Broken Social Structures: The Carcinogens of André Giroux's *Le Gouffre a Toujours Soif*

by

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Abstract (246 words):

In the face of an industrializing and urbanizing province, Québec's provincial government under premier Maurice Duplessis (1936-39 and 1944-59) turned towards the past. The government and the Catholic Church embraced an ideology of clerico-nationalism in order to maintain their status by presenting a nostalgic vision of Québécois life—one that was rural, pious, and insulated from Anglophone influence. However, the urban Québécois had different every-day experiences, often struggling to support themselves by working for the Anglophones who dominated the economy and supported Duplessis in his efforts to crush Francophone unions. Between 1937 and 1977, a wave of authors responded to the Duplessis administration by counteracting the idyllic countrysides exalted by the government with novels that reflected the harsh urban realities facing many Francophones. As Jane Moss has demonstrated, novels written during this time period so often featured characters who were suffering from physical ailments that literary historians refer to these novels as "morbid literature," in which being ill and being Québécois were virtually synonymous. Although morbid novels dominated the 20th-century Québécois literary landscape, they have received little critical attention, with some works, such as André Giroux's *Le Gouffre a toujours soif*, being ignored almost entirely. My thesis will examine how illness in Giroux's novel served as a metaphor for the social ills harming urban Francophones, especially those associated with clerico-nationalism. Particular attention will be paid to the impact of occupational and religious forces in harming the physical, psychological, spiritual, and economic health of the novel's characters.

Introduction

This thesis seeks to investigate how the novel represents the religious and occupational climate of mid-century Québec in terms of its impact on the physical, psychological, spiritual, and financial health of the characters in André Giroux's *Le Gouffre a toujours soif*, particularly the protagonist, Jean Sirois, and the prognosis of his cancer. As Sirois's body slowly deteriorates from lung cancer, his mind is consumed by work-related anxiety and internal religious conflict. These psychological effects, manifested physically through his cancer, are respectively highlighted by the protagonist's slow descent into delirium and the constant patronizing and enfeebling treatment he receives from others, who attempt to conceal their dismay at his condition. As we shall see, Giroux's style of impersonal realism underscores the bleak social conditions of life at the time and the isolating effects of these conditions on the provincial population, which parallels the forces that exacerbate the inevitably lethal cancer in the novel's main character.

Like many Québécois living during the 20th century, Sirois experiences a series of adversities, including degrading and exploitative conditions at work, financial insecurity due to being underpaid, and familial stress due to these economic woes. However, Sirois's core issue is his relationship with religion. He regularly condemns himself and others for their misuse of religious morals, but is so bedeviled by his fear of God and sin that he cannot understand the messages of his priest, who had long sought to help Sirois transform his relationship with God from an authoritarian rapport based on fear, to a more compassionate and loving connection. Sirois is unable to make this change this until he has a break from his own mind and from reality itself in the form of an intense delirium, after which he experiences a brief sense of loving peace from God before dying.

Although both Giroux and Sirois were Christians, Giroux was raised in a religious setting entirely different from that which the majority of Québécois experienced, learning to love God in a more unadulterated form, and with far less fear of sin than has been instilled in Jean Sirois.[1] Seeing as Sirois only overcame his religious guilt to achieve a loving relationship with God late in the book, Mado de L'Isle describes that process as representative of the fact that Québec's Catholic dogma was ineffective in fostering such a much-needed connection.[2] This dogma, however, had been influencing Catholic spirituality in Québec for centuries. Despite this spiritual, and as a result, social delay, Québec was undergoing rapid socioeconomic changes in the 20th century, as more and more rural Francophones moved to urban industrial centers. This migration strained the traditional practices of Catholicism that had previously dominated the community structure in which most Québécois had lived and worked, as secular ideas could be circulated in the city and the pressures in one's village to attend church were not as strong in more anonymous urban areas. Further, Francophones migrating to an urban center often did not find the type of upward socioeconomic mobility they had been seeking: Anglophones largely held the better-paid positions in industrial and commercial sectors, with such work being conducted largely in English, which posed major linguistic barriers for many Francophones.[3] As a result, Francophones working in both blue- and white-collar jobs often found themselves struggling financially.

The goal of this thesis is to understand how these difficult occupational and economic circumstances, coupled with inflexible religious mores, work to harm the physical,

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[1] L'Isle, Mado de. *André Giroux: l'écrivain, l'homme, le poète*. (Québec : Arion, 1994) 5.
[2] Ibid., 13
[3] Behiels, Michael. *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism versus Neo-nationalism, 1945-1960.* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985) 5.

psychological, and spiritual health of mid-20th century Québécois by proxy of the characters in *Le Gouffre a toujours soif*. My thesis will argue that, while both religious and work structures are unhealthy to the novel's characters, the socioeconomic degradation that the Sirois family experiences is unlikely to be overcome, because its cycle remains unbroken at the novel's conclusion: Jean Sirois, the protagonist, never has a chance to advance economically due to his father's death. This prevents him from finishing his engineering degree and forces him to remain subservient to those engineers who were licensed. Even though he has the same level of practical knowledge as they do, he will never be able to command the status nor the salary of an engineer. The cycle of such disempowerment continues upon Sirois's death when he leaves his son Claude without financial support at a much younger age than Sirois, himself had been, which would indicate that it is unlikely that Claude will ever be able to receive the formal vocational training that he would need in order to find a financially stable career. As such, Claude will likely be in an even more compromised socioeconomic position than Sirois. This is in contrast to Sirois's religious problems, which are characterized by self-degradation and guilt, and which are only briefly overcome near the end of his life when he finally allows himself to realize a loving relationship with God, no longer characterized by Sirois's fear of offending Him.

To accomplish the goal of critically examining the novel's position on the religious and occupational forces in mid-20th century Québec, my thesis shall be comprised of six main sections and a conclusion. In the first section, I will provide an overview of the political, social, economic, religious, and cultural histories of Québec leading up to the mid-20th century in an effort to show how these factors play out in Giroux's fictional novel. In the second section, I will examine Giroux's biography and critical literary receptions of his work based on a collection of materials that were published during his lifetime and in the decades following his death. This

biography will pay particular attention to Giroux's religious upbringing, which focused on cultivating a loving personal relationship with God rather than following ecclesiastical leadership. This belief system placed Giroux beyond the bounds of organized religion and caused him to contend with the powerful Catholic Church that influenced the world around him. Giroux's biography is also of particular interest on account of the parallels between his own life and that of his novel's protagonist, Sirois. Like Sirois, Giroux was forced to prematurely enter the workforce following the deaths of both his parents in his late teen years, taking on myriad bureaucratic roles in order to survive on his own. While his personal life is somewhat obscure, it will be examined in this section in as great a depth as is possible. A third section will provide a summary of the novel's plot to further contextualize my argument.

The three remaining sections will be divided thematically in order to asses the novel's portrayal and engagement with midcentury Québécois life. In section four, I will examine the occupational influences in *Le Gouffre a toujours soif*, focusing on how Jean Sirois's boss at work disempowers him while causing him enormous psychological strain. Although his coworkers are sympathetic and even friendly towards him, they fail to grasp the true nature of Sirois's problems, in large part because they have a higher socioeconomic standing than he does as licensed engineers. Additionally, this section will highlight the financial anxiety that adds to Sirois's sense of disempowerment as he cannot obtain a needed raise from his boss to support his family or save for retirement. Although he does stand up for himself by confronting his boss over his refusal to provide a well-deserved raise, this fails. In section five, the focus shall turn to religion, with an emphasis on Sirois's intrapersonal interactions as they pertain to his faith and his priest's efforts to help Sirois foster a loving relationship with God, which he is unable to do. It is not until Sirois experiences a dream-like break from reality and receives last rites from the

priest, Père Étienne, who absolves him from all sin, that he is finally able to embrace God in a loving way rather than cowering in fear at the thought of offending Him. In the final section, I will conclude the thesis by discussing the origins of the title of the novel and the epithet at the beginning of it, which are derived from a poem, "Horlage" [The Clock] written by the 19th-century French poet Charles Baudelaire.

Section I: A Socio-Cultural and Political Overview of Québec

From the founding of New France as a colony in 1534 until the early 20th century, Québec remained a rural, agricultural society, distinguished from the English-speaking colonies to the south and west by its Catholicism, French language, and culture. As was common in the early colonial era, France was primarily interested in extracting resources such as lumber and highly prized furs. To this end, the colony was run by the seigneurial system, where a powerful landlord, known as a seigneur, ruled massive swaths of territory granted by the French King. With the peasants having little to no political rights, nor real ownership of the land they worked, this system was essentially feudal.[4] Danielle Gauvreau uses the term "peasants" (translated from "paysan") in this context as it highlights the feudal nature of the relationship between the tenants (the peasant class, who worked the land) and paid tribute to the seigneur who owned the laned and who collected rent from it. The seigneur himself established towns and held court, which closely mirrored the powers historically held by feudal lords. Although only vestiges of feudalism remained in Europe by the dawn of the French Revolution in 1789, seigneurial structures lasted much longer in Québec and did not disappear until 1854. In Québec, the origin

[4] Gauvreau, Danielle, *Québec: Une Ville et sa Population au Temps de la Nouvelle-France* (Québec : Presses de l'Université de Québec, 1983) 5-7.

of this rather archaic practice was based on the French monarchy's desire to divide the colony quickly and efficiently, with little engagement needed from the Kingdom of France.[5] Because France was not interested in developing or investing in its colony, Québec relied on the Catholic Church for its social structures and cultural stability from the 17th century on. Local churches served as the town meeting place and financed the provincial education, social assistance, and healthcare programs.[6] As French and British competition for dominance in North America increased over the 17th century, France invested in a series of fortresses along the Saint Lawrence River, stretching all the way across the Great Lakes and down the Mississippi. However, neither these fortresses nor the alliances between the French and Indigenous peoples would be enough to protect the French colonies from British naval superiority. Conflict between the two empires in North America would culminate in the Seven Years' War, which raged between 1756-1763.[7]

France lost Québec to Britain in 1763, following France's defeat in the Seven Years' War, at which point Québec was cut off from its motherland and placed under the control of an invader. Britain sought to rapidly assimilate Francophones into British culture and institutions, implementing British civil law, promoting British migration, and establishing Anglican churches and Anglophone schools. Despite these efforts, few Anglophones sought to move to Québec, and Britain's project to assimilate the largely rural population grew increasingly unlikely. Britain eventually abandoned it, as unrest was growing in the thirteen colonies to the south. To avoid conflict on more frontiers, Britain made concessions by reinstating French civil law, thus

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[5] Andersson, P. "Seigneurial System of New France." Heritage Lower Saint Lawrence. 2021. Accessed February 8th, 2023. https://heritagelsl.ca/seigneurial-system-of-new-france/

[6] Gauvreau, Danielle. *Québec: Une Ville et sa Population au Temps de la Nouvelle-France.* (Québec : Presses de l'Université de Québec, 1983) 12.

[7] Dickinson, John, and Young, Brian. *A Short History of Quebec,* Second edition. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000) 48-50.

restoring the seigneurial system which had long-governed the colony.[8] With the Church and the Seigneurs placated, British merchants were able to gain increased access to Québec's lucrative fur trade, because the French character of Québec relied heavily on retaining institutions from French colonization, namely the Church, French civil law, and an economy rooted deeply in agriculture. As a result, Francophone Québécois retained independence in almost every sense of the word.[9]

British efforts to assimilate the colony gradually increased following the American Revolution. Large British companies soon used their extensive financial power to eliminate smaller Francophone merchants in the timber, fur-trading, and growing wheat production industries, financially supported by British capital. Rather than sociocultural domination, Québec's new proprietors aimed to overpower the colony using economic means. This created a sense of cultural insulation in rural Québec, allowing the retention of a fundamentally French cultural identity. In large part because of Francophone desertion of urban areas, Anglophones gained a robust foothold in Québec's cities and controlled the large majority of Québec's commercial power.[10]

Thus, while French rule had focused primarily on extracting products, such as lumber, fur, and fish, to sell in Europe, with low attachment to the colony and minimal permanent immigration to the province, the British aimed to govern more directly, with the goal of transforming the province into a member of the Anglosphere. Despite France's detached approach, the Québécois felt significantly more attached to the French, and bitter conflicts

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[8] Ibid., 52-55.
[9] Bothwell, Robert. *Canada and Quebec.* (Vancouver: UBC Press) 20.
[10] Trudeau, Pierre E. "La Nouvelle Trahison des Clercs." *Cité Libre* 46 (1962): 3-16.

emerged between the Québécois and the British. These were seen most publicly via extremely divisive newspapers advocating combative ideas as to how to handle the bi-ethnic province, with some arguing for Francophone cultural erasure and others seeking to encourage Québécois independence. As more and more Anglophones moved in, and Québécois autonomy grew increasingly uncertain, Francophones leaned further and further into the folds of the Church, which was one of the few remaining vestiges of Québec's French colonial era, to ensure the survival of their culture.

