

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE  
IN THE PROSE WRITINGS OF HERVÉ BAZIN

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At the University of Leicester

by

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**Abstract: Ph. D. Thesis by Diana Hallam.**  
**The Significance of Place in the Prose Writings of Hervé Bazin.**

Manuscript evidence from the Archives Municipales in Nancy provides insights into the way in which Bazin used his settings to create verisimilitude and structure. His use of place is also significant from a thematic point of view. His experiences at his childhood home, Le Pâtys, seem to have been particularly formative, inspiring the Rezeau trilogy. Throughout his writing career, Bazin would re-examine his most dominant place-based concerns in a variety of fictional contexts.

Bazin analysed the way in which some individuals identified themselves strongly with their homes, drawing their sense of identity and continuity from their environment. However, he was also interested in the effect of exile on such rooted people whose close relationship with a specific place was broken or interrupted.

Bazin's portrayal of interpersonal relationships also led to important place-based themes. He showed the tendency of individuals to turn their homes into personal fiefdoms or territories at the expense of others. He also considered the phenomenon of running away from home, examining the motives of those who took flight. Bazin's novels assert the particularly close association between women and the home but also seem to question the ability of men and women to live harmoniously under the same roof.

The outdoors tends to provide places of retreat for Bazin's characters and his novels suggest that the beauty and complexity of the natural world is a source of solace in life. Indeed, Bazin's affection for the natural environment seems to have inspired much of the more philosophical writing of his later years in which he considers man's role and responsibilities in relation to the uniqueness of his planet.

Overall, by means of his novels and his non-fictional writing, Bazin affirms the importance of place in determining man's identity, relationships and ultimate significance.

## **Introduction.**

The aim of this thesis is to consider the ways in which Hervé Bazin uses settings in his writing. Bazin's novels and short stories, as well as his non-fictional works, such as *Abécédaire* and *Ce que je crois*, provide a wealth of material for an analysis of his use of place. However, before introducing the key elements of our investigation, it seems appropriate to outline the issues which have influenced this study.

## **Bazin in his Critical Context.**

In approaching the work of Hervé Bazin, there can be no denying his popular success. *Vipère au poing* made a huge impact when it first appeared and it continues to appeal to new generations of readers. Bazin's subsequent novels, published over the course of forty-seven years, ensured that he remained a household name in France. His novels were translated into other languages and found favour abroad. Bazin's importance was recognised by the Académie Goncourt who made him a member in 1958 and their president in 1972. We will therefore study Bazin in the light of his success and attempt to contribute to an understanding of his appeal.

During his lifetime, Bazin had a high profile in the French press. The popularity of his work with the public, his steady output of new novels and the colourfulness of his private life ensured sustained media interest. Furthermore, Bazin seems to have been very willing to talk to critics and journalists about his

life and work. Phillip Crant goes so far as to suggest that Bazin created an interview-persona for this purpose. Noting that Bazin was one of the few writers in France to earn a living entirely through writing, he observes:

Bazin is an individual who knows not only himself and the exigencies and caprices of his profession but also how to cultivate himself and build a persona. His appearances on television, his many interviews for the press [...] present a practised, almost stylized, character.<sup>1</sup>

The interview format certainly proved accessible and engaging to a wide readership. Reviews of his latest books, accompanied by interviews with the author, appeared frequently in French newspapers and magazines. Other interviews were published in anthologies of author profiles. In addition to these, towards the end of his career, Bazin co-operated with Jean-Claude Lamy on a book about his life and work.<sup>2</sup> The text, taking the form of an interview in which Bazin reflects on his life and writing career, includes autobiographical material and personal photographs. Over the course of these many interviews, Bazin himself provided important insights into the nature of his work.

However, Bazin's considerable popularity and prominence have resulted in relatively few formal studies of his writing. Margaret Callander writes that 'Bazin's work as a whole is undervalued'<sup>3</sup> and Michael Cardy suggests that, in English-speaking countries, this is at least partly due to the fact that his work is not well known: 'Le monde littéraire et académique anglophone [...] à juger

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<sup>1</sup> *Hervé Bazin: Social Reflections in Fiction*, Knoxville: New Paradigm Press, 1995, pp.7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Claude Lamy, *Hervé Bazin: entretiens avec Jean-Claude Lamy*, Paris: Stock, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> 'Bazin, Hervé', in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. Peter France, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p.72.

selon les bibliographies, demeure ignorant'.<sup>4</sup> Bazin has also received fairly little academic attention in France. In their article on *L'Église verte*, Alexandre Amprimoz and Dennis Essar point out that 'le succès de ce grand écrivain auprès du grand public qui *lit*, semble inversement proportionnel à l'intérêt que lui portent les universitaires'.<sup>5</sup> In his 1968 overview of French literature, Pierre de Boisdeffre considered the lack of critical interest in Bazin to be symptomatic of a widening gulf in France between the novel-reading public and the critics:

Quant au public, jamais il n'a paru si désorienté! Jamais les recherches littéraires et les 'succès' qu'on lui impose n'ont été si loin de ses goûts, de ses préoccupations, si loin de *l'humain*. Pour un Troyat, un Bazin, un Pierre Boulle, un Lesort ou un Groussard, que de romanciers en chambre dont la chance auprès des jurys, la réputation et l'estime dont ils jouissent auprès des critiques sont inversement proportionnelles à l'audience dont ils disposent! Rendu méfiant par des prix littéraires qui lui imposent des écrivains *qu'il n'aime pas*, le public se tourne vers d'autres livres.<sup>6</sup>

Although subsequently elected to the Académie Goncourt and in spite of the book's enormous popular success, Bazin's failure to win the Prix Goncourt for *Vipère au poing* seems to vindicate Pierre de Boisdeffre's view.

In general, such critics who have written about Bazin have tended to adopt an 'autobiographical' approach. The first substantial publication on Bazin, by Jean Anglade in 1962, begins with a series of descriptions of him by friends and contemporaries. This is followed by photographs, the author's family tree and details of his family home and its possessions. The book includes a

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<sup>4</sup> 'La Trilogie Jean Rezeau: chef-d'œuvre d'Hervé Bazin', *Bulletin del'Association des Professeurs de Français des Universités Canadiennes*, 1978, p.65.

<sup>5</sup> Alexandre L. Amprimoz & Dennis F. Essar, 'L'Église verte d'Hervé Bazin: Liberté et conformisme', *Romanic Review*, 79, 1988, p.633.

<sup>6</sup> *Une Histoire vivante de la littérature d'aujourd'hui 1939-1964*, Paris: Perrin, 1968, pp.215-6.

chronology of the author's life up to the time of writing and an assessment of the impact of Bazin's childhood on his writing.<sup>7</sup> In 1972, in the next critical work to appear, Fernando Schirosi associated Bazin's life with his work as his title, *Hervé Bazin: la vita e l'opera*, indicates.<sup>8</sup> In 1973, Pierre Moustiers added a new dimension by pointing out the way in which the autobiographical element sometimes adversely affected the literary outcome.<sup>9</sup> Keith Goesch, who enjoyed considerable access both to Bazin and to his archives, compiled a detailed bibliography of all Bazin's significant writings from 1928 to 1982 and he also includes a detailed chronology of Bazin's life during that period.<sup>10</sup> In all these critical overviews of Bazin's work, the person of Bazin himself is never far from the scene.

The enormous impact of Bazin's first novel, *Vipère au poing*, has been another important influence on critical perceptions of his work. *Vipère au poing* is so widely read that it provides an immediate handle on Bazin's writing and this may have led to a rather limited view of his contribution by the literary and academic communities. As Bazin himself ruefully remarked: 'Éternelle histoire! On reste défini par son premier livre'.<sup>11</sup> The autobiographical nature of Bazin's inspiration, the hero in revolt against his circumstances, the detailed portrayal of family life and strife and the preoccupation with strong female characters have all become norms of Bazin studies to date, and all can be traced back to their first

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<sup>7</sup> Jean Anglade, *Hervé Bazin*, Paris: Gallimard, 1962.

<sup>8</sup> *Hervé Bazin: la vita e l'opera*, Bari: Adriatica, 1972.

<sup>9</sup> *Hervé Bazin ou le romancier en mouvement*, Paris: Seuil, 1973.

<sup>10</sup> *Hervé Bazin: essai de bibliographie des œuvres d'Hervé Bazin, première livraison, 1928-1982*, Paris: Lettres modernes, 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Gilbert Ganne, *Messieurs les best-sellers*, Paris: Perrin, 1966, p.217.

appearance in *Vipère au poing*. However central these themes may be to many of Bazin's novels, it is harder to make a case for their importance in later works such as *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, *L'Église verte*, and *Le Neuvième Jour*.

As Amprimoz and Essar remarked in 1988:

La partie la plus en vue de l'œuvre d'Hervé Bazin s'inscrit toujours sous le signe de la monstruosité du drame familial dont *Qui j'ose aimer* (1956) constitue, après *Vipère au poing*, l'exemple célèbre. Mais ces dernières années nous ont révélé, chez le romancier, une esthétique plus subtile et une sagesse plus nuancée auxquelles la critique ne semble répondre que par un certain silence.<sup>12</sup>

It is certainly true that very few critics have undertaken studies of Bazin's complete works, whereas studies of his earlier writings are more plentiful.

The question of Bazin's development has in fact proved perplexing to many critics. There appears to be no clear link between his first book, *Vipère au poing*, and his last, *Le Neuvième Jour*, which depicts the dilemmas faced by a scientist in the face of a global outbreak of influenza. Furthermore, neither of these novels have much in common with *Abécédaire* and *Ce que je crois*, departures from the novel form, both of which were published in the second half of Bazin's career. In what direction, if any, can he be said to have evolved?

Various critics have sought to organise Bazin's work into categories, cycles and phases in an attempt to detect a progression in his writing. Anglade divides the early novels into two main categories. He describes *Vipère au poing* (1948), *La Tête contre les murs* (1949) and *La Mort du petit cheval* (1950) as 'œuvres de pic', dictated primarily by the desire to take revenge on his family

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<sup>12</sup> *Art. cit.*, p.633.

and containing fairly thinly-veiled autobiographical material. The following novels, *Lève-toi et marche* (1952), *L'Huile sur le feu* (1954) and *Qui j'ose aimer* (1956) are categorised as 'œuvres de truelle', representing a freer, more creative approach less programmed by the need to settle scores. Writing later in 1973, Pierre Moustiers follows Anglade's approach and divides Bazin's work into two categories, 'la période du cri' and 'la période du tri'. Like Anglade, Moustiers's categories are based on a division between the more virulent nature of Bazin's early work and his calmer, more reflective later work. This idea of the enraged, youthful author of *Vipère au poing* achieving serenity, sagacity and objectivity in later life was first mooted in a much-quoted comment by Maurice Genevoix: 'Il se décrispa, j'en suis sûr', and appears to have been adopted by Moustiers.<sup>13</sup> Although the idea is very appealing, the publication of *Madame Ex* two years after Moustiers's study rather undermines this notion. This novel's depiction of a messy divorce is far from serene.

More recent critics of Bazin, who have had the advantage of a fuller overview of his work, have detected other kinds of progression in his writing. Zoë Boyer discusses the way in which certain types of female characters evolve and emerge, using the novels of the Rezeau trilogy as her starting point. Once again, she divides Bazin's novels into two eras: 'Ce sont les ascendants, la famille reçue, qui dominant dans les romans de la première époque, tandis que, dans la deuxième moitié de son œuvre, Bazin met en valeur la famille créée ou descendante.'<sup>14</sup> This is a helpful division of the material, although later works

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<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.16.

<sup>14</sup> *La Femme dans les romans d'Hervé Bazin*, Bern: Peter Lang, 1990, p.8.

such as *Un Feu dévore un autre feu*, *L'Église verte* and *Le Démon de minuit* are not as focussed on 'la famille descendante' as *Au Nom du fils*, *Le Matrimoine* and *Madame Ex*, even though, being post-1960 novels, they fall into the 'deuxième époque bazinienne'. Phillip Crant, whose book assessed Bazin's writing from a sociological perspective, considered Bazin's writing in terms of 'the novels of the Rezeau series (cycle); heroines; social novels; and, for the lack of a better term, private life or adventure novels'.<sup>15</sup> However, Crant's last category does not account for Bazin's serious discursive writing in the second half of his career. It would appear, therefore, that Bazin's work is not uniform and resists attempts to impose too rigid a structure upon it. Moustiers in particular pointed out the protean nature of Bazin's output by titling his book: 'le romancier en mouvement'.

To sum up, Bazin's popularity with the reading public in France and his prominence at the Académie Goncourt have given him considerable status, but he has not always been given the critical attention that he deserves. Such criticism as has been done has been greatly determined by the autobiographical approach and by the success of *Vipère au poing*. This has posed considerable problems in interpreting such works of Bazin's as do not fit this mould and in making sense of the diversity of his *œuvre*.

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<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.6.



## **The Significance of Place**

It may be more fruitful to analyse Bazin's development as an author without organising his work into distinct categories. During the discussion following his presentation at the *Colloque d'Angers*, Pierre Masson suggested a different way forward for Bazin criticism. He proposed that it ought to be possible to 'établir une sorte d'archétype et vérifier son fonctionnement dans l'ensemble de l'œuvre' (p.325).<sup>16</sup>

Bazin's use of place is just such an archetype because it is a consistent feature of his work. In each of his novels, beneath the level of the individual subject matter, lies an on-going preoccupation with the way in which the characters respond to their environments. Bazin's use of place is a useful critical tool because it provides a single viewpoint from which to consider the whole of his output and it therefore allows us to discern the way in which he developed. Furthermore, the presence of place-related themes both in the Rezeau trilogy and in the rest of Bazin's œuvre will help us to situate his most famous and critically acclaimed sequence of novels in the context of his work as a whole. We should thereby gain a greater understanding of the relationship between his best-known and his least-known writing.

Most of Bazin's novels convey a strong sense of place. Sometimes his descriptive powers are concentrated on individual rooms such as Constance's chaotic 'capharnaüm' in *Lève-toi et marche*, Salomé's elegant Parisian salon in

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<sup>16</sup> Georges Cesbron ed., Hervé Bazin: actes du colloque d'Angers du 11 au 13 décembre 1986, Angers: Presses de l'Université, 1987, p325.

*Cri de la chouette* and Yveline's dispiriting, rented bedroom in *Le Démon de minuit*. However, he also describes whole houses: the creaking and gloomy mansion of 'La Belle Angerie' in the Rezeau trilogy, the overgrown riverside retreat of 'La Fouve' in *Qui j'ose aimer* and a Carcassonne *Hôtel Particulier* in 'Souvenirs d'un amnésique' in the *Chapeau bas* collection of short stories. His descriptions of outdoor settings are equally vivid. *L'Huile sur le feu* has been justly praised for its evocation of the sounds and smells of the woods at night, and *L'Église verte* celebrates woodland flora and fauna by day. River scenes are another important feature of Bazin's novels. In fact, whether he was writing a short story, an individual novel or a trilogy, Bazin was always at pains to make the setting real to the reader.

Several critics have already highlighted the importance of place to Bazin. Martine Dufossé detects a strong regional theme in Bazin's writing. In her book, *Les Bazin et la province d'Anjou*, she compares and contrasts Bazin's depiction of Anjou in his overtly Angevin novels with that of his great-uncle, René Bazin.<sup>17</sup> She identifies those aspects of Anjou life which give rise to comparable treatment by both authors and she seeks to demonstrate their literary indebtedness to the region. Michael Cardy, on the other hand, identifies 'l'exil, tant spirituel que physique' as 'un grand motif de l'œuvre de Bazin',<sup>18</sup> whereas Vinciane Philips details the ways in which Bazin uses his settings to emphasise the psychology of his characters and to clarify the nature of their interaction with one another.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Les Bazin et la province d'Anjou*, Angers: Éditions du Choletais, 1977.

<sup>18</sup> *Art.cit.* p.59.

<sup>19</sup> 'Qui j'ose aimer, L'Église verte d'Hervé Bazin: étude de l'espace imaginaire', (unpublished master's thesis, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, 1983).

René Garguilo identifies the presence of the opposing themes of confinement and escape in a cross section of Bazin's novels, taking the 'cléftomanie' episodes in *Vipère au poing* as his starting point.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Marie-Rose and Marguerite-Cécile Albrecht focus on Bazin's preoccupation with the natural world. In a paper given at the Bazin conference in Angers in 1986, they comment on his use of botanical vocabulary to evoke natural settings.<sup>21</sup> These critics have all provided valuable leads for this study's analysis of the overall significance of place in Bazin's work.

The sense that readers and critics have acquired of the importance of the settings in Bazin's novels is borne out by new evidence from archive material. Shortly before his death, Bazin made many of his manuscripts and other papers available for study at the *Archives Municipales* in Nancy. No critics have, as yet, assessed the extent to which these documents widen our understanding and appreciation of Bazin's work. A particularly intriguing aspect of the manuscripts is that each one is accompanied by a dossier of notes which formed the preparatory stage of Bazin's writing process. In the vast majority of cases, these dossiers include notes and detailed maps he made during site visits to the places in which his novels were to be set. Bazin was evidently a writer who took great trouble to ensure that he could picture his settings clearly, in order then to describe them accurately. The presence of place-based research amongst key preparatory documents, such as lists of characters and plot developments,

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<sup>20</sup> 'La thématique de l'enfermement dans l'œuvre d'Hervé Bazin', in *Hervé Bazin: actes du colloque d'Angers, op. cit.*, pp. 49-57.

<sup>21</sup> 'Le sentiment de la nature dans l'œuvre d'Hervé Bazin', in *Hervé Bazin: actes du colloques d'Angers, op. cit.* pp.165-179.

suggests that settings were integral to Bazin's initial conception of a novel. The archive evidence also shows how Bazin used his settings to structure his novels. Each dossier contains his planning grids for his novels and these invariably include detailed references to the settings. The manuscripts indicate that place was far more important in both generating and shaping Bazin's fiction than has hitherto been realised and we shall begin our study by considering the insights into Bazin's technique that they afford.

We will then analyse the strong emotional responses of Bazin's characters towards place. Firstly, we will follow in Martine Dufossé's footsteps and examine Bazin's affinity with the Anjou region, as expressed in the Rezeau trilogy. However, an analysis of Jean Rezeau's relationship with his childhood home will lead us to discuss Bazin's interest in the wider notion of 'enracinement'. This notion of rootedness is a rich and prevalent theme which reaches beyond Bazin's Anjou-inspired fiction and deserves study in its own right. Bazin's characters are so acutely aware of their roots in their places of origin that departure from those places feels like a kind of exile. Exile is a corollary of rootedness, its natural counterpoint, and, as Michael Cardy has pointed out, it is of great importance as a theme in Bazin's writing.

The bond between Bazin's characters and their homes is often so intense that their interaction with other people takes the form of a territorial conflict. Many critics have commented, in passing, on the conflictual nature of the relationships that Bazin depicts, but few have appreciated the extent to which these conflicts are played out in spatial terms. Bazin was fascinated by the way in

which individuals lay claim to certain places and use them as power-bases from which to impose their will on others. We shall assess this aspect of his fiction in detail. The antithesis of this notion of territoriality is the notion of escape, identified by René Garguilo as an important theme in Bazin's writing. Bazin depicts place-based power struggles which are often so intense that escape becomes a psychological necessity. We will therefore also consider the prevalence and significance of the idea of 'fugue' in Bazin's writing.

Bazin's portrayal of the interaction between men and women usually involves a particularly fraught power-struggle for territorial dominance. His observation of the behaviour of men and women indoors and outdoors is astute and leads him to some startling conclusions. Women exert a strong attraction for men, but, once they take control of the household, they often repel and expel them to the margins of the home and into the outdoors. We shall consider the behaviour of Bazin's male and female characters both in the domestic and outdoor spheres and consider the wider implications of Bazin's assumptions.

We shall then pursue the line of enquiry suggested by Marie-Rose and Marguerite-Cécile Albrecht and consider Bazin's evocation of the natural world. Bazin clearly took great delight in the natural world and enjoyed the discipline of describing it with minute accuracy. However, his treatment of the natural world was more than merely descriptive. He was interested in the way in which the outdoors can provide a refuge from fraught domestic settings and a haven for the individual.

Finally, we shall consider Bazin's view that the natural world is a showcase for the beauty and complexity of planet Earth. Although he was initially absorbed by the ways in which individual human beings respond emotionally to place, in his later work he was increasingly preoccupied by how society as a whole interrelates to its setting. This in turn prompted him to explore questions of societal and planetary sustainability.

In considering Bazin's approach to place-related issues, we have been particularly struck by his tendency to think in terms of antitheses. Bazin was interested not only in exile but also in those who choose never to leave their homes. He analysed those who cling on to their territory and those who flee. He was fascinated by the antagonisms between men and women and by their contrasting attitudes to the indoors and the outdoors. He was interested both in the fragility and the sustainability of the earth. His treatment of the significance of place illustrates what one critic has termed 'Bazin's binary mind'.<sup>22</sup> He was instinctively drawn to place-based polarities and to the discussions that such polarities generate.

An analysis of Bazin's use of place also yields new insights into the nature of his autobiographical inspiration. We are challenged to reconsider what we know about his life and personality in order to account for the startling idiosyncrasy and prevalence of certain place-based themes in his writing. Furthermore, Bazin's treatment of place provides clues as to exactly how he extrapolated from personal experience in order to remain creative even when he

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<sup>22</sup> 'Flight is Right?' *Times Literary Supplement*, N° 3571, 7 August 1970, p.869.

was not drawing directly from his own life.

Overall, in considering the significance of place in Bazin's writing, we hope to draw attention to the quality of his work. One of his greatest achievements as an author was the way in which he explored and exploited notions of place during the course of nearly half a century of extremely varied writing. Bazin's use of place illuminates his technical proficiency, his psychological insights and his most deeply held convictions.

## **Chapter One: Setting and Form.**

Although his choice of subject matter varied greatly, the form that Bazin adopted for his novels and short stories remained constant throughout his writing career. Two main characteristics were to define his approach: a concern for verisimilitude on the one hand and careful attention to structure on the other. He sought to establish a true-to-life context for his characters and his books have linear plots, with a clear beginning, middle and end. In these respects, Bazin worked within the traditional conventions of the novel. Pierre de Boisdeffre notes that, at a time when many novelists were experimenting with form, ‘le roman “conventionnel” [...] est solidement défendu par [...] Bazin.’<sup>1</sup> Bazin’s skill in creating believable and shapely novels owed a great deal to his use of place. When we analyse the way in which Bazin used his settings to underpin the form of his novels, we can begin to appreciate the subtlety and intricacy of his method.

### **Setting and Verisimilitude.**

Many critics have been impressed by the verisimilitude of Bazin’s writing. Phillip Crant refers to Bazin’s ‘unyielding commitment to verisimilitude in his novels’.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, some critics have considered him to be a realistic writer and Bazin was not dissatisfied with this categorisation: ‘Certains critiques, soucieux de classements, me rangent [...] dans la catégorie fourre-tout des néo-

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.31.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.208.



réalistes. Moi, je veux bien'.<sup>3</sup> Bazin considered that realism provided the best vehicle for reaching a large readership because readers would be able to identify with the subject matter. This in turn would allow him to challenge his readers directly. For Bazin, realism was 'littérature de réflexion (dans les deux sens du terme) où la glace n'est pas faite pour conserver notre image, mais pour la remettre en question'.<sup>4</sup> Here Bazin puns on the two meanings of reflection in order to express the dual purpose of the realist writer's attempt to reflect life as it is, as well as to reflect on it.

Some critics have suggested that Bazin's novels are so realistic that they are in fact sociological documents. Maurice Bruézière disparaged novels such as *Le Matrimoine*, *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, and *Madame Ex* as 'que de la sociologie romancée'.<sup>5</sup> Phillip Crant, on the other hand, regards this aspect of Bazin's work as its chief distinction. He considers that it is Bazin's capacity for sociological observation which earns him his place in the canon of twentieth-century French literature:

If there is a literary niche between the philosophical novels of Sartre and Camus, the pastoral novels of Giono, the personal writings of Colette, or the hard-hitting, male-favoured novels of Montherlant and Saint-Exupéry, it would be the broad social novels of Bazin, written with objectivity and passion during almost half a century.<sup>6</sup>

Bazin himself tended to view much of his writing as an exercise in sociological

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Louis de Rambures, *Comment travaillent les écrivains*, Paris: Flammarion, 1978, p.27.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Bruézière, *Histoire descriptive de la littérature contemporaine*, tome II, Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1976, p.254.

<sup>6</sup> *Op.cit.*, pp.209-210.

observation. In a letter of thanks to the critic Fernando Schirosi in 1972, he indicated that he sought to develop the form of his novels in an increasingly sociological direction:

Vous savez ce que je veux être, modestement: le romancier de la vie privée en cette partie du siècle... de la vie privée dans ses rapports avec une évolution galopante de la vie sociale. J'ai commencé par le particulier; je vais de plus en plus au général.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, whereas *Vipère au poing*, *La Mort du petit cheval*, *Lève-toi et marche*, *L'Huile sur le feu* and *Qui j'ose aimer* are all novels concerned primarily with intense private struggles, the documentary feel of a work such as *La Tête contre les murs* was to become increasingly present in later novels.

Bazin's use of place was a key element in creating this atmosphere of sociological realism. Robert Kanters considered that it was Bazin's familiarity with the French provincial setting, in particular, which enabled him to produce such highly realistic and sociologically valuable fiction:

C'est l'étude de la province, avec ses mouvements de transformation lents et de longue durée, qui peut seule donner une base à la géologie sociale, et c'est pour cela qu'elle est presque irremplaçable dans le roman de mœurs.<sup>8</sup>

Bazin certainly considered himself to be a provincial writer: 'Je vis, j'écris en province. Parlant d'elle et des sept Français sur huit qui l'habitent, j'en suis un pro!'<sup>9</sup>

Another important aspect of Bazin's ability to conjure up a realistic

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<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.8.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Kanters, 'Le Mariage, entre le ciel et l'enfer', *Le Figaro Littéraire*, N° 1129, 4-10 Dec. 1967, p.20.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Claude Lamy, *op. cit.*, p.118.

provincial setting was his awareness of its linguistic particularities. He deliberately uses provincial vocabulary and idiom in his writing. The name of his most famous character is taken from dialect: ‘Une “Folcoche” est, dans la paysannerie du Segréen, la truie qui dévore ses petits’.<sup>10</sup> Bazin also valued local sayings. In *L’École des pères*, Abel Bretaudeau mourns the loss of his mother in terms of the old provincial expressions that he will never hear her say again: ‘Je ne l’entendrai plus parler du *pays bas*, dire *avette* pour *abeille*, *barrer la porte* pour la fermer à clef et *Dieu se déconsidère!* à la mort d’un enfant’ (p.176). In *Ce que je crois*, Bazin refers to ‘ce que les paysans de ma province appellent l’amour d’en bas et l’amour d’en haut’ (p.94). This phrase is also used by Nathalie in *Qui j’ose aimer*: ‘Vois-tu, Isa, on s’accroche par en haut et par en bas: j’ai l’idée que par en haut tu ne l’étais pas assez’(p.290). In fact, Nathalie is Bazin’s most prolific user of country sayings:

Noces de mai ne vont jamais. (p.194)

Ne sème pas sous le croissant : il faucille avant toi. (p.194)

Fille grêlée aime l’orage. (p.198)

Le souvenir et les cierges, ça brûle à petit feu. (p.249)

Fleur fanée porte graine. (p.288)

(Faire) de la poire du curé avec du fruit défendu’ (p.289)

Assiette réparée recède à la cassure’ (p.290).

The provincial flavour was more important to Bazin than accuracy for its own sake and he admitted to having invented some country maxims of his own.

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<sup>10</sup> *Hervé Bazin: Actes du Colloque d’Angers, op. cit., p.336.*

Under the heading 'Citations' in *Abécédaire*, he remarks: 'Comme les proverbes, j'en invente; et personne jusqu'ici ne semble s'en être aperçu' (p.61).

However, the classification of Bazin as a writer of provincial, sociological realism is not entirely satisfactory. Although it accurately describes the extremely documentary style of *Le Matrimoine* and *L'École des pères*, it does not adequately account for the rather racy plots of *L'Huile sur le feu*, the story of a compulsive pyromaniac; *Qui j'ose aimer*, depicting an incestuous relationship; the volcanic catastrophe on Tristan da Cunha recounted in *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*; and *Un Feu dévore un autre feu*, which concerns doomed love and suicide during a Latin American coup. Throughout his writing career, Bazin showed a distinct predilection for the dramatic, the extreme and, indeed, the monstrous. This is best accounted for by accepting Bazin's description of himself in *Abécédaire* as a 'conteur': 'Ce que je suis, avant tout, sans complexes' (p.67). Bazin, who published stories for children, short stories in newspapers and three collections of short stories in 1951, 1963, and 1992, had a gift for story-telling which gave him a vast readership and enduring popularity among those who enjoyed a good 'page-turning' read. Kanters wrote of Bazin: 'Il a un don presque unique parmi les écrivains de sa génération: il sait se faire lire'.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, Bazin always balanced his taste for remarkable stories with

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<sup>11</sup>Robert Kanters, *Des Écrivains et des hommes*, Paris: Julliard, 1952, p.293.

a concern for realism of context. He described himself as ‘un conteur ancré dans le quotidien’.<sup>12</sup> His entry under the title ‘Banal’ in *Abécédaire* sheds more light on this synthesis. Of the banal, he wrote:

Gloire à lui, rimant avec son contraire: l’original! Toute littérature qui fait la moue devant le commun me paraît fort princesse, oubliant que chacun naît, respire, boit, mange, dort, fait l’amour et meurt comme tout le monde. (p.42)

Here he asserts that the writer’s role is to depict and hallow the ordinary, everyday experiences shared by everyone. Bazin then admits that it is the unusual rather than the usual which excites our special interest: ‘Le merveilleux, bien sûr, nous lui serons tout œil’(p.42). However, that which is out of the ordinary will be complemented by the ordinary, ‘il [le merveilleux] fleurit très bien en terre de quotidien’(p.42). This is the essence of Bazin’s literary technique. He sets out to ‘rendre l’imaginaire vraisemblable en l’ancrant dans l’exact’.<sup>13</sup> Startling stories are highlighted and offset by very realistic contexts.

Bazin’s use of place is crucial in providing the realistic context for the more exotic elements of his writing. Place forms the texture of the ‘quotidien’ which counterbalances the ‘merveilleux’ of the plot. He was at all times concerned to create believable settings and he used a variety of methods to achieve this.

The most straightforward way in which Bazin ensured the realism of his décor was to set novels in places in which he himself had lived. He claimed to

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<sup>12</sup>Jacques Jaubert, ‘Hervé Bazin s’explique’, *Lire*, October 1978, p.33.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Louis de Rambures, *op. cit.*, p.28.

have portrayed ten of his own homes in his fiction. Norma Perry asserts that Daniel Astin's house in *Au Nom du fils* was based on the house in which Bazin was living at the time in Chelles.<sup>14</sup> He used the same town and road with the difference that there could in reality be no 'mair' to the Quai Auguste-Prévot since the house faced the river Marne. Another setting for *Au nom du fils*, the river-side retreat of 'L'Émeronce', was based on Bazin's own cottage in Annetz-sur-Loire. In describing the advantages of close personal familiarity with a setting for a novel, Bazin shows a painter's preoccupation with visual detail and accuracy:

Il existe entre l'objet et vous une résonance perpétuelle; quand on en connaît tous les aspects selon la lumière et selon les heures, cet aspect au moment voulu, vous n'avez pas besoin de le chercher, il vient immédiatement.<sup>15</sup>

Bazin here emphasises the speed with which he can picture a familiar setting in order to evoke it in written form.

Perhaps the best example of this close connection between Bazin and his settings is to be found in his portrayal of the house and grounds in the Rezeau trilogy. There is plenty of evidence that 'La Belle Angerie' was based on Bazin's own childhood home of 'Le Pâtys'. The name 'La Belle Angerie' was in fact the name of the farmhouse nearest to the family home. The family surname is changed to Rezeau, the name of the seat of the Hervé branch of the family, where Bazin lived from 1911 to 1923. The nearby town of Marans is

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<sup>14</sup> Norma Perry ed., *Au nom du fils*, London: University of London Press, 1960, p.xxii.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xxiv.

renamed 'Soledot', based on a quotation from a well known local writer, Mathilde Alanic: 'Luit mon soleil d'eau'. Bazin was in fact using an easily breakable code to encourage the identification of the Rezeau family at 'La Belle Angerie' with the Hervé-Bazin family at 'Le Pâtys'.

In the case of Bazin's first novel, *Vipère au poing*, the realism of the setting served purposes beyond the purely literary. The book was written primarily as a means of exposing and shaming his family. Bazin confided to J.A.W. Caldwell:

*Vipère au poing* est un roman à clefs. Je me vengeais sur la famille et j'espérais, en l'écrivant, vendre assez d'exemplaires pour faire scandale dans ma région natale et pour gêner par conséquent les coupables que je décrivais dans le roman.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, Jean Anglade has pointed out that:

[Bazin] a toléré qu'une édition de luxe de *Vipère au poing* à tirage limité fût illustrée par des photographies représentant le manoir du Pâtys, un certain nombre d'Hervé-Bazin ou d'autres personnes aisément identifiables ayant appartenu à leur entourage.<sup>17</sup>

The inspiration for the setting of the novel could hardly have been made plainer. Furthermore, when describing 'Le Pâtys' as 'La Belle Angerie', Bazin seems to have changed little beyond the name. There is a document in the Nancy archive, entitled 'L'Écorce et le cœur', in which a group of school children report their visit to 'Le Pâtys' prior to interviewing Bazin in 1995. As part of their research, the children documented and photographed the condition of the buildings and grounds. They noted the continued existence of the distinctive towers which are

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<sup>16</sup> 'L'Évolution d'Hervé Bazin, romancier', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Macquarie University, Australia, 1977), p.A/8.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.60.

described in the novel as ‘les deux nobles tourelles où sont dissimulés les cabinets d’aisance’ (p.14), the bedroom window from which Brasse-Bouillon escaped, the river ‘Ommée’, ‘l’allée des platanes’, some remaining ‘taxaudiers’ and even the V.F. still scratched into the bark of some trees.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Bazin’s documents at the Archives Municipales in Nancy reveal that, when he was not depicting one of his own homes, he relied on research to ensure the verisimilitude of his settings. Bazin always prepared his novels by gathering materials from different sources for a preparatory dossier. He termed this process ‘le travail de l’abeille: la miellée’.<sup>19</sup> Although many of the different elements of research vary from dossier to dossier, place-based research is always present.

By far the fullest dossier, which Bazin went to great lengths to compile, is that for *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*. Bazin described it to Jean-Louis de Rambures in the following terms:

Pour *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* le dossier comportait: cartes géographiques, journaux locaux, rapports administratifs (j’ai même appointé à cet effet durant un an ... le gouverneur de l’île!), interviews et fiches d’identité des habitants de Tristan da Cunha chassés par le tremblement de terre. J’ai fait pour préparer ce livre les voyages nécessaires. Notez que j’aurais pu, pour raconter l’arrivée des rescapés en Angleterre, me contenter de recourir aux archives de l’époque. J’ai préféré voir de mes propres yeux ce qu’ils avaient vu en refaisant moi-même le trajet en ferry, de l’île de Wight à Southampton, en voyant de mes yeux l’estuaire de la Hamble, la raffinerie, les chantiers navals.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix pp.i-ii.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Jaubert, *art. cit.*, p.38.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Louis de Rambures, *op. cit.*, p.29.



He also mentions his use of ‘appareils photos et caméra 16 Paillard pour photographier ou filmer éventuellement le cadre d’un roman.’<sup>21</sup> He was not content to rely on published maps for his research, these had to be backed up by first hand experience of the place, ‘voyant de mes propres yeux’, as well as a filmed record of his visit.

Bazin always took notes during visits to places that he intended to use as settings. He often listed key features. His ‘notations locales pour *Qui j’ose aimer*’ are typical of this approach.<sup>22</sup> The extent of his concern for accuracy can be gauged from the questions he subsequently put to the Mayor of Sucé, whose letter was also included in the dossier for *Qui j’ose aimer*.<sup>23</sup> During his site visits, Bazin would also sketch rough maps. The preparatory documents for *Cri de la chouette* include a site-based sketch of the layout of Gournay, the town in which Jean Rezeau is living with his family.<sup>24</sup> Lest the existence of this map should puzzle scholars, he has labelled it: ‘Comme je l’ai fait souvent caser dans le texte ces détails qui “font vrai”’. Bazin was clearly using a well-established technique of inserting real topographical information into a novel to increase its overall verisimilitude.

He also made site visits to ensure the accuracy of his depiction of interior settings. The preparatory notes for *Madame Ex* include four sides of sketched maps and jottings made during a visit to the Palais de Justice in Paris.<sup>25</sup> Some of

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix, p.iii.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.iv.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.v.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.vi-ix.

the details from this research are incorporated into the opening chapter of the novel, when Aline and Louis Davermelle hear their divorce proceedings. Aline notices ‘la grille à l’écusson fleurdelisé’, ‘le buffet’, ‘un monument d’un certain Bérrier ou Pérrier’ (p.7), ‘l’escalier centrale dominé par ces quatre colonnes géantes entre lesquelles jouent à cache-cache les trois parties de la devise nationale’ (pp.7-8) and the ‘galérie de la Sainte Chapelle’ (p.8), all of which had been recorded on Bazin’s map of the ground floor of the Palais de Justice and in his notes.<sup>26</sup> Aline then makes her way into ‘la Grande Salle, large comme une place de village et partagée en deux parties [...] par huit pilastres carrés’(p.8), which corresponds exactly to Bazin’s sketch of ‘Palais grande salle, croquis sur place, janvier 1974’.<sup>27</sup> Just as Bazin had noted on his map, Aline notices ‘la rotonde d’accueil à lampes vertes’, the ‘dallage à bandes noires’(p.8), the ‘premier cénotaphe surmonté d’un quidam perché comme un saint dans sa niche’ and ‘ce monument aux morts de France’ (p.9). Towards the end of the novel, Aline and Louis Davermelle make their second visit to the law courts in Paris to settle the disputed custody arrangements for the two youngest children. The hearing takes place in the ‘Chambre des Référés’ and once again the details of the room, described by Aline, are to be found on Bazin’s site-visit map.<sup>28</sup> She notices ‘les consoles à palmettes’, ‘le plafond à moulures dorées’, the ‘ampoules nues’, ‘trois hautes fenêtres à gauche’, ‘une horloge’, ‘la balustrade de bois’ and the two sides of the seating arrangements, ‘côté lumière’, ‘côté ombre’(p.264).

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<sup>26</sup> See Appendix, pp.vi-vii.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.viii.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.ix.

The emphasis throughout is upon the contrast between the highly personal dramas of the Davermelle couple and the cool legal environment in which their conflicts are to be resolved: 'Dans ce temple du non' (p.8). When Bazin brought his fictional couple into direct contact with the apparatus of the French legal system, he spared no effort to ensure complete verisimilitude by means of location.

Bazin's most detailed series of preparatory maps were for the setting of *Lève-toi et marche*. The dossier for this novel includes two sides of notes and sketched maps entitled 'visite avec Cathelin en bord de la Marne'.<sup>29</sup> Bazin also includes a sketch of the front elevation of the apartment block in which Constance will live and a floor plan showing the lay out of the rooms in her house.<sup>30</sup> Both drawings are labelled '9 Grande rue, St. Maurice' and appear to show a real apartment. In this case, Bazin's concern to achieve authenticity of décor even had a mischievous quality to it. In his interview with Jean-Louis de Rambures, he remarked:

J'aime piéger mes lecteurs. Toujours dans *Lève-toi et marche*, j'ai décrit avec tant de précision la maison (réelle) de mon héroïne (imaginaire) que plusieurs lecteurs, l'ayant reconnue, ont sonné à la porte et demandé à la concierge de visiter l'appartement de Constance.<sup>31</sup>

This incident demonstrates the success of Bazin's policy of using authentic places to confer credibility onto the imaginary, and often unusual, activities and situations of his characters.

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix pp.x-xi.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.xii-xiii.

<sup>31</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.29.

He tended to make preparatory maps of settings even when they were not verifiable public places like the Palais de Justice in Paris, or identifiable private addresses as in the case of Constance's flat. The dossiers for *L'Église verte*, *Au nom du fils*, and *Qui j'ose aimer* all include floor plans of the houses which the protagonists will inhabit.<sup>32</sup> The sketch of 'La Fouve', for *Qui j'ose aimer*, is particularly detailed and shows the position of the house in its grounds and in relation to the surrounding roads and rivers. However 'La Fouve' was, in fact, a fictional amalgam of houses which Bazin knew well. In a letter to Jacques Brengues he explained:

La Fouve, elle-même, n'existe pas: elle est le résumé d'un certain nombre de maisons de famille qui se trouvent (Rezeau, Rousson, Le Pâtys) dans la même région (bords de Loire, de l'Authion, de l'Hommé, de l'Erdre).<sup>33</sup>

Bazin also felt the need to sketch out the forest hideaway of the nameless stranger in *L'Église verte*.<sup>34</sup>

The purpose of such maps was to enable Bazin to be consistent and coherent in moving his characters around invented settings. According to Norma Perry, in the case of *L'Huile sur le feu*, Bazin 'created [...] a village which he drew in minute detail, and "learnt" by heart so as not to be ill at ease – or ever incorrect – in the movements of his characters round the village'.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, he situated the village in the Bocage region: 'Après avoir inventé de toutes

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix, pp.xiv-xvi.

<sup>33</sup> Fabienne Épinette Brengues, 'Loire, rivières de l'Ouest et la symbolique de l'eau dans l'œuvre d'Hervé Bazin' in *Loire-Littérature: actes du colloque d'Angers du 26 au 29 mai 1988*, Angers: Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 1989, p.723.

<sup>34</sup> See Appendix, p.xvii.

<sup>35</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp.xxii-xxiii.

pièces le village où se situe *L'Huile sur le feu* [...] j'ai dessiné un parallélogramme sur la carte Michelin et, les raccordant aux routes véritables, j'y ai tracé les chemins du village de Saint-Leup'.<sup>36</sup> Presumably Bazin's reason for not choosing a real village was the fact that its existence would serve to contradict the novel's account of the many fires which destroy or damage significant numbers of buildings. Although *L'Église verte* is also set in the entirely imaginary village of Lagrairie, the map for this novel is by far the most detailed of all the maps in the manuscripts.<sup>37</sup> It is carefully drawn on a whole sheet of foolscap and Bazin has painted it in watercolour. Like Saint-Leup, it is inserted into an indentifiable part of France.<sup>38</sup> This is done so skilfully that the critic Vinciane Philips is able to locate it somewhere near 'les communes de Beléglise, Génomier, Saint-Savin, qui se trouvent à l'est de Poitiers et plus précisément dans le département de la Vienne', although she admits that 'il est impossible de situer de façon plus précise le lieu de l'action'.<sup>39</sup>

Bazin's maps were not generally intended for the reader. Of all the maps in the archive, only two of Tristan da Cunha find their way into the final, published novel. The maps served primarily to give Bazin a context or foothold for his imagination. He remarked: 'C'est lorsque je suis totalement familiarisé avec les gens et les lieux, réels ou fictifs, que je décide de me lancer'.<sup>40</sup> For Bazin, the accuracy of the décor, whether real or imagined, and his ability to

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Louis de Rambures, *op. cit.*, p.29.

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix, p.xviii.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xix.

<sup>39</sup> Vinciane Philips, *op. cit.*, p.65.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Louis de Rambures, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

picture it clearly in his mind's eye was a *sine qua non* of the writing process.

The short story, 'On y verra que du feu', published in the collection *Le Grand Méchant doux*, and its preparatory dossier from the Nancy archives provide a crucial insight into the way in which Bazin blended research and story-telling. On this occasion, his dossier contains the fire brigade's official report of a real fire at the Restaurant Calvert in 1971.<sup>41</sup> This source includes detailed information about the setting of the fire:

La Société CALVET exploite dans un immeuble d'habitation un restaurant 165 Boulevard SAINT GERMAIN à PARIS 6ème arrondissement.

L'immeuble marque l'angle du Boulevard SAINT GERMAIN et de la rue du Dragon. Il a une superficie de 120 mètres carrés environ sur quatre étages.

Le rez-de-chaussée est occupé par la cuisine et une salle de restaurant.

Au 1er étage, une seconde salle de restaurant est reliée à la première par un escalier intérieur en bois qui ne dessert que de niveau.

Bazin imports all of these elements into his story. The Restaurant Calvet becomes 'Le Damien Saint-Germain'. On the night of the fire, in Bazin's story, there are 'trente-huit couverts au rez-de-chaussée'(p.108), some clients 'dans le petit salon vert [...] à l'étage'(p.110) and the manager calls the fire brigade 'en leur demandant de passer par la ruelle pour alerter le moins possible la clientèle'(p.110). M. Claude muses aloud to his staff: 'Je me demande vraiment pourquoi mon père n'a jamais voulu faire installer un ascenseur' (p.111), as the fire spreads through the building by way of the wooden staircase. With these

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix, p.xx.

passing references, Bazin recreates the Restaurant Calvet exactly. He also refers to two photographs, and additional information in order to depict the character of the general.<sup>42</sup> His source reads as follows:

Le Général Ferauge, que vous pouvez situer dans l'action, était petit et obèse, très sanguin et très colérique. Traumatisé par quelques grandes opérations (Publicis notamment), il se rendait sur presque toutes les interventions pour feux moyens. Sa conception très exigeante de ses responsabilités le conduisait à prendre en main les opérations dès leur début, vérifiant le travail de chacun, houspillant celui-ci, criant après celui-là [...] Cette activité était, bien sûr, très remarquée des journalistes [...] Tous ces journalistes et photographes, ayant des autorisations spéciales, auraient franchi les barrages de police et se seraient trouvés au milieu des pompiers.

Again we find that Bazin includes many of the key elements from his source material in his story:

Un petit gros au visage sanguin, casqué, botté, enfourné dans sa veste de peau et qui pourrait être pris pour un pompier quelconque si deux étoiles, sur une patte de cuir, ne révélaient son grade.  
'Le général!' jette à un collègue un photographe qui, son coupe-file en main, vient de franchir le barrage. Depuis l'affaire de Publicis il ne rate pas un gros coup. Premier flash. Le général, fidèle à sa réputation, paie de sa personne, gueule où il faut. (p.116)

'On y verra que du feu' demonstrates Bazin's close reliance on factual material and research regarding place and even characterisation.

However, there are some important differences between Bazin's short story and his fire service sources. The sources ensure that his story is 'vraisemblable', but the story-telling instinct required a more intriguing event than a fire started 'dans la gaine de ventilation de la hotte de la cuisine', as in the case of the Restaurant Calvet. Bazin's imagination may have been caught by the

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.xxi-xxiv.

fire report's reference to the proprietor of the restaurant responding to the fire 'sans panique'.<sup>43</sup> This *sang-froid* is psychologically accounted for by Bazin in such a way as to create a sinister narrative. Perhaps inspired by the statement in the fire report that 'Le dernier niveau est utilisé en grenier où sont entreposés différents matériaux combustibles'<sup>44</sup>, the restaurateur in the story is calm during the fire because he has started it himself by lighting 'une accumulation d'emballages'(p.121) on the third floor with a cigarette lighter. The 'Damien Saint-Germain' has been losing money for some time and he hopes to recover his losses by claiming the insurance money. The short story, 'On y verra que du feu', thus provides a particularly striking example of Bazin's technique of 'rendre l'imaginaire vraisemblable en l'ancrant dans l'exact'.

### **Setting and Structure.**

In an interview with Christine Garnier, Bazin reflected on his work as a novelist and proposed that a structured approach was even more important than psychological insight: 'La vertu première, avant même la lucidité, c'est l'organisation'.<sup>45</sup> He has been praised for the craftsmanship and even the classicism of his writing and the Nancy archives provide key insights into exactly how he achieved these qualities of balance and rhythm in his writing. Once again we shall find that Bazin's use of setting had an important role to play.

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<sup>43</sup> See Appendix, p.xx.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Christine Garnier, *L'Homme et son personnage*, Paris: Grasset, 1955, p.4.



Manuscripts in the archives indicate that Bazin often used his settings as the basis for the structure and development of the plot. Two short stories in particular are accompanied by maps which show that the progression of the narrative corresponds exactly to the movement of the characters around the location. ‘Chapeau bas’ and ‘Souvenirs d’un amnésique’, both published in the *Chapeau bas* collection, were clearly written in conjunction with the maps which accompany their manuscripts. Both stories demonstrate the way in which the setting provided the guiding and organising principle for Bazin’s writing.

The plot of ‘Chapeau bas’ follows the procession of a funeral *cortège* through an Anjou village. Bazin sketched a preparatory map of the village showing the route taken by the coffin bearers.<sup>46</sup> Topographical references from this map appear throughout the short story, structuring and punctuating the action.

The expository scene features the barrel-maker Nicolas, who hears the church bell tolling for the funeral of Emma, a local prostitute. He is irritated by the smug malice of his neighbour Julie, who has invited people to watch the spectacle of an entirely unattended funeral procession from the window of her top-floor flat. She speaks for the village when she boasts: ‘Il n’y aura pas un chat. Tu peux regarder la rue: elle se vide’(p.12).

The second section of the story is seen through the eyes of the priest who is accompanying the coffin. He is acutely aware of the unnatural emptiness of the town. Julie’s prediction has been borne out. The priest describes his route

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<sup>46</sup> See Appendix p.xxv.

street by street, emphasising at every turn the absence of the villagers who have removed themselves from the coffin's path.

Un peu plus loin, dans la basse ville, le même glas accablait l'impasse Moreau. (p.14)

L'abandon du pavé criait le mépris de la ville. (p.16)

Au bout de l'impasse le passage des Carmes était vide et, au bout du passage, la rue du Vieux-Marché parut encore plus vide. (p.17)

Mais le pire n'était pas arrivé. La rue du Vieux-Marché terminée, commencerait le quartier haut. Dès le croisement avec la rue de la Libération on sut à quoi s'en tenir. L'agent de service qui réglait la circulation – illusoire – [...] étendit les deux bras pour protéger le convoi et interdire l'accès du carrefour à d'invisibles voitures. (pp.17-18)

La rue du Général-de-Gaulle, ex-Grand-Rue, aorte de la cité, nettoyée de ses bourgeois. (p.18)

The priest is overwhelmed with embarrassment and begins to think in terms of the route still to be covered to get Emma's body to the church and then back to the cemetery again. The *cortège* makes its way up the rue des Remparts and is then joined by the barrel-maker and his wife as it passes the local shops to reach 'la place Notre-Dame [...] si purgée de toute vie, si monumentalement raide qu'elle semblait devenue un agrandissement de sa carte postale' (p.26).

Once the procession has entered the church, the story moves into its third phase. Nicolas and his wife hatch a plan. During the service, they visit key places in the village disseminating the rumour that Emma has left millions to be distributed among those who attend her funeral.

The emergence of the *cortège* from the church marks the fourth phase of the story, during which the coffin is carried to the cemetery. The narrative is once again punctuated by topographical references, but this time they are accompanied by descriptions of the large number of people who have appeared to follow the procession.

Devant l'église [...] trente personnes [...] attendaient sur la place. (p.35)

On repassa par la rue des Remparts [...]. On repassa par la rue du Général-de-Gaulle et les commerçants furent tous sur leurs seuils, décents jusqu'à l'os. (p.38)

On repassa par la rue du Vieux-Marché, et le populaire déferla. (p.39)

Enfin laissant à gauche le passage des Carmes [...] le convoi s'engagea dans la rue du Cimetière, amorce de la rue de Nantes [...] tout était couvert par un immense piétinement et la queue du cortège en était encore au carrefour quand les roues du corbillard commencèrent à faire crisser le gravillon du cimetière. (p.39)

The comic effect here is achieved through irony as the reader has the opportunity to contrast the scenes of the empty streets with those of the full ones.

The story comes to an end when Nicolas and his wife admit their trick to the solicitor and, again, topographical references trace their retreat out of the cemetery. Nicolas's verdict on the events, given from the vantage point of the hill, is also connected to the townscape. He ironically compares the sight of the greedy and hypocritical villagers counting each other in the cemetery, so that they can share the booty, with the 'Vallée de Josaphat' where 'les justes seraient comptés'(p.46). 'La Vallée de Josaphat' was a proposed title for the story in its

manuscript form, which further underlines the importance of the place symbolism in Bazin's mind.

The technique of using place to structure a narrative is even more sophisticated in 'Souvenirs d'un amnésique', also published in the *Chapeau bas* collection. Pierre Moustiers rightly refers to this story as 'un petit chef-d'œuvre'.<sup>47</sup> This time the physical journey depicted in the story is closely linked to a psychological one. The symbolic use of place, which Bazin seems to have been aiming for at the end of 'Chapeau bas', is worked out in greater detail and is more integral to the story as a whole.

A hand-written note at the end of Bazin's manuscript version of the story indicates that it was pictures of attics which inspired the story to be written: 'Nouvelle inventée pour "interpréter" les lithos de Fourt: greniers'.<sup>48</sup> Bazin also noted here that he began writing the story in a house in Carcassonne, which may well have been the inspiration for Madame Lagruelle's house, so minutely described in the narrative, and of which, as usual, he made a preparatory sketch.<sup>49</sup> As in the case of 'On y verra que du feu', the setting has suggested the story, but Bazin now looked to express the significance and symbolism of the setting.

This time the story begins in a cemetery. The associations of death and bleakness, which a cemetery readily conveys, are seen to mirror the inner state of the story's protagonist. Madame Lagruelle has become emotionally deadened

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<sup>47</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.185.

<sup>48</sup> See Appendix, p.xxvi.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xxvii.

and numbed by the mysterious disappearance of her husband, Henri, twenty-nine years previously. He is presumed dead. She has struggled to maintain the family sawmill business on her own and at great emotional cost. As she visits Henri's empty grave, reference is made to her weary resignation: 'Pour une heure, il ne reste plus que le coût du triomphe: vingt-neuf ans de solitude, de harassante autorité, de renonciation à la meilleure part, à une simple existence de femme'(p.189). The expository scene is brought to a close when Madame Lagruelle is taken by her chauffeur to her *hôtel particulier* in Carcassonne. No details of her route are given as these are of no psychological significance. In fact the protagonist is so wrapped up in bitter thoughts that she is 'étonnée d'avoir déjà traversé Carcassonne' (p.191).

The next section of the story unfurls as Madame Lagruelle is summoned to the attic by her maid. The language used to refer to the attic underlines its symbolic significance. It is a place where unused objects are stored and then forgotten about. It is a dark, shadowy place where one cannot see clearly. The attic of this house belongs behind the scenes, it is a mysterious world unseen by visitors. In this story, it becomes a metaphor for memory itself. Madame Lagruelle's attitude to the attic mirrors her attitude to the painful memories of her vanished husband. She suppresses thoughts of the past, thus the approach to the attics is described as 'ces régions où elle n'avait que faire, où commençaient ces immenses, ces tortueux greniers' (p.193).

The way in which the attic is described, as Madame Lagruelle makes her way through it, reflects her growing sensitivity both to what it contains and to

her own memories. The list of unwanted objects she sees as she passes begins prosaically with ‘sablières surchargées de paquets de cordes, d’oignons vidés de toute substance, de chaînes, de cages rouillés’ (p.195), but then goes on to mention the more ambiguous presence of ‘reliques incertaines’, which then lead Madame Lagruelle to perceive ‘une sorte de téléphone pour fantômes’(p.195). Madame Lagruelle is becoming less matter-of-fact and more suggestible with every step. Psychologically, she is ready to see a ghost, and indeed she does. The encounter with Henri, a shadow of his former self, leads her to compare him to ‘un fantôme’ (p.199) and later to ‘un fantôme abusif’ (p.203). He is a ghost who has returned to haunt the place in which he once lived. The shadowy light of the attic, ‘très sombre, véritable cave aérienne’ (p.194), and the physical difficulty in seeing anything, ‘elle clignait des paupières dans l’ombre, cherchant son homme’ (p.196), come to symbolise Madame Lagruelle’s confusion. She is metaphorically in the dark as to what has happened to her husband, why he has returned and what her reaction should be. The shadowy attic also symbolises the partial recall of Henri Lagruelle, who has recovered some memory, but not all of it: ‘Le choc spectaculaire, l’éclair dans la nuit, je crains que ce ne soit de la légende. Tout est reparti pour moi d’une indication très vague’ (p.211).

The central section of the story unfolds in the last room of the attic as Henri recounts his long struggle to recover his past, from a starting point of total amnesia. Madame Lagruelle’s thoughts and feelings evolve as she listens, but her outward coldness leads her husband to despair of resurrecting his marriage. Henri makes to leave the attic, and the couple leaves the unseen and private

world of memories and goes down into the sawmill courtyard below, which brings this section to a close.

There now follows the pivotal moment of the story, which is expressed in spatial terms. Madame Lagruelle must choose by which route to see her husband off:

S'il voulait s'en aller, cet homme, c'était son droit. On lui demandait seulement de bien vouloir sortir, anonyme, par le portail de l'usine, de ne pas emprunter l'itinéraire privé, le jardin, le hall, enfin la porte – trop symbolique –, de sa propre maison. (p.228)

Madame Lagruelle is hesitant, and distracted by an oil slick on her way to the factory exit. The issue is decided by her husband, who asks to leave via the 'oasis'(p.229). His use of the family name for the garden and his choice of such an emotionally significant route triggers the final phase of the story.

As with the cemetery and attic, the associations of the garden are in tune with the thoughts and feelings of the main characters. Gardens are often places of idyll or romance and this one proves no exception. The garden is revealed to have been the site of Henri's proposal to his wife, forty years previously. There is also a 'rosier-cascade'(p.230) of such significance that Madame Lagruelle has had it replaced. As they pass through the garden, Madame Lagruelle is struck by the inappropriateness of her subsequent use of the garden for business purposes and Henri feels increasingly uneasy and guilty that he remembers so little about a place of such emotional importance.

The story reaches its resolution as the couple enters the hall. They are now at the heart of the home and important decisions must be made about their

*ménage*. Is Henri to be welcomed back or is he to leave by his own front door? Overcome by emotion, Madame Lagruelle asks her husband to stay for dinner. Henri understands the significance of the invitation and accepts.

