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THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM IN THE THEATRE
OF MICHEL TREMBLAY

by

Katharine M. Dennis

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM IN THE THEATRE
OF MICHEL TREMBLAY

By

Katharine M. Dennis

This study explores the problem of freedom as interpreted by Michel Tremblay in nine plays from his Belles-Soeurs cycle. An introductory overview of Quebec's history and literature presents evidence of an authoritarian social order which, from the mid-nineteenth century until the Quiet Revolution, gradually sapped Quebec's vitality in the name of "la survivance." The plays, written between 1965 and 1984, are then analyzed to show how Tremblay portrayed the effects of authoritarianism, and the progress of individuals toward self-affirmation and the exercise of freedom.

Tremblay's early plays depicted alienated men and women whose lives are defined by roles. Further weakened by authoritarian relationships that foster dependence, and by a philosophy of dualism which teaches sexual repression, these individuals lack a clear sense of self. A few rebels refuse their socially assigned roles, only to adopt others which are equally limiting. In 1971 Tremblay introduced the first of several characters who, despite society's deceptive language and images, uncover basic truths about themselves and others. Discarding traditional roles and gender distinctions, they exercise personal freedom; the authoritarian system remains powerful, however, able to crush the defiant individual who encourages the weak and dispossessed to become more independent.

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In 1977, Tremblay initiated a series of novels which reveal the backgrounds of characters in the plays. He returned to the play cycle in 1984 to portray a woman's successful struggle to unify a repressed and divided self. Helped by a society which values the individual and promotes personal freedom, the protagonist accepts the past and achieves social integration as a self-directed, independent person. Through techniques drawn from the classical theatre and the theatre of the absurd, Tremblay encourages audiences to look and listen with fresh attention as he depicts Quebec's experience of a universal problem, the exercise of freedom.

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1989

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Introduction

Michel Tremblay made his debut on the Quebec literary scene in 1964 with a one-act play, Le Train, which won first prize in Radio Canada's Young Authors' Competition. His first major play, Les Belles-Soeurs, was produced in 1968, when it was the theatrical event of the Montreal season. In addition to the plays which now make up the cycle of the Belles-Soeurs and the related novels in the Chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal, Tremblay has published other plays and novels, a collection of short stories, and adaptations of plays by classical and contemporary authors. Regularly performed in Canada, and especially in Quebec, Tremblay's theatre is steadily reaching new audiences. In November 1986, as his twenty-seventh book was being published in Quebec, several works from his play cycle were being produced in theatres from Sweden to Japan, and a series for British television was under way.

In the beginning, Tremblay did not anticipate the creation of a fictional universe, with interrelated and recurring characters through whom he would explore the problem of personal freedom. This "universe," the world of the belles-soeurs, grew out of Tremblay's realistic, yet imaginative portrayal of life on the Plateau Mont-Royal, the working-class Montreal neighborhood where he was born and grew up. Alternately focusing on family life on the residential rue Fabre and the activities of the Main, Montreal's nightclub district, Tremblay revealed that despite their widely divergent lifestyles, his characters were all

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confined by a traditional ideology which denied human freedom. Nevertheless, as one play followed another, characters began to rebel against their dehumanizing situation, and to seek their own voices and places in society. In 1977 Tremblay announced that the cycle was complete, and began work on the first of the Chroniques.

In less than ten years Michel Tremblay had earned a reputation as one of Quebec's leading playwrights, and few would argue with critic Zelda Heller that Les Belles-Soeurs marked a "turning point in Quebec theatre, in Quebec literature, even in Quebec thinking."¹ Not that the response had always been favorable--Tremblay's use of coarse, profane joual or Québécois, as it is now called, was highly controversial, especially in the beginning. "Je ne suis pas bigot de nature, mais je dois bien avouer que c'est la première fois de ma vie que j'entends en une seule soirée autant de sacres, de jurons, de mots orduriers de toilette," objected Martial Dassylva in his review of the play's première.² Others argued that however offensive the language might be, it was unquestionably appropriate. "Sans le joual, Germaine Lauzon n'existerait pas, Les Belles-Soeurs n'existeraient pas," wrote Laurent Mailhot.³ Whether they liked it or not, Quebec audiences heard themselves as they never had before. They also saw themselves in new ways, for the play's realism was undeniable: "tout ce qu'il dit est VRAI, plus vrai que nature," wrote one critic; "elle (la pièce) nous permet de nous voir comme dans un miroir," wrote another.⁴ And when the mirror failed to reflect the image of the traditional Quebec mother, spectators were often both surprised and shocked: what they had taken for reality was a myth. The mère de famille had disappeared, and in her place were belles-soeurs. As Laurent Mailhot observed, "Jamais



peut-être dans notre littérature un mythe n'a été à ce point réactivé et dénoncé, rempli et vidé."⁵

But Tremblay did not confine his attention to just one myth; he called into question the entire ideology which had shaped French Canadians' self-images for a century. Within four years after the opening of Les Belles-Soeurs, five more plays in the cycle had been produced. In each one, Tremblay confronted audiences with contemporary Quebec, with sounds and images which refuted their traditional identity as an agrarian society of French-speaking Catholics devoted to family and Church, and shunning the materialism of their Anglo-Saxon neighbors. Joual was far from the standard French which was supposedly their goal, and said much about the state of their religious faith as well. As the family disintegrated, individuals felt cut off from God, from each other, and from their own being, and were overwhelmed by their apparently meaningless existence. Furthermore, the Main, the one hope of escaping the family, offered only an illusory freedom. Beneath the glitter, its social order was confining and dehumanizing.

During this early period, Tremblay's goal was to present a portrait of Quebec's alienation. In 1969, he characterized his theatre as a "claque sur la gueule," a theatre "qui vise à provoquer une prise de conscience chez le spectateur. Voyons-nous, une bonne fois, tels que nous sommes, pour un jour, peut-être, dépasser tout cela."⁶ By 1971, when asked about the hopelessness and despair of his plays, he pointed to the most recent one, A Toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou, in which sixteen-year-old Carmen deliberately chooses to pursue a career, rather than assume the traditional role for women: "C'est le premier personnage que je fais depuis que j'écris qui s'en sort. Il fallait que ça se

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fasse, ce théâtre de désespoir-là pour aboutir à quelque chose."⁷ Protagonists in the next two plays, Hosanna, and Bonjour, là, bonjour, although less orthodox than Carmen, are able to identify personal values and develop fulfilling relationships. In doing so, they free themselves from confining social norms and assume responsibility for making their own choices. In 1976, Sainte Carmen de la Main depicted a brief moment of fulfillment in artistic achievement and social responsibility, suggesting, however, that such heights of perfection and selfless love cannot long endure. Finally, through the two characters in Damnée Manon sacrée Sandra, Tremblay took a fresh look at life on rue Fabre. There is a new mood of tolerance, but although individuals are no longer condemned by society for the choices they have made, they are still confined by roles which prevent direct communication between individuals--and between a playwright and his public. On this rather personal note, Tremblay closed the cycle of the Belles-Soeurs.

Tremblay then turned to the novel to explore the lives of characters first introduced in the play cycle. In a 1979 interview he talked of his desire to "create a kind of large epic, which takes place in one particular street, at one particular point in the history of Quebec, and to make out of it a microcosm."⁸ In another interview, two years later, he gave several reasons for writing novels. One was that he wanted to be able to speak directly to his audience in a way that he found impossible to do as a playwright: "Alors, j'ai écrit un roman pour pouvoir, moi, parler au monde sans passer à travers des personnages."⁹ Above all, he wanted to explain his Plateau Mont-Royal characters:

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Parce que je voulais rajeunir mes personnages de vingt-cinq ans et aussi faire une genèse de mon théâtre. J'ai écrit un cycle entre 1965 et 1976, et j'ai eu besoin de décrire au monde comment les personnages en étaient arrivés à être ce qu'ils étaient. Quand les quatre romans des "Chroniques" vont être finis, l'oeuvre suivante sera Les Belles-Soeurs. Je suis en train d'expliquer comment mes personnages sont devenus les belles-soeurs, comment ils sont devenus Marie-Lou, Carmen, etc. D'ailleurs, les années quarante m'intéressent beaucoup. C'étaient les années avant qu'on commence à penser à se révolter.¹⁰

Five novels have now been completed. The works published to date might be called Tremblay's imaginative search for roots in reality and myth, beginning in 1942, the year he was born. Concentrating on one family inspired by, but not identical to, his own, Tremblay shows how lives are gradually shaped by situations and events that for various reasons people are unable to control. In one individual after another, the sense of self is undermined, and alienation occurs. Rarely in the novels do characters clearly understand their situation and the choices that must be made if they are to maintain their integrity. Nevertheless, the novels invite readers to understand the circumstances which have influenced decisions in the past, and to see how each generation is both bound to the past, yet free to make different choices.

In 1984, Tremblay returned to his play cycle with Albertine, en cinq temps. Albertine, who had appeared previously, both in plays and novels, is one of Tremblay's most alienated women. At seventy, after being cared for by a supportive medical staff, she finally confronts, understands, and accepts her past. Albertine's discovery of selfhood is especially significant because society has helped free her from a self-defeating way of thinking, and has encouraged her to make independent, responsible choices.

The "way of thinking" to which I refer is rooted in the nineteenth century policy of "survivance," which has had long-lasting and unforeseen effects on Quebec society. Margaret Atwood argues that survival is a central symbol in both French and English Canadian literature; it may refer to "bare survival" in harsh or adverse conditions, or to the "grim survival" of a crisis or disaster.¹¹ For Quebec, she adds, it also means "cultural survival, hanging on as a people, retaining a religion and a language under an alien government."¹² What should not be overlooked is the fact that in Quebec, survival was more than an instinctive "hanging on;" it was a carefully formulated policy. Threatened with assimilation, French Canadians formed a well-disciplined society under the leadership of the Church. "La survivance" became a way of life, and while it was successful as an emergency measure, it proved too restrictive to promote the long-term development of a vigorous society.

During the Quiet Revolution the Québécois took stock of their situation and concluded that the old survival strategies were more often harmful than beneficial. Some writers proposed to dismiss them as no longer affecting life in Quebec, but Tremblay realized that habits and attitudes are not easily replaced, especially by people who feel weak and insecure. Beginning with Les Belles-Soeurs, he forcefully calls attention to the way individuals are confined by the survival policies which have been internalized throughout society, not only as rules governing morality and social conduct, but as basic attitudes and self-images. Conformity to those policies, he insists, no longer results in survival but in alienation. As one play follows another, freedom

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becomes the battle cry of characters who revolt against stifling traditions and seek meaningful lives.

The chief purpose of this study is to examine nine of Michel Tremblay's plays with respect to the problem of personal freedom. Although Tremblay himself has consistently favored the separatist cause, most of the characters who inhabit his fictional world are not ready to think about independence as a political or cultural issue. They are instead trying to discover individual integrity and maintain it in personal relationships and in their work. Not only must they free themselves from old habits, but they must also choose courses of action which reflect their values and will--no easy task in milieux where conformity is the rule. The plays might be studied as reflections of Tremblay's personal concerns. My objective, however, is to consider how the playwright presents the problem of personal freedom in Quebec at a time when the hierarchical social order, dominated by the Church, is being replaced by a secular, pluralistic society in which individual members decide how to fulfill their personal and community responsibilities.

Because the plays are being read in the context of a period of social change, I shall begin my study with an overview of historical events and policies seen in relation to their influence on Quebec's self-image and the exercise of freedom within Quebec. Examples from the literature of Quebec are also included to show how the theme of freedom was treated in the thirty-year period which preceded Les Belles-Soeurs. Although familiar to students and critics of Quebec's literature, this material is worth examining here because it sheds light on problems

which came to a head during the Quiet Revolution, and thus helps us appreciate the accuracy and originality of Tremblay's vision.

The main body of this study is devoted to the nine major plays of the Belles-Soeur cycle as it exists in 1986.¹³ The first section discusses Les Belles-Soeurs (1968), En Pièces détachées (1969, 1971), and La Duchesse de Langeais (1969). These plays illustrate ways in which the self is confined and falsified, particularly by traditional family roles; they also point out the difficulties of attaining the self-awareness necessary for making responsible choices. In the second section, which includes A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou (1971), Hosanna (1973), and Bonjour, là, bonjour (1974), several protagonists identify personal values and, refusing traditional roles, pursue goals of their own. They are the first of Tremblay's characters who have the inner strength to exercise freedom. The next two plays, Sainte Carmen de la Main (1976) and Damnée Manon sacrée Sandra (1977), explore the role of the artist in society, and ways in which the artist's freedom may be limited. The fourth section examines Albertine, en cinq temps (1984), which charts an individual's progress toward freedom against a backdrop of social change. This leads to the final discussion of the exercise of freedom as Tremblay has depicted it in the fictional world he has created on the Plateau Mont-Royal.

Notes

¹ Zelda Heller, review, "Tremblay's Belles-Soeurs Landmark in Quebec Theatre," The Montreal Star 25 May 1971, rpt. in Les Belles-Soeurs, by Michel Tremblay (Montréal: Leméac, 1972) 155.

² Martial Dassylva, review, "L'Amour du joual et des timbres-primes," La Presse 29 août 1968, rpt. in Les Belles-Soeurs 133.

³ Laurent Mailhot, "Les Belles-Soeurs ou l'enfer des femmes," Le Théâtre québécois Jean-Cléo Godin and Laurent Mailhot (Montréal: HMH, 1970) 198.

⁴ Patrick Schupp, review of Les Belles-Soeurs (n.p., n.d), rpt. in Les Belles-Soeurs 144. Adrien Thério, essay, "Les Belles-Soeurs," in Les Belles-Soeurs 150.

⁵ Mailhot 194.

⁶ Fernand Doré, "Michel Tremblay, le gars à barbe sympathique," Le Magazine Maclean June 1969: 10, quoted by John Ripley in "From Alienation to Transcendence: The Quest for Selfhood in Michel Tremblay's Plays," Canadian Literature 85 (1980): 44.

⁷ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Entrevue avec Michel Tremblay," by Rachel Cloutier, Marie Laberge, and Rodrigue Gignac, Nord 1. 1 (automne 1971): 57.

⁸ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Where to Begin the Accusation," by Renate Usmiani, Canadian Theatre Review 24 (Fall 1979): 29.

⁹ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay et la mémoire collective," by Donald Smith, Lettres québécoises automne 1981: 55.

¹⁰ Tremblay, interview by Smith 55.

¹¹ Margaret Atwood, Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1972) 32.

¹² Atwood 32.

¹³ Omitted from discussion are Trois petits tours (1969), a collection of three short plays about the entertainment world of the Main; Demain matin Montréal m'attend (1972), a musical, also about show business on the Main, and Surprise! Surprise! (1975), a brief sketch made up of telephone calls concerning party plans gone awry.

PART I

**THE PROBLEM OF FREEDOM: AN OVERVIEW OF QUEBEC'S HISTORY
AND LITERATURE**

An Overview of Quebec's History and Literature

When Charles de Gaulle proclaimed "Vive le Québec libre" during his visit to Expo '67 in Montreal, he focused worldwide attention on the separatist cause. His dramatic announcement did little to improve the already strained relations between Quebec and the rest of Canada, nor did it help outside observers to understand the significance of the changes which were transforming Quebec society. As sociologist Marcel Rioux has pointed out, the Quiet Revolution was a people's effort to free themselves from internal as well as external forms of bondage:

La révolution tranquille, c'est beaucoup plus une libération des esprits, la naissance d'attitudes critiques envers les choses et les hommes que des actes proprement révolutionnaires. C'est aussi et surtout une revalorisation de soi, la réapparition d'un esprit d'indépendance et de recherche, qui avait gelé au cours du long hiver qui a duré plus d'un siècle. Les Québécois acquièrent la certitude qu'ils peuvent changer beaucoup de choses s'ils le veulent vraiment. C'est la mise en veilleuse de ce fatalisme des vaincus et des minoritaires qui en viennent graduellement à penser 'qu'ils sont nés pour un petit pain' et qu'ils sont loin de tous avoir 'la tête à Papineau.'

Many Québécois would agree with Rioux that French Canadians had come to see themselves as permanently excluded from the world's wealth and power, not even entitled to the pursuit of happiness which their neighbors to the south claimed as an inalienable right. And because people who have little confidence in their own self-worth are unlikely to accept the responsibilities of freedom, the "revalorisation de soi" at the heart of the Quiet Revolution was a first and critical step toward freedom. To understand this process, which is also central to

Tremblay's work, we will begin by tracing the development of Quebec's self-image and its relationship to freedom.

Quebec, the first settlement in New France, was founded in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain. Unlike the groups of religious dissenters who settled in New England, French colonists were not there to establish a new order; they came to perpetuate the social and religious institutions of France, and to promote its political and commercial interests. While they often displayed a certain independence, they thought of themselves as part of the French empire rather than as individuals pursuing personal goals.

In 1763, following the military defeat of French forces in Quebec, New France was ceded to England. At first, Catholics were barred from holding public office, but the Quebec Act of 1774 recognized the Catholic Church, restored French civil law, and helped the British win the cooperation and support of the senior clergy. Indifferent to French-Canadian commercial interests, Church leaders saw Quebec as an agricultural society, with themselves as its representatives. They also believed that cooperation with the English was in the best interests of everyone concerned.

English and Church authority were not openly disputed until the beginning of the 19th century, when the secular-democratic force led by Louis-Joseph Papineau formed a group called "Patriotes." Despite Church opposition, they advocated independence, but their armed uprising in 1837-1838 was crushed. French Canadians suffered still further humiliation when the London government sent a commission led by Lord Durham to investigate the unrest. As a result of his recommendations, the Act of Union was passed in 1840, reducing Quebec's autonomy. Lord

Durham also recommended assimilation as the best way to eliminate friction between French and English Canadians, arguing that French Canadians were an uneducated people who had neither a history nor a literature, and would therefore benefit from the civilizing influence of English culture.² His remarks have not been forgotten--or forgiven.

Of most immediate concern in 1840 was the obvious threat to the Catholic faith and French language. Forging new alliances, moderates helped preserve Quebec's autonomy and ensured French Canada's participation in the negotiations which resulted in the British North America Act of 1867. One of four provinces in the newly-created Dominion of Canada, Quebec won a degree of control over provincial affairs, and French was recognized in the national Parliament and the provincial Parliament of Quebec. Unable to achieve political freedom, the French Canadians nevertheless used what political power they had not only to prevent assimilation, but to maintain an active French presence in the national government.