Despite the Church's association with Québécois cultural and political autonomy, the upper echelons of the Catholic Church's hierarchy had aligned interests with the British colonial government.[11] This alliance had begun as early as the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776, during which time the Church ordered all Catholic Québécois to support the British and to condemn the Revolution. Further political loyalties to the crown can be seen in the Church's efforts to forestall the Québécois Rebellion of 1837, even though they failed to prevent it altogether. The rebellion embodied a violent manifestation of the intense Francophone political and economic anxiety concerning their ability to survive as a people in a highly Anglophone-dominated colonial system. Thus, the first attempt to achieve independence gave rise to the robust separatist movement that lives on in Québec even today.[12] Britain, better described as Federal Canada after the 1840 Act of Union and 1867 Act of Confederation, furthered efforts to integrate Québec by creating a new central government, which, upon being established, dissolved the Québec colony into the Canadian Federation. This had the effect of strengthening a sense of nationalism in Québec with increased reliance on the Catholic Church as an upholder of

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[11] Dickinson, John, and Young, Brian. *A Short History of Quebec,* Second Edition. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000) 59-61.
[12] Griffin, Anne. *Quebec: The Challenge of Independence* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1984) 36-37.

a distinct cultural identity.[13] Despite the Church's support of the crown during the 19th century, Catholicism would play an increasingly central role in developing separatist and nationalist political ideologies due to its enormous sociocultural influence in the province. Here, it is important to make a slight distinction between separatism and nationalism: separatism has a nationalist basis but goes further than simply rallying around provincial spiritual and political leaders, insisting instead that Québec could not maintain a distinct identity unless it separated from the Canadian Federation to form a new nation.[14] Nationalism, on the other hand, focused on greater cultural independence and sociopolitical autonomy, with a strong sense of affiliation with the provincial government to uphold these principles. As a result of continuing efforts throughout the 19th and into the early 20th century from the Federal Canadian government to undermine the cultural and political autonomy of Québec, an anxiety that Québécois culture was on the brink of being overrun emerged and culminated around the time of the 1936 election of Maurice Duplessis and his party, the Union Nationale.

Meanwhile, industrialization was transforming the economy across all of Canada, which led to an influx of rural migrants leaving pastoral, agricultural work behind in favor of jobs in the industrial economy. As a result, Francophones, who had historically been a minority in Montréal, came to constitute the majority of its population as early as 1875, demonstrating the creation of a new French-speaking "industrial proletariat."[15] The percentage of all Québécois men working in agriculture can demonstrate the scale of the population shift from rural to urban settings: in 1901, 44% of all men living in Québec in worked in agriculture; in 1941, 27%, and in 1951, just 17%.[16]

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[13] Ibid., 37-38
[14] Ibid., 30
[15] Bothwell, Robert. *Canada and Quebec.* (Vancouver: UBC Press) 20.
[16] This total includes the Québécois Anglophones who were seldom involved with farming.

As Québec slowly began to urbanize, a literary genre known as the *roman du terroir* (rural novel) emerged around 1860 and reached the heights of its popularity between 1916-1939.[17] The authors of these works exalted the rural, agricultural, religious, and pious lifestyle that had long been the predominant way of life in Québec, with the goal of reducing urban industrial migration as well as reflecting a yearning for the days of French colonization, prior to the experiences of Anglophone political and economic domination. The years surrounding the emergence of the *roman du terroir* saw a sharp rise in agricultural production, but the most profound impacts on the province were seen in the rise of urban manufacturing: in 1851, the value of Québécois manufactured goods was around $600,000, ballooning to $15,000,000 just ten years later, in 1861, then expanding to $104,660,000 in 1881.[18] This urban growth worried Québécois Church and state leaders, who feared that the mass emigration from the countryside could lead to the destruction of a pious people by the sinful influences of modernity.[19] This religious and political reaction to industrialization only served to increase the popularity of the *roman du terroir*, as it was believed that such novels, in emphasizing piety, morality, and the value of a traditional village life, could help to mitigate the effects of urbanization. Despite these novels' decreasing representativeness of contemporary Québécois life, they were popular among both religious and conservative readers, providing a literary basis for the nationalist movement.

The genre continued to grow long after the province became an industrialized society, one that was economically integrated into Anglophone North America.[20] Despite the popular

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[17] Perron, Paul. *Narratology and Text: Subjectivity and Identity in New France and Québécois Literature.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 152-153.
[18] Dickinson, John, and Young, Bryan. *A Short History of Quebec.* Second Edition. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000) 107-108.
[19] Bothwell, Robert. *Canada and Quebec.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995) 36-37
[20] Dickinson, John, and Young, Bryan. *A Short History of Quebec.* Second Edition. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000) 267-268.

appeal of the pious and pastoral *roman du terroir*, the Catholic Church was also seeing a decline in its ability to furnish social services due to the increasing urbanization of the population.[21] This was largely due to the fact that the Church, at the administrative level, still aimed to paint a romantic picture of idyllic countryside life, as had been done in the *roman du terroir* genre.

The progressive urbanization of Québec thus created a schism within the Church, since the high clergy in the Church administration clung to this historic ideal, while the lower clergy, who sought to provide social assistance on the ground, were overwhelmed and often grew disillusioned with their leaders. Further alienating the higher and lower factions of the church was the fact that the Church's administration began to accept financial support from the Québécois government, a move which, as a whole, the Church had historically resisted, yet which ultimately brought the high clergy and provincial leaders closer together.[22] Such a relationship would become particularly important in the conservative government of early-to mid-20th-century Québec.

This government, aligned with and heavily influenced by anglophone financial interests and the high clergy of the Church, rose to power under the premiership of Maurice Duplessis from 1936-39 and 1944-59. His political platform was comprised three main elements: supporting rural and agricultural development; maintaining the traditional role of the Catholic Church in society and in social services; and minimizing the influence of the Canadian Federal Government through anticommunist policies that led to less taxation and regulation, and to labor policies which favored business development at the expense of workers. His advocacy of political autonomy, religious values and institutions, and support for rural areas gave the

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[21] Handler, Richard. *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) 84-85.
[22] Ibid., 86.

impression that Duplessis would be a protector of provincial culture and historic agricultural life.[23] Duplessis's autocratic political style helped the provincial government consolidate power via resistance to the Anglophone federal government, providing him increased political control by rejecting many of their domestic policies. [24] In the sociocultural domain, Duplessis pushed back against federal education reform and created the Tremblay Commission, designed to be responsible for cultural preservation efforts as well as to counter the Federal Canadian government's formation of the Massey Commission, which had similar objectives as the Tremblay Commission, but aimed to protect the culture of all Canadian regions.

However, Duplessis's goal of consolidating power by rejecting federal influence also had a directly harmful effect on the Québécois population. He rejected federal efforts in 1945 to sponsor one-fifth of all provincial public works projects, to establish pensions for all citizens over age seventy, and to provide a public health insurance plan as well as allocate money for public health projects and hospital construction undertaken by the provinces, all of which would be funded by a federal takeover of income, corporate, and estate taxes.[25] The result of this federal project would have been the expansion and centralization of social services, which were administered by the Church and were quite meager, guided by a philosophy that the family should largely care for its own.[26] Duplessis's rejection of federal support stemmed from the fear that accepting federal dollars would mean accepting greater federal control, and a loss of his influence over the Church, which had come to depend on Duplessis's government to support its social works. [27] This willing self-destruction, done to maintain political power, was only the

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[23] Black, Conrad. *Duplessis.* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977) 335-337.
[24] Ibid., 474.
[25] Behiels, Michael. *Prelud to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism Versus Neo-Nationalism, 1945-1980.* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985) 187-190.
[26] Coleman, William. *The Independence Movement in Quebec 1945-1980.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) 48.
[27] Handler, Richard. *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) 83.

beginning of the Duplessis regime, the policies and vales of which would go on to drive Québec into a dark and difficult period known as *La Grande Noirceur* (Great Darkness; 1936-1939; 1944-1959).

In addition to resisting federal financial support for the Québécois population, Duplessis worked to disempower unions that backed many of the province's Francophone workers. This was motivated by Duplessis's collaboration with the Anglophone business elite in the large provincial cities: Montréal, Québec City, and Trois-Rivières. Wealthy Anglophones provided Duplessis with campaign funding in exchange for political favors, particularly his opposition and outright prohibition of unions unaffiliated with the Catholic Church. As his first term came to a close, Duplessis further repressed workers' unions with two new laws: the Act Respecting Workmen's Wages and the Fair Wage Act. These acts, both passed in 1937, allowed the government to intervene in collective bargaining between unions and employers, as well as undermine the rights of workers to choose their unions, giving his administration greater control over an increasingly marginalized workforce.[28] His motivations for undermining the labor rights of his own constituents were to attract American and English-Canadian companies. One of the starkest examples of Duplessis's determination to control workers came in his violent response to the 1949 strike staged by asbestos mine workers, who demanded better protections for miners' health, pensions, a few days of paid leave, and a wage of at least one dollar per hour.[29] Duplessis quickly declared the strike to be illegal and sent police to break it up. When this did not work, the police teargassed and arrested many of the strikers, who ultimately gained little, while many lost their jobs.

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[28] Dirks, Patricia, *Failure of L'Action Libérale Nationale.* (Montréal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991) 39.
[29] Marsh, James, "Asbestos Strike: Turning Point in Quebec History," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia,* 2012

Duplessis's mistreatment of workers and the effects of his harsh labor policies were mostly felt in cities. However, the rural population also suffered from Duplessis's alliance with wealthy businesses. Amid an effort to provide electricity to rural areas—which in and of itself was an effort to keep the Québécois on farmlands and away from the city—new customers were shocked to be charged exorbitant rates by private companies favored by Duplessis. This highlights the level of corruption that was prevalent throughout his administration, undermining the socioeconomic wellbeing of Québécois all across the province, while benefitting the wealthy Anglophone businessmen to whom he catered his policies.[30]

Fortunately for workers and their unions, religious minorities, socialists, communists, and anyone else who resisted Duplessis, his conservative nationalist party's long reign would come to an end not long after his death in 1959, which was followed by the subsequent victory of the Liberal Party in 1960. This election was the birth of a massive sociopolitical change: La Révolution Tranquille (The Quiet Revolution). The new liberal government enacted a sweeping set of reforms, quickly reversing the anti-federalist stance to receive Ottawa's financial support for these changes. One of the most contentious debates leading up to the Quiet Revolution surrounded educational reforms, which largely revolved around the question of secularization. The Church's financial vulnerability had been bandaged by patronage from Duplessis, but with federal support, schools and universities were able to expand their offerings to many more Québécois, providing secular training to the local population in fields such as engineering and business in order to compete in Anglophone-dominated sectors.[31] Slowly, Québec further integrated into the social and economic milieu of North America, though this was by no means a

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[30] Dirks, Patricia, *Failure of L'Action Libérale Nationale.* (Montréal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991) 39.

[31] Behiels, Michael. *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism Versus Neo-Nationalism, 1945-1960* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 170-172.

linear process. Soon after the Quiet Revolution, the strongest separatist movement seen to date emerged with the election of le Parti Québécois in 1976, which led to an unsuccessful independence referendum in 1980, with another referendum held under a new government in 1995, which also failed.[32]

On a larger scale, Canadian politics slowly embraced the idea of a multicultural and bilingual Canada, including Anglophones, Francophones, and First Nations, which has allowed for more positive relations between Québec and the rest of Canada. However, separatist sentiments linger, waxing and waning as Québec continues to navigate the preservation of its culture in a socio-politically and economically evolving world. While the province has generally had stable relations with Canada, the future between the two governments remains uncertain. between the two remain uncertain.[33] Reforms like the restoration of the welfare state, also supported by the Federal Canadian Government, were not merely the whims of the new provincial government: many Francophone intellectuals and laypeople alike had sought them for years.