The story is made up of a series of journeys. Madame Lagruelle has travelled from the cemetery to her home and then, accompanied her husband, out of the attic, through the yard via her garden to the front door. Henri also relates his activities over the years he has been away; the journey from Montreal to New York, to the mental hospital, to war, to a sawmill in Oregon, and then back to France as he gradually pieced his past together. However, the story also tracks the internal, emotional journey of each of the characters. Madame Lagruelle moves from fear, cynicism, and hostility to shame, self-awareness and need. Her emotional evolution is very finely drawn; there are no fewer than forty-four references to her state of mind during the course of the story. Henri becomes increasingly enlightened as to the nature of the woman he has returned to meet and increasingly unhopeful of finding the warmth that he has come for. The physical and emotional journeys are blended, creating a kind of latter-day *carte de Tendre*.

The cartographic aspect of the story must have been very important in Bazin's mind because his manuscript contains a sketch of the journey through the building with heart symbols marking the location of each key emotional development.<sup>50</sup> He also notes in the manuscript the possibility of publishing a version of this map alongside his story:

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<sup>50</sup> See Appendix, p.xxviii.



Il y aura peut-être lieu, pour montrer poétiquement l'itinéraire de Mme L., de dessiner l'ensemble des bâtisses, en grisé, voire – au besoin – en 'coupe'. Un simple trait rouge (qui irait en s'épaississant, symboliquement) servirait en somme de fil conducteur au récit.

Bien entendu donner au plan une allure moins raide, quand on atteindra le jardin qui [doit] être traité en 'oasis' (une autre couleur?)

Un petit cœur sous l'étoile, un plus gros au moment où Mme L. décide de retourner par le jardin. Un cœur dans l'oasis même, près du banc. La ligne rouge se terminera très épaisse par une flèche indiquant l'entrée de la maison.

On pourra peut-être (à voir) 'faire mourir' le trait rouge à distance, dans la rue d'où vient Mme L., sortant du cimetière.<sup>51</sup>

Bazin clearly wished to emphasise the way in which he had used the setting to structure his story.

His manuscript notes also indicate that he was concerned about the verisimilitude of the story for he jotted down an alternative version, entitled 'variante':

Il y aura lieu d'étudier la variante 'songe', qui utiliserait le fauteuil du hall. Mme Lag., fatiguée, rentre du cimetière et, en attendant le dîner, s'assoit, s'assoupit. Elle rêve toute la suite. Quand elle revient avec son mari, dans le hall, elle s'assoit de nouveau ( en rêve, cette fois, mais ceci fait la liaison) dans le fauteuil. Henri s'en va. Elle se réveille, tandis que la bonne entre. Elle s'étonne. Il n'y a pas de trace de pas sur le sablon du jardin. Mais il y a quelque chose de changé en elle. Cette variante élimine le côté un peu fabuleux de l'affaire et assure à la nouvelle une autre fin, qui n'est ni bonne ni mauvaise.<sup>52</sup>

However, in spite of these reservations, Bazin chose to retain the original version of his story. He opts for a concrete and symbolic use of place rather than an imaginary one.

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<sup>51</sup> See Appendix, p.xxix.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xxx.

Although the short-story form clearly demonstrates Bazin's ability to impose a clear structure on a narrative, he was equally concerned to achieve the same levels of organisation in his longer fictional writing. As a committed practitioner of the traditional novel, Bazin ensured that all his novels had a clear beginning, middle and end. Indeed, he felt unable to start writing a novel unless these three elements were established in his mind: 'Mais je ne me lance jamais tant que je n'ai pas "la pince", autrement dit un bon début et une bonne fin...et, entre les deux, de quoi assurer le sandwich'.<sup>53</sup> In his interview with Jean-Claude Lamy, he affirmed: 'Je ne sais pas comment travaillent les autres, mais l'idée de tracer les premières lignes et de me laisser aller, sans savoir où j'irai, ne m'a jamais effleuré. Il me faut d'abord me mettre d'accord avec moi-même, prévoir certaines scènes (l'entrée, la finale surtout)'.<sup>54</sup>

Bazin took great care over the opening chapters of his novels, and he relied heavily on descriptions of the principal setting as a means of beginning the narrative. He declared that he found the first four chapters of a novel the hardest to write, but that, once they were written, the rest of his narrative flowed easily: 'A l'inverse d'une course de fond où nul ne halète au départ, mais à l'arrivée, c'est le début d'un récit, le "chapitre d'attaque" et les quatres ou cinq suivants qui me donnent le plus de mal'.<sup>55</sup> The intricacy of his expositions and the way in which they contain the seeds of the rest of the novel may well account for this difficulty.

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<sup>53</sup> Jacques Jaubert, *art. cit.*, p.38.

<sup>54</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.107.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.107-8.

Bazin's expository chapters tend to follow a similar pattern. He launches the reader straight into the middle of an arresting piece of action in the first chapter; a boy strangling a snake in *Vipère au poing*, a handicapped girl risking a swim in *Lève-toi et marche*, a man apparently walking on water in *L'Église verte* and so on. The succeeding chapters then establish the characters' home setting and it is in describing this décor that Bazin brings to light the issues which are to dictate the rest of the plot. This slightly theatrical procedure of setting the scene is referred to directly by the narrator in *Vipère au poing*, ' nous voici donc [...] sur la scène de *La Belle Angerie*. Tableau unique' (p.43).

In *Vipère au poing*, Bazin's expository use of the setting is particularly accomplished. The first chapter after the snake episode begins with a detailed description of 'La Belle Angerie'. The house is presented by the narrator as the perfect expression of the aspirations, delusions and deficiencies of the Rezeau family, with which he intends to take issue in the rest of the novel. The pretensions of the family are immediately indicated in the name of the house: 'Déformation flatteuse de "la Boulangerie"' (p.13). The wholesome, day-to-day necessities implicit in the notion of a *boulangerie* are suppressed in favour of the other-worldly connotations of 'La Belle Angerie', for this is a family which scorns the basic comforts of life and instead pursues notions of spiritual and social superiority. The insincerity of the family's spirituality is then implied as 'La Belle Angerie' is described as: 'Un nom splendide pour séraphins déchus, pour mystiques à la petite semaine' (p.13). Repeatedly the grandeurs of the building are enumerated only to be immediately deflated; 'deux nobles tourelles'

are in fact ‘où sont dissimulés les cabinets d’aisances’ (p.14) and the ‘immense serre’ turns out to be ‘stupidement orientée au nord, de telle sorte que les lauriers-roses y crèvent régulièrement chaque hiver’(p.14). The fate of the oleanders anticipates the fate of the house’s human inhabitants, for this home is both physically and emotionally cold, a place where nobody thrives. The house is further described as remote and inaccessible, which ensures that the abuses perpetrated within it will go largely undetected, until the narrator completes his task of revealing its darkest secrets to the reader. The description of this strange and menacing house captures the readers’ interest and prepares the ground for the rest of the narrative.

With *Qui j’ose aimer*, Bazin adopted an almost identical expository technique to that used in *Vipère au poing*. Critics, who had found the novels following *Vipère au poing* rather lack-lustre, hailed this novel as a worthy successor to Bazin’s famous début and, in particular, they praised its form. The first chapter depicts the narrator and protagonist Isa swimming naked in the river poaching fish. As in *Vipère au poing*, this first chapter also has symbolic value, calling to mind important themes in the novel. Just as the killing of the snake evoked notions of an encounter with evil, so the naked swim and the pregnant fish caught by Isa raise the whole question of sexuality. In the second chapter Isa describes her home and, in so doing, she conveys aspects of the household which are to have important consequences for the plot.

At the very beginning of her description of the house, Isa asserts her absolute loyalty to it: ‘Cette jeunesse-là, pourtant, n’a jamais connu qu’une

vieille maison. Je n'en rêve pas d'autres' (p.24). She then describes 'La Fouve' in terms which emphasise its femininity. It is shaped like a mother hen: 'Une poule à cou nu (le cou nu, c'est la cheminée) rechauffant ses poussins' (p.25). She also describes the ivy-clad surface of the building: 'Le tout, disparate, trouve son unité dans la patine, sous cette vigne vierge [...] qui, l'hiver venu, enveloppe encore les murs et les nourrit d'un grand réseau de veines. Parfait symbole!' (p.25). The idea of the nurturing mother-hen is now extended to the ivy which nourishes the walls. The ivy, like the hen, is female, but this time virginal. This is perhaps what makes it the perfect symbol for the place, nurturing but unsullied by a man. Isa goes on to explain 'La Fouve, depuis un demi-siècle, c'est une maison de femmes à qui des maris fragiles ou inconstants n'ont su faire, en passant, que des filles' (p.26). In this respect, history will repeat itself. Maurice will prove to be unfaithful to her mother and will leave the house in disgrace, having caused Isa to conceive yet another daughter. As in the case of 'La Belle Angerie', 'La Fouve' is described as enshrining the values of its occupants and it is these values which are to dictate the development of the rest of the novel.

More than twenty years later, with the publication of *L'Église verte*, Bazin was to provide another very effective exposition along similar lines. The first chapter of the novel features the surprising discovery of a solitary man in the woods who seems to walk on water. Having thus grasped the reader's attention, in his next chapter, Bazin goes on to describe the home of the novel's protagonist, Jean-Luc Godion, who has just witnessed this strange sight. The

sight of his late wife's portrait on the wall of his home prompts Godion to take stock of his life on this day which would have been her birthday. Godion reflects on the comfort that he draws from the natural world; the forest near his home and the garden that he tends. He reflects on the quiet nature of his life, centred on household tasks and the reassuring presence of his daughter. Claire's singleness and lack of professional ambition keep her at home with her father, working in the book-bindery upstairs. Godion also expresses his affection for the town which he and his ancestors have long inhabited: 'Oui, au moins suis-je dans mon élément depuis toujours. Lagrairie...' (p.21). As he remembers his long career as a teacher and headmaster of the local school, he hears the reassuringly familiar sound of the schoolchildren coming home, which rouses him from his rêverie.

In placing Godion in his physical context, Bazin introduces the key elements which will determine his reaction to the nameless stranger in the woods. Godion's knowledge and love of the natural world will place him in sympathy with the young man and his status as retired headmaster will encourage the local community to entrust the young man to his care. The proximity to the town will give the nameless man a taste of reintegration into society, but, when this fails, Godion's desire to retain the company of his daughter and secure his comforting routines will lead him to send the young man away.

Many of Bazin's most effective endings also rely on the setting. He often used a cyclical structure for his novels. Narratives end with a return to the place

where the action started, but the emphasis is on how much has changed since the beginning of the novel. At the end of *Qui j'ose aimer*, Isa is still at 'La Fouve', but she is now in self-imposed isolation, nursing her memories and an illegitimate daughter: 'Je n'oublie rien. Mais je me garde, comme se garde ma Fouve, dévorée autant que défendue par ses halliers de ronces et de souvenirs' (p.315). *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* begins and ends on the island of Tristan da Cunha, but both the island and its inhabitants have been fundamentally changed as a result of the volcano's eruption and the subsequent sojourn in Britain. The use of the same setting to begin and end both novels creates a sense both of continuity and of finality.

Bazin often used a natural setting to begin and end a narrative. In doing this, he tended to focus on the way in which the setting had altered. The fact that the natural world is continually changing serves to emphasise the fact that human life must also move on. *Le Matrimoine* begins in the Jardin des Plantes in Angers when Abel and Mariette visit the scene of Abel's proposal. The sequel, *L'École des pères*, ends with a visit by Abel and Mariette to the same scene. The language used in both passages is very similar. In *Le Matrimoine*, we read:

Ridicule! C'est là, paraît-il, dans ce jardin public, au bout de la spirale de troènes taillés [...] c'est là sur ce banc de ciment imitation bois, [...] que je fus touché par la grâce. (p.9)

In *L'École des pères*, we read:

Un peu plus loin, la spirale de troènes taillés [...] le banc de ciment imitation bois sur lequel nous étions assis, voilà trente-six ans, [...] n'existent plus. (pp.283-4)

The proposal setting provides continuity between the two novels whilst at the same time highlighting the passage of time. In the earlier novel, Abel calls on it to witness his proposal: ‘Le sentier [...] les feuilles [...] le banc que j’ai épousseté avant de m’asseoir, peuvent en témoigner comme j’en témoigne’(p.11). In the second novel, it is the more durable trees which are called as witnesses: ‘Mais les arbres, qui dureront plus longtemps que nous, en restent bons témoins’(p.284). The fertility of the natural world is also used to mirror the fruitfulness of Abel and Mariette’s marriage, which has led to four children and now grand-children: ‘Le jeune acacia, qui avait accroché mon chandail, déploie maintenant toute une famille de branches épineuses’(p.284).

Bazin uses a similar technique in *L’Église verte*, which begins with Godion, Claire and Léonard spying on their intriguing man of the woods at ‘La Marouille’. The book ends with a return to this same place: ‘Nous nous sommes installés, sans raison, à l’endroit même d’où, voilà huit mois, nous avons vu l’inconnu surgir nu au bord de l’île’ (p.250). However, once again the changes in the environment emphasise that time and events have moved on: ‘Nous braquons nos jumelles comme si elles avaient aussi le pouvoir de rapprocher le passé [...] Non, la souche qui *lui* servit de socle [...] les inondations de ce pluvieux hiver l’ont transportée ailleurs’(pp.250-251). The fact that the log which previously led to the stranger’s hideaway has vanished provides a spatial metaphor for the impossibility of going back in time: ‘Si nous voulions pèleriner en face, nous ne le pourrions plus’(p.251). The transience of the experience is reflected in the changed aspects of the place which bore witness to the events.



Bazin also used the setting to ensure balance in the main body of his narrative. He compares the way in which he constructs his novels to the work of an architect: 'Je suis un praticien – un architecte'.<sup>56</sup> Like any architect, he is concerned with questions of balance and counterbalance and with the correct position of focal points. Bazin makes no secret of his methodical approach to achieving a balanced novel: 'Je ne crois pas aux théories mais aux méthodes'.<sup>57</sup> There is ample evidence in the Nancy archives of the precise nature of his methods. Most of his manuscripts are accompanied by a detailed reference grid: 'Au fur et à mesure je dresse ce tableau qui n'est pas un plan mais un moyen de contrôle'.<sup>58</sup> The purpose of the grid was to ensure the overall balance of the novel. Bazin described it to Jean-Claude Lamy as 'une feuille de contrôle [...] pour surveiller l'équilibre des chapitres'.<sup>59</sup> The vertical axis of the grid consists of the chapter numbers in numerical order. The setting of each chapter is always recorded. A brief summary of the content of each chapter is also given, as are the names of the various characters who appear. Bazin used his grid to survey his novel as a whole and did not hesitate to re-write sections if he felt that the overall shape was unsatisfactory: 'Je fais un, deux, parfois trois brouillons, je change, je rature, je coupe, je laisse enfin reposer le texte'.<sup>60</sup>

Bazin was particularly pleased with the structure of *Qui j'ose aimer*: 'Je crois que c'est ma meilleure œuvre surtout en ce qui concerne la poésie et le

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<sup>56</sup> Norma Perry, *op. cit.*, p.xxi.

<sup>57</sup> André Bourin, 'Les enfants du demi-siècle: Hervé Bazin', *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 21 February 1957, p.1.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Jaubert, *art. cit.*, p.23.

<sup>59</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.102.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102.

style de composition'.<sup>61</sup> Pierre Moustiers was so impressed by the form of this novel that he wrote: 'Avec *Qui j'ose aimer* naît et s'impose un grand romancier classique'.<sup>62</sup> Bazin's 'feuille de contrôle' for *Qui j'ose aimer* reveals how this success was achieved.<sup>63</sup> Two of Bazin's planning columns on the grid are devoted to the setting; one is entitled 'Eau', to designate riverside scenes and the other is headed 'La Fouve'. The prominence of the setting in each chapter is indicated by gradations of shading in the columns. Bazin uses each of these settings in different ways to preserve the balance of the novel as a whole.

Descriptions of the river Erdre provide *Qui j'ose aimer* with a pattern and a rhythm. According to the 'feuille de contrôle', 'Eau' makes its strongest showing in the first and last chapters of the novel, thus creating a pleasing circular framework for the plot. However, 'Eau' also features strongly towards the middle of the novel, just after its centrepiece in which Isa allows herself to be seduced by her stepfather, Maurice. In appearing at the beginning, middle and end of the novel, the river serves to emphasise the overall shape of the novel. The first river scene depicts the calm before the storm; the virginal Isa swims naked and unembarrassed in the waters of her river. The central river scene occurs in the eye of the storm; Isa swims in the river again, this time attempting to wash away her sexual misdemeanour. The final river scene occurs once the storm has passed and Isa is left at peace by the river with a baby in her arms. The presence of the river is also indicated on the grid at other key

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<sup>61</sup> See Zoë Boyer, *Op. cit.*, p.111.

<sup>62</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.128.

<sup>63</sup> See Appendix, p.xxxi.

moments in the novel. Belle's arrival with Maurice and the diagnosis of her illness, Isa's fury at Maurice's intrusion and her truce with him, Isa's developing affair with Maurice and Maurice's departure, Isa's acknowledgement of her pregnancy and her own subsequent motherhood are all accompanied, to some extent, by references to the river. The river recurs like a refrain, punctuating the action in a rhythmic way.

The planning grid also indicates that Bazin deliberately used descriptions of the river to counterbalance moments of drama in the plot. *Qui j'ose aimer* is typical of his writing in depicting a fraught domestic situation. However, Isa Duplon's family situation is extremely tense, even by Bazin's standards. Isa is conducting an affair with her stepfather as her mother lies dying of a disfiguring disease. Were it not for Bazin's acute awareness of the importance of balance, Isa's emotions and the tensions between the characters could create an unsustainable and unconvincing intensity to the novel. However, the events of the plot, and the characters' reactions to them are deliberately interspersed with Isa's sensual descriptions of the natural landscape around her, in particular, the river Erdre.

The detailed descriptions of the riverside throughout the novel serve to create a sense of the passing of time. On his 'feuille de contrôle', Bazin sets the action of the novel between September in the first year and October two years later; time enough for Isa to meet Maurice, be seduced by him and bear his child. He indicates the passage of time by means of short references to the effect

of the changing seasons on the landscape. This situates the action in real time, in an unobtrusive and even poetic fashion.

Bazin's use of 'La Fouve' was another key element in balancing the narrative of *Qui j'ose aimer*. He counterbalances the story of Isa and Maurice's affair with that of Isa's disrupted but ultimately dominant relationship with 'La Fouve'. Maurice and 'La Fouve' are found to have an equal and opposite attraction for Isa. The house offers the exclusion of men, seclusion from the world, tranquillity, and continuity. Maurice offers sex, engagement with the outside world, excitement and change. The action of *Qui j'ose aimer* unfurls as Isa makes her choice between these options.

The originality of this novel lies in the way in which Bazin identifies Isa's sexual choices with her choice of environment. Virginity and celibacy are associated with 'La Fouve', sexuality and relationships are identified with Nantes. Initially, Isa seems to have rejected the world in favour of residence at 'La Fouve'. She has decided not to continue her studies: 'Je me sentais incapable d'entrer en pension, de vivre autre chose que cette existence partagée entre une rivière, une machine à coudre, un banc de messe tapissé de vieux velours' (pp.32-33). However Maurice challenges this devotion to 'La Fouve' and employs Isa as his legal assistant in Nantes. Nat, the housekeeper and moral guardian of 'La Fouve', considers that the path to eternal damnation leads via Nantes: 'Depuis que son lointain époux s'y était noyé dans le muscadet et que Maman en avait ramené Maurice, Nantes, pour Nat, c'était Babel et Babylone, un lieu de confusion et d'impudicité' (p.145). The topography of the novel thus

becomes imbued with sexual significance. 'La Fouve' stands for seclusion and female intactness and Nantes for temptation and licence. Isa's decision to work in Nantes is presented by Nat as destructive of the house and its values: 'Alors, c'est vrai, tu travailles avec Maurice? La Fouve est donc rasée?'(p.160). When Isa finally has sex with Maurice, he asserts his victory over 'La Fouve' by carrying her off to his stronghold in Nantes and having sex with her again. However, the death of Belle means that Isa must make a choice. Maurice proposes marriage and offers to take her away with him to Nantes and thence out of the region. Isa rejects him and, in rejecting him, rejects the outside world. She concludes: 'Si l'amour renonce, La Fouve continue'(p.273). Isa decides in favour of the way of life at 'La Fouve', accepting isolation and renouncing any further relationships with men.

The opposition between 'La Fouve' and Nantes is typical of Bazin's interest in antithetical settings. In fact, Bazin often used the interplay between two different locations as the basis for structuring his novels. The action of his novels alternates between antithetical locations until the tension is finally resolved at the end of the narrative.

One type of antithesis favoured by Bazin is the contrast between places of confinement and freedom. *La Tête contre les murs* is structured along these lines. The novel follows the fortunes of the unstable and delinquent Arthur Gérane. When at liberty, Arthur commits petty crimes for which he is then confined. He escapes briefly, only to be recaptured in the course of further misadventures. His career is thus characterised by an alternation of periods at

large and periods of confinement, with each imprisonment becoming more intense. The action is finally resolved when Gérane is handicapped trying to escape justice and finds himself utterly unable to escape again. In *Lève-toi et marche*, Bazin adopts a similar format. Constance Orglaise, the protagonist, suffers from a progressive wasting disease. She makes sorties into the town in order to escape the monotony of her sickroom and exert her influence on a small group of protégés. Ultimately, she becomes too ill to go out and her death resolves the dichotomy between her confinement as an invalid and her efforts to maintain a stake in the outside world. *Un feu dévore un autre feu* adds a new twist to this contrast between confinement and freedom. The protagonists are Manuel, a South American politician, and his girlfriend Maria. As a result of a military coup, Manuel is a wanted man and must hide in a French diplomat's attic, which becomes the principal setting for the action. Manuel's confinement in the attic preserves his life, but a step outside will result in death. Bazin resolves the plot by abolishing this distinction between the refuge and the outside world, for Manuel develops acute appendicitis and faces death in his refuge as well. All three of these novels rely for their structure on the alternation of settings of confinement and liberation until this tension is abolished through the disability or death of the protagonist.

Another way in which Bazin uses settings to structure his novels is to compare and contrast an individual household with the wider community. In *L'Huile sur le feu*, Bazin establishes two settings: the intensely unhappy Colu household on the one hand and the Bocage village of Saint-Leup on the other.

The narrator Céline describes the tension at home between her warring parents, Eva and Bernard Colu. She also narrates events in the village, where her fire-fighter father is taking a leading role in responding to arson attacks. Initially, the connection between the Colu family and the arson attacks in the village seems to be purely a function of Bernard's fire-fighting responsibilities. The narrative proceeds by a process of alternation, depicting by turns the worsening Colu household and the increasingly ravaged village, until Céline finally realises that her father is the arsonist and that the connection between her home situation and the attacks on the village are causal rather than incidental. The narrative is resolved when Bernard, having confessed all to his daughter, commits suicide during a final and spectacular arson attack. The novel thus explores the way in which private, domestic suffering can spill over into the public domain.

Later in his writing career, Bazin continued to use antithetical settings to generate structure and plot, but he also used them to stimulate debate. *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* depicts the experiences of the residents of Tristan da Cunha who are forced to evacuate their primitive island and take refuge in England. Although critics at the time were baffled by Bazin's drastic departure from his customary depiction of French provincial settings and concerns, the apparent difference in subject matter belies a great similarity of structure. It is easy to see why Bazin was so attracted to the Tristan episode, as it is structurally so akin to other novels in which he examines the competing claims of two very different locations for the loyalties of his central characters. Here the opposition is between the remote, natural island of Tristan da Cunha, in which everyday

survival is a struggle, and the extremely urban and populous South of England, where consumerism is rife. The protagonists, this time a group of islanders, must make a choice to stay or to return. The novel thus weighs in the balance the relative merits of Tristan's hardship-based culture and the technologically advanced consumer culture in Britain. The structure of the novel lends itself particularly well to this discussion.

The first section, depicting life on Tristan, considers the proposition that a society can function perfectly well without all the paraphernalia of modern western civilisation. The second section considers the opposite assumption, made by the British government, that the islanders will be better off in England because it is technologically more advanced and materially richer. In the third section, the islanders return to their island seeking to create a new order which reflects the best of both worlds; a synthesis of Tristan social cohesion and purposefulness combined with a few British technological advancements. *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* is the clearest example of the way in which Bazin selects two opposing settings, invests each one with opposing agendas and generates both plot and debate in fostering interplay between the two places.

However, Bazin's masterpiece in terms of setting and structure is undoubtedly *L'Église verte*. Once again he uses antithetical settings: a wild, dense and ancient forest on the one hand and on the other, the small, conventional French provincial village of Lagrairie. The novel begins in the forest where a young man has taken up residence in an attempt to live outside society. When he is accidentally injured by huntsmen, he is brought into the



village where he creates a furore by refusing to give his name. In so doing, he asserts his individualism and refusal to conform to social norms. Bazin here gives his two contrasting locations philosophical significance. The forest stands for freedom and the village for social confinement and conformity. The novel becomes a discussion of how and whether an individual can live outside society.

Into this by now familiar antithetical structure, Bazin introduces a third element. The Godion household is in the village, but near the forest, and its inhabitants have their allegiance in both camps. Although Godion is a respected member of the local community, he is also a great nature-lover with considerable sympathy for Mutix's desire to live in the forest. Mutix is brought to the Godion home to convalesce and, as Phillip Crant puts it, the house becomes a kind of 'decompression chamber', a half-way house in which Mutix is given the opportunity to choose between reintegration into society and escape to nature.<sup>64</sup> The question which sustains the reader's attention throughout the main body of the novel concerns Mutix's ultimate whereabouts. Will he settle into a relationship with Claire Godion and remain in the village or will he escape to the forest as soon as he is fit again? His stay with the Godions is punctuated by forays into the forest and into the village, as Bazin holds the two possible outcomes in tension. Ultimately, the authorities succeed in discovering Mutix's identity and he flees back to the wilds. *L'Église verte* is one of Bazin's most finely-balanced novels. Bazin systematically alternates the social and natural environments throughout the novel, with the Godion household as a pivot

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<sup>64</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.170.

between the two until Mutix's choice is made. It is his most sophisticated investigation into the nature of personal freedom and the relationship between an individual, a household and a society.

## **Conclusion.**

Bazin's settings were of crucial importance to him at every stage of his creative process. Works such as 'On y verra que du feu' and 'Souvenirs d'un amnésique' show the way in which a setting often provided the initial idea for a story. Once equipped with a story, Bazin certainly relied upon his description of the settings to create a sense of verisimilitude. The Nancy archives offer ample evidence of the trouble Bazin took to research and record his settings in order to convey them accurately. He also used settings to give him a way into his subject matter. Key locations always feature prominently in his expository chapters and introduce the themes which will be developed later in the narrative. Furthermore, settings help to establish the framework for the main body of the text; Bazin uses them to structure and balance the plot as well as to generate the more discursive aspects of his writing. It is therefore no surprise that, for Bazin, the setting was a prerequisite for creativity. As he put it: 'J'ai besoin d'avoir les pieds sur terre pour pouvoir me lancer dans l'imaginaire'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Jean-Louis de Rambures, *op. cit.*, p.27.

## **Chapter Two: Rootedness and Exile.**

We have considered the importance of place to Bazin from a stylistic and methodological point of view. It is now time to turn our attention to his understanding of the personal significance of place for he was fascinated by the relationship between individuals and their places of origin, the phenomenon of ‘rootedness’, and also by the effect of the loss of those roots, which he considered a form of exile.

### **Rootedness and Continuity.**

Bazin’s concept of rootedness was based on his own family’s very distinctive and long-standing relationship with its ancestral home and land. He was acutely conscious of how long the Hervé-Bazin family had been based in the Anjou region, and he considered that his peasant farming ancestors were as rooted to the soil as the crops that they tended. In *Abécédaire*, he described them as ‘treize générations [...] accrochées au bon alluvion entre Loire et Authion’ (pp.48-9) and ‘bien ancrés sur leurs terres’(p.49). He clearly drew satisfaction from the fact that his ancestors could be traced so easily as a result of their long association with the Angers region. In *Abécédaire*, under the title ‘Ascendants’ (p.34), he provided a family tree reaching back to the eighteenth century and, under the title ‘Bourgeoisie’ (p.48), he gave a summary of his paternal ancestors dating from 1592. Bazin was so taken with the notion of his family history that he seems to have considered writing a novel about it, as he explained to Jacques

Jaubert: ‘J’ai beaucoup d’éléments sur l’histoire de ma famille depuis Louis XIII [...] J’en suis à la quatorzième génération connue; ce serait amusant de rédiger quatorze chapitres [...] Le titre serait *L’Arbre cache la forêt*’.<sup>1</sup> Although this novel never appeared, Bazin’s interest in long-established families was to resurface in his treatment of the theme of rootedness throughout his writing career.

A long-standing historical connection between individuals and their place of origin is a consistent feature of Bazin’s portrayal of rootedness in his novels and his awareness of this phenomenon must have been born of his understanding of the rootedness of the Hervé-Bazin family in Anjou. The characters in his novels who are most attached to the places in which they find themselves are conscious of generations of family links with those places. In *Qui j’ose aimer*, Isa’s attachment to ‘La Fouve’ derives, in part, from her sense of historical continuity: ‘J’y suis née, ma mère aussi et ma grand-mère. Un aïeul s’était installé là au lendemain de la guerre de Vendée, sur “un terrain de curé” acquis lors de la vente des biens nationaux’ (pp.24-5). Abel Bretaudeau, the narrator of *Le Matrimoine*, is similarly aware of his forbears, describing his house on the Rue du Temple in Angers as ‘cette maison habitée par six générations de Bretaudeau’ (p.21). In *L’Église verte*, Jean-Luc Godion bases his claim: ‘On ne peut pas être plus Lagrairien que moi’ (p.21), on the fact that: ‘Scieur de long, mon aïeul y épousait déjà une fille de bûcheron sous le Second Empire. Ma maison vient de son fils’ (p.21). In each case, the loyalty of the characters to

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<sup>1</sup> Art. cit. p.26.

their home is based on a sense of historical precedent. This is particularly evident in the case of Folcoche's insistence on staying in the largely ruined family seat of 'La Belle Angérie'. Salomé cannot understand her grandmother's attachment to the dingy house: 'Dans un studio bien chauffé, en ville, elle serait cent fois mieux que dans ce château minable'(p.78). Jean Rezeau explains his mother's refusal to leave in terms of the family's historical attachment to its estates: 'Ton grand-père aurait répondu: Nous étions là sous Louis XVI. La raison paraît mince, mais pour certains elle est épaisse comme un mur de fondation. La moitié du canton est encore possédée par des gens de cette race' (p.78). The rootedness of Bazin's characters is based on their sense of the importance of maintaining the continuity of historic links with their place of origin.

Rooted people also remain in their place of origin in order to benefit from the social prestige which has accrued to them over generations and which cannot be easily recreated or replicated elsewhere. In an entry in *Abécédaire*, entitled 'Madame', Bazin reflects wryly on the fact that, for all his fame as a novelist, it is his mother rather than himself who has more status in the Anjou Craonnais region, for it is she who has remained 'enracinée' in the area:

Je viens de tourner autour de ce que *Ouest-France* appelait 'le berceau de ma famille' [...]. On ne m'a parlé que de Madame. Moi, je suis parti depuis très longtemps, Madame, elle, n'a pas bougé. Elle est enterrée là, près de Monsieur. Finalement c'est elle, pas tellement gorgone, plutôt forte matrone, qui a illustré le coin. (p.161)

Bazin was very aware of the collective achievement of his ancestors in accumulating prestige in the locality. The Hervé-Bazin family were members of

what Bazin termed the ‘bourgeoisie terrienne’. Originally peasant farmers, they had increased their holdings over centuries and had eventually achieved hard-won and much cherished status as substantial landowners. His depiction of the Rezeau family’s local status seems to have been strongly based on the Hervé-Bazin model. When, as a middle-aged man in *Cri de la chouette*, Jean Rezeau is obliged to sell his family’s estate, he is acutely aware of the generations of achievement that he is undoing:

Vendre son bien! Moi, je pensais au premier Rezeau en sabots, acquéreur de son clos, incapable d’imaginer que sa chaumière serait doublée sous Capet, triplée sous Barras, flanquée de tourelles et de pavillons sous Badinguet, pour connaître enfin la pioche du démolisseur. Car c’est de cela qu’il était question. (p.280)

To dissolve one’s roots is to leave a certain kind of status behind.

However, most of Bazin’s rooted characters cling determinedly to their ancestral homes in order to retain their position in the local community. In *Vipère au poing*, Brasse-Bouillon satirises his family’s pride in their social prestige:

Célèbre, évidemment, dans un rayon qui n’est pas celui de la planète, mais qui a dépassé celui du département. Dans tout l’Ouest, notre carte de visite, gravée si possible, reste en évidence sur les plateaux de cuivre. La bourgeoisie nous jalouse. La noblesse nous reçoit et même parfois nous donne une de ses filles. (p.18)

In *Qui j’ose aimer*, Isa considers her family’s respectability in the eyes of the local gentry as a consequence of their long residence in the area. They have remained there: ‘Jusqu’à ce que l’oubli, l’habitude, la persistance d’une suffisante fortune leur aient permis de se classer parmi les honorables familles

du coin' (p.25). In *L'Église verte*, Jean-Luc Godion takes advantage of his local good name in order to extend his own respectability to Mutix, whose rootlessness and namelessness have provoked suspicion amongst the local community. Abel Bretaudeau, in *Le Matrimoine*, trades on his local prominence in order to secure a wealthy wife. Mariette's entrepreneurial family gains prestige in the locality in which they run their shop by marrying into the old-established Bretaudeau family. The Bretaudeau family is content to allow their son to marry beneath him socially as this will shore up family funds. In each case, Bazin's rooted characters draw a distinct advantage from their local status.

Another benefit of rootedness in the Bazinian scheme of things is the fact that it necessarily involves living in an old house. All of Bazin's most rooted characters are touched by the poetry of their ancient homes and cannot imagine living in a modern house. In *Qui j'ose aimer*, Isa rejects out of hand the notion of a new house:

Cette jeunesse-là, pourtant, n'a jamais connu qu'une vieille maison. Je n'en rêve pas d'autres, je ne comprends même pas ces bâtisses neuves aux angles durs, aux crépis crus, aux jardins composés, plantés d'arbres qui ne vivent que de terreau et n'ont pas de souvenir au pied. (p.24)

The association of 'neuves' with 'durs' 'crus' and 'composés' indicates that a house which has not been worn with age cannot be a true home; it remains in some way a 'fake'. The notion of rootedness is alluded to here in the contrast between the newly-planted trees growing in compost and the personification of the older tree whose long-established roots seem to provide access to precious memories. In *Cri de la chouette*, Jean Rezeau also contrasts the impersonal

nature of a modern dwelling with the very tangible sense of the past in an older house:

Un appartement que vous avez souscrit sur plans, une maison que vous avez fait construire, vous n'y pouvez imaginer que vous; l'espace n'y est pas dédoublé par le temps et celui que meuble votre corps n'est pas en quelque sorte usagé [...] Chemisées de long et le pompon du bonnet de coton tombant sur l'oreille, sept générations assez mal lavées, hormis d'eau bénite, ont grouillé dans ce lit dont elles firent pudiquement chanter les ressorts du sommier. Chaque fois que je remue, je leur donne des coups de coude. (p.221)

This passage highlights the difference between the rather sanitised nature of a modern house and the humorous idea of the presence of generations of smelly ancestors who are so real to the narrator that he feels that he is sharing his old bed with them.

The close bond between Bazinian characters and their old houses is further expressed in their intense sensual and physical familiarity with their dwellings. Jean Rezeau is completely attuned to his surroundings at 'La Belle Angerie'. As he makes his way down to the dining room, he observes the details of the play of light, he knows how to leave the room to prevent the arrival of insects, he knows at what point the staircase will creak and he is sensitive to the dominant smells of the house:

Je longe le grand couloir éclairé de biais par un soleil couchant qui plaque sur la cloison d'en face une flamboyante réplique des œils-de-bœuf. J'en pousse un, mal fermé, pour ne pas laisser entrer la touffeur et les moustiques. L'escalier craque où il faut. L'odeur de vermoulu augmente sous les poutres du rez-de-chaussée. (pp.228-9)

The senses of sight, touch, hearing and smell are all engaged here, conveying the totality of Jean Rezeau's sensitivity to the house.



In *Qui j'ose aimer*, Isa revels in her instinctive knowledge of her surroundings. Her intimacy with the house is expressed in her ability to find her way around it effortlessly at night:

Je me revois, la nuit, rôdant dans la maison obscure et me dirigeant du bout des doigts, rassurée, ravie de pouvoir dire, rien qu'en effleurant la cloison, à quel endroit de la pièce je me trouvais, de reconnaître la commode invisible à l'odeur du bois de rose. (p.94)

Je l'ai déjà dit: j'aime rôder la nuit, furtive et tâtant les murs. Une fois de plus mes pieds nus, aussi sûrs que mes mains, reconnurent les éraflures du lino, l'arête usée de la palière. Puis, cassée en deux, je me laissai filer sur la rampe jusqu'à la boule de cristal du rez-de-chaussée dont la fraîcheur vint se bloquer entre mes seins. Enfin je cherchai, du bout du gros orteil, cette file de carreaux légèrement creusés par un siècle de passage entre des meubles rivés au sol par un siècle de présence et qui menaient comme un sentier du vestibule à la cuisine. (p.164)

Isa's bond with her house is expressed in highly sensual language. There is the sense of touch; 'me dirigeant du bout des doigts', 'effleurant', 'tâtant', and the sense of smell, 'l'odeur du bois de rose'. Isa responds to the house at night in the way that she might respond to a lover: 'se bloquer entre mes seins', 'rassurée, ravie'. This sensuality of language has two functions. Firstly, it anticipates her imminent sexual encounter with Maurice, and, secondly, it establishes her connection with the house as an equivalent and potentially rival bond to that which she will establish with Maurice. Indeed, the two relationships are incompatible to the point of being mutually exclusive. The chapter in which Isa has sex with Maurice ends with her loss of intimacy with the house: 'Je m'enfuis, butant deux fois dans l'ombre de cette maison où je me reconnaissais d'instinct et qui ne me reconnaît plus' (p.169). The house here is personified.

Like a lover who has been rejected in favour of somebody else, it refuses to acknowledge Isa. Her ability to guide herself instinctively around the darkened house has been lost and her contact with the house is no longer sensual, but clumsy and painful, 'butant deux fois'. By contrast, Maurice, who cannot claim to have his roots at 'La Fouve', has never acquired the slightest physical sensitivity to the building. As he makes his final exit from the house at Nathalie's command, Isa notes tellingly:

Puis l'escalier craque, sous le poids d'un homme à qui deux femmes, très occupées de lui, n'ont pu faire comprendre, en dix mois, qu'il ne faut pas poser le pied sur cette latte qui s'enfonce. (pp. 267-8)

Maurice's insensitivity to the house means that he has always been out of place in it and his ultimate departure from it therefore seems fitting.

In *L'Église verte*, Godion's familiarity with every sound in his house is almost a sixth sense. As in the case of Isa, this is particularly revealed at night. Godion is so attuned to the sounds in his house that he immediately notices when a noise stops. He senses that his daughter has left her room to spend the night with Mutix:

Quand Claire est dans sa chambre, séparée de la mienne par une mince cloison, je sais qu'elle se retourne dans son lit, je perçois vaguement le rythme de cette respiration nocturne, légèrement sibilante, qu'elle a depuis toujours. [...] Elle n'est pas là, j'en suis sûr. (p.163)

Bazin's ability to portray the rooted character's intimate familiarity with his or her home gives his writing a sensual quality. His attention to the smallest detail makes the settings he creates seem all the more tangible and real.

However, the mere fact of living in an old house does not constitute rootedness. The narrator of *L'Huile sur le feu* mocks the pretensions of the mayor, Monsieur Heaume, who aspires to gentility and has therefore purchased 'un débris médiéval hautement historique' (p.36). The narrator undermines the mayor's aspirations by asserting that the man is in fact *nouveau riche* for he has made a fortune as a 'fabricant de sacs' (p.36). The changes he has made to the property betray his suburban instincts, for the house has been 'coûteusement percé d'outre en outre pour y adapter le chauffage central, l'eau courante et l'électricité' (p.36). The couple's approach to restoring the property is rather academic and unintuitive: 'l'escalier du genre dérobé, que Mme Heaume a "reconstitué" à la place où il "aurait dû en exister un au moyen âge"' (p.36).

By contrast, the truly rooted person has such a close relationship with the home that the slightest change to it is a travesty. This is evinced most clearly by Jean Rezeau's meditation on a broken windowpane in *Cri de la chouette*. Jean Rezeau's suburban wife is unperturbed that she has just kicked out an old windowpane at 'La Belle Angerie'. Her reaction acts as a foil to that of her husband whose ancestral home this is. Jean Rezeau is moved to reflect on the age and uniqueness of the pane. It is this reaction which reveals the true extent of his rootedness in the house. After a long reverie, in which he believes himself to be oppressed by the weight of the past enshrined in the room, he concludes: 'Le passé me fatigue' (p.221). However, his reaction to the broken pane calls forth a deeper, gut reaction, which gives the lie to his previous thought patterns, as he observes:

Voyez comme nous sommes: ambigus, vite contredits par nous-mêmes. C'est le carreau-loupe qui vient de disparaître, hé, pomme! Sur cette fenêtre aux croisillons rongés par vingt décennies de pluies, pas une vitre n'a la même teinte. On y trouve de tout: depuis le chambourin verdâtre, bullé, inégal, déformant les images jusqu'au verre moderne, clair, lisse et plan, de trois dixièmes. A travers le carreau disparu affligé en son centre d'un défaut, d'un léger renflement, tous les collègues, les sept générations qui faisaient la grasse matinée vacancière avec moi, qui viennent comme moi de sauter du lit, ont trouvé que le prunier d'en face avait de plus grosses prunes. (p.222)

Once again, the emphasis here is on the age of the building and the sense of continuity with one's forbears that this inspires. The glass has been weathered by twenty decades of rain and peered through by seven generations of the family. Age has invested the windows with idiosyncratic and therefore irreplaceable qualities. Unlike modern windows, each pane is unique and the missing pane was especially unusual for the way that it deformed the view of the plum tree. This minute appreciation of the smallest quirk in an ancient home is the product of the rooted person's perspective.

For the rooted person, the age of a house or a piece of furniture provides a comforting point of contrast to the transience of individual human lives. In *Au nom du fils*, Daniel Astin reflects that his son will make love to his new wife 'dans ce lit dont je suis né, dont tu aurais dû naître et où ta grand-mère, ta mère et, par ma grâce, Odile n'auront été, ne sont qu'une femme continue: Mme Astin' (p.369). The key word here is 'continue', for individual human lives are fleeting, but together they achieve continuity by means of their shared experiences in the places in which they are rooted. The capacity of the physical world to represent continuity in the face of human transience is perhaps most fully expressed by Bazin in his thoughts entitled 'Meubles' in *Abécédaire*:

Vingt propriétaires, sans doute, m'ont précédé dans la possession [...] de *mon* buffet Louis XIV; et c'est de lui seulement que les vers n'ont pas eu raison. Campons-nous devant lui: massif, immobile, embaumé de vieille encaustique, inconscient d'avoir ouvert ses portes à tant de gens qui depuis ont fermé les yeux. Assurément *le plus meuble* des deux, ce n'est pas lui, c'est moi. (p.166)

The very size and immovability of the sideboard, described here as 'massif' and 'immobile' contrasts with the fragility of human life. Bazin plays on the idea of mobility inherent in the term 'meuble' to assert that human beings are more moveable than their furniture: 'le plus meuble des deux'. The choice of the word 'embaumé' anticipates the idea of death expressed in the closing of the previous owners' eyes, which again contrasts with the opening of the dresser doors. Very similar language is used by Godion in *L'Église verte* to describe the furniture in his bedroom:

Les meubles de ma chambre, le lit, la commode, l'armoire rustiques, en place bien avant moi, lourdement immobiles depuis un siècle, affirment une présence qui fleure l'encaustique (p.89).

The word 'immobile' features again here and the smell of the polish once again stands for venerability. The age of the furniture inspires humility in the rooted person who acknowledges that it was in place before he was. Rootedness is perhaps ultimately an attempt to deny the essential transience of human life. In identifying themselves strongly with the fixity of place and the inanimate world, and in taking up their place in a long line of antecedents who have done the same, Bazin's characters attempt to achieve a kind of permanence.

In the novels in which Bazin depicts rooted characters he appears to be in sympathy with their way of life. He establishes the depth of their historical and

social connection with the area and he shows the way in which they savour and value their surroundings. Furthermore, he is very much alive to the comforting continuity that roots provide.

However, Bazin was aware that continuity of residence over many generations in one place was an increasingly unusual phenomenon in a highly mobile society. He and his brothers had all left their native town to pursue their adult lives elsewhere. He lamented the weakening of ‘les enracinements provinciaux’:

Éparpillés en France, ni moi ni aucun de mes frères n’habitons plus notre ville natale. Il n’y reste qu’un caveau de famille, d’ailleurs plein et du fait de la distance rarement fleuri: un caveau où nous n’avons aucune chance de nous réunir auprès de nos parents et grand-parents. C’est un exemple banal de cette dispersion des parentèles et du brassage général qui, au hasard des emplois, des mariages, des adresses successives, n’a cessé d’affaiblir les enracinements provinciaux, d’effacer les cousinages, de rétrécir les filiations au point que pour la plupart de nos enfants la leur se réduit au couple dont ils sont issus et qu’ils se sentent naturalisés par leur domicile. (p.115).<sup>2</sup>

The preponderance of negative terminology here accentuates the notion of loss, ‘ni...ni...aucun’, ‘aucune chance’, ‘affaiblir’, ‘effacer’, ‘rétrécir’, ‘réduit’. The next generation will be entirely disconnected from their family’s historical roots, and their base will be limited to the family home in which they grow up.

Bazin’s evident sympathy for the rooted way of life and his awareness of how precarious and unusual it was becoming led to the suggestion that he had adopted his great uncle René Bazin’s agenda. In *Cri de la chouette*, Bazin

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, p.xxxii.

depicted the Rezeau family's sale of their ancestral home and estate, and he set their loss in the context of a wider social picture. Jean Rezeau concludes at the end of the novel: 'Nous disparaissions dans l'éradication générale des vieilles souches terriennes' (p.279). There appeared to be a clear parallel between *Cri de la chouette* and *La Terre qui meurt*, one of René Bazin's most celebrated novels decrying the social and economic trends which were causing agricultural families to lose their links with the land. Robert Kanters wondered whether Bazin had developed his great uncle's conservative instincts and asked: 'Est-ce à M. Hervé Bazin qu'il appartient aujourd'hui d'empêcher la terre de mourir?'<sup>3</sup>

However, although both René and Hervé Bazin were impressed by the phenomenon of rootedness or *enracinement*, they drew very different conclusions from their observations. For René Bazin, the notion of *enracinement* carried with it a strongly conservative, Catholic and patriotic agenda. Long-standing agricultural families should continue to nurture the land which they had tended for generations. Their agricultural involvement would therefore continue to embed them in the local community. This in turn would ensure a secure framework for individuals through interdependence and a strong association with the Catholic Church. To René Bazin, the threat to this rooted way of life was a threat to the very fabric of France.

Hervé Bazin's approach, on the other hand, was more pragmatic and progressive. In his own life, Bazin embraced precisely the changes which René Bazin had so feared and systematically rejected the values with which he had

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Moustiers, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

been brought up and which his great uncle had championed. He exchanged conservatism for Marxism, Catholicism for agnosticism, and turned his back on the upper middle class. René Bazin's easily identifiable fictional counterpart René Rezeau, 'vénérable et octogénaire' (p.266), is mocked by Brasse-Bouillon in *Vipère au poing* as tediously backward-looking: 'Le retour à la terre, le retour de l'Alsace, le retour aux tourelles, le retour à la foi, l'éternel retour!' (p.19). Brasse-Bouillon's aggressively progressive attitude was close to Bazin's own. In *Vipère au poing*, Brasse-Bouillon declares:

Je suis la négation de leurs oui plaintifs distribués à toutes les idées reçues, je suis leur contradiction, le saboteur de leur patiente renommée, un chasseur de chouettes, un charmeur de serpents, un futur abonné de *L'Humanité*. (pp.262-3)

Although Bazin derives gentle humour from the contrast between the boy's overstatements and the bathos of 'un futur abonné de *L'Humanité*', it seems unlikely that he disagreed with the general direction of Brasse-Bouillon's thinking. Indeed, in a letter to Jacques Brengues, Bazin identified himself in the strongest terms with Brasse-Bouillon: 'Je suis Madame Bovary, disait Flaubert et c'était douteux. Je suis Brasse-Bouillon et là, ce n'est pas douteux'.<sup>4</sup> Bazin considered that his family's determination to continue the way of life that they had inherited from their forbears showed a failure to move with the times. He commented to Jean-Claude Lamy: 'Jusqu'en 1950 leurs idées, leurs mœurs

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<sup>4</sup> Fabienne Épinette-Brengues, *Étude sur Hervé Bazin: Vipère au poing*, Paris: Ellipses, 2000, p.83.



avaient un bon retard d'un siècle.'<sup>5</sup> The voice of the thirty-seven- year old author seems to inform Brasse-Bouillon's very precocious critique of his family's conservatism. When the family throws an expensive party to celebrate the silver anniversary of René Rezeau's election to the *Académie française*, Brasse-Bouillon attacks their hypocrisy and foolish denial of the realities of the modern world:

Mais tant d'argent dépensé pour la gloire, alors que nous manquons du nécessaire, est-ce vraiment charmant? Mais ces paysans, traités en serfs en plein xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, n'est-ce pas désuet? [...] Le monde s'agite, il ne lit plus guère *La Croix*, il se fout des index et imprimatur, il réclame la justice et non la pitié, son dû et non vos aumônes; il peuple les trains de banlieue qui dépeuplent ces campagnes asservies, [...] il pense mal parce qu'il ne pense plus vôtre, et pourtant il pense, il vit, infiniment plus vaste que ce coin de terre isolé par ses haies, il vit, et nous n'en savons rien, nous qui n'avons même pas la T.S.F. pour l'écouter parler, il vit, et nous allons mourir. (p.273)

The key phrase here is 'il vit et nous allons mourir'. Like Bazin, Brasse-Bouillon accepts from the outset the unsustainability of his family's rooted lifestyle and personally identifies himself with what he perceives to be the spirit of the modern age. *Cri de la chouette* is informed by this same note of acceptance. As Pierre Moustiers puts it, Hervé Bazin was most certainly not using this novel to 'empêcher la terre de mourir': 'Hervé Bazin, sur ce point, ne se fait aucune illusion et *Cri de la chouette*, en même temps que la fin d'un mythe, sanctionne la fin d'une époque'.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly Bazin was in a position, as a result of his own background, to understand and articulate the experience of rootedness in his novels. He was

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<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.20.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. Cit.*, p.242.

aware of just how rare this continuity of relationship between people and a place was proving to be. Certain aspects of the experience clearly appealed to his imagination. The sensual pleasures of an old dwelling, the awareness of the presence of one's ancestors in the same place, the comforting thought that, even though individuals will die, the house and the family will continue; all of these ideas seem to have appealed to Bazin's poetic sensibilities. They occur repeatedly in his fiction and confer many of his novels with an intriguing and deeply felt sense of place. However, his treatment of the theme of rootedness is in no way ideological or political. Unlike René Bazin, he does not advocate continuity for its own sake. For Hervé Bazin, social change is inevitable and must be embraced.

### **Rootedness and Exile.**

Although Bazin's experience of the Hervé-Bazin heritage in Anjou sensitized him to a specific and rather patrician form of rootedness, his own relationship with his roots was complicated by the unhappiness of his upbringing. It was, in fact, the determination of the Hervé-Bazin family to hold on to their ancestral home which was to be the direct cause of much of Bazin's childhood misery. By the time Bazin was born, his family's hold on its estates was weakening due to post-war devaluation, falling agricultural prices, and higher taxation. Bazin owed his very existence to the family's attempt to boost their finances through marriage. In *Abécédaire*, Bazin states that his mother Paule, *née* Guilloteaux, had been 'retirée du couvent pour être mariée (disons

mieux bradée) à un juriste moustachu se sacrifiant lui-même pour une dot capable de sauver la maison de famille et le domaine contigu, largement hypothéqués' (p.10). The resultant unhappy marriage of Jacques and Paule, the aggression and even sadism of Paule and the extreme economies required to retain the house were to be the inspiration for *Vipère au poing*, a thinly-veiled attack by Bazin on the abuses of his own family.

Bazin's childhood misery and difficulties with his mother were such that he exiled himself from the family home for most of his adult life. Leaving home as a very young man, he set up residence, initially in straitened circumstances, in Paris and thereafter in a succession of houses, many of them to the east of Paris, well away from the family stronghold in Anjou. Bazin described this state as one of uprootedness. In the introduction to his edition of the *Colloque d'Angers*, Cesbron quotes him as saying: 'Je suis aussi [l'écrivain] des déracinés'.<sup>7</sup> When his father died, he was disinherited from the family house and land. His own self-imposed alienation from the place was thus formalised by his Hervé-Bazin relatives. Surprisingly, in 1956, he responded to the family's request that he buy 'Le Pâtys' in order to save it, and he found himself returning there after an absence of over twenty years. However, he did not re-establish himself in the family home. He sold the house, thus severing the family forever from its roots. Thereafter, Bazin was to consider his exile complete.

Bazin's gloss on exile, under the title 'Demeures' in *Abécédaire*, shows just how mixed his emotions about his roots could be:

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<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.12.

*Virtuose des domiciles* [...] j'habite; je ne demeure guère. [...] En fait je suis un exilé. Si j'emporte avec moi les meubles anciens de ma grand-mère, j'ai quitté mon pays auquel je suis pourtant assez attaché pour en avoir fait le décor de plus de la moitié de mes livres. Comment faire autrement? C'est très volontairement qu'avec l'argent gagné par mes premiers romans (ce qui est assez comique) j'avais racheté la propriété paternelle dont j'avais été habilement exhéredé. C'est très volontairement que j'en ai émietté les terres, divisé la maison pour en chasser les souvenirs de la famille. Je me suis puni en même temps qu'elle. (pp.77-79)

Bazin begins with an assertion of his restlessness, 'j'habite; je ne demeure guère'. Clearly none of the homes which he has established as an adult have provided him with a sense of rootedness and permanence. Indeed, elsewhere Bazin described his propensity for moving house as potentially indicative of instability: 'Qu'il y ait là-dedans une certaine instabilité, je le reconnais volontiers'.<sup>8</sup> However, in spite of or even because of his mobility, Bazin clung to objects which had strong associations with his roots. Here he mentions his grandmother's furniture and Jacques Jaubert refers in his article to the way in which Bazin bought back all the family portraits and pieces of furniture, one by one.<sup>9</sup> Visitors to Bazin's successive homes were struck by the presence of twenty-five *Aubusson* and *Gobelin* tapestries which had originally hung at 'Le Pâtys' and, particularly, by the tapestry of Daphnis and Chloé, which had been the inspiration for the 'Amour et Psyché' tapestry in *Vipère au poing*. According to Jean Anglade<sup>10</sup>, Bazin had bought these tapestries back and then spent hours, needle in hand, restoring and mending them. Bazin's determination to recuperate

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Jaubert, *art. cit.* p.37.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.29.

and repair the physical reminders of his roots is accompanied by a desire to return to his origins for the settings of his novels, ‘mon pays auquel je suis pourtant assez attaché pour en avoir fait le décor de plus de la moitié de mes livres’. His choice of the words ‘mon pays’ and ‘attaché’ indicates that a strong bond remains. However, there is no doubting the strength of the emotional imperative which led him not only to leave the area: ‘J’ai quitté mon pays [...] Comment faire autrement?’, but also to sell the house ‘très volontairement [...] pour en chasser les souvenirs de la famille’. Nor is there any doubt about the satisfaction that Bazin drew from settling scores with his family. He notes with glee that it was the proceeds from his vindictive early novels which allowed him to buy the house, reverse his disinheritance and make his revenge complete. Yet, here again, there is emotional ambivalence. Far from being a uniquely satisfying experience, the selling of the house and lands is a painful undertaking: ‘Je me suis puni en même temps qu’elle’. Exile seems to have given rise to very contradictory emotions.

The autobiographically inspired Rezeau trilogy, written at different stages of Bazin’s exile from ‘Le Pâtys’, may well have provided him with a means of working through these very mixed feelings about his roots. In *Vipère au poing*, rejection of roots dominates. Brasse-Bouillon is under no illusion as to the extent of his family’s rootedness in the region; he declares: ‘*La Belle Angerie* est le siège social, depuis plus de deux cents ans, de la famille Rezeau’ (p.13). However, he describes the house only in terms of its pretentious discomfort and decay; the absurdly grand façade, the lack of running water, electricity or

telephone, the dirty well and the parquet floors buckling in the damp. Brasse-Bouillon gives us no sense at all of the poetic appeal of an old house which was to figure in so much of Bazin's later fiction.

Brasse-Bouillon's disgust with the house extends to the land around it. He explains that the house is set in a 'coin de terre glaise' (p.16). In fact, *Vipère au poing* stands alone in Bazin's fiction as the only novel in which there is virtually no sense of the redeeming beauty of the natural world:

Nul pittoresque. Des prés bas, rongés de carex, des chemins creux [...] d'innombrables haies vives qui font de la campagne un épineux damier, [...] et, surtout, mille et une mares, asiles de légendes mouillées, de couleuvres d'eau et d'incessantes grenouilles. Un paradis terrestre pour la bécassine, le lapin et la chouette. Mais pas pour les hommes. (p.17)

This water-logged and reptilian landscape is clearly no place to be.