During the same period, however, the Church began a concerted effort to reduce secular influences and transform Quebec into a self-contained agrarian theocracy which could remain loyal to its heritage and yet not provoke English intervention in its affairs. For nearly a century, Church leaders were to define Quebec and its people in terms of a religious calling. No one did this more eloquently than Monseigneur Pâquet in his famous 1902 sermon on the vocation of the French race in America. He told his listeners that French Canadians were chosen by God to spread their religion and civilization throughout North America. To help them fulfill this destiny, their history would nourish their minds and their autonomy would protect them "against all assimilating forces

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and all corrupting intermixture."³ He then called for "filial obedience to the teachings of the Church and a complete submission to the authority of the leaders who represent (...) the power of the church."⁴ Monseigneur Pâquet concluded by urging his listeners to dedicate themselves to their Church and nation, and to eschew the materialistic values of their neighbors. "While our rivals are, no doubt, in polite struggles contending for the power that stems from industry and finance, our aspirations shall be, above all, to uphold the honour of our doctrine and to gain the palms of apostleship."⁵

Although Monseigneur Pâquet's subject is ostensibly God's will for Quebec, his speech is also about the power and authority exercised by the clergy, who expected their parishoners to obey. Those who did not were almost sure to be punished in some way. It is impossible to say whether or not French Canada would have survived had the Church been less authoritarian. A different question concerns us here, however: how did the Church's increasingly authoritarian policies for survival affect Quebec's self-image and the exercise of freedom?

The kind of social organization actively promoted by Church leaders has been characterized as "autoritaire et fortement hiérarchisée, où chaque individu, selon les talents reçus de la Providence, a une place assignée d'avance et sanctionnée par le clergé."⁶ Within this hierarchy, the clergy formed the ruling class. The basic unit was the family, and couples were responsible to God to have children and to give them a religious upbringing. The father was the authority figure; with him rested the responsibility for final decisions concerning the family. He was also responsible for their support, although many families depended heavily on the wife's economic contribution from gardening and

the raising of poultry and livestock. The woman, subject to her husband's authority, was responsible for the children's early moral and religious training. The basis for the woman's role was to be found in nature, which had equipped her for bearing and rearing children; any departure from that role was viewed by many as ungodly and unnatural. Henri Bourassa, a tireless and outspoken advocate of the traditional Catholic social order, was vehement in his insistence that women should be viewed primarily as child-bearers:

La principale fonction de la femme est et restera--quoi que disent et quoi que fassent, ou ne passent pas, les suffragettes--la maternité, la sainte et féconde maternité, qui fait véritablement de la femme l'égale de l'homme et, à maints égards, sa supérieure. Or la maternité exclut forcément les charges trop lourdes--le service militaire, par exemple,--et les fonctions publiques.

What Bourassa called "la sainte et féconde maternité" made possible Quebec's "revanche des berceaux." Between 1750 and 1950, when the population in Europe quadrupled, the population in Quebec increased by a factor of eighty, giving French Canadians the votes needed to help balance the influx of English-speaking immigrants in Canada.⁸ It is therefore not surprising that Quebec's mère de famille became a legendary figure, the very symbol of survival. As pressure mounted to remove some of the restrictions on the family, and particularly on women, Bourassa inveighed against civil marriage, divorce, factory employment for women, and women's suffrage. The right to vote, Bourassa warned was only the first step in a fatal progression which would result in "la femme-homme, le monstre hybride et répugnant qui tuera la femme-mère et la femme-femme."⁹ Bourassa's remarks, originally published in 1918, were often quoted. In 1940 a law was passed making it legal for

women to vote in Quebec's provincial elections, but not until the 1960s did many women seriously consider assuming any role but mère de famille.

Despite an attempt in the 1870s to bring the schools under government control, the Church won the upper hand, and as a result, education in Quebec reflected the traditional social order and promoted the doctrines, values, and authority of the Church. It was the father's prerogative to determine how much and what kind of education his children should have, a decision often affected by economic factors. Because so little importance was attached to careers in commerce and industry, vocational training and programs in applied science and technology were neglected. The most prestigious secondary schools were the collèges classiques, which offered an academic program, and prepared students for the university and eventual careers in the Church or in professions such as medicine and law. Generally speaking, only relatively well-to-do families were able to afford this kind of education for their children. In the Catholic collèges, the science curriculum was conservative, and reading lists were tailored to avoid works on the Index. Students often obtained banned books, of course, but not without a certain risk, as Gérard Bessette recounts in his 1960 novel, Le Libraire.

Although the Church wielded enormous power over the family, education, and even government, its plans for Quebec's survival as an agrarian society were undermined from the start by the failure of agriculture to sustain Quebec's growing population. Between 1851 and the turn of the century, 500,000 French Canadians left for the United States, where assimilation was inevitable.¹⁰ Large numbers also moved to urban areas in Quebec, and by 1929, nearly two-thirds of the

population was urban.¹¹ Poor and uneducated, French Canadians were in no position to "contend for the power that stems from industry and finance."¹² Even as unskilled laborers, they were often at a disadvantage if they spoke no English, for in Montreal particularly, many of the employers and supervisors were Anglophones. Urbanization was seen as a moral problem by Church leaders, who believed that city life promoted not only materialism, but a general weakening of loyalty to Church, family, and tradition. The Church urged French Canadians to maintain their heritage, but such a policy inevitably produced guilt and alienation; people could not cope successfully with the problems of urban life if they pretended to be living in a nineteenth century agricultural society.

During this period, many novels were written in support of the social policies of the Church. Until the mid-1930s, according to critic Maurice Arguin, "le roman adhérait à l'idéologie de survivance, au point de s'identifier à elle, illustrant l'univers mythique du Canadien, pionnier ou agriculteur, français et catholique, promis à un monde meilleur".¹³ Indeed, nineteenth-century Church leaders had specifically charged French Canadian authors with the responsibility of creating a literature which would not emphasize materialism, as did many contemporary works, but instead show people how to live a moral life in keeping with the Church's teachings.¹⁴ The result was the terroir literature which romanticized rural life and warned readers against the dangers of the city.

Then came Ringuet's Trente Arpents (1938), which broke with tradition. When Euchariste Moisan was forced to leave his thirty acres and move to a New England factory town, the Quebec novel turned from

myth to reality and began its record of the changes that were taking place in French Canadian society. In Bonheur d'occasion (1945), Gabrielle Roy continued that record, revealing the steady deterioration of a family's economic and moral situation in Montreal at the end of the 1930s. The mother strives valiantly to fulfill her role as mère de famille, but the father, having lost one job after another, and his self-respect as well, finally chooses enlistment as a solution to his problems. The novel closes with the departure of a troop train; not only the land, but an entire civilization, has failed its people.

Although many French Canadians volunteered for military service, Quebec voters strongly opposed conscription in a 1942 national plebescite. They had no strong loyalty to republican France, and still regarded the English King as their enemy. English Canadian support was enough to pass the measure, however. Within Quebec, the situation was further complicated by Cardinal Villeneuve, the Archbishop of Quebec; he had been expected to oppose the war, but instead used his position of leadership to support the war effort. Because of this, he was seen as an English puppet.¹⁵ Thus the issue of conscription left the people of Quebec feeling hopelessly outnumbered by English Canadians, despite the "revanche des berceaux," and betrayed by the very institution that was supposed to protect French-Canadian society. French-English relations fell to a new low, and the people of Quebec began to question old assumptions about their role in Canada and in the world.

During this period, Gratien Gélinas wrote a series of satirical revues, Les Fridolinades (1938-1946) which introduced an element of serious social criticism into a form of entertainment popular in Quebec since the turn of the century. Each year he based his program on

events and problems familiar to Quebec audiences; the centerpiece was Fridolin, a working-class youth who naively uncovered hypocrisy, whether his subject was the family, the Church, government, or sex. Tit-Coq (1948), a full-length play which Gélinas developed from one of his sketches, portrayed a war veteran who is discriminated against due to his illegitimate birth. The play may be seen as a criticism of Quebec for its cruel and unjust treatment of its own people, or many be viewed as criticizing English Canada for treating French Canadians as an inferior people who have no legitimate claim to a place in North America. But while Gélinas pointed out fundamental social problems, he did not suggest that change was imminent.

The demand for change was becoming more insistent, however. In Refus global, a manifesto published by a group of artists in 1948, Paul-Emile Borduas and fifteen co-signers refused to be confined any longer by "les murs lisses de la peur, refuge habituel des vaincus," where French Canadians had been isolated from the world ever since 1760.¹⁶ An appeal for cultural, political, and intellectual freedom, Refus global has been called one of the most influential documents in Quebec literature.¹⁷ Its vivid images and compelling language boldly uncovered the many forms taken by fear in Quebec. In the beginning, fear unified French Canadians against foreign enemies; like a fortress, it protected the people inside. Soon, however, people discovered that they could not leave the fortress; their refuge proved to be a trap, a prison. Furthermore, although fear was inspired by an external enemy at first, it gradually penetrated every aspect of life until people were afraid of each other and of themselves. Borduas and his colleagues believed that they had freed themselves by learning about the outside world, and urged

other French Canadians to follow their example. But freedom from fear did not mean freedom from danger, and the fact that authorities could and did punish Borduas (he lost his appointment at the Ecole du Meuble), helps explain why so many French Canadians continued to submit.

Post-war Quebec was indeed not ready to chart a new course. Conservative Maurice Duplessis, Prime Minister of Quebec from 1936 to 1939, was returned to office in 1944, and remained there until his death in 1959. Convinced that Quebec's future depended on adherence to the past, Duplessis had a decisive role in delaying the modernization of Quebec. His retrogressive policies were symbolized by the choice of the fleur-de-lys as the emblem for the new provincial flag, and the motto "Je me souviens." Thus in 1948, Tit-Cog and Refus global notwithstanding, Quebec renewed its links with the authoritarian colonial system of pre-revolutionary France. Duplessis was not a separatist, however. He took steps to protect Quebec's autonomy from Ottawa in areas such as education, but his primary goal was to assure law and order so that Quebec's existing social system could be maintained. Authority for schools and other social services belonged to the Church, industrial development was best handled by private enterprise, and in the 1950s, when Quebec's population was 70% urban, Duplessis promoted policies favoring agriculture at the expense of other segments of society.¹⁸

Loyal as he was to his province's agricultural tradition, Duplessis could not ignore Quebec's high unemployment following World War II. By attracting foreign investors to develop Quebec's natural resources, he created many new jobs, and as a result Quebec's growth kept pace with the growth rate in Canada as a whole. Nevertheless, because the

government sold development rights cheaply and retained little control over the companies, the dangers of "leaving industry to others" became all too apparent, and French Canadians began to demand new public policies which would enable Quebec to develop its human and natural resources for its own benefit.

Attitudes toward labor also began to change under the Duplessis regime. Like many conservative French Canadians, Duplessis viewed work as man's punishment for failure to obey God's commandments: "La grande loi du travail est d'inspiration divine et la sentence portée contre le premier homme est toujours en force: tu travailleras à la sueur de ton front."¹⁹ While he believed that employers owed workers a decent wage, he also thought that workers should never forget their dependence on private enterprise, which created their jobs. Such policies, by failing to recognize people's need for meaningful work, have fostered dissatisfaction and alienation the world over; Quebec was no exception.

Public attention was dramatically focused on workers' rights and needs when Duplessis used provincial police during the asbestos workers' strike in 1949. Among those defending the strikers was Monseigneur Charbonneau, Archbishop of Montreal. "Nous voulons la paix sociale, mais nous ne voulons pas l'écrasement de la classe ouvrière. Nous nous attachons plus à l'homme qu'au capital," he told a Montreal audience in a (May 1) Labor Day speech.²⁰ When Monseigneur Charbonneau resigned, his replacement was more conservative, but too late; Catholics were already beginning to question the social system in which people's needs were consistently treated as being less important than the system itself. Nevertheless, Duplessis was unwilling to accept the fact that

French Canadians were becoming an industrial, urban, secular people, and steadfastly promoted the traditional components of "la survivance"--agriculturalism, anti-statism, and Messianism.

Although the Duplessis years are sometimes referred to as Quebec's dark ages, there were important spokesmen for change. Some were churchmen, like Monseigneur Charbonneau; others were labor leaders, journalists, and lawyers. Two of the best-known critics of "la survivance" were Pierre Elliot Trudeau and Gérard Pelletier, who in 1950 founded Cité libre, a quarterly which treated social and political issues.

The average person, however, was probably far more influenced by television. Introduced in 1952, it gave French Canadians broader access to current events, sports, and drama. Tremblay recalls that he was inspired to write, at the age of thirteen, "une espèce de nouvelle" based on characters from the Plouffe family, a television series by Roger Lemelin.²¹ The popularity of this series, and of Les Plouffe (1948), the novel which preceded it, suggests that French Canadians welcomed a realistic portrayal of family life in a working-class, urban neighborhood.

In post-war Quebec, novels extolling rural life disappeared, and when writers explored the effects of survival policies, country settings no longer evoked peaceful abundance, but frightening isolation in an amoral world of nature where men and women lost not only their ties to society but their own humanity as well. One such example was Le Torrent (1945) by Anne Hébert. A well-known tale of mutilation and matricide, it depicted the fearful destructiveness which results when rigid, uncompromising authority is exercised in the name of morality, stifling

all that is spontaneous and human. The characters' physical isolation on a remote farm reinforced their moral and emotional isolation, and contributed to their annihilation. Long before the Quiet Revolution, "la survivance" was shown to be destroying the very society which it had been designed to protect.

Maurice Arguin has pointed to Le Torrent as typical of Quebec's psychological novel which "fait le bilan d'une vie ou, plus précisément, celui des 'empêchements à vivre,'" namely the past, religion, and the family.²² By the 1950s, these three traditional "valeurs-refuges" no longer represented means of survival, but instruments of domination which prevented the normal development of the individual.²³ As in the case of Hébert's protagonists, thwarted individuals were likely to vent their frustration through destructive acts such as murder, mutilation, fire, and suicide. Margaret Atwood has in fact entitled her chapter on the literature of Quebec "Burning Mansions", because family homes, schools, and other symbols of oppression are so frequently destroyed by fire.²⁴ In Tremblay's theatre, there is even mention of a child who sets fire to his mother's hair.²⁵

Playwrights also depicted authoritarianism and destructiveness, and the price paid by the younger generation. Eloi de Grandmont with Un Fils à tuer (1949) and Yves Thériault with Le Marcheur (1950) both took as their subject brutal fathers who demanded obedience and crushed individuality. Marcel Dubé showed a world governed by nebulous, impersonal forces that were harder to identify, and even more difficult to oppose than was the authoritarian father. In Zone (1953) five young smugglers band together, forming a "zone" outside of the law where they attempt to hold on to their faith in themselves and the

future. The protagonist of Un Simple Soldat (1957), a soldier returning from World War II, finds his working-class world compromised by hypocrisy, self-interest, and submission. Unwilling to conform, he re-enlists, and is killed in Korea. This play, like Zone, suggested that opportunities for self-fulfillment simply did not exist at that time in Quebec. In Florence, written in 1957, the protagonist is a woman who chooses to leave Quebec for New York where she will have greater freedom to develop personal and professional interests. Inspired by her independence, her father decides to help his co-workers establish a union. His decision to work for improvements within society foreshadows the spirit of the Quiet Revolution.

Despite the repressive policies and government corruption associated with the tenure of Maurice Duplessis, Quebec's writers were actively exploring situations which Quebec's leadership refused to acknowledge. Some, like Ringuet and Roy, revealed the trend toward urbanization and exposed the deep-seated problems associated with it. Others, including Hébert, Borduas, and Dubé, portrayed a people confined by debilitating strategies for defense, a people who were being stifled by the system that was supposed to protect them. "La survivance" was shown to be synonymous with repressive moral codes, poverty, fear, and ignorance.

As the originator of those policies, the Church inevitably came under attack. Borduas, for example, openly expressed his belief that the Church could no longer make a positive contribution to Quebec's society. Other critics during the 1950's, many of whom were devout Catholics, examined the Church's doctrines and social policies in the hope of reforming the institution and revitalizing faith. One such

critic was Jean Le Moyne. The articles to be discussed here were written between 1951 and 1960, and are included in a volume of essays entitled Convergences (1969).

In his analysis of the Church's role in Quebec, Le Moyne acknowledged that although Church leadership had made possible the settlers' survival after the Conquest, fear had also survived and grown stronger as a result of Church policy. In its mania for self-apology, Le Moyne said, the Church tried to be everywhere and to provide every solution. But it did more than monopolize those whom it served; it "infected" them with guilt through its teaching of the heretical doctrine of dualism, which treats the body and spirit as separate entities which are always in conflict.²⁶ The flesh, being weak, must be strictly controlled. Even so, sin is inevitable, and the sinner lives under the constant threat of terrible punishment.

As a child, Le Moyne was taught that two angels had been assigned to accompany him: the good angel, with whom his soul would identify, and the bad angel, which was incarnate in his body. He and his classmates were thus split into two parts; "divisés, nous devions aboutir à une tension qui nous fera perdre entièrement le sens de la totalité humaine, qui nous rendra incompréhensible la réconciliation avec soi."²⁷ Sermons contained unforgettable images of hell which filled the children with fear, "la frousse infernale qui nous fit douter de la bonté et de la loyauté divines en nous montrant Dieu comme une foudre aveugle et traîtresse, un hasard personnifié, ou une probabilité néfaste et sinistrement complice des propensions malicieuses de l'homme."²⁸ In spite of their natural tendency to shut out unpleasant

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thoughts, the children were "possédés d'une peur inextirpable et protéenne."²⁹

Because Quebec's dualist doctrines identified the flesh as "le siège de la culpabilité et le lieu du mal," sexuality became one of the principal moral issues.³⁰ As schoolboys approached puberty, they received no explanation of sexual development, but were asked troubling questions, and given mysterious advice in the name of "purity." Girls' sex education was also inadequate; the negative attitude of their mothers and a total lack of information left them quite unprepared for the sexual aspects of marriage. Ignorance was not the only problem, for the convent schools systematically treated even sex in marriage as shameful.³¹

A similar message was conveyed in the depiction of the "mère canadienne-française." This popular figure of fecundity and nurturing love was usually portrayed at work in her kitchen, Le Moyne noted, but while her children were present, her husband was not. The absence suggested that he had no part in the life of the family. The effects of dualism and the resulting sexual repression were also recorded in French-Canadian literature, Le Moyne said, for characters lacked genuine physical presence and rarely experienced fulfillment of the love glimpsed or hoped for.³²

By 1960, Le Moyne was pessimistic about the future of the Church; it was blind to its mistakes and showed no sign of serious reform. Repeating the criticisms which he had been making for a decade, he wrote: "je loge une fois de plus la source de notre mal au plus profond des valeurs et de l'intimité de notre peuple: sa religion, notre catholicisme exproprié par le cléricalisme et perverti par le

dualisme."³³ And although he was convinced that the message of Christianity was as powerful as ever, he foresaw the collapse of the Quebec Church: "Je sais que nous n'en sortirons pas sans la désaffection collective plus ou moins complète dont on s'alarme en haut lieu - sans y rien comprendre d'ailleurs. Nous perdons la foi, et il y a de quoi."³⁴ The events of the 1960s were to prove him right; many people did indeed lose their faith, and the Church was weakened. But the secularization of Quebec society did not automatically eradicate the effects of dualism; the battle between body and soul, especially in its sexual aspects, was far from over.