In the decades leading up to the Quiet Revolution, beginning with the rise of the urbanization movement in the 1920s, artists and intellectuals throughout the province became increasingly aware of the degree to which Québec was lagging behind Anglophone Canadian provinces and the Western World more generally, a sense of inferiority that would only be exacerbated by the regressive politics of Duplessis.[34] Maurice Arguin contends that this strong sense of provincial inferiority inspired a profound shift, from the almost pastoral, pseudo-

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[32] Bothwell, Robert. *Canada and Quebec.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995) 165-166

[33]Ibid., 236-237

[34] Roberts, Julie. "A Nation's Ills: Medico-National Allegory in Québec". (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2009), 207-208.

nationalist literary representations of Québec seen in the *romans du terroir,* to a new type of novel. These narratives depart from an ideal representation of rural Québec and enter the new, industrial cities which are riddled with socioeconomic, religious, and health problems. Unlike the *roman du terroir*, these novels have no specific genre named, being described as "romans des mœurs urbaines" [novels of urban mores] by Maurice Arguin, "medico-national allegory" by Julie Robert, or even part of a broader "morbid world" by Jane Moss.[35] This thesis will use the term morbid literature, similar to what is described by Moss, as it is concise and befitting of the period's literary works. Despite the lack of a widely accepted generic name, the novels are universally characterized by plots involving sickness and death, thus undermining the view that Québec was the best province with the most well-formed institutions.[36] These works became a popular genre during the 1940s through the 1970s and were typically, but not always, set in an urban atmosphere, in contrast to the rural settings of the *romans du terroir*. The urban setting itself, which became more normative as the genre matured, makes these novels more representative of the life of 20th-century Québécois, who had long-since been mostly urbanized as was earlier established. Here, it is noteworthy that Arguin's title describes "symptômes du colonialisme" [symptoms of colonialism], indicating a primary source for many of the illnesses depicted in morbid literature was the effects of English colonization. Both Moss and Arguin explain that the 1944 publication of *Au pied de la pente douce* (At the foot of the gentle hill) by Roger Lemlin demarcates the beginning of the era of morbid literature. This novel is filled with depictions of physical and psychological maladies: alcoholism, measles, infant mortality,

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[35]Arguin, Maurice. "Le roman québécois de 1944 à 1965 : symptômes du colonialisme et signes de libération". (Québec : Centre de recherche en littérature québécoise, Université Laval) 23-24 ; Roberts, Julie. "A Nation's Ills: Medico-National Allegory in Québec". (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2009), 4; Jane Moss, "The morbid world of the Quebec novel," Literature and Medicine 3, (1984): 152-154.

[36] Arguin, Maurice. "Le roman québécois de 1944 à 1965 : symptômes du colonialisme et signes de libération". (Québec : Centre de recherche en littérature québécoise, Université Laval) 123.

scrofula, and even a cult organized around an allegedly saintly man who died from tuberculosis and malnutrition. In this novel, two deaths separate its two-part structure: the first being of that of Gaston Boucher, who struggles with physical deformity and psychological problems related to dependency, which emerge from his mother's overcontrol of him. This results in a nervous attack which then becomes a heart attack after more familial problems arise. In the second part of the novel, the knee infection of Jean Colin turns fatal when his mother bathes it in coal oil rather than the alcohol prescribed by a physician. While there are clear psychological undertones to both Gaston and Colin's death, these illnesses could largely be considered elements of realism, reflective of working-class urban poverty. A second early novel by Gabrielle Roy was published a year later in 1945, *Bonheur d'occasion* [Secondhand Happiness], which is similarly concerned with the problems of the urban poor: lack of nutrition and physical emaciation, chronic colds, and a child with leukemia which is linked to an insufficient diet and apathy. The latter cause, apathy, plays a key role, as Susan Sontag's essay, *Illness as a Metaphor*, argues that cancer was often attributed to psychological causes rather than physiological ones by physicians of the 19th and 20th centuries, who understood little about its origins, such as the physician who diagnosed the leukemia in Roy's novel. Theories about the causes of cancer, which pervaded popular culture at the time, were largely derived from ideas about the mind or spirit. It was believed that chronic feelings of anger, prolonged grief and bereavement, and depression could allow a disease such as cancer to take root and slowly fester.[37] Sontag's arguments become increasingly relevant to the morbid literature genre, as cancer is frequently employed as a trope.

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[37] Sontag, Susan. "Illness as a Metaphor." (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 51-57.

The novel of interest to this thesis, André Giroux's *Le Gouffre a toujours soif* (1953) is remarkably similar to one of Roy's other novels, *Alexandre Chenevert* (1954), in its depiction of the religious and the occupational lives of Québécois men.[38] Like Roy's protagonist, Chenevert, Giroux's protagonist, Jean Sirois, cannot overcome the problems of his white-collar job. Although the novel does not feature the same level of urban poverty characteristic of earlier novels within morbid literature, Sirois is by no means financially secure as he struggles to provide for his family. He cannot obtain a raise, he is overworked, and he is forced to contend with and exploitative working environment. Further, his own puritanical beliefs about his Catholic faith prevent him from fostering a truly healthy relationship with God, whom he fearfully aims to please, instead it is not until the end of his life that he finds a truly compassionate connection with God while in a dream, freeing him from his spiritual woes. However, he does not enjoy this revelation for long and soon dies, leaving his family in even more unfortunate economic circumstances than he, himself knew when his own parents died in his youth.

After the Quiet Revolution of 1960, morbid literature persists and continues to explore cancer as a symptom of psychological problems in novels like in Monique Bosco's 1977 *Charles Lévy, m.d.,* in which the protagonist himself is a physician suffering from terminal lung cancer, struggling with his issues with faith (this time in a Jewish context) and eventually finding peace as a result of an experience near death, which Charles Lévy believes to deliver him from his

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[38] Again, Roy employs cancer in her 1954 novel Alexandre Chenevert, this time much more in line with Sontag's characterization of the metaphoric use of the condition. Particularly present the notion of emotional and sexual repression in the protagonist, Alexandre Chenevert, whose diagnosis of prostate cancer is unsurprising given his emotional isolation from his wife, Eugénie, and his attempts to repress his sexual desires due to his rigid Catholic upbringing. He is so inhibited that he cannot even write a letter to Eugénie expressing his desires to revitalize their relationship, nor is he willing to follow his physician's advice to seek a less tedious job.

spiritual strife. However, Moss finds that morbid literature following the Quiet Revolution often takes on a new flavor, more explicit and extreme in nature.[39] Such is the case in Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's 1971 novel *Les Grands-Pères,* in which the protagonist experiences images of dead children, drowned kittens, slaughtered and castrated animals, and deformed women and children. His hallucinations grow more poignant as he envisions plague, tumors, leprosy, blood, and even excrement spreading across Québec, which Moss argues symbolizes the death of an old way of life—the pastoral ways idealized by the *roman du terroir*—as animals, rivers, houses, and the whole countryside decay. Roch Carrier's *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* (1968) provides a similarly reactionary backlash against the social conditions of the mid-20th century: one man cuts off his fingers to avoid conscription into WWII, while the conscripts who ultimately go off to fight the war for the loathed English return in a coffin or are so dehumanized by their English-Canadian commanders that they vent their rage upon their fellow townspeople. These extreme reactions are absent in the resignation and despair characteristic of earlier morbid literature, particularly that seen in *Le Gouffre a toujours soif,* which demonstrates a less direct critique of the Catholic faith. Here, the priest, Père Étienne, serves as an aide to Sirois's spiritual redemption, though his inferior economic position ensures that Sirois and his family will never be free of the hardships associated with the working class in 20th-century Québec.

[39] Jane Moss, "The morbid world of the Quebec novel," Literature and Medicine 3, (1984): 157-164

Section II: The Life of André Giroux

André Giroux, the author of *Le Gouffre a toujours soif*, was born December 10th, 1916, in Québec City, Québec, to Théophile Giroux and Héloïse De Villers, who was French by birth. He was born second, after his older brother Gaston, followed by sisters Suzanne and Marcelle. Giroux attended l'École Saint-François-d'Assise for primary school, then completed middle school at Saint-Sacré-Coeur-de-Marie. Pursuing secondary education at l'Àcadémie de Québec, Giroux was described as "intelligent, brilliant même, portant déjà en lui la promesse de belles réalisations, prêt à lutter pour la meilleur" [Intelligent, brilliant even, already possessing promise for beautiful achievements, ready to strive for the better].[40] Clearly, Giroux had much potential to be a great writer from a young age. This could be partly influenced by his father's obsessive love for books, which filled an entire floor of the three-story family home. According to Mado de L'Isle, Giroux's religious upbringing was "façonnés à la meilleure école, celle de la famille…ou la primauté de spirituel était reconnu. Dans ce foyer, il apprend à aimer Dieu, la verité…le courage, la primauté du spirituel…il apprend à aimer Dieu." [shaped by the best school, that of his family…where the primacy of spirituality was recognized…he learned to love God, the truth…courage].[41]

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[40] L'Isle, Mado de. *André Giroux: l'Écrivain, l'Homme, le Poète*. (Québec : Arion, 1994) 4-5.
[41] Giroux, Yvette, *Bibliographie analytique d'André Giroux*., quoted in L'Isle, Mado de. *André Giroux: l'Écrivain, l'Homme, le Poète*. (Québec : Arion, 1994) 6.

Although his parents had raised him to have a compassionate outlook, their influence would be cut short and his life forever changed when they died less than two years apart, leaving him and his siblings without parents nor enough money to live. As a result of this tragedy and dramatic change in his family's financial situation, the 18-year-old Giroux was unable to pursue post-secondary studies. Instead, he had to work in the bureaucracy of Québec to have a stable, if intellectually unstimulating career to support himself and his siblings. His government work began as a bookkeeper for the Québec Provincial Secretariat between 1936-1938, working for the same office as a secretary between 1938-1940. Subsequently, he served as an undersecretary in the years 1940-1944. From 1944-1945, he held a brief post as a teacher of French literature at the Académie de Québec and even taught courses at l'Université Laval. He then became a publicist at the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, from 1945-1959. In 1946, Giroux married Rachel Turgeon, with whom he had daughter, Renée, who would be his only child. Between 1959-1963, Giroux was a secretary to the minister of Trade and Commerce. From 1963-1966, he was the Director of Information and Education counsel in the General Delegation from Québec. During the years 1966-1969, he was the General Director of Cultural Dissemination at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Finally, he was appointed as Special Deputy to the Honorable Jean Marchand from 1971-1976.

His true passion, however, was his literary career, which started in 1936 with a newspaper commenting on French-Canadian affairs named *Le Travailleur* (The Worker), where he worked until 1938.[42] While writing as a journalist, he concealed his identity using the pseudonym René de Villers, using the masculine variance of the first name which would be given to his future daughter, Renée, accompanied by his mother's maiden name "de Villers."

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[42] L'Isle, Mado de. *André Giroux: l'Écrivain, l'Homme, le Poète*. (Québec : Arion, 1994) 7

The use of his pseudonym was likely, at least in part, due to the fact that he worked for the provincial government run by Duplessis, whose regime would pass the 1937 Padlock Act, which suppressed dissenting journals and any other written material among other infringements on civil liberty infringements on Québécois.[43] With Giroux's identity safely concealed, he wrote articles commenting on the current affairs of Québec, which were in turn disseminated to the Francophone diaspora in New England (*Le Travailleur* was based in Massachusetts). He moved on to become an editor and contributor for the literary review *Le Jeudi* (The Thursday), which was circulated primarily in Québec, using the same pseudonym from 1938-40. During this time, *Le Jeudi* applauded him for his "sincerity, faithfulness, creative giftedness, language, and profound thought."[44] His later involvement in journals was much more varied, though he was particularly involved with *Amérique Française* (French America) and *La Revue Dominicaine,* (The Dominican Review) which were based in Québec and which covered current cultural and sociopolitical affairs. In 1940, he co-founded the newspaper *Regards* (Looks), a journal which covered topics ranging from philosophy to natural science to arts and letters.[45] Rachel, Giroux's wife, describes the years after 1940 as a source of happiness to him but also as being extremely labor-intensive because he worked to start the magazine as well as continuing with a full-time job in the government. For his work on this journal, he was applauded as creative, profound, and able to connect with and inspire young people. As Mado de L'Isle describes, it was: "une aventure merveilleuse [qui] correspond chez lui à un besoin de dire librement ce qu'il pense" [a marvelous adventure which met his need to freely speak his mind].[46]

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[43] Clément, Dominique. "1937 Padlock Act." *Canada's Human Rights History.*

[44] "sincérité, la même foi, les même dons d'imagination…de langue et pensée profonde." L'Isle, Mado de. *André Giroux: l'écrivain, l'homme, le poète*. (Québec : Arion, 1994) 7.

[45] Ibid., 8.