Brasse-Bouillon then goes on to undermine his family's long-established social status in the area. The other inhabitants of this muddy backwater are stunted, sickly and servile: 'De race chétive, très "Gaulois dégénérés"' (p.17), 'serfs dans l'âme' (p.18). Brasse-Bouillon is at pains to establish the pitiful nature of the locals in order to remove any pride the family might draw from its social pre-eminence in the area.

Brasse-Bouillon makes it clear that there is nothing desirable about his family's roots. The reader is left in no doubt as to why his greatest desire is to uproot himself and to escape the family home and value system: 'Me planter tout seul dans la terre de mon choix, [...] les idées de mon choix'(p.261). The vituperative nature of Brasse-Bouillon's account of his roots is part of his overall rejection of his background and family.

*Vipère au poing* is the *cri de cœur* of a young man who is describing his rejection of home and family. Bernard Grasset, who published *Vipère au poing* in 1948, changed Bazin's date of birth from 17 April 1911, to the 11 April 1917, thus reducing the age of its author from thirty-seven to thirty-one.<sup>11</sup> Grasset may well have wished to identify Bazin more closely with his youthful and rebellious narrator.

However, there are suggestions in the text that *Vipère au poing* was in fact written well after Bazin's youthful confrontations with his family. Brasse-Bouillon is more attached to his background than he realises. He mockingly describes the 'flatteuse cérémonie' (p.266) in honour of René Rezeau and highlights the absurd economies required to provide an aristocratic standard of hospitality which the family can no longer afford. Yet he finds himself unexpectedly moved by the singing of a cousin as he reflects that social change and financial constraints will forever eradicate the Rezeau way of life:

Mais ma haine à moi devine [...] combien cette fête est un défi jeté au siècle et combien elle est fragile, la romance de cette petite cousine qui n'enfantera plus de nouveaux bourgeois craonnais, nés d'une idylle bien dotée. [...] Et je souffre un peu. (pp.273-274)

One senses here the additional presence of an older person's perspective. The perspective of someone who has been in exile long enough to look back with some nostalgia on a 'romance' and an 'idylle' which have already been lost.

In *La Mort du petit cheval*, the sequel to *Vipère au poing*, Jean Rezeau's feelings about his family home are still very mixed. He has left home and has

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<sup>11</sup> See Bazin's account of Grasset's decision in *Hervé Bazin: entretiens avec Jean-Claude Lamy, op. cit.*, pp. 16-18.

begun to establish his independence, but he cannot entirely shake off his ties with 'La Belle Angerie'. He makes two visits to the house, firstly for a family dinner and secondly, with his brother Freddie, to break into his mother's 'armoire anglaise' (p.258) and discover the secret of Marcel's parentage. The house still has the power to kindle his old sense of hostility. As he puts it shortly before his break-in:

Nous y voilà, tout brûlants, tout excités, diables dans la braise. Il s'agit d'une vieille braise, sur quoi s'efforce le soufflet usé de ma rancune. Mais l'on sait que les derniers tisons sont toujours prodigues d'étincelles. (p.254)

However, his exile from the Bocage area has brought about a radical change of response towards the landscape of his youth. When he is summoned back to Soledot to hear the reading of his father's will, there is an unprecedented outpouring of affection for the landscape which, in *Vipere au poing*, he had dismissed as unrelentingly bleak:

Bocage, ma patrie! Intimement mélangés, l'air est vert et l'herbe vive. Les talus ploient sous leurs ronces et sous leur têtards de chênes, coiffés de près à la serpe. Le chemin creux de la Croix-Rabault s'enfonce entre les halliers: ses ornières luisent, larges comme des fossés, remplies à ras bord d'une eau visqueuse où rouissent les trognons de choux. Voici la porcelaine mince des églantines, dont le fruit, cet automne, fournira aux gamins du bourg d'inépuisables réserves de poil à gratter. Voici le jaune acide des dolzas, les roudres rongés de parmélies, les petites vaches qui partagent avec les pies l'honneur d'hésiter entre le noir soutane et le blanc barrière. Voici l'Ommée, offrant sa bourbe aux battoirs des laveuses. Voici Soledot, dont le clocher file la laine grise des nuages. (pp. 234-235)

Brasse-Bouillon associates himself with the place in terms which convey his rootedness, this is his 'patrie', his homeland. Indeed, he describes the scene as only a native could, for he not only describes what the landscape looks like, he



also evokes the ways in which the locals engage with their surroundings. The village boys will use the seeds of rose hips to make itching powder, and the washerwomen will struggle with their scrubbing boards in the muddy water of the Ommée. The portrayal of the landscape is highly sympathetic. The narrator compares the flowers of the dog roses to fine porcelain, and he appreciates the acidic yellow of the rape-seed flowers. He notices the fertile greenness and the grassy smells. However, his portrayal is not idealised. He is matter of fact about the muddy ruts in the road, littered with cabbage stalks. This is the most detailed description of a landscape in the novel, and the detail and depth of the narrator's engagement with what he sees underline its emotional significance to him. Jean Rezeau's view of the Bocage countryside here is a far cry from his damning judgement of 'nul pittoresque' in *Vipère au poing*. Nostalgia has begun to take effect.

Furthermore, Jean Rezeau is beginning to discover that the escape from his roots, which he so craved as an adolescent, comes at a certain price. When he sets up his own marital home in Paris he is acutely aware of its rootlessness:

Comment peut-on tenir si fort à une étrangère, qui n'a pas pris racine avec vous dans les mêmes griefs, les mêmes routines, les mêmes souvenirs? Au pied de notre intimité, il n'y a pas cette épaisseur de vieille vie, ces détritrus d'histoire commune, ce terreau des familles, qui rend vivaces les plus belles comme les plus atroces végétations de sentiments. (p.215)

Here Brasse-Bouillon uses the imagery of root and soil to describe the kind of accretion of experience by which a relationship deepens and strengthens. His relationship with his recently-met suburban wife lacks the depth of a shared past and shared associations that he might have achieved with a local girl from the

Bocage. Jean Rezeau's exile has enabled him to analyse and quantify the nature of rootedness with greater clarity. This description of rootedness as a collection of common grudges, routines, and memories, 'cette épaisseur de vieille vie, ces détritrus d'histoire commune, ce terreau des familles', is the fullest definition of the experience of rootedness yet to be expressed by the narrator.

In *Cri de la chouette*, the long-exiled and middle-aged Jean Rezeau is finally forced to come to terms with the precise significance of his roots in his life. He is called out of exile by his mother, who can no longer meet the running costs of 'La Belle Angerie'. As he puts it, 'il fallait sauver le chef-lieu des Rezeau: Marcel renonçant, Fred nul, il n'y avait que moi de possible' (p.107). Unexpectedly finding himself potential saviour of the family estates, Jean Rezeau's view of his roots is initially rather ambivalent. On the one hand he is loathe to return and is embarrassed by his association with such an eccentric and resolutely anachronistic family. However, his disapproval of the family's values is tempered by the temptation to revisit the house to indulge his memories, 'l'envie de replonger dans ma jeunesse' (p.21), for, to Jean Rezeau, 'La Belle Angerie' is not simply a decaying piece of architecture in need of restoration, but 'une maison aux souvenirs aussi profondément enracinés que les ormes de son parc' (p.21). His ambivalence persists even as he approaches the house for the first time after about twenty years of exile.

J'étais bien étonné d'être là et plus encore de ne pas m'y sentir dépaycé, mais au contraire *revenu* en même temps que vexé d'appartenir à ces ruines, de tirer mon origine d'un périmé, d'un décati où me fascinait pourtant ma jeunesse. Souvenirs, confitures qui laissent remonter leur sucre! (p.72)

On the one hand, he is surprised and moved by the intense familiarity of the place and by the memories which it immediately calls to mind and, on the other hand, he retains that sense of alienation and embarrassment which led him to abandon it all in the first place.

Jean Rezeau betrays the extent of his rootedness by agreeing to purchase the house as his mother has requested. He admits that his brief ownership was entirely programmed by a desire to return to his roots:

Ce rachat de *La Belle Angerie*, c'était un retour à qui, à quoi? A rien. J'avais peut-être cédé [...] aux pressions du moins sympathique de ceux qui m'habitent: un relaps, tenté de revenir sur ces abjurations au nom d'une nostalgique complicité d'origine. D'une complicité qui supposait une complexion, mal dominée par de longs refus: si peu qu'il reste de terre héréditaire, si révoltés qu'en soient les hoirs, les seuls glaiseux peuvent dire ce que ça peut recoller aux pieds. (p.276)

In fact, Jean Rezeau's sense of rootedness seems to be a kind of test case for the extent to which a person can be bound to their place of origin in spite of long exile and every kind of rational and emotional disincentive. Here is a place where he has been miserable as a child, surrounded by people who failed to love him, subjugated by values he despised, in a house which was sordidly uncomfortable and deteriorating all the time, in an unprepossessing climate and landscape, and yet he is drawn back to it, at considerable personal expense, as if by a magnet. The pull that draws him back is none other than the pull of rootedness, here evocatively described as 'une nostalgique complicité d'origine'. The tension between his rational rejection of the place and his emotional attraction to it runs right through this passage. On the one hand, it has inspired 'abjurations', 'refus', 'révoltes', and yet, on the other hand, he has a recurring

desire for return, 'rachat', 'retour', 'relaps', 'recoller'. It is this very complexity of emotion, teased out by Bazin throughout the novel, which makes *Cri de la chouette* such a subtle and nuanced work.

In the end, it is in making his exile from 'La Belle Angerie' permanent and irreversible, by selling both house and land, that Jean Rezeau comes to a full understanding of the importance of his roots to him. He makes the sale in the knowledge that 'je le regretterais, sans aucun doute. Je me sentirais, où que j'aille, en exil.' (p.280). However, the physical exile is simply the loss of a 'tas de pierres' (p.281). What really makes the exile hard to bear is losing a key link with childhood:

Si banal qu'il soit, si insupportables qu'y aient été les nôtres, le lieu où nous avons ouvert les yeux sur le monde, il est irremplaçable. Le quitter, c'est nous dénoyauter de notre enfance et cela nous devient d'autant plus difficile que nous avançons en âge, que l'approche de nos fins raréfie nos recommencements. (p.282)

To be exiled from one's childhood by the passing of years is inevitable, but to be exiled from the location of one's childhood by circumstance is even harder to bear. Jean Rezeau concludes: 'Je suis navré de l'échec'(p.282). *Cri de la chouette* bears witness to the enormous power of nostalgia for youth, however unhappy that youth may have been. As Bazin was later to put it in *Abécédaire*: 'Jeune, j'ai été très malheureux. Jeune, dis-je: c'était le bon temps' (p.146). Paradoxical though it may be, Jean Rezeau realises that his roots are of value to him, not because they are associated with happy memories, loved ones or values he holds dear, but simply because they connect him to an unaccountably precious childhood past.

Ultimately, Jean Rezeau's exile serves to demonstrate the ineradicable nature of roots. For all his protestations, Jean Rezeau never entirely sheds his affinities with his home in the Bocage. In *Cri de la chouette*, he refers to fishing with his son at 'La Belle Angerie' as 'un bon moment, en somme, accordé à quelque chose d'aussi tenace en moi qu'une racine de liseron' (p.213). Here rootedness is compared to tenacious bindweed. This image is apt for, in Bazin's writing, exile never weakens the bond between the rooted person and their place of origin. Bazin stressed the persistent nature of roots in several different novels. In *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, the Tristan islanders return to their devastated island at the first available opportunity in spite of all the efforts of British volunteers to ensure their social integration in England. For all the trauma which has become associated with Céline's home in *L'Huile sur le feu*, she too is unable to renounce her roots during exile. She speaks for all of Bazin's rooted characters when she asks: 'Mais comment m'interdire mes racines? Est-ce ma faute si elles ressemblent à celles de nos têtards de chênes, peu nombreuses, mais si profondes et si dures' (p.9).

Bazin himself seems to have come to a full acceptance of his bond with the Anjou region. He declared: 'Si j'y retourne, moins souvent que les hirondelles, c'est avec le même goût pour le vieux nid. [...] peu gêné par mes contradictions, je pardonne à mes souvenirs, au nom de leur cadre.'<sup>12</sup> Contradictory emotions swept aside, painful memories notwithstanding, Bazin retained his taste for the nest he had fled. Indeed, as early as 1977, a mere five

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix, p.xxxiii.

years after the publication of *Cri de la chouette*, Bazin was stating his intention of spending his old age near Angers: ‘Malgré le réseau d’obligations qui me retiennent ailleurs, mes résidences de raison n’ont rien enlevé au domicile de mon cœur, au pays profond où, comme le poète, j’espère toujours revenir passer le reste de mon âge’.<sup>13</sup> Bazin carried out this intention. In 1996, he died in Angers, the town in which he had been born.

However, Bazin does not seem to have viewed his long exile merely in terms of irreparable loss. He was very much aware of the creative possibilities that it afforded. Once he had left the family home behind, he took advantage of the freedoms afforded him by his new rootlessness. Throughout his writing career he moved house continually and he associated this with the renewing of his creative impetus. As he told Jean-Claude Lamy: ‘Le renouvellement du site semble m’offrir une autre tranche de vie’.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, moving house became a means of self-renewal or even self-reinvention. In *Abécédaire*, he explained that the moves had ‘la vertu de me recommencer, de me rajeunir ailleurs’(p.77). Different houses became associated in his mind with different phases of productivity. During his interview with Jean-Claude Lamy, Bazin listed his various houses in terms of what he had written in each one:

Quatorze maisons successives! [...] Un seul livre à Paris (*Vipère au poing*, dans une cambuse du onzième), trois à Villenauxe (Aube), quatre à Chelles, rien à Gagny, quatre à Bry-sur-Marne, trois seulement à Triguères (Loiret) durant neuf ans, [...] rien à Montargis, un à Barneville (Eure), trois à Mont-Saint-Aignan (Seine Maritime).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hervé Bazin: *Actes du colloque d'Angers*, *Op. cit.*, p.12.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.53.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.53-54.

Furthermore, Bazin made radical changes to most of the houses he occupied. As he explained to Jean-Claude Lamy: ‘Posséder ne m’intéresse guère. J’ai le vice de l’architecte, qui construit ou transforme, puis se désintéresse de ce qu’il a achevé’.<sup>16</sup> For Bazin, a change of domicile was a creative and empowering action.

Some of this sense of the creative possibilities afforded by change makes its way into his account of the exile of the inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha. First of all, he points out that the very existence of a population on the island was due to the fact that successive groups of shipwrecked people decided that exile on Tristan da Cunha gave them the opportunity to create a kind of Utopia. The current inhabitants are:

Fils d’exilés, de naufragés qui ont choisi de ne pas rentrer [...] ils sont élevés dans la méfiance de ce monde où le vol, le viol, le crime, la guerre, la désunion des familles sont choses aussi courantes qu’elles sont, dans l’île, inconnues. Tristan, pour eux, c’est le refuge où la méchanceté des éléments permet d’échapper à la méchanceté des hommes. (p.30)

However, the continuity of the Tristans’ residence on their remote island is broken by the eruption of a volcano and they are forced to go into exile in England. Bazin’s depiction of this exile is not merely concerned with the pathos of the experience. Although he considers the difficulties faced by the exiles, he also describes the way in which their society is ultimately enriched by the experience. Bazin explores the idea that the exile returns to his homeland a changed man, for he cannot unlearn the insights that he has gained from his period away. Ideally his return will allow him to import the best of what he has

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

seen abroad, and the product of his exile will be a creative fusion between what he values in his homeland with what he has learnt elsewhere. This is precisely the case for the Tristans, as Simon explains to the English journalist Hugh Folkes:

Ils n'étaient pas rentrés, eux, pour qu'elle [l'île] restât la même, mais pour y retrouver ce qu'elle avait d'inexportable, amélioré par les leçons de l'exil. Tristan, oui! Mais Tristan avec un port, une usine, des moyens suffisants. Avec le progrès, quoi! (p.183).

In the final three sections of the novel, entitled 'L'Épreuve', 'La Reprise' and 'Tristan le nouveau', Bazin describes the ways in which the islanders improve their island, adopting the most useful aspects of western technology whilst avoiding the pitfalls of rampant materialism. The overall conclusion of the islanders is that exile has been a beneficial and creative experience: 'L'exil nous a beaucoup servi' (p.200).

Bazin's depiction of exile is complex and finely drawn. By means of the Rezeau trilogy, he traced Jean Rezeau's progression from rejection of his roots to acceptance of them and the very mixed emotions which beset him at each stage of this process. It seems likely that, in writing the trilogy, Bazin was working through his own responses to the place he had left in his youth and to which he would return as an old man. Drawing on his own experiences, he was able to express both the freedoms and the longings that exile engenders. While exile can be a creative and useful experience in its own right, its chief function is to provide critical distance for rooted people to assess the precise nature and significance of their roots.



## **Rootedness and Identity.**

Perhaps the single most important discovery that Bazin made about his roots, during his exile, was the extent to which they defined his identity. Although he had deliberately exiled himself from the family home and tried to reject the cultural assumptions that went with it, he nevertheless found himself obliged to admit that his childhood roots had been extremely formative. He came to acknowledge the truth of a play on words favoured by his father: “On est d’où l’on naît”, répétait mon père. C’est encore un peu vrai.<sup>17</sup> Bazin considered that certain specific aspects of his personality were due to his origins in the Bocage region. In 1955, he wrote an article for *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* answering the question: ‘Quels traits caractéristiques de votre province reconnaissez-vous en vous-même?’. He asserted his resemblance to the typical product of his region:

Le chouan est un homme têtu, fidèle, passionné à froid, solidement campé sur ses jambes et sur ses convictions, mélangeant rarement les comptes et les contes, bien qu’il ait l’âme aussi facilement humide que le climat où il vit et subisse chroniquement des attaques de rêve ou de rhumatisme [...] Je ne saurais renier certains traits de son caractère.<sup>18</sup>

He concludes in the same article that, in spite of his peripatetic adulthood and the variety of influences to which he has been exposed in later life, ‘la “grosse racine” tient bon et me fournit encore quelque sève’.

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix, p.xxxiii.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Quels traits caractéristiques de votre province reconnaissez-vous en vous-même?’ *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, No.1461, 1 sept. 1955, p.6.

Bazin's conviction of the connection between rootedness and identity was to feature repeatedly in his fictional writing. At the end of *Cri de la chouette*, as Jean Rezeau bids a final goodbye to 'La Belle Angerie', he concludes that, regardless of the fate of the house and lands, his identity will always be bound up with the place: 'Non, ça suffit, retournons. Nous le savons: Je suis de ce pays'(p.282). He does not say 'je viens de ce pays' but 'je suis de ce pays' thus acknowledging the impact of the place at a much deeper level. The language used here by Jean Rezeau closely echoes Bazin's own acknowledgement to Phillip Crant: 'Je suis ce que je suis. Et je suis de l'ouest de la France'.<sup>19</sup> There is a similar moment of recognition for Walter, the headman of the Tristans in *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, as he leaves his devastated island to go into exile in England: 'Tristan, de toute façon, ce n'est pas seulement une île, c'est nous' (p.59). For both Jean Rezeau and Walter, it is the prospect of exile which prompts the awareness that their roots are a constituent part of their identities. In *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, Bazin gives his fullest account of the link between the environment of rooted people and their development. Close-knit, insular, unworldly, frugal, community-minded, physically strong, brave, resourceful, pragmatic, unsophisticated; each of these characteristics of the Tristans is seen to be an effect of the way in which they have adapted to survive the harshness and remoteness of the island on which they live.

In the short story, 'Souvenirs d'un amnésique', Bazin takes an even more extreme case of the loss of roots in order to consider the relationship between

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<sup>19</sup> 'Un Entretien avec Hervé Bazin', *French Review*, Vol. XLVII, Special Issue N° 6, Spring 1974, p. 258.

rootedness and identity. The story relates the plight of Henri Lagruelle, who has been exiled both physically and mentally from his home in Carcassonne. During a business trip to Montreal, Henri Lagruelle makes a short trip to New York. There he suffers a severe blow to the head, possibly as a result of escaping from the window of a burning hotel. When he regains consciousness, he has lost all of his memory and no longer knows who he is. He is 'irréremédiablement amputé de sa vie antérieure' (p.211). As a result, Henri Lagruelle becomes oddly infantilised, an 'espèce de nouveau-né égaré dans un corps d'homme' (p.209). His lack of background has all but de-humanised him, for as he puts it: 'Un homme sans passé n'est pas un homme'(p.215). For the next thirty years, he suffers the consequences of his lack of identity. Unable to say who he has been, he is unable to lead a purposeful existence: 'J'existais sans vivre' (p.209). His ignorance about his past makes it very difficult for him to determine his future. Far from being a liberating experience, his blank canvas is utterly debilitating. As he puts it:

Quel est donc l'imbécile qui a osé dire: 'Ce qui n'est plus n'a jamais existé!'. Notre passé, c'est notre poids. Sans lui nous nous retournons dans le vide et c'est une expérience que je ne souhaite pas à mon pire ennemi. (p.209)

Without a background it is impossible to create any sense of individuality. What we are is necessarily based on what we have been.

The process by which Henri Lagruelle re-discovers his identity is essentially based on his roots. The first jolt to his memory comes when he goes into an attic and is overwhelmed by a sense of disappointment that it is unlike

another attic which he begins to remember. It turns out that he is remembering the attic where he was sent, when naughty, as a child: 'Ce sont mes plus vieilles racines, mes souvenirs d'enfance qui ont vraiment réussi à revivre'(p.213). In fact, the nature of the attic reminds him of his early experience of a sawmill. When he then decides to work in a sawmill in Canada, Henri discovers that he has prior knowledge of the trade. The routines of the job are 'comme éclairées par le dedans'(p.215). Habitual actions from the past strengthen his memory of his former home, thus illustrating Bazin's assertion in *Abécédaire* of the close link between home and behaviour: 'Habit, habitat, habitude, ce triumvirat de mots en dit plus qu'une longue analyse' (p.223). Soon, Henri Lagruelle finds that he wants to refer to sawmill tools in French, and thereby discovers that it is his mother tongue. This eventually leads him to the realisation that he must be Henri Lagruelle, a French sawmill owner, reported missing some thirty years previously. However, rather than write to the family he now discovers he has, he decides to return to the sawmill of his youth without alerting its residents. Madame Lagruelle finds her husband of thirty years ago inspecting the attic that led him to re-identify himself. This strange but moving story serves as an illustration of the importance of roots in defining or, in this case, re-defining a person's identity.

'Souvenirs d'un amnésique' also shows Bazin's fascination with the deep-seatedness of roots and the way in which their influence exerts itself in an almost inadvertent way. Henri Lagruelle is surprised by each discovery he makes. His place-based memories emerge from a source which is beyond his

conscious control. Bazin had, in his own life, experienced the power of his roots to assert themselves over his will. For all his attempts to make a complete break with his 'milieu originel', he found that he was nonetheless aware of its influence every day:

On a beau se flatter d'être fait de telle sorte que la réaction contre le milieu originel ait prévalu sur son influence, il en reste toujours quelque chose. Je m'en aperçois tous les jours: parfois avec rage, parfois avec satisfaction.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere, Bazin described in more detail the way that his roots persisted in his consciousness, even after long exile. He identified the fact that his aesthetic norm was drawn from the place in which he had grown up. When reflecting on the increasing rarity of the rooted lifestyle, he asked:

Serons-nous la dernière génération à se ressentir comme *émigrée* parce qu'elle n'habite plus son pays d'origine, à jeter dans la conversation des phrases significatives. Chez moi, *la lumière est plus blonde...* Chez moi, *les voûtes des églises sont plus bombées?* Depuis quarante ans je m'y surprends sans cesse. Rien à faire: j'ai l'œil Plantagenêt. Trop bleu ou trop pâle, le ciel n'est pas mon ciel; et les rivières, qui ne fluent pas sur bancs de sable, ne mordorent pas mon eau.<sup>21</sup>

The rooted person has a definite sense of home, a specific 'chez moi'. He therefore has a clear feeling of exile. When such people are elsewhere, they are 'comme émigrés'. However, their perceptions are inadvertently and automatically conditioned by their roots. As Bazin puts it: 'Je m'y surprends sans cesse. Rien à faire'. In fact, we see this very process at work in Bazin's

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<sup>20</sup> 'Quels traits caractéristiques de votre province reconnaissez-vous en vous-même?', *art. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix, p.xxxiii.

description of the attributes of the ideal town under the heading 'Ville' in

*Abécédaire*:

Une ville [...] ça doit garder son caractère local, son passé [...] ça doit s'enraciner dans une province qu'elle exprime. J'allais ajouter: et qui nous exprime... Mais je m'aperçois que je suis en train de parler de tuf et d'ardoise, de ma bleue et blanche ville d'Angers. A titre de référence une cité gagne beaucoup à ce qu'on y soit né. (p.266)

Here, Bazin begins to enumerate the qualities which are most pleasing in a town and then he draws up short as he realises that he is describing his home town of Angers. He realises that the choice of Angers as the prototype of the ideal town is an inadvertent or subconscious choice. Roots are seen to assert themselves unconsciously in matters of taste and judgement; they are the definitive 'titre de référence'.

In *Vipère au poing* and *La Mort du petit cheval*, Bazin derives ironic humour from the fact that, for all his rhetoric of rebellion, Jean Rezeau is unable to discard his 'Belle Angerie'-coloured spectacles. In spite of his left-wing, egalitarian aspirations as 'un futur abonné de *L'Humanité*' (p.263), Brasse-Bouillon is deeply shocked by the sight of the Parisian suburbs, as he makes his way, by train, to the capital:

Le spectacle, pour moi ahurissant, de la banlieue, vient me dédommager. Quel horticulteur a réalisé ce semis à la volée de toutes les variétés de villas? J'ai de solides préjugés esthétiques, et la plupart de ces maisonnettes ne me semblent dignes que d'épiciers en retraite. Entrer de plain-pied dans l'intimité de la lessive qui sèche ou du clapier me choque profondément. N'a-t-on pas appris aux Parisiens à dissimuler les 'communs' derrière quelque haie de lauriers? J'ignore encore que la prodigalité de l'espace est le premier des luxes bourgeois et que le prix du mètre carré de terre craonnaise autorise des ceintures vertes, que ne peut s'offrir la 'ceinture rouge'. (pp.233-4)

There is no doubting the origin of Brasse-Bouillon's 'solides préjugés esthétiques', and his ignorance of the economic realities of city life reminds us of just how narrow this provincial boy's experience has been. *La Mort du petit cheval* has a more episodic structure and a greater variety of settings than *Vipère au poing*. In this novel, Jean Rezeau has left home and has begun to make his way in the world. However, although he has physically made the break with home, he is still unable to discard its aesthetic values. When he describes the Ladour household, he is only able to define it in terms of how it differs from 'La Belle Angerie':

Ceci est vraiment un intérieur, par opposition à *La Belle Angerie*, qui est avant tout un extérieur, une façade. Tous les objets ont l'air de vouloir servir à quelque chose. Nulle parade. Les portraits, qui ne représentent pas des ancêtres, mais de vulgaires grands-parents, ne sont pas résumés par les ors de leur cadre [...] Un poêle, un poste de T.S.F., une pendule d'un merveilleux mauvais goût, un aspirateur, un chemin de fer électrique m'annoncent qu'ils existent, qu'ils ont le droit de faire du bruit, de manquer d'allure. (p.89)

Rezeau standards are implicit in the references to 'vulgaire' and 'mauvais gout' and to the Ladour emphasis on utility rather than show. By this means Bazin shows that, although Brasse-Bouillon has physically left home, his frame of reference is still rooted there.

Bazin also establishes the extent to which rootedness leads to cultural as well as aesthetic assumptions. In *Vipère au poing*, Brasse-Bouillon betrays his roots in his adoption of *droit de cuissage* with the peasant girl Madeleine and his patronising manner towards the railway employee who dares to *tutoyer* him in Paris. These incidents demonstrate the extent to which Brasse-Bouillon has been

tarnished, not only by the lovelessness of his home, but also by its snobbish double-standards. He emerges, at the end of the novel, aware of what a monster he has become: ‘Je m’avance dans la vie [...] effarouchant mon public, faisant le vide autour de moi. Merci ma mère! Je suis celui qui marche, une vipère au poing’(p.318). Brasse-Bouillon’s instinctive social snobbery is an indictment of the deeply rotten nature of his rather unusual background.

By contrast, in the case of *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, Bazin uses the cultural assumptions of the exiled Tristan islanders to highlight the shortcomings of the mainstream. The vantage point of the Tristans is naïve and common-sensical and it is precisely these qualities which give their observations piquancy. The narrator asserts: ‘A défaut d’être féroces, [les Tristans] peuvent devenir caustiques et, dans l’insolence de la seule naïveté, pénétrants’ (p.117). Through their eyes, the Britons are over-sophisticated and corrupt. Ruth, working in a restaurant, finds her British colleagues lecherous and dishonest. Walter mocks the haste of the British doctor with the Tristan saying: ‘Suppose que ton père t’ait fait cinq ans plus tard... tu aurais de l’avance!’ (p.118) Olive Ragan cannot understand her English hostess’s media-driven concern to stay young-looking: ‘Un vieux chien lèche mieux’, she tells her (p.119). The Tristans berate the sedentary behaviour of the English who take a bus for one stop: ‘Le pauvre! Il monte pour un ticket’(p.120). Bazin uses the Tristan perspective to call English assumptions into question.

Because rootedness is such a deep-seated and individual phenomenon, based on the formative years of childhood, it proves to be an entirely



untransferable experience. When Jean Rezeau buys 'La Belle Angerie' in *Cri de la chouette*, he does so with the support of his family, who have voted four to one in favour of the move. However, when the family take their first holiday together at the house, it soon becomes apparent that they are largely immune to its charms. Jean Rezeau comes to the realisation that his sense of rootedness at 'La Belle Angerie' cannot be replicated in his own teenage children. 'La Belle Angerie' and its environs have no sentimental appeal for them and they respond to the place purely on its objective merits, or lack of them. Their disorientation and inability to engage with this unfamiliar environment acts as a foil for their father's sense of homecoming. He observes:

Un lieu n'est privilégié que par notre enfance et nous ne devons jamais le quitter si nous voulons qu'à leur tour nos enfants s'y accrochent. Les miens étaient des banlieusards et Soledot, pour eux, un trou hanté par deux cents ploucs (p.216).

Ultimately, the financial difficulties of maintaining the house, combined with its lack of appeal for the next generation, drives Jean Rezeau to sell. He is forced to accept that his attempt to re-establish the family roots has failed.

Bazin's acknowledgement of the non-transferability of rootedness was to have important implications for his view of the interplay of rootedness and relationships. Some of Bazin's most successful fiction was to address the question of how the highly personal experience of rootedness affected an individual's emotional bonds with other human beings. In *Qui j'ose aimer*, Bazin posits a scenario in which his protagonist is forced to choose between her attachment to her childhood home and her lover. At the beginning of the novel,

Isa considers 'La Fouve' to be 'une oasis' (p.31) and her devotion to it is such that she has decided not to continue her education because this would entail having to live somewhere else. However, her settled existence is turned upside down when her mother, Belle, returns home to 'La Fouve' with a new husband, Maurice Méliet, thus introducing an unwelcome male presence into the 'matriarcat de La Fouve' (p.31). Belle has, in fact, brought sexual temptation to Isa's doorstep. Belle then falls seriously ill, which gives Isa and Maurice opportunities for intimacy which finally lead to a sexual relationship. However, Belle's death brings matters to a head. Maurice is now in a position to formalise his relationship with Isa, but clearly he cannot live with her in the house in which he was married to her mother. The continuation of their relationship depends upon Isa's willingness to leave 'La Fouve' and escape with him to the south of France. However, Isa chooses the house over Maurice and rejects him, even after she discovers that she is carrying his child. She accepts that the price for staying at 'La Fouve' is a life without any further romantic attachments, for she is now the mother of 'un enfant qui chasse à jamais les épouseurs' (p.293). Ultimately, when forced to choose between her roots and a relationship with men, Isa chooses the former.

Overall, *Qui j'ose aimer* is a surprising novel because, in spite of its title, Bazin is more interested in the effect of a relationship on Isa's rootedness in her home than in the relationship *per se*. Although the novel appears to be about adulterous and semi-incestuous love, this theme is not probed in detail. The relationship between Maurice and Isa never develops beyond the purely sexual,

and neither character seems to reflect very deeply on the phenomenon of their betrayal of Belle. Bazin seems to be far more interested in Isa's relationship with 'La Fouve' than in her relationship with her stepfather. This is strange because the theme of incestuous love would, at first sight, appear to be the more compelling one. As Zoë Boyer comments: 'Le thème essentiel, donc, de *Qui j'ose aimer*, n'est pas "l'amour" fugace entre l'héroïne et son beau-père, mais plutôt l'attachement sentimental de celle-là à la Fouve'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Zoë Boyer considers that the object of Isa's affections, referred to in the title, is not Maurice but 'La Fouve': 'Nous pouvons donc affirmer que l'interrogatif indirect "qui" dans le titre *Qui j'ose aimer* ne désigne pas forcément Maurice. Car pour Isa [...] La Fouve est aussi une "personne"'.<sup>23</sup> It is typical of Bazin's fascination with place that he should turn his version of Racine's *Phèdre* into an exploration of the intensity of rootedness.

In opposing sexual love and rootedness, Bazin owed much to Colette. Although *Qui j'ose aimer* is an unusual novel, it is not entirely without precedent, as Bazin admitted:

Il me semble reconnaître en moi un mélange bizarre de Mauriac [...], de Montherlant [...] et de Colette – et c'est très nettement ce côté Colette qui l'a emporté dans *Qui j'ose aimer*.<sup>24</sup>

It is in the writing of Colette that rootedness and male/female relationships are seen to be in opposition to one another. In her study of the theme of 'la maison

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<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.113.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

<sup>24</sup> André Bourin, 'Les enfants du demi-siècle: Hervé Bazin'. *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 21 fév.1957, p.1.

natale' in Colette's writing, Marie-France Berthu-Courtivron asserts that Colette's protagonists are emotionally rooted to the homes in which they are born, and that romantic attachments cause trauma because they involve the loss of the childhood home. Her summary of this conflict could apply equally well to the subject matter of *Qui j'ose aimer*: 'La maison natale occupe, dans chaque roman, une position stratégique spécifique, au centre d'un nœud de tensions contradictoires qui assaillent le protagoniste. La tentation du repli natal vient toujours compromettre l'évasion amoureuse.'<sup>25</sup> As we have seen, this is precisely the case for Bazin's Isa. Furthermore, her decision to defy the social expectation to marry the child's father in order to remain in her 'maison natale' is reminiscent of Sido's reaction to the shotgun wedding of a girl in her village in *La Maison de Claudine*:

Si la vilaine envie t'en tient encore, retrouve-le la nuit, dans le pavillon. Cache-le ton plaisir honteux. Mais ne laisse pas cet homme, au grand jour, passer le seuil de la maison, car il a été capable de te prendre dans l'ombre, sous les fenêtres de tes parents endormis. Pécher et t'en mordre les doigts, pécher, puis chasser l'indigne, ce n'est pas la honte irréparable. Ton malheur commence au moment où tu acceptes d'être la femme d'un malhonnête homme, ta faute est d'espérer qu'il peut te rendre un foyer, l'homme qui t'a détournée du tien.<sup>26</sup>

This passage bears considerable resemblance to the subject matter of *Qui j'ose aimer*. Isa's sexual encounter with Maurice does indeed take place in the shadows at her parental home as her mother sleeps. Isa's desire for Maurice is also a 'vilaine envie' and a 'plaisir honteux'. She is ashamed of the sexual

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<sup>25</sup> Marie-Françoise Berthu-Courtivron, *Espace, demeure, écriture: la maison natale dans l'oeuvre de Colette*, Paris: Nizet, 1992, p.11.

<sup>26</sup> Colette, *La Maison de Claudine*, Paris: Hachette, 1977, p.124.

pleasure she experiences with Maurice, describing it as ‘cette joie détestable’ (p.182) because in sleeping with her mother’s husband the relationship is a ‘petit inceste’ (p.178). Ultimately, she allows Nathalie to expel Maurice from the house, ‘chasser l’indigne’, so that she will not be ‘détournée’ from her childhood home. She does not accept Maurice’s proposal of marriage for she knows that he has been a ‘malhonnête homme’ in betraying her mother. It seems likely that Bazin’s debt to Colette in this novel consists largely in the use of a female protagonist whose rootedness in her ‘maison natale’ proves ultimately stronger than a passing sensual attraction to a man whose presence threatens those roots.

It would nevertheless be a mistake to conclude that, in Bazin’s writing, rootedness is a more emotionally satisfying experience than a human relationship. In other works, he seems to be proposing that rootedness without love is damaging to the individual. In *Vipère au poing*, Bazin characterises Folcoche as the ‘le véritable défenseur de la morgue Rezeau’ (p.170). She is a woman who is utterly committed to the preservation of a crumbling ancestral home but who appears to be loveless and unloving. However, in *La Mort du petit cheval*, Jean Rezeau finds evidence that his mother has an emotional life: ‘La Vipère avait du sang chaud’ (p.261). He discovers that Marcel is her favourite son because he is the illegitimate product of a love affair in the Far East. In *Cri de la chouette*, Folcoche finally shows her full capacity for emotion when she falls hopelessly in love with Jean Rezeau’s step-daughter Salomé. It is in speaking to Salomé that Folcoche betrays just how emotionally unsatisfying her rooted life at ‘La Belle Angerie’ has been. She urges the young girl: ‘Ne fais

pas comme j'ai fait. Ne moisiss pas dans ta chambre et dans ta déconvenue' (p.134). For all its brevity, this remark is nonetheless highly revealing. The choice of the word 'moisiss' conveys rotting, decaying, stagnating and profound boredom, as in the expression 'moisir en province'. Her life has clearly also been dominated by emotional disappointment, 'déconvenue'. Furthermore, Folcoche has come to realise that her guardianship of the 'morgue Rezeau' has been a barren and ultimately futile exercise. In a notebook, discovered after her death, she asks: 'J'ai été ici la gardienne de quoi?' (p.274). The emptiness of her rooted existence at 'La Belle Angerie' is such that she is prepared to give it all up at a moment's notice in order to follow Salomé to Canada. Jean Rezeau is amazed at how little her roots mean to her when she sees an opportunity for emotional fulfilment elsewhere: 'Elle envisageait froidement de s'expatrier sur le tard, d'abandonner tout, d'expédier par-dessus bord habitudes, meubles, maison, pays, [...] et le reste' (p.251). Bazin here enumerates all the elements which contribute to a sense of rootedness only to show how insignificant they are when they stand in the way of a relationship with a person. Tragically, Salomé does not reciprocate Folcoche's love and the old woman dies before she is able to rejoin the object of her affections. The overwhelming conclusion is that Folcoche has paid too high a price for her residence of 'La Belle Angerie'.

Madame Lagruelle, in 'Souvenirs d'un amnésique', makes a similar discovery. She has compensated for the loss of her husband by pouring all her energies into being an effective custodian of her husband's sawmill in his absence. At the beginning of the story, she congratulates herself:

Parallèle à la vieille inscription *Lagruelle et C<sup>ie</sup>* [...] se détachait, tout frais, tout flambant, le sous-titre exécuté depuis à peine un mois, sur l'ordre exprès de la présidente-directrice générale: *La charpente moderne, fer, bois et ciment*. Elle sourit. Fief tombé en quenouille, peut-être, mais pour sa plus grande gloire. Si Henri revenait, il serait sans doute bien dépaysé, bien dépassé, incapable de s'y reconnaître. (pp.191-2)

La direction d'une grande affaire, la jouissance d'une maison à la fois austère et confortable. Mais n'était-ce pas là un droit, un salaire, un remboursement de tant de déboires et de peines? (p.211)

By the end of the story, after meeting her husband, she comes to see the emotional cost of her long dedication to her 'fief'. She has come to regard herself as 'une disparue, plus disparue que lui, devenue une vieille dame, arrogante dévorée d'orgueil et d'ambition' (p.226). At the end of the story she asks her husband to stay for dinner, no doubt with a view to rebuilding her marriage.

## **Conclusion.**

Many of Bazin's writings can be viewed as part of a life-time's meditation on the nature and significance of rootedness. For Bazin, rootedness had been a very mixed experience for his roots, though highly distinctive, were associated with considerable unhappiness and degrees of exile. He seems to have been struck, above all, by their formative importance. However, he also had an understanding of the emotional cost that rootedness might involve. Perhaps the most profound conclusion about rootedness is to be found in the words of Henri Lagruelle, the amnesiac, who makes such an effort to return to

his roots, even after a long exile, but who also acknowledges: 'nous n'existons vraiment que là où nous existons pour les autres, là où notre vie est une raison de la leur' (p.225).



### **Chapter Three: Territoriality and Flight.**

Bazin is perhaps best known for his writing about family life and many critics have identified this aspect of his work as his defining characteristic. As Jacques Brenner put it: 'Bazin est essentiellement un romancier de la famille et du mariage; – et aussi du divorce'.<sup>1</sup> Bazin referred to the novels which focussed on the family as his 'fresque de la vie privée'<sup>2</sup> and acknowledged that they seemed to have the greatest appeal for readers. However, a dominant characteristic of Bazin's depiction of family life is the extent to which he presents it in spatial terms, emphasising notions of territoriality and flight. It is this rather unusual approach to the subject that reveals many of Bazin's most intriguing insights into the nature of family relationships.

#### **Territory and the Family Unit.**

Bazin was never in any doubt as to the crucial role of the family in the development of the individual. For all his interest in the formative nature of place-based roots, he considered the family to be the single most important influence on a human being. In *Ce que je crois*, he insists that in spite of his own experience of family unhappiness, the 'liquidation de la famille' (p.171) is no solution. He goes on to assert: 'Rien ne compte davantage pour un être que de pouvoir se situer *dans son parage* (mélangez le vieux sens de ce mot au

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Brenner, *Histoire de la littérature française de 1940 à nos jours*, Paris: Fayard, 1978, p.494.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Jaubert, *art. cit.*, p.25.

moderne, ce sera parfait)'(p.171). The striking feature of Bazin's language here is his use of a spatial metaphor. The word 'parage', usually used to define the local neighbourhood and its boundaries, is here used to describe the family unit. Bazin suggests that the individual draws his sense of bearings and his sense of self from his position in a family. Bazin goes on to conclude that the family is 'cette place, qui ancre toute personne'.<sup>3</sup>

However, Bazin's use of metaphorical language, describing the family as a place, is combined with the much more concrete assertion that the family unit necessarily occupies its own space or territory. As a keen biologist, Bazin was interested in the overlap between human and animal behaviour. In his mind, the family should be considered in terms of 'la superposition de deux structures: l'animale et l'humaine' for, like animals, human beings need to provide a safe place or territory in which to raise their young.<sup>4</sup> Under the heading 'Famille', in *Abécédaire*, Bazin remarks:

Rappelons que la famille, d'ailleurs, est *animale*; qu'à la notion de territoire, c'est-à-dire d'un *espace vital*, minimum, est associée une durée d'élevage, *un temps vital*. (p.105)

A family's territory is therefore defined as 'un espace vital, minimum', necessary for the raising of children.

This definition also implies the possibility of excess. In *Cri de la chouette*, when Jean Rezeau's family are discussing whether or not to buy 'La Belle Angerie', Jeannet Rezeau objects to the plan on the basis that such a property would exceed the biological territorial requirement for a single family:

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<sup>3</sup> *Ce que je crois*, p.171.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146.

Le tas de pierres est trop gros. [...] On peut tolérer la propriété dans la limite du territoire nécessaire à tout animal: pour nous, une maison dans un jardin. Mais si le lot augmente, il contredit la nature. (p.105)

Although Jeannet echoes Bazin's belief in the natural requirement of all families for a property as their 'territoire nécessaire à tout animal', he argues that this requirement ceases to be legitimate once the home becomes bigger than strictly necessary. There is a 'golden mean' dictated by nature, a limit which should not be exceeded. Like animals, human beings should not overextend their territories at the expense of other claimants. In *Madame Ex*, during a discussion about the purpose of marriage, Gabriel argues, like Jeannet, for the existence of individual territories, which must also leave room for others. He insists:

que la nécessité d'un territoire, commune à tous les êtres vivants, fonde la propriété et en même temps le socialisme, cet espace vital ne pouvant s'empiéter sur celui d'autrui. (p.99)

Society can only function if each unit remains within its own parameters and does not seek to encroach upon the living space of others.

Although Bazin here upholds the socialist principle of the equitable division of resources, his view of the family is not collectivist. For all their social cohesion, the Tristan families, newly arrived in England, insist on their right to separate homes for each family. As the headman Walter puts it: 'L'homme a une peau, la famille a une maison. On se tromperait si, les voyant communautaires, on croyait les Tristans grégaires. Ils veulent rester ensemble, c'est vrai. Mais chacun chez soi' (p.89). For Walter, a family could no more be denied an individual territory than a human being could be denied his own skin.

The family groups in Bazin's novels tend to be close-knit and clearly defined in terms of the territory they occupy. The first indication of this is to be found in *Vipère au poing* where the narrator outlines the occupants of his domestic space: 'Moi compris, nous voici donc cinq sur la scène de *La Belle Angerie*. Tableau unique' (p.43). Where Brasse-Bouillon uses theatrical imagery, Isa, in *Qui j'ose aimer*, uses a cartographic image to make the same point: 'Rien de plus étroit que ma géographie sentimentale! Département de *La Fouve*, chef-lieu *Maman*, sous-préfectures *Berthe* et *Nathalie*. Le reste, c'était l'étranger' (p.32). Daniel Astin refers to his family unit as: 'Les sept personnes qui – moi inclus – ont composé mon univers' (p.97). Each of these characters defines their family grouping as making up their 'world'.

According to Bazin, the marking out of a family territory is an essentially protective measure. Although the modern family has little to fear from the predators of the natural world, it may need to fend off hostile social influences. In *Ce que je crois*, Bazin identified a host of sociological factors which were unsettling the family unit and undermining the confidence and authority of parents. Amongst these he singled out the often intruding presence of the television: 'Intervention à domicile (rupture de l'intimité) des visages du dehors (télé) qui requièrent l'attention au détriment des visages du dedans' (p.150). The incursion of the media into the family's territory has the effect of disempowering the father, conventionally the head of the household. As Bazin put it: 'Il n'est plus la Voix du foyer (le prof, la radio, la télé en disent bien plus que lui sur le monde)' (p.151). In *L'École des pères*, Abel Breteau is acutely

aware of the need to distinguish and defend the private, familial nature of the home from the wider social context:

École publique, télé publique. Famille publique aussi, du moins en partie [...]. J'ai toujours pensé qu'il fallait, pour ma gouverne, oublier cet aspect-là, insister en toutes occasions sur le caractère privé. S'il est vrai que nous sommes par toutes sortes de branchements – eau, gaz, électricité, téléphone, ondes – reliés au monde extérieur, il y a encore des murs, des toits, des portes, des volets pour protéger le secteur. (p.88)

The father's role here is to define and defend the home in which the family is to be raised. 'Insister sur le caractère privé' and 'protéger le secteur' are the human being's way of defining his territory vis-à-vis society. It is interesting that Abel refers to the physical attributes of the house; walls, roof, doors and shutters as the defining limits of the territory.

However, Bazin's most threatened territorial group is his Tristan inhabitants. When they lived together on Tristan da Cunha, they were necessarily held together by the parameters of their island : 'Une île forcément [...] ça resserre tout' (p.112). However, the loss of their territory, due to the earthquake, is a matter of great concern to the leaders of the Tristan community.

During their exile on the Calshot military base in England, Simon comments:

Nous étions encore tous ensemble. Mais pour combien de temps? Au nom de quoi? Officiellement, Tristan c'était fini. [...] On sentait tout s'effiloche. [...] Notre groupe après avoir été naturel, maintenu par des côtes, devenait artificiel, clos par un grillage, par la peur de se dissoudre parmi vous. (p.114)

The loss of territory threatens the cohesion of the group: 'On sentait tout s'effiloche'. The intermarriage of Tristans with Britons begins to pose an increasing threat to the survival of a distinct Tristan da Cunha community. It is

against this background that the marriage of two Tristans to each other is such an important symbol, almost a defiance of the loss of territory:

La bonne photo allait pourtant être prise: celle de la ronde traditionnelle autour des jeunes mariés: cercle fermé, anneau de plus, concentrique au leur, mais inscrit par hasard à l'intérieur d'un plus grand, le parallèle du 51° de latitude nord. (p.113)

The symbolism of the pose is important. The Tristan wedding guests physically encircle the bride and groom, reconstituting with their bodies the parameters of a territory which has been lost since their arrival in the northern hemisphere. This is a protective circle, 'un anneau de plus', 'fermé', which guarantees the family unit within it.

### **Territoriality and Family Conflict.**

In spite of Bazin's theorising about the protective function of territorial space for the family, a very different picture emerges from most of his novels. The strong territorial instincts of his characters, in fact, tend to compromise their ability to live harmoniously with their relatives. All too often, family members try to lay claim to the family space at the expense of others. The home becomes a kind of enclosed arena pitching lovers, spouses, parents, children and siblings against one another in a territorial combat for supremacy. Bazin's families are not threatened from the outside, they are threatened from within by the misuse of the territorial instinct. In choosing to consider the different ways in which family members could turn their fire on one another, Bazin had identified a rich

vein of subject material which was to fuel many of his best novels. As Pierre Moustiers put it:

Pour Bazin, la famille est pierre de touche et poste d'observation, théâtre et ring où s'affrontent les passions et les faiblesses, les sacrifices et les envies, la sottise et la bonté, la sagesse et la folie des hommes. A quoi bon chercher l'aventure littéraire ailleurs, d'un continent à l'autre, à travers pampas et macadams, ou dans la narcotique des spéculations intellectuelles quand on trouve tous les éléments de la comédie humaine entre quatre murs.<sup>5</sup>

Bazin would repeatedly portray family members enclosed in their family territory, the 'quatre murs' of their homes, engaged against one another in a fierce struggle for dominance.

In assessing the negative impact of the territorial instinct on the family unit, Bazin considered a host of different family types. He also varied his viewpoint, sometimes narrating events from the male point of view, sometimes from the female point of view and sometimes from the perspective of the on-looking child. He wrote both from the perspective of the most territorially minded individuals and from the perspective of those who were being damaged by other people's territorial behaviour. The gravity of the situation and the extent to which Bazin decried certain behaviour also varied from novel to novel. Overall, Bazin painted a very full and clear picture of the interplay between territoriality and family life.

We will begin our enquiry into this aspect of Bazin's work by considering *L'Église verte*, for in this novel Bazin shows how even the mildest of men can misuse his territorial instincts. Jean-Luc Godion, the narrator, is a highly

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<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.14.

sympathetic character. He has a happy and settled relationship with his unmarried daughter Claire, who lives with him, and he is a pillar of the local community. His open-minded attitude towards others and his love of the natural world are such that he is happy to offer long-term hospitality to the injured Mutix,

a young man universally distrusted by the rest of the village for his determination to withhold his real name and his desire to live a hermit's existence in the forest. However, Godion is also a highly territorial individual, wedded to his home and locality. He admits to himself:

Vous êtes un archi-sédentaire, ancré dans une maison, un village, une forêt qui n'est rien d'autre qu'un territoire, à nul autre pareil, où vos pas sont des marques, au même titre que l'odeur dont un blaireau imprègne son canton. (p.68)

Initially, Godion enjoys Mutix's company and has no objection to the relationship which springs up between the young man and his daughter but the reasons for his acceptance of their relationship indicate that he is in fact a possessive and controlling father. He draws satisfaction from the fact that:

Je sais bien que le séducteur ne gravera jamais son nom près de celui de ma fille [...] ne les mélangera pas davantage sur le registre d'une quelconque mairie. Ne suis-je pas un vilain tendre père affamé de présence, qui pour sa fille préfère l'amant à l'épouseur. (p.165)

When he detects that Mutix will return to his nomadic lifestyle and take Claire with him, he is determined to ward off this danger. Realising that Inspector Ricat will soon be arriving with proof of Mutix's identity, Godion arranges for his daughter to go and see her aunt, knowing that, when confronted with his name, Mutix will simply flee without her:



Mon hôte devenait trop dangereux... Eh quoi! Ma fille! Qu'il lui eût fait et refait l'amour chez moi, à condition que, superbe inconnu, il ne remît rien en cause, soit! Mais nous n'en étions plus là. Nous en étions au rapt de la Sabine. Et j'avais fait mon choix: l'expulsion du ravisseur éventuel. (p.234)

Godion's decision here is couched in highly territorial language. Mutix, having been welcomed as a guest, is now perceived as a danger, a threat to the status quo and, as such, he must be repulsed. However, Godion secures his territory and his way of life at the expense of his daughter's right to self-determination. He alone determines the outcome, 'j'avais fait mon choix', and his territorial self-assertion will come at a high price for Claire.

The expulsion of lovers is not merely a parental activity. In *Qui j'ose aimer*, the female protagonist and narrator, Isa, resists and finally spurns the attentions of her lover, Maurice. Bazin traces the development of Isa's territorial instincts which lead her to this step. Isa's territory, 'La Fouve', is a female preserve. Almost by definition, therefore, the threat to this status quo will come from a man. Sure enough, the first sign of intrusion comes from Maurice Meliset who lives on the other side of the river Erdre in an exclusively male household 'la réplique de La Fouve, mais à l'envers: une maison de mâles' (p.36). Maurice has taken to boating and his presence in the water triggers Isa's territorial instincts: 'J'enrageais seulement de le voir évoluer contre notre berge, dans ces eaux que je considérais comme mes eaux territoriales' (p.38). The threat becomes more pronounced when Isa realises that her mother has formed a relationship with Maurice. She feels that the river has betrayed the household, laying it open to invasion: 'L'Erdre nous avait trahis' (p.37). The threat

intensifies when Maurice makes his first visit to 'La Fouve' as Belle's intended husband. Isa fears that he will take over her territory:

Car il va monter, le prétendant [...] Il entrera en maître, il accrochera son chapeau à la patère; il poussera une reconnaissance dans la 'chambre bleue' de Maman, dans la mienne; il inspectera avec un gros sourire ce féminin royaume [...] il se carrera dans le fauteuil de grand-mère où nul, depuis sa mort, ne s'est assis: il sortira son paquet de Camel et la grande salle sentira l'homme, la gomina, la cigarette. (p.42)

Isa imagines Maurice's arrival in terms of a series of active verbs, all of which are confident or masterful, 'il va monter', 'il entrera en maître', 'il accrochera', 'il poussera', 'il inspectera', 'il se carrera'. Some of the vocabulary is military, 'une reconnaissance', 'inspectera'. There is also an expectation of violation; the use of the grandmother's armchair, sacrosanct since her death, and Maurice entering the bedrooms. Finally, there is the almost animalistic reluctance to let Maurice impregnate the place with his scent, the smell of tobacco.

Once Maurice has indeed established himself in the house, Isa continues to resist what she regards as an invasion. Although outwardly accepting the situation, she nonetheless seeks to undermine Maurice 'l'envahisseur' (p. 55), by means of a 'sourde malveillance' (p.91) and 'l'agacerie, la mesquinerie, la persécution mineure' (p.92). She is horrified that Maurice has settled into the house, 'Maurice s'installait chaque jour davantage' (p.92), and further horrified that his growing confidence is translating itself into a desire to make alterations to the building:

Il osait faire des projets, envisager l'installation d'une baignoire, la réparation des toits, raisonnables bienfaits contre quoi je ne pouvais m'insurger, bien que ce fût là un vrai sacrilège, un changement imposé au décor même et signant son passage à La Fouve. (p.93)

Isa's choice of words here makes it quite clear that it is not the changes in themselves which she finds threatening, for they are 'raisonnables bienfaits'. What she cannot accept is that, in making these changes, Maurice is practising territorial rights and leaving his mark on the territory, 'signant son passage'. It is this which she regards as 'un vrai sacrilège'. Maurice then progresses from plans to actions and hires some labourers to thin out the undergrowth in the grounds. This provokes the strongest reaction in Isa: 'J'étais hors de moi. Ainsi, il ne suffisait pas qu'un étranger se fût imposé dans la famille, il fallait encore qu'il défigurât La Fouve' (p.104).

The death of Belle heralds the final stage in Isa's territorial struggle for the house. In the absence of her mother, Isa feels that she is now its only legitimate heir: 'L'idée me vint soudain que j'étais chez moi, que personne [...] n'avait à y faire démonstration d'autorité' (p.237). Just in time, she discovers and destroys Belle's will leaving the house to Maurice and naming him as the legal guardian of her children. Although it is ultimately Nathalie who drives Maurice from the house, Isa and the reader find themselves concurring with her that 'il était temps!' (p.268). Maurice Méliet is not a sympathetic character. He is weak enough to have been drawn into marrying Belle, even though he clearly does not love her, and duplicitous enough to seduce her daughter, even as she lies dying. Isa's ultimate decision to drive him from her home seems amply justified. This sense of rightness is poetically underlined by the fact that Isa has conceived a daughter and is therefore able to perpetuate the matriarchy into the next generation.