In 1959 language became the subject of public debate when an editorial in Le Devoir claimed that young people especially, spoke joual, not French. A Brother in a teaching order wrote an anonymous letter in response; he agreed that students neither wrote nor spoke standard French, but argued that the situation could not be remedied by classroom instruction alone. If joual had replaced French it was because people felt no need for French; it had no obvious economic or intellectual value in their lives. So began a spirited series of letters which grew into Les Insolences du Frère Untel, published the following year.³⁵ It was a best-seller, and focused attention on Quebec's French: was it in fact an impoverished, bastardized language, unfaithful to Quebec's French heritage? As people began to think about the conditions that had fostered joual, they also began to consider ways of developing a language and culture to reflect their experience as French-speaking North Americans. This attitude suggests a new self-image: they no longer saw themselves as French colonials, but as Québécois.

Two factors facilitated the beginning of genuine dialogue in Quebec. First of all, the death of the Prime Minister, and then his successor, weakened the Union nationale's unity and far-reaching political control. Also important was the fact that Church was ready to relinquish certain responsibilities, for it no longer possessed the human or financial resources to satisfy growing demands for schools and other social services. The people of Quebec at last talked to each other as they never had before, using joual as well as French. In the past others had defined their destiny. They had been French colonists, French-speaking English subjects, a people chosen to obey. By 1960, however, they were determined to choose for themselves how they would live--and be--Québécois.

First came the debates between the two main parties, the Liberals and the Union nationale, as they engaged in the campaign that was to put Liberal Jean Lesage and his "équipe du tonnerre" in office, empowered to begin modernizing Quebec's society. Soon many more voices were heard, espousing a range of political viewpoints, from the radical left to the conservative right. Separatist groups denounced Quebec's "colonial" status and called for complete independence from Canada, but despite terrorist activities Quebec's "revolution" might better be characterized as a period of intense debate as various groups emerged to make their interests known. Out of the many factions, the Parti québécois was formed in 1968. Elected to form the government in 1976, it failed in 1980 to win majority support for its proposal to move Quebec toward independence. Unable to resolve this issue, which divided his party, Prime Minister René Lévesque resigned in 1985. Although some "indépendantistes" saw this as a failure of national resolve, other

observers were of the opinion that the changes which had already occurred had given the Québécois the freedom and self-esteem they needed to maintain their identity and vitality without formal independence from Canada.

What changes took place during the Quiet Revolution? Quebec's first priority was to transform its social system. Power was shifted from the Church to the government, which assumed major responsibility for the educational system and social services. In 1964 the Ministry of Education was established, giving the government authority over public and private educational institutions; at that time plans were made for a secular junior college system which was inaugurated in 1967.³⁶ Between 1961 and 1974, the increase in school attendance was marked, particularly among teen-agers. Quebec's government began to assume control of certain federal programs as well; the hospital insurance plan in 1961, and the pension plan in 1964, both involved a transfer of existing federal programs to Quebec. In the private sector, many labor and social organizations severed their official ties to the Catholic Church, and the number of practicing Catholics declined, as did the number of men and women choosing religious vocations. Civil marriage, divorce, and the use of contraceptives, although still opposed by the Church, became more frequent. The birthrate began to decline, and by 1965 was already below the rate for Canada as a whole.³⁷ By 1974, according to Montreal's bishops, Quebec's society, once "nettement chrétienne, stable, monolithique et plutôt traditionnelle" had become "pluraliste, segmentée, décléricalisée, permissive, industrialisée et urbanisée."³⁸

Changing Quebec's economic situation proved more difficult. Despite government measures which strengthened the Francophone presence in the economy, English Canadian and American interests continued to dominate. By the mid-1970s they were still the major owners of business enterprises, and held a disproportionate number of the managerial positions, especially at the higher levels. Furthermore, immigrants continued to choose to learn English rather than French, evidence that English was considered an economic asset. In 1977, after several attempts to legislate ways to improve the position of French, and thus of Francophones in the job market, the Quebec government passed Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language, which made French the official language of Quebec.³⁹ Whatever its long-term effects on hiring policies, Bill 101 clearly bolstered confidence and pride in French as a fully functional language, well-suited to use in the business world.

Language was an especially important issue for Quebec's writers, since it was so intimately bound up with self-expression, creativity, and the exercise of personal freedom. As we survey a few of the plays and novels which had appeared by the time Tremblay had finished Les Belles-Soeurs in 1965, we will see that writers were raising new questions about the past, as well as exploring Quebec's present and future as a French-speaking people in North America.

During the Duplessis regime, Marcel Dubé had described the effects of a repressive social system on the working class. In 1960, however, he turned his attention to the bourgeoisie, denouncing them for their complicity in maintaining a corrupt social order. Bilan, which premiered on television in 1960, depicted the collaboration of self-serving businessmen and politicians who saw government office as a means

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of acquiring personal wealth, power, and prestige. Offering a hard and public look at the practices under Duplessis, the play conveyed a clear message: government corruption must end.

"Quiet revolution" accurately describes the changes which occur in the 1962 novel Le Poids de Dieu. In it, author Gilles Marcotte portrayed the anguish of a sensitive young priest who realizes as he begins his first assignment that his seminary training, with its heavy emphasis on spirituality, has taught him to dissociate himself from the life around him. Choosing not to renounce his vows, he nonetheless recognizes that he must heal the divorce between spirit and flesh, and consciously work toward becoming a more complete and truly human being.

According to Malcolm Reid, however, "revolutionary literature" began with the first issue of Parti Pris in 1963. The editors and writers favored separatism and a Marxist type of socialism, but their controversial group, which disbanded in 1968, probably had more influence on literature than on politics. One of its founding members, Pierre Maheu, described their purposes as follows: "...our first task will be one of demystification; our critique will do violence to established myths, we shall attempt to destroy, by discovering their contradictions, the morality and legality of the system, and open the way to authentic relationships between men."⁴⁰

In 1964, Jacques Renaud published Le Cassé, a short novel which unquestionably "did violence to established myths" by depicting the destructive forces present in a supposedly healthy, peaceful society. The protagonist's sadistic and destructive behavior is clearly related to social neglect and repression, and can be read as an indictment of the system. Nevertheless, the linguistic violence--the brutal joual

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used throughout the work--made the greatest impact on readers. It spoke of a dehumanized world and challenged Quebec to create a new social order in which life would be more humane.

In Les Beaux dimanches (1965), playwright Marcel Dubé again focused on the bourgeoisie, suggesting that their inability to love or find meaning in their lives is related to a lack of personal and national purpose. Although the adults accept the past without thinking about how it affects them, the daughter of one couple has become a separatist, and argues that Quebec's problems result from its long history of submission to external authority. She is unwilling, however, to accept the consequences of her own sexual independence, and by deciding to have an abortion, she demonstrates a lack of faith in the future which undercuts her separatist rhetoric. Like her parents, she has no sustaining values on which to base her choices in life.

Separatism was the central issue in three well-known novels of the mid-1960s. Jacques Godbout, in the preface of Le Couteau sur la table (1965), called his novel "l'histoire d'une rupture," "une approximation littéraire d'un phénomène de ré-appropriation d'un monde et d'une culture."⁴¹ As the anonymous narrator traces the events which have led him to conclude that he must end his love affair with Patricia, who symbolizes English Canada, it is clear that above all he seeks a reappropriation of self. In Prochain Episode (1965), by Hubert Aquin, the task of identifying the oppressor turns into the problem of establishing one's own individuality. The issue is presented in the form of a spy story in which identities are never fully revealed. The narrator-protagonist, an author plagued with doubts, suffers from a feeling of powerlessness and the fear of impending madness--the fate of

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a man who lacks a sense of self, and who is unsure of both the woman and the country he loves. In Ethel et le terroriste (1964), Claude Jasmin questioned the justification for violence. The protagonist, who has planted a bomb which kills one person, goes into exile, where he gains a new appreciation of his homeland, and realizes that his action was motivated more by his weakness and that of his comrades than by reason. His increased self-knowledge, his deepening love for Ethel, and his hopes for their future suggest that the problem of separatism cannot be dealt with effectively until the people of Quebec are unified and share common goals.

In all three of these novels, although the authors support the idea of Quebec's independence, their protagonists are not successful activists. They bear witness to their insight, patriotism, and growing sense of separation from English Canada, but none has a clear vision of a free Quebec or its future. There is no description of the changes which will occur as a result of freedom nor is there a "dream" like the one which inspired Martin Luther King, Jr. and his followers. In the case of Aquin and Godbout, the narrators' quest for freedom is reflected in their innovative use of language, but for all three authors, freedom means an opportunity to participate fully in a closed society's exhilarating experience of emotional and intellectual liberation.

In her prize-winning novel, Une Saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel (1965), Marie-Claire Blais turned the traditional "roman de la terre" upside down to show that Quebec's children are born free; their society teaches them to submit, but if they resist authority and ignore taboos, some of them will preserve their individuality and retain a certain joie de vivre. In her portrayal of an impoverished rural family, Blais

conveyed both the harsh reality of "la revanche des berceaux" and the miracle of life as year after year a brutish man and a work-worn woman create fresh new lives filled with potential. This potential will almost surely go undeveloped, and yet it is there, a rich source of human talent waiting to be utilized. Young Jean Le Maigre, for example, is fatally ill with tuberculosis, but he avidly seeks whatever experiences life has to offer. Reading, and especially writing, allow him to exercise his imagination and develop his individuality. In contrast to his parents, he lives intensely, but does not survive. The novel, striking for the predominance of black, closes with a description of the new baby, Emmanuel. He has survived the winter, and is happily playing in the bright March sunlight. There is hope that this child will live and someday infuse society with vitality and creativity.

Of all the writers who have been discussed here, whether or not they were associated with the parti pris group, have contributed to the process of demystification. Church and state, Quebec and Canada, past and present, the wealthy and the destitute--all have been examined from a new perspective in order to go beyond the old images which had both shaped and reflected the people of Quebec. "In my view," wrote Jacques Cotnam in 1972, "return to reality is the deeper meaning of the Quiet Revolution (...) which, for the last decade, has radically transformed the political, social, intellectual, and religious climate of Quebec."⁴² Even by 1965, however, Quebec had begun to know itself as it never had before.

When Michel Tremblay began Les Belles-Soeurs, he too was concerned with demystification; he wanted to portray the contemporary working-class family as it was, not as it was traditionally represented. He also

wanted to remain true to his characters by using their language, joual. At the time, he was not familiar with any full-length work in joual, including Le Cassé, which he had not yet read.⁴³ Instead, his decision resulted from dissatisfaction with a Québécois film in which characters spoke an inauthentic "standard" French.⁴⁴ Not wanting to be an author "qui se penchait sur le pauvre monde," he decided that it would be necessary to write "théâtre qui se passait de l'intérieur, où on ne sentait pas que ça venait de l'extérieur."⁴⁵ But if Tremblay found the themes and the language for his characters in the Montreal neighborhood where he grew up, he found diverse sources of inspiration concerning style: Shakespeare's monologues, the choruses in classical Greek theatre, and especially the works of Beckett.⁴⁶ Thus at the age of twenty-three, Michel Tremblay began to write Les Belles-Soeurs, in which his innovative use of traditional theatrical techniques combined with social realism to make the play's opening night one of the more dramatic events of the Quiet Revolution.

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¹ Marcel Rioux, La Question du Québec (Montréal: Les Editions Parti Pris, 1980) 104.

² See Denis Monière, Le Développement des idéologies au Québec des origines à nos jours (Montréal: Editions Québec/Amérique, 1977) 150.

³ L.-A. Pâquet, "Sermon on the Vocation of the French Race in America," Discours et Allocutions (Québec: n.p., 1915) 181-202, trans. and rpt. in French-Canadian Nationalism: An Anthology, ed. Ramsay Cook (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969) 157. Although portions of the sermon appear in anthologies in French, this is the only uncut version readily available to me.

⁴ Pâquet 159.

⁵ Pâquet 160.

⁶ René Hardy, "L'Ultramontanisme de Laflèche: Genèse et postulats d'une idéologie," Idéologies au Canada français 1850-1900, ed. Fernand Dumont, Jean-Paul Montminy, and Jean Hamelin (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1971) 61-62.

⁷ Henri Bourassa, "Le 'Droit' de voter--la lutte des sexes--Laisserons-nous avilir nos femmes?" Le Devoir 30 mars 1918, rpt. in Québécoises du 20e siècle, ed. Michèle Jean (Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1974) 197.

⁸ See Rioux 51-52.

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⁹ Henri Bourassa, "Désarroi des cerveaux--triomphe de la démocratie," Le Devoir 28 mars 1918, rpt. in Québécoises du 20e siècle, author's emphasis, 195.

¹⁰ Ralph Sarkonak, "A Brief Chronology of French Canada, 1534-1982," Yale French Studies 65 (1983): 277.

¹¹ Sarkonak 279.

¹² See Pâquet 160. Economic conditions brought French and English Canadians together in a kind of competition which the Church had hoped to avoid.

¹³ Maurice Arguin, "Aliénation et conscience dans le roman québécois (1944-1965)," Idéologies du Canada français. 1940-1976, Tome 1er, ed. Fernand Dumont, Jean Hamelin, Jean-Paul Montminy (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981) 73.

¹⁴ See Jacques Cotnam, "Cultural Nationalism and its Literary Expression in French-Canadian Fiction," trans. Noel Corbett, The Cry of Home, ed. H. Ernest Lewall (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972) 274.

¹⁵ Concerning the Cardinal's public support of the Allies, Abbé Lionel Groulx wrote: "Non seulement les politiciens feront parler le cher petit Cardinal, ils le feront marcher. Il se prêtera à toutes leurs volontés..." Mes Mémoires, Tome 4, 1940-1967 (Montréal: Fides, 1974) 229, quoted by Richard Arès, s.j., "L'Evolution de l'Eglise au Canada français de 1940 à 1975: Survivance et déclin d'une Chrétienté," Idéologies au Canada français 1940-1976, Tome III, ed. Fernand Dumont, Jean Hamelin, Jean-Paul Montminy (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981) 271.

- 16 Paul-Emile Borduas, Refus global, in Refus global Projections libérantes (1948; Montréal: Editions Parti Pris, 1977) 27.
- 17 Jonathan M. Weiss, French-Canadian Theater, Twayne's World Authors Ser. 774 (Boston: Twane Publishers, 1986) 19.
- 18 Sarkonak 280.
- 19 Maurice Duplessis, Le Devoir 3 jan. 1949, quoted by Monière 304.
- 20 Joseph Charbonneau, quoted by Bernard Saint-Aubin, Duplessis et son époque (Montréal: Les Editions de la Presse, Ltée, 1979) 207.
- 21 Michel Tremblay, interview, "Entrevue avec Michel Tremblay", by Rachel Cloutier, Marie Laberge, et Rodrigue Gignac, Nord 1.1 (automne 1971): 51.
- 22 Arguin 81.
- 23 Arguin 85.
- 24 See Margaret Atwood, Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972) 228-230.
- 25 See Michel Tremblay, En Pièces détachées (Montréal: Leméac, 1982) 70.
- 26 Jean Le Moyne, "L'Atmosphère religieuse au Canada français," 1951, Convergences (Montréal: HMH, 1969) 54.
- 27 Le Moyne 59.
- 28 Le Moyne 61-62.
- 29 Le Moyne 62.
- 30 Le Moyne 56.
- 31 Jean Le Moyne, "La Femme dans la civilisation Canadienne-française," 1953, Convergences (Montréal: HMH, 1969) 91.
- 32 See Le Moyne 69-100.

- 33 Jean Le Moyne, "La Littérature Canadienne-française et la femme," 1960, Convergences (Montréal: HMH, 1969) 107.
- 34 Le Moyne 108.
- 35 The anonymous author was eventually identified as Jean-Paul Desbiens.
- 36 Sarkonak 281.
- 37 Sarkonak 281.
- 38 Arès 294.
- 39 Sarkonak 282.
- 40 Malcolm Reid, The Shouting Signpainters (New York and London: MR, 1972) 32.
- 41 Jacques Godbout, Preface, Le Couteau sur la table (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965) Unnumbered.
- 42 Cotnam 281.
- 43 Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay et la mémoire collective," by Donald Smith, Lettres québécoises Automne 1981:50.
- 44 Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay et le théâtre québécois," by Marc Kravetz, Le Magazine littéraire mars 1979: 89.
- 45 Tremblay, interview by Smith 50.
- 46 Tremblay, interview by Cloutier, Laberge, et Gignac 69.

PART II

THE FAMILY: VICIOUS CIRCLE OF SELF-DECEPTION AND DEPENDENCE

Les Belles-Soeurs: Vestiges of the Traditional Quebec Family

In the summer of 1965, at the age of 23, Michel Tremblay began work on Les Belles-Soeurs. As he later explained in an interview, he wanted to describe women from the working-class milieu in Montreal, and was looking for an idea, something "drôle et absurde," to serve as framework within which the characters could interact in a realistic way.¹ Noting that contests and trading stamps were popular at the time, he decided to center the play around Germaine Lauzon, a housewife who has just won a million trading stamps in a contest. For Germaine, this is a dream come true; by redeeming the stamps, she will be able to refurnish her home completely. Needing help to paste the stamps in booklets, she invites some of her women friends and relatives to a "party" in her kitchen, only to discover at the end of the evening that they have kept most of the stamps for themselves. In the ensuing free-for-all, the women snatch up the remaining stamps and leave Germaine to weep in disappointment and rage. Then, in a surrealistic finale, the women are heard off-stage singing "O Canada." As Germaine finally joins in the singing, more trading stamps miraculously drift down around her. Germaine does not rebel against the irrational system which determines her rewards, nor does she rebel against the belles-soeurs who have robbed her; she will keep on hoping that by chance her dreams will come true. Her story of stamps won, lost, and won again, insignificant in

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itself, illustrates the plight of dependent people who have more faith in luck than in themselves to realize their dreams.

Les Belles-soeurs is divided into two acts, but there is no break in the action, all of which occurs in Germaine's kitchen. Although Tremblay observed the traditional unities of time and place, he did not conform to the convention in Quebec of using "standard" French. Indeed, the exclusive use of joual, the only appropriate language for the belles-soeurs, was initially less acceptable in Montreal than in Paris. When reviewing the play for Le Monde, Jacques Cellard wrote: "Les Belles-Soeurs sont en joual comme Andromaque est en alexandrins, parce qu'il faut une langue à une oeuvre forte."² For Quebec audiences, however, joual had disturbing implications. Previous writers had made only limited use of it, often as a source of humor, and almost always to suggest cultural deprivation. Moreover, since the schools treated French as superior to joual, many Québécois concluded that joual was not only the sign of low social status, but also a sign of Quebec's inferiority to France. Consequently, joual was usually dismissed as an impoverished language which confined thought and prevented the clear expression of ideas.