[46] Ibid., 9

Having established a robust career in journalism, Giroux would embark on a literary career, publishing *Au-Delà des Visages* [Beyond the Faces] in 1948, whose protagonist Jacques Langlet is a devoted worker as well as a devout man, similar to his protagonist in *Le Gouffre a toujours soif*. In Langlet's story, his fear of sin in the moralistic milieu of the Québécois society surrounding him is both socially and sexually debilitating. Ashamed and unable to connect with others, Langlet hires a prostitute, only to later kill her in an attempt to ease his crushing shame. By proxy of this murder, Langlet ruinously tarnishes his Christian soul, which is ironically what he had been trying to protect by eliminating the sinful desires he experienced with the prostitute. However, Langlet is also the victim of his environment, locked into the fearful, moralistic view of religion that pervaded much of Québécois society. Langlet's rigid visage, perhaps better described as a mask, belies the emptiness of the province's supposed values.[47] Giroux's novel, a critical work on the isolating nature of Québécois society, was awarded the *Montyon de Académie française*, a prestigious award from the French Academy, as well as the *David de la Province de Québec* award. A writer for his own journal describes Giroux's novel as "a new take on a drama as old as time and very realistic; the dual between the curiosity of the flesh and the thirst for spiritual integrity…His characters revolt using the flesh. The culpability is tied to a moralistic religion".[48]

This psychological novel and the associated awards would be instrumental in Giroux's receipt of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation of New York in 1952. This provided financial support which allowed him more time to work on crafting *Le Gouffre a*

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[47] Lessard, Jean-Louis, "André Giroux, Au-delà des visages, Montréal, Variétés, 1948, 173 pages," Laurentiana. March 27, 2007.
[48] "une scène nouvelle d'une drame vieux comme le monde et actuel comme la vie; le duel entre la curiosité de la chair et la soif d'intégrité de l'esprit…la révolte de ses personnages est surtout charnelle. La culpabilité est liée a une religion moralisatrice;" Lockquell, Clément. "André Giroux, romancier spiritualiste." *Revue Dominicaine* 54, no. 2 (1948) : 153

toujours soif, which would be published the following year in 1953. The novel centers around the slow death by a lung cancer of a loyal employee at an engineering firm, Jean Sirois. Sirois obsesses over work and his finances, but he is most intensely bedeviled by a conflict between his desire to be a good Christian person and the narrow, rigid definition of a good Christian in midcentury Québec. Being consumed with the need to be a good father and provider for his family, he refuses to take leave from work until he faints there multiple times. This can be explained by the results of a medical exam Sirois had recently undergone: the physician tells Sirois's wife that he has lung cancer and the two agree to conceal the severe disease from Sirois, who sees beyond their calm visages and knows he that is gravely ill (as mentioned previously, such withholding of a cancer diagnosis was common practice at the time because patients were seen as unable to bear the emotional impact of such knowledge). Various members of Sirois's family and coworkers visit throughout the book, most of whom also know about his diagnosis and pretend to be optimistic. However, Sirois is unconvinced by them, frustrated by their treatment of him as a child. One notable exception is Père Étienne, who recognizes that Sirois's fear, and therefore lack of love, for God is due to his intense fear of sinning. Sirois finally achieves an apprehension of God as a loving and compassionate being while in a state of semi-delirium, after which he dies a somewhat peaceful death.

Although *Le Gouffre a toujours soif* was received well by critics and has been described in Giroux's biography as "more moving than *Au-delà des visages*," it nonetheless attracted far less attention and praise than his first novel, *Au-delà des visages,* which won him two awards as well as the Guggenheim Fellowship.[49] The journals that reviewed the book, which were often among those he had written for, praised Giroux's realistic description of Sirois's struggles with

[49] « plus emouvant qu*'Au-delà des visages*. » ." L'Isle, Mado de. *André Giroux: l'écrivain, l'homme, le poète*. (Québec : Arion, 1994) 12.

religion as well as his strong emotional attachments to his son Claude.[50] Other reviews, specifically that of Jean-Paul Plante, emphasize the importance of Sirois's relationship with work and particularly with his boss, Poirier, whose desire for power mixed with pettiness and stinginess cause him to resent Sirois following the latter's request for a raise, threatening Sirois with forced retirement if he misses any more work due to illness. Thus, Sirois cannot do anything but continue working until he collapses, losing further control over his life due to pressure from his boss.[51]

Following the publication of *Le Gouffre a toujours soif*, Giroux resumed his government positions, serving as a secretary, publicist, Director of Information, and Director of Cultural Dissemination at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs between 1953 and 1976. While continuing to toil within the government to support his family, Giroux also continued work on his creative projects, writing for a television show called *14 Rue de Galais*, between 1954 and 1957. This show, written about a disconnected Montréalais bourgeois family, has many similarities to *Le Gouffre a toujours soif*.[52]

One year after the conclusion of *14, Rue de Galais*, in 1958, Giroux was inducted into the Royal Society of Canada. His final creative work was a novel entitled *Malgré tout, la Joie* in 1959, for which he would win the Governor General's Award for French Canadian literature. He would produce no more creative works in the decades that followed, however. In 1977, Giroux died in an automobile accident at the age of sixty.

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[50] Ibid., 13 ; Geneviève de la Tour Fondue, "André Giroux," *Lectures* (April 1954) : 339-340.
[51] Jean-Paul Plante, «La thème de la mesquinerie dans l'ouvre d'André Giroux. » *Revue de l'Université d'Ottowa* 32 (1962) : 417.
[52] Like Giroux's novel, his television series features an aloof Dr. Michaud who appears largely unconcerned for his patient. Both doctors discuss the terminal illnesses with the family, but not the patients, which has an effect of isolating them from their families. Despite this, the protagonists' sisters are the most emotionally involved yet pity their respective brothers in such frail conditions. Both are visited by work colleagues, who, despite their good intentions, stress the protagonists who very much wish to return to work. Finally, there is mention of the priest, Père Étienne, in the show but he is not seen directly in the episode; "14 Rue de Galais Téléroman de André Giroux (1954 à 1957)," YouTube video, 3:19-22:53, posted by "Raymond Tremblay"

Section III: Summary of *Le Gouffre a toujours soif*

Giroux's 1953 novel is prominently characterized by realism, drawing inspiration from the life of middle-class Québécois, particularly his personal experience, which critics like Geneviève de la Tour Fondue argue are hallmarks of his work.[53] Giroux's experiences are translated into *Le Gouffre a toujours soif* by the novel's protagonist, Jean Sirois. Like Giroux, Sirois's parents died when he was about twenty, which prevented both men from obtaining a university degree. While Giroux entered the provincial government, Sirois found employment at an engineering firm. Both had one child, a boy named Claude in the novel, who is the subject of Sirois's admiration. Though he loves Claude, Sirois struggles to support his family due to his low wage. The novel begins with Sirois discussing the possibility of a raise with his boss, Poirier, who dismisses Sirois. While he is initially angry, Sirois is silenced by the fact that he has no leverage with which he can negotiate a raise: he is not a licensed engineer and thus is not viewed as employable by most firms. Though his engineering plans are of sufficient quality such that his coworkers sign them without bothering to examine them, Sirois will never have equal status to them as better-compensated, fully-licensed engineers. This sense of occupational inferiority is exacerbated by the financial problems caused by Sirois's low wages, which pervade his life at home. Despite these socioeconomic problems, a much greater threat lies within him: lung cancer, believed to be caused by smoking forty cigarettes per day as well as the psychological issues which plague Sirois. Physicians and laypeople of the mid-twentieth century

[53] Geneviève de la Tour Fondue, "André Giroux," *Lectures* (April 1954) : 337-338.

emphasized inner mental processes as the basis of cancer as the biological causes for the illness were unclear.[54] This dynamic is cemented into the plotline as Sirois feels increasingly alienated and infantilized by those around him, who create what Sirois perceives to be a game, or a play, around him to deny the severity of his illness. Throughout his prognosis, he is visited by key figures from his occupational, spiritual, and personal lives. A few days after Sirois's meeting with his boss, he faints at work and is taken home by his well-meaning coworker Ruelland. Sirois refuses to take sick leave, fearing a forced retirement which he cannot afford. He returns to work a few days later, arriving before anyone else, and faints again. After this point Ruelland brings him home again and while he maintains the goal of returning to the office, he makes no more plans to do so. At this point, the timeline of and between events has become blurred by unnamed chapters and no direct references to the passage of time or even the time of day. As Sirois becomes more ill, the novel's sense of time becomes increasingly uncertain to the point where it is unknowable if a few moments or a few days pass between chapters.

His dogmatic Catholic principles deprive him of inner peace as he polices his actions and even his thoughts. Unable to turn to God as a source of comfort, Sirois is often visited by the Père Étienne, who demonstrates a more intimate and positive relationship with God. Sirois finally achieves such a relationship during a near-death experience, in which he flees from a group of doomed pilgrims who pray to a giant cross which threatens to crush them. His physical life is temporarily saved by his physician's administration of a steroid shot. Sirois awakens as an almost entirely different person, transformed by his religious experience. Because of his new connection to God, he no longer fears losing his earthly life and dies at peace a short while later. While the spiritual conflict of the novel is resolved, Sirois's wife and Claude are left in an even

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[54] Sontag, Susan. *Illness as a metaphor*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1978) 38-42.

more difficult predicament than the one faced by Sirois in his youth, when the death of his parents forced him to drop out of school. Given Sirois's early death, it is unlikely that Claude will ever be able to pursue the higher education necessary to obtain a well-paid and respectable position, and thus the cycle of oppression that killed Sirois is likely to continue.

Section IV: Power Dynamics at Work

The difficult predicament faced by the Sirois family is similar to that of many Francophone Québécois. As industrialization expanded in the early 20th century, more Québécois moved to cities to seek gainful opportunity. Instead, they often found themselves in menial jobs, struggling to make ends meet while the unequal wealth and higher status of most Anglophones became obvious in an urban environment, a trend that was prominent during the midcentury as well, the time of the novel's writing. Despite the booming postwar economy, Francophone Québécois reaped few of the economic benefits, and many high-status jobs were conducted exclusively in English, effectively shutting out many Francophones. This is similar to Sirois's own experience in the labor market, where, as the narrator describes:

> …il n'avait pas le droit de signer ses plans [parce qu'il ne détenait pas le titre d'ingénieur]. La mort de son père l'avait forcé à abandonner Polytechnique, en première année…Quand sa mère mourut, il avait vingt-huit ans. Il se trouvait trop vieux pour retourner à l'université…Trois ingénieurs, en ville, lui confient la préparation des plans. Au début, ils examinaient soigneusement ses travaux avant d'y apposer leur signature. Aujourd'hui, ils signent les yeux fermés. Mais cette signature, qui n'a l'air de rien, les autorise a garder presque tous les honoraires… Sirois serait capable de passer les examens, depuis le temps qu'il travaille…Mais il n'est pas admissible aux examens parce qu'il n'a pas suivi le cours régulier. (Giroux, 74-75)
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> [because he did not hold the title of an engineer, he could not sign off on his own plans. His father's death had forced him to drop out of first-year studies at a polytechnic

> institute…when his mother died, he was twenty-eight and considered himself too old to return to university studies…Three engineers, in the city, allowed him to prepare engineering plans. Initially, they checked his work carefully before providing their signature. These days, they signed without even looking at Sirois's plans. But this signature, which seemed so insignificant, allowed the engineers to keep almost all fees…Sirois would have been able to pass these exams since the time he started working. However, he would not be able to take these exams as he had not taken the normal courses].

This statement reflects how, even when a Francophone had the merit for a role, systemic circumstances, like the challenges associated with attending university, would keep them from earning what they were worth. Sirois would always have to work for someone else, who could keep as much of the earnings from Sirois's own work as they wished because they, as a formally recognized engineer, held the power to affirm or deny his work, leaving him, like many Québécois, disempowered and without recourse in the face of formalized and inflexible hierarchies.