In many ways, *Le Matrimoine* is the mirror image of *Qui j'ose aimer*, for, in this novel, it is a male narrator who rages against the intrusions of a woman into his territory. However, this time, Bazin analyses the territorial conflict between man and wife. The central preoccupation of *Le Matrimoine* is summed up by Zoë Boyer as 'le pouvoir de plus en plus envahissant de la femme dans la vie conjugale d'un couple'<sup>6</sup> and notions of territoriality amplify this theme throughout the novel. Step by step, Abel finds himself surrendering control over his own home. When Abel's bride, Mariette, moves into the house, which has long been in his family and to which he is very attached, she first decides to make her mark by changing certain aspects of the décor:

Une fois chez moi ... je veux dire: chez nous, dans cette maison habitée par six générations de Bretaudeau et où Mariette n'avait jusqu'ici pénétré qu'en invitée, en très polie et timide future occupante, avec des mains gourdes, un regard qui ne touchait à rien, une bouche sans avis sur l'usage des lieux, voici que ses mains se sont mises à remuer l'air, ce regard à envelopper les choses, cette bouche à proposer des aménagements. (p.21)

Here Abel asserts the fact that this is his territory, 'chez moi', 'cette maison habitée par six générations de Bretaudeau'. He rather wistfully recalls the period when Mariette had no territorial rights, ' invitée', 'polie', 'timide', 'des mains gourdes', 'ne touchait à rien', 'sans avis'. This then suggests the contrast with what has happened now that Mariette finds herself 'chez nous'. The verbs used next show that Abel regards her growing confidence as intrusive, 'remuer', 'envelopper', 'proposer'. This feeling is intensified when Mariette modernises the living room with the aid of her mother as a surprise for Abel. Horrified, Abel

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<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.154.

records the nature of the changes:

La baie, vide, éclairait une pièce inconnue d'où avait disparu l'ensemble Henri II, dont le fronton à balustres (soixante-deux) donnait exactement, lorsque j'avais six ans, l'âge de feu ma grand-mère. Teck à droite, teck à gauche: sur carpette de crylor et sous luminator danois, triomphait la moderne invasion des Vikings. (p.66)

The choice of vocabulary again indicates that the narrator regards changes made within his territory as a violation. He responds to the new décor in terms of the absence of the old. The removal of long-cherished furniture invested with personal significance renders the room 'vide' and 'inconnue'. The changes are perceived to be hostile, 'invasion'. Rape, pillage and barbarity are all implicit in the Viking metaphor and indicate the degree of Abel's distress.

Abel's response to this loss of territorial control is to assert his sexual dominance:

Je l'aplatis, tout habillée, la mince patronne! Je me la fais céder à son seigneur. Quelle femme est sur le dos ce qu'elle est sur ses pieds? Quand tu halètes, mon trésor, une chose devient certaine: c'est que je suis le maître à bord de ton plaisir. (p.69)

By asserting his physical control over his wife, he not only diminishes her power in his own eyes, 'la mince patronne', but also redefines her whole being as a part of his territory. He describes the sexual act as a form of subjugation whereby he becomes once more the territorial chief, he is the 'seigneur' to whom Mariette must cede. Equally, Mariette's sexual enjoyment is depicted as a boat of which Abel is 'le maître à bord'.

However, even this weapon cannot secure Abel's hold over his territory for it is with the birth of his first child that he is forced to acknowledge defeat.

Mariette turns out to be what Abel terms a ‘méragesse’ (p.188), a woman who becomes utterly subsumed by her attentions towards her offspring. Under Mariette’s indulgent eye, their first child soon poses a further threat to what Abel perceives to be his territory:

Si Mariette se croit une éducatrice, moi, je me sens surtout un colonisé. Que fait-il, ce faible conquérant, sinon s’étendre aux dépens de mon territoire? [...] C’est la grande invasion. Rien n’est plus en sûreté. Rien n’est assez caché, assez défendu. (p.186)

The capacity of the child to find his way into every part of the household is perceived here as malign and expansionist. The language is again highly conflictual; the toddler is invested with the powers of an occupying army, ‘conquérant’, ‘invasion’, the father is routed and dispossessed, ‘un colonisé’ who has lost his ‘territoire’, his ‘sûreté’, and who seeks in vain to hide and defend, ‘caché’, ‘défendu’. Abel’s marriage and paternity bring about in him an increasing sense of powerlessness and redundancy and the tone of his narration is one of passive exasperation as he concludes at the end of the novel: ‘Je suis un râleur, mais un soumis’ (p.445).

Abel’s submissiveness is ‘spatialised’ by his tendency to take up less and less physical space in the household. He uses metaphors of oil and water to contrast his wife’s occupation of the house with his own:

Une Guimarch, chez elle, c’est comme une goutte d’huile dans l’eau: aussitôt elle s’étale. Moi je suis comme une goutte d’eau dans l’huile: je m’y recroqueville, je fais perle. (p.259)

Abel recounts his failed attempts to find a sanctuary in his office, in the toilet and even in the bathroom. He laments his loss of privacy and autonomy in

territorial terms: 'On se dit: à chacun son secteur. Mais mon secteur se rétrécit' (p.261). Ultimately Abel's loss of ground is so pronounced that he feels that he has no territory left at all: 'Mais suis-je encore chez moi?' (p.188).

Abel's question is a particularly apposite one for Bernard Colu in *L'Huile sur le feu*. In this novel, Bazin depicts a marriage at breaking point. This time, the wife in the novel fights a territorial battle against her husband in order to be rid of him and to have sole custody of the house and their daughter Céline, the narrator. Bernard Colu has been disfigured by fire and Eva cannot bear the sight of him. However, he cannot easily be dislodged as he seems to tolerate her aggression passively and their daughter Céline refuses to choose between her parents. To Céline's horror, Eva seeks to drive him out by asserting, amongst other things, that he does not live in the house. Céline observes:

Mais pouvais-je accepter que dans la maison mon père eût cessé d'exister? Mme Colu se comportait en veuve, elle ne faisait plus cuire que deux œufs, n'achetait plus que deux escalopes, ne mettait plus que deux couverts. Pas un mot à mon père. (p.210)

Eva's strategy is essentially territorial. By asserting that her husband does not eat in the house she is affirming that the place is not his territory. Colu's response to this provocation is pyromania, and the tension is only resolved when he takes his own life in a fire. Eva Colu is one of Bazin's most unappealing female characters and her ruthless use of the home to drive her damaged husband to despair stands as a reminder of how callous some women can be in seizing and using a territorial advantage.

In 'Souvenirs d'un amnésique', Bazin shows the way in which the territorial instinct may jeopardise any chance of emotional fulfilment. For nearly

thirty years, Marthe Lagruelle has been living a stressful and barren existence running her husband's sawmill, for he has gone missing and is presumed dead. She has known 'vingt-neuf ans de solitude, de harassante autorité, de renonciation à la meilleure part, à une simple existence de femme' (p.189). However, when her husband finally returns, she is unable to be pleased or relieved. His return seems so extraordinary that she begins by assuming that he is a fraudster, adopting a false identity in order to benefit financially: 'Un sosie, bien renseigné et capable de s'emparer d'un état civil pour revendiquer une fortune, cela s'est vu' (p.203). Even when she becomes increasingly convinced that the stranger is indeed her husband, Marthe Lagruelle is careful not to acknowledge him as such for she knows that if she does, she will also have to recognise his territorial rights:

Et on les verrait très vite à l'œuvre, les messieurs graves, les robins, les chat-fourrés, les hommes de loi et d'affaires, empressés auprès du seigneur revenu d'on ne sait quelles croisades et soucieux [...] de rendre à qui de droit l'hommage dû à une si belle fortune, d'oublier son long artisan, redevenu la femme mariée, l'être en puissance d'époux, l'ombre du maître, la négligeable Mme Lagruelle. (pp.218-9)

Marthe dreads the loss of control and status that will inevitably follow the legal reinstatement of her husband.

Nevertheless, her resistance begins to soften when she realises that Henri has not returned because of the business, but because he wants to rediscover his private life. Now she fears that her dedication to the business will discourage him from pursuing a relationship with her and she supposes: 'Une maîtresse femme n'est pas une femme capable de retenir un homme' (p.227). She realises



that her defensiveness has been a mistake and that her reticence has given Henri the wrong impression: 'Il se trompait autant qu'elle s'était trompée sur elle-même' (p.231). However, 'le dernier coup' (p.232) strikes when Madame Lagruelle discovers that her husband owns and runs the most successful sawmill in North America, but has been too modest to say so. If she encourages him now, she will lay herself open to precisely the same charges of greed and self-interest that she has been privately levelling at him. She is overwhelmed by 'la certitude poignante d'avoir gâché le miracle et, du même coup, le reste de sa vie' (p.233). She realises that her territorial instincts have compromised her ability to reinstate her marriage. At the end of the story, Marthe decides to invite her husband to stay for dinner, presumably with a view to renewing their relationship.

However, even in this apparently more hopeful gesture, there are signs that territorial considerations may in fact have been dominant. It is significant that Marthe only decides to welcome her husband after she has discovered that he has no need of her sawmill business. It is only when the territorial issue is thus resolved that she feels able to consider her husband's claim on her heart. Henri, for his part, greets his wife's invitation to dinner with 'un rire fêlé' (p.235). Although he accepts and starts to take his coat off, his wife's cautious encouragement is perhaps a long way short of what he had hoped for. Does he too now suspect her of being calculating? Bazin's story, though touching, is ambiguous. We are left in some doubt as to just how and to what extent these two will finally be reconciled.

In *Madame Ex*, Bazin depicted a marriage which had irretrievably broken down and for which divorce proceedings were underway. On this occasion, he used an omniscient narrator, so that he could explore the thoughts and feelings of each family member. As soon as Louis Davermelle leaves the family home, prior to divorcing his wife, his daughter Rose, senses the imminent collapse of the family unit and she perceives it in terms of the collapse of the territory:

Rien ne sera plus comme avant. Une maison a quatre murs et un toit a deux pentes. Nous quatre, nous étions les murs; papa et maman, c'était le toit. La moitié du toit vient de tomber et le soir, quand je rentre, j'ai honte, comme si j'habitais une ruine, comme si le trou se voyait. (p.43)

Aline responds to her husband's departure in territorial terms by changing the locks on the doors to keep him out. When Louis makes a formal visit to the house, Aline perceives him as an invader: 'Aline déjà détestait l'envahisseur' (p.47). Louis poses a particular threat to Aline because of his bond with the children. She asserts her territorial rights over the children by requiring Louis to wait for them outside: "Dis-lui d'attendre dehors", reprit Aline. "La loi ne m'oblige pas à le recevoir, que je le sache!" (p.48). In an attempt to regain some claim on the territory, Louis enquires after the whereabouts of one of his paintings. Aline again responds with an assertion of her control: 'J'ai des comptes à te rendre? Si tu n'es plus chez toi je suis chez moi' (p.48). When Louis comes to the house the next time, Aline is even more assertive: 'Mais toi, je t'interdis bien de fourrer les pieds chez moi' (p.87). Once again the battle between the sexes is played out spatially, and a failing marriage conveyed by means of one of the partners made to feel no longer 'at home'. However, Louis

uses his car horn to besiege the house, in order to shame his wife into letting the children come out to him: 'Reste la ressource de répéter le siège de Jéricho en triomphant de l'adversaire par le bruit, en le contraignant à tenir compte des sentiments de la rue' (p.86). Although shut out of the family home, he still finds a way to besiege his former territory.

Unlike Éva Colu, though, Aline does not ultimately prevail over her territory. In transforming the marital home into her personal fiefdom, Aline had lost sight of financial realities. Half of the house legally belongs to Louis and the divorce proceedings will ensure that he gets his share. When the solicitor arrives to discuss the sale of the house and the division of its contents, the truth is finally brought home to Aline: 'Ce partage rendait le jugement réel, devenait la noire cérémonie, l'exécution finale' (p.109). The divorce will ultimately ensure that neither Aline nor Louis can ever hope to live there again.

New territories now have to be established. Aline, finding herself with much reduced means, sets up home in a small apartment where family relationships disintegrate still further. Agathe and Rose, two siblings who do not get on, mark out their territory both in the style of decoration and physically on the floor in order to make sharing a room more bearable:

Lit-banquette à gauche, lit-banquette à droite, deux étroites armoires qui se faisaient face [...]. L'insolite c'était la ligne blanche tracée à la craie sur le plancher. Encore heureux que la porte et la fenêtre fussent dans l'axe, séparant ainsi une demi-pièce nue, rigoureuse, d'une demi-pièce frivole, tapissée de photos de stars, de fleurs en papier, d'accessoires de cotillon! 'Chacun chez soi', dit Rose. (pp. 179-180)

Meanwhile, Louis sets up home with his lover Odile. However, Louis' daughter, Agathe, is profoundly uneasy when she visits her father's new house. Her awkwardness is conveyed as the uneasiness of someone entering a foreign land:

Tout se passe comme si elle n'avait plus de langue commune avec ces gens-là. Il n'y a rien à faire: dès qu'elle arrive à Nogent, elle a l'impression de franchir une frontière, de se rendre à l'étranger. (pp.206-7)

She feels *de trop*: 'Agathe s'agace déjà d'éprouver chez son père l'impression de troubler l'intimité d'autrui' (p.208). She is no longer a constituent part of the new family unit and feels consequently out of place on their territory. Nevertheless, she regards her relationship with her father as more legitimate than his relationship with his mistress and this sentiment is also conveyed by means of place: 'Que ce soit la doudou qui sache, qui soit obligée de dire à la fille où sont les objets usuels, il n'y a que Rose à le trouver naturel' (p.208). In *Madame Ex*, Bazin graphically illustrates the way in which family relationships can deteriorate into territorial wrangling.

It is, of course, to *Vipère au poing* that we must turn for the most startling depiction of family disharmony. The extraordinary figure of Folcoche, wife to Jacques Rezeau and mother to three sons, Freddie, Brasse-Bouillon and Marcel, is central to the territorial conflict which rages throughout this novel. Her obsession in life is to subjugate and control others. She sets herself up as the 'maîtresse de maison' (p.53) at 'La Belle Angerie' and assumes territorial dominance; 'la prise de pouvoir de notre mère' (p.67). Next, she devotes herself

to asserting this dominance over her sons: 'Affirmer son autorité chaque jour par une nouvelle vexation devint la seule joie de Mme Rezeau' (p.61).

Folcoche's principal tactic is restriction. She asserts her territorial control by removing her sons' freedom of manoeuvre at every turn. Their day is governed by a timetable, their studies are imposed by a tutor, their inner lives are regulated by public confession, their conversations are monitored, their movements round the house and grounds are circumscribed, their rooms are denuded, their hiding places are rifled, their clothing is minimised, their hair is shaved. The overall effect is one of absolute suppression. She has effectively turned the house into a prison. Penal language is sustained throughout the novel: 'Défense de vous appuyer au dossier de votre chaise' (p.54), 'Je passerai l'inspection régulièrement' (p.54), 'Ses interdictions devinrent un véritable réseau de barbelés' (p.57), 'Rafle générale dans nos chambres et dans nos poches' (p.65), 'Vous serez privé de lecture' (p.71), 'Le périmètre légal' (p.115), 'enfermé' (p.193), 'monter la garde' (p.286). C.B. Thornton-Smith goes so far as to argue that Folcoche is 'une mère concentrationnaire'. In his paper presented to the Colloque d'Angers he asks:

En lisant *Vipère au poing*, est-il interdit de penser que, par ce régime progressivement plus stricte qu'impose Folcoche lors de son retour de Chine, elle se montre précurseur des systèmes totalitaires de répression, et plus précisément du système des camps de concentration nazis?<sup>7</sup>

Folcoche's systems certainly exceed acceptable disciplinary strategies and the measure of control she seeks is punitive.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Folcoche, mère concentrationnaire?', in *Hervé Bazin: actes du colloque d'Angers 11-13 décembre 1986, op. cit.*, p.81.

However, the Newtonian principle that every action provokes an equal and opposite reaction holds good in this book. Folcoche's oppressed children continually strive to defy, overcome or circumvent her requirements. They engage her in both open and covert conflict in order to regain some of the lost ground of their freedom. The result is a continual territorial battle for control. 'La Belle Angerie' and its immediate surroundings are the battleground upon which the battle is played out and military language is used throughout. As W. J. Strachan comments: '*Vipère au poing* is essentially a battle of will between mother and son, with no quarter given on either side. The language and imagery [...] are extensively drawn from war'.<sup>8</sup> The characters are all evaluated in military terms: 'Folcoche, qui eût fait un excellent officier de corps francs' (p.108), Jacques Rezeau 'promu lieutenant général du royaume'(p.114), Brasse-Bouillon as 'l'ennemi numéro un' (p.200) and Cropette as the 'agent double' (p.148). The novel is replete with the language of military strategy: 'la manœuvre' (p.80), 'la "reconquête"' (p.118) 'contre-attaque, engagée de front', (p.143) 'la nécessité de changer de tactique' (p.145), 'les immortels principes de division lente' (p.146), 'armes incertaines' (p.200), 'la guerre civile' (p.201), 'lancée sur le sentier de la guerre' (p.214), 'représailles' (p.217), 'm'offrir à son tir' (p.260). The language of military outcomes is also used: 'l'amnistie' (p.197), 'la vaincue' (p.120), 'une victoire'(p.299), 'conquérant'(p.314) and 'les honneurs de la guerre' (p.306).

Military language is, of course, very credible in the mouth of an

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<sup>8</sup> W. J. Strachan, ed. *Vipère au poing*, London : Methuen, 1970, p. 18.

adolescent boy such as Brasse-Bouillon, whom one might expect to play soldiers and transform his home into a battleground. However, the power of Bazin's use of military concepts lies in the seriousness of the struggle. This is no game of make-believe, but the way in which a young boy perceives and conducts relations with his own mother. When Brasse-Bouillon describes his approach to life in the final chapter as 'je suis, je vis, j'attaque, je détruis' (p.315), this has pathos because the reader is made aware that the only way in which Brasse-Bouillon can affirm himself is through hostility. Emotional scarring is the result of his sustained battle against his own mother. Brasse-Bouillon speaks in his head to his mother saying: 'Tu as forgé l'arme qui te criblera de coups, mais qui finira par se retourner contre moi-même' (p.315). This novel is set after the First World War and there is scope for reference to real warfare, particularly as Jacques Rezeau is described as a war veteran. However, Brasse-Bouillon trivialises his father's war wounds. Real battles and real battle grounds are apparently as nothing compared to the war zone represented by 'La Belle Angerie'.

Ultimately, the greatest threat to Folcoche's domination over her territory lies in the growing physical strength of her sons. At first, her unhappy and poorly-nourished boys fail to grow. Brasse-Bouillon states bluntly: 'Nous ne grandissons guère' (p.88). However, time is not on Folcoche's side and soon she sees that her sons are becoming stronger and pose a real threat to her supremacy. She resists leaving her territory even to have a necessary operation:

Cacor conseillait l'ablation de la vésicule biliaire, mais par tous les moyens Mme Rezeau cherchait à éviter l'opération. L'idée de s'absenter

pour deux mois l'épouvantait: que resterait-il de son empire lors de son retour? Depuis quelque temps, nous avons brusquement consenti à grandir. Et notre mère [...] regardait avec inquiétude monter nos épaules. (p.112)

Folcoche's fears are justified when Brasse-Bouillon and his brothers take advantage of her physical frailty. They take their boat beyond the permitted limits and, when Folcoche tries to jump aboard, they swing the boat to one side and row over the top of her, knowing that she cannot swim. The fact that this episode represents a serious attempt on Folcoche's life, and follows their previous efforts to poison her with deadly nightshade, reveals just how desperate the boys' battle has become.

The scene of territorial conflict then shifts to Brasse-Bouillon's bedroom. The young boy uses his new found physical strength to barricade himself into his bedroom in order to avoid punishment for the boating episode. He succeeds in denying Folcoche access. This is a territorial triumph. Before his mother can starve him out, or get Barbelivien to beat the door down, Brasse-Bouillon escapes out of the window and off to Paris. At the end of the novel, Folcoche makes one final and sinister attempt to regain control. Although Brasse-Bouillon has defined his room as his territory, it is not safe from his mother's reprisals. He watches as she creeps into his room: 'La voici dans mon champ' (p.295). She proceeds to hide her purse in order to impute its theft to her son and thus cause his removal to a 'maison de correction'(p.298). However, Brasse-Bouillon is able to return it to his mother at once. He confronts her with the fact of her 'dernière incursion dans mon domaine'(p.304) and succeeds in securing a



promise that he will be sent away to school. The novel is thus brought to an end with this uneasy truce, and the territorial conflict is resolved by the removal of Brasse-Bouillon from the house.

There is good reason to suppose that the strong emphasis on territoriality in *Vipère au poing* mirrors Bazin's own childhood experience. In the section of *Abécédaire* entitled 'Bateau', Bazin remembers:

La maison, aux cloisons percées de cris et desservie par cet interminable corridor du premier surveillé depuis 'l'antichambre au linge' par un regard aigu qui pouvait mitrailler la sortie de huit portes. (p.43)

The words 'cloisons' and 'interminable corridor' convey a prison, and the mention of the cries and the eyes of the mother piercing and shooting provide the prison atmosphere with its animating presence. We also know that Bazin considered the Angers area in which he had been raised as his mother's territory. In his interview with Jacques Jaubert, he recalled his return to Angers, after years of absence, for a book-signing. His choice of words indicates that this incursion into her territory was by definition provocative: 'Ma venue à Angers, dans son fief, c'était une sorte de provocation'.<sup>9</sup> True to form, his mother responded by arriving at the bookshop and coolly signing a copy of *Vipère au poing*, to the amazement of all, with the words: 'N'est-il pas un peu question de moi là-dedans?'<sup>10</sup>

Bazin's rather pessimistic and conflictual view of family interaction was no doubt born of his own very unhappy childhood for, as Pierre Cogny put it:

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<sup>9</sup> *Art. cit.*, p.30.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p.30.

‘On ne passe pas impunément son enfance et sa jeunesse dans la défiance, la haine et la souffrance’.<sup>11</sup> Certainly he depicts very few happy families in his novels. As Pierre Cogny further observed: ‘Dans l’œuvre entière, un seul foyer uni: les Ladourd de *La Mort du petit cheval*’.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, when portraying this one happy home, Bazin’s narrator is incredulous:

Ces Ladourd me stupéfient. Que sont-ils au juste? Des naïfs? Des hypocrites? De petits saints? Des faibles? [...] Il est hors de doute que, seul, le Larousse pourrait les renseigner sur le sens du mot *rage*, mot clef de ma jeunesse. (pp. 29-30)

Jean Rezeau, like many of Bazin’s protagonists, has experienced only conflict in his family and therefore considers this the norm.

Ultimately, Bazin’s most territorially-minded characters have such a strong sense of self-assertion that their ability to live harmoniously with others is compromised. Their hard edges are not softened but sharpened by family life. Unable to countenance compromise, they go on the offensive, driving out husbands, wives, lovers, sons and daughters. Their dominance is thus expressed in spatial terms. Margaret Callander<sup>13</sup> praises ‘the concentrated energy of [Folcoche’s] stimulating virulence’, but how much of this is due in fact to the way in which she rages around her territory terrifying and marginalising other family members?

Bazin’s ability to create dramatic scenes also owes much to his use of the territorial theme. Brasse-Bouillon blockading his mother out of her room, Folcoche creeping back later to plant her purse in his hiding place, Aline

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<sup>11</sup> *Sept romanciers au-delà du roman*, Paris: Nizet, 1963, p.35.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.72.

Davermelle shutting Louis out of his own home, Louis besieging the house with his car horn, Nathalie catching Maurice kissing Isa and expelling him forthwith; all of these interactions concretise the nature of the conflicts raging between family members. It is not surprising that so many of Bazin's novels were adapted for French television, for internal family conflicts are made clear in a graphically visual way. As Phillip Crant puts it: '[Bazin] reduces ideas to image and description of character to action'.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Notion of 'Fugue'.**

In the course of a territorial battle for supremacy there seem to be only two possible responses to aggression, fight or flight. Bazin was particularly preoccupied by the plight of young people in this situation. Firstly, he realised that children suffer most acutely in warring and unhappy homes and, secondly, he was very conscious of young people's need to assert themselves in order to develop into healthy self-determining adults. In Bazin's writing, flight or 'fugue' is essentially the recourse of the young person for whom home has become intolerable or from whom necessary freedoms have been denied. A 'fugue' testifies to the capacity of a place to become so negatively emotionally-charged that it must be fled, and is also a highly individualistic act because it affirms the ability of an individual to be self-determining, to choose their whereabouts without reference to people who may appear to have control over them.

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<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.58.

Running away was a prominent feature of Bazin's own youth. In 1923, he was expelled from the Sainte-Croix school, in Le Mans, for running away to Paris in an attempt to persuade his grandfather to adopt him. This incident appears in a different form as Brasse-Bouillon's escape to his grandparents in *Vipère au poing*. In 1930, he also ran away from the military academy of Saint-Cyr where he had been sent by his family. He tried to escape to Paris by stealing his father's car, but hit a tree and had to be treated in a sanatorium for memory loss. This episode inspired the opening chapters of *La Tête contre les murs*. Later, in 1931, Bazin succeeded in running away to Paris in order to avoid banking exams at the Banque de France in Saint-Nazaire where his parents had placed him. They then arranged employment for him at a chemical factory in Nantes. In 1932, he again ran away to Paris, this time to pursue his relationship with Odette Danigo, a fellow employee of whom his parents disapproved and who was to become his first wife. Overall, Bazin's youth was extremely unsettled. From 1920 to 1932, he had one governess, five tutors, attended five schools, being expelled from three of them, attended three universities, being dismissed from two of them, and endured a series of very temporary jobs. Throughout these years, the pattern was the same; his parents would impose their choice upon him and he would rebel, be dismissed or run away. In the light of Bazin's own youthful experiences, it is perhaps hardly surprising that he should so often portray young people resorting to running away and do so with such evident sympathy.

Bazin's first novel contains a lively 'fugue' episode in which Brasse-Bouillon runs away from 'La Belle Angerie' to his Pluvignec grandparents in Paris. The confrontations with Folcoche have reached a climax. After attempting to drown his mother, Brasse-Bouillon faces a beating. Inspired by a passage of Chateaubriand, in which the hero resists a flogging, Brasse-Bouillon decides to go one better and, after barricading himself into his room, he runs away.

Throughout, Brasse-Bouillon stresses the exhilarating and empowering nature of his flight:

Je suis descendu par la fenêtre, en employant l'échelle que mes assaillants avaient oublié d'enlever. Remarquez d'ailleurs que, si elle ne s'était point trouvée là, je serais descendu d'une manière beaucoup plus spectaculaire en utilisant mes draps (recette romantique du *Gamin de Paris*, collection tricolore). (p.231)

The reference to the boys' publication, the elevation of his parents to the status of 'assaillants', and the desire to do something 'spectaculaire' indicate that Brasse-Bouillon sees his action as a flamboyant act of derring-do. His 'fugue' also gives him an opportunity to make a series of symbolically defiant gestures:

Calé dans le coin droit, côté face, du compartiment, je fume une cigarette en lisant, Dieu me pardonne! en lisant *Le Populaire*. Le coin droit, côté face, parce que c'est la place réservée à Folcoche [...] La cigarette, parce que mon père ne fume presque jamais, et *Le Populaire*, parce que ce journal est socialiste, donc anti-Rezeau. (p.229)

Although the tone here is humorous and self-ironising, the decisions to smoke and to read a left-wing newspaper express his determination not to conform to family expectations and opinions. In taking Folcoche's preferred seat, Brasse-Bouillon usurps her position of authority over his life and declares his right to

self-determination. Above all, the ‘fugue’ is a highly tactical move. In leaving ‘La Belle Angerie’, he physically escapes the sphere of parental authority and, in seeking the arbitration of his grandparents, he embarrasses his parents into waiving his punishment.

Once Brasse-Bouillon is fully self-determining, he will escape his parents’ milieu altogether by rejecting their social class and their values. In *Cri de la chouette*, Jean Rezeau sees his twenty-four year flight from the Rezeau world in terms of an escape from a whole social class:

Evadé de la *Société* (s majuscule: celle qui n’ose plus se déclarer *bonne*, mais qui continue à le penser), je ne me suis intégré à aucune autre. Je suis un déclassé qui, pour ces Brahmes que sont les grands bourgeois, a préféré les Intouchables. (p.25)

Indeed, Jean Rezeau’s long absence from ‘La Belle Angerie’ expresses spatially his rejection of the archaic values which are enshrined there:

Se dire, dans la seconde moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, qu’on sort de ce mélange de hobereaux ultramontains, de soutanes de couleur, de bedonnants à panonceaux dorés et aux estimes fondées sur des estimations [...] Que somme toute on est né à la traîne, dans une sorte d’enclave du siècle précédent... C’est décourageant. D’où ma fuite et mes hésitations à revenir sur les lieux, même après tant d’années. (p.83)

Even as an adult, Jean Rezeau perceives his relation to his parents’ house as a ‘fuite’ and the potency of the place remains such that he hesitates to return even after so many years have passed. Thus the notion of ‘fugue’ in the Rezeau trilogy comes to stand both for a child’s act of defiance and for an adult’s value statement.

Many of Bazin’s later family-based novels, including *Cri de la chouette*, focussed on the attempts of his own children’s generation to assert their right to

self-determination. Bazin had seven children and considered that he was well placed to write about their attitudes and behaviour. In his chapter on young people in *Ce que je crois*, he declared: 'Je sais de quoi je parle'(p.122), and his popularity with teenage readers seemed to bear out this claim. Pierre Cogny reported in 1963: 'Une enquête que je menais ces jours derniers près d'une quarantaine d'élèves des classes de première et de philosophie pour l'hebdomadaire *Arts* le classait parmi les trois romanciers les plus lus dans 90% des réponses'.<sup>15</sup>

In particular, Bazin observed how the claims of young people to be self-determining centred on sexual emancipation: 'Juvénilité, sexualité, indépendance'.<sup>16</sup> Bazin asserted that the principal difference between his generation and that of his children lay in their approach to sex:

C'est nous, si tolérants que nous estimions être, qui nous référons à nos souvenirs, aux vieilles prohibitions qui en leur temps nous arrêtaient, pour imaginer que les jeunes font forcément de la transgression. Ils font naturellement ce que nous interdisaient des usages et des mœurs, que nous n'avons ni légitimés ni défendus.'<sup>17</sup>

In his novels, the younger generation is quick to take matters into its own hands, sensing the ambivalent reserve of their parents in this area.

Most of the young people's 'fugues' in Bazin's later fiction are therefore sexually motivated. In *Cri de la chouette*, Jean Rezeau is now cast in the role of observer rather than perpetrator of a 'fugue', when his step-daughter Salomé runs away during the family holiday at 'La Belle Angerie'. He reflects wryly

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<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ce que je crois*, p.134.

<sup>17</sup> *Ce que je crois*, p.134.

that, to some extent, history repeats itself and that parents tend to have visited upon them the same youthful indiscretions that they themselves committed:

La fugue de Salomé, pour être différente des miennes, me rappelait des souvenirs en me fournissant la preuve – si besoin était – que les précédents ont toujours des suites et qu’aux enfants, promus parents, le talion est assuré par les leurs. (p.234)

However, Salomé’s ‘fugue’ is indeed ‘différente’. Her motivation for running away is to pursue her relationship with Gonzague, whose reputation has been tainted by his involvement in drug-dealing. Salomé has already claimed her sexual emancipation and now seeks to free herself entirely from any further restraints on the relationship. She writes in her note of explanation: ‘Tôt ou tard une fille doit quitter la maison’ (p.234). Unlike Brasse-Bouillon, Salomé feels that her freedom is restricted, not by the hostility, but by the excessive concern of her family. Her plea is that they will ‘me laisser vivre’ (p.235).

In Bazin’s next novel, *Madame Ex*, Agathe runs away from her mother to be with her lover Edmond, but this time the reader is privy to the thought processes of the young girl as she prepares to leave. Like Salomé, Agathe knows that her mother will not sanction the relationship and furthermore that, in leaving, she is increasing her mother’s isolation. To run away is to avoid confrontation and to prepare her mother for a longer separation. Agathe leaves a note to the effect that she has gone for a short period to the south of France with Edmond in order to cushion her mother from the full impact of the desertion: ‘On croit toujours à ce qu’on préfère croire: à la petite fugue, au retour prochain.



La fugue s'allonge, on se fait une raison; on s'habitue, on devient capable d'apprendre le reste' (p.304).

The motif of children running away from home for the sake of their love-life also features in *L'École des pères*. In this case, the 'fugueuse' (p.166) is Rose Gouveau. In a highly comic scene, Mariette Bretaudeau discovers Rose in bed with her son Guy in the Bretaudeau family home. The girl has run away from home and joined Guy in such a way as to be found out. As she subsequently explains to her parents on the telephone: 'J'ai couché avec Louis de façon à ce que ça se sache et que tu comprennes que tu n'empêcheras rien' (p.166). Her return home is conditional on acknowledgement from her parents of her sexual freedom: 'Je rentre, Papa. Mais désormais je suis discrètement libre' (p.167).

There is, therefore, a considerable contrast between Brasse-Bouillon's youthful escape from 'La Belle Angerie' and the 'fugues' of Bazin's later fiction. Brasse-Bouillon's fugue, set in the twenties, embarrasses his parents and gains him a psychological advantage over them, but he remains under his parents' jurisdiction. Indeed, his mother succeeds in wrecking his innocent romantic attachment to young Micou Ladourd. In *La Mort du petit cheval*, she decrees: 'Terminé, ce flirt de quatre sous' (p.103). However, the young people of Bazin's later writing, from the seventies onwards, use their 'fugues' to claim the right to sexual self-determination, which is legally theirs but which their parents are obstructing. Salomé writes in her note: 'Je me sens tout à fait dans mon droit' (p.234). Rose asks: 'Où est le mal, d'ailleurs? J'ai l'âge' (p.166), and

Agathe also takes full advantage of the emancipation form signed by her mother making her 'désormais libre' (p.305).

However, Bazin also uses 'fugue' episodes to provide insights into the dilemmas faced by parents. Abel Bretaudeau, who belongs to Brasse-Bouillon's generation, struggles to respond as a parent to the greater freedom of his children. When presented with the fact of Rose's presence in his son's bed he struggles to find any precedent to guide his reaction:

Mais que faire maintenant? Très juste, l'adverbe de temps! Comment est-il convenable *maintenant*, en 1975, de réagir, de juger une situation inimaginable quand nous avions vingt ans? (p.163)

When his son Guy misses his exams and runs away to Rose's family, Bazin devotes three pages to Abel's reaction and self-examination. His initial reaction is incomprehension: 'Sécher son examen, foutre le camp, nous mettre en accusation, s'enfoncer dans le terreau, tout ça frisait l'absurde' (pp.150-1). Part of the reason for this disbelief is that Abel has raised his children in a way that he considers to be liberal and sympathetic: 'Je croyais avoir mis au point un système fondé sur la confiance et sur la discussion' (p.151). This thought prompts a moment of nostalgia for old-style, repressive parenting; 'Mais où sont les pères d'antan? Les obéis au doigt et à l'œil?' (p.151). However, at the end of the chapter Abel is perceptive enough to admit that his son does perhaps have grounds for his escape and that he has been controlling him too much: 'On règne, démocratiquement, mais on règne' (p.152).

Abel Bretaudeau's self-examination in the wake of Guy's 'fugue' is as nothing compared to the response of Daniel Astin to the 'fugue' of his son

Bruno, in *Au nom du fils*. This event is so significant that it triggers the emotional journey that is to form the substance of the rest of the plot. The novel opens with Bruno Astin running through the suburbs of Chelles, trying to flee the anger of his father over a zero in French composition. Daniel observes: 'Le petit fuit devant moi, pieds nus, torse nu' (p.9). As he gives chase, Daniel asks himself why Bruno is repeatedly running away:

Est-ce ma faute si cet enfant réagit comme un lièvre et, dès la moindre scène, répond aux reproches avec ses genoux? Il me joue bien ce tour pour la vingtième fois et son zéro de composition française devient sans importance auprès de ses fuites, de plus en plus fréquentes. (pp.11-12)

When Astin finally catches up with the boy, Bruno accuses his father of lovelessness: 'Tu m'aimes moins' (p.17). Suddenly it becomes clear that it is not the boy who has problems, but the father. His father notes:

Il n'est plus l'accusé mais le témoin. [...] Coupable de son zéro. Mais innocent du reste qui le jette par les rues, hagard et poursuivi par M. Astin, cet ogre de bonnes notes. (p.18)

The use of judicial language, 'accusé', 'témoin', 'coupable', 'innocent', makes it clear that wrongdoing has occurred, but not on the part of the child. Astin is brought face to face with the reality that Bruno's 'fugues' are an indication of the shortcomings of his behaviour as a father. Astin's reaction is immediate and profound: 'De sa vie certainement [...] il n'a jamais connu pareil désarroi, pareille haine de lui-même' (p.19). The scene, related in chapter one, becomes a watershed in Daniel Astin's emotional life. From this point onwards Astin's pursuit of his boy is no longer physical but emotional; he seeks to build up a

relationship of love with his son and in so doing becomes gripped with a passion hitherto unknown to him.

The 'fugue' of Rose and Guy Davermelle in *Madame Ex*, unlike that of Bruno Astin, allows no room for parental development, and acts as the final indictment of Aline Davermelle's parenting style. The children who are in the custody of their mother following their parents' divorce, decide that they want to live with their father and stepmother instead. They therefore make repeated official requests to the various authorities before finally running away to their paternal grandparents, demanding to be domiciled with their father. Guy's slump in progress at school, diagnosed by a child psychologist as the result of: 'Image maternelle dévalorisée, d'appel au père pour identification' (p.229-30) lends weight to the children's request. Louis Davermelle has the satisfaction of seeing the children confirming his own view that Aline has become impossible to live with. He notes the irony of the fact that it is Aline's very attempts to undermine the children's father in their eyes which have led them to reject her: 'Enfoncée, Madame Ex! Jugée, lâchée, punie par où elle a péché' (p.242). The flight of the children is yet another step towards the complete ruination of Aline who finds herself abandoned and discredited by the end of the novel.

Although Bazin usually used the theme of the 'fugue' to explore the way in which children assert themselves against their parents, *La Tête contre les murs* is an exception to this rule. Unlike any other teenage protagonist in Bazin's writing, Arthur Gérane's 'fugues' are not gestures of rebellion designed to

achieve a specific purpose, they are simply a manifestation of a personality disorder. The psychiatrist, Dr Salomon diagnoses Arthur's condition thus:

Gérane est un de ces garçons abonnés aux fugues, aux coups de tête et même aux sales coups, un de ces inadaptés qui prennent soit le chemin de l'asile, soit le chemin de la prison, et n'en sortent que pour y rentrer six mois plus tard. (p.68)

Bazin establishes the fact that Arthur's family has a history of mental illness. Both his mother and his sister have suffered from psychosis and, in a final tragic twist, it transpires that Arthur's daughter has inherited his compulsion to run away. Arthur's running away is simply innate. He is, as Pierre Moustiers describes him, 'Arthur Gérane ou le fugueur-né'.<sup>18</sup>

The reason that Gérane is so different from any of Bazin's other youthful escapees is that he serves a very distinct literary purpose. Bazin wrote *La Tête contre les murs* as a critique of what he termed 'le vieux système asilaire'.<sup>19</sup> Because Gérane's illness consists of a compulsion to escape, he necessarily makes his way through a variety of different mental institutions enabling Bazin to build up a full and varied account of asylums. As Robert Kanter put it: 'Arthur Gérane est avant tout le témoin de la vie dans les asiles'.<sup>20</sup> Bazin was drawn to this subject because he had himself experienced the inadequacies and indignities of the asylum system:

L'intérêt que je porte à ces problèmes a des raisons profondes qu'il serait stupide de cacher. Ancien malade moi-même, *je me souviens*. Avant de connaître les choses de l'extérieur, je les ai connues de l'intérieur.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Op.cit.*, p.75.

<sup>19</sup> Hervé Bazin, *La Fin des asiles*, Paris: Grasset, 1959, p.9.

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.292.

<sup>21</sup> *La Fin des asiles*, p.9.

However, Bazin also researched the subject and the locations with his usual assiduity, such that the chief distinction of the novel lies in the detailed portrayal of an environment unfamiliar to most readers. Having established his interest in psychiatric care by means of the novel, Bazin would subsequently undertake a thorough research tour through the mental institutions of France and other European countries on behalf of the World Health Organisation. This led to the publication of *La Fin des asiles* in which he contrasted the shortcomings of traditional institutions with more progressive approaches.

Arthur's tendency to run away serves to pinpoint with absolute precision the central failing of a system which Bazin believed to be as cruel as it was ineffectual. It becomes quite clear during the novel that none of the many institutions to which Gérane is sent has any ability to cure or ameliorate his condition, or indeed that of the other inmates. The asylums simply act as nightmarish collections of deranged and suffering individuals: 'Un bouillon de culture du délire'.<sup>22</sup> Unable to cure, they simply incarcerate with varying degrees of severity according to the seriousness of the condition, in the vague hope that the patients may improve over time. Bazin summed up this situation in *La Fin des asiles*:

La pauvreté des moyens, en psychiatrie, a été longue. Les coups de gueule des porte-clefs, les murs, les cabanons capitonnés, en tenaient lieu. Et l'attente, ce 'sirop de temps', dont l'interminable cure durait jusqu'à la guérison spontanée – ou jusqu'à la mort – du malade. (p.37)

Gérane's tendency to flee necessarily exposes him to the most draconian

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<sup>22</sup> *La Fin des asiles*, p.59.

methods of confinement and allows Bazin to reveal to the reader the full horrors of France's detention centres for the mentally ill at the Hôpital de Saint-Anne in Paris and at high-security asylum units such as the Henri-Colin section at Villejuif. Arthur is subjected to every kind of indignity, culminating in solitary confinement, trussed up with ropes 'comme un rôti de veau' (p.320) in a straw-padded cell. Bazin's descriptive eye lingers at all times on the carceral nature of each of the institutions that Gérane finds himself in. The overall effect is to put the reader in sympathy with Gérane's plight. Gérane's desire to flee is doubly moving, firstly as a manifestation of an incurable mental illness for which he cannot be held responsible, but for which he is nevertheless being harshly punished, and secondly as a very natural response to the extremely unpleasant institutions in which he finds himself.

There is a second Bazinian character for whom the 'fugue' has become a way of life. Like Gérane, he has an unhappy family background, but, unlike Gérane, his 'fugue' is part of a considered response to the difficulties he has encountered in his youth. The past life of Mutix, in *L'Église verte*, is finally revealed by Inspector Ricat towards the end of the novel. He is believed to be the posthumous child of an American soldier and a French woman who died young. His grand-parents took him in unwillingly and sent him away to boarding schools and holiday camps. Mutix ran away from the family who never missed him. He resolved in so doing to run away from society as a whole and also to run away from his identity by abandoning his name. In his fullest account of this endeavour, Mutix explains to the Godions: 'Sommés de consommer,

vous êtes accomplis, vous êtes possédés par ce qui vous appartient. Moi, c'est le luxe inverse qui m'intéresse: vivre sans biens, sans règle, sans sécurité, sans ambition, sans mémoire, sans nom' (pp.186-7). These then are the things from which Mutix seeks to flee; the consumer society, the tyranny of possessions, moral codes, the pressure to succeed, the hold of the past, the confinement imposed by one's previous existence and all the nominal securities of spouse, house and family. The radical nature of this agenda prompts the view in the press that Mutix is in fact running away from all the things that make human beings human, his is a 'désertion de l'espèce' (p.86). However, it can also be seen as a form of modern-day mysticism. Mutix has in fact fled the trappings of the world in much the same way as contemplatives and hermits did in the past, but instead of finding God, he seeks to find a more authentic, pared-down way of being human. In fact, he wishes to shed any kind of individuality and revert to being merely a human in the way that a crow is merely a crow:

Un corbeau a de la chance, affirmait-il. Il est si peu lui-même, il est tellement corbeau qu'il peut revenir percher demain sur une autre branche ou disparaître sans que personne ne s'en aperçoive. (p.225)

Mutix's brief stay with the Godions allows Bazin to explore the response of individuals and of society to the stranger's unusual agenda. His one 'fugue' from the Godion home and into the forest during this period, which Godion describes as 'neuf heures pour respirer de l'air d'escapade, se prouver qu'il est libre, qu'il existe en dehors de nous' (p.156), leaves the reader in little doubt that Mutix's stay in civilisation is temporary, and at the end of the novel he does indeed make good his escape. The 'fugue' depicted in *L'Église verte* is unlike



any other in Bazin's writing because it questions so many of the assumptions underlying 'normal' participation in society.

## **Conclusion.**

In an interview with Gilbert Ganne, Bazin stated the need for novelists to explore the issues they faced at each stage of their lives: 'Exprimons, à chaque étape, les problèmes de notre âge'.<sup>23</sup> Bazin certainly articulated the struggles of the young and the old, children and parents, husbands and wives. However, the originality of these depictions lies essentially in his understanding of the dynamics of place; the ways in which people use space both to circumscribe their family units and to break away from them. He uses notions of territoriality and flight to concretise and dramatise the nature of family conflict but also to analyse and discuss the specific needs and behaviour of certain vulnerable groups such as young people and the mentally ill.

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<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.217.

### **Chapter Four: Women and the Home.**

Bazin's interest in family life naturally led him to describe the home and indeed all of his novels depict at least one domestic setting in some detail. Thus far, we have considered the ways in which Bazinian characters respond to these home environments. We have seen a pattern of belonging and loss in the themes of rootedness and exile, and a pattern of control and escape in the themes of territoriality and flight. It is now time to consider the way in which Bazin perceives and portrays the home itself.

Bazin's technique, when describing interiors, is essentially selective. In their analysis of the way in which the décor is evoked in novels, Bourneuf and Ouellet state:

La description oscille donc entre les deux pôles du croquis qui ne retient que quelques traits significatifs et du tableau qui vise à embrasser la totalité d'un objet.<sup>1</sup>

According to this definition, Bazin's interiors are 'croquis' rather than 'tableaux'. He focuses on the telling detail. In his essay on 'Philosophie de l'ameublement', Michel Butor singles out the particular importance of describing domestic interiors as a means of conveying character:

L'ameublement dans le roman ne joue pas seulement un rôle 'poétique' de proposition, mais de révélateur, car ces objets sont bien plus liés à notre existence que nous ne l'admettons communément. Décrire des meubles, des objets, c'est une façon de décrire des personnages, indispensable: il y a des choses que l'on ne peut faire sentir ou

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Bourneuf & Réal Ouellet, *L'Univers du roman*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975, p.118.

comprendre que si l'on met sous l'œil du lecteur le décor et les accessoires des actions.<sup>2</sup>

This notion of the *décor révélateur* is a key aspect of Bazin's treatment of the home setting. He too believed in the power of a home to expose the psyche of its occupant, and particularly its female occupant because, for Bazin, the homemaker is always a woman. Indeed he once declared to Christine Garnier: 'Au reste, maison et femme ... il n'y a pas une grande différence entre le contenu et le contenant'.<sup>3</sup> This striking assertion of the synthesis of a woman with her house provides the crucial insight into Bazin's strategy. He describes the home in order that the reader may better understand the woman who dwells within it. In order to appreciate the efficacy of this technique, we need first to consider the way in which it is applied to the character of Folcoche, who is widely considered to be Bazin's most potent literary creation.

### **Folcoche and 'La Belle Angerie'.**

Folcoche and the gloomy ancestral seat of the Rezeau family, 'La Belle Angerie', dominate the Rezeau trilogy. Bazin's great skill lay in his ability to identify Folcoche with the house and the house with Folcoche until the two became an almost indivisible whole, and both became more powerful creations than they would otherwise have been. The novels of the trilogy are very different from one another, being written at different stages in Bazin's career and having different points of focus, and yet in each novel Bazin explores

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Butor, *Essais sur le roman*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

different aspects of the synthesis between Folcoche and her home.

In *Vipère au poing*, Bazin sought to establish the detestability of Folcoche. In her article for the *Colloque d'Angers*, Ghyslaine Charles-Merrien makes a strong case for Bazin's psychological need to present his mother as a monster: 'De simple mère de famille, si tyrannique soit-elle, si exceptionnelle soit-elle, Madame Mère devient, par l'art de son fils, "un monstre sacré"'.<sup>4</sup> She argues that Bazin found it impossible to reconcile the enormous and detrimental influence his mother had on his life with the fact that she was becoming a weak and pitiful old lady. The writing process therefore became a means of reanimating, amplifying and indeed immortalising the woman who had had such a malevolent effect on his youth and development. Although many critics have commented on the extraordinary virulence of Folcoche, the key role of 'La Belle Angerie' in creating this 'monstre sacré' has not been fully appreciated. For, in fact, the house is described in such a way as to accentuate the excesses of this extraordinary woman and to show off her cruelty to greatest advantage.

In order for the reader to appreciate the full effect of Folcoche on 'La Belle Angerie', the house is first introduced under the kindly influence of the narrator's grandmother. The house's rural location makes it a desirable retreat from Angers during 'l'été craonnais, doux mais ferme'(p.5). The opening scene shows how the young Brasse-Bouillon's uninhibited exploration of the surrounding countryside gave rise to his encounter with a snake. His activities are interrupted by the welcome sound of 'la cloche de *La Belle Angerie* sonnante

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<sup>4</sup> 'La Révolte contre la mère dans la trilogie Rezeau', in *Hervé Bazin: Actes du Colloque d'Angers du 11 au 13 décembre 1986, op. cit.*, p.64.

pour les confitures. Il s'agissait ce jour-là d'achever un pot de mirabelles'(p.8).

Even the privations involved in living at 'La Belle Angerie' are part of the adventure of summer. Grandmother packs with a view to minimising them:

'[Elle] n'oubliait jamais d'emporter avec elle le piano, la machine à coudre et la batterie de cuisine de cuivre rouge, qui n'existaient point en double'(p.16).

Bazin gives just enough details to convey the pleasantness of summers at 'La Belle Angerie' under Grandmother's homely and practical oversight. Indeed 'La Belle Angerie' is listed as one of the positive memories associated with Grandmother in Brasse-Bouillon's valedictory list:

Le protonotaire, la gouvernante, les vieux domestiques, *La Belle Angerie*, l'hiver à Angers, le chignon de grand-mère, les vingt-quatre prières diverses de la journée, les visites solennelles de l'académicien, les bérêts des enfants des écoles respectueusement dépouillés à notre approche, [...] la robe grise de grand-mère, les tartes aux prunes, les chansons de Botrel sur le vieux piano désaccordé, la pluie, les haies, les nids dans les haies, la Fête-Dieu, la première communion privée, [...] les marronniers en fleur... Puis, soudain, grand-mère mourut. (pp.29-30)

The fact that Grandmother makes 'La Belle Angerie' pleasant, in spite of its intrinsic faults, sets up the contrast with Folcoche, who obliterates anything potentially pleasant about the place and exploits its disadvantages to the full.

Although 'La Belle Angerie' has clearly always been a basically uncomfortable place, Folcoche's sadism is conveyed by her ability to change the inhospitable nature of the house from a passive to an active force. She harnesses its inherent inconvenience to make her children suffer. Folcoche rings the bell, not to announce the availability of jam, but to impose a Draconian timetable. She uses the chapel to humiliate the children by enforcing public confession.

Folcoche makes the coldness of the house more unbearable by banning eiderdowns. She ensures that the inaccessibility of the toilets is harder to bear, by requiring the children to empty their chamber pots, in the middle of the night, soundlessly, cleanly and without the aid of a torch. Although the children had previously enjoyed playing outdoors, she removes their pleasure in it by forcing them out, even in very cold weather. Folcoche takes advantage of the natural boundaries of the park to confine the children, and she insists that the long gravel drive is raked and weeded by the boys. The mud inspires Folcoche to dress her boys in farmers' wooden clogs which are ungainly, uncomfortable, noisy and demeaning. Furthermore, Folcoche uses the remoteness of the house as a licence to maltreat her boys. The reader is left in no doubt as to the assertive and sadistic character of Folcoche, 'qui avait raté sa vocation de surveillante pour centrale de femmes' (p.57).

Just as Folcoche accentuates the shortcomings of the house, so the house underlines the inadequacies of Folcoche. The uncomfortable and dungeonesque qualities of 'La Belle Angerie' establish Folcoche as the antithesis of a homemaker. The total absence of beauty or colour in the house conveys her suppression of her femininity. The lack of food in the house betrays her Spartanism and its coldness suggests her emotional frigidity. The neglect of the house corresponds to Folcoche's self-neglect, and the death of the oleanders in the conservatory, the hydrangeas in the garden and the horses in the fields are symptomatic of her deadly aura.

In *La Mort du petit cheval*, the second part of the trilogy, the power of the loveless atmosphere which Folcoche has created at 'La Belle Angerie' can be measured by its power to continue to harm Jean Rezeau even after he has left home. Initially, the atmosphere of the house is so potent that its influence reaches well beyond its physical parameters and threatens to jeopardise the young Jean Rezeau's new life. Thus, although Brasse-Bouillon makes himself at home in the loving environment of the Ladourd household, Félicien Ladourd is aware of his emotional heritage: 'Tu sens le renfermé, tu es de la race de ceux qu'il est dangereux d'aérer trop vite' (p.34). Jean Rezeau is clearly still scarred by what he described in *Vipère au poing* as 'le manque d'oxygène sentimental qui rendait irrespirable pour les étrangers l'atmosphère de notre clan'(p.39). Indeed, Folcoche appears able to carry the negative atmosphere of 'La Belle Angerie' around with her. Her despairing son senses how her visit affects even the Ladourd household: 'L'air pue la gêne, la colère et l'humiliation' (p.107). The success or failure of Jean Rezeau's ability to carve out a new life is measured in terms of his ability to withstand Folcoche's withering presence. Although she succeeded in destroying his relationship with Michelle Ladourd simply by making one appearance, by the end of the novel Jean has become immune to his mother's malevolence. When Folcoche comes to see him in his marital home, she is unable to set the tone. Drawing strength from his happiness with his wife and child, Jean Rezeau is able to say to his mother: 'Je ne vous sens pas' (p.314). This represents a watershed in their relationship; he has broken free at last.

The depiction of Folcoche in the third part of the trilogy required a further change of approach. In *Vipère au poing*, her malice and power was expressed in her bullying of her young children. In *La Mort du petit cheval*, her villainy consisted in her attempts to blight Brasse-Bouillon's young adulthood. However, in *Cri de la chouette*, her son is a middle-aged, fully autonomous and financially independent *père de famille*. How was her hostile intensity now to be expressed? Bazin finds the answer to this question in Folcoche's strong and largely unrequited attachment to Salomé Fourut, Jean Rezeau's step-daughter. Jean Rezeau again feels under attack, but this time by more indirect means:

A certains moments du reste je n'étais pas loin de croire à plus de noirceur, à l'intention délibérée de nuire, de s'attaquer à ce groupe bien bouqueté que j'ai toujours considéré comme ma revanche, de s'en revancher à son tour en y portant la division. (p.203)

The emphasis here is on Folcoche's harmfulness: 'noirceur', 'intention délibérée de nuire'. 's'attaquer', 's'en revancher', 'y portant la division'. The close juxtaposition of so many different terms expressing his mother's hostility betrays Jean Rezeau's fear that Folcoche's influence and animosity remain undiminished by the passing of years. Folcoche's strategy turns out to be an attempt to take over Salomé: 'Détacher une fille de sa famille par l'insinuation, les cadeaux, l'exercice de l'indépendance [...] l'amener à vivre avec une personne âgée' (p.236). In his manuscript jottings for the novel, Bazin summarises its content and the significance of its title thus: 'Cette vieille chouette craonnaise ... Elle n'aura eu qu'un cri, un cri d'amour, dans sa vie,



pour un(e) enfant qui n'était même pas de son sang'.<sup>5</sup> This is the plot of the novel, and the intriguing new direction in which Bazin steers his trilogy.

Bazin's portrayal of 'La Belle Angerie' in *Cri de la chouette* is tailored to this new purpose, for he must create a context for Folcoche which makes her sudden and all-consuming passion for Salomé credible. Whereas, in *Vipère au poing*, the portrayal of the house had served to underline Folcoche's aggressive and sadistic nature, it is now used to highlight her physical and emotional deprivation. When Jean Rezeau introduces their grandmother to his children, he reflects that in their eyes: '[Elle] n'a pas d'existence précise. Il paraît qu'elle règne, seule, sur trente pièces glaciales, dans un manoir vétuste où ils n'ont jamais mis les pieds' (p.13). Folcoche's very existence is reduced to a mere habitat and the strength of the word 'règne', consonant with the Folcoche of *Vipère au poing*, is now immediately undermined by the word 'seule'. The coldness and decrepitude of the house, 'glaciale' and 'vétuste', suggest the frigidity of Folcoche's emotional life and her own frailty.

In the seventh chapter, the narrator returns to 'La Belle Angerie', but it is the views of his two more objective companions, Marthe Jobeau and Salomé, which provide the framework through which Folcoche's occupation of the old house is perceived. Marthe explains why Folcoche keeps her money in a tin rather than at the bank: 'Elle le tripote, elle le caresse, son papier; elle les taille, un par un, ses petits coupons ... Ça l'occupe' (p.74). This image, reminiscent of Molière's Harpagon and his moneybox, presents a vivid picture of Folcoche's

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix, p.xxxv.

emotional poverty. She has unsuccessfully offered hospitality to a few of Marcel's children, and her only social intercourse, according to Marthe, is 'les causettes après la messe le dimanche et le soir avec moi' (p.74). This is a far cry from the Folcoche of *Vipère au poing*, who was so imperious with those below her in social standing. Her material deprivation is clear from Marthe's account of her diet: 'Trois patates à l'eau, ça fait le compte'(p.75). In *Vipère au poing*, the narrator perceived Folcoche's low levels of domesticity as a deliberate choice in order to make her children's lives uncomfortable, but Marthe makes us see this aspect of Folcoche in a more pathetic light:

Vous savez, Madame, elle ne sait rien faire et maintenant qu'elle est seule, sans bonne, c'est une pitié! Je l'ai vue faire cuire une escalope dans une casserolée d'eau, à gros bouillons. Et ne parlons pas de son linge... Mouillé, c'est lavé: elle vous fait sécher ça, tout gris, au-dessus de son poêle qui fume. Elle est en panne pour un bouton. (pp.144-5)

Salomé's reactions provide an additional criterion against which the squalor and discomfort of the house can be measured. She finds it 'sinistre'(p.76), is overwhelmed by the bad smell, horrified by the process of driving insects out of the bedrooms and disgusted by the kitchen: 'Comment peut-on vivre sans eau sur l'évier? Tout est sale. Il n'y a pas un ustensile dont j'ose me servir'(p.79). In her eyes Folcoche is living a beggar's existence: 'Comment vit-elle? [...] Elle est ruinée'(p.73), and the pride of the Rezeaus nothing more than a 'château minable'(p.78).

