avoir beaucoup de points en commun, les deux sont des ouvrages allégoriques (avec une intrigue de mariage à leur centre) qui peuvent servir comme ressources didactiques pour lectrices attentives en les éduquant sur des sujets sociaux importants reliés autant à des idées personnelles que nationales. Pour accomplir cette étude d'un roman canadien-anglais et un roman canadien-français – tous les deux écrits au Québec – je débute mon analyse en examinant rapidement une sorte particulière d'instruction sociale dans la littérature, commençant avec la littérature de conduite sociale et mettant une attention particulière sur les genres du courtesy novel (comme exemple, j'examine Pride and Prejudice [1813] et la manière dont ce roman fonctionne en tant que ressource didactique dans la tradition du roman de courtoisie), la littérature sentimentale et le genre canadien-français du roman de la terre.

La littérature de conduite sociale date des temps médiévaux et avait initialement pour objectif d'enseigner aux courtisans les bonnes manières, ainsi que les comportements appropriés compte tenu de leur statut social. Lorsque l'importance de l'aristocratie en Europe a commencé
à diminuer au fil des années, le but de ce genre littéraire a changé aussi, s’éloignant des arènes politiques et sociales et en se tournant vers la sphère domestique en général, et, plus particulièrement, vers le rôle de la femme dans cette sphère. Suite à ce changement, la littérature de conduite sociale s’est vue attribuer un nouveau rôle, soit celui d’apprendre aux femmes comment remplir les rôles féminins prescrits pour elles par la société. Cette évolution a aussi vu la diffusion du matériel de conduite sociale dans d’autres genres littéraires, notamment dans le roman.

Au Canada au dix-huitième siècle, les auteur(e)s canadiens-anglais, en manque d’une tradition littéraire qui leur était propre, luttaient pour se définir en tant qu’écrivain(e)s. Par conséquent, plusieurs d’entre eux se sont tournés vers l’Angleterre et la tradition littéraire britannique déjà bien connue (surtout dans le monde littéraire anglophone) pour trouver des genres et des conventions littéraires qui pouvaient bien s’adapter à leurs expériences et qui les permettaient de partager des messages didactiques avec leurs lectrices. Plusieurs des auteur(e)s qui voulaient éduquer les lectrices en matières politiques et personnelles ont choisi la fiction sentimentale comme outil didactique et ont écrit des ouvrages semblables (en style et en but) aux courtesy novels. La même lutte pour développer une identité et une tradition littéraire a aussi eu lieu au Québec, mais un genre littéraire didactique existait déjà au Canada français: le roman de la terre. Le genre du roman de la terre avait un but didactique très différent de celui de la littérature sentimentale; c’était un genre qui mettait l’accent sur le rôle social des femmes dans le contexte des valeurs approuvées par l’Église catholique et qui était destiné à promouvoir un style de vie agraire et la continuité des valeurs et traditions canadiennes-françaises. Malgré ce fait, les ouvrages qui se classent dans ce genre littéraire ont souvent utilisé des intrigues et des
conventions littéraires semblables à celles vues dans les romans de courtoisie et la fiction sentimentale du Canada anglais pour accomplir leurs buts instructifs.

Les messages symboliques dans Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing: A Canadian Tale et Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français sont très différents et, par conséquent, il n’est pas aisé de les comparer sur le plan allégorique. Malgré ce fait, il est possible de les comparer en termes de l’intrigue de mariage, du triangle de personnages (ce qui inclut l’héroïne, le héros et le contre-héros), ainsi qu’en ce qui concerne la structure de lieu en quatre parties (composée de la maison de l’héroïne, la maison du contre-héros, un établissement représentatif de la société et, finalement, la nature).

Le mariage entre cultures vécu par Antoinette dans le roman d’Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing: A Canadian Tale représente un pas vers un bel avenir, autant sur le plan littéral (pour la protagoniste) que sur le plan symbolique (pour le Canada), tandis que dans Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français, le mariage symbolise un moyen pour Maria (et, en même temps, tout le peuple canadien-français) de sauvegarder son passé. Dans les romans de Leprohon et Hémon, une héroïne canadienne-française se trouve forcée à choisir entre un prétendant anglais et un prétendant français (et, dans les deux cas, le choix qu’elle fait a des répercussions similaires sur les plans personnel et allégorique du roman). Malgré ceci, une lectrice attentive peut voir qu’en ce qui concerne l’intrigue amoureuse dans les deux romans, le choix personnel de chaque protagoniste est plus complexe qu’il en avait initialement l’air. En examinant Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, A Canadian Tale et Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français en fonction de l’intrigue de mariage et les conventions littéraires similaires qui sont présentes dans ces romans, cette analyse démontre comment les actions et les décisions des personnages dans ces ouvrages
auraient pu aider une lectrice attentive à réunir des informations importantes, tant sur son rôle féminin prescrit par la société que sur le fardeau de ses choix personnels.

Mots-Clés :

1. Mariage 2. Roman de courtoisie 3. Littérature canadienne
7. Les femmes dans la littérature 8. Littérature canadienne comparée
# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 12

Learning to Navigate the “Disguised Mine Fields” of Assembly Halls and Drawing Rooms: The Didactic Role of the “Courtesy Novel”

a) Learning to Please: A Brief History of the Conduct Book and Courtesy Novel .......................................................................................................................... 17

b) A Study in Life: Edifying Fiction and the *Roman de la Terre* as Didactic Tales in Canada ........................................................................................................... 23

c) Keeping Courtesy Literature Alive: Understanding the Didactic Function of the Courtesy Novel ................................................................................................. 31

d) The Courtesy Novel: Pride and Prejudice as Prototype ................................................................................................................................. 36

Chapter One ................................................................................................................... 57

“Essentially Canadian” or “Essentially Trivial”?: The Critical Debates Surrounding Rosanna Leprohon’s *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*

a) “A Moral Survival Guide for Young Women”: The Critical Reception of *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* in English Canada ........................................................................................................ 57

b) “Une grande leçon de morale”: Understanding the Popularity of *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* in French Canada .......................................................................................................... 60

c) Layers of Lessons: An Analysis of *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* ........................................................................ 66

Chapter Two ................................................................................................................... 72

Once Upon a Time in Montreal...: Fairy-Tales and Didacticism in Rosanna Leprohon’s *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*

a) Learning Life Lessons: Fairy Tales and Sentimental Literature .......................................................................................................................... 73
b) Mistaken Identities: The Character Triangle in Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing............78

c) Unmasking Characters: The Four-Part Structure of Place in Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing........93

Chapter Three........................................................................................................................109
Faithful Reproduction or Imagined Reality?: Maria Chapdelaine as Roman de la Terre

a) A Circumscribed Vision of French-Canadian Reality: The Didactic Function of the Roman de la Terre..............................................112

b) “L’emblème du Canada français”: The Critical Reception of Maria Chapdelaine in France and in Quebec........................................117

c) An Example to Follow: Reading Maria Chapdelaine as a Didactic Tale.....................................................................................125

Chapter Four..........................................................................................................................131
Underneath the Surface: Lessons of Love in Louis Hénon’s Maria Chapdelaine

a) A Single Piece of a Larger Puzzle: Maria Chapdelaine as a Roman de la Terre..............................................................................134

b) Social Education: The Character Triangle in Maria Chapdelaine..139

c) A Social and Cultural Map: The Four-Part Structure of Place in Maria Chapdelaine........................................................................154

Conclusion.................................................................................................................................166
Easing the Burden: Understanding Marriage Plots as Didactic Tales

Works Cited.............................................................................................................................178
Introduction

Learning to Navigate the “Disguised Mine Fields”\(^1\) of Assembly Halls and Drawing Rooms: The Didactic Role of the “Courtesy Novel”\(^2\)

Although, in recent years, it has become common practice for young men and women to choose their own marriage partners on the basis of affection – with little or no input from their family and friends – such has not always been the case in the Western world. Whereas marriage in current times is generally thought to be the result of an attraction between two people, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was far more often a “contract between two families for the exchange of concrete benefits, not so much for the married couple as for their parents and kin – considerations subsumed by contemporaries under the single rubric of ‘interest’” (Stone 182), Lawrence Stone tells his reader in *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800*. Although the previous citation refers to marital customs in England between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the authors of *Canadian Women: A History* argue that marital considerations in Quebec and Canada, as recently as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were similar to those described by Stone. According to the authors:

> few British North American weddings were undertaken without considerable attention to the material needs of the couple. For people whose assets were few, material considerations were important. Marriage contracts carefully outlining the assets and obligations of both parties continued to govern the unions of some British North American spouses

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well into the nineteenth century, particularly among French Canadians.

(Prentice 88)

Although parental control over matrimonial matters in such cases was not limited to daughters, it did tend to have a more negative effect on them than on the young male members of a family. Whereas young men could hope to have a promising and fulfilling career or enjoy some kind of public life, many young women of the time could aspire to little more than a good marriage. In many ways, as Peter Ward reminds his reader in *Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English Canada*³, “marriage [was] as much a public as a private event, and the processes leading up to it [were] as much of social as of personal concern” (4).

The rise of individualism in Europe in the 1700s began to effect a change in the traditional method of arranging marriages by challenging the absolute authority of the patriarch. Consequently, women slowly began to exercise a greater amount of control over their own lives and decisions than they previously had; for one of the first times in Western history, women were given at least some say in the choice of their future marriage partners. As Mary Poovey notes in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen*⁴:

[a]s long as it was strictly confined to certain arenas and ultimately obedient to men’s will, women were allowed to exercise considerable personal – if indirect – power. Before she married, a young girl possessed the power of what moralists called “her Negative”: the right to resist or even reject the proposal of a suitor. In exchange for relinquishing this

³ Hereafter referred to as *Courtship, Love, and Marriage*.
⁴ Hereafter referred to as *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*. 
right, a woman acquired what moralists considered her greatest power: the power of influence. (Poovey 29)

All of these important changes encouraged young ladies of the merchant and professional classes to gradually make their way into the drawing rooms of the aristocracy according to Joyce Hemlow in “Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books.” Once in this completely new and somewhat daunting environment, however, many young women quickly realized they had entered a world for which they were wholly unprepared: the rules and expectations governing drawing-room culture were strict, highly complex and certainly not anything these young women had encountered in their earlier education. Many of them quickly realized – either through personal experience or by seeing another disgraced – that one false move or breach of decorum could quickly jeopardize their reputations, as well as any chance of social advancement they might have. Though it may sound like a gross overstatement to a modern reader, at the time it took only one social misstep to ruin a young girl’s life.

Although the social environment in Canada was different from that of nineteenth-century Europe, many of the contemporary courtship and marital traditions present in Canada mirrored those found in England and other European nations. “Courtship and parental arrangement of upper and middle class marriages [...] followed age-old patterns” (Prentice et al 87) according to the authors of Canadian Women: A History. Young Canadian men and women met in formal settings to court: at balls, parties or various Church-related meetings or activities. Young men could request (or be issued) invitations to visit young women and they were permitted to go for walks (or, if they were wealthy enough, rides) with the young ladies they wished to court. All activities, however, took
place under the watchful eyes of the young couple’s family and friends. According to Ward, “whatever the context of courtship, the important thing to note is that the unmarried met in supervised settings. The forms of supervision varied from one setting to the next but, wherever it occurred, the search for a spouse inevitably fell under the discipline of the community” (66). Despite the different setting of the Canadian countryside, “[r]espectable courting went on more or less under the watchful eyes of the young woman’s elders” (Prentice 87) and followed many of the courtship and marital rituals previously established in earlier, European settings. In all cases, courtship and marriage rituals varied depending on the class, location and ethnic backgrounds of the parties involved and the characters of Antoinette De Mirecourt in Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing: A Canadian Tale and Maria Chapdelaine in Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français are both indicative of this distinction.

As a member of the French-Canadian noblesse, Antoinette meets her suitors in urban, supervised settings (such as during sleigh rides or in ballrooms and drawing rooms) and rarely spends time with these men unless a chaperon is present. Her position as a French-Canadian heiress should ensure that Antoinette’s father, Mr. De Mirecourt, and her other guardians (including Madame D’Aulnay) play very active, significant roles in her choice of husband but, since these family members are either not careful (in the case of Madame D’Aulnay) or uninvolved (in the case of Mr. De Mirecourt) in Antoinette’s first marriage to Major Sternfield, her choice turns out to be a bad one: Sternfield marries Antoinette, not out of affection, but rather to advance his own material interests. Madame D’Aulnay’s error in judgment when advising Antoinette to marry
Sternfield is corrected by the end of the story, but Antoinette’s suffering as a result of her first marriage indicates how important it was for a young bourgeois lady to have proper help and support when making such an important life decision. Maria Chapdelaine, however, was an habitant and therefore met her suitors in more rural settings, where the young men and women were rarely supervised in the same way that bourgeois women were. Since Maria is not an heiress and, therefore, has no significant material goods that a suitor would wish to appropriate, the danger of a young man courting her in order to advance his own material interests is relatively small. Consequently, Maria is much freer than Antoinette to make her own choice of marriage partner, even though her final decision is also greatly influenced by both her family and her French-Canadian culture.

As Katherine Sobba Green notes in *The Courtship Novel 1740-1820: A Feminized Genre*, it quickly became obvious that inexperienced young ladies of a marriageable age needed some kind of instruction to help them learn how to act, talk, listen, “weigh the odds, [...] play their hands, and [...] read the faces opposite theirs” (K.S. Green 19) as they tried to navigate what one critic has called the “disguised mine fields” (Polhemus 48) of assembly halls and drawing rooms. “[C]onfused by the choices before them and not knowing how to select the true lover over the false,” Sobba Green argues, “[women ran the risk of making] irrevocable mistakes. [Consequently, t]here was evidence, even in the magazines, that women appreciated sketches detailing the kinds of choices they had to make” (K.S. Green 140-141). At a time when few other educational opportunities outside the domestic sphere were available to women, early periodicals were one of the few options these ladies had. Another option was the conduct book. According to Poovey, “[t]hroughout the century, [...] conduct books, diaries, and novels
reiterate the lesson that children – especially daughters – should obey their parents’ will in this most critical of all decisions [that is to say, the marriage choice]” (13-14).

Learning to Please: A Brief History of the Conduct Book and the Courtesy Novel

Over the years, the genre of conduct literature took on a number of different forms – “sermons, devotional writings, familiar letters, chapbooks and instruction manuals offering advice on mores and manners, spiritual guidance and practical information on state and household duties” (Batchelor) – yet one element in the genre remained constant: its didactic function. The genre of conduct literature dates back to Medieval times, when courtesy books were used as a means of reinforcing the distinctions between social classes – particularly the distinctions between the aristocracy and those who, at the time, made up the middle class – when the importance of the aristocracy and what it stood for began to decline. Early authors of courtesy books wrote their works to defend the wealth, power and status of the aristocracy, all of which, they knew, was gradually slipping away. This early form of conduct literature was aimed primarily at men and provided “[g]uidance on manners, behaviour, deportment, conversation and dress […] to ensure that the courtier appeared every bit the gentleman he was supposed to be” (Batchelor).

These courtesy books, however, were not limited to men; some space in them was also devoted to instructing upper-class women in the ways they could best please men (Batchelor). As Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse argue in “The literature of conduct, the conduct of literature, and the politics of desire: an introduction,” “an unbroken tradition of such instruction books for women extends from the Middle Ages to the present day” (4).
As criticism of the aristocratic way of life became more frequent and more severe in the seventeenth century, many writers gradually began to shift the focus of their attention towards the ever-expanding middle class. Moving away from the political and social arenas that had always been so important to members of the court, the focus of the genre of conduct literature began to point more towards the domestic sphere in general, and to the role of women in that sphere more particularly. Whereas early courtesy manuals had instructed men on how to be gentlemen, the conduct books that came later went to great lengths to teach women how to fill their prescribed social roles: daughter, wife, and mother, among others. According to Armstrong and Tennenhouse, “[a]t one time, this writing took the form of devotional manuals for the wives and daughters of the aristocracy as well as courtesy books for would-be court ladies. To these, a later period added domestic economies for women […] as well as pamphlets on marriage and domestic life” (4). One aspect with regards to women, however, remained constant throughout this transition: the idea that both the courtesy manual and the conduct book were intended to teach women how to please men.

According to Misao Dean in Practising Femininity: Domestic Realism and the Performance of Gender in Early Canadian Fiction, women were both expected and taught to keep all passions – ranging from enjoyment and anger, all the way to sexual passions – firmly under control. Passivity, obedience and “self-effacement” (Dean 19) were but a few of the qualities deemed most desirable in women in early Canada and, consequently, these were the main ones expounded by Canadian conduct books such as Letters to a Young Lady on Leaving School and Entering the World (1855) by Sarah French, Courtship and Marriage and the Gentle Art of Home-Making (approximately
1893) by Annie S. Swan and *Social Etiquette or Manners and Customs of Polite Society Containing Rules of Etiquette For All Occasions, Including Calls; Invitations; Parties; Weddings; Receptions; Dinners and Teas; Etiquette of the Street; Public Places, Etc., Etc. Forming a Complete Guide to Self-Culture, The Art of Dressing Well; Conversation; Courtship; Etiquette for Children; Letter-Writing; Artistic Home and Interior Decorations, Etc.* (1896) by Maud C. Cooke. In The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, Mary Poovey notes that women (even the very talented women) of the time were encouraged to avoid any behaviour that might draw attention to themselves. She quotes a conduct book, *The Polite Lady: Or a Course of Female Education. In a Series of Letters, from a Mother to Her Daughter,* published in 1769, as stating that “a woman should think it [her] greatest commendation not to be talked of one way or other” (qtd. in Poovey, 21). The late eighteenth-century definition of “female” and “feminine” was, according to Poovey, full of contradictions and complexities. One of the most glaring contradictions she discusses is the fact that, although the eighteenth-century moralists considered femininity to be an innate quality, they also believed that it was one that needed constant cultivation on the part of a woman. Noting that “[d]uring the eighteenth century, in fact, an entire body of literature emerged that was devoted exclusively to this cultivation,” Poovey explains further:

[i]nstructions about proper conduct appeared in the numerous periodicals addressed specifically to women, in more general essay-periodicals like the *Spectator,* and in ladies’ conduct books. This last genre, which consisted of works composed by both men and women, was directed primarily to the middle classes and was intended to educate young girls

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5 Hereafter referred to as *Social Etiquette or Manners and Customs of Polite Society.*
(and their mothers) in the behaviors considered “proper,” then “natural” for a “lady.” Conduct material of all kinds increased in volume and popularity after the 1740s, in keeping with the increased emphasis on domestic education and the growing number of middle-class women readers. (15)

Poovey goes on to elaborate on her argument, stating that letters from readers which were published in the periodicals at the time stated that women looked towards the didactic material of the kind found in these publications as “a guide to their own conduct” (16). All of this material successfully served a didactic purpose for at least two good reasons: first, the works fulfilled a necessary prescriptive function for mothers and daughters by helping to instruct young women on what they should (and shouldn’t) do and how they should act and, second, “as products of the everyday discourse of eighteenth-century propriety,” Poovey argues, “the essays are themselves expressions of the implicit values of their culture” (16). This is to say that the works helped young women of the time situate themselves and their own values with regards to the current values of their society. They also serve to help us, as readers many years later, indirectly understand the realities of women’s lives by functioning as a literary representation of the historical realities these women experienced.

When it came to Canadian conduct books – which were, for the most part, written in the tradition of British courtesy literature and therefore only existed in this form in English Canada since didacticism in French Canada was under the control of the Catholic Church – the focus was on proper etiquette and the instruction of social customs and roles. In many of these conduct books, for example, lengthy and detailed chapters
An example of this can be seen in Annie S. Swan's *Courtship and Marriage and the Gentle Art of Home-Making*, where Swan writes:

> as the wife is properly supposed to be the light and centre of the home, we must first consider her position in it, and her fitness for it. It is by no means so easy to fill the position successfully as the uninitiated are apt to suppose; [...] She has to give herself so entirely and unreservedly, and in many cases to merge her individuality in that of another, that to do it with grace requires a considerable drain on her fund of unselfishness. (20)

Swan then goes on to dedicate twelve pages of one chapter of her conduct book to instructing women on how to be “The Ideal Wife” (19).

Considering the very important nature of the marriage choice at the time, and knowing that full chapters in these books were written on the topics of courtship and marriage, very little space in these conduct books was ever actually dedicated to advising young women on how to choose the right husband. In *Social Etiquette or Manners and Customs of Polite Society*, Maud C. Cooke states that “[t]he first point to be considered on [the subject of courtship and marriage] is a careful choice of associates. […] Especially is this true on the part of the lady, since, from the nature and constitution of society, an unsuitable acquaintance, friendship, or alliance, is more embarrassing and more painful for the woman than the man” (Cooke 120). Even after this claim, Cooke proceeds to dedicate less than three pages of her conduct book to this very important issue, approximately the same amount of space she allots to explaining how to accept or refuse a proposal of marriage.
Once "essentially aimed at creating harmony between the outward behaviour of men and women and the fundamental moral and social values of [a particular] time," the genre of courtesy literature, according to Jacques Carré, gradually began to change, becoming more and more prescriptive. In *The Crisis of Courtesy: Studies in the Conduct-Book in Britain, 1600-1900*, he claims that this shift,

did not simply lead to the narrowing down of a genre into repetitive, uninspired, although (for modern readers) occasionally hilarious manuals of etiquette; but rather it involved the dissemination of its subject-matter into a broad range of literary genres, such as, preeminently, the novel. The decline of the courtesy-book in fact meant the rebirth of the literature of conduct in other, often much more sophisticated, forms. (2)

This important literary development was not only noticed by Carré. Joyce Hemlow claims that the authors of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century courtesy books began to borrow literary devices from early novelists in order to increase the entertainment value of their works and reach a larger audience. She notes that:

>[t]he writers of courtesy books [...] endeavored to enliven their precepts and examples by pleasurable and entertaining devices borrowed from the novel, while some of the novelists attempted to justify and dignify their new art by including the reputable and useful matter of the courtesy books. The transference of the developed techniques of the novel into the courtesy books, or the application to the novel of the courtesy book with all its appurtenances, resulted in a variation of both novel and courtesy book which might be called the courtesy novel. (Hemlow 757)
In order to keep the genre of courtesy literature alive in a new environment, then, as well as to try to legitimize and dignify the emerging genre of the novel, authors of both types of literature began to make concessions in their writing, each adapting aspects of their works to the needs and desires of a new, now largely middle-class reading public. With concessions being made on both sides, it was not long before the line separating non-fiction, thoroughly didactic courtesy books and fictional novels, once clearly drawn, began to blur. Since novels – and particularly novels that use the courtship and/or marriage plot – were already popular among young ladies and seeing as conduct books were “so similar in content and purpose to [these] novels” (K.S. Green 19), it seemed only logical to combine the two, embedding the didactic goals of the latter into the structure of the former. The result was a new hybrid form of literature which was both educational and entertaining: the “courtesy novel” (Hemlow 757).

A Study in Life: Edifying Fiction and the Roman de la Terre as Didactic Tools in Canada

In English Canada, a number of literary periodicals did exist (most notably The Literary Garland, a publication appearing between 1838 and 1851) and these periodicals occasionally examined issues relating to conduct in their pages – primarily by publishing serialized novels or book reviews by Canadian authors such as Rosanna Leprohon, as well as a great deal of content written by British authors – but they did not devote a lot of space to this topic in their publications. Instead, in English Canada, “[r]eading novels as prescriptions for social behaviour proved a constant habit” (Gerson 26) for readers, since the general view at the time was that “the purpose of literature was to instruct: morally by presenting examples of proper conduct and pedagogically by providing useful information” (Gerson 30). As a result, those looking for information or advice pertaining
to social expectations and conduct rules frequently chose fictional works as their source for didactic material, works that were of both British and Canadian origins. For these reasons and because, as Carole Gerson notes in *A Purer Taste: The Writing and Reading of Fiction in English in Nineteenth-Century Canada*⁶, “novels might [only be considered] acceptable if they combined instruction with entertainment, presented a moral and wholesome vision of society, and reinforced conventional norms of sexual and religious behaviour” (Gerson 35), Canadian authors who wished to write for didactic purposes most often chose fiction as their preferred medium. By choosing to write edifying sentimental or historical fiction, these authors knew they could reach a larger audience while still staying within the limits of acceptability of their profession.

In French Canada, didacticism was more or less under the control of the Catholic Church but, according to the Clio Collective, some moralizing tales did appear in *Le Musée de Montréal*, a literary periodical published by a Mme Gosselin (179). Notable examples of other early French-Canadian periodicals for women included Joséphine Marchand’s *Coin du feu* (published between 1893-1896), Robertine Barry’s *Le Journal de Françoise* (published between 1902 and 1909), Catherine (the pen name of an unidentified author) and Robertine Barry’s *La Femme* (published between 1908 and 1912) and Gaétane de Montreuil’s *Pour vous mesdames* (published between 1913 and 1915). According to the authors of *La vie littéraire au Québec*, these magazines and periodicals followed a pattern and a style quite similar to those of British and English-Canadian periodicals: “[s]uivant la formule éprouvée, [ces magazines offrent] un contenu rédactionnel qui comprend d’abord des conseils addressés à la femme au foyer

⁶ Hereafter referred to as *A Purer Taste*. 
auxquels se greffent des rubriques traitant de la vie mondaine, d’art, de littérature, de
mode, de cuisine et de graphologie” (Lemire and Saint-Jacques 188).

Other literary periodicals (such as *La Revue de Montréal* and *La Revue Canadienne*) published articles and novels by French-Canadian women writers such as Félicité Angers, but it is unclear how much of this material was intended for instructive purposes. By 1890, the daily newspapers in Quebec had also begun to publish some literary material in the Saturday editions of their papers according to the authors of *La vie littéraire au Québec*:

> Qu’il s’agisse de *La Presse*, de *La Patrie*, [ou du Soleil,] tous adoptent sensiblement le même modèle « littéraire »: le supplément du samedi qui prend la forme d’un volumineux cahier destiné à la famille dans lequel se trouvent des bandes dessinées, des pages féminines, un courrier du cœur et des pages destinées aux enfants. Une intention didactique semble guider le choix des textes qui figurent parmi les sélections littéraires reproduites dans ces pages souvent animées par des chroniqueuses expérimentées. (184-185)

By the late nineteenth-century, French-Canadian readers were also turning to fiction for didactic purposes according to the authors of *La vie littéraire au Québec*. At the time, much like in English Canada, the novel was considered acceptable only if it promoted good values and served a pedagogical function: “à condition qu’il respecte les bonnes moeurs et qu’il devienne un agent pédagogique important, le genre [du roman] jouit-il d’une certaine légitimité” (Lemire 369). Although a number of different types of novels were available to nineteenth-century French-Canadian readers (*le roman d’aventures, le*
roman historique, le roman apologétique being but a few examples cited by the authors of La vie littéraire au Québec), it was the roman de moeurs (famous examples of which include Jean Rivard (1862) and Les anciens Canadiens (1863)) which arguably had the most obvious didactic purpose: promoting and teaching French-Canadian values. This genre of novel was also well-known for its promotion of an idealistic French, Catholic and agrarian society: “[l]a plupart de ces romans, qui se déroulent essentiellement à la campagne, dénoncent ouvertement les personnages qui ont opté pour la ville et qui sont mal intégrés à la société dans laquelle ils ont choisi de vivre. […] Ils annoncent le roman paysan du premier tiers du XXe siècle” (Lemire 385). The roman de moeurs – “[a]ccepting the premise that agriculture was the key to Quebec’s cultural and economic survival […] and praising] the superior moral virtue of simple country life and the joys of clearing new land, as opposed to life in the immoral cities or emigration to the English-speaking and materialistic United States” (M.J. Green 52) – was the predecessor of the roman de la terre (also called the roman du terroir), a literary genre which dominated late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French-Canadian fiction.

Although traditional conduct books (based on the European model of conduct literature) did not exist in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French Canada in the same form as they did in English Canada, Quebec did have a literary genre of its own that served a distinctly didactic purpose: the roman de la terre. The roman de la terre (or literature of the land) was, according to W.H. New in the Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada, a genre of literature that:

celebrated the rural environment as the site of tradition, ‘true faith’ (ie, Catholicism), and identity (by which was meant both family and the
francophone social family, the set of connections and political attitudes that later came to be referred to by such terms as québecicité or ‘pure laine’ collectivity). *(Encyclopedia 1096)*

As can be seen from the previous citation, the focus of the roman de la terre was largely on strengthening the cultural identity of the French-Canadian people (by celebrating the rural environment of Quebec as the most influential part of the French-Canadian identity). Unlike conduct books, which were more focused on transferring important information about contemporary social standards for personal conduct, the roman de la terre was a literary genre used to foster a sense of national pride in Québécois readers by presenting them with a specific, idealized and highly circumscribed vision of French-Canadian society. Nonetheless, as Mireille Servais-Maquoi argues in *Le roman de la terre au Québec*, “littérature romanesque du terroir présente de la société canadienne-française un tableau stéréotypé qui semble refléter assez fidèlement la réalité” (11).