Undeterred by such attitudes, Tremblay used joual as a clear and powerful expression of confinement itself. The profanity and vulgarity to which Martial Dassylva objected³, should indeed be offensive, for the degradation of language reveals human degradation, people's loss of ideals and personal dignity. To the extent that theatre-goers listened and thus eliminated the social barrier which joual represented for them, the belles-soeurs were freed from one form

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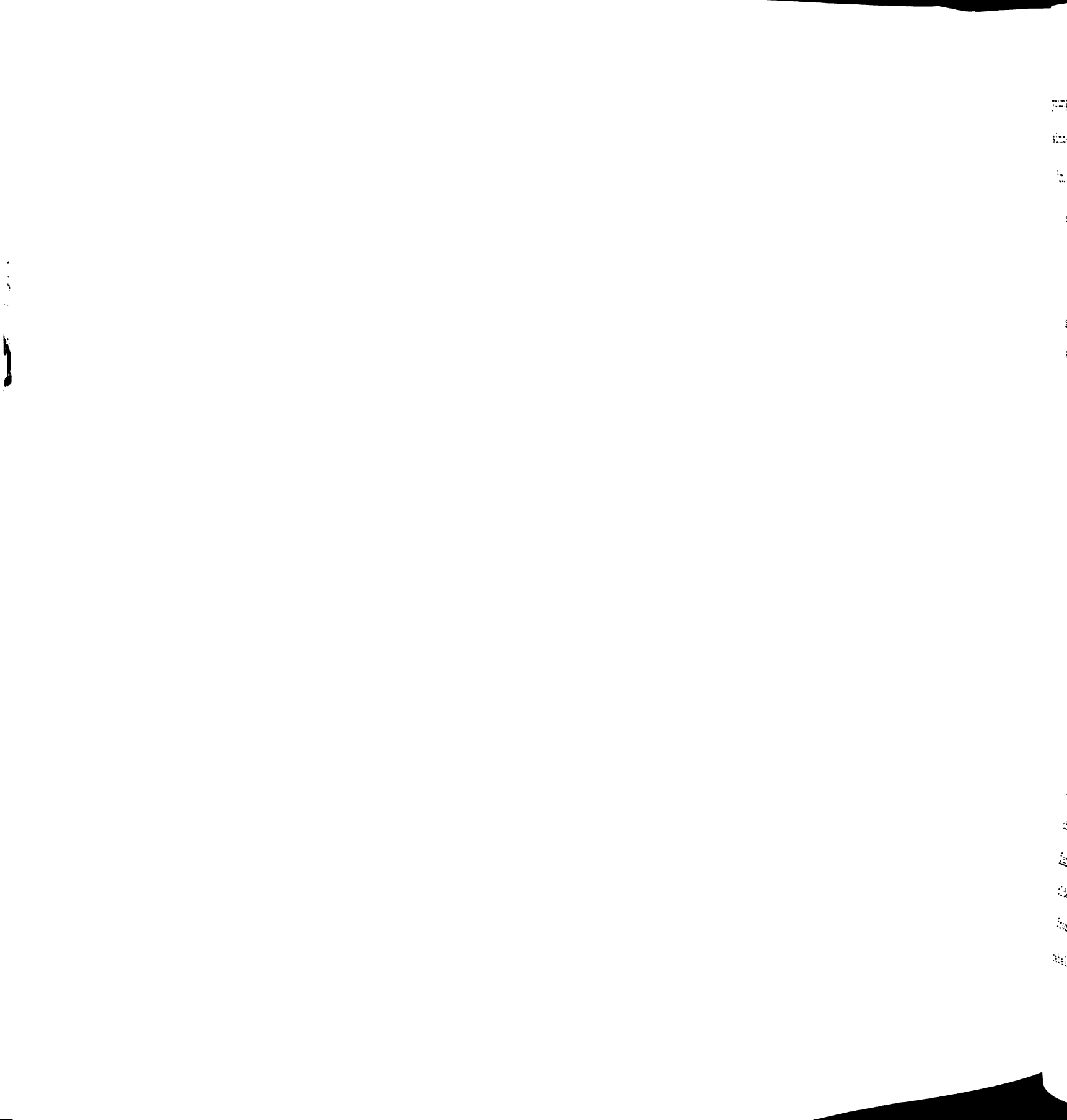
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of confinement: although they had not yet learned to listen to each other, they were being heard.

By setting the play in the kitchen, Tremblay reflects the values of a society which believes that a woman's place is in the home--in the kitchen, to be precise. Just how confining a kitchen can be is obvious when fifteen women are in it! The apartment itself is confined by neighbors, some of whom can see in, others who hear and threaten to call the police when the noise becomes too loud. The belles-soeurs have no free space, no room to think or grow. The theme of confinement is often carried over into costumes which reflect limits of various kinds. Marie-Ange Brouillette's inescapable poverty is apparent in her shabbiness. Yvette, on the other hand, is wearing the hat and dress which she bought for her daughter's wedding, the highpoint of her life, and Lisette's mink stole is proudly and constantly worn as a sign of financial success. Madame Dubuc is confined to her wheelchair, and therefore rarely leaves the upstairs apartment where she lives. Further confined by senility, she is in the care of a son and daughter-in-law who are insensitive, even brutal at times. An inarticulate and dependent automaton, she seems to represent the final stage in a life of confinement.

Mainly, however, the belles-soeurs are confined by their assumption that women are dependent. The two aging spinsters have attached themselves to each other and to the Church. A younger spinster who still hopes to marry, conforms closely to the general lifestyle of the married women, not only to protect her reputation, but because there is no other niche for her in a society where unmarried women over thirty do not exist. She wants to avoid at all costs the situation of Germaine's



youngest sister Pierrette, whom the women have treated as a pariah ever since she left home ten years ago with her boyfriend Johnny to find work in a nightclub. Considered a fallen woman, she is not welcome at her sister's party. The other unmarried women include Germaine's twenty-year-old daughter Linda and two friends. They have jobs, but view their employment as lasting only until they marry. The oldest of the belles-soeurs is Madame Dubuc, who is ninety-three. The seven remaining women are married, and while they all have children, no one mentions having a large family in the tradition of the rural mère de famille. There is also no sign that these women consider themselves "gardiennes de la foi et de la langue," but nevertheless, they see themselves, and are treated by the others, as mères de famille. And in fact, they resemble the traditional Quebec mother in one very significant way: they too view themselves as part of a hierarchical social order in which they have an assigned role, few choices, and little power.

Although the original formulas for survival have been modified almost beyond recognition, they still shape society and influence individuals' sense of self. The belles-soeurs conform to society's standards and enforce conformity through a network which extends to "la fille de ma belle-soeur," "la belle-soeur d'une de mes belles-soeurs," and even to "la belle-mère de ma belle-soeur." Since husbands and children do not reassure the women of their identity as mères de famille, they look to each other for approval. The sisterhood includes older unmarried women who willingly conform in order not to be excluded from the company of neighbors. The younger women who are tempted to rebel all know someone who has paid a high price for refusal to obey the

code of the belles-soeurs. Not surprisingly, many would-be rebels decide to conform.

By 1968, audiences must surely have been ready to acknowledge that the Quebec mother was a myth; some had read Jean Le Moyne, more had read Marie-Claire Blais, and Roch Carrier's La Guerre, Yes Sir! had been out for several months. Nevertheless, the Québécois were not prepared for the belles-soeurs. As these fifteen women were confined--intellectually, emotionally, and sexually--Quebec too was confined, subject to bondage which had developed and been internalized as generations of individuals abandoned personal freedom. Paul-Emile Borduas used the image of a refuge transformed into a prison; we will now consider how Tremblay dramatizes life within the prison, and a few attempts to "s'en sortir."

The play opens with Linda's return from work. Entering the kitchen, she discovers four large cartons in the middle of the room and calls out: "Misère, que c'est ça? Moman!"⁴. She is obviously less than pleased to discover that Germaine's stamps have been delivered: "Sont déjà arrivés? Ben, j'ai mon voyage! C'a pas pris de temps!" (15). Linda does not share Germaine's excitement at the thought of redecorating the house, and is critical of Germaine's plans to invite people in for an evening of putting stamps into booklets, especially since she had intended to see her boyfriend, Robert: "Misère, moman, que vous avez donc pas d'allure, des fois!" she complains (17). But Germaine firmly believes that she deserves her daughter's cooperation, and tries to shame Linda into helping:

C'est ça, méprise-moé! Bon, c'est correct, sors, fais à ta tête! Tu fais toujours à ta tête, c'est pas ben ben mêlant! Maudite vie! J'peux même pas avoir une p'tite joie, y faut

toujours que quelqu'un vienne tout gâter! Vas-y aux vues, Linda, vas-y, sors à'soir, fais à ta tête! Maudite verrat de bâtard que chus donc tannée! (17).

Filled with self-pity and claiming to be unappreciated, Germaine continues, paying no attention to Linda's attempt to defend herself:

J'comprends rien pantoute pis j'veux rien savoir! Parle-moé pus...Désâmez-vous pour élever ça, pis que c'est que ça vous rapporte? Rien! Rien pantoute! C'est même pas capable de vous rendre un p'tit sarvice! J't'avertis, Linda, j'commence à en avoir plein le casque de vous servir, toé pis les autres! Chus pas une sarvante, moé, icitte! J'ai un million de timbres à coller pis chus pas pour les coller tu-seule! Après toute, ces timbres-là, y vont servir à tout le monde! Faudrait que tout le monde fasse sa part, dans'maison!..." (17).

Not only does Germaine feel entitled to help with the party, she also thinks that Linda should heed her advice about Robert, whom she considers "niaiseux," a "bon-rien" who will never earn enough to support a family comfortably (17). Germaine's attitudes about a woman's role are thus sketched out in just a few short exchanges: since women are dependent on their husbands, they must be careful to marry someone with a good financial future; and within the family the mother has the right to impose her will from time to time, particularly when it is for the benefit of the family as a whole. Children should be grateful and obedient. Feeling that her demands are fully justified, Germaine does not hesitate to belittle Linda, who grudgingly submits: "C'est correct, v'nez pas folle, la mère.." (19).

Mother and daughter continue in this vein throughout the evening, exchanging threats they will not carry out, and then complaining about the unfair or thoughtless treatment each receives from the other. They say nothing that they have not said many times before, and although at one point Linda defiantly walks out on Germaine in the midst of a dispute, she quickly finds an excuse to return. Their quarrels

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illustrate the alternating sado-masochistic behavior of two people who are dependent on each other and who know just how far they can go without risking the definitive separation that neither one really wants. But of the two, perhaps Linda is the more dependent; she refuses Pierrette's invitation to stay with her, exclaiming, "Vous y pensez pas! Des plans pour qu'y veulent pus jamais me voir!" (84). By threatening to disown Linda, Germaine will be able to maintain some control over her daughter until she marries. Then, never having learned to be independent, Linda will undoubtedly try to exercise authority over her children in the same way.

The shabbiness of Germaine's kitchen justifies her desire to redecorate, but she over-reacts, and the result is a comic catalogue scene which literally lives up to its name. Germaine is ecstatic as she tells her sister Rose over the phone that she has enough stamps for everything in the catalogue: "J'pense que j'vas pouvoir toute prendre c'qu'y'a d'dans! J'vas toute meubler ma maison en neuf!" (19). She then excitedly lists the things she wants, pausing to comment that a friend has the same item, but paid a lot for it, or that a selection in the catalogue is even lovelier than a similar one which she has seen elsewhere. Her descriptions are filled with expressions from the catalogue; for her bedroom she has chosen "un set de chambre style colonial au grand complet avec accessoires" (20). There is even furniture for children's rooms, and as she tells Rose, "...c'est de toute beauté de voir ça! Avec des Mickey Mouse partout!" (21). Like a puppet manipulated by commercial interests, Germaine abandons all judgment. Instead of choosing what she likes and can use, she automatically wants everything, even a curtain for a shower that she

does not have. The catalogue, with its glowing illustrations and descriptions, offers the hope of a whole new world where people are always winners. And so Germaine wants it all, eagerly anticipating the moment when she will experience the happiness and success displayed in her catalogue. In Germaine's case, the consumer society is shown to be a dehumanizing and alienating influence, giving her the illusion of freedom and power when in truth others define her tastes and determine her choices. The problem is compounded by the fact that it is only by chance that she is able to choose, even from the catalogue. Her new-found power is thus doubly deceptive. It is also short-lived.

The belles-soeurs see in Germaine's good fortune a galling reminder that they are always losers. Early in the play, one woman after another describes contests she has entered. "Pis, avez-vous gagné quequ'chose, toujours?" someone inevitably asks, only to be told: "J'ai-tu l'air de quequ'un qui a déjà gagné quequ'chose!" (41, 44, 46, 47). Insensitive to her guests' feelings, Germaine boasts of how her life will change. As a winner, she will participate in the highly advertized "good life" which they all have dreamed of. Irritated by her smug attitude, and annoyed that she does not offer them some stamps in return for helping her, the women soon begin taking stamps. To preserve their image of respectability, they rationalize the theft as only fair, since Germaine had done nothing to "deserve" the stamps.

The woman who complains the most bitterly of her life as a loser, and of the unjust forces that ultimately control her life is Marie-Ange Brouillette. In a long monologue, she speaks for the majority of the women who subscribe to her basic outlook even if they do not all share her intense bitterness and self-loathing. Germaine's catalogue in hand,

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Lucy

Mary

John

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Marie-Ange begins by contrasting her own situation with that of her lucky neighbor. Only the worst happens to her, Marie-Ange maintains: "Moé, j'mange d'la marde, pis j'vas en manger toute ma vie" (21). As her language shows, she feels irrevocably condemned to a life of debasement and humiliation. Germaine, on the other hand, will enjoy a houseful of new things which she does not deserve: "On peut dire que la chance tombe toujours sur les ceuses qui le méritent pas! Que c'est qu'a l'a tant faite, madame Lauzon, pour mériter ça, hein? Rien! Rien pantoute!" (22). Marie-Ange sees Germaine's prize as another sign of life's gross inequity, evidence that the world is ruled by a cruel and capricious fate.

The luck to which Marie-Ange refers is reminiscent of the diety whom Le Moyne was taught to fear in his childhood, the "Dieu comme une foudre aveugle et traîtresse, un hazard personnifié."⁵ As far as Marie-Ange is concerned, the force which controls her life is also blind, treacherous, and indifferent to what is good and just. Feeling abused and cheated, Marie-Ange can only protest "C'est pas juste!" at the thought of how comfortable Germaine's life will be in comparison to her own (22). By blaming luck for everything that happens, she implies that no one is responsible, and that no one can remedy the situation. Certainly she does not blame herself, or even Germaine, although she feels justified in preventing Germaine from enjoying an undeserved prize. She quotes approvingly the priest who said that contests should be "embolie," but goes no farther in her attempt to understand the luck which she claims is the source of life's injustice (22). The women who take Germaine's stamps instinctively feel the need for a more equitable society, but shaped by their authoritarian milieu, they perpetuate

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authoritarianism and its accompanying injustices. Believing themselves condemned to mediocrity, if not failure, they undercut each other to maintain reassuring group conformity.

Of all the speeches in the play, none more clearly depicts the automaton conformity of the belles-soeurs than the first choral recitation, "une maudite vie plate." It develops from the remarks of Marie-Ange Brouillette, as she resentfully compares Germaine's situation with her own: "C'est pas juste," she complains, "Chus tannée de m'esquinter pour rien! Ma vie est plate! Plate! Pis par-dessus le marché, chus pauvre comme la gale! Chus tannée de vivre une maudite vie plate!" (22). As she speaks, four other women enter, and when she has finished, they all stand together, facing the audience. The shift to chorus is further accentuated by a change in lighting. Then the five women formally announce in unison: "Quintette: Une maudite vie plate! Lundi!" (23). But before they can launch into an account of their daily routines, one of the women begins a sentimental description of dawn; it parodies the 19th century "roman du terroir" which idealized--and falsified--country life. The style and vocabulary are clearly not typical of the belles-soeurs: "Dès que le soleil a commencé à caresser de ses rayons les petites fleurs dans les champs et que les petits oiseaux ont ouvert leurs petits becs pour lancer vers le ciel leurs petits cris..." (23). At this point the other women interrupt, describing their prosaic dawn, and listing the day's unwelcome chores:

Les quatre autres:	J'me lève, pis j'prépare le déjeuner! Des toasts, du café, du bacon, des oeufs. J'ai d'la misère que l'yable à réveiller mon monde. Les enfants partent pour l'école, mon mari s'en va travailler.
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Marie-Ange Brouillette: Pas le mien, y'est chomeur. Y reste couché.

Les cinq femmes: Là, là, j'travailles comme une enragée, jusqu'à midi. J'lave. Les robes, les jupes, les bas, les chandails les pantalons, les canneçons, les brassières, tout y passe! Pis frotte, pis tord, pis refrotte, pis rince...C't'écoeurant, j'ai les mains rouges, j't'écoeurée. J'sacre (23).

As the day progresses, the housewives' growing irritability and frustration is matched by the mood of the rest of the family; by the end of the day, they say, "Quand le monde revient, j'ai l'air bête! Mon mari sacre, les enfants braillent..." (24). Each day has its round of unrewarding activities; the evenings are equally predictable: "Pis le soir, on regarde la télévision!" (24). The chorus concludes, speaking now for Marie-Ange and for belles-soeurs everywhere: "Chus tannée de mener une maudite vie plate! Une maudite vie plate! Une maudite vie plate! Une mau..." (24). Abruptly ending their outburst, they begin to chat as if they were completely unaware of what they had just said.

With wit and style, "une maudite vie plate" describes simultaneously what the women do and how they feel about it. It is the story of lives unlived, mainly because people are convinced that they have no choice but to submit to their unrewarding routine. Recited in unison, with rhythm and energy, the ode creates an atmosphere of coercion which carries the women along, permitting neither rest nor deviation from the way of life against which they are protesting. Mechanically performing the tasks expected of them, the women want only to get through the day's work, which is unappreciated by others and meaningless to them. They complain, but no one listens, and eventually even their complaints become routine. Other expressions of dissatisfaction and frustration occur throughout the play, including the muted, but often repeated "J'ai mon voyage." Although the belles-soeurs

are "fed up" and protest that they have "had it," they perpetuate and reinforce their routines rather than change them. By giving the women's own words a dramatic, theatrical form, Tremblay reveals what the women fail to realize: as belles-soeurs they have conformed to social expectations, developing false selves at the expense of their individuality. To compensate for their diminishing sense of self and self-worth, they have become dependent on each other for reassurance that they are doing the right thing. At present, they are their own jailors. Almost every woman dreams of some form of escape; none is fully aware of the extent to which she contributes to her own confinement.

Conformity stifles spontaneity. It is not surprising, therefore, that for excitement, the belles-soeurs turn to something which is structured, requires no skill, and offers the chance of winning a prize: bingo. Winning means an opportunity to be an individual and to stand out from the group; it is one of the few times when a belle-soeur can be recognized as superior without fear of group reprisal. And although it depends on luck, winning provides an illusion of independence and control.