Like Duplessis, Francophones who rose to positions of prominence often enjoyed considerable wealth. However, this power was often jealously guarded and those who wielded it often used religion to justify that they were still good people, despite their unchristian treatment of those they employed. This phenomenon is reflected in the character of Sirois's boss, Poirier, who sees himself almost in a Godly position as the boss of the engineering firm. His feelings of omnipotence in the workplace naturally come in the form of economic control by means of wages. He believes that: "une telle augmentation ne relève pas d'un droit; c'est un cadeau de supérieur à inférieur. Or, personne n'a droit strict a un cadeau. Donc, aucune injustice à le

refuser" (Giroux, 29), [a raise is not a right; it is a gift given by a superior to his inferior. Nobody has the right to a gift. Therefore, no injustice was done on Poirier's part]. However, he had previously expressed to Sirois that Poirier denies such a raise to Sirois because of his previous absence, not because of his petty belief that a raise was a so-called gift (without this raise, Sirois's family will continue to experience economic hardship despite his hardworking nature). To maintain a visage of fairness, Poirier explains that, because Sirois was "malade deux mois, il ne serait pas juste pour vos compagnons au bureau" (Giroux, 26), [sick for two months, it would not be fair to Sirois's coworkers]. This raises the question of whether Poirier is just in punishing Sirois for his sickness, which Poirier would have us believe. Jane Moss describes such blaming of the cancer patient for their own disease as reflective of the Jansenist influence on Québécois Catholicism, which focuses on the sinful nature of humans. Despite his irreligious actions, Poirier grapples with a sense of sinful guilt as well, which is seen when Sirois, a far better moral authority, denounces Poirier's hiding his actions behind an appearance of spiritual morality. Sirois goes as far as to say to Poirer: "C'est ça! Utilisez l'Evangelique pour masquer vos injustices!" (Giroux, 27) [That's it! Use the Gospel to mask your unjust actions!] Following Sirois's assertation, Poirier soothes his moral ego by demonstrating to himself that he is not unkind and ungenerous financially, even if he behaves in such a manner towards his employees. He tells his subordinate Castonguay: "Vous me ferez penser aussi d'envoyer un chèque aux petits soeurs franciscaines"(Giroux, 28) [you will remind me to send a check to the Little Franciscan Sisters], a religious organization. These characterizations of Poirier demonstrate that even the highest authority in the book is still plagued with religious guilt, unable to see clearly the most reasonable and compassionate action in accordance with their faith. This commitment to appearances is further demonstrated by Poirier's use of religious items, which he sets aside

before exhibiting greedy, stingy behavior towards Sirois. Just before Sirois enters Poirier's office, the narrator describes Poirier's motions: "les doigts sur le clavier des boutons d'appel, il hésite, puis étale quelques dossiers en prenant soin de dégager le petit crucifx d'acajou. " (Giroux, 21) [Fingers on the keyboard, he hesitates, then spreads out several documents by carefully setting down the small mahogany crucifix]. Clearly, Poirier is committed to his faith, but carrying such spiritual items does not mean that he acts in accordance with his faith's core values when making business decisions.

Perhaps Poirier's willingness to engage in such a high level of hypocritical behavior, not demonstrated by any other characters in the novel, is what allowed Poirier to ascend to his current rank, described in similar terms as the position of Duplessis: Poirier is "le chef du personnel" (Giroux, 22) [the head of staff]. The name "Le Chef" was also given to Duplessis, the autocratic premier of Québec during the period of the book's writing.[55] Both Poirier and Duplessis use religion as a basis of distorted moral reasoning, particularly in the context of their treatment of urban workers. Just as Duplessis crushed unions despite the Church's attempt to intervene on the behalf of workers, so also Poirier refuses Sirois more compensation despite his salary being clearly insufficient to provide for him, his wife, and his son. Poirier also undermines positive spiritual values, not only by lying to Sirois about why he is being denied a raise despite deserving one, but also expressing a high degree of stinginess, both of which are strongly disdained by the gospels of the New Testament. Additionally, deceiving others goes against one of the Ten Commandments. Perhaps the most depraved of Poirier's acts comes in his second

[55] Black, Conrad. *Duplessis.* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977) 299.

appearance at the end of the novel when he is unfazed by the death of Sirois, one of the firm's most hardworking employees. Instead, he simply commands one of his subordinates to attend Sirois' funeral on his behalf, with express orders to make sure that his name is included in the press release, saying that: "'Vous irez aux funerailles de Sirois, demain. N'oubliez pas de donner mon nom aux reporters.'" (Giroux, 188) [You will go to Sirois's funeral tomorrow. Don't forget to give my (Poirier's) name to reporters].

Unsurprisingly, Poirier maintains his high socioeconomic standing throughout the book while Sirois's inability to work pose an existential threat to his family, which exacerbate Sirois's struggle with his morality and harshly criticisms of himself for his perceived shortcomings as a Christian. It appears that another parallel may be drawn here, as Duplessis was never concerned about religion outside of the superficial appearance of piety, which served as a guise to enhance his control over Québec's sociocultural and political scene. Both he and Poirier see themselves as sufficiently religious men, who should be able to enforce their own moral judgements as they see fit.[56] In fact, Duplessis aimed to base his government on the model of the Québécois Catholic Church power structure and belief system: ruled by a rigid hierarchy, appearing meritocratic, omnipresent, and absolute. This style of Catholicism, Conrad Black argues, is quite unique to Québec, for it does not aim to be intellectual or gentle, as was the case in Western Europe where Catholics had to coexist with large Protestant populations and secular governments.[57] Poirier exhibits a similarly inflexible and uncompromising style, unwilling to even consider the possibility of giving Sirois a raise nor sending any condolences when Sirois dies, instead merely seeking to use Sirois's funeral to advance Poirier's moral reputation among the general public.

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[56] Ibid., 497-498.
[57] Ibid., 499.

His hypocrisy is completed by his commitment to appearing to be a good Catholic, as he donates to the Franciscan sisters to compensate for his stinginess with Sirois and he bears symbols of his faith, however superficial it may be. This donation is a private performance, a sort of ritual carried out by Poirier to cleanse himself of his misdeeds. The most important witness to this ritual would appear to be God Himself, whom Poirier appears to believe is watching even his smallest of movements. Later, his feelings about such a predicament are described when the narrator explains that: "personne ne doute pas cet apostolat silencieux. Rançon de la vertu: aimer ses frères dans le Christ, et ne pouvoir clamer cet amour" (Giroux, 28), [nobody doubts this silent apostle. Bound by virtue : to love his brothers under Christ, and unable to proclaim this love]. Despite being bound to love his fellow Christians, Poirier expresses a strong distaste for Sirois and his willingness to speak out against Poirier's injustices.

Although Poirier hates Sirois or perhaps because of his hatred, the novel (which is about Sirois, namely his death) begins and ends with Poirier's two appearances, which hints at a key feature of Giroux's broader commentary on the conditions of white-collar Francophone workers, including himself, during this midcentury period: Sirois's life and death are overshadowed and encapsulated by his boss's economic power and greater social status. Sirois is utterly powerless even in the face of Poirier's pettiest whims, which, according to Jane Moss, contributes to Sirois's cancer and ultimately death in the sense that it engenders a sense of futility and hopelessness in Sirois, with this resignation being seen as characteristic of cancer patients in the 20th century.[58]

Sharply contrasting with Poirier's superficiality and self-interest, Sirois works for his family: he feels the heavy responsibility of ensuring his wife and son are financially stable even

[58] Jane Moss, "The morbid world of the Quebec novel," Literature and Medicine 3, (1984): 155-156.

as he takes leave from work. While Sirois will never live to see retirement and his contributions to his pension are essentially meaningless, he refuses his physician's suggestion that he leave work, citing work, and the meager pay associated with it, as part of his paternal duties. Sirois states directly that: "je pense que mon devoir de père, c'est de me cramponner…chaque mois ajoute seize centièmes d'un pour cent à [sa] pension" (Giroux, 42), [I believe it is my duty as a father to carry on…each month adds a sixteenth of a percent towards his pension].

In contrast to Poirier's workplace relationships, which are characterized by antagonism and intimidation, Sirois has amicable acquaintanceships with his colleagues, the most notable of whom is Pierre Ruelland, one of the engineers who profits from Sirois's work, who shares a robust sense of morality with Sirois and proves himself to be Sirois's most reliable colleague. Ruelland expresses an authentic concern for Sirois's health as Ruelland tells Sirois that his work habits are lethal the second time he faints at work, after which Ruelland drives Sirois home, although Sirois wishes to stay at work due to his fears of losing his job. Ruelland warns Sirois: "'vous ne pouvez pas rester dans cet état. Je vous reconduis à votre demeure…vous allez vous tuer'…(Sirois:) 'vous savez que je n'ai pas encore les moyens de prendre ma retraite…'(Ruelland :) 'je lui (Poirier) apprends que je vous ai utilisé pour surveiller les travaux,' (Giroux, 58) ['You cannot stay here in this state. I will drive you back home…you are going to kill yourself…' (Sirois:) 'You know I do not have the means to retire yet…' (Ruelland:) 'I will tell him (Poirier) that I used you to survey some work. Sirois does not immediately respond. He weighs the pros and the cons]. This quote shows that since Ruelland has greater leverage in the workplace than Sirois, he is able to tell the boss something, even a lie, and Poirier will believe it. It also demonstrates that Ruelland, to some extent, is aware of Sirois's serious underlying health

issues: he knows Sirois is risking death and does as much as he can to prevent this inevitable outcome.

Even when Ruelland visits Sirois and tries to make him feel better, Ruelland's compliments are perceived by Sirois as potentially patronizing, or simply untrue, and remind him of the same things he said to reassure a sick coworker, Louis Bergeron. However, it is revealed Burgeron died not long after Sirois's visit to him: "Burgeron était mort cinq mois plus tard" (Giroux, 112), [Bergeron had died five months later]. Considering this reality, Sirois is frustrated by the charade being played out by Ruelland: both men know that Sirois will never recover and be able to return to work.

Ironically, this foreshadowing of being unable to return to work and of his own death, Sirois is extremely pleased that his coworkers are doing his work, holding the job to which he will never return open to him. In reality, Sirois does not appear to continue to receive a salary for his time out sick as he does not even know whether or not he has been replaced. Sirois asks of Ruelland: "'Mon travail…on ne m'a pas remplacé?' [Ruelland:] 'Etes-vous fou (sic)! Le chef de personnel m'a demandé si on peut s'arranger sans vous. Vous comprenez que je lui ai dit oui…J'ai réparti votre travail entre quatre employés et j'en ai gardé moi-même. Je travaille le soir'…[Sirois:] 'Merci infinitement, monsieur Ruelland'" (Giroux, 114), [My job…has someone replaced me? [Ruelland:] Are you insane! The boss asked me if we could arrange without you. You understand that I said yes…I divided your work among four employees and kept some myself. I work at night…[Sirois:] Infinite thanks, Mr. Ruelland]. Sirois then thinks about expressing his gratitude to the other coworkers who helped him retain his position, but stops mid-thought, presumably after realizing he will never recover and return to the office. Thus, the

only beneficiary of these men's generosity are the engineers themselves, who are presumably compensated for their overtime while Sirois languishes in bed, powerless to support his family.

However, Sirois's actual feelings about Ruelland are shown to be mixed, the feelings of which are shown in the following: "Sirois aussi a vu entrer Pierre Ruelland. Son coeur lui a fait un peu plus mal en même temps qu'il éprouvait une sensation de déliverance," (Giroux, 45) [Sirois also saw Pierre Ruelland enter. His heart was weakened while he experienced a feeling of deliverance]. This quote reflects the ambiguity of their relationship while also demonstrating Ruelland's influence over Sirois: he feels physical and spiritual responses to Ruelland's presence, furthering the power Sirois's work life has over him. Ruelland is particularly representative of this influence because he is one of the firm's licensed engineers, on whom Sirois must rely to have his work signed, as described at the beginning of this section. This makes Ruelland a key component in the same system which so ails Sirois.

Despite Ruelland's kind-hearted efforts, his actions belie mixed emotions, similar to Sirois. Ruelland is clearly uneasy around Sirois in such a gravely ill state. Therefore, when Sirois inquires about the office, it provides Ruelland an escape from his interpersonal discomfort. Thus, "Ruelland retombe dans le quotidien, il recouvre son aisance. Peu importe qu'il se trouve dans la chambre d'un malade, un grande malade : sa pensée peut courir ailleurs, reconstituer des decors familiers…Doux quotidien, salut des hommes !"(Giroux, 113) [Ruelland falls back into daily routines, recovering his sense of ease. Regardless of his being in the bedroom of a sick man, a very sick man: his thoughts can go elsewhere, reconstructing a familiar environment…sweet daily life, salvation of men!] Indeed, Ruelland, despite his elevated status as an engineer, is just as chained to his work as is Sirois. However, because Ruelland is not sick or dying, he still takes comfort in the relative security of daily, mundane life and the consistency of his job and is thus

unable to see things from the point of view of Sirois as a sick man. Regardless of his own sense of being tied to his work, Ruelland's visit during the midpoint of the novel further signifies his role the middle of the occupational power structure. By adding the sense of kinship that may stem from working in such stressful conditions, which debilitate Sirois yet enrich his fully-licensed coworkers, Sirois is given a sense of rejuvenation to continue along his journey with a greater sense of peace.