According to Boynard-Frot, the genre of the roman de la terre “ne constitue pas, de 1860 à 1960, un corpus homogène et unitaire” (26); the works included in this category often have different themes and are presented in different ways, making a clear definition for this genre rather difficult to articulate. One common thread, however, does connect all of the romans de la terre produced in Quebec between 1860 and 1960 according to critics: the social and patriotic functions of the works. “Comme toute autre forme de littérature,” Servais-Maquoi argues, “le roman se mettra au service d’une cause, non pas littéraire, mais sociale et patriotique” (Servais-Maquoi 10). During the time period described by Boynard-Frot, the evolution of French-Canadian literature (and,
consequently, the evolution of the French-Canadian genre of the *roman de la terre* was influenced by two major ideological movements in Quebec: the agriculturalist and the nationalist movements. Servais-Maquoi comments on this phenomenon, claiming that “[p]endant tout le dix-neuvième et le premier quart du vingtième siècle, l’évolution de la littérature canadienne-française sera conditionnée par les influences conjuguées de la politique agriculturiste et du sentiment nationaliste” (9). Boynard-Frot also draws attention to these important influences in *Un matriarcat en procès: Analyse systématique de romans canadiens-français, 1860-1960*,\(^7\), claiming that:

[l]e roman du terroir est à analyser comme produit des contradictions idéologiques qui ont affecté le Canada français soumis, à la fois et paradoxalement, aux effets des changements du mode de production qui contraignaient, dès 1860, les agriculteurs à produire pour le marché ou à vendre leurs terres, tandis que les élites, en réaction contre l’emprise étrangère, orientaient le Canada français vers une économie de subsistance ou d’autosuffisance. (25)

The struggle between these two opposing ideologies was played out in the literature of the period and meant that, even as late as 1916, “il [n’existait] encore aucune tradition cohérente du roman du terroir même si l’appellation [commençaient] à se retrouver à l’occasion” (Lemire and Saint-Jacques 386). For this reason, even though critics argue that the *roman de la terre*’s role in French-Canadian society is largely focused on the national and political, one could also argue that it can function didactically on other, less obvious, levels as well. The *romans de la terre* produced in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Quebec also function didactically on the level of the gender subtext –

\(^7\) Hereafter referred to as *Un matriarcat en procès*. 
particularly with regards to the social role and responsibilities of the female protagonist in
the roman de la terre —, which I will argue later when I examine Maria Chapdelaine.

“Rural life was the inspiration for a literature designed to create a comforting
vision of Quebec identity” (M.J. Green 49) Mary Jean Green states in Women and
Narrative Identity: Rewriting the Quebec National Text, and by promoting the image of a
hard-working, honest and virtuous habitant to the French-Canadian population, the genre
of the roman de la terre fit comfortably into the agenda of the Catholic Church in
Quebec. In this way, it became an important tool for the promotion of the Catholic
Church’s own didactic goals, a topic which I will discuss further in chapter three,
“Faithful Reproduction of French Canadians or Imagined Reality?: Maria Chapdelaine as
Roman de la Terre.” In this genre, Janine Boynard-Frot argues in Un matriarcat en
procès, only good and honest characters thrive; all characters who fall outside of these
clearly demarcated lines were considered unacceptable and, therefore, either removed
from the novel in question or punished for their deviant behaviour. By valorizing those
qualities which were considered, by the Catholic Church, essential to the character of a
good French-Canadian (for example hard working and honest), the novels in this genre
played important social and personal didactic roles by demonstrating the standards of
personal conduct to which late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French-Canadian
men and women were expected to adhere. In reading a roman de la terre, Boynard-Frot
argues, men and women were shown examples of the social roles they were expected to
play and the cultural space (relevant to gender) that they could occupy in French-
Canadian society. As a result, it was supposed that the reader would be able to better
understand how he or she should adopt these roles in his or her own life, an issue which I
will refer back to in my later discussion of *Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français* and the *roman de la terre*. This specifically French-Canadian literary genre, it would seem, fulfilled a number of different didactic goals in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Quebec (including social, political, religious, and even personal edification) and the main focus of its didacticism was, in many ways, dependent on the personal tastes and gender of its reader and how she or he chose to interpret a work.

In a similar way to the novel of manners or the courtesy novel, the plot of the *roman de la terre* as far as the heroine is concerned often revolves around the marriage of the central female character. In saying this, I do not wish to imply that all novels in the genre of the *roman de la terre* should be read in the same way as courtesy novels, but rather that, when certain conditions are present (for example when the story of the novel revolves around a central female character and her choice of marriage partner), these works can seen as comparable to courtesy novels on the literal level of the romance. As I will discuss later in chapters three and four, the gender subtext of *Maria Chapdelaine* is the necessary condition that would have allowed a young, nineteenth-century female reader to understand Hémon’s novel as a didactic tale. In *Un matriarcat en procès*, Boynard-Frot states that the change in the heroine’s status, from unmarried girl to married woman, is what characterizes the female in this literary genre: “[c]e qui caractérise le personnage féminin, dans le roman du terroir, c’est donc la transformation de son état de célibataire en phase initiale à celui de mariée en séquence finale” (99).

Once married, Boynard-Frot claims, the heroine no longer has a place in the novel unless she becomes a mother and, even then, her role would be only a very small one.

According to Boynard-Frot, “[m]ariée, la femme n’a plus d’histoire. [...] Il n’y a pas

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8 Hereafter referred to as *Maria Chapdelaine*. 

d’histoire de femme mariée et non mère dans le roman du terroir. La sujette mariée n’entre en scène que pour désirer ou ne pas désirer un enfant” (106-107). If the female character in this genre is not a wife and/or a mother (or if she chooses not to take on these roles), she has no purpose in the *roman de la terre*. Unlike the previously mentioned, primarily British and English-Canadian, genres of the courtesy novel and romantic literature, where the story is as much about the heroine’s transformative journey of personal growth (that is to say her physical and emotional transition from young girl to woman), as it is about her actual marriage, the heroine in a *roman de la terre* has no role beyond that of marrying. There is one common thread, however, that runs through all of these genres, including sentimental fiction, the courtesy novel and the *roman de la terre*: once a heroine marries in these stories, her purpose in the novel (as much as in her own life) comes to an end.

**Keeping Courtesy Literature Alive: Understanding the Didactic Function of the Courtesy Novel**

The women’s periodicals and conduct books which appeared in both Britain and Canada may well have been extremely effective in instructing women on certain subjects that were of importance to them, but they were at best an ineffective source of education, and were especially ineffectual when it came to giving young readers advice about how to choose a husband. For a young lady searching for help or advice on this topic, the information in these works was clearly insufficient. For this reason, it seemed a logical solution to find a way to show women how to make this important decision instead of simply trying to tell them.

Similar in structure and style to the novel of manners (a subgenre of the novel popularized in Britain by authors such as Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane
Austen) as well as the sentimental novel, Hemlow’s “courtesy novel” (757) places a strong emphasis on feelings, social conventions and expectations. Since its style is less overtly didactic and more entertaining than traditional conduct literature, the conduct novel has the added advantage of being more interesting to read than the more pedantic courtesy books of the time. Although many of the novels Hemlow examines in “Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books” are best known as novels of manners, they also fit the description of a courtesy novel. By presenting examples of both good and bad decisions in a number of different circumstances, these novels allow a female reader to educate herself about decision making before she is actually required to face such situations in her own life, particularly with regards to important decisions such as whom to marry, since most of these works are focused on the marriage plot. As Hemlow argues,

> [i]f fiction paints truth, real perils beset the young lady who transgressed certain boundary lines in decorum, propriety, and the like. Outside these boundaries all was lost, and she who strayed beyond them was considered lawful prey. It was necessary, then, to warn her, so that she should not perish unwittingly, unknowingly bring down unhappiness and ruin on her head through ignorance of the demarcation lines. (733-34)

According to Carole Gerson in *A Purer Taste*, “[t]he first social interests of Canadian writers [...] were uncontroversial. Early Canadian fiction dealing overtly with local daily life tends to conform to one of two distinct categories: the didactic prescription of social conduct, and the fictive pioneer guide” (Gerson 134). For authors who chose to write prescriptive works relating to social conduct, few Canadian sources (literary, historical or otherwise) existed for these authors to draw on for inspiration and
guidance in their work. As a result, many nineteenth-century English-Canadian authors chose to borrow conventions which they felt were lacking in Canadian fiction from European sources (such as Austen and Edgeworth) and adapt them for use in their own novels. The result of this was the appearance of a large number of English-Canadian novels which resembled, in many respects, the popular fiction being produced in England at the time, in particular with regards to the genre of the courtesy novel:

Illustrative of the situation of the mid-century Canadian novelist are the careers of Susanne Moodie and Rosanna Leprohon, two authors with rich local experience who looked instead to the sophisticated social life of England for literary conventions to illustrate their familiar themes of filial obedience, faithfulness, generosity, honesty and the supremacy of virtue.

(Gerson 138)

Taking into consideration the evolution of conduct literature and the courtesy novel which I have previously discussed, as well as the didactic uses of the literary genres of sentimental fiction and the roman de la terre which were so popular in nineteenth-century Canada, I wish to argue that fiction was an ideal place for a young woman to educate herself about important life decisions in early Canadian culture. By living (and learning) vicariously through the protagonist of a novel, a reader could gather important information about good and bad life choices – she could even practice making decisions (such as choosing a marriage partner) without fear of consequences or repercussions – permitting her to feel more confident in the decisions she would choose to make if, and when, she must face similar situations in her own life. Although a young, male reader could also educate himself through fiction in a similar way, I have chosen to concentrate
on the female reader for this project because of the emphasis that has been placed on the marriage choice, as made by female characters, in all of the novels that I discuss.\(^9\)

In “Teaching About the Marriage Plot,” Pamela S. Bromberg makes a similar claim, arguing that novels can be seen “as a way for women [...] to gain understanding of their own lives and choices through knowledge of the past and the vicarious experience of life imagined in literature” (132). She goes on to quote Patricia Meyer Spacks who states, in her article “The Novel as Ethical Paradigm,” that “[t]he paradigms of fiction provide an opportunity for moral playfulness: cost-free experimentation” (qtd. in Bromberg 185). Although Spacks appears to suggest a much lighter, less pedagogically intense form of instruction than I am advocating here, her suggestion that a novel is a place of “cost-free experimentation” for a reader resembles the didactic function I am attributing to novels because it emphasizes the idea that a woman could use literature as a way of testing the different options available to her without fear of repercussions and without risking her reputation.

Although some critics (Northrop Frye being a notable example) argue that it is unwise for a reader to use literature as a sort of “guide to life” (Frye, Dreamland 89), there are other critics – such as Rachel M. Brownstein and Sobba Green – who strongly disagree. For my part, I fall somewhere in between these extremes. I do not believe a young woman could use a novel centered on the marriage plot as a textbook, following it

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\(^9\) Since the action in Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing and Maria Chapdelaine is, on the surface level, largely focused on the female protagonists of these works and the personal journey these characters undertake when choosing a suitable marriage partner, I believe that these novels are most likely to affect young female readers (as opposed to young male readers) on a personal level, as didactic works. Consequently – and for the sake of clarity – I will refer to the reader in the feminine form throughout this document. This action, however, does not mean I am arguing that only female readers could have understood these texts in this way, but rather that, as a result of my research, I have concluded that the majority of readers interested in the didactic nature of these texts as they pertained to female characters would likely have been women.
word for word as though it were a set of instructions on how to choose the right husband. However, I hope to show through my examinations of Rosanna Leprohon’s *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing: A Canadian Tale*\(^\text{10}\) and Louis Hémon’s *Maria Chapdelaine* that reading certain novels (particularly ones with a strong gender subtext) could have been seen by a young female reader as a method of testing different options or choices available in order to establish which one was best suited to her. In this way, she would have been able to safely experiment without putting herself or her future at risk.

Although Frye is against using literature as a direct source of instructions for real-life decisions, he does say in “The Keys to Dreamland” that “[w]hatever is completely lifelike in literature is a bit of a laboratory specimen there” (91). By quoting Frye here, I do not wish to argue that he, himself, would have classified novels with a gender subtext as didactic in this way, but I do believe that the aforementioned “laboratory specimen” (Frye 91) metaphor can be interpreted in more than one way. For my purposes, I have chosen to interpret it literally. I believe that Frye’s metaphor alludes to the presence of didactic possibilities in novels (whether these possibilities are intentional or unintentional, overt or hidden) and I believe that this fact supports my argument.

Although didactic writing is generally considered to be writing that is “meant above all to teach or instruct [and generally] sets out to demonstrate a moral thesis, establish a moral example, or convert” (*Encyclopedia* 297), I am using the term didactic in this text to refer to writing that is simply “instructive [and] designed to impart information, advice or some doctrine of morality or philosophy” (Baldick 66). For the purposes of my project, I am not examining whether the authors of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* and

\(^{10}\) Hereafter referred to as *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing.*
Maria Chapdelaine intended their works to function as didactic tools for readers on a personal level, but rather I am looking at how a reader could have chosen to interpret these works as instructive on a personal level, since the novels do provide important information for readers about the times and places in which they were created.

In a similar way to a laboratory experiment, a novel can help its reader test out different theories or options (in the case of these texts, theories about different suitors or the choice of marriage partner) before making a final decision. Characters in courtesy novels and the French-Canadian romans de la terre are often very realistic and similar to everyday people (whether the author does this intentionally or not is not always clear) and one thing about them is certain: these characters are very much like “laboratory specimens” (37) in that they are affected by many variables and can only be fully understood after they have been tested in a number of different situations. Once the characters in a novel have been tested out, in a sense, by the reader, the knowledge that she gains from this experiment can help her to reflect on her own options and feelings and consequently, armed with the information she has gathered and the conclusions to which she has come, it is possible that she will be able to make more informed and sensible decisions in her own life.

The Courtesy Novel: Pride and Prejudice as Prototype

Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice is a good point of departure for my analysis of the marriage plot and how it can function as a didactic tool because, in its descriptions and use of characters and settings, this particular work contains a number of important didactic elements that are essential to a courtesy novel. Criticism of Pride and Prejudice draws attention to two very important literary devices present in the novel which serve
significant didactic roles: the character triangle and the structure of place. I will begin my analysis of the marriage plot in two Canadian novels – Rosanna Leprohon’s *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* (published in 1864) and Louis Hémon’s *Maria Chapdelaine*, published in 1916 – by introducing these ideas and explaining how they function in *Pride and Prejudice*, before explaining in the upcoming chapters how I have chosen to adapt these ideas in order to emphasize the didactic possibilities of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* and *Maria Chapdelaine*. This does not mean, however, that I will examine *Maria Chapdelaine* in exactly the same way I do *Pride and Prejudice* (and, later, *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*). My analysis of Austen’s novel is merely intended to provide ideas and a rough guide for examining the elements in *Maria Chapdelaine* that appear to be similar, on a literal level, to the didactic elements present in the two English novels. Although *Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1813 in Britain, I believe Austen’s work can nonetheless help a reader understand more easily how the didactic elements present in the later Canadian novels function.

Written by Jane Austen and first published in London in 1813, *Pride and Prejudice* is the story of a young lady named Elizabeth Bennet. Along with her four sisters, Elizabeth is searching for a husband but, unlike many young girls her age, she insists that she will not marry for purely economic reasons; she is willing to risk her future financial stability in order to find a husband whom she truly loves and respects. This search for a husband also takes Elizabeth on a journey of self-discovery since both the men she meets and the places she visits help her to better understand her own character. Ultimately, Elizabeth is rewarded for all of her efforts; at the end of the novel, she marries Mr. Darcy, the richest gentleman in the story. By inviting the reader to join Elizabeth on her journey,
Austen pushes the reader of the novel to learn more about herself, insinuating that she will be rewarded for her efforts: “Austen’s formulation of ideal marriage as the culmination of a process of education about the self, the other, and the world,” Bromberg argues, “furnishes a powerful metaphor for connecting reading and learning [...] with personal experience” (126).

One of the ways the marriage plot acts as a didactic tool in this novel is through the examination of the characters: their qualities, their faults, and the ways in which the different characters interact all give the reader important information which can not only be applied to the story but can also, in a broader sense, apply to the reader’s own life. In order to examine how the characters in a marriage plot function didactically in the “courtesy novel” (Hemlow 757), I have chosen to adopt a structure known as the character triangle. The character triangle in the courtesy novel is composed of three main characters: a female character (known as the heroine) and two male characters (one who is a good suitor and one who is not); these characters are, respectively, the hero and the counter-hero.

Early in the story, the heroine is presented with two very different suitors – one of these men is considered a good suitor and the other is not – and the story revolves around the protagonist as she learns which character is which. The heroine is expected to find – and marry – the good suitor, but throughout the story the bad one continues to tempt her with his charms. This character triangle also has larger implications than simply choosing the right or wrong man to marry: the two men the heroine encounters also test her character, moral strength and sense of judgment. By choosing the good suitor, as Elizabeth Bennet does at the end of her story, the heroine proves that she is an intelligent
and thoughtful girl, who is smart and mature enough to stay away from the wrong man. As a result, she is rewarded for her good and careful judgment with a happy and successful marriage. In certain cases, such as in the case of Antoinette De Mirecourt in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*, the heroine who makes a wrong decision can redeem herself by accepting her punishment and taking responsibility for her actions. When she does so, she is generally rewarded in the end as well, but only once it has been made clear to the reader that she has learned her lesson and understands the nature of her mistakes.

The heroine in the character triangle generally starts out young and inexperienced. She is still unfamiliar with the ways of the world and seems to be an easy prey for men (particularly bad suitors) who wish to take advantage of her naivety. Since “[t]he marriage plot most novels depend on is about finding validation of one’s uniqueness and importance by being singled out among all other women by a man” (Brownstein XV), there is also a sense that the heroine herself is not, in some ways, a complete character until she meets the men in her triangle: this is to say the hero and counter-hero. Since the heroine must grow and change in order to complete herself (and can accomplish this only through her experiences), she learns from and is affected by the characters she meets and becomes involved with, including her suitors. Each suitor presented to the heroine represents something different for her future: one may represent tradition, another financial stability or sexuality. In some cases, the heroine is lucky enough to find one suitor who combines all of the things she needs in one character (as is the case in *Pride and Prejudice* when Elizabeth Bennet marries the hero of her story, Mr. Darcy). More often than not, however, the heroine finds that she must choose one quality over another:
tradition over sexuality, financial stability over tradition, etc. Since “[t]he novel that centers on a single heroine and her deciding whom to marry always implies it is important to decide carefully, and possible to choose correctly, and that a lot depends on deciding” (Brownstein 11), it is easy to understand what a huge responsibility the heroine in a “courtesy novel” (Hemlow 757) really has. By living vicariously through the heroine, the female reader has an opportunity to safely experience the positive rewards of a good decision or the negative consequences of a bad one and, if she pays close attention to the consequences she reads about in the story, the lessons that she learns can be of great aid to her in her own life.

For the most part, the character of the hero is easily distinguishable in the courtesy novel, even though he is often not immediately liked by the other characters. Mr. Darcy, for example, in *Pride and Prejudice* gets off to a bad start in Hertfordshire, where he is initially perceived as a very proud man:

[Mr. Bingley’s] friend Mr Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could
then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend. (Austen 8)

The reaction to Mr. Darcy in the previously cited passage is typical of the reaction to the character of the hero in any "courtesy novel" (Hemlow 757). Like the model hero, Mr. Darcy is a shy character who tends to dislike being out in groups. Consequently, he comes across as unpleasant, bordering even on rude, when he is forced to socialize. For this reason, the hero is often misjudged by the other characters and it is only as the reader nears the end of the story that the true goodness of his character is exposed.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy's character is misunderstood by Elizabeth but her opinion of him changes when she visits his home, Pemberley. At first she is shocked by all the kind things Mr. Darcy's housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, has to say about her employer, but her shock soon turns to admiration:

“I have never had a cross word from [Mr. Darcy] in my life, and I have known him ever since he was four years old. [...] If I was to go through the world, I could not meet with a better [man]. But I have always observed, that they who are good-natured when children, are good-natured when they grow-up; and he was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted, boy in the world. [...] He is the best landlord, and the best master, [...] that ever lived. Not like the wild young men nowadays, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name. Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw anything of it. To my fancy, it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men.” (165-166)
Mrs. Reynolds’s account of Mr. Darcy’s goodness is quite remarkable considering how he was first perceived in Hertfordshire. When the heroine (and, by extension, the reader) takes a closer look at his character, however, it becomes clear that Mr. Darcy’s actions are consistent with Mrs. Reynolds’s words of praise and not with the narrator’s initial words of criticism.

As Northrop Frye notes in *Anatomy of Criticism*, “the character of the successful hero is often left undeveloped […] and we have to believe him to be potentially a more interesting character than he appears to be” (169). In other words, actual descriptions of the hero might seem sparse or difficult to find in a text but this is intentional: because his character is left partially undefined, the hero is able to become, for each reader, exactly what she wishes him to be. This is noticeable with both of the previous citations in which Mr. Darcy is described. There is little actual description of his person or his character in either: no concrete examples of his handsomeness, his arrogance or his kindness are given. As a result, the reader is able to imagine that he looks and acts however she wants to believe he would. One thing about his character that is clear, however, is his role with regards to the heroine: the character of the hero in the character triangle represents security and stability for the heroine and by choosing him instead of the counter-hero, she makes a conscious decision to follow society’s rules.

Since, in my research, I have not come across any literary term which I felt could properly describe the role of the second male character in the character triangle, I have chosen to borrow and adapt the musical notion of a counterpoint – an idea or theme that is intended to contrast with the main one – for the purposes of my analysis. Consequently, I have chosen to call this character the counter-hero. Although in some
respects, this character could be considered an antagonist because he threatens the female protagonist and opposes the hero, this term does not adequately describe him because it encourages the reader to ignore a very important aspect of his character: the fact that all of the counter-hero’s personal qualities are intended to contrast with the hero’s qualities. In this respect, the counter-hero exists in direct opposition to the hero: if we consider the hero to be the main idea or theme in the story, then all of the counter-hero’s qualities are intended to contrast noticeably with those of the hero. Where the hero tends to appear distant, moody and reserved, the counter-hero is handsome, suave and eloquent and, with his pretty looks and even prettier words, he tempts the young, impressionable heroine.

Penelope Joan Fritzer, in Jane Austen and Eighteenth-Century Courtesy Books, notes that “[i]n all of Austen’s novels, behavior is the most significant clue to character” (51). She elaborates on her argument by examining the character of Mr. Wickham, the counter-hero in Pride and Prejudice, observing that, “[a]lthough unsavory characters such as Wickham […] are appealing in their behavior at first, invariably they reveal themselves to be morally inferior through their ultimately impolite and profoundly discourteous actions. Their ‘surface’ manners do not redeem their true characters” (Fritzer 51). When the Bennet girls first meet Mr. Wickham in Austen’s novel, the reader finds exactly this to be true. Initially, all of the characters (except for Mr. Darcy) are taken in by Mr. Wickham’s “‘surface’ manners” (Fritzer 51):

the attention of every lady was soon caught by a young man, whom they had never seen before, of most gentlemanlike appearance, walking with an officer on the other side of the way. […] Mr Denny addressed them directly, and entreated permission to introduce his friend, Mr Wickham,
who had returned with him the day before from town, and he was happy to say had accepted a commission in their corps. This was exactly as it should be; for the young man wanted only regimentals to make him completely charming. His appearance was greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address. The introduction was followed up on his side by a happy readiness of conversation – a readiness at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming. (Austen 49-50)

Much attention is given to describing the counter-hero’s appearance and apparent good manners, as can be seen in the previous citation. Since very little positive description of the hero’s appearance and manners is present early on in the novel, the positive qualities and descriptions of the counter-hero help to make him appear more appealing than the hero to the reader. The differences between these two men, although not altogether accurate at so early a stage in the novel, are nonetheless significant and become increasingly obvious as the story unfolds.

Though the counter-hero is usually handsome and charming, he is also the only character in the story who ever truly threatens the heroine, whether the threat is direct or indirect. By directly threatening the heroine, the counter-hero may threaten her physical safety in some way: he might shake or slap her out of anger, or he might place her in some situation that could cause her physical harm. By indirectly threatening the heroine, the counter-hero may endanger her reputation, her respectability, or even her future. Since it is largely the character of the heroine which connects the two male characters, the counter-hero also becomes the only male character to directly challenge the hero. For
example, after Elizabeth accuses Mr. Darcy of cruelty towards Wickham, Mr. Darcy defends himself, in the process describing Wickham’s character to Elizabeth as such:

> the vicious propensities – the want of principle which [Wickham] was careful to guard from the knowledge of his best friend, could not escape the observation of a young man of nearly the same age with himself, and who had opportunities of seeing him in unguarded moments. (Austen 136)

Wickham, then, is revealed by Mr. Darcy to be far different from what the Bennet girls initially believed him to be and it quickly becomes clear to both the reader and the heroine that he is a far more dangerous character than they had anticipated.

The character triangle works as a didactic tool largely because, as Brownstein notes, “[w]omen who read have been inclined since the eighteenth century to understand one another, and men, and themselves, as characters in novels” (XVIII). Putting herself in the shoes of the heroine, a young female reader in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would be encouraged to differentiate between good suitors and bad suitors in her own life by observing the characters of the hero and the counter-hero. Since these men are examples used to demonstrate the qualities which are associated with good suitors and with bad suitors, the female reader learns to look for similar qualities in the people she meets face to face. Consequently, she can begin to understand how to prepare herself to choose well in her own life, if and when she is required to do so.

In *Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen’s Novels*, Laura Mooneyham argues that Jane Austen uses a “tripod structure of place” (158) in her stories. This “tripod structure of place” (Mooneyham 158) consists of three important settings: the hero’s home, the heroine’s home, and one other establishment which,
Mooneyham argues, is representative of "society and the outside world" (Mooneyham 158). Mooneyham claims that this "tripod structure of place" (Mooneyham 158) can give the reader of a novel a more complete view of the individual characters because each of the different settings showcases different aspects of the characters which, otherwise, might not be obvious to the reader. This structure of place is very important because it encourages the reader to look more carefully (and in an unbiased way) at the characters, objects and events before making any judgments on them. As Marcia McClintock Folsom argues in "'Taking Different Positions': Knowing and Feeling in Pride and Prejudice, "Austen shows that objects, events, and people's behavior look different when they are viewed from different vantage points" (101).

In Pride and Prejudice, the setting is composed of three country estates: Longbourn (Elizabeth's home), Pemberley (Mr. Darcy's home) and, finally, Rosings (the estate of Mr. Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine, and also the setting in the novel that can best be said to "[represent] society and the outside world" [Mooneyham 158]). Each of these different settings showcases different aspects of the three characters that form the character triangle: Elizabeth Bennet, Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham.

When Elizabeth first visits Rosings, she must endure Lady Catherine's frequently insulting comments out of politeness. The story's narrator remarks: "Lady Catherine continued her remarks on Elizabeth's performance, mixing with them many instructions on execution and taste. Elizabeth received them with all the forbearance of civility" (Austen 120). Though she does, occasionally, share her opinions without first being asked, Elizabeth is, for the most part, quiet and soft-spoken in Lady Catherine's home,
since her social role does not permit her to express herself at Rosings in the same direct manner she later uses when Lady Catherine visits her at Longbourn, her own home.

When Elizabeth is at Longbourn, she is an active, outspoken and lively young woman who tends to take control of every situation that she is involved in – whether intentionally or unintentionally – and refuses to allow other characters to intimidate or belittle her without fighting back. When Lady Catherine visits Longbourn to confront Elizabeth about the possibility of a marriage between Mr. Darcy and her, Elizabeth does not allow herself to be intimidated by the social status of her visitor. Instead, she lets her true, strong character show:

LADY CATHERINE. “This is not to be borne. Miss Bennet, I insist on being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew, made you an offer of marriage?”
ELIZABETH. “Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible.”
LADY CATHERINE. “It ought to be so; it must be so, while he retains the use of his reason. But your arts and allurements may, in a moment of infatuation, have made him forget what he owes to himself and to all his family. You may have drawn him in.”
ELIZABETH. “If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it.”
LADY CATHERINE. “Miss Bennet, do you know who I am? I have not been accustomed to such language as this. I am almost the nearest relation he has in the world, and am entitled to know all his dearest concerns.”
ELIZABETH. “But you are not entitled to know mine; nor will such behaviour as this, ever induce me to be explicit.” (Austen 238).
Considering their relative social positions, Elizabeth is expected to be deferential with Lady Catherine, answering her questions politely and obeying her requests. Lady Catherine expects the young lady to act at Longbourn in the same way she has seen her act at Rosings. Elizabeth, however, takes advantage of being in her own home and allows a different side of her character to show through, unimpeded by social strictures.

When she visits Pemberley, Mr. Darcy’s residence, however, Elizabeth shows a far more timid, reserved and deferential side of her personality than is seen anywhere else. For the first time, the reader gets a glimpse of the thoughtful young woman behind Elizabeth’s normally outspoken exterior. It is not only the exquisite grounds and beautiful, richly decorated rooms of which Elizabeth is in awe when she first visits Pemberley; she is also in awe of what that estate represents: Mr. Darcy’s position in society. He is a gentleman. According to McClintock Folsom,

[I]ooking out through windows in different rooms of Darcy’s house,
Elizabeth sees objects in the landscape arrange themselves in varied combinations. Of course, the objects do not move; it is Elizabeth who is “taking different positions.” The grounds of Pemberley are analogous to their owner in presenting a viewer with “increased abruptness” from a distance and surprising beauty when seen from a new vantage point. At this moment, Elizabeth is experiencing one of the novel’s central insights: that perceptions from fixed vantage points must be corrected by movement through space, as first impressions must be corrected by movement through time. (101)
During her visit to Pemberley, Elizabeth sees a different Mr. Darcy than the one she first met in Hertfordshire. Just as her views of Mr. Darcy’s estate change as her vantage point does, so too does her opinion of the man himself. In his own surroundings, Mr. Darcy is a far more caring, compassionate and generous man than Elizabeth initially believed him to be. After Mr. Darcy’s first proposal, Elizabeth expresses her feelings for him quite clearly when she says:

“From the very beginning, from the first moment I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain for the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immoveable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world I could ever be prevailed upon to marry.” (Austen 131)

Elizabeth bases her initial feelings for Darcy on what she first sees of him in Hertfordshire. Before seeing how he behaves in his own surroundings, Elizabeth makes up her mind that she hates him and feels convinced nothing could ever change her mind. When she meets him later at Pemberley, however, she is shocked to see (and hear) how different he acts. To be sure, part of the change is the result of Elizabeth’s earlier attacks on his character, but when viewed alongside other scenes at Pemberley where Elizabeth is not present, the reader is able to see that Mr. Darcy is much friendlier and at ease in his own environment than he is in more public places.