In Act Two, nine women join in an "ode au bingo," a chorus triggered by the announcement that bingo will conclude the evening at the next parish social. Overjoyed at the news, five of the women talk about what bingo means in their lives. First they describe their anticipation and excitement as the night of the game approaches. Then they act out a game, with the other four women calling out the numbers "en contrepoint, d'une façon très rythmée," according to the stage directions (87). At last the desired "B 14," and an exultant "Bingo!

Bingo! J'ai gagné!" (87). The prize? Last month it was a plaster door stop in the form of a dog, this month it will be floor lamps. Unanimously the women cheer: "Vive les chiens de plâtre! Vive les lampes torchères! Vive le bingo!" (87).

As in the recitation of "Une maudite vie plate," a change of lighting has announced the departure from conventional dialogue, and as before, the women take positions along the front of the stage to face the audience and express themselves automatically. The tension is genuine, but it is initiated by a contrived situation which stimulates and channels their excitement. A familiar routine, with the tantalizing hope of winning a prize, fills them with an enthusiasm which they cannot generate by themselves. Thus they remain dependent on something external and artificial to heighten their anticipation and subsequent emotional release. Bingo is not simply a game which adds to the fun of a church social; it is an important substitute for self-expression and spontaneity, giving the belles-soeurs a deceptive sense of power and success as well.

Bingo may not be an ideal means for a woman to assert her individuality within her social group, but it does encourage a certain cohesiveness. This cannot be said of the numerous petty quarrels, or "chicanes," as they are called, which constantly erupt during the evening, setting the women against each other over trivial matters. The disputes serve as temporary outlets for the women's frustrations, and allow them to express themselves forcefully and "stand up for their rights" within the norms accepted by their group. None of the belles-soeurs, however, is capable of discussing truly personal matters. Some of the women dare not reveal their thoughts and feelings because they

fear group disapproval and possible censure; others, unconscious of their existence as individuals, have nothing personal to say. Under these circumstances, neither dialogues nor monologues could be used realistically to exteriorize the characters' inner state; Tremblay therefore has his characters talk about themselves in a frankly theatrical, non-realistic way. The action on stage is suspended, and only the speaker is lighted as she addresses the audience. Through her monologue, listeners may learn to know her better than she knows herself.

This is the case with Yvette Longpré who tells about the major event of her life, her daughter's wedding. Still playing her role as mother of the bride, Yvette describes an artificial, saccharine celebration in which the rites and symbols of a sacrament have been so exploited that the original meaning has been forgotten. For her, the whole institution of marriage is reduced to a wedding and honeymoon, and is summed up in a layer of inedible wedding cake which has been carefully preserved to immortalize the most beautiful moment in a woman's life--her wedding day. The emptiness of Yvette's life is equally evident in a second monologue. Like a wound-up mechanical toy, she lists the more than fifty guests at a party for her sister-in-law; the names are recited automatically, without thought or meaning, as if Yvette were a machine, and the guests a series of unrelated objects--all that remains of the extended Quebec family. A complete automaton, Yvette is probably incapable of meaningful human relationships. Surrounded by socially-approved images of marriage and family life, she never suspects that these images are superficial, and that her life is empty.

From the moment Lisette de Courval enters with her mink stole draped around her shoulders, it is evident that she is conforming to what she considers to be the code of a more desirable social class. Her stole and her trip to France are important to her as symbols of her economic and cultural attainment, and her title as "présidente de la Supplique à Notre Dame du Perpétuel Secours" indicates that she is socially prominent as well as prosperous. Aware that the language of the belles-soeurs is inappropriate for a "présidente" with social aspirations, she tries to demonstrate that her own French is refined as well as correct. The trite description of dawn which precedes the ode to "la maudite vie plate" was hers, and she conscientiously corrects her errors, changing "moé" to "moi," and "ben" to "bien." In her zeal, however, she overcorrects and mispronounces both "Europe" and "parler." The belles-soeurs are unimpressed by her efforts, but when Lisette calls Marie-Ange "mal embouchée" for using the word "chier," her criticisms do not go unanswered (25). "J'parle comme j'peux, pis j'dis c'que j'ai à dire, c'est toute!" retorts Marie-Ange; "Chus pas t'allée en Urope, moé, chus pas t'obligée de me forcer pour bien perler," she adds, mimicking her critic (25). Such remarks only reinforce Lisette's determination to leave behind the belles-soeurs with their constant bickering and crude language. Her monologue occurs after a spate of noisy quarreling in which she does not participate. Turning to the audience, Lisette contrasts "Urope" with the present milieu, which she contemptuously likens to a barnyard. Then she adds:

A Paris, tout le monde perle bien, c'est du vrai français partout...C'est pas comme icitte...J'les méprise toutes! Je ne remettrai jamais les pieds ici! Léopold avait raison, c'monde-là, c'est du monde cheap, y faut pas les fréquenter, y faut même pas en parler, y faut les cacher! Y savent pas

vivre! Nous autres on est sortis de là, pis on devrait pus jamais revenir! Mon Dieu que j'ai donc honte d'eux-autres! (author's emphasis, 59).

The monologue adds a new dimension to Lisette's character. Much of the time she is a comic figure whose misguided attempts to speak Parisian French make it obvious that imitation will not solve her language problems--or Quebec's, for that matter. At this level, she is Tremblay's answer to all the purists who had ever advocated that the people of Quebec should sound and write like Frenchmen. But the intensity of Lisette's scorn for the belles-soeurs must surely be understood as having its source in her own profound sense of insecurity which has become inseparably associated with language. Quebec's elite had traditionally taken pride in maintaining a French which was uncontaminated by the bastardized language of the lower classes. Since joual identifies her as belonging to the lower class, Lisette is trying to replace it with a French which she thinks will entitle her to a new position of superiority. She believes that she has made great progress, but the belles-soeurs see only pretense, and do not consider her to be any better than they are. As far as they are concerned, she is still one of them; they refuse to acknowledge the new identity which she is trying to establish.

Although Lisette is the most superficial of snobs, with no genuine interest in language, her underlying feelings of self-doubt and inferiority are real. She is trying to change by imposing one false self over another, and feels more vulnerable than ever because she has no social group with which she can identify. Her isolation and alienation are tied to her misunderstanding of language and her dependence on arbitrary language standards set by a social class

desiring to maintain its own power and authority. The lesson is clear that Quebec must do what Lisette is incapable of doing: establish its own values and create a language which encourages communication across class lines within Quebec, and within the larger Francophone community as well.

Since no men are present at Germaine's party, the women are free to talk about them. The traditional notion of man as the authority figure is fading; in the most fully described incident of the father's authority, the father suffers a heart attack and dies while disciplining his daughter at the supper table! Men are often discussed in terms of their earning power, as we have already seen in Germaine's efforts to persuade Linda to choose a boyfriend with a bright economic future. Marie-Ange's husband is unemployed, which explains why she is the poorest woman in the group. Lisette, on the other hand, has been able to afford a fur stole and a trip to Europe, thanks to her husband's hard work and willingness to borrow. Although women take into account the man's income, they do not always find security. Lise will reveal to Linda that she is pregnant; she was not passionately in love, but her boyfriend gave her so many gifts that she thought he would marry her. Instead, he disappeared when he learned of her pregnancy. Pierrette too has been abandoned by a lover. According to the moral code of the belles-soeurs, however, women are to blame for the outcome if they engage in sexual activity outside of marriage. Lise and Pierrette merit censure, not sympathy. The general conversation includes many references to sex, allowing the women to hint at a subject which excites them, but which they cannot discuss openly. Marriage apparently is not expected to offer sexual satisfaction; the husband has legitimate sexual

needs, the woman has a duty to satisfy them, and if she is lucky, she will not have too many pregnancies, or a protracted period of childbearing. Among the belles-soeurs there is only one woman willing to admit that she lacks sexual fulfillment.

Des-Neiges Verrette, being unmarried, believes it is important for her to have a good reputation, yet she is willingly coaxed to tell a joke about a nun who enjoyed being raped. The joke is well received, but Des-Neiges is upset by the suggestion that something is "going on" between her and the man who told her the story, Henri Simard, the brush salesman. Assured that the remark was not serious, Des-Neiges is relieved: "Vous m'avez faite assez peur! Moé, une demoiselle si respectable!" (51). Des-Neiges Verrette clearly has more than a casual interest in Henri Simard, but since he is not even her fiancé, this "respectable" woman is in no position to discuss publicly what he means to her. It is therefore to the audience that she turns with her story, and if her language remains discreet, she is nonetheless honest about her feelings. Henri Simard brightens her dull life with stories; some concern his travels, but others are dirty, she admits. She has always liked "les histoires un peu salées," she confesses, adding "J'trouve que ça fait du bien de conter des histoires cochonnes, des fois..." (53). She dreams of marrying him, but does not expect it. All she can hope for are his monthly visits: "Si y s'en va, j'vas rester encore tu-seule, pis j'ai besoin...d'aimer...(Elle baisse les yeux et murmure.) J'ai besoin d'un homme" (53-54). Des-Neiges welcomes the sexual aspect of marriage, but does not think that she can do anything to change her present situation. Since traveling brush salesmen have a reputation as

Don Juans, it seems likely that Des-Neiges Verrette will remain "tuseule," a nice, respectable spinster with a taste for spicy stories.

Angéline Sauvé and Rhéauna Bibeau, spinsters in their sixties, have been confined to an even more limited milieu than Des-Neiges Verrette, devoting their lives to the church, parish activities, and each other. The nature of their devotion is brought out in their spotlighted dialogue. They have just come from calling hours at a funeral parlor, and are in the midst of sharing the news that each one gathered. Fascinated with death, they marvel that the late Monsieur Baril, scarcely forty, should die while they have not yet been "taken" despite their poor health. Rhéauna insists that her condition is far more serious than Angéline's: "J'ai souffert bien plus que toi, Angéline! Dix-sept opérations! J'ai pus rien qu'un poumon, un rein, un sein...Ah! j'en ai-tu arraché, rien qu'un peu..." (63). Poor health and suffering have been her life's work; they give her a sense of purpose and hope of salvation. Nevertheless, she worries that she might die before receiving last rites. Angeline assures her friend that even without them, she would go straight to heaven. Secretly Rhéauna agrees; but now that she has demonstrated her own piety, she can point an accusing finger at the unforgivable sins of others.

The mention of sin soon brings Rhéauna to the subject of Pierrette Guérin. "Si y'a quelqu'un que j'peux pas sentir, c'est ben Pierrette Guérin!" she explains, "Une vraie dévergondée! Une vraie honte pour sa famille! J'te dis, Angéline, que j'voudrais pas voir son âme, elle! A doit être noire rare!" (67). Angéline disagrees: "Voyons, Rhéauna, au fond, Pierrette, c'est pas une mauvaise fille!" (68). Until now Angéline and Rhéauna have both been stereotypes, yet believable in their

conformity to a code emphasizing submissiveness, suffering, and death. Rhéauna's hostility toward Pierrette, however, suggests a desire to destroy any reminder of her own empty life. She is not alone in her self-righteous condemnation; the three Guérin sisters, Germaine, Rose, and Gabrielle, agree that Pierrette is a fallen woman, "une vraie catin" (69). Germaine has already repudiated her, in fact. Finally, when the audience has been introduced to her reputation, Pierrette unexpectedly appears, precipitating a crisis: she and Angéline are friends.

For much of Act Two, the pasting and theft of Germaine's stamps continue as an ironic backdrop against which is played out the drama of another moral issue, the acceptable expression of sexuality in the world of the "belles-soeurs". It begins with the mini-drama of the friendship between Pierrette and Angéline. Singly, in small groups, and in unison, the women express their horror as they learn that Angéline is a Friday night regular at the nightclub where Pierrette works. "C'est ben effrayant!" exclaim several; "C'est ben épouvantable!" agree others (76). Twenty-year-old Linda and two friends are no doubt equally surprised, but do not disapprove; "C'est le fun!" they retort (77).

The spotlight focuses again on Angéline and Rhéauna, but this time, their speeches will be interrupted. The other women, although they refuse to listen, cannot remain silent. Their remarks mingle with those of Angéline as she tries to explain her behavior to Rhéauna, who also refuses to listen, saying "T's pus mon amie, Angéline. J'te connais pus!" (77). No matter how innocent her behavior at the club may have been, the harm is done--she was there. "Le club! Un vrai endroit de perdition!" cry Pierrette's three sisters, and the other women agree:

"Ah! endroit maudit, endroit maudit! C'est là qu'on perd son âme" (77). "Le club, mais c'est l'enfer!" concludes Rhéauna (78). Pierrette's laughter, and her wish to spend eternity in a "hell" like the club where she works, alarm her sisters: "Farme-toé, Pierrette, c'est le diable qui parle par ta bouche!" The chorus of young women protests that their elders exaggerate, the older generation replies in chorus "Ah! Jeunesses aveugles! Jeunesses aveugles! Vous allez vous perdre, pauvres jeunes..." (78). The women now repeat the age-old admonitions heard in church and in their families since they were children. It is a sin, they insist, a mortal sin. "On nous l'a assez répété: 'Mettre le pied dans un club, c'est déjà faire un péché mortel,'" say the three sisters (79).

Angéline again pleads with the belles-soeurs to listen to her explanation. "Jamais! Vous avez pas d'excuses!" they reply (79). Then Rhéauna announces that she will not speak to her again until she promises not to return to the club. Angéline knows that she must make a choice. Once more in the spotlight, Angéline tells the audience of her need for friendship and fun. "Le monde que j'ai rencontré dans c'te club-là, c'est mes meilleurs amis!" she confesses, but adds that she has always known that sooner or later her secret would be discovered, and she would have to choose. She decides, of course, to maintain her place in society, and reluctantly complies with the moral code of the belles-soeurs. "Après toute," she concludes, "Rhéauna vaut mieux que Pierrette" (82). She leaves to consult Abbé Castelnaud, and returns later, repentant and submissive. She would like to say goodbye to Pierrette, but Rhéauna objects. "Non, tu s'rais mieux de pus y parler pantoute!" Rhéauna warns, and Angéline abandons the idea (105).

The voice of the majority has carried the day. In her monologue, Angéline has movingly described her joyless life: "J'ai été élevée dans les salles paroissiales par des soeurs qui faisaient c'qu'y pouvaient mais qui connaissaient rien, les pauvres! J'ai appris à rire à cinquante-cinq ans! Pis par hasard! Parce que Pierrette m'a emmenée dans son club, un soir!" (81). But no one will listen; on the subject of clubs, the belles-soeurs are of one mind and speak with one voice: clubs are wicked, evil places, dens of iniquity which corrupt all who enter.

The women's attitude should come as no surprise. During the 1950's, clubs and taverns had been subject to frequent public attack from Montreal's archbishop, Paul-Emile Léger. "Montréal est une ville de tavernes, une ville de clubs, où l'on perd son âme," he warned; "Ville-Marie est devenue la ville du péché...A Montréal, on se rit de Dieu et on lui crache ouvertement au visage..."⁶. The women thus feel completely justified in condemning Angéline, and do not want to hear how after years of loneliness, she made friends and learned to laugh. "J'ai appris à rire" is repeated and hangs over her monologue like an echo as she accepts the inevitable and decides to give up the club forever. From the standpoint of the belles-soeurs, Angéline Sauvé is saved!

How could Angéline afford to rebel? Except for two hours on Friday evening, her life is spent with Rhéauna in activities related to the parish; without them, she would have no life at all. The significance of Angéline's situation is dramatized by the ominous, pervasive chorus. The two odes, although highly stylized, allow the women to use their own words to express the way they all feel about the life they lead. In the scenes involving Angéline and Pierrette, the choral responses are based

on things the women have been told. If the words seem to flow spontaneously, it is only because they have been heard so often that they have been internalized; the powerful voice of Church authority has become second nature. In spite of vocabulary associated with Christianity, the chorus seems pagan, and speaks for a universe which lacks spontaneity and joy, where people unwittingly impose upon themselves a moral code that stifles laughter and the wonderful freedom it brings. In the case of Pierrette Guérin, the moral code proves destructive.

Once properly confessed and renounced, Angéline's evenings at the club can be forgiven. Pierrette's situation is quite different. As a bright and pretty teenager, she seemed to have a promising future. Then she met Johnny, who, as the three sisters all agree, caused her downfall: "Le maudit Johnny! Un vrai démon sorti de l'enfer! C'est de sa faute si est devenue comme a l'est astheur! Maudit Johnny! Maudit Johnny!" (69). Now a nightclub hostess, Pierrette represents debased womanhood and dangerous sexuality, tempting husbands to spend time and money which should rightfully go to their wives and families. The belles-soeurs are unanimous: "C'est là qu'on perd son âme. Maudite boisson, maudite danse! C'est là que nos maris perdent la tête pis dépensent toutes leurs payes avec des femmes damnées!" (77-78). To this the three sisters add "Des femmes damnées comme toé, Pierrette!" (79). Given Pierrette's reputation as an immoral woman, it is understandable that Germaine tries to discourage Linda's conversations with Pierrette. Rose is the only one of the sisters who can imagine how "tu-seule" Pierrette must feel, but when the subject turns to sex, Rose too wants to exclude her sister from the group. "Chus catholique!" she heatedly

tells Pierrette, who has just mentioned the pill; "Reste donc dans ton monde pis laisse-nous donc tranquilles! Maudite guidoune!" (100).

In spite of her sisters' cruel words, Pierrette shows no signs of anger, guilt, or shame. She has come only to see people and to help with the stamps. "J'ai pas la lèpre!" she tells Germaine, promising, "Après la soirée, si tu veux, j'reviendrai pus jamais..." (80-81). Not until the parallel monologues of Pierrette and Lise can the audience fully appreciate Pierrette's present dilemma. Lise has confided to Linda that she is pregnant, with no hope that the child's father will marry her. Pierrette, who has overheard them, suggests abortion. Linda is horrified, but Lise is desperate; to have a baby would mean the end of all her dreams. She wants to get somewhere, she says, to have a car and a nice place to live. "Attends deux-trois ans, pis tu vas voir que Lise Paquette a va devenir quelqu'un! Des cennes, a va n'avoir, O.K.?" (90). Pierrette understands. "J'sais c'que c'est de vouloir gagner ben d' l'argent," she tells Lise; at the club, there was money to be made, and Johnny promised she would have her share (91). At the mention of Johnny, the three sisters automatically chorus "Maudit Johnny," but although they blame him, they have no sympathy for Pierrette (91).