Marthe and Salomé are struck by the physical and emotional poverty of Folcoche's life at 'La Belle Angerie', but the narrator goes one step further than this. Jean Rezeau considers that her interaction with the house has all but

dehumanised her. He describes his mother in terms of an owl and a spider which might be at home in this dark and dirty old house:

Elle nous attendait, immobile comme une chouette dans l'obscurité familière. (p.77)

Les toiles d'araignée ont toujours abondé dans la chambre de ma mère; l'électricité en bleuissait de fort belles, tendues dans tous les coins et je me faisais l'effet d'avoir donné dans une énorme au centre de quoi m'attendait cette femme aux doigts aigus. (p.237)

This accords with Bazin's striking description of his mother in his 'Académie' entry in *Abécédaire*:

Il restait, au fond du bocage segréen, dans son manoir ruiné par une longue avarice, dans sa chambre enfumée où les puces sautaient d'une latte à l'autre, une vieille dame mal lavée, un peu sourde, gênée par la cataracte, immobile au centre de sa vieille toile d'araignée familiale. (p. 15)

It is against this background that Folcoche falls in love with her grand-daughter. In *Cri de la chouette*, Jean Rezeau comments: 'J'ai cru longtemps que son châtiment, elle le trouverait dans l'indifférence et la solitude d'une vieillesse méprisée. Erreur! Elle l'aura trouvé dans l'amour même, découvert trop tard et aussitôt perdu' (pp.255-6). It is precisely the desperate nature of Folcoche's existence that makes her susceptible to a last-ditch attempt to find fulfilment and happiness. 'La Belle Angerie' provides Bazin with a graphic means of showing the utter desolation which precedes Folcoche's great discovery of love.

Furthermore, Bazin uses Folcoche's changing attitude to 'La Belle Angerie' as a yardstick with which to measure the extent of Folcoche's infatuation with Salomé. On the basis of her affection for Salomé, Folcoche

offers Jean Rezeau the use of 'La Belle Angerie' as a holiday home. In response to Salomé's request, she offers to pay half of the renovation costs of the house, and on the advice of Salomé, she entrusts her treasured tin of financial papers to the bank. It is Salomé's room at 'La Belle Angerie' which is restored first. In order to purchase a car and flat for Salomé, Folcoche sells the remaining antique furniture and wooden panelling from 'La Belle Angerie'. In the light of her passion for Salomé, Folcoche reneges on a lifetime of ferocious stewardship of the Rezeau ancestral home: 'J'ai été ici la gardienne de quoi?' (p.274). Folcoche bequeathes her remaining fortune to the girl, regardless of the tax losses that this will incur. Finally, in an attempt to follow Salomé to Canada, Folcoche hands over keys and control of her fortress to her son, who reflects: 'Les clefs! S'était-elle à ce point dégoûtée des débris de son empire qu'elle les abandonnât à mes soins?' (p.250). All of the characteristics that 'La Belle Angerie' had brought out in his mother in *Vipère au poing*, are systematically reversed by Bazin in *Cri de la chouette*, in order to accentuate not her ferociousness, as before, but her infatuation. Folcoche, the prison-warder tries to become a welcoming hostess and Folcoche, the Spartan, takes a new interest in making her home comfortable. Folcoche, the miser, begins to convert her fixed assets into gifts, and Folcoche, the jealous preserver of her domain, suddenly cares little for her dominion.

Folcoche's attempt to integrate herself fully into Salomé's life is doomed from the outset, and this is also conveyed by means of domestic settings. Jean Rezeau makes a brief visit to the flat that Folcoche has bought for his

stepdaughter in Paris. His observation of the décor serves to sum up the cultural chasm, which divides his ageing mother from the object of her affections:

L'ensemblier n'a sûrement pas consulté Mme Rezeau, habituée à ce mobilier disparate des provinces, acquis au hasard des legs et qui fait plier les parquets sous une masse de temps et de chêne. Dans cette composition à la fois stricte et légère où chaque objet vaut par son volume, par sa tache de couleur, où les sièges font chauffer du rouge ou refroidir du vert olive sur un grand tapis de chèvre lui-même jeté sur une moquette anthracite, il n'y a qu'à voir s'avancer Salomé pour comprendre à quel point elle est l'âme de ce décor. Mme Rezeau, à l'inverse, y est aussi inattendue qu'une bonne sœur aux Folies-Bergère. (p.200)

Bazin here stresses the fact that Salomé's flat is the very antithesis of Folcoche's shabby provincial *château*. Her values and ways only apply to 'La Belle Angerie' and, in this sense, she is as otherworldly as a nun at a strip club. Folcoche's attempts to be part of a youthful décor are as doomed as her attempt to dress younger. Her effort towards regeneration brings some happiness at first, and Folcoche's changed posture conveys this. Jean Rezeau observes:

Elle qui mettait si peu de fesse sur les bords de fauteuil, je ne l'ai jamais vue assise ainsi: tout enfoncée dans le moelleux du dossier. Elle a forci. C'est une grosse chatte satisfaite qui rentre la griffe dans le velours et à qui l'emphysème prête une sorte de ronronnement. (p.201)

However, this description of Folcoche's well-being in Salomé's flat finds its equal and opposite scene at 'La Belle Angerie' after the discovery of Salomé's escape. Modernity, comfort and happiness give way to decrepitude and misery as Folcoche's emotional state is again rendered by means of the description of where she is sitting:

Madame Mère s'était effondrée dans son vieux fauteuil crasseux au capiton crevé, coincé entre une fenêtre sans rideaux découpant ses trente-

deux carreaux de nuit et ce poêle qui, poutres comprises, avait si fort enfumé la pièce qu'en plein été elle sentait la suie. (p.235)

When Folcoche returns to the flat to find confirmation of Salomé's departure, Jean Rezeau observes: 'Elle s'assit , haletante et de nouveau toute raide au bord du même fauteuil où elle avait appris à s'enfoncer' (p.240). Her purring has been replaced by anxious panting. The setting is the same as before, but depicts her now bereft. Bazin's great sensitivity to the way in which people react to their environments is very much in evidence here. Simply by describing the way in which Folcoche sits in a chair, he is able to convey major shifts in her emotional life.

It is entirely fitting that the death of Folcoche should entail the loss of 'La Belle Angerie' and bring the Rezeau trilogy to a close, because the house and the woman are a dual literary creation. Bazin had so closely associated the one with the other that it would be a travesty to imagine Folcoche realising her plan to live in Canada, just as it would be impossible to imagine 'La Belle Angerie' providing a home for anyone else. The plot of the trilogy was largely dictated by the exigencies of 'La Belle Angerie' and its mistress. Folcoche's very presence among the Rezeaus was due to the family's impecunious determination to marry money and save the estate. In *Vipère au poing*, Brasse-Bouillon refers to his parents' marriage as 'cette union, rendue indispensable par la pauvreté des Rezeau' (p.21). Furthermore the dependence of the family on Folcoche's money meant that her abuse of the children, described in *Vipère au poing*, went unchecked. Folcoche was sacrificed to a loveless marriage to save the house,

and the Rezeau boys are in turn sacrificed by a loveless mother to maintain the house. The plight of 'La Belle Angerie' triggers the action once again in *Cri de la chouette*. Folcoche's pretext for re-entering Jean's life after a twenty-four year absence is the threat to 'La Belle Angerie': ' Il fallait sauver le chef-lieu des Rezeau: [...] il n'y avait que moi de possible' (p.107). Folcoche's demise occurs just as her son renounces his responsibility to save the house. Its cost in financial and emotional terms has already been too great. In making this decision, Jean Rezeau throws off the factors which have cursed his mother's life and those whom her life has touched. The trilogy can truly be said to have been resolved. In his interview with Jacques Jaubert, Bazin referred to his intention to write a fourth book in the Rezeau series entitled *Larmes de crocodile*, covering the period of Jean Rezeau's 'troisième âge'.<sup>6</sup> However, this book was never written. Perhaps Bazin realised that Folcoche and 'La Belle Angerie' were, in fact, the *raison d'être* of the Rezeau novels and that a fourth novel would be rather lacklustre without them.

In creating the character of Folcoche, Bazin used many of the archetypes of the classic villain. Folcoche has a sinister villain's stronghold, far from normal human life, in which she controls and terrifies her minions. From this power base she makes sorties into the outside world, carrying potential for damage wherever she goes. However, like the most convincing villains, she has complexities and vulnerabilities and her dominance over her evil empire masks an inner emptiness. Furthermore, she has emotional scars which provide some

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<sup>6</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 26.

clues as to how she became a villain in the first place. As with many villains, she is ultimately defeated by the forces of normality. Unable to destroy her family, and unable to be assimilated by it, in spite of her machinations regarding Salomé, she ultimately falls prey to her own mortality and dies. 'La Belle Angerie' serves at every turn to emphasise these archetypes, for it enshrines her malevolence and her emotional bankruptcy, as well as her inability to adapt to normal life beyond its walls.

### **Women Characters and the Domestic Interior.**

In the association of Folcoche with 'La Belle Angerie', Bazin had found an indispensable tool for the characterisation of other female characters. All of his depictions of women in subsequent novels were to rely heavily on his ability to pick out telling details about their homes.

Bazin had a particularly shrewd and sympathetic eye for the domestic interiors of older women. These women are all busy housekeepers, whose domestic details tell the reader much about their lives, circumstances and priorities. In *La Mort du petit cheval*, Brasse-Bouillon moves beyond the sphere of 'La Belle Angerie', so dominated by the character of Folcoche and into the wider world. He finds himself in the homes of women who are very different from his mother. Characters such as Madame Ladourd, a kind motherly woman, Madame Polin, his elderly landlady and Tante Catherine, the guardian of his fiancée, Monique. These women all provide counterpoints to Folcoche and Brasse-Bouillon's eye alights upon the details which distinguish them. The



homely Madame Ladourd runs a house in which ‘tous les objets ont l’air de vouloir servir à quelque chose’ (p.89) and where, unlike at ‘La Belle Angerie’, the emphasis is on practicality rather than show, ‘nulle parade’ (p.89). Madame Polin is a fussy housekeeper who bores Jean with ‘les mille et une recommandations d’usage sur l’emplacement des cabinets, l’usage des clefs, les nécessités du paillason et la sacro-sainte heure des repas’ (p.76). Jean compares her to his bed in her home, ‘un lit neutre, ni mou, ni dur, comme la mère Polin’ (p.76). He notes the portraits of Madame Polin’s three deceased husbands and concludes satirically that she is a ‘veuve professionnelle’ (p.78). Jean also notes Tante Catherine’s taste for clutter. Her house is adorned with photographs, calendars, pink seashells, a warming pan, a cat’s plate, a fruit bowl full of bitter apples, and holiday souvenirs of dubious taste. Tante Catherine is the proverbial fussing and clucking aunt and her interior perfectly expresses this. In *Lève-toi et marche*, we are given a brief glimpse into the home of the well-meaning but rather ineffectual maiden aunt, Mathilde, who scrapes together a humble existence typing in her untidy living room, dubbed by Constance as ‘le capharnaüm’ (p.28). She sits on a rubber cushion for her haemorrhoids, and peels vegetables, surrounded by papers. In *Au nom du fils*, there are only two interiors of note, the one that Astin has inherited, unaltered from his widowed mother, and his mother-in-law’s home across the road. The indomitable Mamoune is elderly and handicapped but takes a very lively interest in the affairs of her family. She speaks her mind with colourful turns of phrase and she navigates her wheelchair past a series of low tables covered with objects placed

to be within her grasp. She has an ingenious system of coloured strings, which she pulls to bring down sweets from her ceiling joists for visiting grandchildren. These details speak of the resourcefulness and practical cunning which she has further deployed in foisting both of her daughters onto Astin.

However, Bazin's technique of describing women by means of their homes is not restricted to his older female characters. In *Cri de la chouette*, the description of Salomé's Parisian flat with its tasteful and modish colour scheme, its fur rugs and specially commissioned portrait, typifies the beautiful, fashionable, sensual, charismatic, spoilt and ultimately self-serving Salomé. *Un Feu dévore un autre feu* differs from most of Bazin's novels in its scant descriptions of place, however the most detailed interior scenes in the novel are those which are associated with Maria, the young romantic heroine of the novel. Bazin devotes three pages to an inventory-style description of the contents of Maria's flat, 'son espace familial' (p.154). He must have felt that readers could not truly appreciate Maria until they had seen her in her flat. The emphasis throughout is on her youth, 'une baignoire où plonger de la demoiselle' (p.155), her newly-found independence from her father and stepmother, 'le tout bien à soi. On s'encoconnait là dans une liberté réduite, mais neuve. On s'y sentait majeure' (p.155), and the normality of her existence as a young secretary with her newly purchased crockery, record player, vacuum cleaner, television and furniture. However, she gives up the normality and freedom of her existence in order to be with Manuel, who is in hiding. This unselfishness of Maria is key to Bazin's depiction of the transcendent nature of romantic love and he relies on

the description of the flat she is about to lose to convey the precise nature of her sacrifice.

Another novel, *Qui j'ose aimer*, undoubtedly represents the apogee of Bazin's tendency to associate interiors with women. The whole point of 'La Fouve', the main setting, is that it has long been inhabited almost exclusively by women. In the expository second chapter the narrator, Isabelle, states categorically: 'La Fouve, depuis un demi-siècle, c'est une maison de femmes [...]. Tout l'indique' (p.26). Bazin then goes on to pick out those aspects of the house which do indeed indicate the occupancy of women only:

Ce jardin même, mal défendu par des mains trop douces; ces gonds rouillés, ces peintures qui s'écaillent faute d'un bon bricoleur; tout cet extérieur à l'abandon, qui contraste avec un intérieur fleurant l'encaustique, où s'allument des cuivres posés sur des meubles anciens qui miroitent par-devant et moisissent par-derrrière en attendant la poigne capable de les déplacer. (p.26)

A house which is uniquely associated with women, shows the effects of their lack of physical strength and their preoccupation with cleanliness. The women do not control the garden, do not oil hinges, cannot paint walls and cannot move heavy objects. The two references to hands in this passage reinforce the notion of the relative weakness of the women as compared to absent men; they have 'des mains trop douces' as opposed to 'la poigne capable' of the 'bon bricoleur'. The chapter closes with another evocation of the house in which Isabelle describes her life as:

Cette existence partagée entre une rivière, une machine à coudre, un banc de messe tapissé de vieux velours et cette place dont je n'usais guère, mais qui restait réservée à ma tempe, près d'une épaule un peu grasse, à l'endroit où les femmes se touchent de parfum (p.32-33).

Isa chooses an apparently unrelated collection of objects to define the parameters of her existence: a river, a sewing machine, a pew, and the place on her mother's neck where she puts on her perfume. However the significance of each of these is their association in Bazin's mind with femininity. Water and rivers are often associated with women. The sewing machine stands for a traditionally female occupation and conventional Roman Catholic piety is also perceived by Bazin as a female tendency.

The feminised zone of 'La Fouve' is the setting for specifically female activities. Isabelle rejoices in the temporary absence of Maurice as this allows a brief return to the old ways: 'Nous étions épanouies, jupe contre jupe, en famille' (p.99). Conversation can now range freely over female topics of conversation: 'Quel repos de pouvoir parler recettes, lessive ou couture sans faire bâiller le monsieur' (p.98). Isa can now hitch up her skirt and pull up her tights with no concern for modesty. The freshly ironed clothing is sitting in piles, the sewing basket is out, Nathalie is darning dishcloths, Berthe is smoothing them out and Isa is hemming a new suit. All is right with the world because, in the absence of Maurice, all the women are engaged in their customary habits: 'la salle [...] est redevenue pleine de nous, de choses familières' (p.98). It even sounds and smells different: 'Nul baryton creusant ces phrases sérieuses qui donnent à l'air ce goût de tabac, mais quatre voix pointues, vivaces, faufilant de la causette sur la pointe de la langue, entre deux bouts de chanson' (pp.97-98). We note in passing that Bazin's portrayal of femininity in

this novel is fairly stereotypical. The women at 'La Fouve' cannot garden or do any form of home maintenance because they are physically frail. Instead their shrill voices gossip and sing. They chatter happily about laundry and recipes. They polish, clean, cook, wash, iron, and sew. The defining objects in their home are a sewing machine and a needlework box.

Bazin's reliance on traditional, female, domestic activities to convey the femininity of 'La Fouve' in turn provides an insight into why he associates homes so closely with women. In Bazin's novels, a woman's place is in the home and a woman's work is her housework. In the transcript of an interview, reproduced by J.A.W. Caldwell at the end of his doctoral thesis, Bazin is recorded as saying: 'Une femme dans un ménage est une femme de ménage'.<sup>7</sup> In this play on words, the woman is defined in terms of her domestic role. From *Qui j'ose aimer* onwards, the wives and mothers in Bazin's novels are mostly presented in terms of their domestic competence. Thus Laure, the future wife of Daniel Astin, is described as 'passionnément ménagère' (p.29), to the extent that Astin regards her merely as another form of domestic appliance: 'Je traitais Laure avec la considération qu'on peut avoir pour une excellente machine à laver' (p.301). In *Le Matrimoine*, Abel Bretaudeau reviews his wife's positive qualities and considers the variety of domestic tasks to which she turns her hand:

Ménagère, lingère, cuisinière, secrétaire, plongeuse, ravaudeuse, esthéticienne, comptable, hôtesse, maîtresse, une main au poudrier, l'autre à l'aspirateur, une main à la pattemouille, une autre au téléphone, les deux dans la bassine, les deux sur la machine pour taper mon courrier, déesse à tant de bras, je te salue. (p.75)

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<sup>7</sup> 'L'Évolution d'Hervé Bazin: romancier' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Macquarie University, Australia, 1977) p.A.20.

Here, as in *Qui j'ose aimer*, Bazin uses key objects to convey womanly activity; the powder compact, the vacuum cleaner, the damp cloth for ironing, the basin and the typewriter. In *Cri de la chouette*, Bertille Rezeau is described by her husband Jean in similar terms:

C'est la fée des machines: à laver, à repasser, à tricoter, à coudre, à mixer, à mouliner, à souffler, à battre, comme à écrire ou à photocopier [...]. Toujours coiffée, laquée, elle est à la fois ménagère, lingère, cuisinière, éducatrice, dactylo, secrétaire, documentaliste, comptable: à domicile. (p.92)

Once again the woman is perceived in a whirl of domestic activity and surrounded by domestic appliances. In *L'École des pères*, Abel Bretaudeau finds himself forced to move with the times. Mariette has extended her sphere of activity beyond the home in order to help in the running of the shop which she has inherited from her parents. Abel finds that he must take a more active role in the home. However, he is uneasy about this because he cannot rethink his fundamental notion that the interior is his wife's domain:

Je fais ce que je peux; je négocie au jour le jour mon aide et ma présence; je m'efforce d'en faire plus; j'ai même la suffisance parfois de croire que je m'améliore. Reste que pour moi la maison même est féminine: un giron où l'aisance d'une femme s'épanouit de pièce en pièce, alors que je m'y sens gauche, sauf dans mon bureau. (p.50)

Here we have the strongest assertion of the indissolubility of the woman and the home: 'La maison même est féminine'. Why? Because it is the context in which women's domestic skills find their outlet and are seen to best advantage.

## **The Evaluation of Wives and Female Partners in the Light of the Home.**

As we have seen, Bazin frequently uses the description of interiors to describe the wives and partners of his protagonists. However, it is at these moments that a new element is introduced into the characterisation of women. These women's home settings are perceived from the viewpoint of the male protagonist, who is evaluating their performance with reference to his own needs and requirements.

The dominant characteristic of Mariette, in *Le Matrimoine*, turns out to be her obsession with her maternal role to the exclusion of all else, including the sensibilities and desires of her husband. All other aspects of Mariette's personality are subsumed by her duties as a mother. 'Mariette a une faiblesse: c'est sans mesure qu'elle se laisse dévorer' (p.173) notes Abel, as he observes her devotion to their first child. He observes her laxity with her son and predicts its effects on the house: 'Les murs vont être rayés, plaqués d'empreintes; les fauteuils écorchés, tachés de chocolat, encollés de bonbons. Qu'importe! Avec la complicité grondeuse de sa mère, Nicolas s'installe. La maison entière, déjà, lui appartient' (p.186). In addition to her *laissez-faire* attitude, Mariette's excessive enthusiasm for motherhood has also expressed itself in the accumulation of endless objects for the child:

J'ai hurlé pendant dix minutes, déballant tout: sa faiblesse envers ce gosse, sa moindre allégeance envers moi, ses dépenses pour le petit prince. Tout a défilé: le trotteur à roulettes, le baby-relax, la chaise haute, le fauteuil hygiénique, le hamac de soie, le *combisiège* pour l'auto, la bouillotte-chat, la têtère pare-chocs, le *chapodo* pour savonner la tête

sans piquer les chers yeux, et le peuple de bricoles, de riens, ramenés de Prisunic, et la débauche de pulls, de bloomers, de salopettes, de barboteuses, de capuches, de polos, de slips nains, de bavettes en éponge illustrées de fables, de mi-bas, de socquettes, de mulettes, de moufles, de chaussons, de botillons en cuir, en veau crispé, en nubuck blanc. [...] Je lui ai cité Tio qui, parmi les femmes, met au rang des pires, avec la paillasse, avec le bas-bleu, l'espèce redoutable de la *méragosse*. (p.188)

Mariette's priority for her interior, as in all things, is the well-being of her son.

In response to Abel's tirade, she states simply: 'Je veux que Nicolas se sente chez lui' (p.188), but Abel is convinced that his wife's indulgence towards Nicolas is at the expense of his own domestic comfort.

In *Madame Ex*, the central preoccupation of the novel is not marriage and motherhood, but divorce. The male narrator accounts for his decision to divorce Aline and make a new life with Odile in terms of the women's respective abilities to create a home. Early on in the novel, Louis explains that his choice to leave Aline for Odile is based not on sexual gratification, but on the fact that he would rather live with Odile:

Surtout Aline semblait – ou plus probablement voulait – ignorer que les hommes ne brisent pas leur foyer parce qu'ils ont décidé de *coucher avec* une autre – ça, tous les maris le peuvent sans se démarier et ils ne s'en privent guère – , mais au contraire parce qu'au-delà du désir, du plaisir quelques-uns arrivent à la dilection; parce qu'il leur devient impossible de ne pas *vivre avec* l'autre .(p.29)

Once Louis has divorced Aline, his decision is implicitly vindicated during two chapters which compare and contrast the relative home-making merits of Odile with his ex-wife. Odile's new home with Louis is seen through the eyes of his parents and the thrust of their observations is that Odile is keeping her man happy: 'Elle le tient comme elle tient sa maison' (p.169). Odile has transformed



what was once ‘une cambuse pourrie dans un jardin de ronces’ (p.167). The parents-in-law now approach:

Sur un tapis vert un peu étroit, ourlé d’arbustes forcément jeunes, une maison restée ce qu’elle était, assez chandelle, mais blanchie de frais; et à la place des petites pièces fumeuses, aux papiers décollés, aux plafonds éclatés, un ensemble coquet, démonstration d’économie alliée à un joli don de la bricole. Habités à leur fouillis méticuleux, M. et Mme Davermelle découvraient un autre genre d’ordre, presque vide et là-dedans un autre genre de bru, vive, à l’aise dans son rôle comme dans sa robe. (pp.167-8)

The fact that Odile has turned a decaying and dilapidated house into a clean and stylish home resonates nicely with Louis’s decision to start his life afresh with her. Odile herself is fresher and younger than Aline, her predecessor, and the décor which she has created reflects this. Although formerly Louis’s mistress, Odile redeems herself in the eyes of his family through her homemaking abilities and her new mother-in-law concludes: ‘Voilà longtemps que je ne juge plus une fille sur ce qu’elle a fait, couchée, mais sur ce qu’elle sait faire debout’ (pp.169-170). Two of Louis’ children, Rose and Guy, are also so attracted to the calm pleasantness of their father’s new home and wife that they prevail upon the courts to reverse their custody arrangements in favour of their father.

There is no indication in the text that Odile is anything other than a charming and loving wife. Indeed, when he was accused of being highly critical of women in his writing, Bazin referred to Odile in his defence: ‘Tenez, dans *Madame Ex*, la seconde femme du héros est adorable’.<sup>8</sup> However, Bazin admitted that she was designed primarily to be a foil for Aline. He continued: ‘Je l’ai voulue ainsi par opposition à la première’. The main thrust of *Madame*

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Jaubert, *Art. cit.*, p.32.

*Ex* is to justify Louis's decision to divorce and Odile's principal function is to highlight Aline's deficiencies.

In the following chapter, the narrator describes the divorced Aline's new home and the contrast with Odile could not be more marked. Where order, cleanliness, home improvement, progress and a sense of well-being had characterised Odile's home, the reverse is true for Aline. Firstly, in terms of accommodation, Aline's situation has deteriorated. As a result of her divorce she has lost her suburban villa and now finds herself in a small flat. She remarks ironically that she has come down in the world: 'Nous occupons maintenant une situation élevée: au cinquième étage. Pour tout le reste, c'est de la dégringolade' (p.175). Aline's new, cramped conditions are leading to strife, chaos and a worsening situation: 'Du désordre, du laisser-aller, des disputes des filles bloquées dans la même chambre [...] Mme Rebusteau n'augurait rien de bon' (pp.175-6). The juxtaposition of the two women's homes creates the sense of a parable or a cautionary tale. Odile, who succeeds in pleasing Louis, experiences an improvement in her status and is provided with a new home. Aline, who has antagonised him, loses her home and with it much of her status. The focus of Odile's domestic activity has been to please Louis and improve his quality of life. Her parents-in-law note that since he has been living with her, Louis has returned to his painting, whereas, when he lived with Aline, he was entirely unproductive in this respect. The focus of Aline's domestic activity, however, was to martyr herself through housework in order to reproach her husband. This is made clear at the beginning of the novel when Louis gives a damning

description of the woman he intends to divorce: 'Butée, tatillonne, exigeante, ombrageuse, toujours insatisfaite, oui, elle est tout cela, Aline. Agressive ou plutôt tracassière, décourageante au possible. [...] Avare de ses joies, mais non de ses déplaisirs; de ses mercis, mais non de ses reproches'(p.23).

To a considerable extent, Aline represents an extension of the character of Mariette in *Le Matrimoine*. Like Mariette she becomes so tied up in her domestic role that she neglects the happiness of her husband. However, unlike Mariette, she never moderates her behaviour and therefore reaps the consequences when Louis divorces her. The feature that both novels have in common is the portrayal of female characters in the context of their homes and housework, with the satisfaction of the male character as the yardstick for their success.

*Le Démon de minuit* is the last novel in which Bazin evaluates the relative merits of female wives and lovers. The male narrator, Gérard Laguenière, compares and contrasts the domestic setting of each of three women in order to justify his ultimate choice. All of the women in the novel are described in terms of their homes. His wife, Solange is described as the model home maker: 'C'est une proprette, une vraie femme d'intérieur, qui coud, lave, compte, cuisine et range à merveille' (p.11). However, her fastidiousness in the home is in stark contrast to her sexual promiscuity. Like Mariette and Aline, this is a housewife who is strong on housework, but poor as a wife. Solange's predatory sexuality is cleverly conveyed by means of small details in her home, firstly in the unpleasant but highly evocative combination of the smell of her 'Opium'

perfume mixed with that of rotting meat: 'le parfum de Solange, remontant de partout se mélangeait curieusement à l'odeur de charogne'(p.154), and secondly in her taste for sexually explicit Chinese ivories, noted with disgust by her husband.

When Gérard has a brief affair with Béatrice Goslin, a young Belgian girl, she takes him to her flat which she describes as 'mon désert' (p.81). The place is utterly bare, stripped by the bailiffs. This proves significant and provides a subtext to Béatrice's admission to Gérard: 'Je crains d'avoir besoin de toi' (p.80). It transpires that her needs are as much financial as emotional. Béatrice's denuded flat is also an early warning of the unsettled nature of her existence. Although she accepts Gérard's financial support, Béatrice is quick to move on.

The ultimate beneficiary of Gérard's largesse is his long-time correspondent, the schoolteacher Yveline Darne. Like Béatrice, Yveline inhabits something of a desert. She lives in a room provided by the school in which she works and she finds its soulless atmosphere and miscellaneous second-hand furniture depressing:

Ouf! Yveline en a assez de cette chambre meublée à la diable qu'en cours de semaine le collègue prête aux célibataires. Tout est dépareillé: le lit de cuivre 1900, l'armoire Barbès, le fauteuil Arts-Deco, le paravent tendu de cretonne plissée qui cache le lavabo, le bureau métallique grisâtre devant quoi elle est assise sur une chaise paillée. (p.85)

Bazin then goes on to associate the forlornness of Yveline's room with the emotional poverty of her background. This is a woman who has had to make do with second-hand affection as well as second-hand furniture:

Yveline ne possède rien ici en dehors de ses frusques, des livres qui s'alignent sur une étagère de bois blanc passé au brou de noix et de l'ours brun en peluche dont les yeux sont des boutons de bottine et qui fut l'alibi de la tendresse pour une petite fille placée par l'Assistance. (p.85)

Bazin establishes the barrenness of Yveline's existence in order to explain why this young woman is prepared to begin married life and parenthood with a sick and elderly man.

An implicit contrast is drawn up between Yveline and Gérard's first wife, who also has humble origins. Solange and her sisters return to their mother's flat in which they were brought up and they are reminded of the squalor of their youth:

D'une jeunesse indigente, entassée dans une chambre commune aux papiers boursouflés par l'humidité, aux fenêtres disjointes sifflant par grand vent [...] au dernier étage de cette caverne salpêtrée donnant sur le quai Romain Rolland, côté Saône, et par une traboule obscure qui puait le matou sur la place du Gouvernement. (p.130)

The interior even carries memories of Solange's easy sexuality: 'Au second palier elle passa, sans ciller, devant une porte dans l'angle de laquelle l'avait coincée jadis un garçon aux mains chercheuses' (p.131). The reader is given access to Solange's thoughts as she recalls her readiness to deploy her beauty and sexual experience to become Gérard's lover in order to secure a share in his fortune and social standing. However, Solange's sexuality turns out to be her undoing in the long term. At the end of the novel she has come down in the world again and Gérard visits her at her flat over the launderette business she is running. She takes up her position, 'sur la marche la plus haute de l'escalier intérieur [...] d'où elle surveillait quotidiennement la clientèle déballant son

linge sale' (p.265). Given that Solange's name may well be a play on *sale linge*, this final interior is a highly appropriate way of characterising her.

However, the value of a woman, in the Bazinian scheme of things, rests not only in her ability to provide her male partner with an acceptable home, but also in her ability to acquire that home and partner in the first place. A recurring theme in Bazin's novels is the importance of being *casée* or settled. At the beginning of *Au nom du fils*, Daniel Astin remembers the circumstances of his marriage to the lively Giselle Hombourg. He reflects that Giselle's good looks had already led to some liaisons, and her mother was therefore anxious to provide her with the respectability that a house and husband would confer: 'On devait me dire plus tard – il y a toujours un scélérat pour le faire – qu'on avait déjà un peu aboyé sur son compte; que le commandant et Mme Hombourg n'étaient pas fâchés de la caser' (pp.26-27). However, Giselle's highly respectable sister, Laure, has compromised her chances in the marriage stakes. She has become too closely involved with her brother-in-law's establishment, without officially becoming the lady of the house. Daniel Astin concludes that she is 'femme à demi casée, femme à demi gâchée [...] Elle s'est identifiée à la maison, accrochée aux enfants. Elle donne mon nom à ses habitudes' (p.75). Women therefore find themselves in a delicate situation. In order to be established in a home they must prevail upon a man to take them in marriage, whilst all the time appearing to have no such design. This is described by the narrator in *Madame Ex* as 'l'art du jeu de dames': 'Casé, casé ... Le mot est malheureux! Tout l'art du jeu de dames consiste à passer sans se faire prendre,

d'une case dans l'autre' (p.343). In *Madame Ex*, Aline seems to be more concerned about the loss of her establishment and the status that went with it, than about the loss of her husband. Her principal grievance against Louis is that he has despoiled her of their marital home:

Une maison, elle avait eu une maison. A elle. Alors que ses parents vivaient chez autrui, sa sœur Ginette dans un petit trois-pièces de Créteil, sa sœur Annette dans une chambre meublée. Elle avait été la bien casée, l'enviée, la chanceuse de la famille, et c'était encore Louis, toujours Louis, qui la dépouillait. Le Misérable! Qui reprend ce qu'il nous donne nous lèse bien plus que s'il n'eût rien donné. (p.73)

In order to recover her status, Aline must consider remarrying. When friends suggest introducing her to the crippled Monsieur Galvey, Aline is tempted by the idea because he owns a large house; this is an 'excitant détail' (p.198). Aline is hopeful that she might prove to be 'recasable' rather than 'laissée-pour-compte' (p.199). The interesting thing about Aline's reflections on possible remarriage is that they are centred entirely on notions of property. The word 'reloger' features three times in a single sentence:

Quand un veuf veut se reloger dans une femme, quand cette femme peut se reloger dans sa vie, on sait bien ce qui compte; et reloger le tout dans une bonne maison n'est pas la moindre des choses. (p.200)

There are some strange juxtapositions in this passage. The idea of re-housing is given a sexual connotation in the context of a widower re-lodging himself in a woman. The woman's place in life is expressed in terms of where she is housed: 'cette femme peut se reloger dans sa vie'. The final use of 'reloger' is the most conventional, being applied to 'une bonne maison'.

What, then, can we conclude from Bazin's use of the term 'caser'? In Bazin's novels, marriage is not primarily about romantic love. Bazin never loses sight of the fact that property is involved. For the woman, the acquisition of a house is one of the main motivations for entering into marriage and she will suffer if the man does not offer marriage or chooses to divorce her. A woman is a person whose social respectability and standing depend on her ability to be housed as a result of marriage. Bazin here adds a new significance to the notion of a woman's place.

### **The Home and Female Sexuality.**

Perhaps the strangest and most idiosyncratic way in which Bazin associates women with interiors is by using the imagery from the house as a metaphor for a woman's body. He refers to a woman's hall-way, door, and lock to describe her womb and sexual organs, to which men have the key. Bazin's use of this place-based imagery to convey feminine sexuality is essentially a male perspective, focussing as it does on such notions of entry.

This imagery appears for the first time in connection with Folcoche. The master key to her private wardrobe never leaves her bosom: 'La clef suprême, celle qui défendait toutes les autres, celle de l'armoire anglaise, ne quitta plus l'entre-deux-seins de la maîtresse de maison' (pp.65-6). The position of the key between her breasts, and the location of the forbidden 'armoire anglaise' in her bedroom, suggest a connection with Folcoche's sexuality. This association is explored more thoroughly in *La Mort du petit cheval*, when her stronghold



cupboard is violated by her sons. The boys discover that in the 'armoire anglaise', kept hidden away under lock and key, is evidence of a secret and passionate sexual life; Folcoche's affair in the Far East and the illegitimate conception of her son Marcel. In the *Abécédaire* section entitled 'Abandon', doors and locks are used to convey Bazin's view of his mother's procreative function more explicitly:

Regardant la bouche de ma mère, bloquée par la serrure de ses dents, j'ai parfois songé à son autre porte molle et j'en ai éprouvé de la gêne, parce que tout de même elle m'avait lâché dans la vie. (p.10)

The cause of the 'gêne' here is a little ambiguous. The son may be embarrassed because he is considering his mother's private parts or because he realises the extent to which he is in debt to her for the gift of life itself.

As so often in Bazin's writing, an idea which first surfaced in connection with his own experience, here of his mother, was to resurface in other fictional forms. The idea of a woman as the entrance hall to life recurs in *L'École des pères*. Abel Bretaudeau reflects on the fact that his children have left home by drawing a parallel between this event and their birth: the children are 'hors de la maison, comme jadis hors de leur mère' (p.251). The woman undergoes a second kind of childbirth when her children leave home, which Abel describes as 'accoucher par la porte' (p.72). A woman's womb becomes an entrance hall, from which she provides a door leading out into the world. Bazin sums up this view of a woman's body as essentially procreative under the heading 'Arche' in *Abécédaire*:

Fermée, secrètement trouée, seulement desserrée quand le désir s'y enlaine, c'est bien de celle de vos jambes, femmes! que depuis le commencement du déluge du temps, sur vos eaux, porte notre survie. (p.31)

Bazin associates the notion of Noah's ark, with the arch created by a woman's legs because both are places which serve to perpetuate the human race.

However, the female sexual organ, 'fermée, secrètement trouée, seulement desserrée quand le désir s'y enlaine' is also a doorway to which locks are attached, in the form of sexual prohibitions. In *La Mort du petit cheval*, Brasse-Bouillon makes use of the door and lock imagery to distinguish between sexual petting and intercourse, decrying the former as false prudery: 'Il y a deux puretés, la blanche et la noire, celle qui respecte ou celle qui enfonce la porte franchement. J'ai horreur de la fausse innocence qui joue avec les serrures' (p.193). In *Le Démon de minuit*, we once again find the close association between a woman's sexuality and the notion of doors and locks. In this instance it is the woman herself who appears to be making the connection between the two. Whilst on holiday in Flaine with her daughter, Solange gives in to her sexual appetite and seeks out an encounter in a local night-club. She returns to her daughter feeling defiled and guilty and begins a routine which, the narrator suggests, follows a habitual pattern:

Solange a ses rites de purification. Elle va se boucler dans la salle de bains, se déshabiller, mettre tout son linge au sale, prendre une douche froide, se frotter au gant de crin. Puis elle reviendra dans la salle, en pyjama blanc, [...] célébrer la fermeture. Double tour de clef pour la porte d'entrée dont les verrous seront tirés en haut comme en bas. Serrage des crémones de fenêtre, des robinets d'eau et de propane. Contrôle du voyant rouge de l'alarme automatique mise en position nuit. Alors assurée des

lieux à défaut d'elle-même, [...] elle ira, [...] se blottir dans l'innocence de sa fille sur le vieux canapé aux accoudoirs râpés. (p.104-5)

The ironic tone of this passage is inescapable. The narrator exploits to the full the contrast between Solange's ability to secure her apartment against intrusion and her inability to be inviolate herself, 'assurée des lieux à défaut d'elle-même'. There is humour here too in the woman's attempt to lock the stable door once the horse has bolted. She celebrates the notion of 'fermeture' in a futile attempt to reverse the fact that she herself has already yielded. The final allusion to the daughter's innocence throws the promiscuity of the mother into relief.

There emerges from Bazin's use of hall, door and lock imagery a stark view of the morality of female sexuality. The woman's body is a very important place in its own right because it is the interior from which life itself springs. If unlawful entry to the woman's body is sought and won, its sanctity is compromised. In *L'Huile sur le feu*, when Céline discovers that her mother has a lover, she feels defiled by the knowledge that her mother has sullied the body from which she gave birth: 'Ce dont tu es née n'existe plus, et c'est un peu comme si tu étais morte. Morte et souillée: ma mère, ô vestibule du monde' (p.155). A woman's body's most important function is the procreation of children and sexual infidelity defiles the temple.

So far, we have pieced together an overall picture of the significance of the hall, door, and key theme with reference to a range of Bazin's novels written throughout his career. However, the most complete single exposition of this theme is to be found in *Qui j'ose aimer*, where Maurice's ability to penetrate

and occupy 'La Fouve' is associated with his ability to penetrate two of the women in the house. This link is first suggested by Isa's reaction to the news that Belle has brought Maurice home to 'La Fouve' because he has made her pregnant: 'Il entrait décidément dans la maison par la petite porte, le beau-père' (p.53). Isa here plays on the New Testament notion of 'entering by the narrow gate' and scurrilously transposes the metaphor to the sexual plane. Maurice has achieved entry to the house because he has achieved entry to Belle.

The association of the doors to 'La Fouve' and the door to a woman is made even more explicit in the case of Isa's relationship with Maurice. Isa's first sexual encounter with Maurice is anticipated by a Freudian dream in which Isa is trying to swim away from a phallic fish, 'un brochet long comme un caïman' (p.163). She is woken from this dream by the sound of the utility-room door swinging on its hinges because it has been left open: 'Aucun doute, la porte de la buanderie avait été laissée ouverte et, poussée dans un sens ou dans l'autre par de légers coups d'air, gémissait sur la rouille de ses gonds' (p.164). The fact that a door to 'La Fouve' has been left open parallels the fact that Isa is about to be sexually open to Maurice, whom she meets on her way downstairs to shut the door and to whom she yields almost immediately. The metaphor of the open door is developed when Isa refers to her body, after the loss of her virginity, as perpetually open, 'cette blessure, si légère et pourtant si profonde qu'elle nous laisse à jamais ouvertes' (p.172). After Belle's death, Maurice seeks to assert his will over 'La Fouve', to which he has inherited some rights. He believes his claims to the house to be strengthened by his sexual claims on Isa and once

again the woman's body is associated with the notion of a house. Isa remarks: 'Il comptait sur moi avec un aveuglement d'homme: fille possédée, fille à merci, c'est une maison dont on a la clef. Il faisait du reste tout son possible pour la dorer, sa clef' (p.250). The identification of the man's sexuality with the key which unlocks and gains access to the woman, is clear here. However, Isa succeeds in resisting Maurice's advances and she sends him away. In so doing, she also secures 'La Fouve' against him. In the final chapter, the fact that Isa has renounced her sexuality in favour of a settled existence at 'La Fouve' is conveyed by her decision to bolt the utility-room door. Nathalie, unaware of the door's significance, complains about this, but Isa is adamant: 'Je n'aime pas que cette porte batte, la nuit; s'il ne tenait qu'à moi je la ferais murer' (p.310). This close association of Isa's body and her house amplifies her dilemma, for Isa has to choose between contentment in her home and sexual gratification. It may be that Isa represents the Bazinian ideal for women. Once her sexuality has allowed her to conceive a child, she opts for a life of chastity.

### **Female Domination of the Home and the Exclusion of Men.**

The whole strangeness of Bazin's 'La Fouve' is that it is a house in which men never achieve permanent residence. It may therefore serve as a metaphor for the overall incompatibility between men and women. In Bazin's novels men frequently achieve sexual relations with women, but they rarely feel at home with them. Indeed it appears that women so dominate the realm of the indoors that men cannot feel at home.

Abel Bretaudeau, in *Le Matrimoine*, notes that his home sphere has become utterly dominated by the presence of his wife:

Mariette est tout sauf transparente et je me dis parfois qu'au temps facile des fiançailles il y avait entre nous de longs repos. Je pouvais, à volonté, aller ou ne pas aller la voir. *Je sortais* pour la rejoindre, alors qu'aujourd'hui, *je rentre*. Je n'ouvre plus, je ferme une porte. (p.79)

The association of ideas here indicates the extent to which Abel is irked by the constant presence of his wife in his home. The positive notion of rest, 'repos', at home has been lost as a result of marriage. Abel's ability to choose 'à volonté' whether he wishes to have Mariette's company or not has also been lost. Previously, seeing Mariette was associated with openness to the world at large, and there is a positive ring to 'sortais' and 'ouvre'. Now, Abel has no refuge. The positive associations of going home, 'rentre', are undermined by a sense of the closing off of possibilities, 'je ferme une porte'. Later, and in the same vein, Abel remarks: 'C'est fou ce qu'une femme écarte en refermant les bras' (p.111). Not only is Abel closed into the home sphere through marriage, he is quite unable to find any space for himself within it: 'Point de recours. Avec Mariette on ne s'isole jamais [...] sauf aux W.C.' (pp.79-80). This picture of the man of the house driven to seek some solitude in the toilet, away from his ever-present wife, is a humorous but graphic illustration of the extent to which home has ceased to be a viable refuge for him. The situation worsens over time. Abel remarks: 'Il m'est pratiquement devenu impossible de m'isoler [...] La paix, nous ne l'aurons pas. Jamais. Même aux waters' (p.260). Abel is conscious of Mariette's constant scrutiny and control everywhere in the home: 'Je retrouve

une femme, fidèle comme la pendule. Ses yeux sont pleins de regards, sa bouche pleine de questions. [...] Elle est là, pénétrée, qui de partout me pénètre' (p.79).

The quest of male characters to 's'isoler' is an ongoing theme in Bazin's writing. They are driven to the margins of the home, the study, the garden, the toilet or the bathroom in an attempt to find a modicum of solitude where they can be alone with their thoughts. Indoors is the context in which women feel most at home. As Abel puts it, in *L'École des pères*, the home is 'un giron où l'aisance d'une femme s'épanouit de pièce en pièce'(p.50). However, the reverse is true for the men, as Abel states: 'Je m'y sens gauche' (p.50). In the home men feel shut in, cramped, controlled and ill at ease.

However, *Le Matrimoine* is far from being the most extreme example of the extent to which the home is a hostile place for a man. Folcoche is the first of a series of Bazinian women who actively persecute their menfolk. Although 'La Belle Angerie' is her husband's ancestral home, it is she who controls every detail of life within it and she reduces Jacques to a terrified cipher. Folcoche also wields financial control over the household. When, in chapter twelve, Jacques's sister asks why he has no power over his wife, she is told that it is because Folcoche holds the controlling financial interest. Folcoche's domination of 'La Belle Angerie' is such that her son, Brasse-Bouillon, feels impossibly constrained 'sous la contrainte de ce toit refermé sur moi comme l'accent circonflexe du mot chaîne' (p.299).

Folcoche seems to have been the blue-print for a series of viciously domineering women who make their homes intolerable for their husbands. Eva

Colu goes to considerable lengths to make the home unbearable for her husband Bertrand in *L'Huile sur le feu*. She ignores him, does not cook for him, mocks him, screams at him, throws crockery at him and there is even the implication that she attempts to harm him physically by tipping over a ladder. Her constant aim is to drive him out, for she seeks a termination of their marriage, which he will not grant. Bertrand's contemporaries are fully aware that his home is rendered hellish by his wife. As Raligue puts it, to send Bertrand home is to 'le renvoyer dans les bras de son dragon' (p.32). Like Folcoche, Eva has the whip hand because she is financially in control of the home, she reminds Bertrand: 'La maison est à moi, tu le sais' (p.263). In the short story 'La Poison', in *Le Bureau des mariages*, Myco's home life is made miserable by his second wife Céleste. Céleste also wields financial power over her husband. She demands that he seek work or she will throw him out: 'Je ne nourris plus, je ne loge plus un feignant! La baraque m'appartient. [...] Tu m'obéiras ou je te fiche dehors' (p.106). Bazin's last collection of short stories *Le Grand Méchant doux* continues this theme in the story of 'Le Pourvoyeur des jours maigres'. Hugues Sourceau promised his dying father to provide for his stepmother and half-sister. Both of these women prove themselves utterly unworthy of his care; the girl is an idle slattern and her mother a drunk and they both taunt the breadwinner of the family to a point beyond endurance. Hugues spends as much time as possible at work at the post office, for his life at home is 'faite de mépris, de cris, de jeûnes, d'entassement dans une cambuse' (p.79). The women render the home provided for them by Hugues as squalid as it is inhospitable and exploit his



sense of financial obligation to them. However, in an unguarded drunken moment, his stepmother Céleste confesses that Sourceau was neither the father of Hugues nor of his half-sister. Hugues therefore feels himself absolved from his vow and leaves the women to fend for themselves.

Abel Bretaudeau is moderately unhappy, Myco and Bertrand Colu are suicidal. Hugues Sourceau succeeds in escaping and Maurice, in *Qui j'ose aimer*, is driven out. For all of them, one thing is clear: the female domination of the home is such that it can never be a refuge for them. It is telling that the only home which is presented as a haven from the world outside, 'une oasis' (p.32), is 'La Fouve'. However, this is a home which accommodates women only, and which is perceived from the perspective of a female narrator and protagonist.

The inescapable conclusion to be drawn from Bazin's presentation of the indoors in his novels is that the home is a female space and, as such, tends to preclude men. The home is the prize to which women aspire through marriage and the context for a woman's domestic skills. Furthermore, the home is the principal means by which both the personalities and the accomplishments of women can be gauged. Indeed a house becomes so much a part of a woman that it comes to serve as a metaphor for her body and her sexuality. Women may neglect the needs of their husbands, as in the case of Aline in *Madame Ex*, and Mariette in *Le Matrimoine*, or they may use their dominance actively to persecute their men. In both cases the home is a female power-base, and the options left open to the men are to hide at the margins of the home, divorce their

wives, run away or commit suicide. Bazin's depiction of the home reveals his deep pessimism about the incompatibility of the sexes.

## **Conclusion.**

The association of Folcoche with 'La Belle Angerie' set several important creative precedents for Bazin's depiction of women and their homes. Firstly, Bazin here established his technique of using a domestic interior to reveal the psyche of a female character and also to show emotional development in a woman. The completeness of his synthesis between Folcoche and 'La Belle Angerie' would perhaps never be entirely matched, but the lavish description of 'La Fouve' and its interrelationship with Isa owes much to the techniques Bazin pioneered in his Rezeau trilogy. Secondly, Bazin used the homemaking prerogative of the woman to evaluate her impact on other members of the family. In the Rezeau trilogy, Bazin held his mother indirectly to account for her deficiencies as a wife and mother by portraying, in fictional form, the unpleasant household that she had created. The outrage she inspired in him was to resurface in his attacks on a succession of inadequate home-makers, from the grudgingly tolerated Mariette in *Le Matrimoine* to the repudiated Aline Davermelle in *Madame Ex* and the execrable drunken Céleste in 'Le Pourvoyeur des jours maigres'. The association of the female body with ideas of doors, locks and keys also made its first appearance in Brasse-Bouillon's fascination with his mother's

secret wardrobe. Finally, in Bazin's depiction of Folcoche and 'La Belle Angerie', we find the seeds of his pervasive anxiety about the incompatibility of the sexes in homes where women seek to dominate and thereby frustrate, alienate or even drive away the men in their lives. The Rezeau trilogy has once again proven to be the birthplace of a series of themes so rich as to permit a whole sequence of literary re-exploitations.

Bazin's portrayal of women might seem at best sexist and at worst misogynistic. Women are seen as the passive recipients of a home as a result of marriage. Having gained their home, their chief function is housework. The extent to which they are perceived in a positive light is then gauged by their ability to keep their men happy. Louis Davermelle's Odile seems to represent an ideal; she is attractive, domestically efficient and unfailingly charming to the husband she selflessly serves. However, the majority of Bazin's female characters fail to please their husbands and are strongly criticised or divorced as a result. Bazin's preoccupation with the reproductive organs and procreative functions of a woman and their close association in his mind with the parts of the house suggests a stereotypical and reductive view of a woman as a sex object, mother and housewife. Misogyny could be construed from the fact that so many of Bazin's married women fall into distinctly unappealing categories. There are the drudges; Laure in *Au nom du fils*, Mariette in *Le Matrimoine*, and Aline in *Madame Ex*. There are the harridans; Folcoche, Éva Colu, two very uncelestial Célestes in 'La Poison' and 'Le Pourvoyeur des jours maigres' and there are also harlots of a sort: Solange and Béatrice in *Le Démon de minuit*.

Bazin's view of women may well have been jaundiced by his unhappy relationship with his mother and his three divorces. He admitted to Gilbert Ganne that: 'Le mariage [...] c'est un état que je ne supporte pas facilement'<sup>9</sup> and he considered that his difficult relationship with his mother had adversely affected the way he related to women:

Nous sommes ce que notre jeunesse nous a faits. Les rapports anormaux que j'ai pu avoir avec ma mère et avec ma famille ont conditionné toute mon existence et notamment mes rapports avec les femmes.<sup>10</sup>

However, he was exasperated by the charge of misogyny. In *Ce que je crois*, he begins his chapter on women with the words: 'S'il est une légende qui m'agace, c'est bien celle de ma "misogynie"'(p.103).

Bazin insisted that it was not his intention to be critical of the whole female sex but merely to discredit the role of the traditional homemaking wife. He explained to Jacques Jaubert: 'Un grand nombre de mes personnages féminins représentent un type de femme que nous souhaitons ne plus trouver'.<sup>11</sup> In *Ce que je crois*, he elaborated: 'Mariette dans *Le Matrimoine* et Aline dans *Madame Ex* représentent pour moi le genre de femmes que les hommes voudraient bien ne plus épouser. Comme ce type d'inévoluée reste fréquent, j'estime rendre service en le déconsidérant' (p.103). As the term 'inévoluée' suggests, he considered that women who stayed at home were failing to move with the times.

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<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.220.

<sup>10</sup> Zoë Boyer, *op. cit.*, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> *Art. cit.*, p.32.

Bazin was convinced of the necessity of getting women out of the home and into work. In *Ce que je crois*, he asserted: ‘Il n’y a pas de doute, *l’idéal, c’est la femme au travail*’ (p.112). He added:

Qui dit foyer dit flamme...et dit cendre. Mariage, marmite, marmaille et marché, toutes les femmes ne se plaignent pas de ce destin, mais peu s’y épanouissent et beaucoup le trouvent harassant. [...] Avec le travail disparaît le “rétrécissement d’horizon” et deviennent réels la libération, l’indépendance financière, le droit formel au partage des tâches domestiques. (p113)

Here he suggests that a housewife’s existence is both exhausting and limiting and he proposes that women, like men, need the broader horizons that the workplace provides. Bazin admitted that many of his housewife characters were ‘des personnages faits pour être détestés par le lecteur’ whose purpose was to serve as a warning of the effects of confining women to the home: ‘Madame Ex [...] et ses pareilles sont des “femmes-avertissements”’.<sup>12</sup> Bazin’s women may therefore be read as illustrations of the way in which the over-identification of a woman with her domestic sphere leads her to become, at best small-minded, resentful and nagging and at worst a domineering and controlling monster. The effects on their relationships with their husbands is disastrous in both cases. Bazin’s criticism of women may not apply to the whole of their sex, but there can be no doubt of the extent of his critique of conventional female homemakers.

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Jaubert, *art. cit.* p.32.

## **Chapter Five: The Refuge of the Natural World.**

Given Bazin's tendency to portray the home sphere as the scene of territorial conflict in general and female domination in particular it is perhaps hardly surprising that he did not view the indoors in a very positive light. Far from having connotations of restfulness and sanctuary 'home', in Bazin's scheme of things, is a place which often needs to be escaped. When the pressures of home life become overwhelming, many of Bazin's protagonists tend to seek refuge in the natural world. In depicting his characters' response to the outdoors, Bazin assesses the factors which propel them outside but he also affirms the inherent attraction of the natural environment. This, in turn, leads him to reflect more philosophically on the way in which the natural world offers solace for life.

### **A Refuge for Men.**

As we have seen, an essential problem that Bazin's male characters face is that they are sexually attracted to women and are thereby drawn into marriage, described bleakly by Bazin as 'malheureusement inévitable'.<sup>1</sup> However, once married, they find themselves unbearably constrained by their homes and their wives. Bazin's view of the necessity of fleeing outdoors for sanctuary seems, to a large extent, to have been born of his own experience. Macé and Séité quote from a letter written by Bazin in which he describes his need to get out of the house:

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Ganne, *op. cit.*, p.221.

Le dehors a toujours sauvé de la tyrannie du dedans et la famille (cette obligation à demeure) n'est supportable que si on peut la "retrouver": la vivre comme seul profit, seule expansion, c'est la catastrophe.<sup>2</sup>

Bazin's choice of words here is extremely revealing. The association of 'tyrannie' with 'dedans' and 'obligation' with 'demeure' makes it clear that Bazin finds the indoors restrictive. The use of the words 'supportable' and 'catastrophe' also indicate a high level of exasperation with domestic life. The redeeming element in Bazin's appraisal is 'le dehors' as demonstrated by the word 'sauvé'. It is the outdoors which seem to provide the 'expansion' necessary to save the writer from 'catastrophe'.

Many of Bazin's male characters are indeed in catastrophic home situations and flee outdoors to escape the tyranny of their wives. In *Vipère au poing*, Jacques Rezeau and his sons find some respite from Folcoche and the gloomy 'Belle Angerie' by going outdoors on hunting expeditions. They cherish the opportunities for freedom that the hunting season provides; as Brasse-Bouillon comments: 'La saison de la chasse nous était [...] bien précieuse' (p.75). In *L'Huile sur le feu*, Bertrand Colu takes refuge in the outdoors when the provocations of his wife become too much to bear, as he admits to his daughter Céline: 'Quand j'ai la tête qui éclate, [...] quand je rage trop, je fous le camp, je sors, je marche' (p.173). Bertrand's outdoor activities are, in fact, entirely contradictory; he is a fire-fighter and an arsonist, an insurance salesman and a destroyer of property, a watchman and a disguised attacker. The only thing

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<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.40.

that these contrasting activities have in common is that they generate a continual necessity for him to spend day and night outdoors, and in this he finds some relief from the hellishness of home. Myco, the protagonist of the short story 'La Poison' in *Le Bureau des mariages*, is another outdoors refugee. Myco is very unhappy in his marriage to the vicious Céleste and his search for mushrooms in the forest is his means of escape: 'Du premier jour, le couple avait vécu sur le pied de guerre. [...] L'existence devenait intenable et, dès potronminet, Myco filait en forêt' (p.104). In *Madame Ex*, Louis Bretaudeau escapes Aline by occupying himself in the garden. Ill at ease in the home with a wife whom he ultimately divorces, he makes the outdoors his responsibility. As his friend Gabriel observes, when he returns to the house with Louis after his separation: 'On voit que l'extérieur, c'était ton domaine' (p.45). This statement holds true for most of Bazin's male characters, who make the outdoors their domain and their bolt-hole.

The usefulness of the outdoors as a male refuge lies in the fact that it holds so little appeal for Bazin's married female characters. The Rezeau men know that they are safe from Folcoche in the woods, because she dislikes getting caught in the undergrowth: 'Folcoche ne s'y hasardait jamais: elle craignait trop pour ses bas' (p.75). Folcoche's disregard of the outdoors is made most manifest in *Cri de la chouette*, when she has the majority of the trees on the estate felled for cash. At her behest, the parkland is reduced to a 'désert' (p.147) the scene of a 'massacre' (p.147). In *Qui j'ose aimer*, Isa's mother Belle is also no country lover. Isa describes Belle as a 'citadine d'instinct' (p.28) who has 'peu de goût'



(p.28) for the country setting of 'La Fouve'. Pierre Moustiers sees Belle as the literary descendant of Folcoche in this respect:

Belle n'a pas de terre chevillée au corps. En matière de génèse littéraire, il serait intéressant de débrouiller les fils qui rattachent Belle, mère d'Isa, à Folcoche, mère de Brasse-Bouillon. Celle-là passive et tendre, vénusienne à souhait est un peu l'antidote de celle-ci qui s'affirme dans l'agressivité mais l'une et l'autre se rejoignent sur un point: l'indifférence à l'égard de la terre.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the great differences of character between Folcoche and Belle, they share a total disregard for the pleasures of the natural world.