In my analyses of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing and Maria Chapdelaine, I have observed that the major settings in each story follow a similar, though not
identical, pattern to the one laid out by Mooneyham. For this reason, I have chosen to adapt Mooneyham’s theory of the “tripod structure of place” (158) slightly, changing it to a four-part structure of place, in order to properly apply this paradigm of analysis to both Leprohon’s and Hémon’s novels. The four settings I have identified as most important in these works are the heroine’s home, the counter-hero’s home, an establishment that is representative of society in general and, finally, as with a great number of other Canadian works, nature. I believe that nature is an important setting in the novels from Canada and Québec because of the great influence that this setting has not only on the course of the stories themselves, but also on the characters and their actions.

The heroine’s home, the counter-hero’s home, and the setting which represents society play the same roles in the novels from Canada and Quebec as the heroine’s home, the hero’s home and the setting which represents society do in Mooneyham’s structure. Since nature is the only setting which has no counterpart in Mooneyham’s structure, and since it is a very important part of these works, I have decided to make the original “tripod structure” (Mooneyham 158) a four-part structure for the purpose of my argument.

According to Margaret Atwood, in Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature – and as can be seen in many other Canadian works, both literary and critical – the theme of survival, or “la Survivance” (Atwood 32) is very common in Canadian literature, and nature is an essential element in this theme. As Atwood argues, nature in the Canadian novel can be “seen as dead, or alive but indifferent, or alive and actively hostile towards man” (54), in some cases threatening the survival of one or many characters. Although her observation is satirical to a certain extent, it nonetheless bears
examination in terms of the four-part structure of place because nature does often appear hostile or dangerous in many Canadian novels. In the case of both Leprohon’s and Hémon’s novels, the reader can see that nature is given a hostile role, threatening all of the characters in the novel in different ways.

Both Mooneyham’s “tripod structure of place” (158) and the four-part structure of place I will be adopting for my own analysis of these two Canadian works show the reader how important it is to fully examine a person’s behaviour in as many different settings as possible before making any definitive judgments on that person’s manners or character. Just as “Austen shows that objects, events, and people’s behavior look different when they are viewed from different vantage points” (Folsom 101) in Pride and Prejudice, each of the four settings in Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing and Maria Chapdelaine change the nature of the interactions between individual characters. By observing these changes, I believe that a reader can learn some very important lessons about life, love and the choices she must make.

Although it might initially appear as though Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing and Maria Chapdelaine have little in common, these novels actually have many similarities in structure and theme. One novel was written by an English-Canadian author and the other by a French European man writing in Quebec, yet both works are about French-Canadian female protagonists who are facing one of the most important decisions of their lives: the choice of marriage partner. While Antoinette De Mirecourt is an heiress who has been raised by her conservative, French-Canadian father on his large country estate, Maria Chapdelaine is a young habitant girl who has become accustomed to living a life very similar in style to the lives of the early pioneers.
Whereas hard and, quite often, physical labour is simply a way of life for Maria, Antoinette is more of an elegant and refined young lady who spends most of her days reading and writing letters. The obvious class differences signalled by these disparate lifestyles are reflected in the settings where these women meet (and are courted by) their suitors, as well as in the expectations (both personal and social) which influence Antoinette’s and Maria’s final marriage choices. Whereas Antoinette encounters Sternfield and Evelyn during sleigh rides and ballroom soirées, Maria meets François, Eutrope and Lorenzo either at Church or at her parents’ home and it is clear in both works that the social worlds in which these women live do affect their actions and decisions. At the heart of both novels, however, is a marriage plot: both of the young, female protagonists must choose a husband from amongst three suitors and the novels examine how (and why) these young women make the decisions they do, in terms of both the personal and national consequences that arise from their choice of marriage partner.

In *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*, “the categories of the sentimental and the national completely merge in what Carl Murphy has called ‘the marriage metaphor’” (Cuder-Dominguez 124), making for a story that has both personal and political significance. According to Pilar Cuder-Dominguez in “Negotiations of Gender and Nationhood in Early Canadian Literature”:

> Leprohon seems to believe in a nation, a Canadian nation, which most needs arise from the union of its two founding peoples, French and English. Just as husband and wife, previously two separate beings, become “one” in the state of holy matrimony, so the French and the English are destined to understand and love one another within the bounds
of one nation, each bringing into the relationship their very best traits.”

(124)

Although it is never explicitly stated in the novel, Cuder-Dominguez argues that the only choice of husband Antoinette can not make is Louis Beauchesne, since a union between these two characters would symbolize continued isolation for Antoinette’s French-Canadian culture and would not represent the vision of a unified Canada which the author appears to favour. By marrying Colonel Evelyn instead, Antoinette severs her ties to the French order that had previously ruled her people. Her union with Evelyn, according to Carl Murphy in “The Marriage Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century English Canadian Fiction” “symbolizes the coming together of the very best of New France with the very best of the victorious English” (Murphy 2). In other words, Antoinette and Evelyn’s marriage exemplifies the solution envisioned by Leprohon to the problem of French-English relations in Canada and symbolizes a positive step towards a brighter future, not only for the protagonist, but also for her country. In this case, the “very best” does not symbolize the social status of the characters, but rather their inner value or level of moral development. Although Colonel Evelyn is a gentleman whose strength of character is already well developed at the beginning of the story, Antoinette’s character needs time and experience to develop her inner strength before she can be considered worthy of Evelyn. Her first marriage to Sternfield and the suffering that she endures because of it help to advance her moral development in a very significant way, to the point that she becomes morally superior to both Sternfield and Madame D’Aulnay and therefore worthy of Evelyn’s affection. The marriage between Antoinette and Colonel Evelyn is therefore
a positive one, both personally (for the characters) and politically (for the country of Canada).

In Hémon’s novel, Maria Chapdelaine narrowly escapes making the same mistake as Antoinette when choosing a husband, but only because she has extra guidance: once she realizes that she must choose a marriage partner, Maria strongly considers choosing Lorenzo Surprenant (the wrong suitor) until she hears the voices of her land, her language and her female ancestors encouraging her to choose Eutrope Gagnon instead. The voices encourage Maria to think about all that she would be giving up if she chose Lorenzo and moved away to the United States: “les cent douceurs méconnues du pays qu’elle voulait fuir” (190), “la douceur joyeuse des noms français” (192) as well as “la solennité chère du vieux culte, la douceur de la vieille langue jalousement gardée, la splendeur et la force barbare du pays neuf où une racine ancienne a retrouvé son adolescence” (193). Maria soon realizes that Eutrope is the suitor who will not only be able to provide for her, but will also enable her to remain in Quebec and continue the traditions that her ancestors began. While she does, technically, make a choice in the novel, this choice is largely determined by two elements: the death of François Paradis, the man that she truly loves, and by the voices of her land, language and ancestors that she hears and that encourage her not to abandon her homeland.

Aurélien Boivin argues in “Maria Chapdelaine, mythe ou symbole?” that:

[e]n choisissant Eutrope Gagnon, colon établi sur le lot voisin de celui des Chapdelaine, Maria choisit d’abord, non l’amour, mais un style de vie: elle accepte de vivre avant tout dans son pays, au milieu des gens de “sa race”. Elle accepte aussi, par sacrifice, de poursuivre le travail de sa mère,
le rôle de la mère, elle qui pourtant, au début du roman, s’associait davantage à son père et épousait presque son goût du nomadisme en choisissant François Paradis. (23)

Contrary to Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, the idea of romantic love plays but a very small role in Maria Chapdelaine. Instead, the love that Maria chooses in the end is a love for her culture, for her people. Although she does not feel romantically attracted to Eutrope, Maria chooses to marry him because of what he represents for her: Quebec and French-Canadian culture, her culture. As Boivin states: “[c’est volontairement qu’elle choisit Eutrope, après mûre réflexion, sans avoir été forcée par quiconque. Elle choisit Eutrope non par amour physique mais par amour pour la race qu’il symbolise” (Mythe ou symbole, 26).

In “French Canada in Fiction,” R. Keith Hicks argues that “[i]t is clear that [Hémon’s] entirely successful intention is to portray the soul of New France in the real and human though allegorical person of Maria” (221). If his assumption is true, Hémon’s novel was clearly meant to be a life lesson for French-Canadian readers and, consequently, readers of Maria Chapdelaine are encouraged to follow in the footsteps of Maria and learn from the choices she makes. By following Maria’s lead, all readers have an opportunity to gather important information that could be of use to them in their own lives and French-Canadian readers in particular can learn how to ensure that the French-Canadian race and culture survives for another generation.

Whether on a personal level or on a political level, the reader can see that the choice of marriage partner made by the heroine in each of these novels is significant and can function didactically in more than one way. In Secret Marrying and Secret
Sorrowing. Antoinette’s marriage to Colonel Evelyn symbolizes a step towards the future for both the story’s protagonist and for the Canadian nation, whereas in Maria Chapdelaine, it becomes a way for Maria and, by extension, all French Canadians to hold onto their past.
Chapter One

“Essentially Canadian” or “Essentially Trivial”? The Critical Debates Surrounding Rosanna Leprohon’s Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing

“A Moral Survival Guide for Young Women”: The Critical Reception of Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing in English Canada

Published in 1864 by John Lovell, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing was well received in Canada by both English and French critics when it first appeared in print and many of the early reviews of the novel in English Canada had particular praise for the didactic possibilities of the work. In the July 1864 issue of the Journal of Education For Lower Canada, one English Canadian reviewer was careful to point out that, although the novel is set in “the epoch immediately following the Conquest of Canada [, …] the moral of the tale [was] quite as applicable to [his] own days” (qtd. in Stockdale XXXVIII), thus clearly emphasizing the didactic possibilities of Leprohon’s work for his contemporary female readers. A second English-Canadian reviewer, this time writing in the 13th September, 1864 edition of the Montreal Gazette, said the novel was “not only pleasantly readable, but highly interesting” and recommended it to “[y]outh especially,” since “the lessons it teaches and moral it enforces, are well worthy of being remembered and observed, especially by the generation of girls now budding into womanhood, or about venturing on this world’s busy life” (qtd. in Stockdale XXXIX-XL). Both reviewers took special care to mention the positive effect that reading Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing might have on young readers, in particular young women whom they seemed

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to believe could profit from the lessons incorporated in the story. Their enthusiasm for these lessons is evident and it proves to modern day readers that the didactic possibilities of Leprohon’s work were recognized by critics early on, soon after the novel’s initial publication.

Even though it was well received when it first appeared in print, the original English version of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* disappeared rather quickly from the Canadian literary scene, not to be published again in book form for over one hundred years in 1973. After its first appearance in 1864, *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* was quickly translated into French by Joseph-Auguste Genand and the popularity of Genand’s 1865 French version long outlived that of Leprohon’s original.

In his 1989 introduction to the novel, John Stockdale claims that:

> [although there is evidence to suggest that *Antoinette De Mirecourt* was serialized in a Montreal periodical entitled *Life* in the 1890s, the first reprintings of the English version [of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*] in book form since 1864 did not occur until 1973 [when] the University of Toronto Press issued a photographic reprint of the first edition of *Antoinette De Mirecourt* in its Toronto Reprint Library of Canadian Prose and Poetry series under the general editorship of Douglas Lochhead, and McClelland and Stewart published a new edition of the novel as No. 89 in its New Canadian Library series. (XLVIII)]

Many subsequent editions of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* have been published in English Canada since the time of the novel’s first reprinting in 1973 but, even now, it remains unclear why a book which initially had such positive reviews was so
quickly abandoned by English-speaking Canadian readers of the nineteenth century. A number of critics have speculated on this topic, among them Carole Gerson who suggests two possibilities for this phenomenon. Her first suggestion is that “Mrs. Leprohon’s works were ‘written at least a decade too early to benefit from the wave of English-Canadian interest in Quebec which was inspired by Parkman’s histories and James Le Moine’s series of *Maple Leaves* and which peaked after 1875’” (qtd. in Stockdale L). As a result, Gerson argues that the English reading public of the mid-nineteenth century would have had little interest in reading about the ordinary lives of French Canadians in Quebec. The second possibility Gerson suggests, and one that I feel is far more interesting (and, in many ways, more applicable to this project) is one that she actually borrows from Stockdale. Gerson says that, according to Stockdale, the lack of interest in Leprohon’s novels – *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* in particular – might:

> have to do with the shock many English-Canadian readers undoubtedly felt as they perused this “essentially Canadian” story about an English officer’s marriage to a young girl from a good French-Canadian family. For, in depicting life in Montreal in the 1760s, Mrs. Leprohon revealed not only a fascinating, vivid world that was romantic and exciting, but also a physically destructive, morally dangerous wilderness that bore a striking resemblance to the Montreal these readers were experiencing in the mid-nineteenth century. (qtd. in Stockdale L-LI)

Both Stockdale and Gerson suggest that Leprohon’s story might have been a little too realistic for nineteenth-century readers. As a result, it could have frightened readers more than it educated them. After all, even though Antoinette makes a fortunate alliance at the
end of the story, she only achieves this after much suffering and loss of respectability. Nineteenth-century readers may have been concerned that something similar could happen to them or to someone they loved. After all, for Leprohon’s reading audience, the threat of a bad marriage was very real and, at the time of the novel’s publication, the streets of Quebec were full of young, British soldiers just like Sternfield and Evelyn. The concern that a young Canadian woman could be fooled into a marriage with a soldier like Sternfield would easily have been enough to affect the novel’s popularity, at least for as long as the story remained current. This argument, however, does not explain why the popularity of the French translation of Leprohon’s novel remained constant for years after the original version fell out of favour with English-Canadian readers. It is clear, however, that the novel had a distinctly didactic purpose from the time of its very first publication. As Gerson notes in *A Purer Taste*, “Leprohon manipulates the social and moral complications presented by the sudden influx of British officers into Montreal society just after the Seven Years’ War to convey a message of emotional honesty and filial obedience” (Gerson 120). The novel, Gerson goes on to confirm, is a kind of “a moral survival guide for young women” (139).

“*Une grande leçon de morale*”*: Understanding the Popularity of *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* in French Canada

Joseph-Auguste Genand, one of the editors of the French language newspaper *Ordre*, initially translated the work to be published as a “Feuilleton” in the *Ordre* but the favourable reaction it received prompted him to, shortly afterwards, publish the story in book form. In the avant-propos to his translation, Genand calls the story:

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Genand’s translation of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* proved to be so popular that a second French edition of the novel was printed in 1881. Well recognized by the Quebec press even though it received less attention than the first, the second French edition of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* was based on Genand’s translation, but the editors took the liberty of making a few changes to his translated text. In the “Note des Éditeurs” which accompanied the new edition, the publisher – J.B. Rolland et Fils of Montreal – states that the success of the novel, “‘assez rare dans les annales de la librairie canadienne,’ had persuaded [them] to issue ‘une seconde édition d’un roman essentiellement canadien par la forme et par le fond et qui renferme une grande leçon de morale’” (qtd. in Stockdale XLVI). Similar to Genand, the publishers of the second translation of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* were careful to emphasize the “grande leçon de morale” (qtd. in Stockdale XLVI) present in the work. Whereas contemporary critics (both English and French) tended to emphasize the moral lessons in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* as they related to young nineteenth-century female readers and the marriage choice (this is to say on a literal, romantic level), more recent criticism of the novel – examples include Carl Murphy’s “The Marriage Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century English Canadian Fiction” and Pilar Cuder-Dominguez’s “Negotiations of Gender and Nationhood in Early Canadian Literature”— examines how
the lessons incorporated in the work function didactically on the level of a national allegory.

One review of the J.B. Rolland et Fils translation, appearing on July 14, 1881 in both the Montreal Patrie and the Gazette des Campagnes (from Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière), claims that the merit of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing:

‘réside surtout dans le travail des détails, dans les épisodes qui reposent l’attention du lecteur, dans la conception des caractères, dans la peinture des personnages, dans la délicatesse des pensées, dans la douceur des sentiments, dans la beauté du style, dans l’harmonie des rôles et dans la morale toujours religieusement respectée’. (qtd. in Stockdale XLVII)

Although the reviewer does comment on numerous different aspects of the novel (the plot, the characters and the settings, among others), once again the emphasis is placed largely on the didactic nature of the story (“la morale toujours religieusement respectée” (qtd. in Stockdale XLVII)). Based on the initial reviews of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing in both English and French, it would seem that many nineteenth-century Canadians found the didactic nature of Leprohon’s novel to be its greatest asset.

Whereas interest in Leprohon’s works died out rather quickly in English Canada, readers in Quebec continued to be drawn to her works well into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In an article written by Gaetane de Montreuil and published in the Canadienne as late as May 1922, Leprohon was praised for creating “‘des caractères comme nous en avons connus, tels que nous en rencontrons chaque jour [parce que] cela établir entre l’auteur et le lecteur une sympathie de compréhension qui fait aimer ses œuvres’” (qtd. in Stockdale XLIX). Appearing nearly sixty years after Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing was
first published, this article shows just how much of an influence Leprohon’s work had on readers over the years.

For Leprohon to write a novel that ends with a happy marriage between a French-Canadian and an Englishman is not altogether surprising, nor is the possibility that she would have chosen to use the marriage plot as a didactic tool to help instruct the young women of her day. Leprohon was herself a young English-Canadian woman born to a prosperous family of Irish emigrants in 1829 (Encyclopedia 652). According to the Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada and John Stockdale, Leprohon was educated in Montreal at the Convent of the Congregation of Notre Dame, where she practised her writing skills by penning religious poetry. Her first poems were published in the Literary Garland in 1846, Stockdale tells readers, and her first prose appeared in the same publication in 1847.

In 1851, Leprohon married Dr. Jean-Baptiste-Lucain Leprohon, a popular French-Canadian doctor who had started his own practice in St.Charles-sur-Richelieu. Aside from a few facts about Leprohon which can be found in public records (newspaper announcements, church records and other similar documents), very little information about this Canadian author is available. Only one other source, letters written by her husband to his friend, Pierre Margry, gives a glimpse (however small) into Leprohon’s home life. Based on her husband’s correspondence, Leprohon’s marriage appears to have been a happy one. One of the most significant of the few references that he makes to their marriage in his letters appears nearly five years after his wife’s death: “Je suis toujours le même, regrettant la perte de cette chère ‘Rosanna’ qui a charmé mon existence pendant 30 années. J’irai la rejoindre bientôt, car ma santé laisse à désirer”’ (qtd. in
Knowledge of Leprohon’s own experience with cross-cultural marriage makes her choice to reward the character of Antoinette De Mirecourt with a happy, cross-cultural marriage at the end of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing rather unsurprising.

Leprohon’s husband, in another letter, also mentions his wife’s writing, saying that her ""plume est mise à contribution par les prêtres, les soeurs, et pour toutes affaires religieuses"" (qtd. in Stockdale XX) which seems to indicate, given Leprohon’s Roman Catholic background and close ties to the Church, that much of her writing would have possessed some form of didactic intent. Since Leprohon actually lived through the era that she writes about in Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing and saw first-hand the many British soldiers who walked the streets of Montreal, it would not be difficult to understand why she might have wanted to use her writing for didactic purposes. Leprohon would have been aware of the many problems that were occurring in Montreal at the time with young ladies falling prey to the British soldiers who were homesick and bored. Stockdale mentions that around the time Leprohon wrote Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, the problem was becoming quite serious. According to him, Frances Monck, the daughter-in-law of the governor general of British North America, wrote in a letter home that ""[L]ast Sunday our Bishop Fulford of Montreal preached a great sermon at the ladies: spoke against their seeking and loving admiration, and particularly warned married women against setting the bad example’’ (qtd. in Stockdale XXIII). Leprohon, therefore, a woman who had young daughters of her own, ""had many reasons to compose her story about ‘Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing’” (Stockdale XXIV), most likely encouraging her to help other young Canadian women also avoid the dangers of a bad marriage.
Although both early English and French-Canadian audiences recognized the didactic elements present in Leprohon’s novel, the two groups nonetheless had distinctly different opinions concerning “the happy marriage ending” (Murphy 3) of the story and its possible effects on their respective communities. Early English-Canadian reviewers, for the most part, considered *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*’s happy ending a positive one because, as Pilar Cuder-Dominguez argues in “Negotiations of Gender and Nationhood in Early Canadian Literature,” it was a “blueprint for the kind of nation [the author] envisioned” (Cuder-Dominguez 119) in Canada’s future. Since, as Murphy states, “[t]he happy marriage ending as the personal solution for Antoinette de Mirecourt and Colonel Evelyn [in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*] prefigures a larger political solution in Canada: the confederation of French and English into one nation” (Murphy 3), English-Canadian reviewers understood the union of these two major characters as an encouraging example of what their native land could someday become.

The early French-Canadian critics, however, did not quite share the views of their Anglophone counterparts. Since the character of Antoinette is considered symbolic of the French-Canadian people, her marriage and subsequent submission to an Englishman is often seen as a representation of the submission of French Canadians to the English. This forced submission, critics argue, could ultimately jeopardize the cultural freedom of all French Canadians. Consequently, although Leprohon’s novel was very popular in its initial French translation – more popular, in fact, than in its original English version – many French-Canadian critics found the ending of the novel slightly unsettling and criticized its happy ending. These critics were especially worried about the effects that Antoinette’s fairytale ending could have on the young women of their community. They
were concerned that the story might encourage some of the more impressionable young ladies to harbour idealistic (even unrealistic) expectations about love and marriage.

Similar to Antoinette’s French father in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*, who is concerned that Antoinette might be lured into an unsuitable marriage by one of the young Englishmen she meets in Montreal, these critics were concerned that “‘la peinture d’un bonheur fictif [pourrait] séduire un jeune coeur nourri d’idéal loin de la trompeuse réalité’” (qtd. in Stockdale XXXIX), both on a literal level and an allegorical level. It must be noted, however, that many of these critics were less bothered by the happy ending itself, than they were upset by the fact that Antoinette’s happy ending comes about through her second marriage to an Englishman. Many of these critics were highly concerned that if young French-Canadian women chose to read *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* on a literal level – consequently choosing to emulate the positive actions of the protagonist by marrying (and, consequently, submitting to) Englishmen – the result would be disastrous for the French-Canadian people.

**Layers of Lessons: An Analysis of Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing**

“Romances like *[Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing ...]* may have dominated the literary scene in Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,” but these kinds of stories, Misao Dean argues in a chapter of her book about the performance of gender in Early-Canadian Fiction, “*Translated by Desire: Romance and Politics in Rosanna Leprohon’s Antoinette De Mirecourt,*” “are generally dismissed by contemporary Canadian critics as examples of an inferior literary form not worthy of sustained critical attention” (Dean 44). Modern-day readers do not need to look very far to find examples of the kind of negative criticism that Dean mentions in her essay; even
in a short biographical text which appears in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and details the life and works of Rosanna Leprohon, John Stockdale, who wrote the introduction to, and edited, the 1989 reprint of Leprohon’s novel, calls *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* “the worst of Leprohon’s Canadian novels (DCB 10:537) because it is her most ‘romantic’” (qtd. in Dean 45). This kind of assumption not only encourages the modern female reader to ignore many of the didactic qualities present in Leprohon’s novel, but it could go so far as to prevent her from even reading this early Canadian work simply because she might assume that the story is somehow lacking in substance because it is classified as a romance. Stockdale, the author of the previously cited biographical entry on Leprohon, is neither the first, nor the only person to criticize *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* because of its romantic genre. Many other critics share his opinion, most of them arguing that Leprohon’s story serves no greater purpose than that of entertaining young ladies.

Some critics, such as Carl Murphy in “The Marriage Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century English Canadian Fiction,” however, have dared to argue that this story could be used to greater ends than simply as a distraction for young ladies, claiming that “the happy marriage ending as the personal solution for Antoinette De Mirecourt and Colonel Evelyn [in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*] prefigures [allegorically] a larger political solution in Canada: the confederation of French and English into one nation” (Murphy 3). By adopting this viewpoint, however, Murphy and a number of other critics all but ignore the love plot at the centre of the work, diverting the reader’s attention away from the romantic aspects of the novel and pushing them towards the more overtly political ones instead. To these critics, the romantic elements of Leprohon’s novel are
merely "the spoonful of sugar which hides the medicine, thus 'essentially' trivial and
certainly dispensable" (Dean 45). Regardless of which of these two viewpoints a critic
adopts, one fact remains constant with those who choose to criticize the romantic label of
Leprohon's story: in the eyes of these critics, the classification of Secret Marrying and
Secret Sorrowing as a romance greatly affects the quality of the work and virtually erases
any pedagogical uses that the novel might have. As a result, the didactic possibilities of
Leprohon's novel are often overlooked by critics and readers alike.

In "The Marriage Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century English Canadian Fiction,"
published in Studies in Canadian Literature in 1988, Carl Murphy tries to avoid the
pitfall described by Heather Murray in her afterword to the New Canadian Library edition
of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, published in 2000, by suggesting that the novel
can be read on two levels: a literal level and a symbolic level. "On a literal level"
Murphy argues,

\textit{Antoinette de Mirecourt} is the story of how an attractive, energetic, but
naïve young French Canadian girl secretly marries a young, handsome, but
morally bankrupt British officer. On a symbolic level, however, we may
view this entire story as an extended metaphor, as a political allegory
which offers a fictional rendition of early Canadian history – hence the

\textit{Canadian Tale} of its title. (Murphy 1)

Murphy mentions the literal level of the novel (or the love story) only in passing, saying
little to nothing at all about what a reader could learn from Leprohon's novel by reading
it literally, as a romance. Instead, he centers his analysis of Secret Marrying and Secret
Sorrowing largely on the political, symbolic level which, although obviously an integral
part of the work as a whole, is certainly not the only aspect of the novel that is worthy of
critical attention. In his eagerness to bring to light the political dimensions of Leprohon’s
story, Murphy virtually ignores the didactic possibilities that reading Secret Marrying
and Secret Sorrowing on a literal, romantic level might hold, especially for young, female
readers.

To view the novel only as a political allegory is no better than to view the novel
only as a romance. Limiting one’s view of the novel to one level of meaning or the other
is akin to viewing a painting while wearing dark glasses: although the viewer will no
doubt see the work before her eyes, her vision of that painting will certainly not be as
clear, or as complete, as it would be if she had removed the glasses first. The painting
itself obviously remains the same, but what the viewer sees does not. She will certainly
miss out on many of the subtleties of the work – nuances of light, colour or texture for
example – since her glasses will undoubtedly alter her vision of her surroundings.

If the reader were to imagine Leprohon’s novel as a painting, it is true that, at first
glance, the “misadventures of Antoinette De Mirecourt, the beautiful, innocent young
daughter of a rural Quebec seigneur, [and her] sudden, clandestine marriage to Major
Sternfield, an English Protestant, a gambler, a womanizer, and a fortune hunter”
(Stockdale XXV) would appear very simplistic. This view, however, would only show
the reader the broad strokes. In order to see that the novel also has much to offer her as a
didactic work – be the lessons personal or overtly political – the reader must exchange
her dark glasses for a pair that will allow her to look more closely at the work before her
eyes and see the didactic possibilities present within it.
In her afterword, Heather Murray asks if, as readers, “we underrate Rosanna Leprohon’s artistic and cultural achievement by focusing on Antoinette De Mirecourt as a romance” (251). Her question fails to take into account one very important issue, however, something which all those who dismiss the romantic nature of this novel also forget: it is not because a reader looks at Leprohon’s novel as a romance that the author’s achievements need be underrated. It is rather when the reader looks at the novel as ONLY a romance or, in some cases, as ONLY a political allegory that the author’s achievements are underrated. I believe that the greatness of Leprohon’s novel lies in the marriage of these two strategies. “[B]y dismissing Leprohon’s novels as ‘merely’ romances,” Murray argues that “[critics ignore] the many ways her novels were understood by readers of the past, and can be enjoyed today” (Murray 251) and, I believe that if a reader views the novel from a purely political point of view, thus ignoring the literal level of the romance, the same will also be true. In the case of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, it is essential to strike a balance between these two extremes; the reader needs to change her metaphorical dark glasses for ones that will allow her to view Leprohon’s novel through a set of double-didactic lenses (ones which encompass both the literal level of the romance and the allegorical level of the nation), a concept similar to Northrop Frye’s vision of literature in “The Keys to Dreamland”: “[l]iterature, then, is not a dream-world: it’s two dreams, a wish-fulfillment dream and an anxiety dream, that are focused together, like a pair of glasses, and become a fully conscious vision” (102).

Although I am aware that the pair of metaphorical reading glasses with double-didactic lenses which I discuss here does not replicate the pair of reading glasses described by Frye in “The Keys to Dreamland,” I feel it necessary to state that it was
never my intention to merely copy his idea. Instead, I have adapted Frye’s metaphor in order to make it more suitable for the purposes of my own analysis. To do this, I have altered the functions of the lenses in the reading glasses: instead of focusing together “a wish-fulfillment dream and an anxiety dream” (Frye 102) as Frye chooses to do, I focus on the literal and allegorical levels of a novel as the lenses for the reading glasses that I describe. Since Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing (and, as I will argue in chapters three and four, Maria Chapdelaine) can be read on two separate (yet equally important and, in many ways, complementary) levels – this is to say the literal, didactic level of the gender subtext and the allegorical level of the nation – I feel that this metaphor could help a female reader better understand a novel and the didactic messages contained within. By focusing the literal and allegorical levels of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing together in a way that is similar to what Frye describes – to form a metaphorical pair of reading glasses – the reader will be able to see the true richness of Leprohon’s text and, thus, fully experience the novel’s “interplay between the didactic and the delicious” (Murray 255).
Chapter Two:

Once Upon a Time in Montreal...:
Fairy-Tales and Didacticism in Rosanna Leprohon’s Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing

In Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels, Rachel M. Brownstein discusses the potential effects that a novel can have on the life of its female reader, arguing that “[w]omen who read have been inclined since the eighteenth century to understand one another, and men, and themselves, as characters in novels” (Brownstein XVIII). By associating the characters she meets in novels with people from her own life, the female reader is able to gather information that could prove helpful to her in many different life situations. Since the locations and situations of characters in a novel also have a tremendous impact on how a reader understands the actions and decisions of the characters, it is equally important for her to understand how and why different settings can (and do) affect characters in certain ways. This knowledge – which the young, female reader gleans from novels that she reads – will serve as a point of reference for her that may, eventually, help her make more informed choices and decisions in her own life.