Since her sisters are unwilling to listen, Pierrette tells the audience about her life on the Main. Head-over-heels in love with Johnny, she worked in his club for ten years, using her good looks to attract customers. Now he says she is too old and unattractive to do her job, and has turned her out without a penny. At thirty she is finished, but Lise is still young enough to start over. Pierrette concludes the first part of her monologue with "J'le sais pas c'que j'vas devenir, j'le sais pas pantoute!" (94). At the other end of the

kitchen, Lise repeats Pierrette's words as she begins to tell about her own misfortunes. How lucky Pierrette is to have a good job and to be in love, she exclaims. Pierrette's monologue picks up immediately: "Y m'a laissé tomber comme une roche!" (95). Too proud to tell what has happened, she counts on alcohol to help her forget her problems. When she and Lise have both finished, although she has not heard what Lise said to the audience, Pierrette holds out her arms to comfort her. It is the only gesture of compassion in the play.

Unlike Angéline, Pierrette cannot repent and be received back into the circle of the belles-soeurs; her attitudes and values are too different. Although single, she loved Johnny and through him had a job she enjoyed and was proud of. She had no doubts about her own worth until Johnny grew tired of her; then she realized that her "worth" was ephemeral, for it had depended on youth. She finds this situation cruel and unfair, but sees herself much as Johnny does: a consumer product dependent on the desires of others for her value. She must accept her fate; if she is no longer found attractive, she is therefore no longer of value. It is not hard to imagine that she will soon destroy herself with her drinking.

Lise Paquette has also tried to escape the world of the belles-soeurs. Motivated less by love than by materialistic goals, she nevertheless rebels angrily against her degrading life of borderline poverty. "J'sais que chus cheap, mais j'veux m'en sortir!" she cries (90). But while she vows to change her life, she makes no plans. Already blaming her pregnancy on bad luck, she will probably give the same reason for her failure to find a better job, and in the end will continue to be "une p'tite waitress cheap du Kresge" (95). Her life

will not change until she knows how to change it, but at least she has a stated goal: "s'en sortir." In this respect, she is different from most of the other women in Germaine's kitchen.

Tremblay skillfully juxtaposes the monologues of Lise and Pierrette into a moving duet of defeat and despair; in doing so, he also calls attention to the two women's inability to confide completely in each other. The support that Pierrette has given Lise is not enough, and Pierrette too is in need of help. Both women have disobeyed the moral code of their society; already Pierrette is rejected by her family, and Lise fears that her father will beat her if he discovers that she is pregnant. But there will be more in store for her than a beating if she has a child out of wedlock. Soon after Lise's conversation with Linda and Pierrette, the women begin to discuss Monique Bergeron, a girl thought to be bearing her step-father's child. The cruel gossip angers Lise, who is keenly aware of Monique's need for the women's help and compassion.

Rose Quimet is the most outspoken in her condemnation of unwed mothers. She puts the entire blame on Monique whose short shorts were an "invitation," she says. Although she obviously has little sympathy for the girls who "get themselves raped," Rose expresses complete contempt for the rest: "C'est des bon-riennes pis des vicieuses qui courent après les hommes! Mon mari appelle ça des agace-pissettes, lui!" (100). Rose has already said with some bitterness that her husband is a "cochon," over-sexed like all the men in his family (28-29). In her view, men are animals, seeking nothing but their own pleasure. Women are supposed to be different; for them sexual activity has only one socially approved purpose, conception. But for all her references to

sex, and even obsession with it, Rose cannot openly discuss her concerns, even with her sisters. She turns to the audience with her story of her husband's endless demands, and her belief that once married, a woman can never say no. "Maudit cul!" she exclaims angrily, recalling that at the time of marriage, her concept of "la Sainte-Union du mariage" was completely unrealistic (102). She did not know what a woman was obliged to endure, but she has made sure to warn her daughter: "... ça fait longtemps que j'ai dit c'qu'y valent, les hommes" (102). Now forty-four, she would like to walk away and start life anew, but "les femmes, y peuvent pas faire ça...Les femmes sont poignées à'gorge pis y vont rester de même jusqu'au bout!" (102).

Rose feels trapped, yet she has contributed to her own entrapment by accepting the idea that she cannot refuse her husband's demands "deux fois par jour, trois cent soixante-cinq jours par année" (102). She was an ignorant bride, she says, but it is not simply ignorance which accounts for her failure to question the role of sex in marriage. Just as Pierrette has allowed society to define her as a sex object and to determine her worth in terms of her attractiveness to men, so Rose has accepted as law the notion that it is a wife's responsibility to satisfy her husband's sexual desires.

Nevertheless, is Rose not suspiciously over-zealous in fulfilling her responsibilities? Perhaps what she cannot admit, even to herself, is that she does not want to say no to sex, but to the insensitive expression of sex that results from the belief that only men are supposed to experience physical desire. If society recognized women's sexual needs, Rose's husband might consider her desires as well as his own. As it is, he probably assumes that his sole responsibility is

procreation. In the world of the belles-soeurs, only unmarried women have the right to say no, a right that Rose envies because it gives a woman some control over her sex life. Rose also envies the women who openly acknowledge their desires, and who apparently find fulfillment, for she is denied that as well. Rose thus loses on several accounts: she neither refuses nor transforms her sexual relationship with her husband, and in her frustration perpetuates the very system which confines her. She relieves men of responsibility for their sexual conduct, and condemns as immoral any woman who betrays the slightest evidence of sexuality. In sum, although Rose appears to conform to the traditional role for women, she is both frustrated and humiliated by marriage.

The closing scene of the play provides a memorable image of conformity. When the guests have left, taking with them nearly all the stamps, Germaine, "tu-seule," weeps bitterly for the dream that almost came true. Then in the distance she hears the women singing. Drying her tears, she stands at attention in her disordered kitchen, and joins the others to sing the Canadian national anthem. Her behavior is automatic; she conforms and never wonders why. The harmonious singing of "O Canada" makes an ironic conclusion for an evening filled with hostility and conflict, especially since it also illustrates the women's obedience to convention. Whatever its meaning for Tremblay and the Quebec audience, the choice of "O Canada" has no special significance for the apolitical belles-soeurs; it is simply the song that they are used to hearing at certain public events. Superficially, Germaine's gesture suggests reconciliation and restored good will, but in fact, nothing has changed; she is merely obeying convention, as usual. The

lack of change is further emphasized by the shower of stamps which falls on Germaine as she sings. Another absurd cycle will no doubt take place, for Germaine has learned nothing from her experience. The trading stamp catalogue still represents the dream she longs to realize, and she still believes that her only chance of winning is to "play the game." So too, the other women will continue their already established patterns of behavior, thus perpetuating a social system which encourages conformity, not freedom.

The fresh supply of stamps, unrealistic yet perfectly in keeping with the theme of luck, is a final theatrical gesture to remind the spectators that they have been watching a play, and to invite them to think about it as a reflection of contemporary society in general, and of Quebec in particular. As Tremblay explained in an interview in 1980, he believes that the playwright's task is to raise, not answer, questions: "Je ne suis pas là pour démontrer quelque chose, pour montrer au monde à vivre. Qui suis-je pour montrer le chemin? Je suis là pour me poser des questions avec tout le monde. Puis, nous réglerons nos problèmes tout le monde ensemble."⁷ Furthermore, since the text of a play is by its nature incomplete, subject to new interpretations each time it is performed, it is not so much a vehicle for imposing a single point of view as a means for exploring basic problems which may be experienced in many different ways. As for the spectator, Tremblay said, "il doit refaire le puzzle qu'on lui présente. Le théâtre est fait de morceaux que tu donnes au spectateur et que celui-ci doit mettre ensemble."⁸ This task, in his opinion, is one which most spectators find challenging and ultimately pleasurable. Certainly, Les Belles-

soeurs is composed of many pieces, and subject to numerous interpretations.

One way of treating the puzzle of Les Belles-Soeurs is to see it as a portrait gallery of women who are unable to conceive of freedom because they have consistently been taught to rely on others to tell them who they are and how to behave. Even though the ideal of "la sainte et féconde maternité," as Bourassa had called it fifty years before, has become "une maudite vie plate," most of the women still accept the view that a woman's place is in the home, and expect to maintain the traditional authoritarian family structure. The repressive moral code, a barrier to mutually satisfying sexual relationships, contributes to their alienation. Nevertheless most of the women enforce rather than challenge it, and perpetuate the notion that the flesh is inevitably corrupt. Ultimately, whether they are conformists or rebels, the women find no alternative to the destiny which generations of French Canadians have summed up in the expression "nés pour le petit pain." In protesting that her family treats her like a "sarvante," Germaine Lauzon expresses something that they all feel, but cannot explain: they are being used for purposes not their own. In short, they are alienated.

Much has been written about the hopelessness of the situation depicted in Les Belles-Soeurs. In 1968, hailing the play as an example of a long-awaited "théâtre québécois de libération," Jean-Claude Germain explained that the spectators are encouraged to observe rather than identify with the characters, and are therefore "set free" to reject the excuses, self-pity, and conformity typical of people's attitudes in Quebec.⁹ But if the spectators are liberated, the characters are not. Powerless and completely lacking in spontaneous will, they are incapable

of change. "On ne sort pas de ce ghetto-là," Germain concluded.¹⁰ Alain Pontaut went still further; he saw no possibility of freedom for the women, and no evidence that Tremblay believed it possible:

On chercherait en vain, pour l'une quelconque de ces femmes...l'amorce d'une solution ou même d'un élan de coeur, l'esquisse d'une possibilité, le commencement d'une espérance, l'ombre d'une porte de sortie. Une hermétique enclos les retient prisonnières, insectes vénéreux dans un bocal clos et qui achèvent d'étouffer, objets d'une entomologie feroçément impassible de la part d'un auteur qui n'est point là sans doute pour leur donner de l'air, mais qui ne croit nullement à leur libération.¹¹

Perhaps Pontaut is correct, but even if Tremblay believed that his characters could never liberate themselves, the fact remains that not all of the women are complete automatons. Some, like Pierrette, Lise, Rose, and Des-Neiges have clung to a few shreds of integrity, and although she submits to Rhéauna's demands, Angéline appears to conform only because of practical considerations. Her basic values and feelings toward Pierrette do not change. And having learned to laugh, perhaps she will be more aware of the possibilities which life offers, even though she is not in a position to take advantage of them.

Laughter is a liberating experience, not just for Angéline, but for the audience as well. In discussing spectator response to Les Belles-Soeurs, Germain acknowledges that some may identify with the characters, and pity them, but laughter, he argues, is the most appropriate response to the play: "Des dépossédés qui s'appitoient sur eux-mêmes ou qui se méprisent eux-mêmes, se dépossèdent encore un peu plus. Rire de soi-même, rire de son impuissance, c'est reprendre possession de soi. C'est déjà posséder."¹²

Germain's point is well taken. Laughter denies the assumption that human beings are powerless automatons, mere tools to be used in the

service of some higher power, be it religious, economic, or political. Tremblay's achievement is to depict human beings who believe they are eternally trapped in a "bocal clos," while showing the audience that there is a "porte de sortie" which could be opened through joint effort. Moreover, due to Tremblay's successful blend of realism and theatricality, the audience is able to recognize its own confinement in that of the characters, and see that it is the result of socially imposed restrictions and taboos which society can lift if it so chooses. To laugh at Les Belles-Soeurs is indeed a sign of "possession de soi;" moreover, it justifies the hope that even the belles-soeurs may someday reject confining roles and norms, and thus "s'en sortir" from what they have always perceived as a "no exit" situation.

Notes

¹ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Le Summum de l'absurde, inspiré d'un concours de vaches, devenait une réalité du jour au lendemain," Magazine Maclean, rpt. in Les Belles Soeurs 152-153.

² Jacques Cellard, Le Monde 25-26 nov. 1973: 19, quoted by Renate Usami in Michel Tremblay (Vancouver: Douglas and Mc Intyre, 1982) 31.

³ See text 2.

⁴ Michel Tremblay, Les Belles-Soeurs (Montréal: Leméac, 1972) 15.
All further references will be contained in the text.

⁵ See text 26.

⁶ Paul-Emile Léger, quoted by Bernard Saint-Aubin in Duplessis et son époque (Montréal: Les Editions La Presse, 1979) 224.

⁷ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay: du texte à la représentation," by Roch Turbide, Voix et images 7.2 (hiver 1982):223.

⁸ Michel Tremblay, interview by Turbide 221.

⁹ Jean-Claude Germain, "J'ai eu le coup de foudre," 1968, rpt. in Les Belles-Soeurs 121.

¹⁰ Germain 123.

¹¹ Alain Pontaut, introduction, Les Belles-Soeurs v-vi.

¹² Germain 124.

En Pièces détachées: The Disintegration of the Family

En Pièces détachées was first performed on stage in 1969; a version for television, which is the text being used here, had its première on March 6, 1971. The play is made up of seven parts, or "pièces," which record the disintegration of a family. The action takes place during the mid- to late 1950s in the Montreal neighborhood which was the setting for Les Belles-Soeurs. Several scenes occur in a "cour intérieure" where women sit by open windows and on fire escapes and balconies, trying to get a little fresh air on a hot summer evening; one scene is in Nick's, a short-order restaurant, another takes place in the Coconut Inn, a nightclub on Boulevard Saint-Laurent, or the Main, as it is often called. The remaining scenes are set in Robertine's apartment, which faces the courtyard. All of the characters appear in only one setting except Thérèse, a working wife and mother, who is in three. Her mobility in comparison to the confinement of the belles-soeurs suggests a determined effort to "s'en sortir," but each apparent "porte de sortie" leads to a "cul de sac." Each night she returns home to an environment which further undermines her strength and makes independence still more difficult to achieve.

The play opens with the women who are relaxing at the end of the day. They introduce the familiar world of the belles-soeurs and explain the "show" which will be presented during the course of the evening by Robertine and her family. The first to speak is Madame

Tremblay, calling her son Michel, who is outside on his bicycle. She orders him home, but he never appears. The other children are equally unresponsive to their mothers' cries. Shouts and noisy comments mingle with quiet gossip. This is a world with no secrets, but references to the latest pregnancy and to philandering husbands are veiled, enabling the women to preserve a facade of respectability. Despite the disturbance of mothers calling to their children, the women are noticeably passive; no one gets up to enforce her child's bedtime rules, or to get the cold Coke that her dawdling child does not bring.

The one woman who remains indoors is Robertine. Her problems are public knowledge, and her noisy quarrels with her daughter never cease to fascinate the listening neighbors. Thus when Robertine closes her blind, all attention is focused on her. Individually and in unison, the women begin to comment on the events and relate the story of "la folle d'en face" (Robertine), her son-in-law Gérard, a "maudit fou" who is now a permanent invalid presumably due to an accident at work, and her daughter Thérèse, a "maudite tête folle," who twenty years ago had pursued and finally married Gérard, then a handsome ladies' man.¹ As she went off to her wedding, she defiantly called out to the watching women: "Chus peut-être pas habillée en blanc, mais je l'ai, mon gars" (18). The women were shocked. "A l'avait pas l'air d'un ange, a l'avait l'air d'un démon!" recalls Madame Tremblay (18). The others agree, repeating "Maudite démonne!" (18). But Thérèse has since paid dearly for her willfulness. Gérard never amounted to much, and she lost a good job at the Coconut Inn because of her drinking. Now she works in a cheap restaurant. There is no doubt, they chorus, "A va finir dans un trou, pis c'est toute c'qu'a mérite!" (19). The women agree that Thérèse

deserves the fate which they are sure awaits her -- a "hole" from which it will be impossible to "s'en sortir." But even as they condemn her, they watch eagerly for her return, waiting for her to express feelings which they all share but cannot, or dare not, articulate.

Twice again the watching women will talk about Robertine and her family; they speak as observers, not as friends, although Robertine was born in the house where she now lives. First they recall Robertine's husband, who spent his money on drink and other women, and then came home to quarrel with his wife. Now it is Thérèse who drinks and then quarrels with Robertine. Their fights are "comme une obligation," says one woman, "comme un besoin," adds another; "y peuvent pas s'en empêcher, y aiment ça," the women chorus, as if such behavior could not be explained or understood (49). Robertine's son Marcel, thirty-five, has been in a mental hospital for fifteen years. Different from other children, he was small for his age, seldom left the house, and never went to school. "Un vrai p'tit monstre, avec ses yeux noirs, sans expression, comme des smokes," he seemed to have a grudge against the world, one woman recalls (69). When he set fire to Robertine's hair and began smashing furniture, he was finally put in an asylum. But while the women call Robertine, Thérèse, and Gérard "crazy," they do not consider them insane. Their folly lies in their failure to conform to neighborhood customs and expectations. Showing no sympathy or compassion, the women watch the "show" with detached fascination.

Robertine agrees that she is different from her neighbors. She would have liked a "normal" family life, but is convinced that her problems with her husband and children have set her apart. According to the women, Robertine has always been secretive, deliberately trying to

hide her situation from them; Robertine feels that she has been ostracized because of her family's behavior. She therefore withdraws into the security of her apartment, convinced that she cannot join her neighbors, who are enjoying an evening in the courtyard. "Mais non," she says to herself as she looks out the window, "j'ai pas le droit à ça non plus! Faut dire que j'ai jamais eu droit à grand'chose, à'fin du compte" (71). Yet because she has accepted her lot without complaint, she also thinks that she cannot be held responsible for the way her life has turned out. She did the best she could, she insists, but her parents were ignorant, her husband unbearable, and her children not normal. "C'est pas de ma faute," she repeats, as she reflects on her life-long struggle (71).

Robertine perceives herself as defined by her role as mother and controlled by external forces. Not once does she think of herself as an individual with any freedom to decide how she will live, nor does she question the validity of her role as mother. Nevertheless, she gloomily predicts that she will eventually be abandoned by her children:

Soyez bonne pour vos enfants, tuez-vous pour eux autres pis y vous le reprocheront toute leur vie! Pis vous finirez votre vie tu-seule, abandonnée, dans un coin, comme une quêteuse dans votre propre maison (71).

In this speech, Robertine epitomizes the long-suffering, martyred mother, the figure so common in Quebec literature. A moment later, however, she smiles as she recalls Thérèse playing with neighborhood children, and Marcel asking for more stories; "...pis moé, j'continuais...C'est mieux que rien," she concludes (71).

"Continuer" sums up Robertine's philosophy. She has kept going despite countless difficulties and bleak prospects for the future. Certainly she has much to endure: her son-in-law is a vegetable

spending his days in front of the television; her fifteen-year-old granddaughter Joanne already thinks she is doomed to fail in any occupation; and Thérèse, who is losing her grip on life, drinks heavily. Although "continuer" is indeed better than nothing, it is closely related to Robertine's passive acceptance of "fate" and her assumption that problems cannot be solved, only "suffered." When Thérèse comes home drunk and abusive, for example, Robertine simply braces herself for another unpleasant evening:

Ca recommence... Ca recommence... Un éternel recommencement... Des années que j'endure ça... Sans dire un mot! Je l'aurai gagné, mon ciel, oui, que je l'aurai donc gagné! Pis a l'a l'air d'être dans une de ses pires journées... Joanne, va falloir que tu m'aides... On va essayer de la raisonner... Et pis non, ça servirait à rien. J'suppose que va falloir toute encaisser sans rien dire! Les bêtises, les reproches, les blasphèmes... les caresses... Quelle soirée en perspective! J'ai quasiment envie de sacrer mon camp...(59).