While Ruelland may not have been able to save Sirois's life after his lung cancer had taken root, Ruelland certainly could have played a role in preventing it in terms of the psychological etiology of cancer theory described by Sontag. Ruelland clearly has some influence over Poirier and could therefore advocate for better pay and treatment of Sirois. Instead, Ruelland facilitates Sirois's exploitation until Sirois can no longer work. Ruelland may be best represented in broader Québécois society by his status: he is the well-heeled Francophone, an exception to the rule of Anglophones in Québec's economy. Yet, by integrating into the industrial urban economy, workers like Ruelland have become complacent in the larger oppression of their fellow Francophone Québécois by supporting the institutions which perpetuate English Canadian dominance. Ruelland attempts to act in accordance with his view of how a Catholic man should behave in providing a form of care to Sirois by allowing him to retain his position. This effort may make Sirois feel better, but it does him little good in the end as he never returns to the office. Instead of helping Sirois, Ruelland's efforts support the engineering firm itself as his overwork compensates for Sirois's absence, preventing any potential staffing issues for Poirier. This reinforces the notion that Ruelland, despite his altruistic intentions, is supporting the institution which is largely responsible for Sirois's financial problems. Upper-class Québécois like Ruelland have the ability to make meaningful changes in

their workplaces and in other societal domains, and the novel highlights the consequences of this group's passivity: increased suffering for those below them (like Sirois). Ruelland's dual role as an individual who enables Sirois's exploitation and as a caring colleague portrays a nuanced view of his position in society. Ruelland's efforts to help Sirois keep a job and visit him demonstrate that Ruelland aims to ameliorate the occupation system that exists, but his efforts to do so are insufficient to enact the structural change necessary to improve Sirois's conditions.

Several other of Sirois's engineering colleagues visit towards the end of the novel, before Sirois dies. One coworker, Rougement, comes bearing a well-intentioned but ill-timed gift: cigarettes. He was, according to Ruelland during his first visit, the first coworker to offer to take on a portion of Sirois's work, showing he truly cares for Sirois. However, Rougement is demonstrably disconnected from Sirois just as was Ruelland in his last visit. Despite Rougement's attempts to comfort Sirois by presenting the cigarettes, Rougement clearly does not understand how to best help Sirois in a meaningful way. Such disconnect again highlights the role of the wealthier and more influential members of Francophone Québécois society, who occupy the middle of provincial economic structures, and the working-class Québécois who struggled to survive. A lukewarm attempt of support like gifting cigarettes parallels the behaviors exhibited by Ruelland at the novel's midpoint: expressing sympathy outwardly while conveying a sense of emotional disengagement and discomfort.

The cigarettes that Rougement brought, having come from the office, also represent how carcinogenic the workplace environment was for him. This notion is exacerbated by the fact that Sirois used to smoke 40 cigarettes a day, likely one of the primary causes of his death. In light of the fact that physicians and laypeople alike often suggested using cigarettes to calm one's "nerves," before and during the mid 1950s, the period in which the novel was written, such a vast

quantity of cigarettes indicates that Sirois may have used cigarettes as a coping mechanism for feelings of work- and money-related anxiety. Unfortunately, the cigarettes have the opposite psychophysiological effect: they increase stress and tension and create a vicious loop whereby Sirois's "nervousness" would be amplified by such heavy use, which is likely to have harmed his physical health as well as his psychological wellbeing.

Ultimately, Sirois's carcinogenic workplace demonstrates how Québécois Francophones, even those employed in white-collar jobs like Sirois, cannot achieve a sense of financial security, as they will be exploited by their employers and bosses, who will leverage their higher status to prevent them from advancing. Further, if they fall on hard times, their employer will look to replace them and even if they do receive some form of support from their coworkers, they will not be able to access the financial support in the form of social services available to Canadians in other provinces, nor will they have the wealth of Québécois Anglophones to allow them to survive unemployed in the long-term. Thus, to live and work as a Québécois Francophone is to be a member of a socioeconomically marginalized class at the disposal of members of higher-ranked classes, and to be exploited as such. Living with such constant occupational pressure and financial anxiety, Sirois has no chance of enhancing his living conditions or those of his family beyond daily survival, with grim prospects for retirement even if his physical health were to remain intact. Such psychologically unhealthy conditions can manifest in physical illness, as Québécois like Sirois have no outlets, spiritual, physical, psychological, or social, in which to find healing respite.

Section V: A Distorted Relationship with Religion

Sirois often employs a similarly devout approach to his religious faith as he does his work; we have seen he feels working is his obligation as a father despite his rapidly declining health and the ultimate financial futility of such efforts. Fortunately, his spiritual journey does not end in vain as he is finally able to make peace with God. Although this journey is difficult, Sirois is very devout, sharing many values with his priest, Père Étienne, and keeping religious articles near him whenever possible. However, the religious distress Sirois experiences distances him from God and thus harms his spiritual health, leading Sirois himself, and by extension the reader, to attribute his cancer largely to spiritual causes as well as to occupational and physiological ones. This reflects how a constant concern for religious mores is not spiritually enriching, but rather harmful to Sirois and to Québecois society at large.

This can be perhaps most directly observed when Sirois attributes his lung cancer to his spiritual failures; he believed his illness was due to not reading his prayer book as often as he felt he should have. At this time, Sirois reflects that "S'il avait imité son père et lu quotidiennement la prière du soir, il n'éprouverait pas aujourd'hui ce malaise physique," (Giroux, 97) [if he had done what his father had and read the nightly prayer each day, he would not have this physical malady]. This means that Sirois himself believes his cancer to be caused directly by his lack of spirituality, although there are, of course, physical and genetic causes related to his illness as was discussed earlier (these were his consumption of a large quantity of cigarettes every day and his mother's own death from cancer). Thus, while his belief is perhaps not entirely true, it is clear that his spiritual health and physical health are intrinsically related in his own mind. He almost

seems to believe he deserves this fate, as he failed to live up to the expectations of his Church, which, as Susan Sontag notes, relates to the notion that an illness such as cancer could be moralized, and thus deserved.[59]

Beyond his discontentment with his own religious shortcomings, he is often frustrated by the amoral actions of others which contradict biblical morality, as was seen when he confronted Poirier's misuse of rationale from the Gospel in denying Sirois a raise. By rebutting Poirier's distortion of Christian principles, Sirois demonstrates a rich understanding of the Gospel. Despite his awareness, Sirois is very self-condemning in terms of his faithfulness, but tries to be a quality member of the Church. An example of this is seen when the narrator describes him as follows: "Jean Sirois ne s'illusionne ni sur la valeur ni sur ses mérites. Souvent même, le père Étienne s'est alarmé du sens aigu de l'indignité que possède son pénitent. Quand il n'était pas en état de grâce, Jean assistait à la messe dominicaile." (Giroux, 98) [Jean Sirois has no illusions about his value or his merits. Oftentimes, Père Étienne is alarmed by the acute sense of unworthiness held by his penitent. When not in a state of grace, Jean attended Sunday mass]. Thus, Sirois attends mass not to enhance his connection with God, but rather to ease his feelings of spiritual unworthiness which demonstrates his inability to foster a harmonious relationship with God. Further, Sirois often struggles to find spiritual contentment in institutionalized Catholic rites, which are arbitrary inventions of the church as opposed to biblically mandated. Sirois, as religious and morally rigid as he is, often expresses discontentment for various exercises of Catholic faith. When he expressed frustration with the rite of confession to his priest, his robust spiritual values are put on full display when Sirois interrupts Père Étienne while he is discussing the role of a priest in God's greater divine plans:

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[59] Sontag, Susan. *Illness as a metaphor*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1978) 43.

> " 'Voyons, vous savez bien que je comprends (Son plan divin) ! Et Dieu sait si je pense comme vous ! Un prêtre qui baptise, qui absout, qui donne la sainte communion, qui aide les mourants, moi, je lui baiserais les pieds. Pour les prêtres de ce calibre, l'immense majorité, quoi, je donnerais ma vie, je vous le jure. D'ailleurs, j'ai déjà souhaité le martyre'…Sirois se signe, prend son chapelet sur la table de nuit et croise les mains " (Giroux, 81),
>
> 'Look, you know that I understand (His divine plan)! And God knows that I think like you! A priest who provides baptisms, absolution, gives holy communion, helps the dying, I would kiss his feet. Por the priests of this caliber, the vast majority of them, I would give my life, I swear. Moreover, I have already wished for martyrdom… ' Sirois crossed himself, taking his rosary from high nightstand and crossing it in his arms.]

This excerpt provides further evidence of Sirois's unwavering loyalty to the Church, while his situation is dire as he is slowly dying, in the process of which also losing the financial means to support his struggling family by his inability to work. It is clear that Sirois needs to experience some sense of comfort in his spiritual life, yet he continuously denies himself such a feeling due to his belief that he is not worthy.

Although much of this pain comes from within his own mind, it is clear that external circumstances reinforce this suffering, thus harming Sirois's spiritual health which in turn undermines his physical health. Despite Père Étienne's best intentions, the structure of the situation in which he interacts with Sirois prevents him from being able to facilitate a personal connection between Sirois and God. Interestingly, Sirois is acutely aware of the forces; he cynically asks Étienne about his use of prescriptive sayings to comfort his parishoners, asking

Étienne: " 'Vous manquez de technique…des recettes que vous avez une facon bien estrange d'engager une conversation serieuse.' " (Giroux, 80) ['Do you lack technique…your use of prescribed sayings are a strange way to engage in serious conversation']. Again, Sirois is demonstrating how these rigid structures cannot facilitate any substantive connection with God, yet also noting him as an intelligent person who has insight into the inner workings of the religious customs of the Catholic Church which overshadow Québécois society. However, Père Étienne is able to influence and provide comfort to Sirois after hearing Sirois's confession. In this moment, the narrator describes: "Le visage, les bras, les mains, les jambes de Sirois se détendent." (Giroux, 81), [Sirois's face, hands, and legs relax]. This is the first time in the novel in which Sirois can be seen in a state that is not tense, ill, sad, or frustrated, showing the heavy burden his sense of spiritual worthlessness has on him as well as the power of Père Étienne to relieve this pain.

Demonstrably, Sirois's spiritual anxieties about confession have a marked physical effect on him, as his body is unable to handle the spiritual burden that he possesses. Unfortunately, confession is a single element of his faith, and Sirois's religious self-torment extends far beyond it: his existential concern is based in his fear of sin and offense of God. This fact is not overlooked by Père Étienne, either. As Sirois becomes more severely ill and can no longer leave the house to attend confession, Étienne visits him, reflecting the same sentiment echoed earlier by the narrator about the pained religious life of Louis (and generalized to Sirois). Instead of being annoyed by the "sickness" of religious bedevilment, Père Étienne expresses concern that Sirois is more concerned with the institutional rules of Catholicism, about which he aims to alleviate Sirois's guilt which distances him from God: "depuis quatre ans [Étienne] tente vainement d'établir dans cette âme dans la paix …[mais] comme chez tous les scrupuleux, la

peur du péché conduit à péché" (Giroux, 82), [(Étienne) had been trying to provide peace to Sirois's spirit for four years, (but) like all scrupulous persons, the fear of sin drives one to sin]. This more compassionate view demonstrates Père Étienne's close connection with God despite his being a member of the Catholic Church's hierarchy. Père Étienne does not wish to play politics, but instead to help Sirois achieve a similar relationship to God as the one held by Père Étienne himself.

Père Étienne's compassionate connection with God exists despite his role as a sort of middleman between the urban Québécois population and the hierarchy of the Québécois Catholic Church. His role is similar to that of Ruelland, who is also a middleman of sorts, attempting to comfort and shield Sirois from the negative repercussions of his boss while Étienne aims to ease Sirois's spiritual suffering and ameliorate his relationship with God. Sirois must rely on these two men to support him, as much as he resists both of their efforts to intervene on his behalf. Their higher statuses and ability to help Sirois demonstrate that Québécois should lean into these types of figures and that they, as individuals who are better-integrated into the existing social structures, have more power to change them from within. However, Ruelland and Père Étienne diverge in that Ruelland is content to continue within the current system, as he is economically comfortable, while we shall see Père Étienne has a desire for real change within the Church hierarchy itself. This perspective is explored when Sirois expresses to Père Étienne that he "déteste tellement Monseigneur Roberge qui parle toujours de l'argent…[Sirois] n'ai pas payé la dime l'an dernier" (Giroux, 82), Sirois [reviles Monseigneur Roberge who always speaks of money…[(Sirois) did not pay tithes last year]. While Sirois's not paying of tithes may not be surprising due to his financial struggles, it is curious that he experiences no apparent moral qualms concerning this behavior, nor does it concern Père Étienne. In fact, Père Étienne

sympathizes with this withholding of tithes because he "sait la réputation de Monseigneur Roberge. Et il songe que de faire enrager celui-ci au sujet de l'argent, c'est peut-être travailler à lui ouvrir les yeux" [knows Monseigneur Roberge's reputation. And he knows that to anger him on the subject of money may be able to open his eyes] (Giroux 82). Thus, Père Étienne is aware of structural problems within the Church and, rather than criticizing Sirois for his shortcomings as a Catholic parishioner, believes his withholding of tithes to be just in trying to change how the high clergy operate. After this interaction, Père Étienne again emphasizes the truly important guidelines of being a Christian by reminding Sirois of the rules by which he should truly try to live: "le Père Étienne detaille les péchés capitaux" (Giroux, 82), [Father Étienne describes the capital sins].