In The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, Poovey states that “[o]nly by participating imaginatively in the choices that the characters in [some] novels face can the reader understand the moral complexities of [her society. In these works, the author] negotiates a complex contract with her readers in which she makes such participation necessary in order for the reader to understand and evaluate the action and the narrator’s comments” (44). Poovey’s statement makes it clear that in order to gather information from a novel, a reader must be willing to participate in the story; she must choose to live vicariously through the heroine and immerse herself in the world of the novel in order to gather
knowledge that could someday help her in her own life. Before examining how Leprohon encourages her reader to participate in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* in this way, I will briefly examine how both the characters and settings functioned didactically in different forms of sentimental literature\(^\text{15}\).

**Learning Life Lessons: Fairy Tales and Sentimental Literature**

In “*Some Day My Prince Will Come*: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale,” Marcia Lieberman examines the important didactic role that fairytales play in society, as well as how these kinds of stories can help to define (or, in certain cases, re-define) traditional gender roles. Although her discussion is particularly related to fairytales, much of Lieberman’s argument can also be applied to other literary works as well, such as novels, since both types of literature are often constructed using what Heather Murray calls “the love plot (and the fairy-tale structure of the ‘three suitors’)” (251). According to Lieberman:

> [n]ot only do children find out what happens to the various princes and princesses, wood-cutters, witches, and children of their favorite tales, but they also learn behavioral and associational patterns, value systems, and how to predict the consequences of specific acts or circumstances. Among other things, these tales present a picture of sexual roles, behavior, and psychology, and a way of predicting outcome or fate according to sex […].

The treatment of girls and women in fairy tales reveals certain patterns which are keenly interesting not only in themselves, but also as a major contribution in forming the sexual concept of children, and in suggesting

\(^\text{15}\) Under this heading, I will include fairytales, romances, novels of manners and courtesy novels.
to them the limitations that are imposed by sex upon a person’s chances of success in various endeavors. (Lieberman 384)

Lieberman’s position on fairytales is clear: she argues that these stories are more than just interesting tales used to distract children, saying that they can also function didactically in a way that allows the text to unfold life lessons. In a way very similar to this, novels that use the love plot can be more than just pretty tales meant to entertain and distract young women; they can also be viewed as educational tools used to help show young ladies (as well as gentlemen) how to make the important choices in their lives.

As Lieberman states in the previous citation, readers learn behavioural and associational patterns from the stories they read and these patterns undoubtedly have a large impact on the decisions and actions of the reader in her own life. After reading a fairy tale – in the story, the good character will most likely be beautiful and, in the end, she will be rewarded for her goodness by marriage to a handsome man, whereas the bad character will be ugly and will end up being punished for her wickedness – the female reader will be likely to believe that goodness is preferable to wickedness, but she will also (perhaps unconsciously) adopt certain ideas as truths, ideas that will negatively impact her life and her relationships with other people. As Lieberman notes:

[i]f a child identifies with the beauty, she may learn to be suspicious of ugly girls, who are portrayed as cruel, sly, and unscrupulous in these stories; if she identifies with the plain girls, she may learn to be suspicious and jealous of pretty girls, beauty being a gift of fate, not something that can be attained. […] Girls may be predisposed to imagine that there is a link between the lovable face and the lovable character, and to fear, if
plain themselves, that they will also prove to be unpleasant, thus using the patterns to set up self-fulfilling prophecies. (Lieberman 385)

Understanding fairy tales as educational tools may prove helpful for readers in certain situations, but the didactic message itself can have a negative influence on a reader since fairy tales do not only contain life lessons for readers, but are also used to “acculturate women to traditional social roles” (Lieberman 383). Reading fairy tales and absorbing versus understanding the didactic message could have a negative impact on a female reader’s view of herself and other people who surround her.

Unfortunately, Lieberman’s discussion of the roles of female characters in fairytales is based primarily on the concept of beauty as an indicator of a character’s goodness, since that is the characteristic most prevalent in the stories she examines. She does note however, that since qualities such as “good-temper and meekness are so regularly associated with beauty, and ill-temper with ugliness” (Lieberman385), this association has become almost fully integrated into a reader’s expectations. As a result, the female reader (often unknowingly) views the characters in the story in terms of a “good versus bad” dichotomy that allows for few nuances and little depth of character. What makes this generalization problematic for my current analysis is that in sentimental literature, as well as in real life, characters are rarely wholly good or wholly bad. More often than not, they possess aspects of both qualities within them and part of the protagonist’s (and reader’s) job is to assess each of the story’s characters via their actions and decisions in order to figure out which of the two traits is predominant. By doing so, both the protagonist and reader learn more about the nuances and other qualities that
make characters appear either “good” or “bad” and readers are able to flesh out their own personal definitions of what makes a character one or the other.

In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, Poovey discusses the sentimental novel, part of a literary genre that, although not identical, is similar in style and goals to the novel of manners and the courtesy novel. According to W.H. New, in *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, the sentimental genre “provided the underpinnings for Romantic fiction, poetry, and melodrama” (1033) and was considered by many to be the perfect literary outlet for women who wanted to write. Poovey tells her reader that “the novel of sensibility, developing along the patterns established by Richardson, provided women with a genre apparently tailor-made for their experience, confined as it was to domestic concerns and affairs of the heart” (Poovey 37-38). The sentimental genre, however, was often criticized by men (and even by some women), for its tender and emotional scenes which many critics felt gave way to excesses of emotion. Poovey quotes Hannah More, an eighteenth-century female writer of a number of conduct books, who encouraged women that wanted to write to work within the boundaries laid out by the sentimental genre because she believed that the limitations of this genre were within a woman’s realm of experience and observation: “[...women] are acute observers, and accurate judges of life and manners, as far as their own sphere of observation extends; but they describe a smaller circle” (qtd. in Poovey 38). This “sphere of observation,” it would seem, included didacticism and women writers of the time, Poovey tells her reader, were “for the most part [...] scrupulous about fulfilling the office of educator [...] Their novels often echo conduct books almost verbatim, stressing self-control and self-denial to the
exclusion of psychological complexity and attributing almost all initiative to the evil characters rather than to the heroines” (38).

Since the genres of conduct books and sentimental literature both tend to encourage readers to associate the behavioural qualities of characters with their ultimate fates, it is likely that a reader of these works chose to view her own life in a similar way. For example, when a heroine was rewarded for her virtuous behaviour and smart decisions by marriage to a handsome (and, oftentimes, rich) man, a female reader would be likely to associate the positive characteristics and choices of this heroine with her eventual good fortune. As a result, she may have expected that good behaviour and smart decisions in her own life – oftentimes behaviour and decisions which resembled those of the heroine – would have similar positive consequences for her. This may have encouraged her to emulate the story’s heroine, in the hopes that she too would be given the opportunity to reap the eventual rewards of her positive actions. When a character’s behaviour and choices were negative, however, the consequences for that character generally were as well, which would have encouraged the reader to conclude that bad behaviour and bad choices are likely to have negative consequences. With this knowledge, the female reader came to suspect that she too could be punished if she made the wrong decision. Consequently, it is likely that she would be more careful with the decisions and actions she chose to make in her own life, in order to avoid the negative repercussions she saw the heroine suffer.

Using the theories of the didactic function of narrative patterns for female readers put forth by Brownstein and Lieberman, I will argue that, by thoroughly examining the characters that form the character triangle in Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing in a
variety of different settings, the female reader of the time would have become more observant and, consequently, may have better understood not only herself, but also the people who surrounded her in her own life.

**Mistaken Identities: The Character Triangle in *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing***

By examining the individual and distinctive qualities of each of the characters that make up the character triangle – the young heroine, Antoinette De Mirecourt, the counter-hero, Audley Sternfield, and the hero, Colonel Evelyn – I will discuss how both the relationships between them and their actions function didactically in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* in order to become a source of valuable information for the novel’s young, female reader.

The heroine in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* is Antoinette De Mirecourt, a young, French-Canadian heiress who leaves her father’s quiet country estate in Valmont to visit Montréal and get her first taste of social life under the guidance of her cousin, Mrs. Lucille D’Aulnay. Early in the novel, the reader learns that Antoinette’s mother died when she was only a baby, and that she was brought up by her father, Mr. De Mirecourt, and an elderly governess named Madame Gérard. In an aside to the reader, the narrator comments that young Antoinette was:

> fortunate beyond measure [...] in having found so kind and prudent a guide to replace the mother she had so early lost; and notwithstanding the excessive indulgence of her father, and the impulsive thoughtlessness of her own disposition, [Antoinette] had grown up an amiable and winning, though not wholly faultless character. (27)
From the very beginning of the story, the narrator makes it clear to the reader that Madame Gérard recognizes both Antoinette’s inexperience with worldly matters and her thoughtless nature. Both of these are causes for concern for the caring governess as Antoinette prepares to visit Madame D’Aulnay in Montréal, largely because Madame Gérard does not believe Madame D’Aulnay is a suitable guide for seventeen-year old Antoinette. The narrator shares Madame Gérard’s concern with the reader, when reporting that the governess told Mr. De Mirecourt that because “[Madame D’Aulnay is] imaginative, thoughtless and impulsive, [and Antoinette is] giddy, childish and romantic[,] nothing good could come of committing [Antoinette] six long months to [Madame D’Aulnay’s] guidance” (15). The reader soon sees, with the help of the narrator, that Madame Gérard is right to be concerned: as it turns out, Madame D’Aulnay is anything but a suitable guide for the young woman and the narrator is careful to point out, at various times throughout the novel, Madame D’Aulnay’s many failings as a mentor. In fact, shortly after Madame D’Aulnay excitedly tries to convince Antoinette to marry Major Sternfield, the narrator interjects in order to point out the absurdity of Madame D’Aulnay’s argument: “Alas, what a dangerous guide and companion had fallen to Antoinette’s lot! How little chance had her simple childish reasoning against the refined sophistries of this accomplished woman of the world!” (59). Just in case the reader had not yet noticed the foolish nature of Antoinette’s mentor, the narrator makes sure to enlighten her.

Immediately upon Antoinette’s arrival in Montréal, Madame D’Aulnay begins to prepare her for the sophisticated, social life she is about to embark on. Although Antoinette is initially horrified at the thought of associating with Englishmen – knowing
full well that her father hates the very name of the English – Madame D’Aulnay quickly hushes her, saying that nothing bad will come of her acquaintance with them. Too inexperienced and uncertain to know that she should trust her own heart, Antoinette naively listens to her cousin. During this particular scene, the narrator makes no comment, but with the previous information she has given to the reader about Madame D’Aulnay, an observant reader will have already begun to see what a truly ineffectual mentor Madame D’Aulnay really is. Her actions, once again, bring to mind Madame Gérard’s initial concerns over her ability to act as a mentor to Antoinette and further encourage the reader to be careful about trusting Madame D’Aulnay’s words and actions as the story unfolds.

The first of the “elegant English strangers” (Leprohon 16) Antoinette is introduced to in the novel is Major Audley Sternfield, the counter-hero of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing. Described by Madame D’Aulnay as “certainly one of the handsomest and most elegant men I have ever met; […] a perfect gentleman in manner and address” (Leprohon 13), Sternfield is actually a womanizer who flirts shamelessly with both Antoinette and Madame D’Aulnay from the moment he first enters the D’Aulnay residence. Physically attractive and utterly charming, Sternfield is, unsurprisingly, able to quickly ingratiate himself with Madame D’Aulnay. As a result, the reader sees that Antoinette is left defenceless, with only a sentimental mentor (one looking for a real-life romance) as her guide. “Alone and inexperienced, [Antoinette] is ill-advised by a person who, initially, is more impressed by Sternfield’s social credentials than by Evelyn’s less obvious – and less glamorous – strength of character” Carl Murphy observes in “The Marriage Metaphor in Early Canadian Fiction” (Murphy 4). With such a mentor, the
narrator makes clear to the reader, it will not be long before Antoinette (unaccustomed as she is to the charms, flattery and love-like protestations of men like Sternfield) develops feelings for the handsome rake.

Initially (and through the eyes of Madame D’Aulnay), the character of Major Sternfield appears charming and gentlemanly, although it soon becomes evident that he possesses a number of quite undesirable qualities, including an inability to control his emotions and a great deal of self-interest. The fact that he possesses these qualities — both considered unforgivable traits in the hero of a sentimental novel according to Pilar Cuder-Dominguez in “Negotiations of Gender and Nationhood in Early Canadian Literature” — are two of the first and most effective hints to the reader that Sternfield is not the right choice of husband for Antoinette.

In her comments, the narrator never discounts Sternfield’s obvious physical charms, but the tone that she uses to describe him leaves the reader in no doubt that his handsomeness and conversational abilities are two of Sternfield’s few positive qualities:

[the latter was Major Sternfield, “the irresistible,” as he had already been styled by some of the fairer portion of the company; and certainly as far as outward qualifications went, he almost seemed to deserve the exaggerated title. A tall and splendidly proportioned figure — eyes, hair and features of faultless beauty, joined to rare powers of conversation, and a voice whose tones he could modulate to the richest music, were rare gifts to be all united in one happy mortal. So thought many an envious man and admiring woman; and so thought Audley Sternfield himself (29).]
Statements such as "certainly as far as outward qualifications went, he almost seemed to
deserve the exaggerated title" (Leprohon 29) and the use of the verb modulate ("a voice
whose tones he could modulate" [Leprohon 29]) are subtle clues from the narrator that
Sternfield is not the gentleman he appears to be. By referring to his nickname ("the
irresistible") as an exaggerated title, the narrator is insinuating that both Sternfield’s
overall physical appeal, as well as his positive qualities, have been overrated; using the
verb "seemed" when stating that "he almost seemed to deserve" his title is also a clever
way for the narrator to draw attention to the fact that Sternfield most definitely does not
deserve it. Finally, the use of the verb "modulate" when describing Sternfield’s voice
suggests that his voice is like a musical instrument to him, one that he can employ for
whatever purposes he wants. "Modulate" has a distinctly negative connotation here, one
that makes the reader suspect Sternfield modifies his voice as needed, making him appear
a somewhat dishonest and untrustworthy person. Throughout the entire passage, there is
an obvious sense of distrust in the narrator’s description of Sternfield’s character and,
even though nothing overtly negative is said about him, the reader still senses that
something about his character is not quite right.

Madame D’Aulnay, the reader learns, is immediately smitten with Sternfield. She
tells her husband that:

Major Sternfield [...] is superbly handsome, polished and courteous in
manner, in short a most accomplished man of the world. He got young
Foucher to introduce him here; and though I received him somewhat
coldly at first, my reserve soon yielded to the deferential homage of his
address, and the delicate flattery of his manner. (17)
Although the previous citation may appear innocent enough, it proves beyond any doubt that Sternfield does have the ability to quickly and cleverly trick some people into falling for his outward charms. This passage is still fresh in the reader’s mind, when she comes across the previously cited narrator’s description of Sternfield. Together, the character’s impressions and the narrator’s criticisms of Sternfield quickly take on more weight. For example, Madame D’Aulnay’s mention of the “deferential homage of [Sternfield’s] address, and the delicate flattery of his manner” (Leprohon 17) both come to mind when the narrator later mentions his “rare powers of conversation” (Leprohon 29) and the beautiful voice that he is so adept at modulating. However innocent all of these comments may seem, they are very important clues to the attentive reader as to the kind of person Sternfield really is.

The hero of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, Colonel Evelyn, is the second suitor the reader is introduced to in the novel. When the narrator first describes him, Evelyn appears cold and distant. In fact, the first time that Antoinette sees him, he is leaning against the mantle-piece in the D’Aulnay residence, listening with obvious disinterest to Madame D’Aulnay. When Antoinette questions Sternfield about him, Sternfield responds with evident dislike: “‘That is Colonel Evelyn:’ and as Sternfield pronounced the name, an expression of mingled dislike and impatience flashed across his face” (30). Sternfield’s reaction to (and subsequent vague description of) Evelyn intrigues Antoinette, who tells her companion that she wants to know more about him. Sternfield obliges, claiming that Evelyn “believes neither in God, nor man, nor yet in woman” and “is a professed, incorrigible woman-hater” (Leprohon 30). His description has the desired effect on Antoinette, who forms an immediate dislike for the man.
Looking closely at the narrator’s comment that “an expression of mingled dislike and impatience flashed across his face” (Leprohon 30), however, it becomes obvious that Sternfield’s ensuing description of Colonel Evelyn is tainted by his decidedly unfriendly feelings towards him. By extension, the narrator’s comment also hints to the reader that she should be careful about basing her opinion of Colonel Evelyn solely on Sternfield’s words, since the two men are clearly not on friendly terms. Throughout the next few chapters, little information is given to the reader about Colonel Evelyn, save a short description provided by the narrator, who says that “Colonel Evelyn occasionally came [to the soirées], but farther intimacy made no change in his grave, quiet demeanor, nor did it soften, in any degree, his remarkable reserve” (38). Evelyn, it appears, is the exact opposite of Major Sternfield: Sternfield appears handsome, charming and eloquent at the beginning of the story, whereas Colonel Evelyn comes across as intimidating, reserved and cold. In the novel, the reader can find pages and pages of text describing Major Sternfield in great detail, yet very little information at all can actually be found about Colonel Evelyn, especially in the first half of the novel. This lack of information could cause the reader to believe Sternfield’s earlier description of the hero, unless she is paying close attention to the narrator’s comments and connotations and is able to see beyond Evelyn’s cold and unfriendly exterior.

One of the few passages in the novel that describes Evelyn in any detail does not appear until nearly half-way through the book and it is, once again, a comment made by the story’s narrator, who states that the Colonel “possessed a rare and powerful intellect, and, though his conversation was wanting in the graceful strain of compliment, [...] to a refined and cultivated mind, it was infinitely more interesting” (109). In the previous
citation, the author carefully refutes the idea that Colonel Evelyn is the kind of character Sternfield (as well as some of the other officers) have portrayed him as being. Instead, the narrator gives her reader a glimpse of his true personality by drawing attention to his “rare and powerful intellect” (Leprohon 109) and to the fact that his powers of conversation are far more interesting to most people than those possessed by men like Sternfield. By adding that the Colonel’s conversation was “wanting in the graceful strain of compliment” (Leprohon 109), the narrator draws a clear connection between Sternfield and Evelyn. In doing so, she points out to the reader that although Evelyn does not possess the same beautiful, almost musical conservational skills and voice that Sternfield does, Evelyn is clearly intellectually superior to the Major and a much deeper character than he initially appears. In this case, the narrator’s intrusion into the text is overtly didactic because the narrator is clearly instructing the reader about how to interpret the actions of the two male characters in the story.

The lack of description for Colonel Evelyn, however, is very much in keeping with his role as the hero in Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing. As the hero, Evelyn’s character is supposed to be somewhat vague because his worth will be proven not by his remarkable physical features or through the praise of other characters, but rather through his actions and words. As Northrop Frye notes in Anatomy of Criticism, “the character of the successful hero is often left undeveloped [...] and we have to believe him to be potentially a more interesting character than he appears to be” (169). Frye’s argument is very well illustrated by the character of Colonel Evelyn who, by all accounts, does appear somewhat dull at first but, by the end of the novel, has more than demonstrated his heroic qualities, both for Antoinette and for the reader, through his kind actions and words.
When she is first introduced to the reader in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*, Antoinette is described as “a young girl, with a slight, exquisitely-formed figure, and very lovely, expressive face” (Leprohon 14) “whose rare personal charms were doubly enhanced by the witching naïveté, and shy vivacity of manner which many found more fascinating than even her beauty itself” (Leprohon 29). The narrator’s description of Antoinette’s beauty helps to situate her character immediately as the heroine of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* and encourages the female reader to associate Antoinette’s beauty with inner goodness. The narrator is careful to note Antoinette’s “witching naïveté” (29) and “shy vivacity of manner” (29), descriptions which make her appealing because they add a little depth to her character while, at the same time, ensuring that she is neither too intelligent, nor too vivacious a young lady. The narrator’s description also, however, hints at the mental and physical vulnerability of her character. The use of the adjective “slight” to describe Antoinette’s figure indicates that she is a physically vulnerable woman who is unlikely to possess or seek power, a quality that makes her appealing as a heroine since, in fairy tales, “[w]omen who are powerful and good are never human [and] women who are human, and have power or seek it, are nearly always portrayed as repulsive” (Lieberman 393). This description also hints at Antoinette’s physical limitations and foreshadows the rapid decline in Antoinette’s health which results from her struggles caused by her secret marriage. In much the same way as the fairy-tale heroines described by Lieberman, Antoinette is singled out “first for punishment and later for reward” (Lieberman 385) because of her beauty and vulnerability and it is clear, even from this brief introduction, that she will, eventually, be rewarded for her struggles. As the story progresses and Antoinette gets
more and more caught up in Madame D’Aulnay’s fashionable and frivolous life, her health begins to suffer dramatically. Her complexion grows paler by the day and she becomes prone to headaches and crying spells. A number of times throughout the latter half of the novel, the reader witnesses Antoinette actually confined to her room by her illnesses. These illnesses (which were foreshadowed by earlier descriptions of the character’s vulnerability) are physical representations of what the narrator has been telling the reader throughout the novel: Antoinette is on the wrong path.

Her suffering, it must be said, is not solely caused by Sternfield’s actions, but is compounded by the fact that she falls in love with Colonel Evelyn, the hero of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing. In fact, her worst decline only begins after Colonel Evelyn opens his heart to her. Once she has a chance to see that Evelyn is not the “professed, incorrigible woman-hater” (Leprohon 30) Sternfield led her to believe, but rather a good and kind man whose value (both professionally and personally) ranks far higher than Sternfield’s, Antoinette is all the more devastated by her error. She must now not only suffer being married to a man she does not love, but also endure an even greater pain: the pain of loving one whom she cannot have.

Although it is true Sternfield is not aware that Antoinette is a French-Canadian heiress (nor is he aware that she will be staying with the D’Aulnays) when he asks to be introduced to the lady of the house, the reader does realize that Sternfield knows his acquaintance with Madame D’Aulnay will guarantee him easy access to the young, French-Canadian heiresses in the community. Antoinette happens to be the first heiress that Sternfield meets in the novel and, consequently, she becomes his prey. In order to get closer to her, Sternfield offers to help both ladies improve their English skills. By
“becoming their preceptor in the English tongue,” (Leprohon 38), he is not only guaranteed easy and regular access to Antoinette, but also a perfect opportunity to make love to her. Although this, in some ways, could be perceived as a harmless activity by the reader, the narrator takes care to point out that Sternfield’s intentions are anything but sincere:

[what dangerous means of attraction were thus furnished Major Sternfield in his new capacity. To sit daily for hours with his fair pupils at the same table, reading aloud some impassioned poem, – some graceful tale of fiction, whilst they listened in silent enjoyment to the rich intonations of a remarkably musical voice; or watched the expressive play of his regular, faultless features. Then when he arrived at some passage of peculiar beauty or fervent sentiment, how eloquent the rapid glance he would steal towards Antoinette – how ardent, how devoted the expression of his dark, speaking eyes. (39)

The narrator’s description of Sternfield as he seduces Antoinette encourages the female reader to feel empathy towards the young heroine. The description of Sternfield’s stolen glances and “the expression of his dark, speaking eyes” (Leprohon 39) affects the reader in much the same way it does Antoinette, making her feel slightly flustered by Sternfield’s inappropriate yet seemingly sweet actions. At the same time, however, the reader has the distinct advantage of viewing the scene from a distance and understanding that Sternfield’s actions are anything but sincere. As she sees Antoinette falling prey to the counter-hero, the reader realizes that, before long, the heroine will succumb to his charms and make a grave error.
Accustomed to living her life in the quiet solitude of her father’s country estate, Antoinette is powerless against Sternfield’s tricks. She becomes easily confused by his attention and, with only Madame D’Aulnay to advise her, she unwittingly gets caught up in his machinations. During a brief description of Antoinette which occurs after she has spent an afternoon with Sternfield, the narrator remarks that “after those long and pleasant hours of instruction, [Antoinette] often sat wrapped in silent reverie, with flushed cheek and downcast gaze that plainly told something more interesting than English verbs and pronouns occupied her thoughts” (39). Here, the narrator is showing the reader that Antoinette is allowing herself to be seduced by Sternfield. The “flushed cheek and downcast gaze” (Leprohon 39) that are mentioned are important because they represent more than just Antoinette’s confusion and/or excitement about Sternfield’s attentions to her. They also represent Antoinette’s natural, physical reaction to the situation, a situation that she inherently knows is wrong (and that the narrator is trying to show the reader is wrong). Inside, Antoinette feels that Sternfield’s actions (and her subsequent reactions and feelings of interest in him) are wrong, but she is unable to admit to this openly and simply continues to allow herself to get more and more deeply involved. Since Antoinette herself is unable (or unwilling) to recognize this problem, the narrator’s role in this passage is to show the reader how Sternfield’s behaviour is affecting her, not only mentally but physically as well. Like a caring mother, the narrator is trying to draw the female reader’s attention to Antoinette’s mistakes (who, in this case, ignores the warning signs produced by her body), in the hopes that it will help the reader understand how important it is to pay attention to these signs in her own life.
Antoinette, unfortunately, has no “fairy godmother” narrator to help her distinguish right from wrong. She has only Madame D’Aulnay, who tells her: “Believe me, dearest, I know more of life than you can possibly do; and you will yet acknowledge the correctness of my opinion” (Leprohon 59). Since it is true that her cousin is more experienced in these matters than she is, Antoinette chooses to listen to her. Immediately after Madame D’Aulnay makes this claim, however, the narrator is quick to point out to the reader (again) how very unsuitable a mentor Madame D’Aulnay really is. When Lucille accuses Antoinette of being in love with Sternfield and Antoinette responds by saying, “Lucille, I am sincere in saying I do not think I love him” (58), Madame D’Aulnay calls her a “delightfully innocent little creature” (58) and insinuates that she just does not understand the concept of love. Since Antoinette herself believes this to be true, she listens to Madame D’Aulnay, who argues that she did not feel half of what Antoinette feels for Sternfield when she got married, yet claims that her marriage is a perfectly happy one. Her conclusion is that, because Antoinette is attracted to Sternfield, she will undoubtedly have a happy marriage. The standard for love and marriage has been set for poor Antoinette by Madame D’Aulnay, and there is little that she can do at this point but acquiesce to her mentor’s advice. Even though, in this case, the heroine is right about her feelings towards Sternfield, Madame D’Aulnay convinces her that she does not understand her own feelings well enough to trust them and pushes her to ignore her own knowledge of herself. As a young woman facing so many new feelings and situations (including: courting, love and choosing a marriage partner, among others), Antoinette’s position in society as a young, unmarried woman does not permit her to have
confidence in her own choices or feelings, and she is therefore encouraged to follow the lead and advice of an inappropriate mentor instead.

On the eve of her wedding to Sternfield, the narrator tells the reader that: “Antoinette De Mirecourt’s destiny was trembling then in the balance. One word of good advice, one encouraging look, would have given her strength to have drawn back from the precipice on which she was standing; but, alas! that strengthening word or look came not” (79-80). With a very straightforward criticism of Antoinette’s mentor and foreshadowing of doom, “the precipice” (Leprohon 80), the narrator is able to make it very clear to the reader in this passage that a woman’s choice of companions is extremely important and can have great consequences for her future.

Since Antoinette’s actions are intended to serve as examples for the reader (and, in this case, negative ones), it follows logically that her error in judgement by marrying Sternfield must be accompanied by a proper punishment. As a consequence of her mistake, she must suffer life with Sternfield: as his wife, Antoinette is legally and morally bound to him and must remain loyal as long as they both live, regardless of how cruelly he treats her. The consequences of her foolish and rash choice torture Antoinette from the very moment that she first takes her vows. The author’s choice of a rose-coloured dress for Antoinette’s wedding gown – “[t]urning to Antoinette’s ward-robe, [Madame D’Aulnay] hastily selected a rose-colored silk dress” (Leprohon 81) is significant. According to a popular English-Canadian saying in the nineteenth century, a pink wedding dress was considered to be a sign of future unhappiness: “[m]arried in pink, your heart will sink” (Ward 110). Just as predicted by this maxim, Antoinette’s
heart does sink almost as soon as she embarks on her unhappy journey as Sternfield’s wife.

By recognizing her initial error in choosing to marry Sternfield and assuming responsibility for it, however, Antoinette is given a second chance at happiness by the author. “The recognition of her mistake and the acceptance of its consequences” Carl Murphy argues, “transform [Antoinette] into the most heroic person in the story” (Murphy 4). For this heroism and strength of character (which only develop as a result of her suffering), Antoinette is rewarded. Following in the tradition of the fairy tale, her reward – like her punishment – is marriage. The second time, however, Antoinette marries the story’s hero, Colonel Evelyn, and goes on to live a happy life. With a man who is both kind and gentle – and as unlike her first husband as he could possibly be – the reader sees Antoinette get her happy ending. After all, as Brownstein tells the reader in *Becoming a Heroine*, “[t]he path of [a female protagonist’s] destiny is a trajectory between the house she must leave and the house she must enter as a bride. The small spaces she walks, runs, or rambles in are analogues to the short time she has in which to accomplish this” (123-124); in other words, the options for the heroine of this kind of novel are limited and the most common, most socially acceptable one for a character to choose is marriage. Once married, the heroine has fulfilled her role as a female in the novel, a role described by Brownstein in *Becoming a Heroine* as necessarily tied to marriage: “[i]mplicit in [these] novels are these truths no longer universally acknowledged: that women are interesting only in the brief time they are marriageable, that marrying is the most significant action a woman can undertake, and that after she marries her story is over” (90). As a result of Antoinette’s experiences, the nineteenth-
century female reader may have felt hopeful that, if she chose to use wisely the advice she gathered from her reading and was careful to make the right choices in her own life, she could someday get her happy ending too and, as a result, would have managed to fulfill her social obligation as a young, unmarried woman.