Robertine does not seriously consider leaving, but treats the situation as routine, as if she were unaware that Thérèse is steadily growing more desperate. Robertine's solution, "continuer," is totally inadequate for Thérèse, who is on the brink of self-destruction.

The scene at Nick's shows Thérèse at work. The opening shots focus on dirty dishes as Thérèse and Lise call out the orders: "Un double submarine all dressed, un grill cheese, deux cold slaw, deux cafés" (23). The rapid pace of the orders, the hybrid language, and the sight of dirty dishes combine to emphasize the sacrifice of human values to convenience and cash. Organized according to a system which dehumanizes the waitresses and the clients, the restaurant obviously does not offer the possibility of meaningful work. In a conversation with other employees during a slack period, Thérèse tells with satisfaction of how she put a customer in his place, and advises Lise, a less experienced

waitress, on techniques for earning more tips. Lise, timid and naive, is impressed with Thérèse's expertise. Mado, the cashier, thinks that Thérèse is manoeuvring to get the best tables and perhaps even the attentions of Nick, Mado's lover, who would then give Thérèse the best job of all--cashier. Thérèse is dumbfounded by Mado's suspicions. Although she was fired from her job at the Coconut Inn, she still views herself as a nightclub waitress, and is insulted that Mado would think she had any intention of staying for long at Nick's, even as cashier. As far as Thérèse is concerned, Nick's is synonymous with ugliness and humiliation. Working there further diminishes her self-esteem, but if she antagonizes Mado, she risks losing even that job. Then her last shred of self-confidence will be gone.

Humiliated and close to despair over the seeming hopelessness of her situation, Thérèse cannot resist stopping at the Coconut Inn after work. The barmaid, Lucille, has been a friend since childhood, and represents what Thérèse had dreamed of being. She is "l'exemple parfait de la 'waitress de club arrivée,'" and has blossomed in her new position as barmaid; "sa 'supériorité' transpire par toutes les pores de sa peau, ... tous ses gestes sont habituellement précis, sûrs, calculés, voulus" (35). Furthermore, as the mistress of the club owner, she has considerable authority over the other employees. No wonder Thérèse looks upon her with both envy and admiration. Caught between genuine affection for Thérèse and the knowledge that Thérèse will cause new problems for herself, Lucille does her best to prevent trouble. But Thérèse is too unhappy to be reasonable, and pours out her longing to return to the club: "Lucille... Lucille... Si tu savais! C'est icitte, ma place, Lucille! C'est icitte que chus t'heureuse!" (41). When

Lucille makes no reply, Thérèse goes on: "J'peux pas continuer à vendre des smoked meats, chus pus capable! C'est les clubs, la rue Saint-Laurent, la nuite, qui me faut! J'ai toujours vécu la nuite, Lucille! J'aime ça!" (41). Lucille sympathizes, but although she agrees that Thérèse was treated unfairly at the club, she also knows that because of her past conduct, Thérèse will not be rehired. She was involved in drunken brawls and also tried to discredit Lucille in hopes of winning the job as barmaid. Lucille bears no grudge because she realizes that Thérèse, undisciplined and weak, harms only herself.

Unlike Lucille, who understands and fulfills the requirements for a successful nightclub waitress, Thérèse has never seriously considered what is expected of her, nor has she thought through her own values. Her main goal has always been to escape the life led by her mother and neighbors. Consequently, she rejected the role of housewife, only to choose an equally confining and ultimately destructive role.

In the background the Aurore sisters are heard singing about a girl who got her wings singed upon leaving her family nest for the city:

Méfiez-vous, petites filles
De la grande ville vile
Restez avec votre mère
Vos frères, vos soeurs et votre père! (41).

The refrain, like so many sermons and "romans de la terre" familiar to earlier generations of French Canadians, warns that the city is immoral and therefore dangerous; it is far better for a girl to stay home and live as her parents have lived. In Tremblay's theatre, staying home involves risk, too, but in this case the warning is significant. It is followed by the arrival of Tooth-Pick, who works for Maurice, the club owner, and takes care of some of his underworld business. Tooth-Pick taunts Thérèse about Marcel, her drinking, and the possibility that she

too will end up in an asylum. Despite her intention to stay calm, she spits in his face. "Ton frère pourrait avoir de nos nouvelles avant pas longtemps!" he warns (44). Maurice then arrives and orders her out of the club. Thérèse insists that she is not afraid of him, to which Maurice replies: "Ouan! Chez vous y ont tu peur? Astheur, fly, va te paqueter ailleurs" (44).

Thérèse could scarcely be more completely humiliated, powerless, and alone. First Lucille reminded her of the desired role which she had failed to fulfill, then Tooth-Pick provoked her into losing her self-control, and, with Maurice, has reminded her of past failures and disgrace. Not the least of her humiliations is the reference to her family. When she does not keep up her payments for the damage she caused in a scene at the club, Maurice's henchmen extract the money from Robertine by threatening to harm both Thérèse and Marcel. According to the neighbors, Marcel is the only person Thérèse has ever really loved. She still cares about him, and his safety is more important to her than her own. In addition, she is ashamed to add to Robertine's problems. She has always seen her mother as a submissive victim, and from childhood has been resolved that her own life would be different. However, it is becoming obvious even to Thérèse that her revolt has achieved nothing positive. Worst of all, her mother and brother are forced to suffer because of her. Only by drinking can she temporarily blot out her despair.

Thérèse is thoroughly drunk by the time she enters the courtyard, but she knows that the women are waiting for their "show." Mockingly she calls to them: "Tiens, la basse-cour est déjà jouquée! Hi girls! Beau temps pour étendre!" (57). She greets family members with equal

sarcasm, especially Gérard: "Minable! Espèce de pou! Bon rien! Sans dessein!" (60). Nothing remains of the handsome man on whom she had pinned her hopes of happiness and success. Slumped wordlessly in front of the television, Gérard ignores her insults, provoking her even more. When Robertine tries to calm her, Thérèse begins a recital of all the failures and fears that haunt her. The long-awaited battle has begun.

Given their shaky economic situation, it would not be surprising if Thérèse and her mother quarreled about finances, but money is not discussed. They might also quarrel about Thérèse's morals or her drinking, but while both subjects are mentioned, they are of minor importance. The main issue is the way Robertine brought up her children. Robertine thinks of herself as a long-suffering mère de famille who has done her best to raise her children according to the standards of their society. When she reminds Thérèse of all that she has done for her, however, Thérèse scoffs at the idea: "Que c'est que t'as faite, pour moé, hein, dis-lé! Dis-lé juste pour voir!" (60).

A barrage of insults follows as Thérèse claims that her mother was "tellement bête, tellement vulgaire," "niaiseuse comme y s'en fait pus," "une vraie bebitte!" (61). She adds that she was ashamed of her, and her friends were afraid of her. Everything is Robertine's fault: "C'est de ta faute si on est toutes malheureux, dans'famille! Si tu nous avais élevés comme du monde, j'aurais marié quelqu'un qui avait du bon sens, mais non..." (61). Thérèse does not complain of her ignorance of sex or say that she married just to get away from her family, as do some of Tremblay's women characters; instead she complains of the authoritarian treatment which she and Marcel received as children. "On n'a pas été élevés, Marcel pis moé, on a été garrochés," she insists,

and if Marcel is in an asylum, it is because of Robertine (61). Thérèse sums up her argument with one final charge: "T'as jamais été une mère pour nous autres! Tu t'es jamais occupée de nous autres, pis astheur, tu fais la martyre!" (61-62).

Mildly at first, Robertine denies Thérèse's accusations: "Quand tu bois, tu fais exiprès pour tout conter de travers à tout le monde, pour me mettre ta vie manquée sur le dos!" (62). When Thérèse persists, Robertine counterattacks, presenting her version of past events. "J'en ai assez, tu m'entends, j'ai mon maudit voyage! Chus tannée de passer pour une maudite folle par ta faute! Si je t'ai pas élevée c'est parce que t'étais pas élevable!" (62). She accuses Thérèse of having been willful, "une maudite tête folle" who had violent temper tantrums as a child, and who at fifteen made scenes because she was not permitted to stay out past midnight. She claims that she was the one who felt ashamed as she tried to excuse and hide Thérèse's conduct. She continues, reminding Thérèse of her unruly behavior in front of the neighbors: "Quand t'arrivais aux p'tites heures du matin pis que tu réveillais tous les voisins en criant, en chantant, en sacrant, c'était pas vulgaire, ça?" (63). She also reminds Thérèse that Marcel was born mentally retarded. As for Gérard, she had always said he was a "bon-rien," but because other women were "crazy" about him, Thérèse wanted him for herself, and got pregnant to force him into marriage. Thus much of what Robertine says is factual or a plausible interpretation of the facts. But before the argument can end, Robertine insists that Thérèse take back her remarks: "Dis-lé, Thérèse, que t'as tort," she cries (64).

Thérèse can hold out no longer; she sobbingly agrees that her mother is right and she is wrong. In a masochistic outburst which concludes their quarrel, Thérèse is at Robertine's feet. Assuming a posture of child-like submission, she takes the blame for everything that has happened and puts herself at her mother's mercy:

J'm'hais, moman, j'm'hais! Chus t'une écoeurante, t'as raison! T'as toujours été bonne pour moé! C'est moé qui est mauvaise! Chus méchante! Chus méchante! J'fais exiprès pour te faire souffrir! J'mériterais que tu me battes, moman, j'mériterais que tu me battes! J'te demande pardon! Je r'commencerai pus jamais! Jamais, jamais! (64).

Her feelings of guilt and despair exorcised for the evening, Thérèse abandons herself to her mother's care, and is soon on her way to bed.

The quarrel functions as a sado-masochistic rite which temporarily frees Thérèse from responsibility for past failures and restores Robertine to her full status and authority as mother. But participants and watching neighbors alike know that nothing has been resolved. Thérèse has only to spend another day at Nick's to be reminded that her present way of life is intolerable, and once again she will rebel, no more effectively than before. In some ways, mother and daughter are not so different; Robertine has stubbornly tried to maintain order and discipline, and Thérèse has just as stubbornly defied it; neither one thinks about how to make life worthwhile. Both women behave automatically, but Thérèse's rebellion is based on an instinctive refusal of a system which hampers personal growth and the achievement of individual potential. Robertine's attempt to enforce the social code arises from internalized social values. She has accepted without question the unwritten law that a woman who refuses to follow in her mother's footsteps can expect not only failure but punishment as well. Robertine has therefore resigned herself to a life of conformity; at

least it permits her to keep going. Much as she needs Robertine and depends on her, Thérèse would rather risk the dangers of rebellion than conform. The greatest dangers, of course, lie with people like Maurice and Tooth-Pick, who will not hesitate to destroy her if she defies their authority.

But why are the neighbors so fascinated by a routine quarrel? If the women cannot resist listening, it is because this is their fight, too. Thérèse is rebelling against a system which dominates the entire society, a tradition which includes an inadequate educational system, limited opportunities for women, and the fatalistic attitude that people cannot change or control life, and must therefore accept their situation as it is. In sum, the quarrel reveals the problems of a society beginning to free itself from confining traditions at a time when the rebels lack a clear sense of self. They have no examples to follow, little support from family and friends, and few opportunities for developing and expressing their potentialities through work.

The neighbors are incapable of revolt, and caught in the endless cycle of their "maudite vie plate," they cannot even find words to express the boredom and meaninglessness of their lives. They depend on Thérèse and Robertine to be their spokeswomen. This is implied in the exasperated comment of a woman whose husband has ignored her question to him:

C'est ça, réponds-moé pas! Reste effouerré devant la télévision pis occupe-toé pas de moé! T'es t'assez plate, Joseph, t'es t'assez plate que chus t'obligée de passer ma vie à regarder chez les voisins pour voir si y se passerait pas quequ'chose! (17).

In her revolt and failure, Thérèse dramatizes the women's buried dissatisfactions with life, at the same time excusing their passivity by

assuring them that disobedience and defiance are not worth the resulting humiliation and degradation. The women look forward to their "show," unable to empathize, yet finding an outlet for their own repressed feelings. Their response suggests society's ambivalent attitude toward existing norms, overtly supporting them, covertly longing for someone to change them.

When Marcel quietly enters the house that night, he is disappointed that no preparations have been made for his return. He had asked the family to empty the apartment of its old furniture and to paint the walls white, but nothing has changed since he went to the hospital. Marcel, it seems, is obsessed with ridding their home of all that is ugly and worn-out; he wants them to start a new life together in a fresh environment uncontaminated by the past. Looking around at the shabby room, he concludes that no one wants him to come home. Nevertheless, he decides to stay for a while. He thinks he will be able to watch without being noticed by the others, as he did when he was a child. Adults, assuming he could not understand their conversations, would talk as if they were completely unaware of his existence. Now he has the added advantage of dark glasses, which he thinks make him invisible--probably because people no longer notice and comment on his "peculiar" eyes.² To his surprise and disappointment, Robertine immediately sees him when she enters the room. Marcel can only protest:

Vous êtes pas supposée de me voir quand j'ai mes lunettes!
Même vous! Pis vous êtes supposée de parler en anglais!
Envoyez, parlez en anglais, vous allez voir, j'vas toute
comprendre! A l'hôpital, quand j'ai mes lunettes là,
j'disparaïs dans les murs pis y'ont beau parler en anglais,
j'comprends toute! Toute! c'est mon pouvoir qui fait ça! (76-
77).

Marcel then admits that his power does not always work; sometimes things do not disappear when he wants them to, which frightens him. Gently Robertine takes off his glasses and confirms her suspicions: "Y'a les mêmes yeux que la dernière fois" (77). He insists that he has not run away from the hospital, but from the various remarks he makes during his visit, it appears that he struck one of the attendants, and then somehow managed to escape. As he talks to Robertine and Thérèse, he dwells on two subjects: his fears and his desire to be reunited with his family.

Marcel apparently lives in a state of constant fear at the hospital. Disturbing bells awaken him in the morning, then he spends the day at the window watching cowboys and Indians fighting in the park-only television, perhaps, but an experience which does little to reassure him. Although he claims to be supremely powerful when he makes himself invisible and disappears into the walls, he is afraid of one of the attendants, whom he calls "frère-mets-ta-main," and is sure that "they" spy on him and are trying to poison him (79). His paranoia is related to an incident which occurred some fifteen years earlier at the Coconut Inn. He believes that Tooth-Pick put a powder into his drink to make him see things. What really happened is not clear, but Tooth-Pick's recent threats regarding Marcel imply that he has some means of frightening, if not actually harming Marcel, even in the hospital. Marcel's fear of poisoning is therefore not entirely irrational. In fact because he knows that Tooth-Pick is dangerous and should be avoided, he shows better judgment than his sane, but unreasonable sister.

Marcel's profound desire to be with his family is indicated in a variety of ways. He makes numerous comments about trying to telephone Robertine; it appears that the hospital had not allowed him to call.

At one point, he carries on a conversation with her as if he were talking on the phone. He wants to know why she so seldom visits him, urges her to take him home, and concludes the conversation by making her promise to visit him. When they have "hung up," he declares: "Y viendront pas!" (82). In this instance, as in his comments about Tooth-Pick, he does not try to disguise reality. Nevertheless, much of the time he acts as if he were still in the hospital, and the others go along with the idea. In the end, they use this as a ruse to send him back to the asylum, pretending that the waiting taxi has come to take him home for good.

Marcel had hoped to be reintegrated into the family, but they are scarcely any stronger than he, and cannot help him. Gérard calls him "fou," and avoids talking to him. Joanne is not afraid or judgmental, but is too young and inexperienced to take much responsibility. Thérèse tries to please him and willingly sacrifices the truth to avoid confrontation. She dresses in white, as he asks, and has the others wear white as well. She also does not argue when he insists that Joanne is ten, although in fact she is nearly sixteen. Robertine is the one who is most troubled by his fears and by his pleas to be taken home. She is also the one who feels responsible for him, and makes arrangements for his return to the asylum. Although she keeps the situation under control, she knows that the price is Marcel's growing terror and alienation.

Marcel is clearly to be identified with Quebec. One of the neighbors recalls that as a child, he always talked about Quebec (City), and wanted to go there. When he wanted to play with the other children, they would exclude him by telling him "Va-t'en à Québec!" (71). The

implication is that he was looking for the "real" Quebec, as if he did not already live there, or as if he wanted to be part of another, different Quebec. Marcel's life in the asylum, and his attempt to gain power through withdrawal and invisibility parallels the survival strategy which Borduas had described so effectively in "Refus global." To prevent assimilation, French Canadians had withdrawn within the borders of Quebec, becoming invisible observers rather than participants in the world around them. However, instead of feeling safe, they only became more afraid. The remedy for Borduas and his colleagues lay in renewing contact with the world; Marcel's solution is to become part of his family again. Through him, Tremblay suggests that Quebec's first step toward self-affirmation is to form a society which incorporates--rather than excludes--the weaker and often alienated elements of society. The time has come for Quebec to clean house, discarding what is worn and useless, in order to make a fresh new start as a reunited family.

Gathered for Marcel's departure, the family members comment on their lives as one by one they join the background chorus of neighbors murmuring "Chus pus capable de rien faire" (90). Gérard is the first to speak. He can't do anything any more; the family is ashamed to have him go out, so he is trapped in his chair with his cane. "Chus pus capable de rien faire," he repeats, and Thérèse joins him (90). "Aie, chus rendue basse rare," she exclaims, explaining that earlier in the evening, she had hoped to be arrested for public intoxication so that she would not have to go home (90). Joanne joins the mounting chorus, predicting that she will never succeed in beauticians' school. If she were as intelligent as her mother, she would try to get out of her

present situation; unfortunately she has her father's head, she says. Robertine repeats an earlier speech, foretelling a lonely old age in which she is abandoned and made a beggar in her own house. They all chorus loudly "Chus pus capable de rien faire" (92).

Here as in Les Belles-Soeurs, Tremblay makes effective use of the chorus. The neighbors who have remained aloof, keeping their distance as they watched and predicted the ruin of the entire family, now join them to express the same overwhelming feeling of powerlessness. As each new voice is added, the atmosphere becomes more oppressive. The chorus speaks for dependent people who systematically rationalize defeat. Joanne is smart enough to know that she should get out of her crippling home environment, but cannot, she says, for lack of intelligence. Once-handsome Gérard thought he could always depend on women to pay his way; Thérèse thought a husband whom other women desired was the key to success. When they discovered that they were both weak and dependent, Gérard collapsed and Thérèse became increasingly destructive. Robertine's motto "continuer" has enabled her to survive, but it conceals the need for active intervention to halt the worsening cycle of events which is steadily destroying her family.