Distaste for rural life may have originated with Folcoche, but it was a trait which was to characterise most of the wives in Bazin's novels. In *Le Matrimoine*, Abel's wife, Mariette, appears to have no need of the natural world. She has been born and brought up in Angers and is unfamiliar with the countryside. Furthermore, once her first child has been born, she seems to settle contentedly into an entirely house-bound existence. As Abel puts it: 'Mariette est devenue une de ces femmes invisibles comme en ont la moitié des Angevins, une de ces femmes bloquées dans le champ de gravitation intense de la famille' (p.287). The use of gravitational imagery here strikingly conveys the extent to which Mariette is confined to the indoors. In *Cri de la chouette*, Jean Rezeau's wife Bertille is similarly disconnected from nature. Jean describes her as a 'banlieusarde typique' (p.28) and she is quite unprepared for the remote and wild environs of 'La Belle Angerie': 'Au nez de Bertille je pouvais mesurer à quel point les citadins de banlieue dans leurs maisons pourvues de tout, dans

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<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.135.

leurs jardins peignés, peuvent ignorer la vraie cambrousse' (p.214). This picture of women as highly domesticated creatures for whom the natural world has no appeal reappears in a brief cameo portrait in *L'Église verte*. Godion describes his sister-in-law in the following terms:

Elle m'a laissé entendre qu'elle deviendrait volontiers la belle-mère de sa nièce. Connaissant [...] ses habitudes citadines, son incapacité à chausser des bottes et à comprendre qu'on s'exténue à produire ce qu'on trouve au supermarché, j'ai décliné cette offre raisonnable, qui lui aurait assuré une maison de campagne en m'obligeant huit mois sur douze à vivre en ville. (p.232)

It is no surprise that the country-loving Godion has turned down the offer of marriage.

The reason why married women are so often disconnected from the outdoor world is, to some extent, explained by Odile in *Madame Ex*. Odile contrasts her freedom as an unmarried woman, when she was Louis's mistress, with her domestic subjugation now that she is his wife:

Sort singulier! Etranges résultats de la dilection. On vous a tant aimée qu'on vous a épousée. Et de ce jour vous voilà servante. Vous étiez la chérie, la mignonne, la choyée, sans charges, sans responsabilités; vous n'aviez à vous occuper que d'un homme, tendre et attentif, mais logé, nourri, blanchi, ravaudé, repassé ailleurs, [...] Et hop! Terminé, ma chère. De celle qui part devenez celle qui reste. Epluchez, cirez, cousez, balayez maintenant. (p.146)

This is the heart of the matter. Married women are so caught up in the ceaseless round of domestic chores, 'épluchez, cirez, cousez, balayer', that the outdoors become an irrelevance to them. The very skills which qualify women to dominate the indoors, also restrict them to it, 'devenez celle qui reste'.

In order to gauge the importance of the outdoors for Bazin's male characters, it is essential to understand the extent of his anxiety about the status of men in the domestic sphere. Bazin considered that men had lost almost all of their prerogatives in the home. The self-sufficiency of a modern woman is such that she can raise her children, run her home, earn a living, and vote for the government without the help of a man. The only function which uniquely falls to the man is the fertilisation of the woman. In *Qui j'ose aimer*, Bazin posits a scenario in which men's contribution is reduced quite simply to their procreative function: 'Car La Fouve, depuis un demi-siècle, c'est une maison de femmes à qui des maris fragiles ou inconstants n'ont su faire, en passant, que des filles' (p.26). In fact, Isa expresses one of Bazin's key anxieties about the status of men: 'Je n'étais pas loin de mettre dans le même sac l'homme, le matou, le père lapin, le coq qui ne pond pas, le bourdon de l'abeille qui ne fait pas de miel, le taureau qui ne donne pas de lait. Personnages épisodiques que tout cela!' (pp.31-32). By means of the matriarchy of 'La Fouve', Bazin suggests that, in a modern society, a man's presence in the home is scarcely required at all. However, in the outdoor world, a man's greater physical strength is of value in subduing the forces of nature. Bazin's portrayal of men in the outdoors therefore tends to focus on their muscular prowess for he considered the outdoors to be the last refuge for this male attribute.

The very different roles that Bazin assigns to the sexes in the natural world can perhaps best be seen in their response to water. Bazin focuses on the fluidity of the female form in the water, and the sensual interplay between the

woman's body and the river. In *Lève-toi et marche*, Constance bathes in the river Marne and the emphasis is on the physical deformities of her nubile body. In the short story 'La Raine et le crapaud', Reine moves through the waters of her river with the ease of a fish, and the narrator concentrates on the litheness of her movement. In *Qui j'ose aimer*, Isa swims naked in the river Erdre, and she describes her body reflected in the water: 'L'eau indiscreète [...] me renvoya l'image, d'un rose sourd, secrètement touché de sombre aux racines des membres' (p.13). This connection between water and femininity seems to suggest a further association of water and motherhood. For both Isa and Reine, their connection with the river results in a child. Isa considers that the river is to blame for having brought Maurice into her life: 'L'Erdre nous avait trahis' (p.37) and her poaching of a pregnant fish from Maurice's section of the river anticipates her own fate. In Reine's case a baby is quite literally born to her across the waters. In both the novel and the short story, Bazin explores the association between water, femininity, and motherhood. In the light of this association, Folcoche's inability to swim may well be particularly significant, indicating her total lack of femininity and maternal instincts.

Where Bazin's female characters have a physical and procreative unity with water, Bazin's portrayal of men's interaction with water is all about dominance. Women bathe, but men pit themselves against the water on boats. In some instances this is done to impress women. Jean Rezeau takes Monique boating on their first date in *La Mort du petit cheval*. Maurice first exerts his sexual attraction for Belle when she sees him in his fishing boat and Joss takes

Gladys boating in *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*. However, in other cases, men use their skill on the water to take or to save life. In *Vipère au poing*, Brasse-Bouillon and his brothers attempt to drown their mother from their boat whereas, in *L'Église verte*, Mutix demonstrates his agility on a river punt to save the elderly Mélanie from drowning in the waters of a flood. The emphasis in all of these situations is on the way in which the men use their physical strength to gain mastery over the water and over the situation.

Part of the attraction of Tristan da Cunha, which Bazin travelled so many miles to visit, lay in the extent to which it was a primitive society still reliant on male physical strength. On Tristan, the strong winds and harsh seas, the isolation and lack of technology meant that male muscle was still essential for the survival of the whole community. However, when the explosion of the volcano on the island forces the Tristans to go into exile in England, the islanders are brought into contact with the European model of society in which brain is of more worth than brawn. In Western society a man finds that, as Bazin put it in *Ce que je crois*, 'sa force musculaire n'en impose plus du tout dans un temps où le moindre moteur fait mieux que lui' (p.151). Consequently, the Tristan men suffer a great loss of status in England, where their physical strength qualifies them only for menial tasks. Simon decides to return to Tristan because to do so will restore his dignity as a physically strong man: 'Je veux retrouver la vie pour laquelle je suis né. Une vie où ce que je sais fait de moi un homme qui compte, au lieu d'un sous-fifre, chez vous' (p.151). Simon here articulates Bazin's own

concern about the diminished status of male physical strength in developed countries.

Bazin uses contrasting boating expeditions in England and on Tristan to drive home the differences between the two cultures. In England boating is a leisurely pursuit, as Joss discovers when he takes his girlfriend, Gladys, out on tranquil waters:

Des dizaines de couples trempaient de la rame dans l'eau, plaquée de mazout, où dérivait des boîtes vides, des bouchons de papier gras. Qu'est-ce qu'il fichait là, tirant sur des avirons de pacotille? L'écume, la vague à vaincre, la vigueur d'une mer qui répond à la vôtre, qui se laisse arracher la subsistance mais non la distraction, le sens même de la course où l'homme vit de son bateau, les risques, les sifflements du vent lui manquaient. L'idée de perdre Gladys [...] l'effrayait moins que celle de perdre sa vie, de patauger pour toujours dans une rivière sale, des routines enfumées (p.167).

The words associated with boating in England convey weakness, tawdriness, and pointlessness: 'trempaient', 'fichait', 'avirons de pacotille', 'patauger', whereas much more vigorous language is used to describe boating off Tristan: 'vaincre', 'vigueur', 'arracher', 'les risques'. The tameness of rowing in a polluted river, compared with the challenge of taking on the seas around Tristan, becomes a metaphor for an overall loss of identity and self-esteem, 'perdre sa vie'. Bazin follows up this passage with an account of Joss taking enormous risks to collect the mail from a passing ship in the seas around Tristan. The significant thing about his feat is the conclusion that he draws from it: 'Rien d'autre à dire. Ce qu'il peut être, il sait seulement qu'il l'est redevenu' (p.171). His demonstration of skill on the sea is more than a mere physical activity, it is a statement of self-identity and of self-worth, a realisation of his full physical

potential as a man, for on Tristan da Cunha, the ability of male Tristans to subdue the rough seas around the island acts as a measure of their masculinity and defines their value to the community.

At the end of the novel, Hugh Folkes is surprised to find that the Tristans have retained their tradition of sending young men in coracle boats on a hazardous twice yearly expedition to the neighbouring island of Nightingale. He learns that they do it to affirm their manhood: 'Est-ce qu'un homme peut se croire un homme en se sentant protégé de tout?' (p.239). The clear implication of Bazin's comparison between Tristan da Cunha and England is that highly technological societies have reduced men's status and self-esteem.

Just as the natural world is found to be the best context for male physical strength, so it also provides men with a place in which to assert themselves sexually. This theme first appears in *Vipère au poing*. Brasse-Bouillon's chosen tree of refuge in the grounds of 'La Belle Angerie', the 'taxaudier', seems to have distinctly phallic associations. Sitting high up in the 'taxaudier' gives the boy an instinctive sense of increased virility and domination: 'Je ne sais pourquoi, mais, perché tout là-haut, je me sens tout autre. Dominant les toits bleus de *La Belle Angerie*' (pp.260-261). Brasse-Bouillon's reflections from the top of the tree soon turn to future sexual conquests: 'Cet avenir, maintenant proche, où je pourrai me planter tout seul dans la terre de mon choix, les idées de mon choix, les ventres de mon choix' (p.261). His sexual ambitions become focused on Madeleine, a local peasant girl, and his 'taxaudier' provides him with a place to assess his chances: 'Maintenant, lorsque je monte au taxaudier, c'est

surtout pour m'interroger sur les résultats de ma cour auprès de la jeune vachère' (p.282).

The natural world not only gives Brasse-Bouillon an increased sense of his own manhood, it also provides him with opportunities to satisfy his sexual appetite. He waylays the young peasant girl in the countryside around 'La Belle Angerie' as often as he can and succeeds in seducing her, away from watchful eyes, 'sous le cèdre, dont les dernières branches retombantes forment une sorte de dais' (p.286). The natural world gives Brasse-Bouillon the necessary scope and privacy for sexual relations which could not be countenanced elsewhere.

There is a disturbing side to Bazin's depiction of male sexual behaviour in the outdoors. The natural world is not the context of pleasant romantic trysts between lovers. Instead it is seen to unleash and accommodate the most primitive male sexual instincts. Brasse-Bouillon regards his relations with Madeleine as serving a purely physical function: 'L'hygiène publique a inventé les crachoirs comme Dieu a inventé les femmes'(p.282). The natural world underlines the essentially animalistic and even squalid nature of their encounters. When Brasse-Bouillon realises that he will soon be leaving 'La Belle Angerie', his sexual drive becomes more urgent and even more basic. He casts any remaining caution and modesty to the winds and has sex with Madeleine in the open air:

Les colchiques, qui flanquent la diarrhée aux vaches, les colchiques mauves de l'automne s'entrouvrent maintenant comme des paupières fatiguées par l'abus du plaisir. Sous ces yeux de filles perdues et sous les yeux du chien de *La Vergeraie*, qui appartient à une race où l'on ne se gêne guère, je fais l'amour en rase campagne.' (p.307)



Brasse-Bouillon's activities here are all too similar in spirit to those of the dog who looks on. The presence of the cow dung reminds us of the basest physical functions, to which this loveless coupling can broadly be equated. Madeleine's complicity and lack of innocence is reflected in the flowers which look like 'les yeux de filles perdues' and which are 'fatiguées par l'abus du plaisir'. In *Vipère au poing*, we find the first signs that the natural world is a refuge for the gratification of lust.

Nineteen years later, Bazin was to revisit this same theme in his novel *Le Matrimoine*. Abel Bretaudeau, who has been feeling increasingly emasculated by the stultifying domesticity of his life with Mariette, finds a new sexual focus in the person of Annick, a young woman at the family seaside party. It is significant that it is in the outdoors that Abel gives in to an unconquerable urge to possess the girl. He notes the effect that the outdoors has in unleashing his most basic sexual instincts:

Voilà un mois que je respire plus court, près d'elle. Dans ce décor sauvage je me sens tout primitif. De ma vie je n'ai eu plus forte envie de plaquer une fille à terre, de l'y accointer, bon gré mal gré, au bénéfice du poids. (p.361)

The wildness of the landscape, described here as 'sauvage', is directly and even causally linked to Abel's altered state. He is now subject to the basic urges which he has apparently managed to keep in check for the past month: 'Je me sens tout primitif'. The vocabulary used to describe the sexual encounter he envisages is all about the assertion of male physical strength, 'plaquer [...] à terre', 'accointer', 'au bénéfice du poids'. He plans to gratify his own physical

desires, and to dispense with the niceties of courtship rituals, or a consideration of Annick's wishes, 'bon gré mal gré'. This is an assertion of male desire and of male strength entirely divorced from any civilising or domesticating influences.

Later in his relationship with Annick, Abel considers possible places in which they can have their assignations. Again he is drawn to the outdoors and, as with Brasse-Bouillon, the connection is made between the outdoors and the animalistic nature of his sexual activities. He refers to the advantages of 'la campagne aux accueillantes haies où, quand il fait beau, quand le paysan ne herse ni ne bine dans le coin, vous pourrez faire ce que l'oiseau, le lapin, le chien errant font librement dans le même cadre' (pp.377-8). The key word here is 'librement'. In the outdoors, Abel feels able to regard his sexual activity as an uncomplicated act, an emulation of wild animals which are not governed by society's sanctions.

The theme of the imprisoning nature of domestic life as opposed to the liberating possibilities of the outdoors is also evoked in this episode. Indeed Abel states: 'Adorable petite pute! Pourquoi faut-il qu'avec toi le monde me paraisse ouvert, quand près de Mariette il me paraît clos?' (pp.381-2) On the one hand, Mariette is associated with the indoors, 'le monde clos', in which Abel experiences domestic constraint, and, on the other hand, Annick is associated with the outdoors, 'le monde ouvert' because, with her, Abel is able to flout sexual boundaries, experience liberation through sexual licence in the open air, assert his male physical dominance and gratify his sexual desires.

Where Bazin had used imagery of enclosure, houses, halls, doors and locks, to express female sexuality, he now uses outdoor imagery to convey male sexuality. The free rein of male sexuality is equated with the liberating nature of wide open spaces. Indeed, the landscape is compared to a woman, lying open to be penetrated. In *Le Matrimoine*, Abel compares the natural world to a female form waiting to be possessed by men. When he analyses the French language he is dismayed by the preponderance of female words, but he notes the phallic significance of the words which have a male gender:

Que la terre, la mer, comme la plaine, soient du féminin, on veut bien: ce sont, à l'horizontale, de grandes fécondes, au-dessus de quoi l'air, le feu, l'arbre, l'oiseau, qui se dégagent à la verticale, sont correctement masculins' (p.384-5).

In *Cri de la chouette*, Jean Rezeau makes a similar point when he remarks that the farmers are the rightful owners of the land technically owned by the Rezeau family: 'Le pouvoir est passé du bailleur au preneur. La terre, comme les femmes, n'est pas à celui qui la possède, mais à celui qui entre dedans' (p.85). Truly to possess the land and truly to possess a woman, a man must penetrate. The way in which men subdue and cultivate nature becomes a metaphor for the male sexual act. Trees, fires, and spades all convey their phallic and penetrative power.

Bazin's depiction of the outdoors counterbalances his portrayal of the indoors. Where women's childbearing and home-making skills give them the advantage in the home, men's greater physical strength gives them an edge outdoors. Married women are essentially confined to the home and so the

outdoor world becomes a place where men can re-engage with their masculinity and sexuality. However there is a dark side to Bazin's depiction of the sexes for he shows the way in which women tend to abuse their husbands indoors and men's sexual drive becomes rather sinister outdoors.

### **A Haven for the Individual.**

Whilst Bazin's portrayal of housewives and married couples tended to focus on issues of confinement and escape, he was also interested in the significance of the natural world for unmarried people. Many of Bazin's single characters are highly self-determining and they seem to use the outdoors to reconnect with their inner selves.

Bazin's single protagonists are essentially introverted, drawing their strength and counsel from within, and the natural world provides a perfect retreat for the purposes of introspection. In *Qui j'ose aimer*, when the unmarried Isa realises that she is pregnant, she knows that she must take some big decisions: 'Il faudrait réfléchir, savoir ce que je veux, ce que je peux encore' (p.285). In order to ponder her situation, she heads outdoors: 'J'oblique vers la motte du cormier, vers mon éternel rendez-vous avec moi-même: le bord de l'Erdre'(p.286). The importance of the Erdre lies primarily in its function as 'mon éternel rendez-vous avec moi-même' and it is significant that Isa feels the need to go out of doors to find herself. In *Au Nom du fils*, the widowed Daniel Astin finds respite in the primitive riverside cottage at Annetz. As with Isa, what draws him particularly is the river: 'Comme beaucoup de gens qui ont toujours

habité près d'une rivière, je sais mal me passer d'eau et la plus belle lumière provençale ne m'en rembourserait pas: mon œil a soif' (p.84). Daniel later explains that Annetz is 'mon isoloir, mon reposoir' (p.228). Astin's rhyming play on these two words emphasises the association in his mind between solitude and restfulness.

The desire of Isa Duplon and Daniel Astin to be alone outdoors to think owes much to the precedent set by the adolescent Brasse-Bouillon, in *Vipère au poing*. Brasse-Bouillon has a particular expression for these moments of inner appraisal: 'Je fais le point' (p.259). He also chooses a place outdoors in which to think, 'sur l'extrême branche de mon taxaudier, qui devient véritablement mon isoloir' (p.260). For Brasse-Bouillon, as for many of Bazin's characters, this process of isolation and introversion is a deliberately outdoors activity:

C'est ridicule, je peux tout aussi bien faire le point ici, dans cette pièce [...]. Je peux, certes: mes idées sont aussi lucides dans ma mansarde que sur la branche balancée à dix mètres du sol par l'éternel vent d'ouest. Mais je ne veux pas. Je ne prends pas de décisions sous la contrainte. Sous la contrainte de ce toit refermé sur moi comme l'accent circonflexe du mot chaîne.' (p.299)

Brasse-Bouillon here makes the point that reflection and introspection are not necessarily outdoor activities. He is as sure of his own mind in his bedroom as he would be up a tree. However, the outdoors provide a more conducive environment for private thoughts, because in the outdoors the individual feels free from the constraining presence of other people.

Many of Bazin's characters' relationships with the natural world are based on a need not only to enjoy, but also to affirm their individuality and this

often involves some form of defiance. In *Lève-toi et marche*, the handicapped Constance seeks to reaffirm her strength of will by defying the restrictive caring of her aunt. She wheels herself out of doors and down to the river Marne for a plunge in the water. She describes her swim as: 'Une expérience intermédiaire entre le bain d'eau de Lourdes et le bain d'Achille' (p.8). She is clearly seeking both healing and strength, and yet she is intelligent and self-ironising enough to know that this swim will not improve her incurable illness. Its benefits are purely psychological. Illness has weakened her self-determination, or as she puts it: 'je me manque'(p.20). The swim therefore allows her to reassert her will over her own life. She uses it to establish herself in her own eyes as a strong character who can and should place her inner strengths at the service of others. This swim marks the beginning of the novel and the start of Constance's battle to wield a positive influence over other people's lives, in spite of her physical weakness.

In other works by Bazin, there is the clear implication that the natural world provides an essential refuge for those who do not conform to society's expectations. In *Le Bureau des mariages*, the short story 'La Raine et le crapaud' features the highly unusual female character, Reine. Reine's unfortunate circumstances have made her something of a pariah. She is the daughter of a water bailiff who has committed suicide. She is extremely ugly and is further disfigured by a hare-lip. She may also be mentally subnormal, for the mayor describes her as 'un peu simple' (p.223). However, Reine has made a haven for herself in the natural world. She lives in a shack on a small patch of firm ground in the middle of a marsh: 'Ce *no man's land* tour à tour annexé par

les joncs ou par l'eau et qui se relève insensiblement pour former une île' (p.225). She subsists by poaching fish with her bare hands. When the mayor throws his niece's illegitimate baby into the river in order to save her reputation, Reine, 'la solitaire, vierge hideuse et mère impossible' (p.230), seizes her opportunity, rescues the child from the water and becomes its adoptive mother. Reine is the first of Bazin's characters to create a life for herself in the natural world completely away from society and its norms. In this respect she anticipates Mutix in *L'Église verte*, who also makes a hideaway on an island in a marsh. The importance of this story lies in its affirmation of the natural world as a legitimate haven for an unorthodox life-style.

Reine is also the literary precursor of Isa, the heroine of *Qui j'ose aimer*. Although, unlike Reine, Isa is a beautiful woman who has conceived her own child, the baby nonetheless places her beyond the pale in society's eyes, for not only is she a single mother, but she has had the child by her step-father. When Isa decides to go through with the pregnancy, her decision is made in the context of her riverside retreat at 'La Fouve', 'défendue par ses halliers de ronces' (p.315). Isa knows that the seclusion of her house in the countryside is such that she will be able to isolate herself almost entirely from the rest of society and, therefore, raise her illegitimate baby in peace and defiance of normal social codes.

The striking thing about Bazin's female characters who find refuge in the natural world is that they are all somewhat unorthodox. In *Cri de la chouette*, the protagonist Céline has quarrelling parents who make her home so intolerable

that, as her godfather, Monsieur Heaume, remarks, ‘tu sèches d’angoisse, chez toi’ (p.283). Her response to this has been rather unusual. She has become a creature of the outdoors and a largely nocturnal one at that. Indeed she is known as ‘la Chouette’ (p.166) because of her tendency to be up and out in the woods, even at night. She finds that the outdoors offer the best means of escape from her troubled home, and describes herself as ‘cette éternelle échappée qui n’avait pas de plus grand plaisir que de galoper dans les champs’ (pp.42-3). Claire Godion, in *L’Église verte*, is another female character who loves to walk in the woods. Where Céline is likened to an owl, Claire is compared to a cat. Claire’s unorthodoxy lies in her decision to avoid lasting relationships with men because she is happier at home with her father. She makes occasional sorties to gratify her sexual desires but never brings her mates home. Hers is a ‘vie-de-chatte, aux longues présences entrecoupées d’absences ambiguës’ (p.20). Both Céline and Claire, like Isa and Reine, have adopted rather idiosyncratic lifestyles.

The key attribute of all of these women who find refuge in the natural world is that they are single. Céline is a pre-pubescent tomboy, Reine’s looks repel men: ‘aucun gars n’en a jamais voulu’ (p.223), Isa rejects Maurice’s offer of marriage and Claire prefers to stay with her father. It is the singleness of these women which permits them to follow unorthodox lifestyles. As Michael Cardy comments:

For the most part, Bazin’s female characters are interesting and/or sympathetic to the extent that they refuse their conventional functions as wife and mother. Rejection, or at the very least stern criticism, of traditional feminine roles constitutes almost a condition of their freedom.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Some Contextual Approaches to Hervé Bazin’s *L’Église verte*’, *Nottingham French Studies* 27, 1988, pp.48-9.



Their singleness also constitutes a condition of their ability to regard the natural world as a refuge for, unlike their married counterparts, they are not beholden to any men nor confined by the housework that this entails.

Mutix, in *L'Église verte*, is perhaps the most extreme example of an unusual character finding refuge out of doors. Mutix's unorthodoxy lies in his determination to be completely independent from the rest of society. To this end, he has shed his name and has chosen to live unknown and unknowable in the sanctuary of the forest. His choice of an anonymous forest existence is a declaration of his right to total self-determination. There he can enjoy 'la fierté d'être autre, de n'appartenir qu'à soi-même et à la nature' (p.248). For Mutix, the natural world provides the perfect context for absolute individualism.

There is evidence that Bazin had some sympathy for Mutix's approach. In *Abécédaire*, under the title 'Individualisme', Bazin laments the swamping of the individual by society:

Individualisme. Il en a pris un coup. On ne peut se défaire [...] de la société. Or, telle qu'elle est aujourd'hui, personne ne me convaincra que ce qui est personnel y a plus d'importance que ce qui est collectif. L'indépendance rustique, l'isolement, l'autosuffisance, l'anachorétisme laïc, le "meditant spectateur du monde" en lui-même retiré [...], voilà qui n'est plus de saison! Nous dépendons bêtement du gaz, de l'eau courante, de l'électricité, de la radio, de la télé, des assurances, de la paperasse, de la banque, de la Sécurité sociale, des allocations, des partis, du téléphone, de notre employeur, des vacances, de la consommation de masse, du logement difficile, des postes, des autoroutes, de la machine à laver, du prix de l'essence, des administrations, des modes, des idées (de plus en plus reçues), de la publicité envahissante... Individualistes, les Français? C'est une vieille légende. (pp.146-7)

Mutix's life-style corresponds to all of Bazin's definitions of individualism; his independence is based on the land, he seeks isolation and self-sufficiency and he is a lay hermit with an unusual view of modern life. The positive gloss which Bazin gives such attitudes is contrasted with the passive helplessness of the majority. All of the enmeshing aspects of society mentioned here are precisely those things which Mutix seeks to avoid. According to Bazin true individualism is at odds with current trends, 'voilà qui n'est plus de saison', 'c'est une vieille légende'. The demise of such individualism explains why Mutix's choices are so out of step with the rest of society and therefore so provocative. It is significant, in the light of this passage, that Mutix's longest exposé of his thoughts should take place during a power cut; an eventuality which illustrates the vulnerability of the irreversibly communal, passively technological society of which he wants no part. Mutix's refuge in the forest accords with a kind of nostalgia for a time when life seemed simpler and human beings could be more self-determining. His escape is therefore a critique of a modern, technological society which necessitates too high a level of social accountability and interdependence and in which the individual counts for little.

In his fictional writing, Bazin was fascinated by the different ways in which individuals shrugged off social conformity in order to retain an unusually close connection with the landscape. All of these different literary endeavours may, in fact, have been rooted in a nostalgia for childhood, for, in Bazin's scheme of things, children are best placed to enjoy the natural world. In Bazin's writing, children are able to participate fully in the outdoors because they are

free from the domestic responsibilities which confine their parents to the home. Furthermore, the countryside particularly attracts children because it provides levels of freedom and self-determination unattainable indoors beneath the watchful eyes of parents. *Vipère au poing* is written from the perspective of a child and, as a result, the parkland around the house features a great deal in the novel. Snake-strangling, tree-climbing, girl-chasing, graffiti-scraping, and boating adventures all allow the children to assert themselves by escaping or resisting parental prohibitions. In a sense, all of Bazin's characters who take refuge in nature are reverting to a child-like state where they can be entirely self-preoccupied and shirk the responsibilities of marriage and domesticity.

In adult life, Bazin's more conventional, married protagonists lament the loss of their childhood connection with the landscape. In *Le Matrimoine*, Abel, hearing of the death of his aunt, returns to 'La Rousselle', the old house near the Loire in which he was brought up. As he approaches the house, he remembers his childhood interaction with the landscape:

Ce lacis de vicinales, qui se faufile à travers un lacis de bras d'eau bordés de cannes [...] ma tante m'y a, enfant, cent fois promené. C'est par là que plus tard, sur sa barque plate, j'allais ramasser, nid après nid, des colliers d'œufs d'effarvatte. Suis-je revenu assez crotté de ces prés bas, rongés de petit jonc, hérissés de têtards d'osier, creusés de nappes imprécises où marine, en été, sous le nénuphar et la canetille, une purée de feuilles qui sent son roui. (p.235)

The countryside here becomes superimposed with memories of different periods of his childhood, his many walks as a very small boy with his aunt and his punting expeditions when older. The memories have a physical immediacy. He remembers each type of plant that clung to his clothes and the musty smell of

the rotting leaves. This lyrical description of the outdoors is the only one of its kind in the novel and, as such, its impact is all the greater, for most of the action is set in Abel's marital home in Angers. This one visit to 'La Rousselle' serves to remind Abel of exactly what he has had to sacrifice in marrying the urban Mariette: 'Ces arbres, ces champs, cette maison, tout me raconte ma jeunesse, tout me dit aussi que j'en ai décroché' (p.239). The landscape here acts as a reminder of a childhood intimacy with the countryside which the requirements of adult domestic life entirely exclude.

The importance of the landscape in much of Bazin's writing is in fact due to this very connection with childhood. Although the countryside features a great deal in *Vipère au poing*, the lyrical tone usually associated with nature in Bazin's writing is notable for its absence. Brasse-Bouillon is unsentimental and indeed critical of 'ce coin de terre glaise'(p.16) in which he finds himself. However as Jean Rezeau grows older, he becomes nostalgic for his youth, and the landscape in which he grew up becomes imbued with a new importance because of its power to summon up the past. As he explains in *Cri de la chouette*:

Le lieu où nous avons ouvert les yeux sur le monde, il est irremplaçable. Le quitter, c'est nous dénoyauter de notre enfance et cela nous devient d'autant plus difficile que nous avançons en âge, que l'approche de nos fins raréfie nos recommencements. (p.282)

When Jean Rezeau takes leave of his childhood home for the last time before its sale, it is striking that his nostalgic feelings are directed towards the grounds rather than towards the house: 'Jamais la baraque ni son contenu ne m'ont

beaucoup importé. C'est dehors que je fais un dernier tour' (p.281). In Bazin's writing it is the natural world and not the domestic interior which reconnects the individual to his or her childhood.

In *Cri de la chouette*, Bazin uses one particular incident to illustrate the power of the landscape to conjure up the past. The three Rezeau sons, now middle-aged, are summoned back to Soledot to sign 'La Belle Angerie' over to Jean. Each of them independently decides to go back to the old house, each directs his steps not towards the buildings, but into the grounds. As Folcoche later puts it, 'ils sont allés godailler dans le parc pour raviver leurs souvenirs' (p.151). The three men instinctively make their way to the river's edge where their old boat is moored and at once a spell is cast:

Ainé, cadet, benjamin n'ont pas d'âge; les années, les situations, les apparences, les intérêts perdent leur sens, leurs poids. Les trois frères sont au bord de l'étang [...] ils viennent d'apercevoir le bateau. Leur vieux bateau. (p.149)

Once in the boat, the men are transported back into childhood:

Nous voilà, quinze fois pères à nous trois, mais pleinement dans l'enfance, debout et les jambes écartées, qui appuyons, hilares, avec un bel ensemble sur la gauche, puis sur la droite. (p.150)

The river and the boat have plunged them fully into the past, they are 'pleinement dans l'enfance'. The synchronisation of the Rezeau men's instincts is all the more remarkable because they have had almost nothing to do with one another for twenty years. Indeed the only thing that they have in common is a shared nostalgia for the landscape of their youth. As the narrator remarks: 'Personne ne parle. Qu'aurions-nous à dire, nous qui n'avons rien de commun

qu'une évocation ?'(p.150). The river landscape has become the only refuge of the Rezeau's collective past and its effect on the three men proves its power to put them back in touch with their childhood.

Bazin's accounts of boating expeditions at 'La Belle Angerie' probably represented an attempt to record and conserve his own childhood memories. In a section entitled 'Bateau' in *Abécédaire*, Bazin explained that his fondness for river landscapes in his novels was essentially nostalgic:

La rivière était nôtre, des deux bords, depuis le pont de la route de Chazé jusqu'au barrage sec en été, bouillonnant en hiver. Ramant peu, godillant davantage et surtout piquant la perche dans la vase, [...] nous en avons fait des kilomètres, entre des berges chevelues, trouées par les rats d'eau, et sous d'incertaines passerelles faites d'un tronc jeté en travers! Nous en avons reniflé de l'air de marais, sentant la sauvagine, le poisson, l'herbe rouie! Je ne pardonnerai jamais au Génie rural d'avoir passé ce paysage au bulldozer. [...] Et qu'on ne me demande pas pourquoi dans mon œuvre figure tant d'eau lente, scellée de nénuphars...! (pp.43-44)

The Rezeau trilogy had in fact become the last refuge of the river landscapes of Bazin's youth, for they no longer existed in reality. For Bazin, the immortalising of such places in his writing was the only way of preserving their power to summon up his childhood past.

Throughout his fictional writing, Bazin establishes the different ways in which individuals use the landscape to reaffirm their individuality. The countryside affords them respite for reflection and introspection, and it may also provide a more lasting refuge for highly self-determining and even unorthodox behaviour. The natural world also has the power to remind Bazin's characters of their formative childhood years when their relationship with the outdoors was unimpeded by the demands of adult life.

## **Solace for Life.**

Thus far, we have considered the way in which the natural world provides places of retreat for Bazin's characters, enabling them to get away from their troubled homes, and find the solitude that they need for reflection, and even unorthodoxy. However, although the outdoors is a highly effective 'isoloir' Bazinian characters are not merely driven outdoors, they are drawn to it. Bazin suggests that the natural world is a source of solace in its own right. He examines the ways in which the natural world can exert a soothing influence and he draws some philosophical conclusions about its significance for human beings.

Bazin's personal enthusiasm for the natural world is well documented. In his interview with Jean-Claude Lamy, he described himself as a countryman, 'un campagnard qui fuit le béton', and a nature lover, 'un familier de cette vague entité qu'on appelle (en ville) la nature'.<sup>5</sup> Bazin combined his love of the countryside with a lifelong study of it. Drawing on his natural sciences degree, he followed in his father's footsteps as an amateur biologist. Under the heading 'Amateurisme' in *Abécédaire*, he refers to his expertise as a collector of shells, his years as an amateur astronomer and his 'thèse insolite, une *Flore toponymique*' (p.22). All of these activities indicate the extent to which Bazin was absorbed by the natural world.

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<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.56.

For Bazin, nature provided solace precisely because its detailed complexity demanded attention. Bazin was never afraid to use precise botanical names and terms in his novels. Marie-Rose and Marguerite-Cécile Albrecht, who make a study of Bazin's descriptions of nature from a botanical point of view, praise his œuvre as 'un catalogue arboricole, floral de haute spécificité et grande qualité'.<sup>6</sup> In the section entitled 'Nature' in *Abécédaire*, Bazin asserts that his concern for terminological accuracy is not pedantry, but proof of close observation. It is the sign of a relationship of engagement and interest in the natural world:

Qui ne serait gêné de ne pouvoir mettre un nom sur quelqu'un qui lui parle? Je le suis tout autant devant l'oiseau inconnu qui chante pour l'entourage – donc pour moi –, comme devant le champignon qui a pris la peine de se soulever à mes pieds. Sèche, la nomenclature, sans doute! Mais le mot renvoie au cri, à l'odeur, à la couleur, à la forme, à la course, à la trace. Je nomme. Je suis ce familier qui tutoie la vie en sa diversité. (p.177)

For Bazin, the act of naming a plant precisely is part of the process of appreciating it.

However, Bazin also drew a more emotional form of solace from the natural world. In *Abécédaire*, under the heading 'Volubilis', Bazin pays tribute to the convolvulus:

En août, en septembre, chaque matin, c'est un ravissement: fleurissent à foison les grandes ipomées bleues (dont la corolle, véritable entonnoir d'azur, peut avoir dix centimètres de diamètre et qui sont, curieusement, proches parentes d'un légume tropical, la patate douce). Entortillés sur le tronc de mes jeunes pommiers, ces liserons royaux triomphent dans l'éphémère: à midi tout est flétri. Mais le lendemain matin, à l'aurore, le

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<sup>6</sup> Marie Rose Albrecht and Marguerite Cécile Albrecht, 'Le Sentiment de la nature dans l'œuvre de Hervé Bazin', in *Hervé Bazin: Actes du Colloque d'Angers du 11 au 13 décembre 1986, op. cit.*, pp.165-6.



miracle se renouvelle: c'est le plus fragile, c'est le plus obstiné défi que la beauté, durant toute une saison, lance contre la mort. (p.270)

This passage is typical of Bazin's approach when describing the natural world. His scientific grasp of what he is describing is clear from his use of botanical terms, 'volubilis', 'ipomée', 'corolle', and his awareness of the plant's place in the wider scheme of nature, 'proches parentes d'un légume tropical, la patate douce'. Allied to Bazin's botanical accuracy, is his determination to describe the flower as accurately as possible, 'entonnoir d'azur', 'dix centimètres de diamètre' and to be precise about its flowering season and growing habit: 'en août, en septembre', 'à l'aurore', 'à midi', 'entortillés sur le tronc'. Yet this fairly scientific approach in no way diminishes Bazin's emotional response to the flower. He is deeply moved by its beauty: 'c'est un ravissement', 'ces liserons royaux triomphent', 'le miracle se renouvelle'. Bazin draws solace from the beauty of a flower which is so intense and yet so short lived: 'le plus obstiné défi que la beauté, durant toute une saison, lance contre la mort' (p.270). The dominant tone of this passage, expressed in both scientific and literary language, is one of awe. The beauty of the natural world seems to provoke wonder at the mystery of life itself. Although the convolvulus does not overcome the power of death, its defiance nonetheless prompts great joy and admiration from Bazin.

Bazin passes on to many of his protagonists his knowledgeable enjoyment of nature. The natural world provides his characters with a stimulating *délassement* from the rigours and monotony of their everyday lives. They immerse themselves gladly in the study of different aspects of the natural world

and their hobbies distract them from the worries of their existence. In *Vipère au poing*, Jacques Rezeau, who was based on Bazin's father, is a proficient naturalist. He is fascinated by astronomy, tree, plant and sea species and his favourite hobby is the classification of flies. His fly-collecting distracts him from his unhappy home. In the short story, "La Poison", Myco's interest in mushrooms sustains him in his life with the dreadful Céleste. He is an amateur mycologist who delights in the exactitude of mushroom identification:

Le père Lormel disait des russules et non des 'verts', des clavaires et non des 'cornes de cerf', des psalliotes et non des 'boules de neige'. Ce faune connaissait par cœur son *Petit Atlas illustré des champignons de France*. (p.101)

Bertrand Colu evades his miserable home and his own criminal activities through bee-keeping, Gérard Laguenière finds distraction from his unsatisfactory marriage in his shell-collecting, and Éric Alleame's interest in the stars provides a rare break from his work. One of the chief joys of Jean-Luc Godion's retirement is his walks in the woods with his daughter and godson: 'Des longues randonnées dans ces bois où nous sommes parfois des cueilleurs de simples, de bolets, de framboises, de noisettes, mais surtout des *voyeurs*. [...] qui se réjouissent seulement d'identifier cent variétés de papillons, d'oiseaux, de rongeurs' (p.7). For Bazin's characters, the natural world provides solace from everyday concerns because it is an unfailing source of fascination, a huge encyclopaedia of living organisms to be observed, understood, collected and named.

However, Bazin also imparted to his protagonists a capacity for a more lyrical response to the outdoors. The natural world not only provides his

characters with an intellectual diversion, it also offers emotional balm. Bazin's men and women are invariably in situations of conflict, either within themselves or with others. However the natural world uniquely has the power to break into their consciousness and still their inner turmoil because they become caught up in the beauty and complexity of the natural scene before them.

Isa's experience of the river Erdre in the early morning after she has lost her virginity to Maurice is a particularly good example of the soothing effect of nature on a Bazinian protagonist. She has spent a sleepless night, numb and tense with self disgust: 'J'étais bien restée comme une bête, les dents, les poings, les paupières serrés, incapable de bouger, de penser, de comprendre' (p.172). As soon as morning comes, she rushes outdoors and explains that this response has been quite instinctive: 'Si j'allais, sans hésitation, vers la rivière, je n'y avais pas réfléchi une seconde' (p.173). The depth of her attachment to the natural world is such that, when in need of solace, she does not even have to think about where to find it. Immediately she begins to feel the beneficial effects of the natural world: 'L'aigreur de l'air, assortie à la vivacité des oiseaux, au fil coupant de l'herbe me fit du bien' (p.173). There then follows a description of the river which is minutely observed and rapturous, as Isa is moved by the beauty of what she sees.

When Isa describes the river, there is a distinct change of tone from her usual narrative style. Her self-preoccupation and cynicism are suspended and she becomes reverential and tender. This sudden change of tone conveys the powerful effect that the scene has upon her:

Un moutonnement blanchâtre dévalait les pentes jusqu'à l'Erdre, bourrait de coton les clairières cernées d'arbres frileux repliés dans leurs branches. L'Est, encore sans sommeil, envahissait rapidement le ciel décoloré, d'où la lumière ricochait de nuage en nuage, pour retomber de très haut, froide et pure, aspirée avec de grands cris par la ronde des premiers martinets. (p.173)

A fleur de berge, l'Erdre filait, étirant rudement des cheveux d'algue parmi les pialements des effarvates depuis peu revenues et disloquant des loques de brumes, des gazes, des fumées mouvantes où se camouflait l'élan d'une jeune armée de roseaux. (p.174)

Isa responds to the quality of the air, to the changes in the cast of natural light and to the precise shades of colour in the landscape. She distinguishes between the sounds made by the different species of birds. She details the plants, and animals, observing how the plants grow and how the birds and animals move, noting how the algae is parted by the river and how the birds slice up the mists with their flight. The accuracy of the scene is coupled with an acute awareness of its appeal, and this is expressed in poetic language. The trees are personified as 'frileux', wrapping their branches around them, the eastern light invades the morning sky, and the algae is likened to tresses of hair parted by the waters. The reeds are camouflaged by the mist and their serried ranks suggest the comparison with an army, but they also have charm, they are 'jeunes' with 'élan'.

Macé and Séité suggest that Isa's response to the landscape is typical for a Bazinian protagonist:

Il arrive [...] que l'ironie, presque toujours réservée dans l'œuvre aux êtres humains, disparaisse d'elle-même: le masque tombe et la sensibilité de l'auteur se laisse voir. Cet abandon, Hervé Bazin l'éprouve sans réserve lorsqu'il évoque la nature [...] Alors surgissent un nouveau langage, un écrivain nouveau [...] une sensibilité en éveil qui participe de

toutes ses fibres à la vie de la nature [...] et nous livre ainsi des pages dans lesquelles transparaît une poésie teintée de fugitives émotions.<sup>7</sup>

This ‘sensibilité en éveil’, this tone of peaceful receptivity to the beauties of nature, leaves the reader in no doubt as to the solace the Bazinian protagonist draws from the natural world.

Clearly, the natural world has the power to alter the mood of a troubled onlooker, but it also serves to put their problems into perspective. The outdoors constitutes an effective refuge for Bazin’s characters precisely because it is in no way affected by the events of their lives. Bazin’s depiction of nature is never anthropocentric and he eschews poetic fallacy. When Isa bathes in the lake after losing her virginity, she is struck by the fact that her own change of state is in no way reflected in the landscape: ‘Le seul sentiment qui m’habitât était une sorte d’étonnement devant un paysage si semblable à lui-même, si fidèle à ce qu’il avait toujours été’ (p.173). The unchanging nature of the outdoors provides a comfortingly fixed point for a girl whose life has just been turned upside down. At the end of the novel, Isa notes that, in spite of the cataclysmic changes in her own life, the river is quite unchanged: ‘Tout près dans un maigre chenal, l’eau glisse, lente, plate, étouffant des miroitements d’étain; et le temps glisse avec elle; et c’est toujours la même eau dans la même rivière’ (p.307). In spite of the major changes of human existence, the natural world can sometimes be relied upon to provide a soothing note of continuity.

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<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.44.

Although many of Bazin's novels celebrate the solace of nature, *L'Église verte*, provides the fullest exploration of this theme. The official view of Mutix, adopted by the press and the local bureaucrats, is that anyone seeking refuge in nature must be mad or bad or both. The local newspaper suggests that his bid to get back to nature is merely a cover for a man who must have something to hide:

En tout cas, s'il ne s'agissait pas d'un malfaiteur en fuite, d'un pilleur, d'un traîneur, d'un étranger douteux, d'un minable cherchant à faire parler de lui, voire d'un malade mental, mieux valait se méfier de la fable du "retour à la nature". (p.53)

The press place Mutix in the tradition of the miscreant using the natural world as a hide-away. The bureaucrats in the novel, Madame Salouinet and Maître Millet, share the newspaper's scepticism about Mutix's motives: 'On ne se terre pas dans les bois sans mauvaise raison' (p.170), and they attempt to pin him down by means of interrogation. The national French press, in their coverage of Mutix's story, suggest that he is simply misanthropic and accuse him of 'désertion de l'espèce' (p.86), an idea which Madame Salouinet adopts enthusiastically. However, Mutix's relationship with Claire and his courageous rescue of 'la tante Mélanie' during the flood all indicate that he is a warm, and even compassionate human being. If Mutix were a criminal or were indeed suffering from some kind of personality disorder, his decision to opt out of society would be less surprising, and less threatening to the status quo. However, his stay with the Godion family serves to establish that he is both law-abiding and normal. His decision to live in the forest is therefore all the more perplexing.

At first sight, it appears that Mutix's recourse to the natural world has much in common with that of other Bazinian characters. Godion believes that both he and Mutix are particularly drawn to the natural world because they have certain similarities of character: 'Aisance du pied, ferveur de druide, compétence zoo-phyto-dendrologique, anorexie sociale et peut-être, plus banalement, le goût d'interloquer' (p.69). He identifies the recourse to the countryside as both a negative and a positive urge. It is driven by a negative propulsion from the irritating presence of other human beings on the one hand, 'anorexie sociale', and a positive enthusiasm for the natural world on the other, 'aisance', 'ferveur', 'compétence'. He also detects in their joint attraction to the outdoors an element of nonconformity, 'le goût d'interloquer'. In all these respects Mutix and Godion's response to the landscape has much in common with most of their Bazinian forbears.

However, Godion is quick to acknowledge that the similarities between himself and Mutix should not detract from the important differences between them. Although Godion is very appreciative of the natural world, he remains an active and fully integrated member of society. Mutix's response to the natural world is far more radical. In order to find solace and purpose in life, he has decided to disconnect from society, shed his social identity and become subsumed into nature. In this respect he envies the animals who have no awareness of their individuality in the first place: 'Un corbeau a de la chance [...] Il est si peu lui-même, il est tellement corbeau qu'il peut revenir percher demain sur une autre branche ou disparaître sans que personne ne s'en

aperçoive' (p.225). Where Godion enjoys the natural world for the purposes of recreation, Mutix seeks to bond himself to it absolutely.

All of Bazin's characters find relationships difficult and need the peaceful solitude that nature provides, but Mutix is the only one to give up entirely, even on some apparently promising relationships with Godion and Claire, and determine to have nothing further to do with other people. There are hints in the text that Mutix's need for the solace of nature is proportional to the unhappiness that he has experienced in his family life. When Inspecteur Ricat reveals Mutix's true identity in the penultimate chapter of the novel, he also sheds light on Mutix's exceptionally miserable childhood: 'Humilié, renfermé, malheureux d'exister, se mettant lui-même en quarantaine' (p.238). The inspector considers that Mutix's actions have been principally reactions to his home situation: 'votre anonymat, j'en suis persuadé, est à la fois pour vous un recours et une revanche' (p.236). Mutix's adoption of the solace of nature can only fully be understood in the light of his past suffering.

Throughout *L'Église verte*, Bazin uses religious language to underline the fact that the natural world is able to provide Mutix with the kind of solace normally associated with religion. The title of the novel associates the natural world with a church and therefore suggests that, like a church, it may offer a retreat from the world, a place of sanctuary and peace. Mutix's attempt to retreat into the natural world is continually compared to the activities of Christian hermits and mystics. Mutix is following 'la vocation d'ermite, au sein de la nature' (p.75), his retreat leads him not to the bosom of the father, but to the



bosom of nature. Like the hermits he is seeking absolution, but this is not the absolution bought for mankind by Christ's death on the cross. He is seeking 'l'absolution verte' (p.27), a kind of peace away from the stresses of modern living. As with the mystics of old, Mutix's radical lifestyle has a certain inspirational effect on ordinary people. Godion uses the word 'pèleriner' (p.251) to describe his return to the place where Mutix was first observed and one of the villagers remarks that: 'il restait caché chez vous comme le Saint-Sacrement dans le tabernacle, mais on savait qu'il était là' (p.246).

The comparison between Mutix's presence in the Godions' house and the sacramental presence of Christ in the church is the most extreme example of the way in which Bazin re-deploys Christian language to underscore the spiritual nature of Mutix's retreat into the natural world. Although Bazin had largely abandoned Christian beliefs, a process which he described at length in the first chapter of *Ce que je crois*, he instinctively drew on Christian terminology to create metaphors for the significance of the natural world. As an atheist, he felt that he lacked an adequate alternative frame of reference with which to describe the transcendent importance of the refuge of nature. In his interview with Jean-Claude Lamy, Bazin stated that: 'Surtout, les références, les images, le vocabulaire religieux, sont tenaces. Dans la forêt des symboles dont parle Baudelaire, l'incroyant bûcheronne mal'.<sup>8</sup>

For Bazin, the capacity of the natural world to offer solace was inextricably bound up with its capacity to provide solitude. The extent to which

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<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.144.

he was attracted to unspoilt and isolated landscapes can best be measured by his determination to make the long and difficult journey to Tristan da Cunha. *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* is Bazin's most ambitious attempt to capture an unspoilt natural refuge in literary form. Hugh Folkes, Bazin's narrator, revels in the remoteness of this largely uninhabited island. He asserts that to live there is to enjoy 'le seul luxe d'un espace habité par moins de dix hommes au mille carré, dans l'infini grouillement de la grande saumure' (p.184). Indeed the islands nearby are completely uninhabited. Hugh Folkes makes a brief visit to Nightingale and is delighted because it seems 'voué à l'absence humaine' (p.229). His desire for true solitude in this landscape is so intense that he wishes he could not hear even the sounds of the boats which have carried him there.

Bazin again uses Christian terminology as a way of emphasising the preciousness of the isolation which the island affords. The title of *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* calls to mind the Beatitudes, but here Bazin gives them his own twist; blessed are those who are able to live on the 'île de la Désolation'. In the Beatitudes, a series of different difficulties are described as being blessed because they will lead directly to a heavenly reward. In Bazin's title the apparent difficulties of living on a desolate island are actually redeemed in the here and now. The islanders have already reached the Promised Land for, at the end of the novel, the narrator describes the uninhabited island of Nightingale as 'ce Chanaan de vie sauvage' (p.241). It is precisely the lack of human beings on this island which gives it a kind of purity akin to sanctity, it is 'une sorte de temple hypèthre, voué à l'absence humaine' (p.229).

Bazin's enthusiasm for the solace of solitude in an unspoilt natural setting is matched only by his impatience with the overcrowdedness of so much of the countryside. He is at all times aware of the paradox that in seeking out the restorative aspects of the outdoor world, human beings often spoil the very thing that they have come for. In his view, the natural world ceases to be a refuge if it is subjugated by man. In *Vipère au poing*, Brasse-Bouillon mocked his father's aversion for pleasure beaches when he tells his boys: 'Evidemment, le paysage est bien gâté par les panneaux publicitaires de ces horribles marques d'apéritifs ou par les villas de style américain. Mais vous tâcherez d'en faire abstraction' (p.178). However, in *Le Matrimoine*, Abel Bretaudeau is equally, if not more horrified by the scene at the beach in Brittany where he has joined his wife's family on holiday. Abel regards the over-populated and over-domesticated beach as little more than a theme park for children:

Tout est là: une grève fine comme le talc, nette de franges, s'enfonçant insensiblement dans l'eau; un cadre de granit, peu glissant, creusé de conques à lochettes, crevettes, crabillons; et à gogo des petits bateaux, des pédalos, des toboggans, des concours de châteaux, un minigolf, un poste de secours à bobos, cinq ânes, dix vendeurs de glaces, de bonbons, d'orangeade... O paradis des méragosses! (pp.343-4)

This version of nature is tamed, uninteresting, overcrowded and commercialised.

In *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, Simon remembers, with no affection, the British holiday-makers as 'Les migrants désespérés que les mois d'août massacrent sur les routes et qui s'acharnent sur les pédales, dans l'espoir insensé de retrouver quelque part des lambeaux de nature à souiller de papiers gras' (p.241). Bazin's frustration about the way in which the restfulness of the

natural world is compromised by the presence of hordes of other tourists is also reflected in his choice of a possible quotation, from an anonymous source, for the introductory page of *L'Église verte*:

Le vacancier croit fuir la mégapole: il ne fait que changer de termitière en infestant la mer et la montagne où les média le rattrapent, le regavent de chantaille, de nouvelles et de publicité ... O solitude, partout dévastée comme la nature! Qui n'a, au moins une fois, rêvé de se replier loin du pullulement, du vacarme du monde?<sup>9</sup>

Although this quotation introduces the manuscript rather than the published version of the novel, it nonetheless makes it clear that the ideal and true refuge in Bazin's frame of reference is a natural setting beyond the reach of radio or television, beyond the reach of other holiday-makers and entirely unbesmirched by the polluting presence of man.

Mutix's significance is therefore perhaps symbolic rather than pragmatic. At no point does Bazin suggest that Mutix's lifestyle is a real alternative for Western man. Godion prevents his daughter from running away with Mutix into the forest. In so doing he is acting in his interests as a father but also, in a sense, representing society. The young man's lifestyle is a personal choice born largely out of unusual personal circumstances, 'le choix d'une vie fruste' (p.248); it is considerably less desirable and achievable for Claire. Furthermore, in *Ce que je crois*, Bazin dismisses the back-to-nature movement as an unsustainable aberration: 'L'ambition hippie de retour au primitif n'aboutirait à rien d'autre qu'à l'élimination d'inadaptables (dont la nature n'a jamais été chiche)' p.250. Ultimately Mutix will live and die alone in the forest as an 'inadaptable'.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix, p.xxxvi.

However, Mutix stands for that part of every person who sometimes feels what Bazin regarded as the very legitimate desire to get away from the hue, cry and over-sophistication of modern society and be immersed in the absolute peacefulness of the natural world. As the quotation in the manuscript for *L'Église verte* puts it, 'qui n'a, au moins une fois, rêvé de se replier loin du pullulement, du vacarme du monde?' Bazin is sufficiently realistic to know that those of us who fulfil these urges are one-offs. However, Mutix's decision to take refuge in the natural world is a powerful indictment of modern society and he expresses criticisms which many may feel, but which most are unable to act upon.

Mutix may have over-identified himself with the natural world, but *L'Église verte* also depicts those at the other end of the spectrum who have totally disconnected from nature and who draw no solace from it. Madame Salouinet, the 'juge d'instruction', is the antithesis of Mutix. She is a lady in grey, a model civil servant, the embodiment of social conformity and pedantic bureaucracy. Madame Salouinet is vexed by Mutix's success in resisting society's attempt to classify him and she is determined to thwart his bid for anonymity. Bazin's cameo portrait of her is masterly, conveying the essence of her personality with great precision and economy. As so often, when depicting female characters, he includes a fleeting description of the place in which she spends the most time, in this case her office:

Ce bureau du palais dont les fenêtres donnent sur la place Royale cernée de bâtiments républicains: Centre des impôts, Sécurité sociale, sous-préfecture, tout un pierre-sur-pierre administratif qui n'a de commun avec la campagne que ce qui le domine: un ciel enfin bleu. (p.215)

The view from Madame Salouinet's office elegantly conveys her outlook on the world. It has little 'de commun avec la campagne'. Instead she is entirely focused on the legal and administrative functions of society. Her perspective is as limited as the scene outside her window: 'un pierre-sur-pierre administratif'. The only element linking Madame Salouinet's world with the natural world is the sky above her head, which she is probably too busy to notice. Madame Salouinet is completely disconnected from the natural world and it is therefore small wonder that she is so unsympathetic towards Mutix.

However, Bazin makes it clear that Madame Salouinet is by no means unusual in her disconnection from nature. For many people, the natural world offers no solace because it remains a closed book. Jean-Luc Godion distinguishes between those who respond to the natural world and those who are immune to it. He defines himself and his family as 'des gens qui savent voir, à l'inverse de tant d'autres passant à côté de tout, les yeux ouverts et le regard fermé' (p.7). Godion praises his protégé, Léonard, because 'il a de l'intérêt pour tout ce qu'ignorent les enfants du béton' (pp.66-67). Later he notes: 'Il en savait déjà long, le gamin, bien plus que la plupart des citadins qui, de la Toussaint à Pâques, ne voient plus que du bois debout, dont le port ou l'écorce ne leur apprennent rien' (p.196).

In *Abécédaire*, under the heading 'Sens', Bazin attempted to account for city dwellers' imperviousness to the details of the natural world. Taking the example of his own sons, he asserted that the strong and unequivocal stimuli of

city life had severely reduced their sensory perception and impaired their ability to respond to the subtleties of the natural world:

Il y a perte d'acuité. Que parmi mes fils citadins, pas plus au ramage qu'au plumage, aucun ne soit capable de différencier un pinson d'un mésange, rien d'étonnant. Mais à la violence lumineuse et sonore de la ville leur réponse semble être une certaine nonchalance de l'attention. [...] La remarque s'étend à leur toucher: on dirait qu'ils ont les mains gantées [...] La remarque s'étend à leur goût, standardisé: nous mangions des reinettes ou des calvilles; eux ne mâchent que de la pomme. [...] Tout le monde n'a pas les narines frémissantes de Colette. Mais de l'immense collection des senteurs naturelles peu leur restent sensibles et encore moins identifiables. (pp.227-8)

Bazin here suggests that place determines sensory sophistication. City dwellers only ever have to recognise and respond to crude stimuli, 'la violence lumineuse et sonore', and their senses are therefore under-used. The key word here is 'perte', for they have lost their receptivity to the more finely modulated messages sent out by the natural world, the detail of a feather and the hint of a scent.