**Unmasking Characters: The Four-Part Structure of Place in *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing***

The structure of place in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* is made up of four major settings: Monsieur and Madame D’Aulnay’s mansion in Montréal (the setting which is representative of “society and the outside world” [Mooneyham 158]), nature (as a general setting), the heroine’s home and the counter-hero’s home. By examining how the novel’s three major characters act (and re-act) in each of these settings, I hope to demonstrate how both the places and situations in which a character appears can showcase different aspects of that character’s personality. This paradigm of place shows how a female reader might come to realize it is impossible to fully know or comprehend a character until she has seen him or her in more than one setting. I hope to demonstrate how the gradual unmasking of a character in a novel can be understood didactically, as a way of teaching the female reader about the importance of examining a person’s character (with a particular emphasis on possible suitors) in a variety of different situations and locations.

In the opening pages of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*, the reader is introduced to the Montréal home of Monsieur and Madame D’Aulnay by the story’s narrator. This setting is important in the novel because it is the setting which represents society and, as such, it is where a large part of the action in the novel takes place. Monsieur D’Aulnay’s position in society, coupled with his wife Lucille’s plans to host
many balls, soirées and other social activities during Antoinette’s time in Montréal, are
the reasons why I consider the D’Aulnay mansion the setting in Secret Marrying and
Secret Sorrowing that best serves as the establishment which represents “society and the
outside world” (Mooneyham 158). This is the setting in which the characters come
together to talk, dance, eat and court members of the opposite sex, among other social
activities. As the centre of “life and gaiety” (Leprohon 13) in the novel, the scenes that
take place at the D’Aulnay mansion demonstrate how society and its rules can influence
the actions of all the characters. The mansion, in many ways, is the social centre of the
story and it is the place where the heroine and, by extension, the reader meet both the
counter-hero and the hero for the first time.

When Major Sternfield is first introduced in the novel, he almost immediately
impresses Madame D’Aulnay with his deferential manner and delicate sense of flattery.
As the story unfolds, nearly every time that Sternfield attends a social function at the
D’Aulnay mansion, his ease and friendliness help him to earn new friends and admirers.
He builds his reputation in society by carefully adhering to the social customs of the
times (seeking an introduction when he first meets someone, showering the ladies with
attention and compliments), thereby appearing a perfect gentleman when in society and
encouraging others to believe that he is an amiable and pleasant young man. Sternfield
carefully cultivates his good name in the social circle in which he finds himself, at least
until after his marriage to Antoinette has taken place. This process of securing his good
name in society, however, serves a more sinister purpose than simple vanity for
Sternfield: once Antoinette sees through him and tries to tell Madame D’Aulnay about
his true personality and his actions towards her, the good reputation he has built for
himself serves to protect him, ensuring that the more negative aspects of his character are not discovered. At least once during the story Madame D’Aulnay witnesses him lose his temper with Antoinette, and although she is shocked to see it, she continues to defend him, feeling certain that a gentleman such as Sternfield could never truly be a cruel man. She even goes so far as to excuse his behaviour, claiming that it is attractive because it arises out of his great love for Antoinette:

[who would have thought that such a dear, handsome, fascinating creature could so soon have turned tyrant! And yet there is something in his very violence, arising as it does out of the excess of his love for you, calculated, it seems to me, to render him ten times dearer to the one he has chosen from among all of her sex. (116)

Since she has only ever encountered Sternfield in social situations (and primarily in her own home), Madame D’Aulnay does not realize that there are other aspects to his character than the kind, friendly gentleman with whom she converses in her parlour. Antoinette and the reader however, who have the advantage of seeing him in other locations and situations, eventually realize that there is a much darker side to Sternfield’s personality than Madame D’Aulnay thinks.

When Colonel Evelyn first appears in the social setting represented by the D’Aulnay mansion, however, he is described as “courteous and attentive” (Leprohon 28) by the narrator but it is made clear that he does not go to any special effort to make new friends or acquaintances. Since he is not the kind of man who conforms to social expectations simply to build a good reputation for himself, Evelyn is never seen making false attempts to be pleasant or friendly when he appears in society. As a result, he often
appears somewhat rude and unpleasant to those who surround him. "Though refined and
courteous in manner, he never paid a compliment" the narrator says of Colonel Evelyn,"never uttered any of those commonplace gallantries which pass current in society as
successfully as remarks on the weather" (Leprohon 38). From the previously cited
passage, the reader gets a sense from the narrator that although Evelyn is a gentleman, he
is not as outwardly friendly as Sternfield and has difficulty adapting in social situations.
During his conversation with Madame D'Aulnay at her St. Catherine's Eve ball, where
Antoinette meets the Colonel for the first time, Evelyn does not even try to give Madame
D'Aulnay any praise or attention as so many other men would do. The narrator
comments that:

\[\text{[t]he lady had brought the whole artillery of her charms to bear on her}
\text{companion, speaking glances, bewitching smiles, and sweetly modulated}
\text{tones; but though he was courteous and attentive, she felt she had made}
\text{little or no impression; and to the courted and fascinating Madame}
\text{D'Aulnay this was indeed a mortifying novelty.} \ (28)\]

By acting this way in the social setting – particularly towards the hostess, a member of
the French-Canadian aristocracy, – Colonel Evelyn quickly gains an unfavourable
reputation with the people in his social circle, a reputation that proves hard to shed later
on.

Much like Sternfield and Evelyn, Antoinette – when in society and, in this case, at
Monsieur and Madame D'Aulnay's house – also has a specific social role to play. As a
"wealthy heiress, high-born and handsome" (16), she is expected to be charming and
attractive, while at the same time remaining quiet and coy. As a young woman, she is
allowed to flirt tastefully with the young men she meets, but since "[t]he rules of respectable social conduct required chaperons for unmarried girls and young women" (Ward 68), she is not supposed to spend time alone with (or even favour) one particular young man over another, unless she is betrothed to him. Antoinette is able to conform to this role relatively easily at first, so much so that Colonel Evelyn initially pays little to no attention to her, assuming that she is just like all of the other silly girls he has met before.

His opinion of Antoinette changes drastically, however, when he is obliged to spend time with her during one social outing: a sleigh ride, which Madame D'Aulnay organizes soon after Antoinette's arrival in Montréal. After meeting Colonel Evelyn in the Place D'Armes, Madame D'Aulnay is so impressed by his team of horses that she specially requests that he, and his beautiful English Bays, join her sleighing party set to take place the following day. Colonel Evelyn offers to lend his horses to her, but she refuses to accept them if he does not accompany them as well, so he reluctantly agrees to participate. Madame D'Aulnay's reason for including Evelyn, it must be noted, is not because she particularly likes him, but rather because she wishes to torture him (in a sense), by making him participate in a social activity where she knows he will be uncomfortable. It is likely that Madame D'Aulnay does this in large part because of the way that Evelyn acts towards her, as the reader can see when Madame D'Aulnay refuses his request for her to ride in his sleigh: "[Madame] D'Aulnay good-naturedly answered [Sternfield] in the affirmative, not very sorry at the same time to inflict a passing slight on the ungallant Colonel, who seemed to think it so severe a hardship to share the occupancy of his sleigh with her charming self" (47). Her treatment of Evelyn seems to be her way of getting back at him for not playing the expected social games.
The scene where Madame D’Aulnay asks the Colonel to participate in the sleigh ride is a social one (even though it does not, technically, take place at the D’Aulnay mansion but instead in the official social setting of the Place D’Armes) because in it both Madame D’Aulnay and Colonel Evelyn are obviously playing their respective social roles. It is clear, however, that Evelyn is very uncomfortable doing so. His uneasiness is evidenced both by his obvious discomfort when Madame D’Aulnay insists he participate in the driving party, physically signalled by his biting his lip and reining in his horses. This scene is also important for another reason, because it demonstrates the incredible sense of control and authority that – both with regards to his horses (which could be said to represent other people) and himself – Colonel Evelyn has in social situations. Although it is not clearly indicated at this point, this information will be significant for the reader later on during the sleigh ride when Evelyn actually does lose his control: not only does he lose control of his horses (which can be compared to his loss of authority over some of the British soldiers he works with, such as Sternfield), but he also begins to lose some of his own self-control as his feelings towards Antoinette begin to change.

On the morning of the sleigh ride, after Evelyn quickly (and reluctantly) invites Madame D’Aulnay to be his companion, she chooses to punish “the ungallant Colonel, who seemed to think it so severe a hardship to share the occupancy of his sleigh with her charming self” (Leprohon 47) by accepting Sternfield’s request to ride with him. In her place, she forces an unsuspecting (and clearly uncomfortable) Antoinette to ride with Evelyn. During the sleigh ride, Evelyn’s bays are suddenly frightened by a loud noise and take off at a very rapid pace, causing him to struggle to maintain control over them in this new, natural setting:
In the eager admiration of the moment, the Colonel unconsciously relaxed his grasp on the reins, when a shot, suddenly discharged from the gun of some country sportsman near, startled the spirited steeds, that instantly set off at a most fearful pace. The peril was imminent, for the road led close along the bank of the rapids, rising in some places several feet above the chafing waters. Still, the hand which held the reins was one of iron, and its firm and vigorous grasp was a considerable check on the headlong career of the terrified animals. (49)

Evelyn prepares himself, throughout this struggle, to calm Antoinette, whom he expects will be nearly hysterical beside him like most other young ladies would be. What he finds, however, when he looks at her is the complete opposite. Glancing at Antoinette, Evelyn can clearly see that she is frightened, but she bravely tells him not to worry about her and to “attend to the horses” (49) instead. Impressed to see that Antoinette is coping so admirably with her fear, he is able to focus all of his energy and concentration on controlling his horses. Despite the very real dangers posed by the cold, snowy Canadian weather and the steep bank down which the sleigh crashes (causing both horses to be gravely injured and eventually put down), Evelyn and Antoinette manage to survive this ordeal.

In this natural setting, where neither of the characters is in control, Evelyn and Antoinette work together in order to save their own lives. Without this cooperation, both characters would undoubtedly crash down the bank with the sleigh and, quite likely, suffer (if not die) from the effects of the biting cold. The consequences of this accident for Evelyn and Antoinette could very easily have been the same as the consequences that
François Paradis faces in *Maria Chapdelaine* when he refuses to listen to the other characters and decides to brave a snowstorm, by himself, on New Year’s Eve. Paradis’s stubbornness and refusal to cooperate with the other characters who try to help him quickly results in his demise: lost in the woods, he freezes to death alone. Evelyn and Antoinette’s sleighing accident could easily have proven similarly fatal for both of the characters because of the dangerous situation they find themselves in, but it does not because they work together to prevent it. The situation not only encourages them to cooperate, but it also serves another, more important purpose as well: it allows both Antoinette and Colonel Evelyn to see qualities in each other which they would likely never have had the opportunity to see in Madame D‘Aulnay’s parlour.

When Evelyn praises Antoinette’s bravery, she shyly responds by saying that she was as afraid of Evelyn himself as she was by the situation, claiming that “[t]hey say one great fear almost neutralizes another; and terrified as I was by the mad career of our steeds, I was almost equally afraid of yourself” (Leprohon 53). She goes on to explain to him that she needed to behave well in his sleigh because she felt she was unwanted: “I was in your sleigh merely on sufferance: I had been, as it were, forced on you, undesired and unsolicited, and consequently felt doubly bound to behave well” (53). Since she had heard such unflattering things about Evelyn from Sternfield, Antoinette was very concerned about how he would react to her, a young woman, when disaster lay before them.

Antoinette’s confession makes both Evelyn and her realize how inaccurate their previous knowledge of each other really was. They realize after the fact that if they had only ever been in contact with each other in the social setting of the D‘Aulnay mansion,
their views of one another would have been very different and highly incorrect since their expected social roles would never have enabled them to get to know each other’s “true” personalities.

The second most remarkable example of how nature acts upon characters in the novel is actually part of a story told to the reader (as well as the other characters in the novel) by Mr. De Mirecourt, Antoinette’s father. On a trip to Québec, Mr. De Mirecourt meets an English gentleman and, although he “hates the very name” (Leprohon 16) of the English, he ends up being very impressed by the kindness of the man he meets. When a heavy snowstorm comes up during the voyage, accompanied by high winds, Mr. De Mirecourt realizes that his winter clothes are not thick enough to keep out the cold:

> my chattering teeth plainly betrayed this to my companion, who, instantly, with a kindness the more remarkable that I had previously repulsed most ungraciously his one attempt at conversation, unfolded the large cloak laid across his knee, [...] and insisted on my wearing it. (171)

After this kind gesture, Mr. De Mirecourt talked with the Englishman and learned, to his surprise, that his “fellow-traveller was not only a person of high intellect, but also a just and liberal man, totally free from the prejudices that rule so many of his caste and race” (171). In the previous citations, it is nature’s hostility towards the two travellers – one of them French, the other English – which brings them together and ultimately helps break down any prejudices they may have had towards each other. They soon realize they actually have much in common, a fact that they would never have known if the storm had not come up, since Mr. De Mirecourt would never have spoken to his fellow traveller simply because of his English background. In this case, the storm which prompts the
Englishman – who, it turns out, is Colonel Evelyn – to help out his fellow traveller also serves a greater purpose: to show Mr. De Mirecourt that all Englishmen are not necessarily as awful as he believes them to be. Additionally, the other characters in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* (and, by extension, the reader) are able to learn more about the Colonel’s character. Evelyn’s past actions towards Mr. De Mirecourt help to refute Sternfield’s earlier negative description of Evelyn’s character. Not only does this new information give Antoinette and the reader a better understanding of Evelyn’s character, it also gives her more information about the Colonel, allowing her to more accurately compare him to Sternfield.

Once in the setting of the ballroom, however, the dynamics of all the relationships between the characters are guided by society’s rules and expectations. In this setting, the behaviour of each character is determined by his or her social status and sexually prescribed roles and the heroine, the counter-hero and the hero are expected to adapt their actions to fit these expectations. After Antoinette has secretly wed Sternfield, the reader sees that things become extremely difficult for her in this social setting. Since she is now, officially, a married woman, there is no reason why she should not give more time and attention to her husband than she does to other men – something Sternfield obviously expects her to do – but since she is still, socially, considered a single woman, this remains a dangerous thing for her to do. Sternfield refuses to allow Antoinette to publicly admit to their marriage because he does not want her to be disinherited, yet he still expects her to submit herself to him as a wife should, by being faithful, loyal and obedient to him at all times. A perfect example of Antoinette’s struggle can be witnessed in one of the ballroom scenes at the D’Aulnay mansion. In this scene, Antoinette is socially expected
(as a young, single woman) not to be bothered by the sight of Sternfield dancing and flirting with another young woman. As his wife, however, she is tortured by the sight of him, her husband, whispering flatteries in another woman’s ear as she looks on:

\[\text{i}n\ \text{another\ moment,\ she\ saw\ him\ by\ the\ side\ of\ a\ graceful,\ dark-eyed\ brunette,\ whispering\ in\ her\ ear\ with\ the\ devotion\ he\ usually\ vouchsafed\ herself.\ An\ uneasy\ feeling\ smote\ her,\ but\ she\ resolutely\ combatted\ it,\ and\ accepted\ the\ hand\ of\ the\ first\ partner\ who\ presented\ himself}\ (105)\.

It is not because Antoinette loves Sternfield that this indiscretion upsets her, but rather because she realizes that even though she does not love him, she remains bound to him for the rest of their lives. Antoinette’s struggle to balance these two very different social roles (at the same time) begins to take a dangerous toll on her health. Her body, the narrator tells the reader, reacts to this struggle in ways which she, herself, would not be permitted to react: “[i]t was no cold or external physical ailment that blanched Antoinette’s cheek, but mental suffering” (147). The pallor of her face is symbolic of her inner struggle.

As her physical state worsens, Antoinette decides to return to Valmont, her father’s country estate in the hopes of rehabilitating herself. This new setting is Antoinette’s home and, as a result, she is freer in her actions and words here, than she is in Montreal. Once having returned to Valmont, Antoinette realizes how happy and unrestricted she had felt there. In her own setting, Antoinette has more self-confidence and is better capable of standing up to Sternfield. At the D’Aulnay’s in Montréal, she always feels as though she must do what her cousin and Sternfield want her to do and, as a result, the narrator shows the reader just how much these two characters influence
Antoinette’s actions and opinions. At Valmont, on the other hand, Antoinette is in control of her own destiny and is not afraid to stand up for herself.

Before leaving to spend time at Valmont, Antoinette tells Sternfield that she does not want him to visit her. He appears one evening, however, unannounced and expects to find the same docile young woman he met and married in Montréal. The Antoinette he meets, however, is someone quite different. Instead of fearfully submitting to his will as she does at the D’Aulnay’s home in Montreal, Antoinette bravely stands her ground and refuses to meet him in public, even though he is her husband. Boldly, she tells him that until he agrees to openly call her his wife, she will treat him the same as any other man of her acquaintance:

“Listen to me, Audley. You have robbed me of nearly all I value in life, – my liberty, my happiness, the approbation of my own conscience. Nothing remains to me now save my reputation, and that no threats or menaces of yours shall induce me to risk in stolen interviews or secret meetings with you. If your love is so great,” here the speaker’s tones involuntarily grew sarcastic, “that you cannot exist without occasionally meeting me, come openly to the house in your own character of a gentleman, not disguised as you are to-night.” (196)

Being in her own surroundings makes Antoinette brave enough to hold her ground and Sternfield is shocked by the change in her behaviour. Whereas she would not have risked arguing with him in Montreal, Antoinette is no longer afraid to fight back once she finds herself in her own setting and she lets him know in no uncertain terms that she will not be controlled by him there. Despite his attempts to bully her into submission, Antoinette
stands firm, refusing to change her mind and forcing Sternfield to return home, defeated.

After their encounter at Valmont, Antoinette is slightly more confident upon her return to Montreal but, back in the social setting of the D’Aulnay mansion, she is quickly subdued by Sternfield and forced to return to her social role as his submissive, obedient wife. As a result, Sternfield returns to his position of authority once back in the social setting of the novel and Antoinette is forced to submit, once again, to his authority.

When Antoinette learns that Major Sternfield has been near fatally injured in a duel (fighting against her childhood friend Louis Beauchesne), she is forced to choose which of her conflicting social roles – young, unmarried woman or faithful wife – is most important to her in the present situation. Despite having jealously protected her reputation up until that point, Antoinette chooses to risk everything socially – her reputation, her family’s reputation and even the anger of her very socially-conscious husband for breaking the promise that she made to him – to visit Sternfield on his deathbed. Antoinette does not want her husband to die hating her and, consequently, is unwilling to wait for Monsieur D’Aulnay to accompany her to the officers’s quarters. Instead, she rushes off to Sternfield’s home with only Jeanne in tow – a highly inappropriate social move for a young, supposedly unmarried woman – hoping to make peace with Sternfield before he dies. When she enters the officers’s quarters where Sternfield lives, the dynamic between the two characters changes once again. Here, in his own space, Sternfield becomes the one in control and it is Antoinette who must give in to him. In this setting, Sternfield is no longer concerned about proper social conduct or maintaining his reputation and he unrelentingly exerts his control over his young wife. The narrator tells the reader that, even though he lies dying in his bed, Sternfield finds
enough energy to cruelly exact yet another promise from Antoinette, this time a promise that she will never agree to marry her friend Louis Beauchesne:

“Pshaw! No girlish sentiment. I want nor protestations nor speeches, but a promise, aye! An oath,” he added more fiercely, “that you will never be aught nearer to him in any circumstances, than what you have hitherto been?”

“Willingly,” she eagerly rejoined. “With heart and soul.” (Leprohon 236)

This is an easy promise for Antoinette to make since she had already decided, long before, that she could never marry Beauchesne because she does not love him. As a result, it is quite easy for her to obey her husband’s request. Nonetheless, here in his own setting, Sternfield more than takes back the control that he lost over Antoinette at Valmont.

After observing Sternfield’s character in at least three different settings in the novel and seeing how it changes from one to the next, the reader is left with no doubts about the kind of man he is represented to be. The reader can see that he only appears to be gentlemanly and kind when in a social setting, but becomes cruel and tyrannical once removed from it. Colonel Evelyn, however, does not appear friendly or kind in social settings, which may initially cause the reader to think that he is less of a gentleman than Sternfield. Once removed from the falsity of the social world, however, Evelyn’s true character appears more clearly and the reader comes to realize that he is, without a doubt, the novel’s most honourable and kind male character. By meeting him in different settings, the reader is able to clearly see that Evelyn is the hero of Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing. Antoinette, in a way that is similar to Colonel Evelyn, is a very
different girl when not in the social setting of the D'Aulnay mansion: her strength of character is evident in both natural settings and in her own setting, her home, Valmont. It is truly in these settings that her strongest character shines through.

By demonstrating the changes that each of these characters undergoes in the four main settings of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* (the D'Aulnay mansion, nature, Valmont and the Officer's quarters), Leprohon shows the reader how important it is for one to observe a character or suitor over time, and in a variety of different settings, in order to be able to fully see and understand him or her. Antoinette's experiences in the novel also demonstrate for the reader how important it is to protect one's social reputation throughout the process of courtship and marriage, in order to avoid falling prey to unworthy acquaintances such as Major Sternfield or Madame D'Aulnay, thereby causing oneself much anguish and misfortune. Not only will this knowledge (both of others and of oneself) encourage the reader to develop a better understanding of other people's characters (in fiction and in real life) before making any important decisions but, in the case of choosing a marriage partner, it might also help to ensure a happy, successful union for the parties involved. As Cuder-Dominguez argues:

Leprohon makes a point in the novel of setting down the conditions for a healthy, successful relationship - within a marriage or a nation - the main one being knowledge of one another. Sternfield and Antoinette get to know each other in the artificial settings of ballroom and soirée, where everybody looks their best and are prone to fall for false appearances; Evelyn and Antoinette get to know one another very well in difficult circumstances outside of their control. Leprohon contrives to create, for
each of them, one episode where they are able to display their true selves
to advantage. (126)

In doing so, Leprohon gives her reader very important information about the characters in
the novel, information that could be abstracted from *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* by the reader and used to organize and understand her own life. By examining
Leprohon’s novel in terms of the character triangle and the four-part structure of place
presented in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*, a female reader accustomed to using
fiction as a means of instruction in this way would have understood Leprohon’s messages
about the importance of gaining a “knowledge of one another” (Cuder-Dominguez 126)
in all relationships and about protecting one’s reputation and, subsequently, she would
have been able to apply this knowledge to her own life, either in a personal sense (by
using it to make a decision about whom she should choose to marry) or in a broader
sense, by allowing this information to shape both her understanding of her homeland and
her vision for the future of the Canadian nation.
Chapter Three:

Faithful Reproduction or Imagined Reality?: Maria Chapdelaine as Roman de la Terre

Literature has always played a pivotal role in the creation (and propagation) of a national identity and, after Henri-Raymond Casgrain’s vision for the future of Québécois literature was published in 1866, it became clear that Quebec would be no exception to this rule. In “Le mouvement littéraire au Canada,” Casgrain argued that, someday, Quebec would have its own national literature: “[o]ui, nous aurons une littérature indigène, ayant son cachet propre, original, portant vivement l’empreinte de notre peuple, en un mot, une littérature nationale” (368). This literary tradition, he argued, would not only reflect the values, character, talents and intelligence of the Quebec nation, but would also keep the imprints of Quebec’s natural landscapes and the qualities of its people. Consequently, la nôtre sera grave, méditative, spiritualiste, religieuse, évangélisatrice comme nos missionnaires, généreuse comme nos martyrs, énergique et persévérante comme nos pionniers d’autrefois; et en même temps elle sera largement découpée, comme nos vastes fleuves, nos larges horizons, notre grandiose nature, mystérieuse comme les échos de nos immenses et impénétrables forêts, comme les éclairs de nos aurores boréales, mélancolique comme nos pâles soirs d’automne enveloppés d’ombres vapeuse, comme l’azur profond, un peu sévère, de notre ciel, chaste et pure comme le manteau virginal de nos longs hivers. (Casgrain 368)

Quebec literature, it would seem, should be a reflection of everything that makes Quebec a nation different from others: the traditions of its people, the beauty of its landscapes
and the power (both real and metaphorical) of the magnificent natural elements that make the countryside of Quebec so different from other areas of the world.

As Quebec has evolved as a nation in the years following Casgrain’s article, it has become increasingly obvious that political issues are also a very important part of the Quebec cultural landscape. It is not surprising, then, that the dominant plots particular to Quebec literature reflect this evolution and, for some time now, have been intimately connected to the politics of the Quebec nation. In the introduction to *Women and Narrative Identity: Rewriting the Quebec National Text*, Mary Jean Green examines the central position of literature in Québécois society and how it is related to that nation’s political issues, stating that:

> the dominant plots of literature and society have historically been enmeshed in the political project of Quebec’s cultural survival, always threatened, which endowed these narratives with unusual ideological force. Almost from its beginning, as [Henri-Raymond Casgrain’s prescriptions for a Quebec literature] attest, the Quebec novel has been enrolled in an ongoing identitary project involving the entire society, given the task of providing narratives through which French-Canadian and, later, Québécois identity could be defined. (7)

Since literature in Quebec is so intimately linked to the Québécois cultural identity – and, generally, any work of Quebec literature which has an impact on society deals with either one, or both, of these topics – writers in Quebec sometimes feel as though the subject of national identity has been forced upon them, whether by means of the subject matter they
are required to cover or the structure they feel obliged to use. Green clarifies this point for her reader by saying that:

> [a]s Jacques Godbout has lamented, all Quebec writers have found themselves, willingly or unwillingly, involved in the Quebec identitary project, which he calls the "national text." Because of the central role of the Quebec novel in the construction of national identity and the readiness of Quebec readers to accept certain fictional portrayals as, in the words of Henri-Raymond Casgrain, a "mirror" of their own collective experience, Quebec literary history has seen the continued production of what I have called "identity narratives," narratives designed and perceived as a statement about an always endangered national identity. (3)

This ever-present identity project may partially explain the lack of women’s romance novels (for example: novels of manners or courtesy novels) – both genres which were extremely popular in 19th century France, England, the United States and, even, in English Canada – in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Quebec. Since romance novels did not easily (or neatly) fit into the "identitary project" (M.J. Green 3), there was little to no room for works of this kind in the French-Canadian literary canon (a canon which, it is important to note, was controlled by the Catholic Church). This is not to say that there was no market for these kinds of novels in French Canada; facts prove otherwise. Romance novels written in English Canada – Rosanna Mullins-Leprohon’s *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* being but one example – were rapidly translated into French after their initial English-language publication and were, oftentimes, even more popular in their French language translation than they were in the original English
versions, Green points out. Some novels, such as *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* went to print a far greater number of times in French translation than they ever did in English. What could have caused the lack of this type of work in a culture where, by all accounts, its popularity was high? Green suggests that, perhaps, "[t]he French-Canadian literary project, the identitary mission," was too important to the national agenda for Quebec writers to spend their time penning works that would deal with "trivial" matters, matters which were "of interest only to women" (M.J. Green 11). The end result of this "French-Canadian literary project" (M.J. Green 11) is that only a very small number of French-Canadian novels aimed primarily at women were ever produced, often forcing female readers who might be interested in these kinds of works to look elsewhere.

In her argument, however, Green overlooks one very important function of the early Canadian novels aimed at women: the ability of these works to function as didactic tales. Her claim implies that this kind of novel – one which deals with matters, for the most part, of interest to young women – could serve no purpose other than entertainment or diversion for female readers; an assumption that is incorrect. As I showed by examining the character triangle and the four-part structure of place in Leprohon's *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing*, these novels can also be read on a deeper level, one that tackles questions of identity, gender roles and cultural values in ways that are neither simple nor superficial.

**A Circumscribed Vision of French-Canadian Reality: The Didactic Function of the Roman de la Terre**

Quebec did, however, have a genre which was similar in structure to courtesy and romance novels, even though it was not always intended for the same purposes: the *roman de la terre* or, as Green translates it "the novel of the land" (11). Following in the
path of the historical novel, the genre of the *roman de la terre* became the dominant genre in French-Canadian literature around the turn of the twentieth century and its popularity continued steadily through the Second World War. The *roman de la terre* allowed authors to celebrate the things that make French-Canadian culture special and, according to Green, “[i]t’s idyllic portrait of Quebec rural life was perceived as an ideal literary vehicle for the French-Canadian ‘agriculturalist’ vision, in which life on the farm became the expression of a divinely inspired mission” (M.J. Green 11). This view is directly opposed to the view of farm life which was commonly represented in urban fiction, one where life on the farm was a life of drudgery, and where farmers were little more than slaves to their land.