Intriguingly, Giroux uses the term "capital sins" after describing the Monseigneur's behavior, which are also known as the seven deadly sins. This word, "capitaux," is commonly used in reference to financial capital as well as in the context of classifying sins as is the English translation "capital." This shows the reader that the Monseigneur is clearly misaligned with the Church's spiritual teachings, even appearing to express the capital sin of greed, which, in his position as a high Church official, may further debase the relationship between the faithful and the Church organization. Again, this can be seen with Sirois and Étienne as the Monseigneur's desire to amass financial capital at the expense of exacerbating his parishioners' poverty becomes a point of contention for Sirois. Because Père Étienne understands this behavior as causing problems for his parishioners, he seems to express approval of the idea of ignoring the Monseigneur's demands for more money.

Sirois's financial frustration and anxiety stem from his inability to provide a financially secure household for his wife and son, a place of economic necessity, while Poirier and Roberge

have no apparent familial financial woes, especially given their higher positions in their respective organizations (and presumably higher salaries). However, because the Church was struggling to maintain its social influence during the Duplessis administration (and thereby the time of the book's writing), one may assume that the Monseigneur's constant talk of money is not purely greed-driven and does, in fact, involve authentic concern for the financial affairs and abilities of the Church to support the Québécois population, it is portrayed as having manifested in an almost exactly similar way as the financial stinginess expressed by Poirier as he invented reasons to deny Sirois a raise. This parallel may be interpreted as a broader critique of the Church's general need for funding and the greediness of mid-20th century industrial capitalists: the Church would not need to fundraise as much for inadequate social services if money-obsessed capitalist bosses like Poirier were willing to pay their employees a fair wage for their dutiful work.

While Sirois will never be freed of the temporal chains of his financial situation during his life, he is finally freed from his religious bedevilment when he nearly dies. In doing so he loses contact with reality and is released into his imagination, while simultaneously receiving last rites from Père Étienne, a process designed to cleanse the last of one's sins before one leaves the earth. During his loss of consciousness and while the priest is performing the rites, he imagines himself in a mountainside town, near a crowd of pilgrims. However, this dream takes a strange turn when :

> "Les fidèles se pressent sur la place en forment une procession. La croix énorme menace d'écraser tous les pèlerins. Un murmure de prière s'élève, assourdissant…Courir, se sauver est la seule solution…il abandonne la partie. Il ne reverra plus la maison de ses

> parents… Ne plus lutter contre le monde entier. S'abandonner à la grâce de Dieu, du Père." (Giroux, 141)
>
> [The faithful crowd together in procession. The enormous cross threatens to crush all of the pilgrims. A deafening murmur of prayer rises…To run, to save oneself is the only solution…he abandoned the party. He will never see again the home of his parents…No longer will he struggle with the entire world. To abandon himself to the grace of God, of the Father].

During these last few lines, Sirois finally realizes that he cannot question the faith of every single thing. Rather, the best thing for him to do is to give himself up to God in the final stage of his life. It is highly likely that Giroux wishes for the reader to interpret Sirois's dream in a symbolic fashion similar to that of 20th century psychoanalytic dream interpretation. His surmounting of the summit of a mountain comes at the end of his life, which, up until that point had been a long and difficult spiritual and psychological journey, or pilgrimage as Giroux describes. Clearly, the threatening size of the cross represents the crushing weight of his faith and associated struggles, which threatened his survival as well as that of his fellow pilgrims. In abandoning them, he saves and frees himself from their deafening prayer, which was an ironic response to the cross which threatened to crush them. This was clearly a self-destructive act which, by escaping it, allowed Sirois to be free of the baggage associated with his past experiences with religion.

Soon after, Sirois has a revelation in which "les imaginations hallucinants avaient fui; la pensée de Dieu, dépourvue de toute crainte, lui était source de joie, d'espoir, de confiance. Oui, il a désiré Dieu, enfin ! Est-ce cela, la foi ? " (Giroux, 145), [the hallucinatory imaginations had fled ; the thought of God, free of all fear, was a source of joy, of hope, of confidence, to Sirois.

Yes, he desired God, at last! Is this it, faith?]. Of course, this revelation is not just due to Sirois's internal revelation in a dream: receiving complete absolution from all of his earthly sins via last rites provided his soul great relief, which allowed his mind to find a new sense of peace with God, and as a result, life as a whole. He is able to take this new outlook on life, born from not only internal changes but the blessings of Père Étienne, who has shown himself to be a compassionate figure with great concern for the struggles faced by Sirois and others, such as Sirois's financial anxiety which was triggered by Monseigneur Roberge.

As has been stated previously, this period of revelations is an important and interesting one in the book, but the actual instruments used to save Sirois come from two very different sources: the priest and the doctor Michaud. Their divergent processes are described as follows:

> En entrant dans la chambre, le prêtre a donné l'absolution a Sirois. Il a ensuite…retiré l'ampoule des saintes huiles, un tampon d'ouate, le Rituel, le crucifix indulgencié, l'étole réversible, le surplis froissé, le goupillon…Le médecin est entré en trombe. La main calme et sûre, il a injecté de la coramine dans le bras inerte. — (Marie:) Ses paupières bougent ! " (Giroux, 137)

> [Upon entering the room, the priest gave Sirois absolution. He then…pulled out the lamp of holy oils, a cotton ball, the Sacrement, crucifix of indulgences, reversible stole, a wrinkled surplus, and aspergillum…the doctor entered with a flourish. Using a calm and sure hand, he injected a steroid shot into the motionless arm. — (Marie:) his eyes are moving!]

While Étienne is still preparing to provide his support to Sirois using an ancient and multi-step process, the doctor simply employs modern medicine, which takes an immediate effect in

reviving Sirois from a state of near-death. Although Sirois slowly begins to return from his delirium after getting the steroid shot, he still receives last rights which seem to have eased his mind and spirit, yet it was the steroids which saved his body to allow for the inner mental processes to take place.

While Sirois is finally able to break free from the chains of his spiritual self-torture, inner religious struggles and the Church's influence can be seen in almost all other characters of the novel, which further globalizes the phenomenon of religious bedevilment. In the beginning of the book, as has already been seen, Poirier struggles with his religious morality despite behaving in openly amoral ways. When confronted by Sirois for his use of religious masking to justify these actions, Poirier experiences "l'inquitude…[que Poirier] chasse avant qu'elle ne prenne corps…Poirier savoure l'avantage de sa systeme philosophique…avec son aime scrupuleuse." [Worry…which he chased away before it could take form…Poirier savoured the advantage of his philosophies….with his scrupulous soul] (Giroux 29). Poirier, unlike Sirois, is able to manage his religious anxiety, despite his high level of scrupulosity, by reassuring himself that he is guided by a system of moral philosophies which allows him to evade the spiritual intent behind the rules and behave as autocratically and amorally as he wishes.

Later, the narrator explicitly expresses disdain for Sirois's self-tormenting religious beliefs by proxy of Sirois's brother Louis. Louis, upon hearing of Sirois's illness, begins thinking selfishly of the material gains he might make if his brother perishes: "s'il mournit, peut-etre, [Louis heritait] sa camera; c'est un appareil de prix" (Giroux, 64), [if Sirois died, perhaps (Louis would inherit) his camera]. Louis quickly reverses on this thought and begs God to forgive his transgressions of thought: "Vous le savez, Vous, mon Dieu, que je ne tiens pas du tout sa camera ! Ca m'est passe par l'esprit, comme on peut avoir une mauvaise pensée, sans

plus….j'irai a la messe tous les jours pendant un an, si Vous le guérissez, mon Dieu…c'est agaçante la maladie dans la famille" (Giroux, 64), [You know, God, that I don't at all wish to have his camera ! This passed by my spirit, as one can have a bad thought, nothing more…I will go to mass every day for a year, if You heal him, God…the family sickness is frustrating]. This last component is the narrator's, presumably Giroux's, commentary on the situation, that of internal religious struggles and drastic efforts to avoid drawing any negative attention from God to the extent of self-torture and drawing the ire of a man like Giroux, whose naturalistic beliefs would suggest treating oneself with the same compassion that one should extend to others, and that God extends to his followers. In her biography of Giroux, Yvette Giroux describes this belief system as follows: "la primauté du spirituel était reconnu…il apprend à aimer Dieu." [primacy of spirituality was recognized…he learned to love God].[60] By contrasting the inner religious experience of the Sirois family's with that of Giroux, it is clear that the religious politics and associated rules that Louis and Sirois follow are more in line with a politicized version of Catholicism. The stringent rules of this system alienate its adherents from a true connection with God, hence why the narrator would have described the Sirois family's interactions with God as problematic.

The inner religious experience of female characters remains similar to the struggles experienced by the male characters, but diverges sharply in terms of content and depth. For Marie, Sirois's wife, the case is not as clear. In the context of the plot, Marie's religious inner life is explored by Giroux after that of Poirier and Sirois, and her experience is followed by that of Louis. Her inner turmoil is the first thing the reader understands about her, coupled with her

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[60] Giroux, Yvette, *Bibliographie analytique d'André Giroux*., quoted in L'Isle, Mado de. *André Giroux: l'Écrivain, l'Homme, le Poète*. (Québec : Arion, 1994) 6.

inability to lean into her faith as a source of comfort. Such sentiments are expressed when the narrator describes Marie's inner tought processes : "elle ne sait plus que dire; l'anxiété, la peur, la terreur traissent la source de ses mots. Elle tente, mais vainement, de lancer une prière à la Vierge." (Giroux, 31) [She no longer knew what to say; the anxiety, fear tried, in vain, to start a prayer to the Virgin]. This comes after she learns that Sirois will not get his badly needed raise and that their family will continue to struggle financially.

At a loss for where else to turn, Marie seeks the intercession of her patron saint for the outcome of her situation: her husband's declining health, coupled with an inability to financially provide for the family's needs, which will soon make him extremely burdensome to her. Although in this instance, she prays for assistance, as things continue to decline, we learn that Marie is in fact having difficulty relying on her Catholic spirituality to sustain her. For example, later in their conversation, when Sirois asks her: "aide-moi à m'habiller" (Giroux, 33) [help me get dressed], Marie's inability to surrender her worries to God becomes apparent: "Marie ne songe pas à déposer son fardeau au pied de la Croix. Elle garde tout au chaud, dans son cœur. Il faut un minimum de paix pour songer au Christ." (Giroux 34) [Marie does not think of placing her burden at the foot of the Cross. She keeps everything warm, in her heart. One needs a modicum of peace to think of Christ.] Unlike her husband, she remains unable to find spiritual peace at the novel's end. Despite her anxiety, she does not appear as tortured by such a lack of connection to God as Sirois was. The reason as to why appears self-explanatory: Giroux described her as not even thinking to place her burden with God, while Sirois constantly ruminates and reflects on how he may be offending God. It is unclear why such a discrepancy may exist, but as Jane Moss describes, for authors of this time period's morbid literature genre,

such an emphasis is not atypical, since: "in Québec heredity, family, environment, education, religion, and economic structures [disproportionately] overwhelm and crush young men."[61]

In a similar vein as Marie, other prominent female characters, if they experience inner turmoil related to faith, are much more two-dimensional than Sirois's, Louis's, and Poirier's back-and-forth shifts between maintaining faithfulness and acting without regard to religious morality. The inner religious experiences of Judith, Sirois's sister, are not explored at all in the novel, although she does suggest bringing a priest to see the dying Sirois in her first visit, soon after Sirois takes leave from work. Marie expresses disdain for the idea as she worries that doing so would be akin to telling Sirois he has a lethal cancer and will soon die. The dichotomy between the religious experiences of men and women in the novel reflects the divergent impacts of the mid-20th century's sociopolitical conditions: as Anglophone domination of the male-dominated business world was enhanced by Duplessis's anti-union actions, men like Sirois struggled to maintain their social role as the financial provider of the household financial provider.