Like Godion, Bazin divides his characters into two groups: those who see and appreciate the natural world and those who do not. The majority of Bazin's characters fall fairly categorically into one or other of these camps. Jacques Rezeau sees, Folcoche does not. The adult Jean Rezeau and his son Aubin see, Bertille and her daughters do not. Céline and her father see, Éva does not. Isa sees, Maurice and Belle do not. Abel Bretaudeau has the capacity to see, Mariette does not. Mutix, and the Godions see, Madame Salouinet does not. Furthermore the characters who are endorsed by Bazin, the characters who are given the narrative voice, are invariably those who know how to appreciate the natural world and who draw solace from it. Although Bazin does not advocate

extreme back-to-nature life-styles, he clearly does not favour total disconnection from nature either.

Bazin deliberately polarised Mutix and Madame Salouinet in order to generate debate within his novel. The three meetings between them, during which Madame Salouinet handles Mutix's case, are essentially ideological clashes. The question at issue is the position of the individual vis-à-vis society and the natural world. Mutix considers that he has no obligation to society and that he is perfectly entitled to reintegrate himself fully into the natural world. Madame Salouinet considers his preoccupation with nature to be a form of madness, 'le délire vert' (p.75) and his disdain for society's procedures as a 'monstruosité' (p.217). Mutix and Madame Salouinet's positions provide the kind of 'thèse' and 'antithèse' type of structure which Bazin favoured in his discursive novels, and which he had previously used to great effect in *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*.

If Mutix and Madame Salouinet personify Bazin's 'thèse' and 'antithèse', Jean-Luc Godion most definitely provides his 'synthèse'. Unlike Mutix, Godion does not evade society. His long and successful career as the local primary school headmaster has earned him the respect of the local community. We know that primary school teachers gained Bazin's particular approval, for under the heading 'École' in *Abécédaire*, he affirmed: 'Je ne respecte personne autant que les bons instits' (p.89). Where Mutix simply rejected everything to do with society, Godion seeks to change society for the better by exercising an influence over village affairs as a member of the local council. Bazin wrote *L'Église verte*



at his country home near Châteaurenard where, like Godion, he was also a local councillor. We can therefore assume that Bazin fully approved of Godion's engagement with the community. However, unlike Madame Salouinet, Godion does not take bureaucracy too seriously. Madame Salouinet's thinking is too hide-bound. She is obsessed with conformity, 'être en règle' (p.217), and her preoccupation with a legal career has made her world too small. By contrast, Godion's connectedness to the landscape serves him well, making him precisely the kind of rooted, balanced, thoughtful, and independent-minded person most needed at the grass-roots level of any community. Godion is involved in society, but his love of the outdoors keeps him healthily objective and broad-minded.

For Bazin, the solace of nature gives individuals an essential perspective on their lives and valuable insights into society, but it does not constitute a viable alternative to normal social interaction. Godion represents the golden mean between Madame Salouinet who has no sympathy for the natural world and the excessively escapist Mutix. There is every reason to suppose that Godion's attitude to the natural world corresponded to Bazin's. Michael Cardy points out the affinities between Godion and the author: '[Godion] is *privileged*, in that he [...] partakes of the novelist's own consciousness and enjoys the benefit of his language. The eyes and above all the voice of the narrator are largely those of Bazin himself'.<sup>10</sup> Godion expresses Bazin's own balanced approach to the solace of nature.

Another key feature of Godion's relationship with the natural world is that

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<sup>10</sup> *Art. cit.*, pp.46-47.

he shares Bazin's interest in cultivation, he has a 'main de jardin' (p.93). As Godion puts it: 'Sauvage ou domestique, la nature ce Janus, j'en aime les deux aspects' (p.93). Godion's description of the way in which he cares for his apple trees shows his *savoir faire* in the garden:

Mes arbres, ils sont bêchés au pied, fumés, grattés, maintenus à la hauteur et à la forme voulue par le sécateur à ficelle, défendus contre les parasites aux huiles blanches, aux huiles jaunes, à la bonne vieille bouillie qui protège aussi ma treille et qui bleuit le mur derrière elle. (pp.92-93)

This passage is very similar to Bazin's description of his own activities in the garden at 'Le Grand Courtoiseau' at the time of writing *L'Église verte*:

La taille en sec d'hiver, la taille en vert d'été, variables selon l'espèce hâtive ou tardive, la marcotte en butte ou en panier, la greffe en écusson, en fente, en couronne, les boutures, c'est fou ce qu'un jardinier doit savoir faire.<sup>11</sup>

Both Godion and Bazin express their love for the natural world not only in their familiarity with the forest but also in their competence in the garden. In his interview with Jean-Claude Lamy, Bazin expressed his excitement at the creative possibilities that are unleashed when human beings husband nature:

C'est l'aspect créatif, à partir de presque rien, qui m'excite. Vingt centimètres de tige plantée en temps utile et qui redonne un rosier, c'est un peu Eve tirée d'une côte d'Adam.<sup>12</sup>

This sense of the joys of cultivation permeates *L'Église verte*. Godion sows his corn salads, harvests his chicory, picks his apples for cider from his orchard, sets up tables of birdfeed, prunes and sprays his fruit trees and plants artichokes,

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<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp.55-56.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56.

courgettes, tomatoes, cabbages, lettuces and celery. The rhythms of the garden punctuate his year.

Godion's garden is a source of solace to him. Its requirements override the other sorrows and disappointments in this widower's life, such that he is by far Bazin's most serene narrator. Zoë Boyer describes him as: 'Moins fougueux et beaucoup plus raisonnable que le héros-narrateur du cycle Rezeau, moins faible mais aussi lucide que les héros baziniens d'*Au nom du Fils*, du *Matrimoine*, et de *Madame Ex*'.<sup>13</sup> On the anniversary of his wife's death, Godion has, as usual, been working in his garden. He explains that to observe and participate in the fresh growth of plants from year to year gives him a sense of personal renewal: 'Le vieil homme que je suis, avec fleurs et légumes, grâce à lui répétant de la vie nouvelle, *se sent repousser* chaque année au jardin'(p.19). Despite bereavement and the prospect of his own death, Godion draws solace from his plants.

To the French mind, the notion of drawing solace from cultivating a garden immediately suggests Voltaire's *Candide*. In his interview with Jean-Claude Lamy, Bazin affirmed that he had 'un vrai coup de cœur pour la main de la fée Chlorophylle! Et tant pis si cela fait *Candide*!'.<sup>14</sup> Here Bazin shows his debt to Voltaire's thinking. In the absence of a Christian God and in the presence of the real and insoluble problem of evil and pain in life, man must seek to make the best of life and draw satisfaction from it where he can. For

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<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.217.

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.55.

Bazin, solace and meaning in a godless world were best derived from an active enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world.

### **Conclusion.**

The natural world introduces such serenity as is to be found in the writing of Hervé Bazin. The home situations in Bazin's novels invariably produce acute interpersonal stress, and Bazin's characters flee these tensions by escaping out of doors. Furthermore, the natural world restores the dignity of the harassed, marginalised and emasculated Bazinian male. In the natural world men assert their virility in manly pursuits. The natural world is also a refuge because it provides the most effective decompression chamber in which the narrators can finally be alone, and at peace to commune with their own thoughts and it sometimes gives them the leeway to reject conventional lifestyles. However, the natural world is a source of fascination and wonder in its own right. Its beauty and complexity draw Bazin's characters out of their self-absorption and into an active and stimulating engagement with the flora and fauna around them. Although Bazin had a post-Christian world view, he used the language of Christian piety to express the spiritual satisfaction and solace which only the natural world could provide.

Indeed, the natural world can be seen as a kind of index of serenity in Bazin's writing as a whole. In those novels in which the natural world features little, the Bazinian protagonist is afforded scant relief from the dramas of his or her life. In novels such as *Lève-toi et marche*, *Le Tête contre les murs*, *Un Feu*

*dévore un autre feu* and *Le Neuvième Jour*, the emphasis is on the dilemmas and infirmities of the protagonists for whom there is no relief and ultimately no escape. Constance dies a disappointed woman, Arthur Gérane awaits death, paralysed in a mental hospital, Manuel can only leave his hiding place to meet the firing squad and Eric Alleaume battles hopelessly in his laboratory against the very virus which he has unleashed upon the world, before succumbing to his own death from cancer. The natural world also features little in novels such as *Le Matrimoine*, *Madame Ex*, and *L'École des pères* which are intensely and even claustrophobically focused on the trials and tribulations of domesticity and the marital state. In all of these novels Bazin's pessimism is manifest and his anxieties dominate.

By way of contrast, however, novels in which the natural world features strongly often portray individuals triumphing over their circumstances, empowered by their closeness to nature. In *Cri de la chouette*, Jean Rezeau reaffirms his love of the Bocage countryside before laying his mother, and the demons associated with her, finally to rest. *Au Nom du fils* is a declaration of new love for a son and a celebration of the joys and sorrows of fatherhood. In *Qui j'ose aimer*, Isa successfully asserts her right to live at peace in her matriarchy on the banks of the river Erdre. *L'Église verte* depicts the individual appeal of the natural world as a forest haven for the misanthropic Mutix and the widowed Godion, and in *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, the natural world of a secluded island offers a collective retreat for a society determined to escape consumerism. All of these novels offer some kind of optimistic vision. In each

case the protagonists find a new and satisfying way of life and their satisfaction, contentment and ultimate serenity owe much to the natural world. We therefore conclude that the natural world is a key redemptive element in Bazin's writing. Not only does the natural world bring relief from the besetting difficulties of the home, it also seems to activate reverence for life itself and positivity about how life might ideally be lived.

## Chapter Six: Man's Place.

### The Preciousness of the Earth.

Thus far we have considered the ways in which Bazin himself and the characters he created reacted to the places in which they found themselves. The prevalence of certain types of response has allowed us to detect specific themes throughout Bazin's novels. However, it is now time to consider not only the implicit emotional significance of place for Bazin, but also its explicit and intellectual significance.

It is impossible to give a full account of Bazin's treatment of place without referring in detail to two works in which he departed from the novel form in order to express his key concerns more overtly. For different reasons, these books, and the ideas about place contained within them, have not received the attention that they deserve. In 1977, Bazin published a volume in the series *Ce que je crois* which, although close to his heart, did not sell well. As he said to Jean-Claude Lamy: 'Mes recueils de poèmes, qui les a lus? Et mes essais, comme *Plumons l'oiseau* ou *Ce que je crois* (auquel je tiens beaucoup)?'<sup>1</sup> Bazin believed that the public was deterred by his departure from the novel form. *Ce que je crois* has also tended to be ignored by critics of Bazin who, if they refer to it at all, do so only in passing. In terms of its content, *Ce que je crois* bears closest resemblance to a second work, *Abécédaire*, published in 1984. Both books were constructed on the basis of jottings collected over many years, but

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.106.

*Abécédaire* proved to be more popular with both readers and critics. Its alphabetical format is more playful and entertaining, allowing for a rag bag juxtaposition of reminiscences, word-play, emotional outbursts, and philosophical ruminations in quick succession. The different entries are by turns caustic, nostalgic, sentimental, factual, wistful and angry. However, the light-hearted approach, varied tone, and fragmentary structure have perhaps diverted readers from the joined-up thinking contained within it. When *Ce que je crois* and *Abécédaire* are read in conjunction with one another they present a startlingly complete worldview, for all of Bazin's thinking leads him to the veneration of a place. The dominant notion throughout is the preciousness of the earth, a planet as unique as it is vulnerable.

Earth gained in importance for Bazin because he had abandoned the Catholic faith of his childhood. According to Bazin there is no God and, therefore, no heavenly kingdom or recreation of a new heaven and a new earth. 'Paradis' in *Abécédaire* is defined pithily in just three words: 'Entièrement redevenu terrestre' (p.189). The effect of this knowledge for Bazin is to intensify his experience of life. In *Abécédaire*, under the title 'Résurrection', he remarks: 'Qui ne craint pas d'enfer ni n'espère aucun paradis éprouve moins d'angoisse devant la mort, mais davantage devant la vie' (p.215). The fact that man's consciousness is confined to his physical life must surely sensitise him all the more to the experience of life on earth. Just as the earth alone encompasses our life, so it also enshrines our death. Under the heading 'Lune', Bazin describes the earth as our final resting-place: 'La Terre est un cimetière' (p.159). He



elaborates on this idea later, describing the earth as a vast city of the dead, a 'nécropole': 'la terre est tapissée d'une épaisse couche de mort en même temps que de vie ressuscitée' (p.178). For Bazin, the only afterlife for man is for his body to be reincorporated into the soil and thence back into fresh life forms on earth. Speaking to Jean-Claude Lamy, Bazin said that he would not be buried in the family vault for this reason: 'Mieux vaut, gaz et poussière, retourner directement à la nature, devenir alluvion qui fera pousser de l'herbe'.<sup>2</sup> The earth then is the unique setting of man's life and his death.

Another factor which makes the earth precious for Bazin is the fact that he believed it gave rise to human beings in the first place. He was knowledgeable about the natural sciences and was particularly well-informed about developments in biology and astronomy. In fact, he saw himself as a biologist or astronomer *manqué* and, in his concluding entry in *Abécédaire*, he confesses: 'J'aurais aimé être astronome. J'aurais aimé être biologiste' (p.283). In a press interview to promote *Ce que je crois*, he declared that the book had given him an opportunity to draw on his scientific background:

La culture scientifique par exemple ne transparaît guère dans mes romans. J'ai pourtant préparé d'abord une licence de sciences naturelles, avant de passer à une licence ès lettres [...] j'ai toujours été fêru d'astronomie [...] je suis de très près les travaux des biologistes. La science m'intéresse surtout pour les éléments de réflexion qu'elle fournit.<sup>3</sup>

It is precisely this astronomical and biological knowledge that gave Bazin such a deep reverence for the way in which life developed on earth. Having established

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<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.143.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Deligny, 'Hervé Bazin: "Ai-je loupé ma vraie carrière?"', *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 17-23 November 1977, p.5.

his lack of belief in God in the first chapter of *Ce que je crois*, Bazin devotes his second chapter to scientific theories as to how life may have evolved on earth. The point which he is at pains to establish, is the extraordinary combination of astronomical and biological factors which enabled the earth to come alive. In a shorter account in *Abécédaire*, entitled 'anthropique', he emphasises the uniqueness of the earth: 'non seulement habitable, mais probablement le seul à pouvoir l'être parmi tous les mondes possibles' (p.29). The fact that so many different factors should have been present on earth to allow man to evolve makes the planet a source of wonder for Bazin: 'Nous sommes et c'est sûrement une chance exceptionnelle'.<sup>4</sup>

However, Bazin's understanding of the process of evolution leads him to reject an anthropocentric view of the earth's significance. In *Abécédaire*, under the heading 'Absurde', he points out man's growing awareness of his true position vis-à-vis the universe: 'Ce naïf apprend [...] que, de l'univers il n'est *ni le centre ni le but ni la mesure*, comme le croyait encore son grand-père. [...] l'homme se retrouve simple animal privilégié par l'évolution' (p.14). In contrast to the traditional Christian understanding of the earth and all its resources having been made by God for man, Bazin asserts that man was in fact made from the life which pre-dated him on earth. In an *Abécédaire* entry entitled 'Animal', Bazin uses the terminology of Christian narratives to refute their central premise:

Au commencement était l'animal et l'animal était tout, avant que de lui naisse l'homme et de l'homme les dieux. Telle est la vraie Genèse. ( p.26)

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<sup>4</sup> *Ce que je crois*, p.63.

Dès l'instant, retouchons un mythe. Les animaux, nous ne les avons pas, avec Noé, fait monter dans l'arche pour leur permettre de survivre. L'arche, c'est la terre entière où ils n'ont sûrement pas gagné à nous voir tardivement introduits. ( p.27)

According to Bazin, man is not made in God's image to rule over the natural world, he is merely the fortunate outcome of animal life-forms on a privileged planet.

Bazin's view of man's indebtedness to the natural world formed the basis of his sympathy with the ecological movement: 'L'écologie prône avec raison le respect, la défense de la vie sous toutes ses formes'.<sup>5</sup> Several entries in *Abécédaire* convey his indignation about man's arrogant destruction of the environment. Under the heading 'Vandalisme' in *Abécédaire*, he summarises man's impact upon the Earth:

L'extension des déserts, la destruction du tiers des terres arables, de la moitié des forêts, l'infestation des airs et des eaux, la famine et la surpopulation chez les uns, la surproduction et le chômage chez les autres [...], la prolifération des cancers urbains, la régression rapide des flores et des faunes. (pp.258-9)

His view of the earth is therefore not only that of an astronomer and biologist, but also that of an ecologist. His is an essentially bleak view of the earth as prey to man's excesses.

In other entries in *Abécédaire*, Bazin's concern about ecological matters has a much more personal feel and he expresses concerns about the environment closer to home. As a keen countryman, Bazin was particularly incensed when

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<sup>5</sup> Jean-Claude Lamy, *op. cit.*, p.56.

landscapes which he knew and loved were spoiled by environmental insensitivity. In an entry in *Abécédaire* entitled 'Yeti', he mourns the destruction of the Alpine scenery at Flaine, which he had enjoyed before its exploitation as a ski resort:

Avant le moteur et le promoteur, ce que c'était beau, la montagne où glatissait l'aigle, où s'énervait le chamois! J'ai connu le cirque de Flaine, intact. Maintenant, c'est du béton sur quoi, de pylône en pylône, une araignée géante tisse du câble noir... N'allez pas le chercher plus loin: c'est ici qu'il pullule, qu'il glisse sur latte ou sur le cul, l'abominable homme des neiges. (p.280)

Here Bazin compares human beings to the legendary abominable snowman, for such is their destructive impact on the surroundings. He expresses his sorrow that the wild beauty of the place he knew has been lost, 'J'ai connu le cirque de Flaine intact', 'que c'était beau'. In a similar passage in *Abécédaire*, under the heading 'Bateau', he laments the disfigurement of the countryside he knew as a child:

Je ne pardonnerai jamais au Génie rural d'avoir passé ce paysage au bulldozer, abattu les aunes, les cyprès chauves, les peupliers blancs de Hollande, chassé les martins-pêcheurs, les foulques, les colverts, détruit notre Ommée [...]. Je ne lui pardonnerai jamais d'avoir, à sa place, tiré tout droit un canal imbécile. (p.44)

Bazin's anger is conveyed in the repetition of 'je ne pardonnerai jamais', and his dismissal of the landscaping efforts of the local council as 'imbécile'. His affection for the landscape is implicit in the precision with which he names all the birds and trees which have been lost. Bazin was particularly aware of the vulnerability of woods and trees. Under the heading 'Abattre' in *Abécédaire* he asserts:

Quel dommage qu'un arbre ne puisse lutter, disposer de ses branches comme un poulpe de ses bras! Un tigre, un taureau, une vipère, ça se défend. Un arbre, ça n'a que l'épaisseur de son tronc pour décourager le bûcheron [...] Je les connais tous, les derniers géants de ma proche forêt. Un chêne de cinq cents ans, abattu en cinq minutes, c'est un scandale. (p.10-11)

Again here, it is Bazin's engagement with a specific landscape, 'ma proche forêt', which stimulates his ecological concern for trees in general. As so often in Bazin's writing, it is his relationship with a particular place which gives rise to more far-reaching reflections. Even in his more objective writing, Bazin shows his tendency to move from the particular to the general.

In spite of his rejection of anthropocentrism and his criticism of mankind's arrogance vis-à-vis the environment, Bazin nonetheless believes in the dignity and importance of human beings. For Bazin, man's intelligence represents a particularly important phase of evolution. Indeed the earth is precious precisely because it nurtures and sustains human life. In *Ce que je crois*, Bazin urges upon the reader a new understanding of man's significance in the world, not as a sinner, expelled from Eden and God's grace, but as the most intelligent life form the earth has produced: 'Allons! Soyons fiers! Nous ne sommes pas des êtres déçus, chassés de je ne sais quel Éden. Nous sommes des primates *promus*, de millénaire en millénaire, à l'aventure de l'intelligence' (pp.31-2). This notion of the earth uniquely containing, in man, a repository of intelligence leads Bazin into a new area of place-related thinking:

La Terre peut être détruite et l'humanité avec elle et avec l'humanité sa connaissance dont la réussite [...] doit être estimable [...]. Il n'y a que notre expansion dans l'espace qui puisse nous mettre à l'abri. (pp.187-8)

The very fragility of the earth means that human intelligence risks extinction. It is, therefore, necessary for man to find other planets in the universe where he might live.

Another argument proposed by Bazin in favour of planetary migration is the fact that, in giving rise to and sustaining human intelligence, the earth also circumscribes man's knowledge and awareness:

De la Terre, mère absolue, nous tenons tout: nos sens, nos instincts, et par là même nos concepts, nos valeurs, inconsciemment esclaves de notre biologie (et de ce fait très locales) [...] "Faire le tour de la Terre," disait déjà un philosophe du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, "c'est faire le tour de l'homme" (pp.180-181)

This passage, in *Ce que je crois*, underscores the importance of the earth in Bazin's world view as the creator and sustainer of man's intelligence, but adds a new dimension to the argument, namely that the earth alone has shaped and limited man's consciousness. Bazin's fundamental view of human perception is that it is entirely place based. All thinking is necessarily 'locale'. Man's scope is defined and therefore limited by his residence on planet earth, 'faire le tour de la Terre ... c'est faire le tour de l'homme'. Man's location determines his thinking because it provides his only frame of reference, 'de la Terre mère absolue nous tenons tous'. The rhyming of 'Terre' and 'mère' reinforces the personification of the earth as mother. If man is not only to safeguard but also to extend his intelligence, he must seek new horizons beyond his own planet. Under the title 'Espace' in *Abécédaire*, Bazin wrote: 'Ce sont de grandes migrations qui, de tout temps, ont transformé le destin des hommes [...] il n'y a plus de vide à remplir, il n'y a plus d'aventures qu'au dessus de nous' (pp.98-99). Here Bazin

asserts that places have always had a transformational role to play in man's thinking. In the absence of undiscovered parts of the globe, modern man's further intellectual development depends on his ability to move beyond his familiar habitat.

Bazin was convinced of the likelihood of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe and was quite undeterred by the scepticism of fellow intellectuals on this subject. Indeed, he considered the assumption that mankind is the only sophisticated life form in the universe to be arrogant. Under the heading 'Extraterrestre' in *Abécédaire*, he deplores 'l'orgueil des singes nus, entassés sur cette petite boule'(p.103). The encounter between the residents of earth and other living beings is the future for man: 'C'est la rencontre avec "une autre intelligence" qui me semble devoir être l'événement capital de notre devenir'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, for Bazin, the quest for new inhabited and habitable planets represented mankind's next evolutionary step. In *Ce que je crois*, he declared: 'Nous voilà capables de quitter la planète: rien de plus important depuis que le primate s'est redressé' (pp.179-180). Bazin here displays the evolutionary biologist's view of man's destiny in terms of enormous segments of time. Under the heading 'Uranorama' in *Abécédaire*, Bazin describes his role as an observer: 'Je suis une sentinelle postée dans un petit ici-bas pour surveiller un immense ailleurs' (p.257). The preciousness of the earth lies in the fact that it has produced both a viewer and a vantage-point from which to survey the universe. The striking aspect of Bazin's view of man's place in the system of things is that he

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<sup>6</sup> *Abécédaire*, p.100.

combines reverence for the earth with a serious open-mindedness about a wider universal context for man.

### **Man's Planetary Dilemmas.**

Bazin's view of the preciousness of the earth led him to criticise aspects of modern society. Firstly, Bazin believed that man's technological sophistication has profoundly disorientated him. He considered that the pace of man's technological advance has exceeded his rate of moral advance, and referred, in *Ce que je crois*, to the 'décalage effrayant entre la mince autorité de la morale et l'empire exorbitant de la technique' (p.230).

Furthermore, the increase of scientific and technical knowledge has been such that it is very difficult to gain an overview of mankind's overall position. In *Ce que je crois*, Bazin describes this problem as 'l'hyper-savoir' (p.238). Knowledge can no longer be retained by a single human mind, 'rendant ainsi très difficile non seulement les vues d'ensemble, mais la juste appréciation de la connaissance d'autrui' (p.238).

In addition to man's difficulties in marshalling his knowledge, the advance in his technical prowess has also undermined his ability to see danger coming, for the old correlation between space and time has been abolished. Under the heading 'Déséquilibre' in *Abécédaire*, Bazin reflects upon a time when, from their defensive tower, Roman soldiers could watch any enemy advance. Due to more recent technological advances, 'il y a divorce entre l'espace et le temps, vieux associés. Il y a dans notre vie une telle intensité de



mouvement [...] que nous avons cessé d'être à l'aise dans le probable, dans le local [...]. On ne peut plus voir venir' (p.80). Man no longer has time to reflect upon his position: 'La quasi-instantanéité des transmissions modernes bouscule nos temps de réflexion'.<sup>7</sup> Man's relationship to place has therefore changed fundamentally. Where distance previously provided a sense of security and even a fortress mentality, the modern dislocation between time and space has undermined the separateness of one place from another. Man can no longer take refuge in distance.

By far the greatest threat posed by man's technological advance, however, is the nuclear bomb. Unless man can master his own moral immaturity and technological sophistication, he will lose his place on earth altogether. Bazin told Jean-Claude Lamy: 'L'Adam actuel se dominera ou il se chassera lui-même de son paradis terrestre'.<sup>8</sup> The reference to Adam here is apt for, if not as a gift from God, then through his nuclear technology, man has indeed achieved dominion over the whole of creation. Bazin is in no doubt of the dire consequences of nuclear conflict for the planet. In *Abécédaire* under the heading 'Paix', he states: 'un conflit nucléaire ne laisserait ni vainqueurs ni vaincus, mais une planète déserte (p.188). Whereas once man's greatest threat came from the natural world, now it comes from weapons of his own devising: ' Les civilisés [...] ont lieu d'être plus terrifiés par leurs techniques que les sauvages par les

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<sup>7</sup> *Ce que je crois*, p.233.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 154.

forces de la nature'.<sup>9</sup> Technology has utterly changed man's relationship to the planet, placing it entirely at his mercy.

However, the threats to the earth envisaged by Bazin are not only technological, but also societal. Bazin's criticisms are directed exclusively towards the developed world. In a section of *Abécédaire* entitled 'Dilemme', he identifies the First World's abandonment of belief in God as having engendered rampant materialism in 'une société hédoniste' (p.81). Under the *Abécédaire* heading 'Avoir', Bazin observes that Western man no longer defines himself morally by what he is, but materially by what he has, and this has led to the predominance of 'des sociétés de jouissance, des bonheurs de possession' (p.40). In an attempt to satisfy its decadent consumerism, the First World exploits the poorer nations. In an *Abécédaire* section entitled 'Droits', he asks: 'Comment tolérer que la moitié de la planète (et justement la plus pauvre) soit exploitée par l'autre que pourrissent ses appétits?' (p.88).

At the very end of *Ce que je crois*, Bazin concludes that man stands at a crossroads in his relationship with the planet. Either he will continue to over-exploit the world's natural resources and court nuclear disaster, or he will achieve self-mastery in these respects and find sustainable ways to occupy the earth. Bazin ends on an optimistic note. He does not fear for his children, instead he envies them their role in deciding the future of the planet:

Je connais des gens qui tremblent pour leurs enfants, qui regrettent de les avoir fait naître en des temps incertains. J'envie plutôt les miens qui vont vivre une époque certainement redoutable, mais exaltante, où leur génération, renouvelant un vieux mythe [...] devra choisir entre le désert et la Terre promise. (p.251)

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<sup>9</sup> *Le Grand Méchant doux*, 'Pour une nouvelle Arche de Noé', p. 37.

Once again, Bazin uses a reformulation of Christian notions here to convey the idea that man, like the Israelites in the Old Testament, is on a journey. Like the Israelites, he is seeking his rightful place in a Promised Land but he must overcome the wilderness to reach his destination. The Israelites were heading for Canaan, but for modern man the Promised Land is a sustainable planet. For the Israelites, the wilderness was a real desert; for future generations the wilderness is the worst-case scenario, the result of mismanagement of the earth. For both peoples, the journey to the Promised Land involves self-mastery and determination to reach their goal.

Bazin's observations on man's place are planetary in their scope and consider mankind's destiny in terms of the longest possible sweeps of time. He engages with the biggest question of all, the question of the planet's purpose. Bazin dismisses the Christian view of the earth's significance as God's creation, entrusted to man, pending Christ's return. Instead he offers a vision of the significance of the earth as a cradle of evolution, the birthplace of human intelligence and the launch pad for further investigation of the cosmos and its probable inhabitants. The salient characteristic of Bazin's reflections on man's place is his focus on the bigger picture in terms of time, space and significance.

### **The Question of Sustainable Societies.**

*Ce que je crois* and *Abécédaire* describe both the importance and vulnerability of the earth. They establish Bazin's view of the difficulty mankind has in finding a sustainable *modus vivendi* on the planet. It is in the light of this

diagnosis of the problem that we must now turn to Bazin's most discursive fiction, for it is by means of works such as *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, and the short story 'Pour une nouvelle Arche de Noé' in his final collection of short stories, *Le Grand Méchant doux*, that he investigates possible solutions to man's dilemmas.

'Pour une nouvelle Arche de Noé' takes the form of a letter to the mayor of Chétrault, applying for planning permission for a nuclear shelter in the caves of Anjou. The author of the letter, Jean-Luc Dartimonnier, feels oppressed by fear of a nuclear holocaust: 'Je suis terrifié par la menace de mort qui pèse sur cette vie à plus ou moins long terme' (p.35). He wants to create a refuge in which to safeguard the future of the human race, and he regards this as a noble and important enterprise: 'Je crois que ce serait une superbe tâche d'homme de lui trouver, avant le désastre, une autre voie de passage vers l'avenir' (p.35).

The author of the letter has much in common with Bazin. Firstly, his project is conceived with reference to very exact topographical information about Anjou, for his plan is to exploit the natural geology of the area. Secondly, like Bazin, he fears that man's technical powers exceed his capacity for judgement: 'Savant il l'est le bougre! Sage pas du tout' (p.37). Again, like Bazin, he believes that man's intelligence is the result of years of evolutionary advance and, as such, it needs protecting: 'Il a fallu quatre milliards et demi d'années pour aboutir à sa cervelle. A ce prix-là l'intelligence, [...] ça se protège' (p.38). He also affirms his belief in the likelihood of habitable planets and intelligent life existing elsewhere in the universe. Jean-Luc shares with

Bazin a detailed knowledge of biology, which informs his plan to include sperm banks in the shelter to ensure sufficient genetic diversity, and which enables him to predict precisely which insect life-forms are likely to survive a nuclear disaster. He paints a sobering picture of what will be left on Earth once it is safe for the refugees to leave their shelter:

Épargnés peut-être, les taupes, les vers de terre, les bestioles aveugles que dans leur profonds sous-sols rencontrent les spéléos, les anguilles envasées au fond des lacs qui n'auraient pas bouilli, les mouches qu'on dit peu sensibles aux rayonnements et qui ne craindront plus la mort subite dans le bec des hirondelles. De la vie que nous connaissons, multiforme, follement généreuse et follement exploitée, l'homme de Chétrault, avec si peu de bétail et de volaille, rêvera furieusement. (pp.42-3)

This is a depiction of precisely that desert that Bazin feared for man at the close of *Ce que je crois*.

In his view of humanity as both privileged and at risk, Dartimmonier's letter reads like a précis of Bazin's *Ce que je crois*, and yet it transpires that Dartimmonier is mad. There are clues within the text that he suffers from some kind of personality disorder. At the end of the story, we discover that the mayor is a doctor and that he is forwarding the letter to a colleague at the mental hospital where Dartimmonier is being cared for. Nevertheless, the doctor concedes that the letter contains a germ of truth and the story ends with his verdict: 'Tout de même: les fous parfois nous interpellent!' (p.44).

An entry in *Abécédaire* entitled 'Vésanie' provides us with a possible key to the interpretation of this story:

Des pays riches gaspillant une abondance de biens qui masquent leur misère morale. Un tiers monde affamé, pullulant et, de surcroît, pillé par les précédents. Des budgets militaires globalement très supérieurs aux

dépenses de santé. Un système monétaire incohérent laissant libre cours à toutes les spéculations. Une destruction accélérée de la faune et de la flore. Une pollution incontrôlée de la planète. Et malgré l'approche des grandes pénuries, la foi aveugle en la croissance continue... Au fou! J'ai visité plus de cinquante asiles pour le compte de l'OMS lors de 'l'année mentale'. La démence m'a paru bien plus inoffensive au-dedans qu'en dehors. (pp.263-264)

There is a sense in which mankind's behaviour on his planet is more dangerously mad than anything that goes on in a mental asylum. However, the status of Dartimonnier's plan for a refuge remains ambiguous at the end of the story. It can be viewed either as an unnecessarily neurotic response to the atomic threat, which sane people do not need to take seriously, or as an important suggestion which sane people are themselves too mad to act upon. "Pour une nouvelle Arche de Noé" uses the format of an outsider from society, in the form of a mad-man, to provoke reflection on the very real threat posed by the nuclear bomb and on the lack of contingency plans in the event of such a disaster.

In *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, Bazin employs a similar technique to instigate a far more wide-ranging discussion of the ills of Western society and possible societal alternatives. In this case, Bazin again chooses a group of outsiders, the residents of Tristan da Cunha, who are evacuated from their secluded and primitive island and find themselves in bustling, consumerist Britain. Unimpressed by their experiences in England, they return to their island, but their contact with the Western world is to have a considerable impact on the way in which they develop their own society.

When it was first published, *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* appeared to critics to be something of an aberration from Bazin's familiar and successful

literary techniques. Yet when the book is read in the light of *Ce que je crois* and *Abécédaire*, which were to be published after it, its place in Bazin's *œuvre* becomes clear. Like *Ce que je crois*, and to some extent *Abécédaire*, the novel is specifically designed to discuss issues facing society and to suggest sustainable alternative modes of society. Critics such as Kanters were amazed that 'le talent si fortement provincial, angevin de M. Bazin'<sup>10</sup> should have seen fit to transplant itself to the other side of the world. However, they underestimated the distances that Bazin would be prepared to travel to find an instructive point of contrast for Western European society. Bazin also departed from his usual procedure by selecting a well-documented public event, thereby sacrificing the creative free hand afforded by fiction. Yet it was precisely the reality of the Tristans' rejection of life in England which made it so startling and provided the starting point for an analysis of precisely why and how they had opted for a different type of society. The book is written not by a first person narrator, usually favoured by Bazin, but in the third person. Moustiers considered that, in doing this, Bazin suppressed 'ses élans naturels' and submitted to 'l'autocratie de la troisième personne'<sup>11</sup>. Yet this decision again indicates the seriousness of Bazin's purpose, for in this novel his preoccupation is not with the personal and the subjective, but with the universal. Bazin also abandoned his usual preoccupation with individuals and chose instead to describe a group. Moustiers felt that this made the book untypical and unsuccessful:

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Kanters, 'Un Age ou l'on croit aux îles', *Le Figaro Littéraire*, N° 1250, 4-10 May 1970, pp. 23.

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.213.

C'est la première fois que dans un roman d'Hervé Bazin [...] il est impossible au lecteur d'identifier physiquement les acteurs, impossible de mettre une image sur chacun d'eux. La personnalité de certains comme Ned, Simon, Walter, Ralph, Don, Ruth ou Joss ne surnage, par intermittence, que pour retomber dans la masse communautaire.<sup>12</sup>

However, it is precisely this emphasis on community which allows the book to remain focused on societal issues.

Bazin uses the perspective of the Tristan evacuees in England to single out the principal shortcomings of a materialist society. Its dominant fault is seen to be that of excess, disguising an underlying emptiness. Thus, although excessively populous, 'surpeuplé de présence humaine' (p.97), England is nonetheless seen to be lacking in social cohesion: 'un monde où les gens sont si nombreux qu'ils ne peuvent pas vous connaître, où ils semblent même pas en avoir envie' (p.77). Excessively built-up, 'incroyablement bâtie' (p.67), the English are constantly trying to get away: 'Ça ne parle que de vacances, [...] de samedis sur la route' (p.81). Money is the only index of success and well-being: 'N'est-ce pas [l'argent] qui prétend rendre légale, vitale, cette échelle des salaires où montent, progressifs l'estime et le bonheur exprimés en chiffres, comme la chaleur en degrés Fahrenheit?' (pp.120-1). Yet money proves to be a worthless indicator, for the satisfaction it brings is illusory. The British are seen to be continually jostling to increase their wealth, but are never satisfied: 'Toujours chercher, crier, courir, jouer des coudes, écraser l'autre [...] toujours recommencer et n'en jamais finir avec l'envie, [...] pourquoi vraiment?' (p.123). Consumerism is seen to be mindlessly addictive and wasteful, leading

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* p.216.



to increasingly high prices and a prevailing sense of dissatisfaction, ‘gaspillage, surenchère, mépris de ce qu’on a, folie de ne savoir jouir que d’autre chose’ (p.183). There is a sense of excessive activity and haste, ‘cette agitation, [...] cet esclavage de l’heure’ (p.145). The emphasis on material acquisition devalues both the old and the young who cannot take part in the rat race, and crime abounds. Perhaps most damning of all is the Tristans’ observation that life in a consumer society fails to satisfy its members emotionally: ‘Votre vie ne remplit pas le cœur, elle remplit les poubelles’ (p.217).

Bazin, like the Tristans, strongly questioned the European view that their society represented a satisfactory blueprint for the rest of the world. Indeed Bazin believed that the West would not be able to retain its global supremacy. In a pessimistic piece entitled ‘Occident’ in *Abécédaire*, he described the weakened state of Europeans: ‘Ultra consommateurs, jouisseurs, inciviques, laxistes, paresseux, minés pas la drogue, l’alcool, le péculat, la dénatalité, le terrorisme, je ne vois vraiment comment ils pourraient rester compétitifs’ (pp.181-2). The Tristans’ visit to England seems to have provided the means for Bazin to express his own very critical views of the West.

The significance of Tristan da Cunha is that it is as far removed from Western Europe as it is possible to get, both in terms of physical distance, and as a society. As such, it provides a perfect point of contrast. In describing the island and its society, Bazin is, in a sense, positing a counter argument. If Europeans are unable to find fulfilment in their technologically advanced consumer society, then perhaps true satisfaction can be found in very primitive, technologically

under-developed places where there are almost no material benefits to be had.

When researching the island, the journalist Hugh Folkes consults press cuttings.

In the course of his research, he comes across an observation by a Western journalist:

La faim, l'inconfort, l'isolement, la lutte contre une nature hostile [...]. Le bonheur dans le dénuement, c'est une réussite; c'est aussi une leçon vite tournée en scandale par ceux qu'humilie secrètement l'esclavage de leurs besoins. (p.28)

It would seem that the very struggle to sustain even subsistence-level living on the island is somehow ennobling. Furthermore, the difficulty of the conditions makes even such a meagre standard of living feel both satisfying and fulfilling. This sentiment is expressed by Walter, the spokesman for the Tristans, as they arrive in England: 'A Tristan, on peut être pauvre et se sentir riche. Ici nous craignons que ce soit le contraire' (p.69). The implication of the Tristans' decision to leave England and return to their primitive island appears to negate the value of centuries of technological advance and their return is described by the journalist Hugh as 'le réflexe de fuite vers le passé' (p.137). The reaction of one British journalist encapsulates the radical nature and apparent folly of the Tristans' decision:

Romantisme imbécile! Le mouchoir agité pour dire bonjour à la civilisation, le voilà donc qui ressort pour lui dire adieu. Je sangloterais si j'avais le temps. Mais habitué aux bilans, je dis que chauffage central + électricité + gaz + écoles de tout niveau + travail assuré + salaire décent + télé, radio, cinéma, théâtre + ravitaillement, confort, soins, transports, assurances, retraites et loisirs en tous genres, c'est une somme de privilèges qui rend ridicule l'autre total: feu de petit bois + lampe à pétrole + rudiment scolaire + patates + chariots à bœufs + toits de chaume + liberté encagée sur quelques milles carrés + splendide isolement à huit

jours du premier chirurgien. Poser la question c'est la résoudre. (pp.147-8)

Yet the Tristans' decision appears to signify that, when confronted with a stark choice between antithetical worlds, they prefer primitivism to technically advanced consumerism.

However, Bazin does not use this novel to advocate a return to a primitive form of society. Having submitted his thesis that Western society has become dissatisfied in spite of its sophisticated materialism, and having considered its antithesis in the form of a completely under-developed island society, Bazin then follows the classic pattern of a French essay and considers a synthesis of the two positions. Initially, the Tristans were tempted to reject the Western way of life absolutely: 'Nous avons été tentés, en vous voyant dire non sans cesse à ce que vous êtes, de suspecter vos avantages, de les rejeter en bloc' (p.200). Yet they come to see that a use of Western technology does not necessarily commit them to a Western European system of values: 'La technique est la même à Londres et à Moscou [...] il n'en est fait nullement le même usage' (p.215). Furthermore, technology is their best hope for rendering the island adequately habitable again: 'La nature dans le coin serait plutôt brutale et il n'y a que la technique à la mater' (pp.200-1). Indeed the action of the volcano has worsened their already very difficult conditions and threatens to create an unbridgeable gap between their own standard of living and the standard of living in the West. In the interest of attracting their people back to the island, only technology can help them to recover the ground that they have lost: 'Nous ne pourrions supporter un trop gros décalage' (p.200).

However the Tristan departure from the Western model lies in their emphasis on necessity as opposed to over-abundance: 'Il ne faut que ce qu'il faut: rien de moins, rien de plus' (p.201). As one of the islanders explains to Hugh when he visits the resettlement: 'Le diable c'est le superflu [...]. Nous vivons justement dans la religion du nécessaire' (p.232). They believe that their location will in itself protect them from Western-style excess: 'L'isolement même nous protège du luxe en le rendant hors de prix. Notre mentalité aussi: être nourris, vêtus, instruits, équipés, embauchés à chance égale nous semble suffisant' (p.233). The delicate balance achieved by the Tristans is to make technological advance and the comforts it affords their slave rather than their master. Material possessions exist to support life on the island rather than as an end in themselves. In his concluding remarks in *Ce que je crois*, Bazin was later to write: 'Comme l'évolution technique n'est pas moins irréversible que l'évolution génétique, il n'est pas question de revenir en arrière. [...] Nous ne renoncerons à rien. Mais nous devons très vite contrôler tout' (pp.249-250). It is the Tristans' decision not to turn their backs on technology but to make controlled use of it that earned Bazin's particular approval.

However, the significance of the Tristan model goes beyond the islanders' sustainable approach to technology and consumerism. A reading of *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* in conjunction with *Ce que je crois* and *Abécédaire* reveals that their political system was also very close to Bazin's notion of the ideal. Under the heading 'Autobiographie' in *Abécédaire*, Bazin indicates that he was particularly drawn to the island's 'exemple de socialisme spontané'

(p.36). This small community had created a constitution consisting of only one guiding principle: ‘Nul ne s’élèvera ici au-dessus de quiconque’ (p.27) and as a result had forged a society which enshrined the socialist ideal of egalitarianism and shared property. The fact that a group of castaways should have selected a very simple form of socialism to regulate their society chimes in with Bazin’s view of the universal desirability and inevitability of the socialist model. In *Ce que je crois* Bazin wrote: ‘Socialiste je fus, socialiste je reste et même si persuadé de l’avenir socialiste du monde que celui-ci pour moi ne fait pas question’ (p.200).

The idiosyncratic nature of the Tristan constitution also demonstrates Bazin’s belief that socialism should not be applied in the same way in every country, but that it should mould itself to the individual requirements of each nation. In the chapter of *Ce que je crois* devoted to socialism, Bazin describes it as ‘une vérité protéiforme, une vérité qui ne reste pas nue, qui se rhabille au gré des situations, des coutumes, des nécessités locales’ (p.201). Tristan da Cunha, therefore, provides an example of how socialism can and should be allowed to mutate *sur place*. Bazin wrote in *Ce que je crois* that wisdom in politics must be founded on a knowledge of place: ‘On peut, on doit appliquer au socialisme ce qu’un sage répondait à la question: “quelle est la meilleur forme de gouvernement?” Comme lui, je demande qu’on précise: “Pour qui? Quand? Où?”’ (p.201). It is typical of Bazin’s sensitivity to the notion of place that even his political views were subject to questions of location.

The Tristan political system commended itself to Bazin not only because of its socialism, but also because of the extent of its democracy. Bazin's belief in the desirability of socialism did not extend to a belief in the desirability of undemocratically imposed social models. In *Ce que je crois*, he warns: 'On ne change pas l'homme contre son consentement. Défendre un idéal ne peut jamais passer par la trahison, même provisoire, de son contenu' (p.207). The striking aspect of Tristan society is that its socialist model is sustained in the context of a more complete democracy than exists even in Western Europe. In describing their political system, the Tristans refer to it enthusiastically as 'la plus franche démocratie du monde' (p.219). In *Ce que je crois*, Bazin identifies important shortcomings of Western European democracy. He states that the Western European political system has become, in effect if not intentionally, a gerontocracy: 'La vieillesse gouverne et bloque l'accession aux responsabilités' (p.125), and that this accounts for the frustration of young people who are forced to take to the streets to express themselves politically. However, on Tristan da Cunha, the young make a key contribution to their society, which depends upon their physical vigour to tame the island. As Simon explains to Hugh: 'Nous n'avons guère de problèmes avec nos jeunes. Ils prennent des responsabilités en même temps que des muscles' (p.239). Like their Western counterparts, they vote from the age of eighteen, but, unlike them, they are encouraged to take leading roles in government from the age of twenty-one. Their active participation in government is ensured by a quota system, which dictates that a third of the governing council must be comprised of young people. The Tristan

system of government also ensures that women, under-represented in Western governments, take an active part in the Tristan governing council.

Furthermore, the Tristan model of government has an immediacy about it which makes it more democratic than systems in Western Europe. In *Ce que je crois*, Bazin pointed out that the state's tendency towards centralisation and bureaucracy were compromising the spirit of democracy in the West. For Bazin, decentralisation and self-governing institutions were the way to revive democracy at grass-roots level: 'Il est clair que l'autogestion, à tous les niveaux: entreprise, commune, canton, province... est le seul contrepoids possible à l'omniprésence, à l'omnipotence de l'Etat' (p.206). In *Abécédaire*, under the heading 'Pouvoir', Bazin makes a plea for 'Le moins d'Etat possible!' and defines a more democratic system: 'Jusqu'ici nous n'avons connu que des systèmes pyramidaux dont la pointe ignore la base. L'autogestion – ce rêve – ne serait rien d'autre qu'un pouvoir sphérique enveloppant un centre resté en pleine masse' (p.202). The Tristan system of government is the embodiment of this ideal. The small size of the community allows the decision-making process to take place at its very heart. Indeed, political and business decisions are subjected to the same rigorous standards of democracy, because the means for generating income are commonly owned: 'Tout se passe comme si l'île était une coopérative [...] Autogérée, diriez-vous, puisque le conseil en fait est à la fois une assemblée municipale, un parlement, un syndicat et un comité de gestion' (p.231). Thus, all of Bazin's most serious critiques of Western democracy find a model solution in the system of government on Tristan da Cunha.

We must now consider the extent to which Bazin formulates a blueprint for a sustainable society through his writings. At the very beginning of *Ce que je crois*, Bazin appeared to be wary of making any absolute assertions. In his preface, Bazin pointed out the breadth of meaning of the words ‘je crois’, which can be used to make a statement of faith, to affirm belief, to make a judgement or simply for conjecture. He declared that his book would consist of a series of suppositions or ‘approches’ (p.9). He asserted his distaste for absolute solutions: ‘ Si j’aime débattre en effet, je n’aime ni trancher ni chercher à convaincre [...] si j’ai des idées, je répugne aux systèmes qui me semblent tous abusifs’ (p.10).

However, perhaps in spite of himself, he concludes *Ce que je crois* with an assertion of absolute belief in a system, in a form of government which will provide a total solution to the planet’s problems:

Je crois – pour une fois au sens fort de ce verbe – à la *nécessité absolue d’une écosociété mondiale*, seule capable d’assurer (en liaison avec le socialisme) les régulations nécessaires, la sécurité, l’égalité des individus et des peuples, une démographie et une économie stabilisées, une démocratie ascendante à tous les niveaux, un respect strict de l’environnement, une distribution équitable et une prudente recyclage des matières premières, une qualité de vie substituée à une quantité de biens. (pp.250-1)

The main themes of this system, therefore, are democratic socialism, the controlled use of natural resources and the curbing of consumerism, in order to increase the quality of life for everyone. These are precisely the dominant characteristics of the Tristans’ society at the end of *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*. We may, therefore, conclude that, in Tristan da Cunha, Bazin was able to localise his ideal. However, before confirming this conclusion we should



consider the point that *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* was written before *Ce que je crois*. Given what we know about the highly place-based nature of Bazin's inspiration, it seems more likely that Bazin's apparently abstract ideal system delineated at the end of *Ce que je crois* was in fact suggested by his experience of Tristan.

If Bazin did indeed intend Tristan to be an example to the West, then the island's society must be seen to be perfectly sustainable. However, the scale of the island would seem to pose very real difficulties in this respect. The smallness of the population and its limited resources uniquely permit it to achieve a degree of participatory democracy and collective ownership which would be impossible in bigger countries with larger populations and more complex economies. Hugh Folkes, the English journalist who has familiarised himself with the island and its institutions, identifies the smallness of the island as a factor which compromises its value as an example to other larger nations: 'Il ne suffit pas qu'une société croie en elle; il faut qu'elle soit assez nombreuse que ça fasse sérieux' (p.240). However, Hugh remains perplexed by the island and he concedes that the limited scale of its social experiment may be significant if it is considered as 'un modèle réduit' (p.237). Nonetheless, the smallness of the island's population, coupled with its remote location, may well conspire to bring about the failure of its sociological undertaking. The population is not likely to become large enough to ensure adequate genetic diversity in the long term. Hugh is tempted to consider it as a one-off, an unsustainable freak of circumstance, 'seulement un effet du hasard, un stage dans l'impossible,

condamné à plus ou moins long terme' (p.237). In addition, as Hugh points out, the island community is at considerable risk from the active volcano at its heart. Nevertheless it is significant that the impediments to the island's viability in the long term are the effects of geography rather than ideology.

There is a strongly utopian flavour about Tristan da Cunha, as presented by Bazin. There is no crime, no war, and no discontent. There are no poor, no rich and there is no overcrowding. Instead there is mutual respect, a harmony of purpose between men and women, young and old, full employment, housing for everyone, education, adequate medical care and sufficient material comforts. It may, in fact, be precisely this utopian element which makes the island so instructive as far as Bazin is concerned. In *Ce que je crois*, Bazin asks: 'Mais à quoi ça sert, l'utopie, sinon à prophétiser la réalité de l'après-demain?' (p.212). The significance of Tristan da Cunha, when we consider it in the light of Bazin's other discursive writings, is that it represents Bazin's view of the way in which all societies should develop. If other societies can adopt this peaceable and equitable system, then it is unlikely that nuclear shelters will be necessary after all. In the bunker mentality of 'Pour une nouvelle Arche de Noé' and the optimistic vision of Tristan da Cunha, Bazin considers a best-case and a worst-case scenario for man's place on this planet.

## **Conclusion.**

Critics have tended to consider *Abécédaire*, *Ce que je crois*, and *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation* as individual aberrations from Bazin's usual

family-based subject matter and first person narrative style. However, this shift in style should alert us to the fact that Bazin was quite deliberately moving into new areas of thought and expression. When these works are considered in conjunction with one another, a surprisingly systematic and comprehensive world-view emerges. In them we see the seeds of a more objective, universal and philosophical response to the notion of place. As Bazin wrote these works in the second half of his writing career, we have every reason to suppose that they expressed his maturity as an individual, as a writer and as a thinker.

### Conclusion.

Qu'est-ce qu'un homme, en effet? C'est un organisme double, corps-esprit, dont l'existence est une incessante adaptation à son milieu, c'est un être *qui est à lui-même un perpétuel problème*.<sup>1</sup>

Because Bazin regarded man as an 'organisme double, corps-esprit', he portrayed his characters' emotional and intellectual life in the context of their physical whereabouts. Abstraction is not a feature of his work. Indeed, he tended to be critical of the *nouveau roman* movement precisely because he felt that it had become too disconnected both from reality and from the average reader. For Bazin, realism was the surest way to appeal to the public and this necessitated verisimilitude of setting. The preparatory jottings in the Nancy archives bear witness to the trouble he took over this aspect of his writing and his high sales figures indicate that readers did indeed relate to novels which presented apparently real human beings in apparently real places.

However, it is a tribute to Bazin's skill as a novelist that his treatment of settings went far beyond establishing verisimilitude. His use of place combined the pragmatist's interest in the nature of reality with the poet's concern to achieve impact, symbolism and structure. He described settings, both indoor and out, in a precise and highly evocative way. The reader is positively transported to the decayed and chilling chateau of 'La Belle Angerie', the overgrown riverside manor house of 'La Fouve' and the windswept island of Tristan da Cunha. Bazin also succeeded in giving his locations symbolic significance.

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<sup>1</sup> Hervé Bazin, *La Fin des asiles*, Paris: Grasset, 1959, p.26.

Often the location seems to sum up or concretise the most central concerns of the novel. 'La Belle Angerie' becomes almost synonymous with the hardships and emotional deprivation experienced within its walls, 'La Fouve' becomes the embodiment of the idea of a reclusive and longstanding matriarchy and Tristan da Cunha, in all its primitive beauty, is itself a reproach against Western decadence. Furthermore, many of his settings seem to dictate not only the direction but also the shape and pace of the plot. The progressive disintegration and ultimate sale of 'La Belle Angerie' bring the Rezeau trilogy to an end, the threat to 'La Fouve' causes Isa finally to renounce Maurice and the calming of the volcano on Tristan da Cunha prompts the islanders' return and resettlement, just as its eruption had originally brought about their exile.

Bazin's interest in place was not only based on considerations of style. His childhood at the family home of 'Le Pâtys', under the harsh oversight of his mother, Paule Hervé-Bazin, made an indelible impression on him and provoked a lifetime's preoccupation with certain place-based themes. The Rezeau trilogy, so closely inspired by Bazin's own family experience, therefore serves to provide insights into the issues which most concerned him.

Firstly, 'La Belle Angerie' testifies to the potency of place. In *Madame Ex*, Louis asserts that:

A des années de distance il y a des points fixes, des relais pathétiques où il est impossible de revenir en indifférent, des lieux dont les murs semblent porter des plaques invisibles, gravées à votre nom. (p.331)

According to this definition, 'La Belle Angerie' is the 'relais pathétique' *par excellence*. The place provokes in Jean Rezeau all manner of contradictory

emotions but never indifference. His narration becomes a continual and ongoing appraisal of his responses to it, even ‘à des années de distance’. He analyses his sense of rootedness and sense of exile, his desire to stand and fight and to turn and flee, his need to throw off the tyrannical control of Folcoche and yet his fascination with the same. He yearns for the scenery, so unique to the house’s environs, but is also aware of its unattractive aspects. By means of the Rezeau trilogy, Bazin seems to have articulated his own very formative and very mixed responses to his family home.

The writing of the Rezeau trilogy by no means exhausted Bazin’s interest in the power of place. These three novels, in general, and *Vipère au poing* in particular, were to act as a seedbed for themes which would recur throughout his writing. As an autobiographically-inspired author, Bazin realised that his background had been such a determining influence that he would not be able to reinvent himself in order to generate a new wave of fiction. Instead he would have to build on his experience in new ways. As he put it: ‘Quelquefois notre formation, même si cela a été une déformation, a une telle puissance qu’elle est résistante comme le granit, et qu’on est obligé de bâtir sur ce qu’on a’.<sup>2</sup> Bazin subsequently reexpressed his core experience of place by means of a variety of fictional contexts.

Thus it is that the psychological experience at the heart of so many of his novels is one of a strong personality caught in a web of conflicting responses to place. Bazin’s characters, like their creator, feel the strength of their roots whilst

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<sup>2</sup> Norma Perry, *op. cit.*, p.xxxiii.

at the same time facing a threat to those roots or feeling exiled from them. They may desire territorial control but also wish to run away from the fight. They may be attracted to women and yet desire to escape their domestic dominance. They long for the refuge and balm of the natural world whilst acknowledging that the natural world so often serves to illustrate man's most destructive tendencies. These are the warp and weft with which the action of the novels is woven, the opposing poles which energise the characters and between which they oscillate.

Bazin's characters are assailed by these contradictory reactions to place and frequently find themselves in dilemmas as to how to respond. In this respect, they illustrate his belief that man is 'un être qui est à lui-même un perpétuel problème'. However, they are lucid about their struggles and often come to specific conclusions. Jean Rezeau acknowledges the formative importance of his roots whilst at the same time accepting the sale of 'La Belle Angerie'. Isa Duplon decides that 'La Fouve' is more important to her than relationships with men. The Tristans choose to leave England and return to their island in spite of the difficulties. Mutix opts to break away from the Godion household and return to the natural world, abandoning his relationship with Claire. Folcoche becomes disgusted with her ruined manor house and devotes herself instead to Salomé.

Each of Bazin's characters develop in specific ways according to the way in which they react to their settings. As Bazin explained to J.A.W. Caldwell: 'Nous sommes formés par notre acceptation ou par notre rejet de l'ambiance où

nous nous trouvons.’<sup>3</sup> In the novels, we see at work this very process of acceptance and rejection which Bazin believed to be so formative of the human personality. Each character demonstrates the way in which life necessarily involves making decisions in relation to one’s environment, such that: ‘L’existence est une incessante adaptation à son milieu’.