The *roman de la terre*, however, also served an important secondary purpose that had little in common with its first, largely agrarian goal: novels in this genre were also intended to set the standard for behaviour in French-Canadian culture and both men and women in Quebec were encouraged to look towards the *roman de la terre* (also called the *roman du terroir* by Janine Boynard-Frot) in order to better understand their own social and gender roles. In *Un matriarcat en procès*, Janine Boynard-Frot says that “[l]e roman du terroir ne représente pas la réalité” (212) and goes on to quote Charles Grivel, who argues that this genre of literature is “représentatif de l’état idéologique, c’est-à-dire de l’image élaborée par la classe dominante et généralisée par elle pour dérober l’état de fait” (qtd. in Boynard-Frot 212).
Whether the genre of the *roman de la terre* has a realistic or an ideological basis, its importance in Quebec society, Bleton and Poirier tell their reader in *Le vagabond stoïque: Louis Hémon*:\(^{16}\):

ne se mesurait d’ailleurs pas seulement dans le petit monde de la littérature, mais aussi dans les usages sociaux qui en étaient faits. Sur le modèle communicationnel « descendant » de la propagande, au moment de son heure de gloire, en plein pétainisme, le roman de la terre devait recevoir tous les encouragements pour servir de modèle, de matière à réflexion scolaire. (Bleton et Poirier 125-126)

In a society largely controlled by the Catholic Church, the *roman de la terre* was one of the few literary genres writers could use to share messages (whether social, political or other) with their readers. As Kathy Mezei explains in “Quebec Fiction: In the Shadow of *Maria Chapdelaine*”:

[op]e of the oldest colonies of North America, Quebec by the nineteenth century was primarily French-speaking, Catholic, conservative, anti-industrial, and aggressively agrarian. Novels, unless didactic and moral, were condemned by the Church as dangerous. Responding to these constraints, the popular novel of the soil [*or roman de la terre*] flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, promoting and representing agrarian ideology and virtues. (Mezei 896)

Mezei observes that “novels of the land” (Green 11) were among the few works produced in early twentieth-century Quebec that the Church did not condemn because of the genre’s focus on gender roles and the importance of the French-Canadian identity, as well

\(^{16}\) Hereafter referred to as *Le vagabond stoïque.*
as the didactic and somewhat virtuous nature of the roman de la terre. The reason behind this, however, is more complicated than Mezei lets on.

In Un matriarcat en procès, Janine Boynard-Frot elaborates on the reasons behind the popularity of this genre, as well as explaining why the roman de la terre or roman du terroir fit in so well with the ideology of the Church. She argues that, with the roman de la terre:

[1]a littérature se voit donc assigner une fonction exclusive de représentation d'une réalité que l'on prend soin de circonscrire. Le modèle proposé, c'est celui de l'habitant à l'aise mais modeste et surtout docile, tant il importe que ne soient point exhibés, ni même esquissés, les conflits sociaux [...]. L'art en tant que pratique transformatrice est exclu. On va prohiber tout ce qui n'est pas « saine et utile littérature », tout ce qui n'est pas roman « bon », « honnête », « moral », « vertueux », « national ». (16)

The roman de la terre, it would seem, is a literary genre with a very rigid structure that is intended to represent a very specific and circumscribed vision of the reality of Quebec society. In it, good, honest and virtuous ideas and characters exist; anything falling outside of these lines is considered unacceptable in these works. By promoting virtues, this genre of “saine et utile litterature” (Boynard-Frot 16) is perfectly in line with the goals and constraints of the Catholic Church. As Boynard-Frot makes clear in the previous passage, the roman du terroir is also not used to represent or deal with social conflicts, but rather uses the model of the modest and hard-working habitant to promote the values and ideals that a writer believes are necessary for the success of the nation, another point that ensures the genre is well in line with the values being promoted by the Church.
In her discussion of the *roman de la terre*, Boynard-Frot is careful to point out that:

[l]e texte littéraire, de par ses seules structures n'a pas de sens; il n'existe, comme pratique signifiante, qu'en fonction de l'intertexte. Les romans du terroir ne sont lisibles [...] que par leur encadrement constitué de discours et d'écrits politiques, culturels, sociaux, économiques et religieux. Le texte n'est produit et conçu qu'en vue de créer un effet sur le destinataire.

(211)

In this sense, the *roman du terroir* appears to be quite similar to the romance and courtesy novels previously discussed. For the most part, these latter works also deal with political, cultural and social issues in their respective societies, although the didactic functions of the romance and country novels were not always considered as prominent as their entertainment value.

One of the most influential and celebrated novels in the genre of the *roman de la terre* is, without a doubt, Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine*. Although technically written by a Frenchman from Europe, *Maria Chapdelaine* is considered a Quebec novel by many because of its content and because it was composed in and submitted to a French publisher for publication while the author was residing in Quebec. *Maria Chapdelaine* is one of the first Quebec novels to focus its story on a woman and, to a certain extent, a woman’s life experience:

[The apex of this literary genre is the successful *Maria Chapdelaine*, which in a realistic yet lyric setting describes the marital choices of Maria, a young habitant girl: Lorenzo Surprenant offers the temptations of a New
England industrial town; François Paradis offers romance, but as he is a wild and dashing *coureur de bois* who drinks and swears, death in a snowstorm conveniently eliminates him. Finally, Eutrope Gagnon, the struggling farmer next door, offers a replica of Maria’s stalwart father and of her current situation – life in the backwoods (Mezei 896).

Framed by didacticism, the marriage choice as it appears in a *roman de la terre* presents vastly different lifestyle options for a female protagonist and is intended for a very different audience than the literature of romance, manners and conduct. The emphasis in this case is far more heavily placed on the political and social meanings behind the protagonist’s choice than it is on the personal aspects of the character’s decision.

“L’emblème du Canada français”¹⁷: The Critical Reception of *Maria Chapdelaine* in France and in Quebec

Although *Maria Chapdelaine* was actually the last work Louis Hémon composed in his short life, it was the first of his novels ever to be published, only a matter of months after his tragic death in July, 1913. Since its publication, Hémon’s *Maria Chapdelaine* has been translated into more than twenty-five different languages and its popularity has eclipsed, by far, that of any of Hémon’s other works. According to Paul Bleton and Mario Poirier in *Le vagabond stoïque*, *Maria Chapdelaine* is, without a doubt, one of the first best-sellers to appear in the French literary canon, with regards not only to the number of copies sold, but also to the effect that the novel had on its audience:

*Maria Chapdelaine* est en effet l’un des premiers best-sellers de la littérature française, que l’on définisse quantitativement le terme par les tirages ou qualitativement par sa capacité à rejoindre un public.

The influence of Hémon’s novel in the literary world has been far more extensive than even the previous citation suggests. In fact, as Green argues, the work itself has become “a powerful literary model for Quebec, [one] which was explicitly evoked by the important [Québécois] cultural spokesman Felix-Antoine Savard in his novel *Menaud maître-draveur*, and which implicitly underlay much of the subsequent literary production” (M.J. Green 55) in Quebec, beginning with early twentieth-century French-Canadian fiction and continuing right up to present day Québecois literature.

Initially published in serial form in the popular French magazine *Le Temps* between January 27, 1914 and February 19, 1914, *Maria Chapdelaine* was first discovered by Louvigny de Montigny, a prominent figure in the history of both Canadian and Québécois literatures. De Montigny – an author, one of the founding members of the École Littéraire de Montréal, founder and (subsequently) editor of the *Les Débats* newspaper, a translator for the senate and one of the founding members of both the Canadian Authors Association (1921) and the Société d’écrivains canadiens (1922) (Les archives littéraires) – was so impressed by Hémon’s novel that he quickly drew the attention of Montreal editor Joseph-Alphonse Lefebvre to the book. De Montigny’s enthusiasm for the book was obviously contagious since, only two years later in 1916, Lefebvre published the first Canadian edition of *Maria Chapdelaine*, bringing Hémon’s extremely popular and well-known novel (in book form) to the Francophone population of Canada for the very first time.
Although much of the attention Hémon’s novel has received from critics over the years has been positive, some of it has been anything but. This negative attention has been focused, largely, on two areas: first, a discussion of the author’s intentions for *Maria Chapdelaine* at the time of the composition of the work and, second, an on-going debate over how closely the characters and events in *Maria Chapdelaine* match up (or do not) with real-life people whom Hémon met, as well as experiences he had, during his sojourn in Quebec. Since the first Canadian printing of the novel only appeared after Hémon’s death, no one is fully aware of his original intentions for the work, whether or not he drew his inspiration for the characters and the actions in the novel from real-life experiences, or even how fictional (or non-fictional) the novel actually is. Without Hémon having left any answers to these questions upon his passing, it is obviously impossible for anyone (reader or critic) to resolve these major critical debates.

I have chosen to concentrate my research and analysis of the critical reception of *Maria Chapdelaine* mainly on the arguments of those Canadian and Québécois critics who were writing about and/or critiquing the novel after its 1916 publication in Canada. Before I begin this, however, I will very briefly examine the initial critical reception of Hémon’s novel in France, in order to compare and contrast the two.

In *Le vagabond stoïque*, Bleton and Poirier argue that one of the major reasons for the huge sense of excitement surrounding the publication of Hémon’s novel in France, was the fact that many Frenchmen believed that, in Quebec, Hémon had found a new France; a country which, in terms of both language and culture, resembled the old, pre-revolution era France which many Frenchmen had so loved and greatly missed. These
readers were struck not only by the differences, but also by the great sense of familiarity, they found in the country and French-Canadian culture in *Maria Chapdelaine*:

Hémon, aux marches de l’empire britannique, annonce aux siens qu’il a rencontré la langue maternelle et plus encore, une culture préservée, vivante, celle d’avant la IIIe République, ce qui simplifie d’autant son rôle de passeur. [...] Hémon et ses thuriféraires français des premiers temps sont saisis par les ressemblances, par la familiarité; *Maria Chapdelaine* est un roman régionaliste, parlant d’un terroir un peu lointain, certes, mais tout à fait apparenté à ceux des romans antérieurs de Guillaumin ou Bazin et, plus encore, à cause de la coloration mystique, à ceux des romans contemporains de Chateaubriant, Pourrat ou Genevoix. (Bleton et Poirier 104)

Although Hémon’s novel speaks of a land that is, in many respects, quite different and far away from France, Bleton and Poirier claim that many French readers of Hémon’s novel, nonetheless, found important resemblances to such famous French authors as Guillaumin and Bazin in the work. Even though Hémon’s novel was published in 1913, the story itself was actually set a few years earlier and in a Francophone culture that, even in its isolation from France, had clearly managed to preserve what many Frenchmen considered the “old ways” of their country. At a time of great change and upheaval in the French empire, Hémon’s novel was refreshing for many French readers, providing them with renewed hope for the future of their country via a nostalgic vision of their past. As a result, Quebec came to be viewed as an extension of the Old France and, Bleton and Poirier tell their readers, *Maria Chapdelaine* itself became an enduring emblem of
French-Canadian society in the social discourse of France. Bleton and Poirier confirm that Hémon’s novel permitted a different configuration of new and old for France, by creating an example of an exotic, far-away land that was filled with a large degree of sameness, a sameness that was comfortable (and comforting) to Frenchmen and women after the intense upheaval they experienced because of the Great War:


For readers and critics in France, Quebec had, in more ways than one, become a “New France” and it was viewed by many French men and women as hope for a return to the pre-war days of the French empire; a continuation of a now (sadly) extinct way of life.

In his “Présentation” of _Maria Chapdelaine_, Aurélien Boivin observes that Canadian critics of Hémon’s novel tend to fall into two diametrically opposed categories: certain among them love the work, declaring that _Maria Chapdelaine_ is a literary masterpiece, while others detest the novel, arguing that Hémon used his work to portray French Canadians in an unflattering light. Critics in this second camp argue that the
characters in *Maria Chapdelaine* portray French Canadians as a backwards, uneducated and ignorant population. The idea that French Canadians might have had this reputation imposed upon them by way of a novel written by a transplanted Frenchmen has angered many critics, who adamantly deny this reputation and argue that the picture Hémon has painted of French-Canadian culture encourages undeserved (and unprovoked) criticism from readers.

Critics such as Ernest Bilodeau, Louvigny de Montigny and Damase Potvin were the original, unofficial leaders of the group of critics who heralded *Maria Chapdelaine* as a literary masterpiece, arguing that the novel honourably captures both the spirit of the “pays du Québec” (qtd. in Boivin, Présentation 7) and of its countrymen. This viewpoint was articulated by Bilodeau in particular, who argued that, in the novel, Hémon “a su comprendre le pays et ses honnêtes et pittoresques’ habitants” (qtd. in Boivin, Présentation 7).

The other group of critics (with Ubald Paquin as one of its leaders), accused Hémon, principally, of misrepresenting French Canadians in the novel by describing them as backwards and uneducated country folk who appear to be little more than slaves to their lands:

[i]ls] accusent Louis Hémon de tous les maux en présentant les Canadiens français, surtout à l’étranger, comme un peuple de paysans illettrés et arriérés, esclaves d’une terre cruelle et tyrannique qui les mène inévitablement à l’asservissement, à l’aliénation, au misérabilisme.

(Boivin, Présentation 7)
These critics were particularly upset because they did not want readers of the novel from other countries to automatically accept this unflattering vision as a manifestation of the true French-Canadian identity. Many of these critics believed that, as a Frenchman, Hémon could not possibly have been familiar enough with this country – or the traditions of its inhabitants – to properly capture the French-Canadian spirit in his writing. These critics even went so far as to accuse Hénon of denigrating the “country of Québec” (qtd. in Boivin, Présentation 7). In the words of Paquin, Hénon was: “incapable de saisir l’âme canadienne et [il] a dénigré le ‘pays de Québec’ ” (qtd. in Boivin, Présentation 7).

Since the novel was being praised by critics in the opposite camp for being a faithful representation of French-Canadian life, critics such as Paquin were extremely concerned that Maria Chapdelaine would have major negative repercussions for French Canadians, harming their chance of showing the world the intelligent, strong and capable citizens they were and could be.

One very important fact that many critics tend to overlook when discussing Hénon’s novel, is that Maria Chapdelaine is not (and never was) intended as a documentary on French Canadian life. The novel, Aurélien Boivin reminds readers in his introduction to Hénon’s work written in 2000, was never intended as an entirely faithful literary reproduction of French-Canadian society, but, simply, as a story:

\[
\text{il faut préciser que l’écrivain breton n’a jamais eu comme objectif d’immortaliser, dans Maria Chapdelaine. Récit du Canada français, tous les modes de vie au “pays de Québec” ni, non plus, de brosser un portrait fidèle de tous les colonisateurs du pays qu’il visitait pour la première fois.}
\]
Throughout the years since the novel’s publication, many critics have tried (with varying degrees of success) to pinpoint specific details in the novel that they believe prove Maria Chapdelaine was actually based both on Hémon’s time in Canada and on the French-Canadian family with whom he stayed. Although it is true that the story itself, as well as many of the characters in the work, resemble some of Hémon’s Canadian experiences and acquaintances, it also remains clear that they are not exact replicas of them. The similarities present can be accounted for by the fact that, like his father and brother before him, Hémon was a keen observer. His strong observational skills resulted from a great interest in other cultures, as well as the values and attitudes of the individuals who form these cultural groups: “[c]’est d’ailleurs là un autre trait des trois Hémon, Félix, Félix fils et Louis : un sens aiguisé de l’observation fondé sur un intérêt pour les moeurs et les comportements d’une culture particulière et des individus qui s’y insèrent” (Bleton et Poirier 37).

During his stay in Quebec, Hémon chose to fully immerse himself in the customs and practices of French-Canadian society: he spent his days working on the farm and he socialized with the local population, soaking up the particularities of French-Canadian culture. Based on the connections that have been made by critics between Hémon’s novel and his Canadian experiences and acquaintances, Hémon’s observations undoubtedly did serve as part of the inspiration for his novel, but they are likely not the only things that did. Although Hémon did not necessarily intend for his depiction of French-Canadian society to become the norm for readers around the world, his
descriptions of French-Canadian life and its traditions in Maria Chapdelaine did become the standard for many years, much to the happiness of some and the regret of others.

An Example to Follow: Reading Maria Chapdelaine as a Didactic Tale

Like many of the other novels in its genre, the story of Maria Chapdelaine follows a young girl who has reached a critical stage of female life: the choice of marriage partner. In a way very similar to a romance or courtesy novel, Maria Chapdelaine is presented with three different suitors: Eutrope Gagnon, Lorenzo Surprenant and François Paradis. Each of these men represents a different possibility for Maria’s future; they are each personifications of paths that she could choose to take in her life. In Hénon’s novel, Maria’s dilemma regarding the choice of marriage partner is understood, first and foremost, as a representation of the national predicament in Canada and, only subsequently, is it understood as didactic on a personal level. In this way, Maria’s eventual choice of husband not only demonstrates the values that Maria herself personally possesses, but also the national allegory behind the roman de la terre and the values promoted by Church leaders.

Considering the details of Hénon’s own life and relationships, it is unlikely that he would have chosen to write a novel that was intended to serve as a didactic tool for young women. Louis Hénon was born in Brest in 1880 to Louise Le Breton and Félix Hénon, a highly respected professor and critic who spent much of his career working in the department of public instruction during the IIIe République. Although the son studied law at the University of Sorbonne and seemed destined to pursue a career as a civil servant like his father, Hénon ended up working a number of vastly different jobs in
many different places, including stints in the military, as an office clerk and journalist in London, England and as a farmhand in Périnonka, Québec.

Hémon’s short life was characterized by his lack of commitment in all areas: not only did he refuse to commit to a career, but he also literally abandoned his family, his partner and his child, leaving all of them behind when he moved to Canada and sending letters to them only occasionally. According to Bleton and Poirier, “[c]ontre l’idée de laisser une institution et la logique linéaire de la carrière surdéterminer sa vie, Louis Hémon aura prétendu se faire lui-même, en dehors de l’appareil d’État, de la fonction publique, des centres de pouvoir” (31). Perhaps in an act of rebellion against his very distinguished and traditional family – nearly all of the male members of his family pursued careers related to the State – Hémon lived his life as more of a wanderer than a family man. His gypsy lifestyle, however, made it hard for him to make ends meet and his letters home to his mother over the years are characterized by frequent requests for her to send him money.

Hémon spent nearly ten years in London, England – from 1902 until 1911 – where he met and was involved in a relationship with a young actress named Lydia O’Kelley. Their relationship produced one daughter, Lydia-Kathleen, born in 1909. After O’Kelley was institutionalized at the County Asylum at Hanwell, Hémon chose to abandon both mother and daughter. He later told his father that O’Kelley was most likely suffering from incurable insanity, but he felt that she did not deserve any esteem, only pity. His young daughter was left to the care of his English sister-in-law (and was later taken in by Hémon’s own sister, Marie, after her English aunt passed away) and it was not long before Hémon was on the move again, this time to Canada. Shortly after he left
London, Hémon’s father accidentally discovered Hémon’s secret daughter (by opening a letter addressed to Louis) and wrote to him, criticizing him for his actions. Hémon responded with a scathing letter, telling his father that the affair was none of his business. Hémon closed his letter by saying:

Je m’arrête ici, et j’aime autant garder pour une autre lettre ce que j’ai à dire de mon départ de Montréal, dans trois semaines environ. Comme on se connaît et comme on se comprend mal entre parents et enfant! Je vous fais de la peine à chaque instant, et à chaque instant vous dites ou vous faites quelque chose qui m’éloigne de vous. Affectueusement tout de même. (qtd. in Bleton & Poirier 67)

This letter, dated May 19, 1913, was the last letter that Hémon sent to his father. Hémon was hit by a train near White River, Ontario on July 8, 1913, not long after he submitted his manuscript for Maria Chapdelaine to his publisher in Paris (Encyclopedia 483). The details of his life reveal a man who did not appear to have any desire to settle anywhere or to put down roots and, although he was never married to Lydia O’Kelley, it is clear that Hémon was, himself, a perfect example of the wrong marriage choice. Unlike Rosanna Leprohon whose happy and conventional marriage paralleled (in certain ways) the marriage that closes Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, Hémon’s own life experiences are far removed from what his reader sees in Maria Chapdelaine. For all of these reasons, it seems highly unlikely that he would have intended Maria Chapdelaine as a didactic tool for young women in matters of the heart. This, however, does not mean that a reader could not herself choose to interpret the novel as a didactic tale in terms of the marriage choice.
Faced with three possible marriage partners (each represented by a different suitor), Maria Chapdelaine, a young, French-Canadian girl, must decide what she wants most for her future: financial prosperity, freedom or tradition. The first of Maria’s three suitors, Lorenzo Surprenant, represents financial prosperity outside of Quebec, in the rapidly expanding economy of the United States. The second, François Paradis, is a coureur-de-bois who, although he lives a life of danger and adventure, seems to represent freedom for Maria because he has no commitments (to land or to people) and can go wherever his spirit takes him. Maria’s third suitor, Eutrope Gagnon, represents tradition since he has chosen to settle down on a small parcel of land in Quebec and work hard to continue the traditions of his French-Canadian ancestors. After François Paradis, the one Maria loves, gets lost in the woods and perishes during a Christmas Eve blizzard, her options are reduced to two, and she is left to choose between financial prosperity or tradition.

After Madame Chapdelaine dies, Maria truly begins to understand the important roles that her mother (and, consequently nearly all women) in French-Canadian society play: those of wife and mother. It is at this point she begins to realize that, although she could follow in her mother’s footsteps, she does not wish to. Maria tells herself that, after her period of grieving is over, she will marry Lorenzo Surprenant and go to live with him in the United States:

Un peu plus tard, quand ce deuil serait fini, Lorenzo Surprenant reviendrait des États pour la troisième fois et l’emmènerait vers l’inconnu magique des villes loin des grands bois qu’elle détestait, loin du pays barbare où les hommes qui s’étaient écartés mouraient sans secours, où les femmes
souffraient et agonisaient longuement tandis qu’on s’en allait chercher une aide inefficace au long des interminables chemins emplis de neige.

Pourquoi rester là, et tant peiner, et tant souffrir lorsqu’on pouvait s’en aller vers le Sud et vivre heureux? (189)

After deciding this, however, Maria hears the voices of her land, her language and her ancestors that tell her not to follow Lorenzo Surprenant to another country, far away from her homeland. They remind Maria of all the things that she will miss out on by leaving Quebec:

Elles n’avaient rien de miraculeux, ces voix; chacun de nous en entend de semblables lorsqu’il s’isole et se recueille assez pour laisser loin derrière lui le tumulte mesquin de la vie journalière. Seulement elles parlent plus haut et plus clair aux cœurs simples, au milieu des grands bois du Nord et des campagnes désolées. Comme Maria songeait aux merveilles lointaines des cités, la première voix vint lui rappeler en chuchotant les cent douceurs méconnues du pays qu’elle voulait fuir. (190)

The voices speak to Maria about the beauty of the changing seasons in her homeland, about the beauty of her language – the French language – which the Americans in the United States would not speak and which she would no longer hear on the streets, in the playground or at Church. They also speak of the women, like Madame Chapdelaine, who came before her and worked hard, struggled and stayed in Quebec to keep their culture and traditions strong for future generations. It is only after this, that Maria realizes she cannot leave her homeland and she decides that she must stay in Quebec: “Alors je vais
When Maria fully understands how important her role as a woman is to her culture, she realizes that her marriage to Eutrope Gagnon is the right choice for her to make. She comes to understand that Eutrope will not only provide for her in financial and material ways, but will also enable her to carry on the traditions of her ancestors and protect her French-Canadian heritage.

By following Maria on her journey from beginning to end, the reader of Hémon’s novel is able to fully understand both how (and why) Maria makes the choice that she does, and why this choice is the best one for her. Maria’s experiences in the novel can easily be read as more than simple entertainment; both personally and politically her journey can also function as a didactic tale. By looking closely at the options for a young woman in the text, I wish to argue that Maria Chapdelaine could serve as a kind of unofficial guide for a young female reader of those times in Quebec, not only by allowing her to better see (and understand) the options which were available to her, but also by giving her insight into which of these options might be most suitable for her and her people.
Chapter Four:

Underneath the Surface:
Lessons of Love in Maria Chapdelaine

« C'était ainsi » writes Hémon in chapter thirteen of his novel,

quand une fille arrivait à un certain âge, lorsqu'elle était plaisante à voir,
saine et forte, habile à toutes les besognes de la maison et de la terre, de
jeunes hommes lui demandaient de les épouser. Et il fallait qu'elle dit:

« Oui » à celui-là, « Non » à l'autre… (154)

Although choosing a marriage partner may not seem like a monumental task in today’s world of single life, alternative families and high divorce rates, at the turn of the nineteenth-century in Quebec few of the decisions women had to make rivalled this one in importance. In early English- and French-Canadian fiction – as in real life – the choice of marriage partner was a crucial decision that almost every young female character had to face. Consequently, an important question that was probably on the minds of most young women at the time revolved around the pragmatic and social aspect of the decision; as the narrator in Maria Chapdelaine asks, “[q]uand une jeune fille ne sent pas ou ne sent plus la grande force mystérieuse qui la pousse vers un garçon différent des autres, qu’est-ce-qui doit la guider?” (155).

In Hémon’s novel, Maria’s final choice (and the way she arrives at her decision) not only answers this question in the context of the national allegory and the roman de la terre, but may also have helped contemporary readers find the solution to this problem in their own lives. When reading Maria Chapdelaine, readers could rehearse important life decisions through the characters, the plot and the theme chosen by Hémon for his novel. In this chapter, I will examine how the character triangle (formed by the characters of
Maria Chapdelaine and her suitors, Eutrope Gagnon and Lorenzo Surprenant) as well as the four-part structure of place dramatize Maria’s final decision and, consequently, the didactic function of the work.

In *Un matriarcat en procès*, Janine Boynard-Frot argues that “[un] texte n’est produit et conçu qu’en vue de créer un effet sur le destinataire” (211). Although Boynard-Frot’s argument is made with specific reference to the French-Canadian *romans de la terre* that were published between 1860 and 1960, her statement can also apply in a more general way to other literary genres and situations as well. In chapter two, I examined how Leprohon’s *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* functions didactically on a personal level, yet also has distinct political messages hidden underneath the surface of the romance. In my analysis of the work, I explored how the protagonist’s actions and choices in the novel can influence those of the female reader, allowing her to live and learn vicariously through the story of Antoinette De Mirecourt. In this chapter, I will examine how Louis Hémon’s *Maria Chapdelaine* functions didactically in a similar way, on both cultural and personal levels. Although these two novels use similar devices to instruct their readers – both use the character triangle and the four-part structure of place – there is one very distinct difference between the two. The didactic focus of Hémon’s novel is actually the reverse of Leprohon’s, that is to say that instead of focusing primarily on the personal, romantic lessons as Leprohon does, the focus of Hémon’s novel is on the cultural and/or political issues unfolded in the allegory of nation, with lessons of a more personal nature underneath the surface level.

Whether by accident or intent, *Maria Chapdelaine* has a definite ability to influence the decisions and actions of its reader on many levels. In the protagonist,
Hénon creates a prototypical heroine for the French-Canadian nation. This protagonist chooses to ignore the temptations and exotic charms of American life embodied by one suitor, Lorenzo Surprenant, by marrying her other suitor, Eutrope Gagnon – the young habitant living on the parcel of land next to the Chapdelaine home – and to remain faithful, instead, to her French-Canadian culture and traditions. As an allegorical character, Maria is representative of the Quebec nation and, as a result, her actions and decisions are believed to represent the actions and decisions that Quebec (as a nation) should make. By following her lead and consciously choosing to remain in Quebec, it is understood that Quebecers would not only remain faithful to their land and French-Canadian roots and culture, but also to their ancestors and the dreams that those men and women had for their nation.

Whereas marriage (both in real life and in literature) is generally thought of as being a way for a woman to break from her past and start a new life, marriage in Hénon’s novel plays the opposite role: for Maria, a marriage to Eutrope Gagnon is a way for her to hold onto her past and continue the work of her mother and grandmothers, while helping keep French-Canadian culture alive. Although marrying Eutrope and remaining true to her roots may not be exactly what Maria initially wants, the story’s narrator is careful to tell the reader that Maria eventually understands that it is her duty to obey the voices that tell her to stay true to her country, her language and her ancestors.

Read as an allegorical work, Maria Chapdelaine has a very clear message: despite the many temptations that Quebec might face, the nation as a whole (and each of its individual citizens) should choose to remain faithful to its historical roots and ancestors.
In the same way that Maria chooses to hold onto her past by marrying a close neighbour, Eutrope, Quebecers are being advised to remain faithful to their pasts as well.

If the reader of *Maria Chapdelaine* chooses to look beyond this surface, however, she will see that Hémon's novel does not have to be read only as a cultural lesson; it can also be read on a more personal level, as a lesson to young women who find themselves in a life situation similar to Maria’s. Even though the *roman de la terre* is not a documentary representation of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century life in Quebec, it nonetheless has realistic elements in it that could allow a reader to understand aspects of her own life and environment in terms of the information that she gathers from the novels she reads. For this reason, I wish to argue that, although Maria is commonly regarded as an allegorical character, it would not be wrong to say that she could be more than this also. Maria could also be viewed in another light as well, as simply a young woman in early twentieth-century Quebec trying to make one of the most important decisions of her life: the choice of a marriage partner.

**A Single Piece of a Larger Puzzle: *Maria Chapdelaine* as a *Roman de la Terre***

In *Un matriarcat en procès*, Janine Boynard-Frot provides an in-depth examination of the French-Canadian literary genre of novels commonly known as the *roman de la terre*. She argues that, in order to fully understand a *roman de la terre* such as Louis Hémon’s *Maria Chapdelaine*, it is essential for a reader to view the work as a single piece of a larger puzzle, always taking into consideration the political, cultural, social, economic and religious discourses in which the work was created.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women had two very specific roles in French-Canadian culture: those of wife and mother. It is often asked whether or not it
was possible for young women to break away from these roles and make a different choice for their futures. In *L’histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles*, a group of scholars called the Clio collective argues that such a break from tradition would have been quite unlikely in the nineteenth-century:

[habituellement [au début du siècle], les femmes n’ont que peu ou pas de biens personnels, sauf quelques exceptions issues de milieux bourgeois. La fille de cultivateur reçoit une dot quasi symbolique [mais qui donc peut survivre avec un lit et deux moutons? Celle qui a reçu un peu d’instruction sait qu’elle ne pourra vivre décentement avec son salaire d’institutrice. L’artisan, l’ouvrière, la couturière, la domestique savent déjà que leur salaire ne leur permet même pas de survivre seules. [...] Trouver un homme qui possède une terre ou qui gagne un revenu deux fois plus élevé que le sien représente pour la majorité [des femmes] la voie la plus intéressante. (177)

It should come as no surprise then that *Maria Chapdelaine*, a novel which encourages young French-Canadian women to follow exactly this path – while, at the same time, glorifying the agrarian lifestyle that was so central to the development of Quebec at the time – was rapidly accepted and supported by both the French-Canadian population and the Catholic Church.