The dichotomy between the male and female religious experience is also apparent towards the end of Sirois's life, when a young woman by the name of Madelaine Dubois serves as an in-home hospice nurse. Although he is nearly twenty years older than the twenty-two-year-old Madelaine, he is attracted to her, asking her if she has a love interest and becoming "déçu qu'elle soit amoureuse…Il pourrait être son père. Et puis, il est marié. Et puis, il se meurt. L'âge, l'état civil, on peut toujours passer outre avec de la volonté et du cynicisme" (Giroux, 152), [disappointed that she was in love (with someone else)…He could have been her father. Also, he is married. Also, he is dying. Age, marital status, one can always surpass those with will and

[61] Jane Moss, "The morbid world of the Quebec novel," Literature and Medicine 3, (1984): 154.

cynicism.] Although he is attracted to this woman and has some inklings of desire for her, he continuously brings himself back to the reality of his situation and the barriers between them, yet again questions the strength and meaning of those barriers. All the while, Madelaine simply answers his questions without caring about his hidden sexual desires, simultaneously musing about how the previous six months as a hospice nurse has given her a new perspective on those who make great sacrifices for religion :

> "Elle se dit qu'il est bien difficile d'imaginer, dans des lits d'amour, tous ces apprentis cadavres qu'elle a veillés depuis déjà six mois…elle pense au cloître, à un hôpital où l'on ne soignerait que des pauvres. Elle rêve de renoncement jusqu'à l'immolation, cette fille débordante de santé et de vie. Tout ou rien ! Elle sait que ce sera rien"
>
> [She says to herself how difficult it is to imagine that, in these beds of love, all the corpses-in-training that she stayed with over the past six months…she thinks about the nunnery, about a hospital where on cares exclusively for the poor. She dreams of giving herself up, of sacrificing herself, this girl overflowing with health and life. All or nothing! She knows there will be nothing] (Giroux 155).

In this moment, Madelaine is reflecting on the Catholic faith's directive to make great personal sacrifices to care for the poor and unwell. Such a duty is described in absolute terms, all or nothing, and given her psychological fatigue after only six months of caring for the sick and dying, she has become aware that she is unlikely to continue giving herself to this work, thus resolving her own internal religious struggle. In contrast to Madeleine's brief consideration of martyrdom, Sirois's prolonged interior battle over the state of his spiritual salvation is finally

resolved through Père Étienne's administration of last rites when it is believed he is dying, providing the much-needed spiritual and psychological relief that Madelaine was able to realize with comparative ease. At the same time as these rites are being given, Dr. Michaud provides Sirois a steroid shot which revives him and thus allows the story of Sirois's spiritual realization to be recounted. Thus, the relationship between spiritual and physical health in this situation remains ambiguous, though their interdependence and strong potential for interaction is clear. The conclusion of my thesis will explore further comparisons between the occupational and religious structures in the novel, particularly with respect to their physical effects on Sirois and the prognosis of his cancer.

Conclusion:

With this physiological representation of Sirois's inner conflicts in mind, one wonders why cancer was selected by Giroux as the central component of the novel's plot. To understand this, we shall return to Sontag's analysis on how cancer was seen at the time of the 1953 novel's writing and publication. Cancer's attribution to psychological causes, such as chronic feelings of anger, or prolonged grief and bereavement, could allow this type of disease to take root and slowly fester.[62]

Both grief and repressed anger are present in Sirois's life: He lost both of his parents within two years of each other, before turning twenty. These losses additionally forced him to drop out of university and immediately enter the workforce to support himself financially. Because of his unfinished studies, he was unable to become licensed as an engineer and despite having the practical knowledge to do the work of an engineer, he is unable to obtain the license or the salary of one. Instead, he works under licensed engineers and struggles with financial insecurity due to his underpaid position, thus being disempowered.

The stress associated with Sirois's religious bedevilment also likely drives his excessive consumption of cigarettes, which had been established by the time of the 1953 novel's publication as being directly connected to lung cancer in both medical literature and popular media.[63] However, Sirois is able to overcome his inner problems associated with his scrupulosity, while he remains powerless in his economic situation. While his son Claude serves as a form of psychological relief from his religious pain, Sirois also sees himself in Claude, and

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[62] Sontag, Susan. "Illness as a Metaphor." (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 51-57.

[63] Allan Brandt, "Inventing Conflicts of Interest: A History of Tobacco Industry Tactics," *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 1 (2012): 63-71, https://doi.org/10.2105%2FAJPH.2011.300292

tries to warn him to not to make the same mistakes that Sirois did in becoming trapped in a marriage, and therefore economic union, that Sirois did not want at the time:

> “Je ne t'engueulerai pas, Claude, mais je t’avais prévenu. Tu vois, tu as fait un enfant a cette petite fille, et aujourd’hui, tu hésites à l'épouser parce que tu n’es pas certain de l’aimer. Il faut l'épouser. Vous serez sans doute malheureux, mais au moins, vous serez malheureux dans la légalité. C’est tout ce que la civilisation peut vous offrir. Pourquoi ils s’entêtent à parler, les prêtres ? Ils se parlent si mal, en général. Moi, les regarder vivre suffit à m’édifier. Vous trouvez à redire, messieurs ? Faites-en autant qu’eux, après, nous discuterons. Je veux bien croire qu’elles sont pauvres. Je veux le croire, mais vous n’exigez pas un acte de foi, dans ce domaine, n’est-ce pas ? Il a dit : « Donne tes biens aux pauvres et suis-moi. » Sincèrement, nous avons peu d’impression qu’elles donnent l’intérêt de leurs biens, aux pauvres. Elles n’ont pas la foi. Elles trichent. ” (Giroux, 171)
>
> [I will not yell at you Claude, but I had warned you. You see, you have had a baby with this girl, and today, you hesitate to marry her because you are uncertain if you love her or not. You must marry her. You will doubtlessly be unhappy, but at least you will be unhappy legally. That is all that civilization can offer to you. Why do the priests insist on speaking? In general, they speak so badly. Seeing them is enough to enlighten me. Do you find any fault in that, gentlemen? Do as much as they do, then we will talk. I want to believe that women are poor. I want to believe so, but You are not demanding an act of faith, are You? He said: ‘Give your possessions to the poor and be like me’. Truly, I have the impression that women give the interest from their possessions to the poor. Women are faithless. They lie.]

This glimpse into Sirois's past indicates that he did not wish to be married at the time that he had his son, Claude, yet was forced to by social pressure stemming from religious influences, specifically, a priest he had been in contact with. Ultimately, being in this marriage with the financial burden associated with supporting his wife and son seems to have been a painful experience which further distanced him from spiritual authorities. However, he was responsible for the conception of his son, and is thus implicated in causing his own carcinogenic predicament. This is in line with a key component of Sontag's argument: that cancer patients were deemed responsible for their own illness.[64] Although this is true for Sirois in the novel, his agency is limited by social mores which are perpetuated by the priests, as well as rules and hierarchies governing his workplace. Further, a sense of resentment and frustration, in this context directed towards women such as Sirois's wife Marie, can be seen in Sirois. His inability to express or act on this frustration is likely to be a part of the carcinogenic emotional repression given that the forcing of his marriage was driven by both religious and economic forces.

Despite the pressure Sirois received from the priest who told him to marry Marie, the Père Étienne aims to relieve religious tension from Sirois's life in order for him to have a peaceful and intimate relationship with God. While his coworkers attempt to support him, they are unable to relieve the occupational and financial stress he experiences, which stems from Poirier's exploitative behavior and Sirois's lack of formal licensure to practice as an engineer.

Thus, the novel's occupational structures are ultimately the most carcinogenic and harmful to Sirois, although his chronic religious bedevilment is also extremely unhealthy. Returning to the reason as to why Sirois could not obtain an engineering credential, it was due to

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[64] Sontag, Susan. "Illness as a Metaphor." (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 47.

his father's death which interrupted his university studies, when he was twenty years old. His son, Claude, is only six years old during the novel, losing his father much earlier and obviously cannot work to support himself at such a young age, while Marie will be left nearly penniless, thus becoming a poor woman, the type of woman who was discussed by the priest in Sirois's memory when pressuring him to marry her in the first place. Thus, the Sirois family will be in an even worse financial position than they were during Sirois's younger years, creating a cycle of financial insecurity and ill health, with Marie, like Sirois before his spiritual awakening, being psychologically unable to lean into a spiritual connection with God to find peace. This situation parallels that of Francophone Québécois workers in the sense that their inferior economic position was continuously perpetuated by economic structures which prevented them from reaching a higher standard of living like that experienced by Anglophone Québécois workers. Further, Sirois's intense inner suffering due to religious anxiety and the association between his spiritual freedom and physical death underscore the relationship between his spirituality and his illness. Both religious and occupational forces are highly carcinogenic to Sirois, although his ultimate freedom from religious bedevilment highlights the fact that this social problem can be resolved, while economic structures will continue to harm Francophone Québécois. The more durable and longstanding nature of this problem, as opposed to the more flexible nature of one's individual relationship with the Church and God, is more in line with Sontag's description of the mid-20th century belief about the psychological causes of the slow and incurable development of cancer.

The problems with both the industrial economy and religious climate, which prevent Francophone Québécois from advancing to higher-status, better-compensated positions as well as distance them from God are also reflected in the title and epithet at the outset of the novel,

both borrowed from the 19th century French poet Charles Baudelaire. His poem "Horlage" (The Clock), from which the epithet and title are drawn, is part of a larger collection of Baudelaire's work titled *Les Fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil), which is thematically relevant to *Le Gouffre a toujours soif* in the sense that it aims to explore the individual's relationship with modern, industrial civilization, alienation from the natural world, temptation to sin and alienation from God.[65] "Horlage" is situated within the chapter "Spleen et Idéal" (Spleen and Ideal), the name of which presents an inherent contrast: the Spleen, which represents a form of depressed, deep-sated dissatisfaction and boredom with life, and the Ideal, a perfected, imaginary vision of existence. The concept of the spleen is certainly conveyed through Giroux's novel, with both occupational and religious power structures being key sources of dissatisfaction and malaise for Sirois. However, the Ideal can be said to have been achieved after Sirois is released from his bedevilment and discovers a compassionate and intimate connection with God. This highlights the possibility of spiritual redemption for Catholic Québécois in spiritual predicaments like that of Sirois. Though the concept of the Ideal is present in religious contexts, Sirois's job and the stress associated with his economic and occupation position are enduring elements of the Spleen throughout the novel. This reality extends after Sirois's death, when Poirier aims to use Sirois's funeral as a means to access reporters and the personal publicity associated with their position in society. Clearly, an imbalance between the Spleen and the Ideal exist in the novel in favor of the former. Such an imbalance was likely present in contemporary Québécois society, characterized by the period's name: The Great Darkness.

"Horlage" establishes time and its passage, represented by a clock, a type of sinister God, similar to the deity with which Sirois had a fearful and morally confused relationship both at

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[65] Baudelaire, Charles. "Horlage," in Fleursdumal.org, 1868 ed.

work and in his spiritual life.[66] While the passage of time was important prior to industrialization, it became a newly-dominant force because of the widespread availability of mechanized clocks in the early 19th century, during Baudelaire's lifetime. Previously, it had primarily been churches which possessed clocks, an important detail, but their clocks did not dominate the daily lives of parishioners except to call them to prayer. During the industrial revolution, however, factories required strict time management.[67] Thus, Baudelaire is critiquing both industrial and ecclesiastical uses of time to control the lives workers and parishioners, as is the case for Jean Sirois.

In the stanza prior to the one with the titular verse "le gouffre a toujours soif" [the bottomless abyss], Baudelaire describes time as extracting money, thus tying it directly to the economic and occupational woes he observed around him, which Giroux borrowed for his own novel. The verses are: "Les minutes…sont des gangues qu'il ne faut pas lâcher sans en extraire l'or!" [Minutes…are the ore which one must not give up without extracting gold]![68] This is a sentiment expressed by Sirois in instances such as his statement that staying at work to add one-sixteenth of a percent to his pension was his obligation as a father; even as he grew sicker and sicker, he ignored his physician's advice to rest and continued to pursue money. By examining Giroux's title and epithet, the essence of his message is revealed: the necessity of pursuing wealth under an unworkable economic system and efforts to demonstrate ostensibly good Catholic behavior is harmful to Québécois, harming not only their physical bodies but also their connection with God.

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Davies, Alun. "The Industrial Revolution and Time." OpenLearn. The Open University, 2010. https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history-science-technology-medicine/the-industrial-revolution-and-time
[68] Baudelaire, Charles. "Horlage," in Fleursdumal.org, 1868 ed.

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