With every novel, Bazin shed new light on each of his key themes and he seems to have come to some striking conclusions. In considering rootedness and exile, Bazin affirmed the significance of place in determining individual identity and self-perception. Often it is by clinging to the place in which they feel most at home that his characters define who they are. Isa will not be separated from ‘La Fouve’ in spite of sexual and social pressure to live with Maurice, her lover and the father of her child. Mutix returns to the forest in spite of his relationship with the Godion family. The Tristan islanders resolve to remain on their island in spite of its active volcano and the possibility of a more comfortable life in exile in England. In the short story ‘La Raine et le Crapaud’, Reine uses her pariah status as a river woman to save and raise an unwanted child in an unorthodox manner. In each of these cases, highly idiosyncratic characters make highly individual choices and are encouraged to do so by their commitment to a place. The place that they have chosen is a crucial element in their self-perception and their choice to remain rooted becomes a gesture of self-definition: I belong here, this is who I am. Indeed, these characters are so strongly associated with the places in which they reside that the settings come to express and underline their

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<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. A.17.



very essence. The menacing and emotionally bankrupt figure of Folcoche in the Rezeau trilogy is enhanced by her residence of the spartan and neglected 'Belle Angerie'. The sensual but self-sufficient Isa Duplon, in *Qui j'ose aimer*, centres her existence on the overgrown, secluded and feminine world of 'La Fouve'. Mutix, the reserved and nameless stranger who has fled human society in *L'Église verte*, identifies himself absolutely with the forest in which he hides. When Jean-Claude Lamy asked Bazin what intellectual legacy he would like to bequeath to his youngest son, Bazin replied that it would be 'un "mot moteur", qui est du reste ma devise: *Sois!*'<sup>4</sup> For Bazin, the key attribute of an individual was his or her force of personality and he was very sensitive to the way in which rootedness enhanced this sense of individuality.

Bazin was also fascinated by the significance of place in human relationships. Most of his novels showed the difficulties that human beings have in living harmoniously under one roof. He admitted: 'j'ai préféré les aguerris aux éléments et trouvé les bons rapports moins excitants que les mises en scène de la discorde'.<sup>5</sup> Just as Bazin's characters use place to define themselves, they also use place to assert themselves. The setting is not merely the stage upon which the action is played out, it is also an object of contention, the prize for which the characters struggle. More often than not, this struggle comes at the expense of satisfactory human relationships. Bazin was particularly concerned by the way in which women tended to turn their households into domestic fiefdoms in which to dominate their husbands and children. His depiction of a

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<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.172.

<sup>5</sup> *Abécédaire*, p.282.

series of different marriages, in various states of disrepair, added up to a powerful critique of the conventional female home-maker. Éva Colu in *L'Huile sur le feu*, Mariette Bretaudeau in *Le Matrimoine*, Aline Davermelle in *Madame Ex* and Solange Laguenière in *Le Démon de minuit* are all housewives who, in their different ways, make their families' lives a misery.

In general, Bazin's characters express his own forceful and rather highly charged nature and like him they tend to find themselves in fraught domestic situations; however the tension in their lives is offset by their response to the natural world. The beauties of nature draw them out of their self-absorption, away from their interpersonal battles and into a realm of complexity and delight. Bazin's appreciative and detailed depictions of the natural environment are a notable distinction of his work. The natural world lends lyricism and balance to his narratives just as it also provides balm for his protagonists.

In his later fiction and non-fiction, Bazin's affection for nature seems to have had a considerable influence on his view of society and of the individual. In *Les Bienheureux de la Désolation*, he voices a critique of the debilitating nature of Western consumerism and praises the community on Tristan da Cunha for its simplicity and closeness to nature. In *L'Église verte*, Jean-Luc Godion seems to model the ideal balance of appreciation of the natural world and detached but useful engagement in the local community. *Ce que je crois* and many entries in *Abécédaire* discuss the relationship between mankind and the planet. Bazin underlines man's significance as earth's most evolved life-form, as

well as stressing his responsibility not to destroy the world, over which he has achieved such an alarming mastery.

The final words of *Abécédaire* provide a parting insight into Bazin's creative personality:

Mais la question *Qu'aurais-je voulu être?* n'a aucun sens. Je suis fatalement moa, pour parler clown: j'achève mon tour de piste. Et pourtant, Seigneur! en qui je ne crois guère, pour l'arc-en-ciel de votre botanique, pour le solfège de vos oiseaux, pour la tiède épaisseur des forêts de septembre, pour être le témoin d'un autre siècle où la justice se fasse comme l'amour, pour en savoir sur ce monde étonnant toujours davantage et, notamment, qu'il ne deviendra pas, ici, un désert fait de main d'homme, pour ricocher de vie en vie comme ces pierres plates que les enfants tirent de biais sur les étangs [...] *refaites-moi zygote!* On efface tout et je recommence. (p.284)

We see here the relationship between his great personal affection for the natural world and his concern for mankind to preserve the planet and achieve sustainable and just societies. We also see Bazin's sheer enthusiasm for the experiences of human life in his desire to live a series of existences. In a sense, by means of his fictional writing, he achieved his desire to 'ricocher de vie en vie'. However, Bazin accepted the inevitability of the self as the starting point for all endeavours: 'La question *Qu'aurais-je voulu être?* n'a aucun sens. Je suis fatalement moa'. His skill lay precisely in his ability to exploit and re-exploit his own responses to place, whether actual, emotional or intellectual, in a variety of fictional guises. In so doing he succeeded in articulating and illuminating key questions of human identity, relationships and significance in a convincing and accessible way.

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(H) L'entrée du Pâtys (La Belle Angerie)  
(M) Peu nets, mais présents, les V.F. gravés sur les arbres.



(H) L'allée des platanes.

(B) Les tourelles :  
La plus petite pour les lieux d'aisances.  
La plus importante servant d'oratoire  
à l'étage.



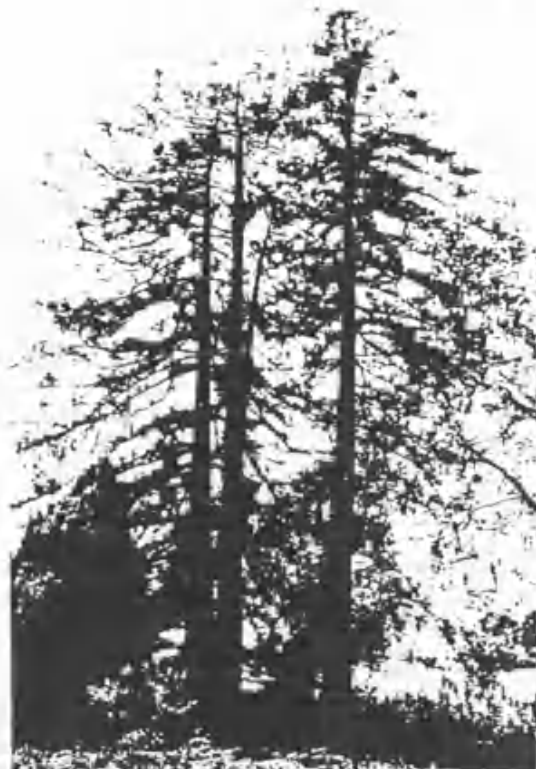
(B) "L'Omme, dès qu'elle sort du parc, où elle a été  
artificiellement élargie, se resserre sous un dôme  
de ronces et de branches enchevêtrées."





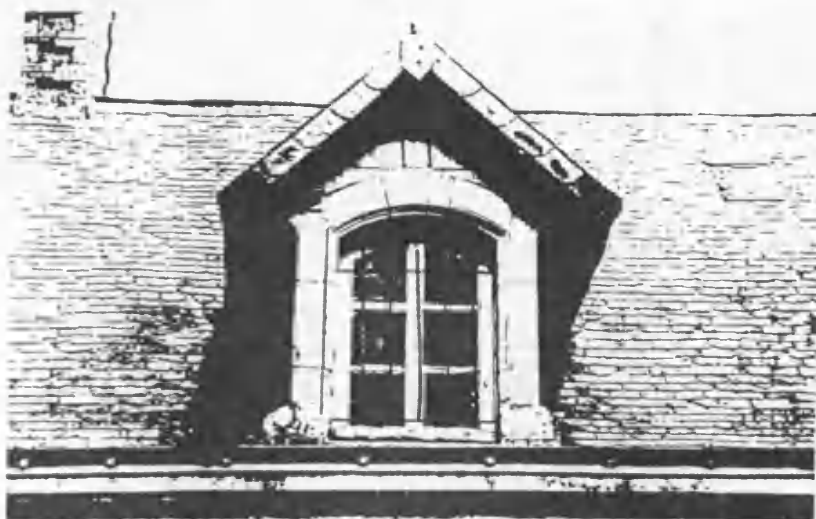
(H) Le grand grenier du pavillon de droite aménagé en musée personnel (entomologique) par Jacques Hervé-Bazin.

(M) La fenêtre de la chambre de Brasse-Bouillon.

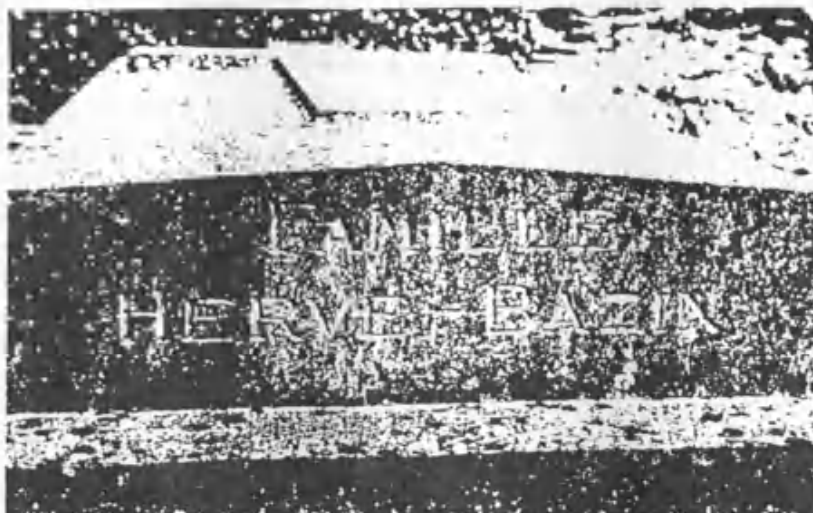


(H) Quelques taxauiers rescapés...

(B) La ferme qui a donné son nom au Pâtys dans la trilogie d'Hervé Bazin.



(B) "Il me plaît que (la tombe) celle de mon père, d'abord enterre à Segre (notre chapelle était pleine), puis ramené à Soledot, n'offre à l'œil qu'une dalle de marbre, avec cette seule inscription : ...



La Chapelle s O (2874 ha.) d. l'ouest  
Laudon

de de La gacherie  
(Mappes de Valois 1837)

Tourbières

10 de nauts

embouchure de l' Hoc maré  
villas nautaises

source d'eau  
minérales  
fermeuse

chataignes  
osiers

Forêt 11 avril

Canal

6 m. de grand Magail abattu  
12 m. de en coup

cloaque de Montetel

Via de la forêt

10 de nauts

Cen que fou (2870 ha.)  
de l'ouest  
Laudon

tourbières

forêt

de de Seillerad  
(seigneur de Notre  
seigneur de Seillerad  
par Nifard)

il fut aller tourner par Suce

Notations  
locales

par

qui j'os dire

Suce

le de au paille

chataignes  
maison de la forêt

Mairie  
de Sucé (L. Inf)  
-----

Sucé, le 13 janvier 1956

Archives Municipales NANCY  
Dépôt Hervé Bazin

Le Maire de Sucé  
à Monsieur Hervé Bazin, 23 bis quai Auguste Prévot  
à Chelles ( S et M)

Monsieur

En réponse à votre demande, j'ai l'honneur de vous  
donner ci-dessous quelques renseignements.

A ma connaissance, le chataignier dont il s'agit  
était sur la commune de Sucé, lieu dit Jaille; il a été abattu  
il y a déjà quelques années.

Un chataignier assez gros existe encore à l'extré-  
mité de l'ancienne propriété de Montretrait, à quelques mètres  
de la route de Saint Mars du Désert.

La pêche au Parelhier ne se pratique plus. Le Parel-  
lier fait maintenant partie d'un lot de pêche loué à la so-  
ciété de pêche "La Gaule Nantaise" et on y fait seulement la  
pêche à la ligne.

C'est bien l'Erdre qui sépare Carquefou et la Chapelle  
s/Erdre et il n'existe pas d'autre pont que celui de la  
Jonelière; pour aller de la Chapelle à Carquefou il faut pas-  
ser par Sucé ou encore par Nantes.

En fin il existe un ouvrage traitant de la commune  
de Sucé; ouvrage de l'abbé Grégoire, je ne sais si on le trouve  
encore en librairie. "

Dans l'espoir que ces quelques renseignements pour-  
ront vous être utiles, je vous prie d'agréer, Monsieur, l'as-  
surance de ma considération distinguée.

Le Maire

*[Signature]*



Fallais de justice

Paris p. Vi

esc.  
vers  
9<sup>de</sup> salle

drapeau

horloge

Tribunal  
de  
police

RF

tricolores  
RFes

RT

Liberte

egalite

fraternite

Buffet

capitaine  
d'esp.

Archives Municipales NANCY  
Dépôt Hervé Bazin

parking

Grille

aux fleurs  
de lys

velos  
a l'inter

plafond  
muralle

permeable

de  
chapelle



modèle mlet a l'avant du rû  
 le gars en robes en haat  
 2 femmes p'une plus aut une p'rous  
 p'rie en dessous Longs XVI, des avoat  
 p'rie des gards fleur  
 et un p'rie

avec une statue  
 de saint, sur son  
 sofa, avec des dans  
 en has clique de

Archives Municipales NANCY  
 Depot Hervé Bazin

Wonne un saint  
 2 dames en p'rie  
 et par de France p'rie es crivant  
 Inscrption Berget  
 forum et fies

FOOTS

carrière  
 ref en p'rie  
 p' France  
 effiant d'un  
 casque un  
 megrat en  
 comars de  
 mardre

Antique Combl. du Palais  
 Ass. Prisonniers de guerre et rebotes de palais  
 Comite d'Action de Resistance judiciaire

l'antichambre de Broze  
 au ans becozes electifas  
 p'rie colonnes de Broze

forum en com mof  
 p'rie un p'rie  
 p'rie en com mof

air eglise



Palais de Justice  
Chambre des Références

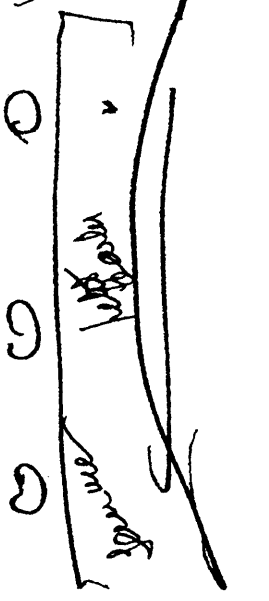
hurler

Republique

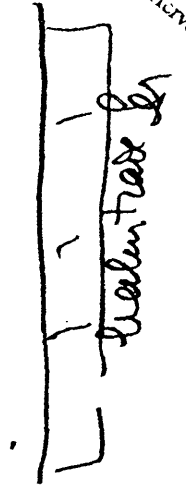
Plagiat a vue de nez  
avec 4 ampoules

consoles a palmettes

Référence



3 Lignes



Archives municipales NANCY  
Déput Hervé Bazin

galerie



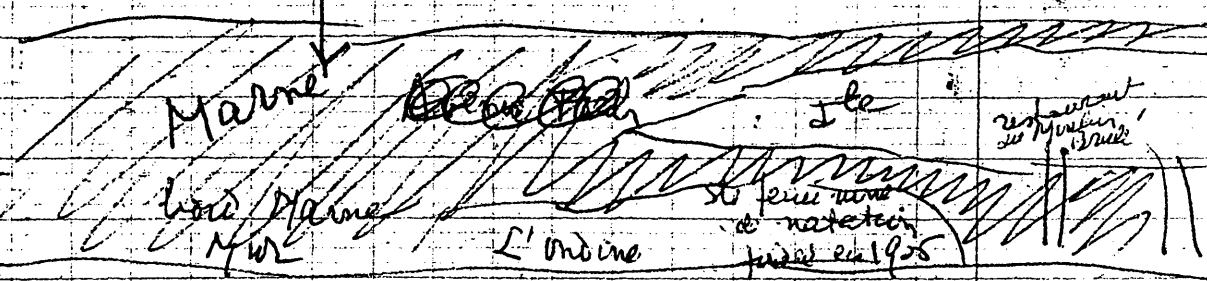
# Visite avec Cathelin en bord de mer

Archives Municipales NANCY  
Dépôt Hervé Bazin

Quai d'Alfort  
Rue des 2 Marins

(1)

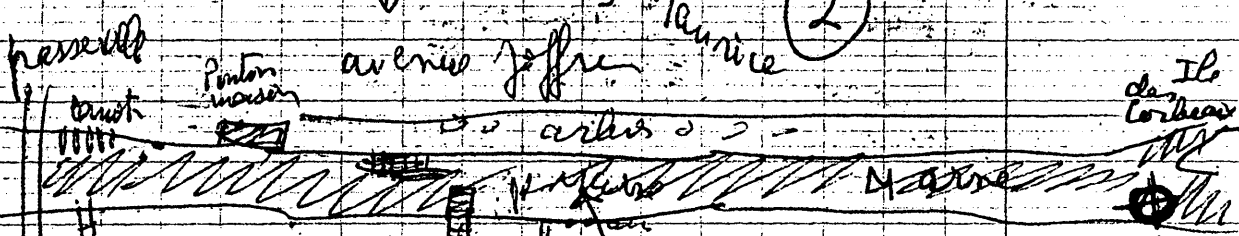
Dr Sanang - Le Florida  
Ou Emittas Bal (a. l'ave)



avenue Forth

(5<sup>e</sup> arr. de) Domaine de Charente améca

(2)



Bassin  
réserve  
ASA  
section de Natation

Maisons  
L'elan

"poste de secours"  
en rive - sur le mur  
"Pointement de secours"

Dépos  
admission  
de se baigner  
sans payer  
Bain  
de  
Constance  
Chapite 1

Barrage / pas ser. 56 brise-jets

+ l'air  
club-  
jeune

quai d'Alfort  
habité 2 faces à partir barrage

Centre  
Municipal  
de culture  
en face  
du barrage  
et  
plage



Port de  
charbonnage

fil  
et  
accidents  
d'entretien

Accident  
de voiture

Maisons d'Alfort

Bord de l'eau

Bibliothèque Municipale  
Œuvres Sociales

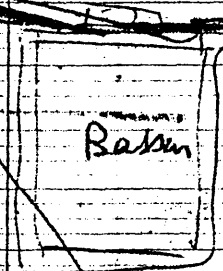
Square de H. Frémont  
anti-fus

deuxième niveau de l'école  
+ 1908 44

des années 11 et 12 tours de moulins  
des ponts aussi par les  
cristal aussi catastrophe

②

①



monument  
au pè-  
le  
Dessiné  
1879-1912  
Suite de la lande  
du pont  
de chateaux

Square  
interne carré

corde  
de la police

un banc  
"Interdit"

Arbres de ciment  
blancs

Banc sans  
ciment  
côté de la vasque

Exement Original

1882

1. Supernatural deeds of God and His angels  
 2. deeds of the holy men and women of the past and present

Spent the evening

descente cordons

6 more Feb & a more

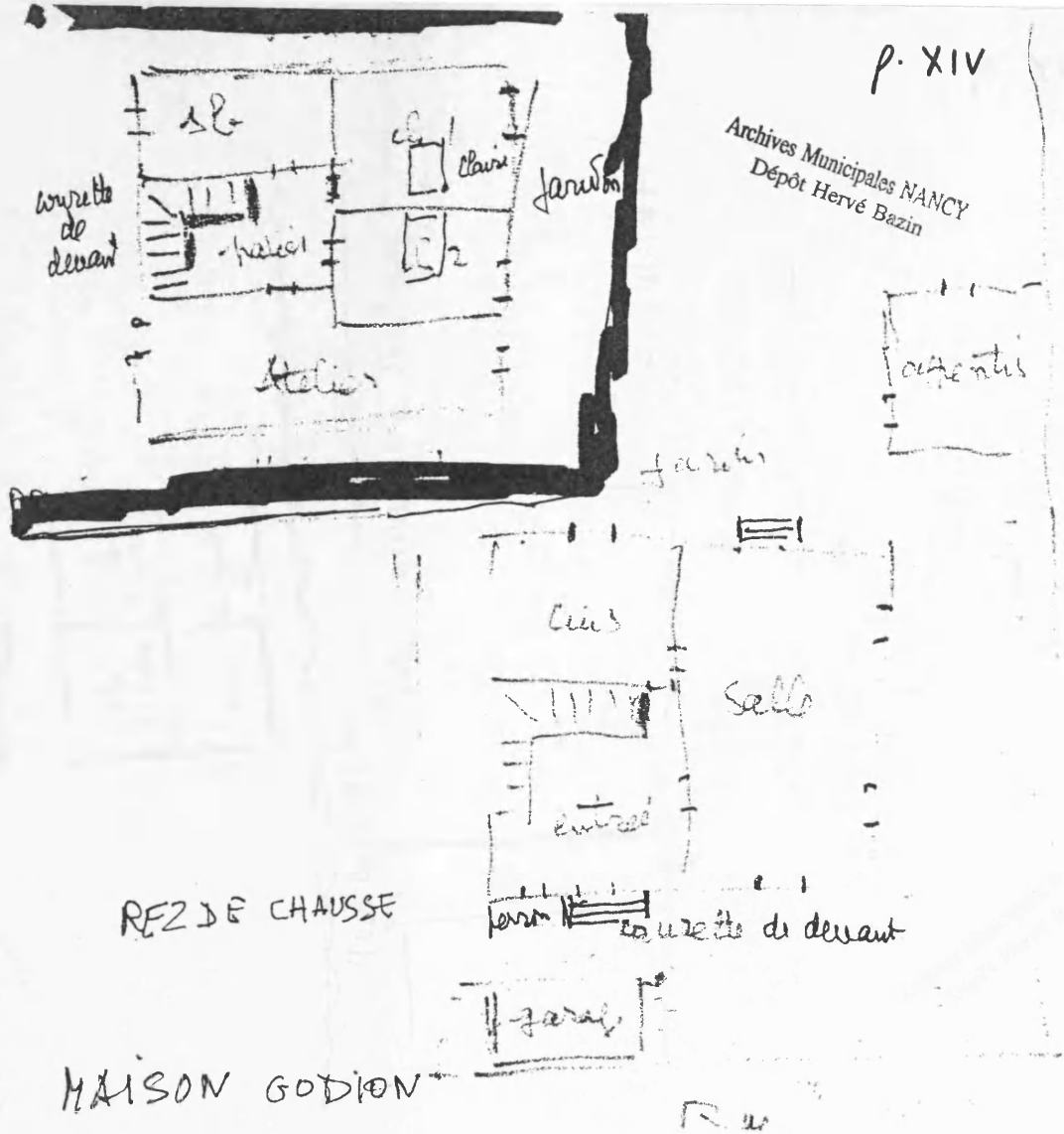
*Bangor*

Proques de la nuit son duobone

9 grande rue à Maurice



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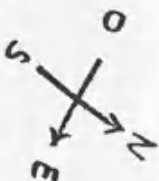
# **SPECIAL NOTE**

**THIS ITEM IS BOUND IN SUCH A  
MANNER AND WHILE EVERY  
EFFORT HAS BEEN MADE TO  
REPRODUCE THE CENTRES, FORCE  
WOULD RESULT IN DAMAGE**



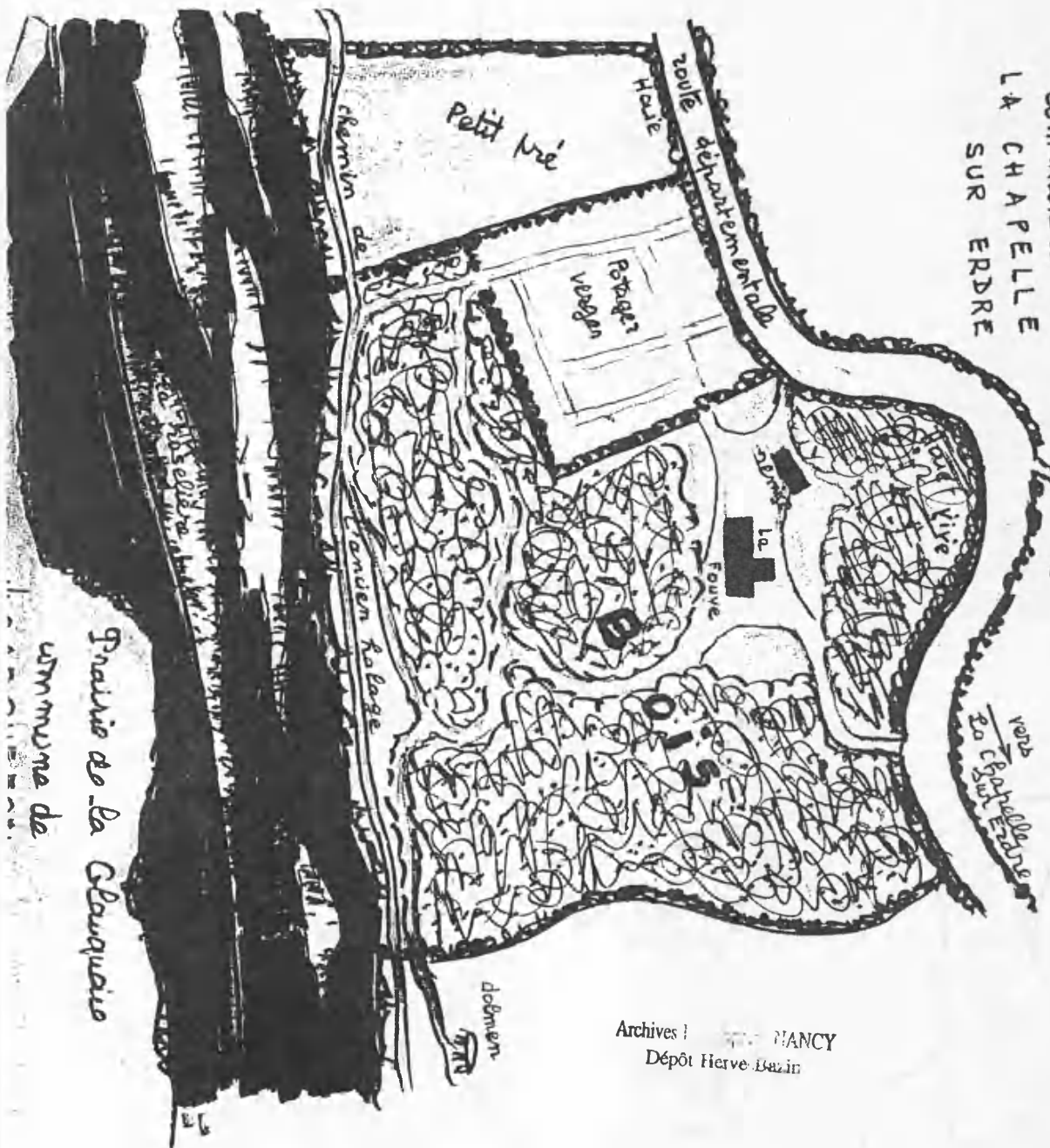
# La Foue

Commune de  
LA CHAPELLE  
SUR ERDRE

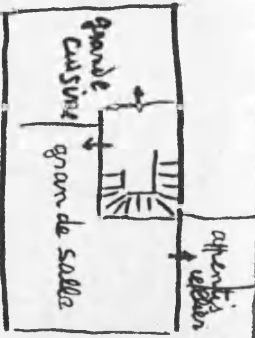


Le clos  
Bouelle

La Chapelle  
sur Erdre



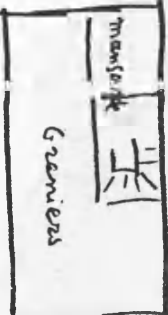
Archives | NANCY  
Dépôt Herve Bazin



nd.ch



ju



gr.

qui d'une auuel  
chem de la maison  
d'Isabelle et de  
son père au bord  
de l'étendue

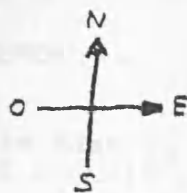


Le gîte de "Hix" ou  
"Quidam"

à la ronceraie  
d'Espion



QUI  
Plan succinct  
de la forêt



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SI P. XIX  
SAVIN

grande

Putzsch

MEMOR

SUR

DUBIN

 $S^T =$ 

limite de commune

La Marouille

Roncia

gita 1

Ronceraie  
d'Espion  
gite 2

La Pierre,  
Lacroix

Le Grand-Hallier

Taillie

Le  
Ressaut  
(pinède)

grande Futaie

Saxifragaceae

Route de

Post version 2

Rond Point de  
La Grande

Patricia

LAGRAIRIE

testis

Grand Verbow

ES 179, 73B

# GENETICS



A LAISSER EN BLANC

I - DESCRIPTION DES LIEUX

La Société CALVET exploite dans un immeuble d'habitation un restaurant 163 Boulevard SAINT GERMAIN à PARIS 6ème arrondissement. L'immeuble marque l'angle du Boulevard SAINT GERMAIN et de la rue du Dragon. Il a une superficie de 120 mètres carrés environ sur quatre étages.

Le rez-de-chaussée est occupé par la cuisine et une salle de restaurant.

Au 1er étage, une seconde salle de restaurant est reliée à la première par un escalier intérieur en bois qui ne dessert que ce niveau.

Les 2 et 3ème étages sont à usage d'habitation. L'atelier de lavage et de repassage du linge de table se trouve également situé au 3ème étage.

Le dernier niveau est utilisé en grenier où sont entreposés différents matériaux combustibles.

Un escalier en bois, ayant son entrée à rue du Dragon dessert tous les étages.

L'immeuble, de construction ancienne, est en briques et pierre mais a subi différentes travaux dans son gros oeuvre. Certains planchers sont en bois, d'autres en béton armé.

La charpente est en bois, la couverture en zinc.

II - CONDITION DE LA DECOUVERTE DU FEU

Les cuisiniers aperçoivent le feu dans la gaine de ventilation de la hotte de la cuisine. Ils préviennent le propriétaire du restaurant. Devant l'importance de l'incendie, celui-ci fait évaquer sans pause quatre vingt clients qui étaient, ordonne au personnel de quitter l'établissement et alerte les secours.

1) 21 heures 10 - L'Etat-Major reçoit par l'automatique 16, un appel pour Feu de Cuisine 163 Boulevard Saint Germain rez-de-chaussée.

21 heures 12 - Le Fourgon-Pompe, l'Echelle sur porteur de Colombiers partent.

Le Premier-Secours de POISSY est demandé.

III - SITUATION A L'ARRIVÉE

21 heures 14 - Les secours de COLOMBIER arrivent sur les lieux. De grandes flammes sortent des fenêtres du rez-de-chaussée, du premier et deuxième étages, et montent en façade jusqu'à la toiture. L'escalier qui dessert l'immeuble est entièrement embrasé.

IV - DÉROULEMENT CHRONOLOGIQUE DES OPERATIONS

Le Capitaine VARRIVAST, chef de garde, donne l'ordre d'installer deux grosses lances en refoulement sur le Fourgon-Pompe. Bonche d'incendie utilisée n°69 - 6ème arrondissement - pression 3 bars 75 M2 X 1 par la deuxième équipe du Fourgon, de plein pied par l'entrée du restaurant.







1) En 1974, l'Etat Major aurait, c'est vraisemblable, reçu plusieurs appels et aurait systématiquement fait partir plusieurs fourgons.

- alerté le Général et l'officier de Permanence
- envoyé un officier de l'Etat-Major de Groupement, sur les lieux et sous délai

Le Général FERAUGE, que vous pouvez situer dans l'action, était petit et obèse, très sanguin et très colérique. Traumatisé par quelques grandes opérations (Publicis notamment), il se rendait sur presque toutes les interventions pour deux raisons. Sa conception très exigeante de ses responsabilités de commandement à prendre en main les opérations dès leur début, vérifiant le travail de chacun, houpillant celui-ci, criant après celui-là, (la Fontaine a très bien raconté ce genre de choses), jusqu'à ce qu'il ne

Après avoir été de bonne nuit, cette activité était d'un air, très remarquée des journalistes de presse écrite et télévisée et comme il n'était pas avare de commentaires, il était très populaire dans ces milieux.

Un feu comme celui du restaurant CALVET, en 1944, aurait, compte tenu de l'heure, réuni sur les lieux Europe 1, RTL, France Inter, FR3, (peut-être même TF1) France-Soir, le Parisien libéré, l'Agence France Presse etc...

Tous ces journalistes et photographes, ayant des autorisations spéciales, auraient franchi les barrières de police et se seraient trouvés au milieu des pompiers.

Dans une opération comme celle-ci, bien menée, avec sauvetage de personne réussi, le Général FERAUGE, crispé dès le début (il serait arrivé vers 21 heures 20) se serait montré détendu voire, souriant ou hilare, face à la presse. Il n'aurait pas manqué de rappeler que la femme <sup>sauvée par l'incident</sup> n'aurait en la vie sauve que parce qu'elle avait fermé sa porte, empêchant ainsi ~~le~~ feu de rentrer dans le local où elle se trouvait. Il se serait retiré vers 23 heures 30, et, bien sûr, aucun officier ne se serait retiré avant.

En même temps que le Général, seraient arrivés sur les lieux un Colonel (Commandant en second) un autre Colonel (Chef de corps) un lieutenant Colonel (officier de garde technique) un officier de préventif, un officier de liaison et notre photographe de garde.

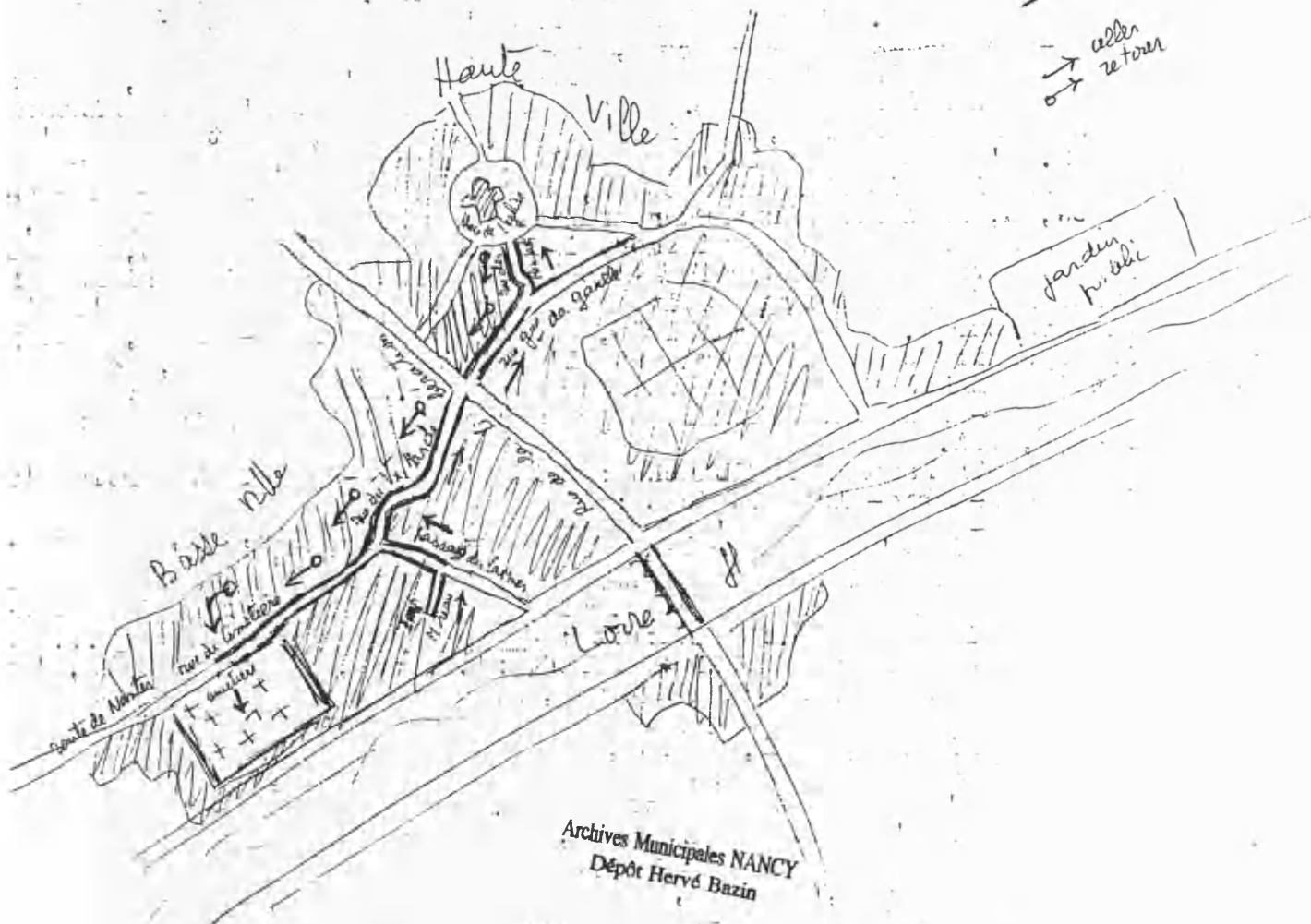
Les spectateurs ou les témoins n'auraient pas pu ne pas remarquer un tel manège.

dans du poêle et le corbillard s'ébranla, tandis que les chantres  
~~ENNENNENNENN~~, pour occuper le vide et le silence, entonnaient le de  
profundis

plan de la ville  
 pour la  
 nouvelle

itinéraire  
 du convoi

→ aller  
 ← retour



Puis elle leva les yeux et, à l'instant, ses paupières cessèrent de papilloter ; à l'instant, elle sut qu'elle était sauvée. Foudroyé par le tutoiement, M. Brown ne bougeait plus, M. Brown était en train de mourir, debout, de s'effacer derrière son double. Et se détachant de lui, avec un visage renouvelé, Henri Lagruelle, incapable de se contenir plus longtemps, éclatait d'un rire rélé et commençait à déboutonner son manteau.

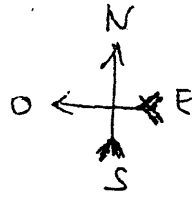
Hervé Bazin

Archives Municipales NANCY  
Dépôt Hervé Bazin

nouvelle inventée  
pour "interpréter" les lithos  
de Font : graves

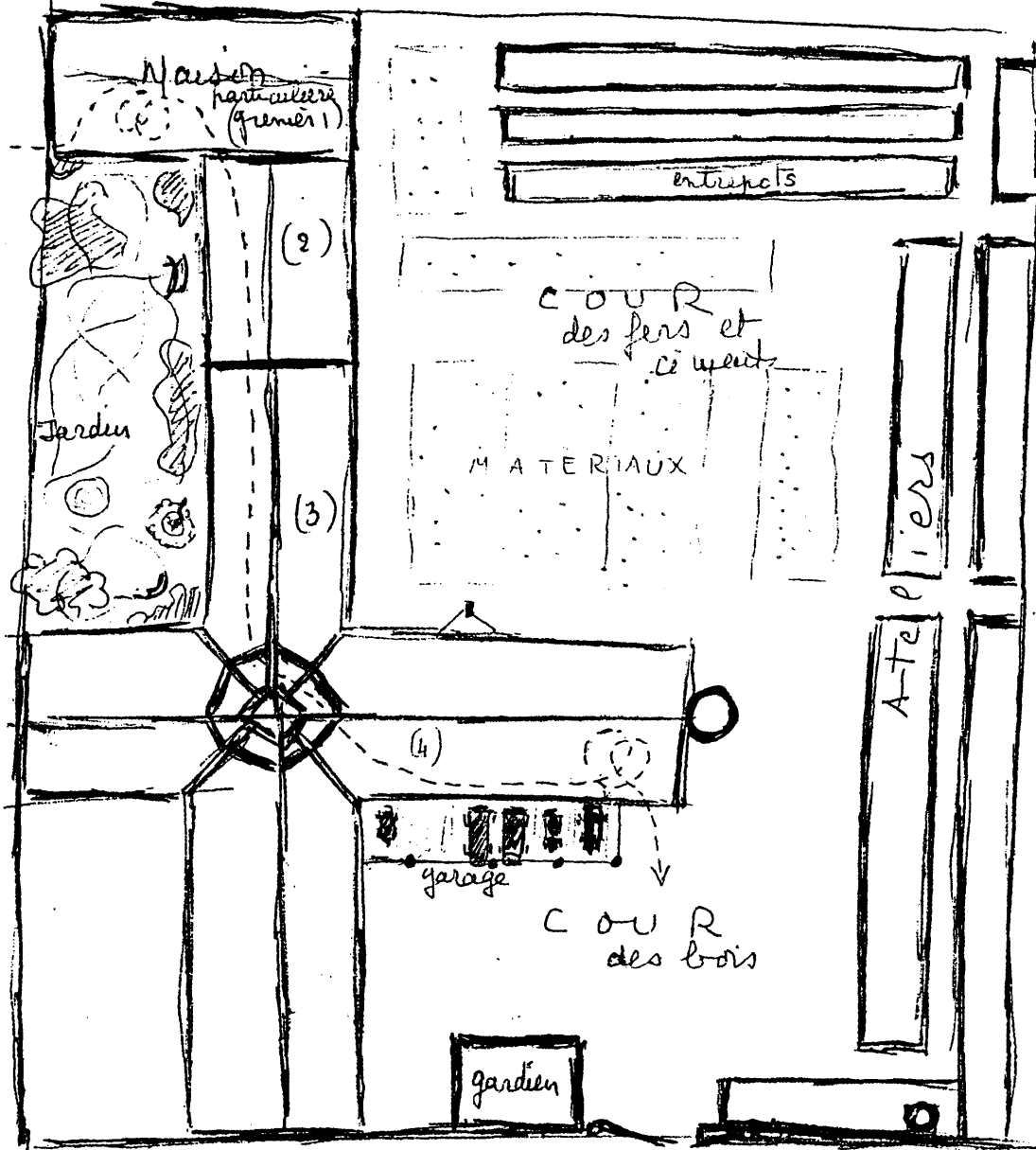
A la commission  
par suite de l'absence  
du chef Joel Picton, lithographe  
Terre n°  
A d'elles, 25 bis rue Pré'vot

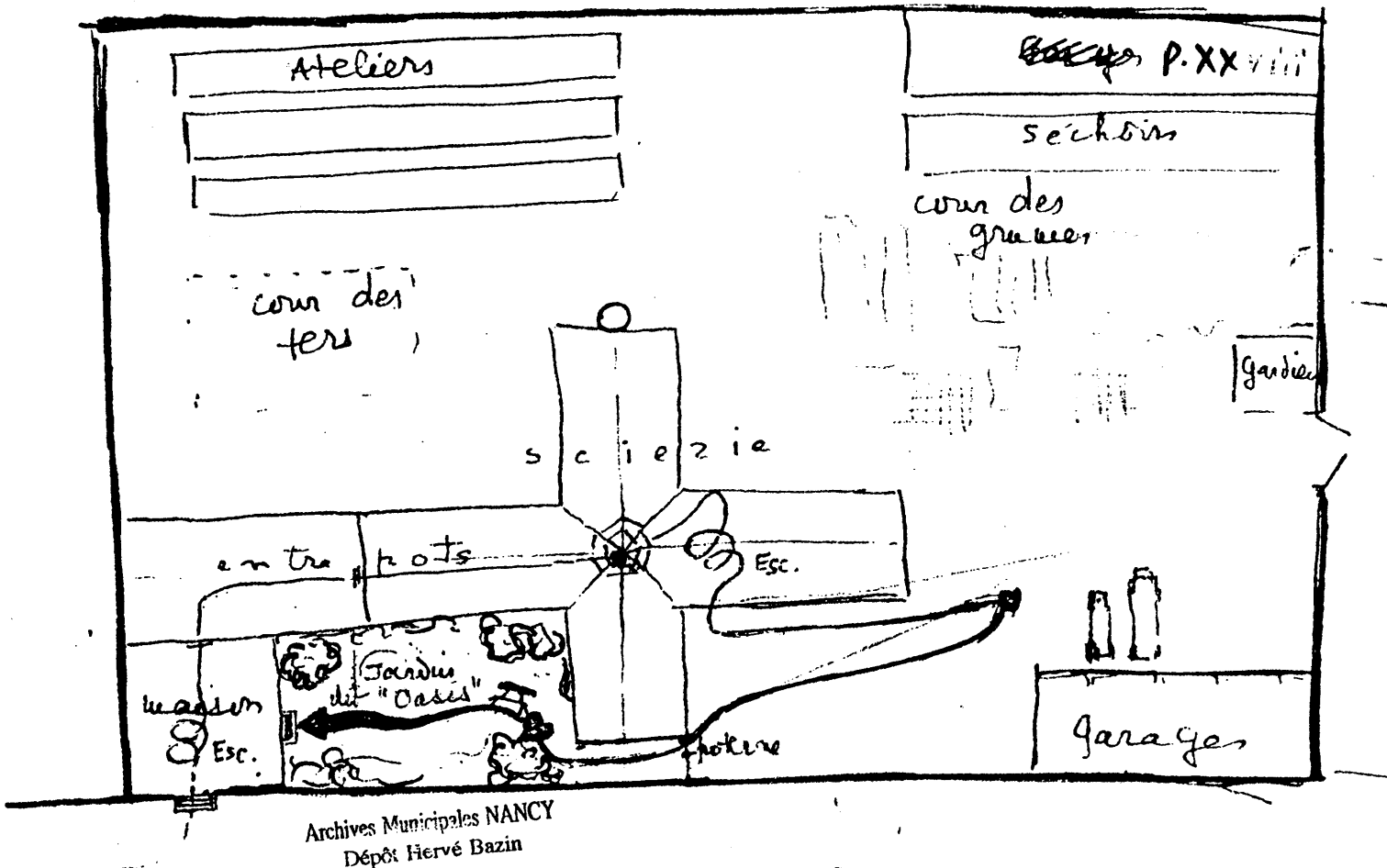
Titre d'abord lynn Lagruelle : Enscrite  
"Ce pauvre Hervé" (nouvelle littéraire)  
Enfin "Sonnets d'un amoureux".



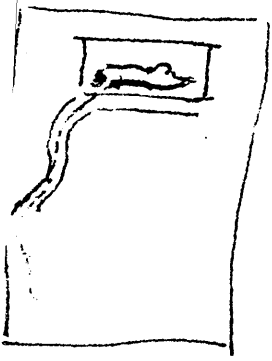
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Plan de la "maison Lapruelle"





le chemin par un rue par le rue Lapruelle



### Plan des Etés Loguella.

Il y aura peut-être lieu, pour monter poétiquement  
l'itinéraire de Huo L. de dessiner  
l'ensemble des batisses, en grise, voire - au besoin -  
~~une~~ "coupe". Un simple trait rouge (qui  
trait et s'épaississant, symboliquement)  
servirait en somme de fil conducteur au  
récit.

Rien entendu d'une façon un peu allée  
un peu raide, quand on atteindra le jardin  
qui étoit traité en "caser" (une autre couleur?)

Un petit cœur sur l'échelle. Un + fort au-dessus  
de Huo L. décide de retourner par la fenêtre.  
Un cœur dans l'escalier, un peu de l'escalier. Les  
lignes "rouge" de la maison, les escaliers, les  
une → indiquant l'entrée de la maison.

On pourra peut-être (à voir) "faire mourir" le haut  
rouge à distance, sans le red d'un vieux Huo L.  
surtout de cimetière.





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roman fair

10

[illegible]

p. xxxii

# Si fortement de la tribu andégave...

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*Hervé Bazin*  
*de l'Académie Goncourt*

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Dépôt Hervé Bazin

EPARPILLÉS en France, ni moi ni aucun de mes frères n'habitons plus notre ville natale. Il n'y reste qu'un caveau de famille, d'ailleurs plein et du fait de la distance rarement fleuri : un caveau où nous n'avons aucune chance de nous réunir auprès de nos parents et grands-parents. C'est un exemple banal de cette dispersion des parentèles et du brassage général qui, au hasard des emplois, des mariages, des adresses successives, n'a cessé d'affaiblir les enracinements provinciaux, d'effacer les cousinages, de rétrécir les filiations au point que pour la plupart de nos enfants la leur se réduit au couple dont ils sont issus et qu'ils se sentent naturalisés par leur domicile.

On est d'où l'on naît, répétait mon père. C'est encore un peu vrai. Mais la réussite de plus en plus fréquente des *parachutés*, la popularité des champions venus d'ailleurs et *rachetés* par le club du cru, le développement de la diaspora vacancière, la double appartenance à quoi conduit la multiplication des résidences secondaires (souvent les plus chéries) montrent assez qu'il faudra réviser le dicton. On est de plus en plus de l'endroit où l'on vit ; et parfois de nulle part (c'est le cas dans mainte ville-dortoir pour des milliers d'*inter-urbains*). Les spécialistes commencent à mesurer l'importance qu'a sur notre psychologie *ce manque d'attachement poliade* et, regrettant les *communautés restreintes* où s'épanouit l'identité, ne soupçonnent pas sans raison que la bande pour les jeunes, le parti pour les adultes n'en sont pas devenus pour rien les virulents substitués.

#### UN HASARD TRES SYMBOLIQUE

Serons-nous la dernière génération à se ressentir comme *émigrée* parce qu'elle n'habite plus son pays d'origine, à jeter dans la conversation des phrases significatives. Chez moi, *la lumière est plus blonde...* Chez moi, *les voûtes des églises sont plus bombées* ? Depuis quarante ans je m'y surprends sans cesse. Rien à faire : j'ai l'œil Plantagenêt. Trop bleu ou trop pâle, le ciel n'est pas mon ciel ; et les rivières, qui ne fluent pas sur bancs de sable, ne mordorent pas mon eau. Parce qu'elle était angevine depuis au moins quatre siècles, ma branche paternelle, qui dans l'entre-vallées, sur les alluvions de l'Authion, fut l'une des premières à faire sa pelote dans la graine de fleurs, puis compta, avec nombre de juristes, une demi-douzaine d'écrivains ou de politiciens du coin. Parce que les miens, que je connais tous par leur nom et dont le visage, depuis deux cents ans, m'est familier (j'ai leurs portraits), font partie de la rubrique locale. Parce que je suis comme eux né à Angers et plus précisément rue du Bellay, hasard très symbolique. Parce que j'ai été élevé rue du Temple, dans

l'ancienne et inconfortable maison des Templiers qu'habitait ma grand-mère (et dont la tour d'angle abritait un escalier d'*orneaux* en spirale au sommet de quoi ma gouvernante, Mlle Lion, m'enleva dans ses bras pour mieux me faire entendre les cloches de la ville carillonnant à toute volée pour la victoire). Parce que je n'en suis parti qu'à vingt ans et que, si j'y retourne, moins souvent que les hirondelles, c'est avec le même goût pour le vieux nid. Parce que la moitié de mon œuvre a l'Anjou pour cadre, quand ce n'est pas Angers même. Parce que je sais combien de pas il faut faire pour traverser la place du Ralliement, qui est notre place de la Concorde. Parce que, peu gêné par mes contradictions, je pardonne à mes souvenirs, au nom de leur cadre, et que je me sens aussi satisfait d'avoir pour aïeul un chef chouan qui força les Ponts-de-Cé, défenses avancées de la cité, que de voir celle-ci confier aujourd'hui à nos célèbres roseraies le soin de fournir les chevaliers de la rose-au-poing.

#### LE DANGER D'ETRE D'ANGERS

Bloue-et-blanche, si mariale, si longtemps traversée par les processions d'anges du Grand-Sacre et encore maintenant si fidèle au tuf et à l'ardoise ! Comme la clef qui figure sur tes armes nous enfermait bien dans tes murs ! *Le danger d'être d'Angers* (disait plaisamment Pavie) ne ressemble pas à celui d'être corse. Notre idiome à nous, en effet, c'est le français, affiné dans les châteaux perchés sur nos côteaux. Mais si le particularisme ici n'existe pas, la particularité persiste que les *étrangers* pénètrent mal, mes compatriotes ayant une manière affable — et terriblement efficace — pour défendre leur complicité. L'Anjou est une île de terre ferme, essentiellement baignée par l'histoire. Très semblable à l'ancienne Ile-de-France, dont elle fut rivale : sauf que nos comtes, nous les avons envoyés régner en Angleterre et que nos ducs, nous les avons expédiés sur quatre trônes d'Europe. Comme la Seine partage Paris, la Maine partage notre ville : tête et cœur, carrefour de routes et

de fleuves, rassemblant fortement pays de ceps et pays de souches, trente-six cantons de glaise, d'humus ou de caillasse dont la géographie n'était pourtant pas impérative, puisqu'elle fait allégeance à Notre Dame la Loire, suzeraine d'autres fiefs, à travers quoi, furieuse ou nonchalante, elle ne fait jamais que passer. Je tiens pour important que, malgré les abandons consentis à nos voisins lors du grand découpage révolutionnaire (qui nous fit perdre Château-Gontier, La Flèche, Bourgueil...), le département soit resté constitué par l'essentiel de la Province; qu'il continue à s'identifier avec elle; que nous ne soyons pas vraiment du Maine-et-Loire, mais demeurions angevins; que ce terme s'applique aux natifs d'Anjou comme aux natifs d'Angers même, tous *si fortement de la tribu andégave*, assurait Blanchoin, *qu'on pourrait croire que nos rues s'étendent de Segré à Saumur, de Baugé à Cholet...*

#### CHANTER DANS SON ARBRE GENEALOGIQUE

Allons, Dumnacus, notre père, lisse tes moustaches tombantes! Je suis bien de tes fils. D'Ulger à Proust (le chimiste, bien sûr), du roi René à David, j'exalte l'héritage: *le livre du cuer d'amour esprîs*, le brochet au beurre blanc, *la boule de fort*, la fillette de Layon, les dix-sept tours de

schiste noir que Condé appelait *la plus fameuse forteresse du royaume* et qui, de verticale en horizontale, font aujourd'hui pendant à dix-sept stades, le S.C.O., le festival d'art dramatique où Camus redonnait son *Caligula*, les grisailles de Saint-Serge, les rosaces de Saint-Maurice, les Z.I. où se sont installés Bull ou Cibié, Outelec ou Thomson, et ces boulevards gagnés sur des remparts dont les notables conservèrent si longtemps la hauteur. Des lissiers de l'*Apocalypse* comme de ceux qui nous firent cadeau du *Chant du Monde* de Lurçat, qu'ai-je voulu être sinon le modeste continuateur, tisseur de phrases, soucieux de faire roman par roman (j'ai lu ça dans notre *Courrier de l'Ouest*) *une espèce de tapisserie rendant compte, panneau par panneau, d'une évolution sociale saisie au niveau du quotidien.*

Comme Mauriac, comme Faulkner, je suis — toutes proportions gardées — de ceux dont Max Jacob disait qu'ils ne chantent bien que dans leur arbre généalogique. Quand je reviens chez moi, de temps à autre, il m'arrive de passer rue Ménage (Gilles Ménage, poète et grammairien, ami de Mme de Sévigné et dont Molière fit le Vadius des *Femmes savantes*: ancêtre que je partage avec Michel de Saint-Pierre); il m'arrive de remonter le quai René-Bazin. Est-ce assez farce? Je me prends à penser que vers l'an 2000, un bout de rue dans le quartier de l'Esvière où, enfant, je poussais mon cerceau, ferait bien mon affaire.

Cette vieille chronique  
"à l'ancienne"  
qui m'avait été  
qu'un cri, un cri  
d'amour, dans sa  
vie, pour une  
enfant qui m'était  
si chère pas de son  
sang...

Armand  
Loroux = Laroux  
Fouquet = Fout

Les Folcrou = Les Fourmy

Utiliser pour Saborné  
une aventure romanesque  
à l'instar de la petite  
Fouquet (mais la terminer  
à la fin versée)

Utiliser une chronique  
qui plus exacte et  
m'attache à elle (exemples  
des 2 premiers tomes,  
exemples du 3)

## Or de la Chronette

La section de la chronique  
"en face". Au vu du fil  
ayant pris celles pour H2 Artin,  
traversons la Harne et  
installons Jean Repeau à  
Gurnay (non y et ions toutes  
les fois, y est plus près de moi (prévoit)  
Chamois, venue et  
légèrement retouchée, dont  
les correspondances  
aux données de  
vièvre au point  
et de la lueur  
du petit cheval.  
(La "mort" de la vie  
vièvre femme, par  
accident, per mettant  
seule de donner une  
suite et d'inclure  
dans le tout une note,  
entièrement romanesque,  
des passages véritablement  
véritables. A noter ainsi un personnage fictif  
(Saborné) pour remplacer Harques)

La scène de la signature  
dans une liasse  
"Harques", qui est  
vraie, ne sera pas  
utilisée. Elle fait  
"avantageux".

Notes  
rapides  
août 1971

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Dépôt Hervé Bazin

La scène de la signature  
dans une liasse  
"Harques", qui est  
vraie, ne sera pas  
utilisée. Elle fait  
"avantageux".

- La mort de la mère qui est tenue  
(P. 100-101)
- Les scènes du clouage, du testament,  
du mariage
- L'enterrement (Burgin)
- L'enterrement (Burgin)
- Le rachat de la Belle Angoria
- Le mariage non de Fred
- La préférence d'un mœ à (P. 100-101)
- L'enterrement, auto... etc

- Le testament en faveur de  
Jacques, légataire universel
- La mort de la mère à Chelles  
(P. 100-101)
- L'enterrement à Luras  
(P. 100-101)
- La vente de la Belle Angoria

Bonille ne sera aucune des  
mes 3 femmes  
Tous les enfants sont inter-  
venus pour empêcher  
l'identification

En la forest de longue actente  
 Tu entreras selon m'entente...

( Roi René )

Dederz la lande enz el bocage  
 Ot uns homs son hermitage...

( Lai del désiré )

On ne peut lui dire pis que son nom

( proverbe )

Le vacancier croit fuir la mégapole : il ne fait que changer de termitière en infestant la mer et la montagne où les media le rattrapent, le regavent de chantaïlle, de nouvelles et de publicité... O solitude, partout dévastée comme la nature ! Qui n'a, au moins une fois, rêvé de se replier loin du pullulement, du vacarme du monde ?

( Anonyme )