Similar to the real-life situation of young women in Quebec, female characters in the *roman de la terre* generally had one option open to them: what Marie Couillard, in “Écrire et vivre au Québec des femmes: Impression et expression d’une culture” calls the “faire” (88) of marrying. In novels where nearly all of the power lay in the hands of the
male characters, choosing a marriage partner was one time when a woman was allowed
some form of control (however small) over her own life. “Mais ne se marie pas qui veut”
(Clio 177), the Clio collective is quick to remind its readers. Regardless of a woman’s
power to choose one man over another, it still behoved her to carefully and thoughtfully
consider all of her options (even those which, to her, may have seemed less attractive),
before making a final decision. Since the choice of marriage partner at the time was an
extremely important one for both the individual and her family, the decision-making
process leading up to a woman’s final choice was not to be taken lightly. This burden of
choice did not affect one linguistic group more acutely than the other. Concern over the
marriage choice was a shared burden, one that crossed the boundaries of language,
impacting the decisions of nearly all Canadian women in the nineteenth century. As
Peter Ward comments in Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English
Canada, “[m]arriage was such a momentous event that few rushed headlong to the altar.
What emotion drove forward, prudence usually deterred” (101).

Although women in 19th century Quebec did possess more rights than many
women in other Canadian provinces at the time (since women in Quebec were ruled by
Civil Law18), it was nonetheless essential for a woman to make a good marriage if she
hoped for a financially and materially secure future. As early as the 1830s, women in

18“...In Quebec, [part of Lower Canada from 1791 until 1841 (when the Act of Union came into effect)], the
French Civil Code prevailed after the British takeover, and thus French marriage law continued to apply”
(Prentice et al 88). This meant that, in order to marry, agreement was required from both parties, the
publication of banns was necessary and a ceremony had to be performed by an Anglican or Catholic priest
in order for the marriage to be legal. In this way, women at least had the right to choose not to marry a
certain person, even though this was probably easier said than done. With regards to other rights, “the
French provision for the ‘community of goods’ prevailed, protecting to a degree the wife’s interest in the
marital property, regardless of the religious denomination of the couple. Contracts sorted out the details to
the mutual satisfaction of the marrying parties and their friends, before the weddings of propertied
individuals could take place” (Prentice et al 88). In other parts of Canada, Common Law prevailed. No
marriage contracts were required and, as a result, many women had no protection whatsoever from a bad
marriage or even, to a certain extent, after their husbands died.
Quebec were being warned – by way of literature – about the dangers of marrying only for love. In a short story entitled *Folly of Marrying “all for love,”* an elegant suitor quickly morphs into a brandy drinker after his wedding. The author of the tale ends up imploring her readers not to follow the same path: “No, No! écrit l’auteure, *no more marrying for love in the family*” (qtd. in Clio 180). The Clio collective goes on to remind their readers that throughout the 19th century and even well into the 20th, “[s]’il est important d’aimer, il est encore plus important de faire un bon mariage” (180). With so much at stake for young women and for their families, it appears that there was little space for the consideration of love in the marriage choice.

How, then, was a young woman supposed to know the difference between a good marriage and a bad one? What did an ideal suitor look like? And how would he act? These were all questions that very likely went through the minds of young women of a marriageable age, many of whom were probably unsure how they should go about making this very important decision. Although women were being warned not to marry “all for love” (qtd. in Clio 180), it was hard for them to know whether love should factor into the decision a little bit, or whether it should come into play at all. With so many questions and concerns to consider before making a choice, it would not have been surprising for any young woman to feel a little confused and in need of help and advice.

Unfortunately, at the time, these kinds of matters of the heart were also things that women did not often discuss openly. Although they could discuss these issues with their female acquaintances and members of the clergy, these options were not always the most helpful. Oftentimes, acquaintances and clergy members had their own personal agendas when it came to a young woman’s marriage and these did not always take into
consideration the feelings or desires of the young woman. As well, women ran the risk of finding themselves confiding in acquaintances who were unqualified to help them with their marital dilemmas. As a result, young ladies who felt in need of advice often had few places they felt they could confidently turn to for help; for women in Lower Canada, conduct books and courtesy novels (among the most reliable sources of information available for English women) were not available. Some didactic literature did appear in French language periodicals of the time (such as the *Musée de Montréal*) but for the most part French-Canadian women looked towards literature for help and advice. Although the literary genres which most often discuss courtship and marriage (conduct literature, the novel of manners, the *roman de la terre*) were intended for very different purposes – personal edification, political and/or national pride – they did have one thing in common: in one way or another, they all discuss the issues surrounding love and marriage that were on the minds of young female readers. As a result, they not only served their original purposes, but could also be used as important resources for young women bewildered by the choices they were facing.

In his afterword to *Maria Chapdelaine*, Bernard Clavel says that, as a reader, “[n]ous nous laissons aller à nous identifier à tel ou tel personnage. Et c’est bien là, me semble-t-il, que se mesure la force d’une oeuvre. Qu’elle nous fasse croire que nous en sommes le héros” (203). Clavel’s comments support my theory that Hémon’s novel can function didactically on a personal level. By identifying with the character of Maria, a young female reader was given an opportunity to vicariously experience some of the same dilemmas facing the protagonist of *Maria Chapdelaine*. 
At the same time as the novel helped familiarize female readers with some of the important decisions (such as the choice of marriage partner) that she may have faced in her own life, Maria Chapdelaine also showed her that she was not the only young woman facing these kinds of dilemmas. Through this kind of vicarious learning process, the female reader was able to experience some of the likely consequences of the different choices that may have been open to her before she made her own decisions. Although this personal learning process is quite different from the more nation centred lessons that Hémon’s novel is now most commonly known for, it is, nonetheless, another important way that Maria Chapdelaine functioned as a didactic tale.

**Social Education: The Character Triangle in Maria Chapdelaine**

In a similar way to Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, both the character triangle and the four-part structure of place in Maria Chapdelaine can be viewed as ways to understand the importance of the choice of a marriage partner for a character’s future. Although the authors of these two novels use these devices in different ways and as means to different ends, the interactions between the characters and the settings are similar enough in both works to make the didactic functions of these novels comparable.

One of the things that makes Maria Chapdelaine an attractive character – and one that a reader can easily relate to – is her humanity; she is “une femme à la fois traditionelle et pleinement humaine” (Smart 116). Maria is a very ordinary girl who lives and works on her family’s land, helping her mother with daily domestic tasks and occasionally accompanying her father to town for supplies or to attend church.

Described by one young man in the story as “une belle grosse fille, et vaillante avec ça” (Hémon 24), the narrator makes it clear early on that Maria Chapdelaine is an
attractive prospect as a marriage partner for many of the young men of her acquaintance.

Maria’s beauty is also part of her role as the heroine in a *roman de la terre* since, as Boynard-Frot claims in *Un matriarcat en procès*, "[l]a beauté est d’une telle nécessité que c’est elle qui conditionne l’émergence du personnage féminin dans le roman du terroir. [...] Peu importe que le personnage féminin soit marqué de qualités positives ou négatives [...] seule la beauté conditionne l’apparition de la femme" (158). Maria’s beauty and purity are important aspects of her character not only because they make her an attractive marriage partner, but also because they help to situate her as the heroine at the center of the community in *Maria Chapdelaine*.

When Maria and her father attend church in the first chapter of the novel, a number of young habitants signal their interest in her but, unfortunately, the Chapdelaine family’s living situation – a small parcel of land far on the opposite side of the river from Péribonka, in the woods beyond the small town of Honfleur – makes it very difficult for any young men to court Maria. As one of the young men notes: "[c]’est de malheur qu’elle reste si loin d’ici, dans le bois. Mais comment est-ce que les jeunesse du village pourraient aller veiller chez eux, de l’autre bord de la rivière, en haut des chutes, à plus de douze milles de distance, et les derniers milles quasiment sans chemin?” (Hémon 24). Geographical distance, however, is not the only thing keeping suitors away from Maria. A very introverted person by nature, Maria barely says more than a few sentences over the whole course of the novel. She is a very pensive person and one of the only characters in *Maria Chapdelaine* who spends the majority of her time thinking about, and observing, everything that is happening to and around her. Unfortunately, this quality often causes her to feel confused and unsure about her feelings. One of the first scenes to
demonstrate this confusion occurs shortly after Maria's return from Saint-Prime. One evening, Eutrope Gagnon visits the Chapdelaine family and the narrator remarks that, although Maria is comfortable around him and has become accustomed to seeing his pleasant face within her family circle, her time away has made her uncertain of her feelings and has caused her to doubt whether or not there will be a place for him in her future:

Maria regardait parfois à la dérobée Eutrope Gagnon, et puis détournait aussitôt les yeux très vite, parce que chaque fois elle surprenait ses yeux à lui fixés sur elle, pleins d'une adoration humble. [...] Cette courte absence d'un mois semblait avoir tout changé, et en revenant au foyer elle y rapportait une impression confuse que commençait une étape de sa vie à elle où il n'aurait point de part. (Hémon 43-44)

Although the previous passage only partially describes the scene, it does demonstrate that Maria is an observer. She notices, when she looks at Eutrope, that he is looking back at her and she understands what this really means for her, as a young woman. Although he does not mention his intentions until much later in the book, Maria already knows at this point in the story the reason why Eutrope has become a regular in "le cercle des figures de [sa] famille" (Hémon 43): he is hoping she will accept to become his wife.

As previously mentioned, Misao Dean states that some of the most desirable qualities in nineteenth-century women included obedience and "self-effacement" (19), all qualities which are clearly present in Maria's character, even though she herself lives in twentieth-century Quebec. These qualities are also part of Maria's role as the heroine of a roman de la terre, in particular Maria's ability to deny her passions. In Un matriarcat
en procès Boynard-Frot explains to her reader that “[I]a sujette qui résiste, celle qui mate ses désirs sexuels, qui se soustrait à l’étreinte et inhibe tout désir, celle-là est qualifiée de forte et supérieure” (154). Maria’s ability to deny her desires makes her a strong and superior character in the community.

It is important to note, that the passive nature of Maria’s character is also a direct result of her role as the female protagonist in a roman de la terre. In this literary genre, gender roles were very specific and authors tended to follow them very closely. According to Patricia Smart in Écrire dans la maison du père: L’émersion du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec, the passivity of Maria’s character is directly linked to her role as a woman in the novel. She argues that, underneath her quiet, pensive exterior, Maria is a woman with great inner strength and depth of character:

[t]out en tenant un rôle féminin tout à fait « traditionnel », Maria a la grandeur d’une héroïne. Chez elle, la passivité, l’obéissance et le silence, caractéristiques de tous les personnages féminins du roman de la terre, recèlent une force de caractère, une profondeur, un tenace désir de bonheur qui sont le moteur de la vision romanesque. (Smart 117-118)

When the story starts, Maria has just returned from a trip to Saint Prime to visit her mother’s family. Since she has reached a marriageable age, Maria realizes that she will soon have to make a decision about what kind of life she hopes to lead, as well as what kind of husband she will have to choose in order to live that life. As she considers marriage, Maria is sure of one thing: after having seen the difficult life her mother has led since her marriage to Monsieur Chapdelaine, she knows for certain that she does not

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19 Hereafter referred to as Écrire dans la maison du père.
want to have the same kind of life. Near the end of the novel, as Maria prepares to make her final decision, the narrator says:

[v]ivre ainsi, dans ce pays, comme sa mère avait vécu, et puis mourir et laisser derrière soi un homme chagriné et le souvenir des vertus essentielles de sa race, elle sentait qu’elle serait capable de cela. [...] Elle pourrait vivre ainsi; seulement... elle n’avait pas le dessein de le faire....

(189)

Over the course of the story, Maria begins to fully understand the role of her mother (and other women) in French-Canadian society: in the same way that Boynard-Frot argues that the character of the mother (in this case Madame Chapdelaine), “contrairement à celle du père, ne serait donc pas essentielle au roman du terroir” (99), Maria realizes that women are not necessarily considered essential to contemporary French-Canadian society in any respect beyond their roles as wife and mother. In Maria Chapdelaine this is made clear by the fact that Madame Chapdelaine’s influence on the actions and decisions of all the characters is greatest only after she is removed from the story. It is this realization that causes Maria to question herself about what is truly most important to her for her future.

Over the course of the novel, Maria is presented with three very different suitors. In Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature, Margaret Atwood states that each of these three suitors represents a different, possible way of life for her character:

Eutrope Gagnon offers Maria a simple, habitant life (similar in a number of ways to her current life experience); as a French-Canadian now settled in the United States, Lorenzo Surprenant offers her a completely different lifestyle from the one she is living, far away from the hardships of the Quebec countryside; the third suitor – and the one that Maria
feels she truly loves – François Paradis “might have combined dynamic growth with continuity of cultural values” (Atwood 218), had he not died tragically in the woods.

Since, as I previously mentioned, young women were not advised to marry for love, it is not hard to see why François Paradis suffers the fate that he does in the novel; Maria cannot marry for love even if she wishes to and François’s death ensures that Maria does not make this mistake. With François’s death, the option of the love choice also dies, highlighting the necessity for the heroine to make pragmatic or allegorical choices instead, ones that will favour collective (over individual) values. With only two suitors remaining after François dies, Maria is forced to re-evaluate her own values and desires in order to decide which qualities she feels are most important to her future: duty and tradition in the local French community or an easy life and financial security in a foreign land and an English community.

In his introduction to Hémon’s novel, Aurélien Boivin describes François Paradis as a nomad who is unable to settle down and, consequently, incapable of providing the stability any cultural group would require in order to ensure its future:

Paradis, c’est aussi le coureur des bois, le nomade libre comme l’air, incapable de se fixer à demeure sur une terre, d’assurer donc la permanence d’une famille et d’une race, ainsi qu’il l’a avoué à la mère Chapdelaine, lors de sa première visite. Or, pour survivre, un peuple doit s’approprier un territoire, l’habiter, le posséder. Bâtir un pays, c’est accepter de l’habiter. (Présentation 12)
On both the cultural and personal levels, Boivin argues that choosing François would be a mistake since he would never be capable of settling down, a problem that would prove difficult, as much for a family as for a nation.

Although he is obviously fond of Maria, François remains a wanderer at heart; he is a man who could never bring himself to settle in any one place for too long which could only prove problematic for Maria in the future. François himself even tells Madame Chapdelaine: “gratter toujours le même morceau de terre, d’année en année, et rester là, je n’aurais jamais pu faire ça tout mon règne, il m’aurait semblé être attaché comme un animal à un pieu” (48). On a political level, it is for this reason that Maria cannot choose to marry François. On an allegorical level, it would be disastrous for the character representing Quebec to marry such a nomadic man as François Paradis because it would suggest that the Quebec nation is willing to choose a transitory and uncertain future over one of stability.

Although critics often argue that, in the novel, François Paradis represents freedom for Maria, I disagree somewhat with this observation. I believe that the character of François Paradis more closely resembles the character of Samuel Chapdelaine, Maria’s own father, and it is for this reason that I believe he must be eliminated from the story. A marriage to François would be more likely to represent sameness or continuity for Maria than a marriage to Eutrope Gagnon or Lorenzo Surprenant would. By marrying someone so similar to her own father in habits and desires, Maria would, inevitably, be forced to lead the same life as her mother. Even though one man is a coureur-de-bois by profession and the other is an habitant farmer, both characters are drawn to freedom, adventure and hard work and both also have a
strong desire to be continually on the move. Neither wants to be tied to one parcel of land for his whole life. The major difference between the two characters is that François is open and honest about his need for movement, telling everyone that a sedentary existence would make him feel trapped. Monsieur Chapdelaine, however, is never willing to admit this fact openly, not even to his wife. Though he is less vocal about his nomadic behaviour, Monsieur Chapdelaine is most certainly a mover. He chooses a piece of untamed land, works as hard as he can to build a home and prepare the land for farming. Once he achieves his goal, however, he always desires change and starts the whole process over again. His entire life, Maria’s father has spent working and moving, never staying long enough in one place to sit back and enjoy his accomplishments.

Unfortunately, because she is in love with François, Maria cannot see this problem for herself. She imagines that a life with François would be different from her current everyday life; that is to say, more exciting. She does not realize that by marrying him, she would essentially be following in the footsteps of her mother. With François as a husband, Maria would be forced to move constantly in order to fulfill her husband’s need for adventure and change. Her life would be full of struggles and hard labour, little more than a continuation of what she has already experienced. François’s death, therefore, is more than just a plot device used to remove the love option from the story and force Maria to choose to marry someone to whom she does not necessarily have a romantic attachment. It is also a means of ensuring that Maria cannot choose a man who is like her father, even if she wishes to. Similar to the way Leprohon removes the character of Louis Beauchesne from Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, Hémon removes François from Maria Chapdelaine. By exiling Beauchesne to France after he
kills Sternfield (where he will be forced to stay for the remainder of his life), Leprohon ensures that Antoinette’s father will not be able to arrange a marriage of sameness between the two; by causing his death, Hémon removes François completely from the novel, also ensuring that a marriage of sameness is not possible for Maria. Although simply removing Beauchesne from Quebec is enough to stop a possible marriage between Antoinette and her friend (since Antoinette does not love Beauchesne enough to want to marry him), it is made clear by the narrator of Hémon’s novel that Maria is willing to follow where François Paradis leads because she loves him:

L’amitié que François Paradis a pour elle et qu’elle a pour lui, par exemple, est quelque chose d’unique, de solennel et pour ainsi dire d’inévitable, car il est impossible de concevoir comment les choses eussent pu se passer autrement [...]. Lorsqu’elle songe à François Paradis, à son aspect, à sa présence, à ce qu’ils sont et seront l’un pour l’autre, elle et lui, quelque chose frissonne et brûle tout à la fois en elle. (89-90)

In the previous passage, the narrator makes it clear that Maria’s feelings for François go beyond simple affection and it is obvious that she prefers him over all other suitors. As a result, the only way for a marriage between these characters to be avoided is for François Paradis to be removed completely and definitively from Maria and from the novel.

The hero in Maria Chapdelaine is Eutrope Gagnon, a young French-Canadian who has taken (with his brother) a small parcel of land near the Chapdelaines. He desires nothing more than to work on this land and create a beautiful little farm of his own, where he will live his life with his wife and family.
Eutrope is a quiet, polite young man, as is evidenced by his first appearance in the novel when the narrator remarks: “Malgré qu’il vînt pour Maria, comme chacun savait, c’était au père Chapdelaine seulement qu’il s’adressait, un peu par timidité et un peu par respect de l’étiquette paysanne” (39-40). Eutrope is careful to follow traditional customs when he visits the Chapdelaines in order to make himself appear a worthy suitor for Maria.

During Eutrope’s first visit to the Chapdelaine home at the beginning of the story, the narrator remarks that, “[d]epuis un an [Maria] s’était habituée sans déplaisir à ses fréquentes visites et à recevoir chaque dimanche soir, dans le cercle des figures de la famille, sa figure brune qui respirait la bonne humeur et la patience” (43). At this point the narrator signals to the reader that Maria is not unaware of Eutrope’s admiration for her, nor is she particularly bothered by it. All of the descriptions the narrator gives of Maria through the eyes of Eutrope contrast greatly with those given through the eyes of François. Whereas the narrator speaks of Eutrope’s humble admiration for Maria, all of the descriptions which the narrator gives from François Paradis’s point of view are slightly more sexually charged, speaking of Maria’s physical appearance and its effect on him more than anything else: “[s]a jeunesse forte et saine, ses beaux cheveux drus, son cou brun de paysanne [...] Il se prit à penser en même temps que c’était lui qui avait dû changer, puisque maintenant sa vue lui poignait le cœur” (47).

One thing about Eutrope that makes him unlike the traditional figure of a hero is that he is already acquainted with Maria and is a young man around whom she feels comfortable. In a large majority of cases where a character triangle appears – including in *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* – the man presented as the hero is someone
whom the protagonist is only meeting for the first time and, generally, her first
impression of him is anything but positive. With Eutrope, however, Maria has already
begun to form a relationship (if only through his regular visits to her family home) and,
although she does not feel that she particularly loves him, she knows that she does not
dislike him and that his visits are not unpleasant to her.

As the story unfolds, more details about Eutrope’s character are gradually
revealed, both to Maria and to the reader. Just after François Paradis is killed in a
snowstorm, Eutrope decides to tell Maria how he feels about her, awkwardly confessing
his affection and asking her to wait one year for him to gather up enough savings to get
his farm started and build a house for them to live in. After his confession, the narrator
remarks that: “[c]’était cela tout ce qu’Eutrope Gagnon avait à lui offrir ; attendre un an,
et puis devenir sa femme et continuer la vie d’à présent, dans une autre maison de bois,
sur une autre terre mi-défrichée...” (151). Although Maria does not say “yes” or “no” at
this particular moment, it is important to note that she says more to Eutrope after this than
she says to any of her other suitors, foreshadowing a little her eventual decision to accept
his proposal.

Unlike Samuel Chapdelaine and François Paradis, Eutrope is not the kind of man
who likes to move around in search of adventure. He wants to lead a quiet, traditional
life – the kind of life Maria experienced while visiting relatives in Saint-Prime – and he is
therefore representative of traditional French-Canadian values. Eutrope is convinced that
his hard work and patience will pay off in the end and he looks forward to the day when
he will be able to sit on his front porch with his wife and look out over the land and home
he has created for his family. At the time of his first proposal, Eutrope tells Maria:
"Je sais bien qu’il faudrait travailler fort pour commencer, continuait Eutrope, mais vous êtes vaillante, Maria, et accoutumée à l’ouvrage, et moi aussi. J’ai toujours travaillé fort ; personne n’a pu dire jamais que j’étais lâche, et si vous vouliez bien me marier ça serait mon plaisir de peiner comme un bœuf toute la journée pour vous faire une belle terre et que nous soyons à l’aise avant d’être vieux. Je ne prends pas de boisson, Maria, et je vous aimerais bien...” (151-152)

Eutrope is not living for the moment, but is planning to work as hard as he can to create his kingdom (in a manner of speaking) so that, someday, he will be able to sit back and admire all that he has done, knowing that he himself worked hard to accomplish everything. Eutrope lives a life of self-reliance, believing that, with time and patience, he will be able to look after himself. Although the prospects he offers are less exciting than those offered by Lorenzo Surprenant, one should note that Maria gives more of a response to Eutrope than she does to Lorenzo when she says: “Je ne peux rien vous dire Eutrope, ni oui ni non ; pas maintenant... Je n’ai rien promis à personne. Il faut attendre” (153). Although her response does not give much of an answer, it is important because it is one of the only times in the novel Maria speaks directly to anyone.

The counter-hero in Hémon’s novel is Lorenzo Surprenant, a young French-Canadian man who has chosen to leave his home in Quebec and take a job in an American factory, thus moving to the United States and, in a sense, abandoning his homeland. Over the course of the novel, Lorenzo returns to Quebec a number of times and for a couple of different reasons: first, he wishes to sell his recently deceased father’s land and settle his estate; second, after meeting Maria during his first trip home, Lorenzo
has decided that he would like to court her because he believes that she would make him an ideal wife.

Allegorically, Lorenzo represents a break from tradition: he abandoned the French-Canadian way of life in search of prosperity, moving to the United States to work in a factory. He is quick to admit that he does not want to live off the land as so many Quebecers do, because he believes that the difficult life this would require is not something to which he wants to commit himself. Lorenzo is uninterested in hard, constant work; he wants to work only a little and have more leisure time. Unlike Eutrope, whose main goal is to work hard as a young man so that, later on, he will be able to sit back and enjoy the fruits of his labour, Lorenzo is looking for instant gratification: he wants to work only as much as necessary in order to allow himself time to sit back, relax and have fun right now.

When he makes Maria an offer, Lorenzo tries to dazzle her with stories of American life:

mais si vous étiez ma femme vous n’auriez pas besoin de travailler. Je gagne assez pour deux, et nous ferions une belle vie : des toilettes propres, un joli plain-pied dans une maison de briques, avec le gaz, l’eau chaude, toutes sortes d’affaires dont vous n’avez pas l’idée et qui vous épargnent du trouble et de la misère à chaque instant. [...] Mais je vous aime, Maria, je gagne de bonnes gages et je prends pas un coup jamais. Si vous voulez bien me marier comme je vous le demande, je vous emmènerai dans des places qui vous étonneront ; de vraies belles places pas en tout comme par...
Lorenzo’s proposal is filled with promises of an easier life in the United States. He promises Maria a life where she would not have to work, but would still be able to have all of the luxuries she could want, things that she would never be able to have in Quebec. His promises are very tempting for a young woman who feels as though she wants to escape from the cruel countryside of Quebec and the hard labour of the farm, as well as from the memory of her true love who was tragically taken away from her by a snowstorm that swept through her cold, unforgiving homeland.

Near the end of the story, after her mother’s death, Maria decides that she truly does not want to live the same life her mother did and initially tells herself that she will marry Lorenzo Surprenant after her grieving period is finished. Just as she decides this, however, she hears voices which speak to her of Quebec and its beautiful landscapes, of the beauty of the French language that she would not hear in the United States and, finally, of her ancestors – her mother and grandmothers – who worked hard to keep their culture alive in a new place. These voices encourage her to not abandon her home and to stay in Quebec and continue living life, proudly, as a habitant:

[La voix] disait: “Nous sommes venus il y a trois cents ans, et nous sommes restés… Ceux qui nous ont menés ici pourraient revenir parmi nous sans amertume et sans chagrin, car s’il est vrai que nous n’avons guère appris, assurément nous n’avons rien oublié. […] Nous avions apporté d’outre-mer nos prières et nos chansons : elles sont toujours les mêmes. Nous avions apporté dans nos poitrines le cœur des hommes de
notre pays, vaillant et vif, aussi prompt à la pitié qu’au rire, le cœur le plus
humain de tous les coeurs humains : il n’a pas changé. [...] Autour de
nous des étrangers sont venus, qu’il nous plaît d’appeler des barbares; ils
ont pris presque tout le pouvoir ; ils ont acquis presque tout l’argent ; mais
au pays de Québec rien n’a changé. Rien ne changera, parce que nous
sommes un témoignage. [...] C’est pourquoi il faut rester dans la province
où nos pères sont restés, et vivre comme ils ont vécu, pour obéir au
commandement inexprimé qui s’est formé dans leurs coeurs, qui a passé
dans les nôtres et que nous devrons transmettre à notre tour à de nombreux
enfants : Au pays de Québec rien ne doit mourir et rien ne doit changer...”
(193-194)

After a short period of reflection, Maria realizes that she should listen to these voices and
so she decides to stay in Quebec and marry Eutrope: “Maria sortit de son rêve et songea :
‘Alors je vais rester ici... de même!’ car les voix avaient parlé clairement et elle sentait
qu’il fallait obéir” (Hémon 195).

By choosing Eutrope as her marriage partner, Maria is not marrying into sameness
(as she would have if she had married François Paradis), yet her marriage allows her to
remain rooted in French-Canadian culture. She stays true to her country, her language
and ancestors by marrying Eutrope, yet because he is not quite like her father in that he
wishes to settle permanently in one place and build a home and life there, Maria still gets
what she truly wants in the end: a life that is different from her mother’s.
A Social and Cultural Map: The Four-Part Structure of Place in Maria Chapdelaine

Louis Hénon’s use of space in Maria Chapdelaine can be analyzed as a four-part structure of place to show how different settings can impact (both positively and negatively) on a character, as well as on his or her actions. The four major settings that form the structure of place in the novel are the Church, the Chapdelaine home, the United States and, finally, nature. All four of these settings greatly influence the decisions and actions of the novel’s major characters in slightly different ways. As Jean-Claude Vernex argues in “L’espace canadien dans ‘Maria Chapdelaine’”:

Un roman, d’un point de vue géographique, peut être considéré comme un document de premier ordre tant pour les informations qu’il contient sur un certain cadre de vie à une époque donnée, et sur les perceptions qu’en ont les hommes qui l’habitent, qui l’utilisent, qui le transforment, que pour les images véhiculées implicitement par l’auteur, images qui traduisent souvent, au delà de sa propre personnalité ou de celle de ses héros, les codes de la société qu’il décrit. (63)

The settings in a novel help to frame the action, both with regards to location and with regards to the cultural and social values associated with the society being depicted and, as a result, they can affect and influence the actions of each character in the work. In Maria Chapdelaine, the four major settings situate the female reader with regards to time, place and location and help her better understand the characters that she is observing, as well as their actions and decisions.

Jean-Claude Vernex calls the church in the roman de la terre a “lieu communautaire par excellence avec son rythme hebdomadaire (du moins pour les
habitants des ‘vieilles paroisses’) et annuel (la messe de minuit); le perron de l’église, lieu d’échanges sociaux (les nouvelles), parfois même lieu d’échanges économiques” (64). In the opening pages of Hémon’s novel, the reader sees the small Church at Péribonka take on exactly the previously described role as the narrator outlines the flurry of social activity taking place after Sunday Mass has let out in the small town. By commenting on the people who are present in the scene, their attitudes, manners of dress and personalities, the narrator subtly explains to the reader how some of the characters, in this social setting, act differently than they might in another, less social, setting:

« Ite missa est. » La porte de l’église de Péribonka s’ouvrit et les hommes commencèrent à sortir. [...] Mais voici que les hommes et les jeunes gens franchirent la porte de l’église, s’assemblèrent en groupes sur le large perron, et les salutations joviales, les appels moqueurs lancés d’un groupe à l’autre, l’entrecroisement constant des propos sérieux ou gais témoignèrent de suite que ces hommes appartenait à une race pétrie d’invincible allégresse et que rien ne peut empêcher de rire. (19)

The narrator goes on to make a few short comments on the activity taking place outside the church, painting a very ordinary, social portrait of the population of Péribonka. Since the church is, by its very nature, destined to be a place for social gatherings, in Maria Chapdelaine it becomes a microcosm of the larger, French-Canadian society. As a result, when characters find themselves in this setting, they tend to adopt their socially expected and acceptable roles, roles which are most often defined by gender – and not by social rank – in French-Canadian society. As early as this first scene at the church, the reader
can begin to understand the importance of the church’s role in determining the behaviour of the characters.

An example of this occurs after Sunday mass is over, when the narrator tells the reader that the men exit the Church first and gather outside on the balcony to smoke their pipes and talk. The topics of their conversations include the weather, their current activities, the latest happenings in town and any other bits of news they feel might be of interest to themselves or to others. Since these men are only able to get together approximately once a week, Sunday Mass at the church is a perfect opportunity for a social gathering: here, the men are able to make new acquaintances and catch up with old friends, learn about all the different things that are happening in the villages surrounding their own and, sometimes, even make business deals.

The behaviour of the male characters in this scene seems completely normal and predictable; it is exactly what the reader would expect these men to do (not only in fiction, but also in real life). A few pages into the chapter, the narrator turns the attention away from the men, and shows the women as they start to make their way out of the church. Sounding very much like a ballroom scene in a novel of manners, the narrator surveys the women and tells the reader that:

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\text{Jeunes ou vieilles, jolies ou laides, elles étaient presque toutes bien vêtues en des pelisses de fourrure ou des manteaux de drap épais ; car pour cette fête unique de leur vie qu’était la messe du dimanche elles avaient abandonné leurs blouses de grosse toile et les jupons en laine du pays, et un étranger se fut étonné de les trouver presque élégantes au coeur de ce pays sauvage, si typiquement françaises parmi les grands bois désolés et la}
\]
This scene gives the reader a vague idea of the role women are expected to adopt in this social setting. Though all of the women are beautifully and elegantly dressed, not one of them actively does (or says) anything in the scene, with the possible exception of Maria, who shyly turns her eyes away from François Paradis when he speaks to her. In this one, simple descriptive paragraph, Hénon is able to clearly outline the role of women in French-Canadian society. The picture that the narrator draws for the reader, tells her that although women were supposed to be useful in other settings and areas – a quality that is evoked by the narrator’s comment that the ladies had replaced their everyday work clothes, the “blouses de grosse toile et les jupons en laine du pays” (Hémon 23), with more elegant clothes for their Sunday social gathering – they were expected to be little more than beautiful objects when they appeared in social settings.

Another important point to note in this Church scene is that no woman is described as speaking to anyone (at any point) during the scene, reinforcing the widespread belief that women were better seen than heard. In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, Mary Poovey writes that women were encouraged to avoid any and all behaviour that might risk drawing attention to themselves and, although Poovey was writing about women in eighteenth-century England – a time and culture far removed from those of Hémon’s novel (and closer to the culture and time period of Leprohon’s work) –, the female reader can still see evidence of similarities between the women in the works of Wollstonecraft, Shelley and Austen (as examined by Poovey) and the women in Hémon’s novel. As Boynard-Frot mentions in *Un matriarcat en procès*, “[1]a
représentation de la femme dans le roman du terroir est celle d'une sujette inapte à faire, inapte à dire, inapte à être sinon en l'état dégradé que réalise sa position de subordination dans son rapport à tout sujet” (191). Women in the roman de la terre, it would seem, are incapable of doing, speaking, and existing in any role beyond one of subordination to the male subject and this is exactly what the female reader of Hémon’s novel sees in the previously described church scene.

It is also significant to note that only one female character gets special mention from the narrator in the scene at the church and that character is Maria. Even so, Maria remains silent and passive throughout the scene, never speaking, even when she is directly addressed by both her father and François Paradis. She remains silent for the whole chapter, and one of Maria’s only actions hardly passes as an action at all: when her eyes meet François’s for a brief moment during her father’s conversation with him, Maria averts her eyes: “[le regard de François] voyagea une fois de plus de Samuel Chapdelaine à Maria, qui détourna modestement les yeux” (Hémon 26). Although Maria is quiet and timid throughout much of the novel, her behaviour in the church scene is significant to note because it helps to show the reader how the characters in the novel adhere to socially acceptable gender roles when they find themselves in a social setting.

When Maria and her father return home from Church, the reader immediately sees how a new setting – the Chapdelaine home – can have a very different influence on a character and his or her behaviour. As the second chapter begins, the narrator tells the reader that:

[Il]’heure du souper était venue que Maria n’avait pas encore fini de répondre aux questions, de raconter, sans en omettre aucun, les incidents
de son voyage, de donner les nouvelles de Saint-Prime et de Péribonka, et toutes les autres nouvelles qu’elle avait pu recueillir au cours du chemin.

(35)
The quiet, timid Maria whom the reader meets in the first chapter – the one who never speaks a single word even when she is directly spoken to – has suddenly been transformed into a warm, friendly and talkative character. Her family members surround her while she tells them all about her trip and the local news; one of her brothers watches her intently to make sure that he doesn’t miss anything she says while her sister sits with her arms around Maria’s neck and Madame Chapdelaine asks Maria many questions about her experiences. The character that did her best not to be noticed at Church has now become the centre of attention and, it is plainly obvious, is quite comfortable in this alternate role in her own surroundings.

This fact is consistent with the four-part structure of place, since the heroine of this period is always most at ease in the setting that is her own home. It is also in this domestic setting (and only this setting) that the heroine is able to have some form of power over her own life, her own decisions and, even sometimes, over other characters. In the previously cited passage, Maria’s power is only used to capture her family’s attention but, later in the novel, she uses this power in a very different way: to make her own decision about whom she wishes to marry.

After Lorenzo Surprenant proposes to Maria when visiting her home one evening, the narrator tells the reader that, although Maria has many questions to ask Lorenzo, she is careful not to say anything that could be mistaken for the beginning of a promise:
What is most interesting in the previous citation is not the fact that Maria does not ask Lorenzo any questions about the United States, but rather the fact that she actively chooses to remain silent. She does this for a reason: she wants to be sure that she doesn’t make any kind of promise to anyone until she has thoroughly considered all of her options. She wants to be in complete control of her decision and she would not be able to have this control if she spoke and said something that resembled a promise. Only in this setting, her own home, does Maria feel powerful enough to actively make this kind of choice; in the other settings in the novel, she would not be able to take on such an active role.

Similarly, when Eutrope Gagnon asks Maria to marry him on the porch of the Chapdelaine home, the reader sees her take control of the situation by telling Eutrope that she cannot promise him anything at that particular moment. Her decision to go against her socially expected role (by not immediately accepting his proposal) is something that Maria is only capable of doing in the relative safety of her own home. Here, she is allowed to take some control over her own life and decisions and she uses this power to her advantage. Unlike in the social setting of the Church, where Maria is careful to adhere to her social gender role as a quiet, passive woman, in her own home, Maria becomes a much stronger, active character.
Although the United States is not a setting where any part of the action in the story actually takes place, it is still very present in the narrative through Lorenzo Surprenant, who uses it as a way to try to convince Maria to marry him. During his visits to Quebec, Lorenzo takes great pride in describing his new home and all of the things that can be found there to Maria:

Oh! Maria, vous ne pouvez pas vous imaginer. Les magasins de Roberval, la grand-messe, une veillée dramatique dans un couvent ; voilà tout ce que vous avez vu de plus beau encore. Eh bien, toutes ces choses-là, les gens qui ont habité les villes ne feraient qu’en rire. [... D]e beaux trottoirs d’asphalte plats comme une table et larges comme une salle – rien qu’à vous promener de même, avec les lumières, les chars électriques qui passent tout le temps, les magasins, le monde, vous verriez de quoi vous étonner pour des semaines. Et tous les plaisirs qu’on peut avoir ; le théâtre, les cirques, les gazettes avec des images, et dans toutes les rues des places où l’on peut entrer pour un nickel, cinq cents, et rester deux heures à pleurer et à rire. Oh! Maria! Penser que vous ne savez même pas ce que c’est que les vues animées! (142-143)

Lorenzo paints an idealistic portrait of the United States for the reader, in large part because he is using his words to convince Maria to marry him and move away from her homeland, to join him in the States. Between the lines, however, the reader can find a few bits and pieces of hidden information that are very important when trying to understand the relationship between these characters and the settings. When Lorenzo tells Maria that she will not have to work in the States, he is not only saying this to be
kind and generous; his promise is also ensuring that he will be the one who is in charge of their relationship and home. By taking on the role of the bread-winner, he will have the control.

Also, as the voices tell both Maria and the reader later on in the novel, if Maria were to choose to make the United States her home, she would be forced to sacrifice many of the things (things which are related to her homeland) that help to form her identity as a French-Canadian. By moving to the United States with Lorenzo, Maria may lead an easier life in some ways, but she will also be giving up any (and all) control over herself and her own actions and decisions.

The final setting that makes up the four-part structure of place in the novel is nature. This setting is present throughout Maria Chapdelaine – from the very first page to the last – and it is certainly one of the most important ones in the novel. As Jean-Claude Vernex notes, “[l]a nature est omniprésente [dans Maria Chapdelaine]; elle guette l’homme; elle ne lui pardonne aucune faiblesse, aucune démission dans sa lutte pour la maîtriser” (63). This setting is particularly significant because it shifts the balance of power away from the characters completely: when in a natural setting, all of the characters are equally powerless and out of control. The reason for this is quite simple: when in a natural setting, the characters find themselves facing nature, a force that is much larger and much more powerful than they could ever hope to be. It has power over everyone and everything. Outside of the building, towns and other man-made settings in the novel, nature is in control and the consequences that characters face for fighting against it are serious: often, those characters who stubbornly defy nature (or those who actively fight against it) end up dead.
In order for the characters to survive in this setting, it quickly becomes clear that they must learn to work together, to cooperate. By observing the actions of the characters in *Maria Chapdelaine* who are struggling against nature, I believe that the reader of Hémon’s novel will be better equipped to understand the importance of compromise and cooperation in all areas of one’s life. This setting also allows the reader to see qualities present in certain characters (such as pride, vanity or stubbornness) that do not necessarily appear as clearly when these characters appear in other settings.

The most obvious example of how nature functions didactically in *Maria Chapdelaine* can be found in the example of François Paradis’s death. Refusing to listen to the experienced woodsmen who tell him not to go outside in the storm on Christmas Eve, François decides that he absolutely must see Maria and will let nothing stop him from doing so. He believes that he is strong (and experienced) enough to beat the odds. The fury of the storm, however, causes him – an experienced *coureur-de-bois* – to become disoriented and lose his way in the woods. Unable to fight back against the power of nature, François ends up freezing to death in the snow, alone. His stubborn pride and his refusal to listen to the advice of others (people who, in this particular case, were more experienced than him and understood the importance of cooperation) highlight some of his negative qualities for the reader: although François’s determination and enthusiasm could be viewed as positive qualities in a number of ways, these same qualities also have a strong negative aspect to them as well. As Patricia Smart, in *Écrire dans la maison du père* notes,

[*][La mort de François, on l’a souvent remarqué, a des ressemblances avec le sort des héros tragiques grecs ou shakespeareiens. En se décidant malgré*]
tous les conseils à braver la tempête pour retourner voir Maria, François pêche par « orgueil » et s’attire une punition de la part de la nature. (Smart 120)

Much like the Greek and Shakespearian heroes Smart refers to, François’s flaw is his ego. In refusing to accept help or advice, he will not accept that he has any weaknesses, that other people might have information that could help him or that it could be beneficial for him to cooperate with other characters and, as a result, he is punished by nature. François’s fate, on another level, prioritizes collectivism over individualism and encourages the reader to adopt the same view, thereby electing to become part of a particular group (in this case, choosing to join, or remain part of, the French-Canadian nation). For his stubborn self-sufficiency, François’s punishment is death and by examining this turn of events, the female reader can learn about the importance of cooperation and, consequently, would be able to apply this lesson to her own life.

Both the character triangle and the four-part structure of place in Maria Chapdelaine help to show how important it is for young women to carefully examine the qualities and actions of the people she meets, and to do so in a variety of different settings, before making any final judgements on them. In Hénon’s novel, Maria is careful to take her time when getting to know her suitors because she understands the great impact of her choice, not only for her alone but also for her family. Unlike Antoinette De Mirecourt who hastily marries the first handsome young man she meets when she arrives in Montreal (and who is subsequently punished for her thoughtless behaviour), Maria is very cautious in her actions and decisions and demonstrates how important it is for a character to carefully consider all of her options and choices before
settling confidently on one. Antoinette’s haste may be partially explained by her position in society as an heiress. Her father is a member of the French-Canadian noblesse and, consequently, she is less likely to be concerned about the material and financial situations of her suitors since she believes her future is already secure. Antoinette is easily taken in by the flashy and frivolous life of Montréal society and does not think, at any great length, about the consequences of her actions. While living a life of sleigh rides, balls and soirées, surrounded by elegant ladies and handsome men, Antoinette allows herself to forget about her future and chooses instead to live in the moment. Maria Chapdelaine, however, lives a difficult life in the wilderness of Quebec, far from the comforts and the wealth of Montréal society, and understands that she must take material and financial security into consideration when choosing her marriage partner. As an habitant herself (and as the daughter of an habitant) Maria does not have a financially or materially secure future before she marries; her future prosperity is entirely dependent on whom she chooses as her husband. As a result, it behoves her to very carefully consider all of her options before making her final choice and it is her understanding of this reality that most certainly underlies Maria’s very thoughtful decision. For an attentive reader, Maria’s caution and consideration are important lessons to remember. If the female reader chooses to observe Maria Chapdelaine throughout the story, she may come to understand how important a thorough knowledge of a potential suitor’s character can be to the marriage choice: Maria’s example shows that knowledge of a suitor should be as influential – if not more – as true love.
Conclusion:

Easing the Burden: Understanding Marriage Plots as Didactic Tales

Generations of girls who did not read much of anything else, whose experience was limited by education, opportunity, and convention, have gone to fiction to escape a stifling or a boring or a confusingly chaotic reality and have come back with structures they use to organize and interpret their feelings and prospects.

Rachel M. Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine: Reading About Women in Novels*, xviii

Rachel M. Brownstein's claim that female readers can find structures in fiction that they subsequently use to organize their lives and interpret their own feelings is of particular interest to me – not only as a literature student but also as a female reader – because it is something I feel I can relate to since I, myself, have more than once looked to novels for information and ideas – sometimes, even advice – that I could apply to my own life. According to the feminist theorists and literary historians previously discussed (including Bromberg, Brownstein, Cuder-Dominguez, Dean, Fritzer, Gerson, Sobba Green, Hemlow, Leiberman and McClintock Folsom), female readers did (and, perhaps, even still do) see novels as more than simple diversions; they also consider fiction a place they can turn to for important information about life. For a reader who wants to gain knowledge about certain topics but does not want to take too many real-life risks, living vicariously through a fictional character allows her to experience new things without suffering from the unpleasant and unwanted consequences that could very well go along with a real-life lesson. Moreover, as Gerson suggests in *A Purer Taste*, literature was
commonly considered an important didactic source (with particular emphasis on the instruction of social behaviour and customs) in nineteenth-century English Canada, making it likely that a young female reader of the time would have turned to literature in order to gather life lessons.

For the most part, didactic material in nineteenth-century English-Canada appeared in two literary genres: the primary source was sentimental or historical fiction (with a major emphasis on novels), and secondary sources included the early Canadian periodicals (such as *The Literary Garland*). Since the purpose of literature was, in a very general sense, to instruct, many Canadian readers looked towards these literary sources for lessons that might help them make sensible and informed decisions in their own lives. Even though the general didactic focus of literature, at the time, was different in French Canada than it was in English Canada, its primary goal remained the same: to instruct. Whereas English-Canadian novels proved to be a source of social instruction for readers, providing examples of proper social conduct and important and helpful information, in French Canada literature emphasized the social role of women in Quebec (in the context of the values approved by the Catholic Church) and promoted the Quebec agrarian lifestyle, as well as the continuation of French-Canadian values and traditions. Didactic literature in French Canada appeared both in fiction (including the *roman d’aventure* and the *roman de moeurs*, the latter of which was the predecessor of the *roman de la terre*), and in French language magazines such as *Le Musée de Montréal, Coin du feu, Le Journal de Françoise, La Femme, Pour vous Mesdames, La Revue de Montréal* and *La Revue Canadienne*. 
It is no secret that many women – even in recent years – have looked to Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* for examples of how men and women should (and do) behave, as well as to gain information about how to read others and understand what qualities to look for in a life partner. One needs only to look at the large number of recent books and films based on Austen’s novel and produced in the last decade – the *Pride and Prejudice* A&E mini-series, *Bride and Prejudice*, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, and the list goes on – to see how current a didactic resource *Pride and Prejudice* really can be. As Brownstein argues, women who read have been identifying themselves (and their acquaintances) with the characters they meet in novels for many years now and the continued popularity of Austen’s works – still regularly in print nearly two hundred years after their initial publication – certainly proves her point. Brownstein’s theories about how readers can identify with (and learn from) the heroines in novels has not only helped me to understand more completely how fiction can help to shape a reader’s life, but it also encouraged me to examine this theory more closely, by looking at how a novel with a courtship and/or marriage plot could be understood as didactic by a female reader, both on the surface level of the romance and on a more symbolic, social or political level as well.

After reading Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Rosanna Leprohon’s *Antoinette De Mirecourt Or Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing: A Canadian Tale* and Louis Hémon’s *Maria Chapdelaine: Récit du Canada français*, I observed that, although all three of these works were produced in very different times and places (Austen’s was published in Britain in 1813, Leprohon’s in Quebec in 1864 and Hémon’s in Quebec in 1916) and each contains quite different social messages, enough similarities do exist
between the works in terms of the courtship and/or marriage plot and how it functions
didactically on a literal level – that is to say on the level of the romance – to make these
works comparable in terms of a potential educational influence on their readers.

Both Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing and Maria Chapdelaine are
allegorical novels that use the courtship and/or marriage plot to educate their readers
about important issues relating to nation. On an allegorical level, the choice of marriage
partner in both novels is of great significance. In Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing,
according to Mary Jane Edwards in “Essentially Canadian,” “[Evelyn’s] marriage to
Antoinette is clearly meant to symbolize the union of the old and new orders in Canada
and the emergence of a new society” (20). In “Negotiations of Gender in Early Canadian
Fiction,” Cuder-Dominguez makes a similar argument, claiming that, in Secret Marrying
and Secret Sorrowing, Leprohon creates a blueprint for the kind of Canadian nation she
envisioned – a unified Canada – and through her novel, she passes this idea on to her
readers, hinting that Antoinette’s cross-cultural marriage is a step towards a brighter
future, both literally (for the protagonist) and metaphorically (for the Canadian nation).

In Maria Chapdelaine, however, marriage symbolizes a way for Maria (and, by
extension, all French Canadians) to hold onto the past. In his introduction to Maria
Chapdelaine, Boivin states that “[e]n choisissant le colon Eutrope Gagnon, Maria choisit
d’abord, non l’amour, mais un style de vie” (Mythe ou symbole, 23). The lifestyle that
Maria chooses in the end by marrying Eutrope, is the lifestyle that will allow her to
remain in Quebec and continue the traditions of her ancestors, passing her culture and
traditions on to future generations. Although it is unclear whether or not Louis Hémon
actually intended Maria Chapdelaine to represent the French-Canadian people, the view
of the novel as an allegorical work has become so common in literary history that it is
now simply taken as a given. Even with these very different political agendas, however,
one common thread does tie these two novels together in terms of the political focus of
their marriage plots: in both cases, the only marriage that must be avoided is a marriage
of sameness.

In the case of Antoinette De Mirecourt, the narrator makes it clear early on that
the only person Antoinette cannot marry is Louis Beauchesne, her childhood friend and a
fellow French-Canadian. A union between these two characters would symbolize
continued cultural isolation for Antoinette’s French-Canadian culture, exactly the
opposite of what Leprohon envisions for the future of Canada. In Maria Chapdelaine,
however, the only suitor that it is clear Maria cannot choose is François Paradis, the
young, handsome coureur de bois to whom she is immediately attracted. Although
François represents freedom for Maria for many critics, my analysis of his character has
led me to disagree with this argument. Instead, I have concluded that François is the
character in the novel most like Monsieur Chapdelaine and, consequently, is the suitor
who would symbolize a marriage of sameness for Maria. By marrying François, Maria
would lead a life very similar to her mother’s life, never staying long enough in one place
to set down roots. On an allegorical level, this kind of marriage would be disastrous
because it implies that the Quebec nation does not want to set down roots, and would be
willing to choose a transitory and uncertain future over one of stability. In both of these
novels, the authors remove the option for a marriage of sameness from the heroine by
removing the suitor who represents this threat from the novel. In Secret Marrying and
Secret Sorrowing, Beauchesne is exiled to France after he fatally wounds Sternfield in a
duel, whereas François Paradis dies in the woods on his way to see Maria on New Year's Eve. It is not necessary for Leprohon to kill off Beauchesne's character in her novel, though, since Antoinette has no desire to marry him. In this case, the danger of a marriage of sameness is low and it is therefore safe enough to simply remove Beauchesne from Canada. In Hémon's novel, however, it is necessary for the author to kill François Paradis's character since it is obvious that Maria loves him more than her other suitors and would be willing to follow him wherever he led. For this reason, the only way to ensure that a marriage of sameness does not occur in *Maria Chapdelaine* is for the author to remove François definitively from the novel.

One of the things that interested me the most in these two novels from Quebec is the way that the characters in each act (and re-act) – as well as how they change – when they appear in different settings in the novel and, subsequently, I was most interested in learning what observing these actions and changes could tell a reader. In “‘Taking Different Positions’: Knowing and Feeling in *Pride and Prejudice*,” Marcia McClintock Folsom argues that “Austen [...] demonstrates that one person may see the same thing differently at different times and places” (102), an observation which has been crucial to my examinations of the character triangle and the four-part structure of place in each of these novels. By applying the structure of the character triangle to *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* and *Maria Chapdelaine* and by closely examining how the characters of the heroine, the hero and the counter-hero function in these novels (as well as how they appear to change when in different settings), I realized that an attentive reader – one who was used to reading fiction as a source of didactic material – would also come to understand that it is essential for a person to observe another's character in a number of
different settings (and over a period of time) in order to fully grasp what kind of person he or she was. It was also clear from my research, that a reader who could learn this important lesson from these novels would not only be able to personally identify with the heroines of *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* and *Maria Chapdelaine*, but would also come to better understand her own real-life acquaintances. By comparing them to the characters she has encountered in her reading and subsequently classifying them in terms of the roles she envisioned them playing in her life, a reader might develop a better understanding of her own self and her life. Since, as I discovered through my research, fiction was a primary source of didactic material in nineteenth-century English and French Canada (according to many literary theorists and historians, including Gerson, Boynard-Frot and M.J. Green), the idea that a reader might choose to do this seemed likely.

These structures were much easier to apply to Leprohon’s *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* than they were to Hémon’s *Maria Chapdelaine*, partly since Leprohon’s novel had a clear, socially instructive intention from the time of its publication and partly because Leprohon used British literary conventions in her novel that match up very well with the analytical paradigms used in the criticism of *Pride and Prejudice* that helped shape my own discussion of these novels. As Gerson notes in *A Purer Taste*, “Antoinette De Mirecourt, unsubtly subtitled ‘Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing’ [was] a moral survival guide for young women being wooed to transgress the will of their parents” (Gerson 139) and, therefore, was obviously intended by its author to act, at least in a small way, as a source of information and advice for its intended reading audience: young, nineteenth-century Canadian women. *Maria Chapdelaine*, however, is
a thoroughly French-Canadian novel that has never been considered didactic on a personal, literal level; its major function has always been as a national allegory, its purpose being to convince young Québécois men and women to remain faithful to their land and their culture. In this way, it was much more difficult to use critical patterns that were advanced by British critics to try and prove that Hémon’s novel might also be understood by readers as instructive on the literal level of the romance. Whereas readers of Leprohon’s novel were likely to feel a personal connection to the character of Antoinette, the readers of Hémon’s novel did not always see Maria as an actual person, but rather as a representative of the Quebec nation.

My analysis of the characters and settings in Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing and Maria Chapdelaine also led me to observe that the narrators in these two novels play very different roles: whereas in Leprohon’s novel the narrator has a very clear, didactic purpose – sometimes even editorializing –, in Hémon’s novel the narrator is less visible in the text and makes no overt instructive comments about the characters or their actions. In this way, the didacticism present in Maria Chapdelaine is much more subtle than it is in Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, so much so that it would take a highly attentive reader to find the more subtle didactic elements that appear in the novel. In Hémon’s novel, it is when the voices appear at the end of the story that the didactic nature of the work begins to show.

The narrator in Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing quite often invites herself into the text, whether to comment on the action or to influence how the reader of the novel sees (and understands) what is happening in the story. An example of this interference can be seen directly after the reader has been introduced to Madame
D’Aulnay in chapter two. After a discussion during which Madame D’Aulnay tells Antoinette that “the only sure basis for a happy marriage, is mutual love, and community of soul and feeling” (18), the narrator interrupts to comment that:

Apparently, mutual esteem, moral worth, and prudence in point of suitable choice, counted for nothing with Madame D’Aulnay. Well might the trustworthy governess have raised her voice against entrusting to such a mentor, Antoinette De Mirecourt, with her childish inexperience, rich, poetic imagination, and warm, impulsive heart. (18)

The narrator’s comments at this point are clearly intended to not only draw the reader’s attention to the fact that Madame D’Aulnay is an unsuitable mentor for young Antoinette, but also to indicate that she should be cautious about listening to Madame D’Aulnay’s advice. Similar interference from the narrator occurs throughout the story, regularly drawing the reader’s attention to both Madame D’Aulnay’s unwise advice and Antoinette’s frequently foolish decisions. The narrator’s highly didactic role in Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing ensures that even a less attentive or observant reader would still be likely to gather information and advice from the novel as she reads.

The narrator in Maria Chapdelaine rarely (if ever) interrupts the action to comment on it, remaining instead a constant but – for the most part – unobtrusive presence in the novel. The scenes in Hémon’s novel are described with an almost photographic accuracy, but the narrator is careful not to comment extensively on what is happening in the story; instead, she simply describes what she sees:

Pour Maria Chapdelaine, qui regardait toutes ces choses distraitement, il n’y avait rien là de désolant ni de redoutable. Elle n’avait jamais connu
que des aspects comme ceux-là d’octobre à mai, ou bien d’autres plus frustes encore et plus tristes, plus éloignés des maisons et des cultures ; et même tout ce qui l’entourait ce matin-là parut soudain adouci, illuminé par un réconfort, par quelque chose de précieux et de bon qu’elle pouvait maintenant attendre. Le printemps arrivait, peut-être... ou bien encore l’approche d’une autre raison de joie qui venait vers elle sans laisser deviner son nom. (26-27)

The previous citation appears in the novel just after Maria has returned from Church at the beginning of the story; this Church outing is also the first time that Maria meets François Paradis. It is obvious from the narrator’s comments that Maria’s general feelings about life have recently changed, yet there is no indication in the passage that this change is due to her meeting François; the reader can only assume that he has been the catalyst for it. The narrator’s words (here and throughout the novel) do little to help guide the reader and, as a result, she must simply follow Maria’s lead and observe the action taking place in the world of the story if she wishes to find information that she could apply to her own life situation. In truth, it is not until the second to last chapter of the novel, that a truly didactic presence appears in *Maria Chapdelaine*: the voices that speak to Maria and influence her choice of marriage partner. Only once these voices have spoken in the text, can the reader begin to put together all of the information she has gathered from the novel and see that the work might truly have an instructive purpose. In the case of *Maria Chapdelaine*, my work has led me to conclude that it would take a highly attentive reader to pick up on the didacticism that can be found in Hémon’s novel
– particularly the didacticism which exists on the surface level of the marriage plot – since *Maria Chapdelaine* is rarely considered a romantic work in this sense.

Although I myself began this project by looking at *Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* and *Maria Chapdelaine* primarily on the literal level – this is to say the level of the romance –, I soon realized how important the symbolic level of these texts is to their didactic function as well. As a result, I came to understand that it is as important to view these works in terms of the larger picture, which includes the romantic and political aspects of the novels, since the personal is so often political in fiction (and vice versa). It was the deeper understanding that I developed of these early-Canadian works and their allegorical functions which led me to adapt Northrop Frye’s glasses metaphor as a method of viewing and understanding fiction didactically in terms of the marriage plot. Frye theorized that a reader uses a pair of metaphorical glasses – made up of “a wish-fulfillment dream and an anxiety dream” (Frye, *Dreamland* 102) focused together – to read literature fit my project extremely well once adapted because, as a result of my work, I have realized that a reader needs to revision these texts and look at both the literal and symbolic levels of a novel together, in order for the text to truly speak to her and teach her about the burden of choice. Reading these novels in only one of these ways is insufficient because so many important details can get lost or ignored in the process. Consequently, the best way for a reader to fully see and understand how a marriage plot might function didactically in a novel is for her to examine a work through a metaphorical pair of reading glasses, ones which fuse the personal and allegorical levels of the text, in order to give her a more complete understanding of the whole didactic
message of the work and allow her to thoroughly (and enjoyably) experience personal edification by means of a literary adventure.
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