Only Marcel does not join the final chorus of defeat and powerlessness. Boldly he declares: "Moé, j'peux toute faire! J'ai toutes les pouvoirs! Parce que j'ai mes lunettes! Chus tu-seul...à avoir les lunettes! (92). After moving back and forth between reality and illusion, Marcel makes his final choice, advocating disguise and illusion. By giving the last word to Marcel, Tremblay dramatizes the folly of seeking power through disguise, and also emphasizes the need

for a sane approach in analyzing and controlling the various dehumanizing forces which make selfhood and freedom impossible.

In En Pièces détachées, the protagonists are no longer an integral part of society, as they were in Les Belles-Soeurs. The passive neighbors keep their distance, aloof, watching, judging, and stifling in the oppressive atmosphere of a society that refuses to change. Like her neighbors, Robertine accepts the traditional social order; her children, however, have always refused it, Marcel by withdrawing from society, Thérèse by rebelling against it. Easily frustrated, Thérèse has wasted her energies in defiant and ultimately destructive behavior. Her revolt cannot succeed until she takes responsibility for her own actions. Robertine's role as mother gives her the strength to continue, but not the strength to initiate positive change. Thus each for her own reasons, Robertine and Thérèse both abandon all hope for the future and join their neighbors in their chorus of powerlessness, leaving only Marcel to enjoy an illusion of power. As the family disintegrates, society collapses, too. If there is any hope, it lies with those who leave this world of impotence and despair while they still have the strength and will to do so. Since the play opens with Madame Tremblay's unsuccessful attempts to make young Michel return home, there is a suggestion that "s'en sortir" is possible -- even if it is only for an evening's play.

Notes

- ¹ Michel Tremblay, En Pièces détachées (Montréal: Leméac, 1982) 15-17. All further references are contained within the text.
- ² The neighbors especially remember his eyes. See text 78.

La Duchesse de Langeais: Disguising Dependence

La Duchesse de Langeais, a monologue in two acts, opened in May 1969, following in close succession the stage version of En Pièces détachées, which was first performed in April of that year. By using the title of a well-known Balzac novel, Tremblay suggests the themes of imitation and disguise. The opening scene, however, was inspired by a situation which Tremblay had observed at a bar in Acapulco: a tourist from Quebec, completely drunk, stood on a chair and announced: "Ce soir on fait pas l'amour. Ce soir on se saoule."¹ Intrigued, Tremblay watched, and saw in his compatriot possibilities for the protagonist in a play he had been thinking about.

The result was "la Duchesse," an aging homosexual prostitute, who tells about his past as he drinks alone during an afternoon siesta in a resort much like Acapulco. He is Marcel's uncle, a reference deleted from the television version of En Pièces détachées, and not unlike Marcel, he uses disguise to escape feelings of being isolated and weak. In addition to creating the Duchesse persona, he has built a reputation in the homosexual community as an accomplished female impersonator. His imagination and acting skills, which enable him to distance himself from his activities as a prostitute, allow him to think of himself as a talented, experienced actor who skillfully plays his role without becoming personally involved. At the age of sixty, after a lifetime of prostitution, he thought he had so completely mastered his

"art" that he could not be affected by personal feelings. But his monologue reveals that he is still human, and capable of love after all. Through this complex and ambiguous character, Tremblay continues his exploration of how individuals respond to the restrictions of the society in which they live.

In the stage directions, Tremblay describes the Duchesse as "une vieille pédale" who displays every effeminate mannerism imaginable: "Aucun balancement de hanche, aucun geste de la main, aucune oeilade 'perverse' ne doivent être épargnés. La caricature doit être complète, parfaite...et touchante."² Since language is an important part of his image, the Duchesse emphasizes his lack of masculinity by using feminine pronouns and adjectives in referring to himself. In fact, after remarking that the sun will make him "rouge comme un homard," he exclaims: "Un homard! Seigneur Dieu! j'commercerais-tu à parler de moé au masculin? Quelle horreur! C'est vraie que homarde..." (83-84). But if the pun is weak, it is worth noting that the Duchesse consistently refuses to call himself male. At the same time, he knows he is not a woman, and he also knows that his customers do not want a real woman--only the illusion of one. Because I will be discussing the Duchesse as a male who plays a role that only a male can play, I prefer to use masculine terminology in referring to him; Tremblay, however, consistently refers to the Duchesse as "elle."

The opening line, delivered with a dramatic flourish, establishes the existence of a problem too painful to confront: "Ce soir, on ne fait pas l'amour, on se saoule!" (82). After downing a drink, the speaker then proclaims, as if addressing his friends at his favorite Montreal bar, "Oui, les filles! Fini l'amour, ni-, ni, fi-ni! Final-

bâton, on n'en parle pus!" (82). A moment later, acknowledging that he is in fact "tu-seule," he begins to create for himself an imaginary audience whose curiosity he has already aroused with his theatrical introduction. In contrast to the belles-soeurs, who could not even imagine communicating with the people around them, the Duchesse is able to foster the illusion that he is surrounded by sympathetic listeners, an illusion which envelops the audience in the theatre, perhaps freeing them somewhat from their usual moral perspective, and helping them become more receptive than they might otherwise be.

Since he is wearing men's clothing which Tremblay describes as "horribles vêtements d'été américains," the Duchesse wastes no time in identifying himself as feminine: "Tu-seule, la tite-fille," he sighs to himself (82). He further qualifies himself as "une femme du monde" and then as "une vraie folle" (82). He shows off his linguistic versatility as well; in addition to his native joual, he speaks "à la française," and likes to include an occasional English expression. His dramatic gestures, his language, his use of the impersonal "on" in the initial toast, followed by his use of second and third person in reference to himself all reinforce the impression that he is a multi-faceted character whose public images are deliberately used to conceal another and probably quite different self.

A resourceful showman, the Duchesse skillfully attempts to present himself in a favorable light. To minimize the loss of an important asset, youth, he emphasizes his forty years of experience; his travels, his talents, and his sexual expertise have all helped make him irresistible to men. He is, he declares, "une mangeuse de mâles" (83). But the Duchesse feels that he must also confront, and negate if

possible, what others say about him: "Quand on parle de moi, on dit toujours: 'La Duchesse? Une folle! Tapette comme y'en a pas!'" (83). Such terms do not bother him, he says, but he clearly feels insulted by the emphasis on "tapette." "Au fond, sont pas plus fines, celles qui disent ça," he protests; "C'est des poudrées, des folles, pis des tapettes, elles aussi" (83).

In taking the name Duchesse, the protagonist has laid claim to special status within his group. He justifies this claim with the argument that he has had more years of experience than anyone else, but his argument falters when he thinks about what that experience has entailed. Reflecting on his past, and numerous partners whose names he cannot recall, he admits frankly "Y'a personne à Montréal qui a connu autant d'aventures stupides que moé, je pense" (85). Then he goes on to sum up his career in language which invalidates his every pretension of glamour and success: "Y'a personne qui a connu autant de monde pis qui a fourré autant que moé dans le grand Montréal pendant les quarante dernières années... J'ai passé ma vie à ça, mes p'tites filles, j'ai passé ma vie à ça! Pas d'autre chose: la graine, la graine, la graine" (85). He pauses, pretending to scold himself for his vulgar language, which critics have told him is offensive and unsuitable for a duchess. Still refusing to conceal the ugliness of prostitution, he continues: "j'ai quarante ans d'expérience pis quelqu'milliers d'hommes dans le cul, ça fait que j'peux me permettre de faire la duchesse" (87).

The expression "faire la duchesse" underscores the distinction between the man and the duchess role which he claims the right to play. "Duchesse," in his eyes, is a sign of rank, and a title which can be earned. Since he has endured more years of "aventures stupides" than

anyone else, his unmatched record should be recognized. Much like his sister Robertine who feels that her lifetime of struggle and humiliation has earned her a place in heaven, the Duchesse argues that for his "quarante ans de service," he deserves first place in the hierarchy of the homosexual community (82).

By his fourth drink, the Duchesse cannot hide the fact that he is troubled by something more than the criticisms of the vacationing young homosexuals who object to his vulgarity and threaten to exclude him from their group. He cannot even finish his salute: "Ce soir, on ne fait pas l'amour..." he begins, but this time the problem surfaces: "L'amour! Calice! J'avais presque oublié ça!" (87). Assuring his listeners that he is not going to "brailler comme une grosse Italienne," he finally explains his situation: "chus malheureuse comme je l'ai jamais été dans ma tabarnac de vie. Pis savez-vous pourquoi? Oui mes agneaux, c'est ça, vous l'avez... En plein ça: j'ai une peine d'amour!" (88). Climbing on a table and raising his arms, he repeats his news: "'La duchesse de Langeais' a une peine d'amour" (88).

The stage directions indicate that this dramatic announcement is followed by silence; it seems to confirm the Duchesse's suspicions that no one cares. Knowing that he must confront his pain and humiliation alone, he turns as always to his "femme du monde" role for support:

Allez dire ça aux pompiers, y vont vous pisser dessus! 'La duchesse', une peine d'amour! Comme si c'était possible! Après quarante ans de métier! Ben moé aussi j'pensais qu'après quarante ans de métier on n'avait pus de coeur, imaginez-vous donc! Ben, écoutez-moé ben, les p'tites filles, après quarante ans d'expérience, quand on se rend compte qu'on a encore un coeur...Arrête, Alice, arrête! T'es t'après t'attendrir! T'es quand même pas pour chialer! Une femme du monde, ça chiale pas devant le monde! Une femme du monde, ça chie sur le monde! Je chie sur le monde entier! (88).

After reminding himself that there can be no place in his life for sentiment, he tries to restore his self-confidence by recalling the most exciting years of his life. He does not talk about his decision to make his living as a prostitute, except that he left a job as "aide strip-tease" to accompany a rich German lover to Europe where he learned "les premiers rudiments de (s)on futur emploi de duchesse," and where he also found he could support himself "free-lance" when he tired of his "dieu allemand" (92). He returned to Montreal "La femme du monde dans toute la conception qu'on peut se faire du mot," and embarked on a unique career as "duchess" and prostitute (92).

He began to give Sunday afternoon teas for his transvestite friends who arrived "toutes guindées" in corsets, long dresses, and high heels (93). For a period of two years, "On prenait le thé, le corps bien raide, le p'tit doigt en l'air, pis ensuite on faisait de la musique de chambre" (93). The highlight was performing in public for a charity: "On s'appelait le 'Ladies' Morning Club, Junior'! Un triomphe sans précédent! Les hommes applaudissaient à s'en casser les deux bras! (93). These are happy memories of companionship, when role-playing gave him the feeling of belonging to conventional society and yet allowed him to ridicule its pretensions.

The Duchesse also enjoys recalling other roles which were deliberately directed toward men who wanted male partners, but who, because of their dull lives and fragile sense of masculinity, also wanted the illusion of making love to the kind of glamorous, exciting woman celebrated in the theatre and Hollywood films. When he first began to "faire la duchesse," he boasts, Montreal was at his feet: "Tous les hommes, les vrais, les mâles, les beus, se trainaient à terre devant moi

dans l'espoir que je daigne jeter un regard sur eux" (89). His success stemmed from his ability to gratify both the physical and psychological needs of his customers. For his ice man, he was "sublime" as Edwidge Feuillère in La Dame aux camélias, for his roller skater, he played Esther Williams, and for his many actors, he had two numbers which were "absolument époustoufflants," including Sarah Bernhardt in L'Aiglon. This was his chef d'oeuvre, he assures his listeners; "Ben, c'est ben simple, j'avais quaisment l'air d'un homme!" (90). Enthusiastically describing his roles, costumes, and props, he takes great satisfaction in recalling the illusions he created and the emotions he evoked among the men for whom he performed.

Perhaps he was his own most satisfied customer, for in imitating these actresses, his lack of masculinity was acceptable, even desirable. Moreover, in acting parts made famous by stars as different as Shirley Temple and Mae West, he could pretend that he was a versatile actor, and personally appealing and powerful as well. "J'étais une grande artiste, dans mon genre," he asserts (89). Indeed, his account of past achievements indicates a genuine flair for drama, but he has used his talents to lock himself into a way of life which he knows is dehumanizing and ultimately indefensible. Nevertheless, the speech which concludes Act One shows him clinging desperately to the values which he has espoused for so many years:

J'ai travaillé en saint sacrifice, moé, pour arriver où je suis aujourd'hui! Mais je ne regrette rien, par exemple! Pas une miette! C'que j'ai fait, j'l'ai fait parce que j'voulais le faire! Ça m'intéressait pas de rester une p'tite folle de Montréal, moi, pas du tout! Non, mes ambitions étaient de plus grande envergure... Putain internationale pour commencer, pis, après, duchesse! J'ai fourré sur quatre continents, moi, vous savez! (...) Mais c'est parce que j'aimais ça! Mon métier, je l'ai choisi! Pis j'ai passé une

maudite belle vie! (...) Oui, mes chéries, 'la duchesse',
c'est quelqu'un! Pis a l'a rien à regretter. Ou presque...
Juste c'te maudite histoire...(94)

Here the Duchesse pauses; he is not yet ready to acknowledge the full significance of "c'te maudite histoire."

The effects of the whisky are increasingly apparent in Act Two. As the Duchesse loses control over the role he is playing, he is less able to repress unpleasant memories. Reminded of his childhood, he describes himself as a victim who soon learned to victimize others. At the family gathering to celebrate his first communion, for example, he became "malade comme une cochonne," because his sister had given him whisky as a prank (98). Aware that he was unattractive, he probably accepted abuse as a matter of course. "J'étais une première communiant affreuse, mes chéries! Affreuse! Tannante comme sept, laide comme un cul de singe gratté à deux mains, le brassard de travers, pis les yeux dans les culottes du cousin Léopold" (98). The Duchesse knows that people will be shocked by his last remark, but insists that it is true. His sexual initiation was painful, but he soon began to enjoy the pain: "Faut croire que j'ai toujours été masochiste...J'aime ça quand un mâle me fait mal! Ca fait que des fois j'agaçais le cousin Léopold à le rendre fou pour qu'y me fasse ben mal..." (99).

Thus at the age of six, the Duchesse discovered that by submitting to his cousin, he gained power over him, an experience which laid the foundation not only for homosexuality, but for the sado-masochistic behavior which was to mark his relationships for the rest of his life. At twelve, he began to invite men's attention in movie theatres; the danger added to the excitement, especially since the men were afraid of being caught with a minor. "J'étais dangereuse," he recalls with

satisfaction, quickly adding, "Mais ma chérie, t'as toujours été dangereuse! Pis tu l'es encore!" (100). He is too intelligent, however, not to realize that his success as a prostitute is not so much proof of his power as it is evidence that many men share his inability to find a satisfying life within conventional society.

To distract himself from his memories, he thinks of having sex with a Peruvian sailor. "Ca va toute me faire oublier ces écoeuranteries-là," he cries, but recalls instead only numbers--238 sailors, until he lost the notebook in which he kept his record (101). He was so successful in the New York port that the female prostitutes were jealous. "J'ai toujours été plus femme que toutes les femmes," he explains, implying that because he is a man, he knows exactly what techniques men appreciate, and thus can provide even more physical gratification than a woman (101). "La technique est là, mes chéries, toute est dans la technique," he exclaims (102). Although he resorts to his "femme-du-monde" French, he cannot hide his debasement: "Je fais 'fleur de rose', moi! Oui, j'ai goûté à la merde, moi! Mais c'est parce que j'le voulais! Parce que j'aimais ça! Parce que je veux plaire à celui avec qui je fais l'amour" (103). Immediately he corrects what he has just said, not to deny the ugliness, but to emphasize it by replacing "amour" with "cul"(103). Thus he finally admits that prostitution is not love; it is degradation accepted in a desperate desire to please and be found pleasing. This leads to his account of the experience through which he has become aware of both his humanity and his alienation.

The Duchesse has been profoundly touched by a brief affair with Peter, a nineteen-year-old youth whom he met at the resort. They

became acquainted when the Duchesse, "en minaudant" as he thinks befits a woman of the world, asked Peter what he liked to do in bed (103). Peter's direct gaze and blunt reply--"I'm a fucking buck-driver-buffalo!"--were exciting, but the Duchesse was soon to experience something more (103). "On pense qu'on n'a plus de coeur," he confesses, "pis on se rend compte tout d'un coup que c'est tout ce qu'y nous reste!" (104). For the short time that they are together, the Duchesse looks after Peter, providing meals, bathing him ("y'adore ça, se faire laver"), and taking him out (104). "Oui, j'me traîne devant lui parce que je l'aime," he declares, and unable to explain his new feelings, he concludes: "J'peux tout simplement pus me passer de lui! C'est... c'est comme si c'était mon enfant...c'est qu'aisment pur c'que je ressens pour lui!" (104). To his surprise, the Duchesse discovers that he is capable of the tender, nurturing love of parents for their children, a kind of love which he had never before given or received.

The experience is devastating, not so much because Peter leaves, but because it forces the Duchesse to acknowledge that he has always deliberately excluded love from his life. His whole monologue testifies to a life wasted because he had assumed that he could never love or be loved. Nevertheless, knowing that Peter will not return, the Duchesse falls back into his usual pattern of self-deception. "Braille un bon coup," he tells himself, "pis après...après, fais comme toujours: "dis-toi que t'es la plus belle pis la plus fine, pis que tout le monde est rempli d'hommes qui t'attendent!" (106). Struggling to his feet, he declares: "Les hommes sont à tes pieds, duchesse!" (106). Then he collapses on the table, crying "Mais j'm'en crisse, j'en veux pus!" (106). The bottle tips, splashing him with whisky; he is motionless as

he makes his final confession: "On m'appelle 'La duchesse de Langeais' parce que j'ai toujours rêvé de mourir soeur, Carmélite... En buvant du thé!" (106).

Because of the play's title, Balzac's duchess has been a shadowy presence throughout the work. Her name suggests the authority and distinction so important to the Duchesse and his companions, for they have no real economic, social, or political power. Perhaps because they are treated as non-persons by the outside world, they create identities to reflect their interests and tastes, and choose names according to the image they wish to project. The Duchesse is probably the only one in his group to have read the Balzac novel; if so, he can claim it as evidence of his erudition, and simultaneously feel free to interpret the character as he wishes. He usually treats Balzac's duchess as the epitome of worldliness and superiority, a "femme du monde" who refuses to admit defeat, and inspires him not to give up. His actual performance, however, seems to be little more than an imitation of status-seeking Québécoises. If the Duchesse imitates only what is fiction or imitation to begin with, perhaps it is because he has no other models. Indeed, until his affair with Peter, he has seen life mainly as pretense and pose.

But while the Duchesse now knows that spontaneous feelings are necessary if life is to have meaning, he cannot free himself from the role on which he is so dependent. Inspired by Balzac's heroine, who renounced her worldly power and withdrew to a convent, the Duchesse likes to dream that someday he will belong to a different kind of community, free of the pressures of his present life. He does not, however, suggest repentance or a desire for forgiveness. Instead he

envisions a quiet, ordered world in which there is no need to be masculine, and where serenity is symbolized by drinking tea. Finally at peace with himself and with the world, he would be ready to die. Such a possibility seems remote considering his situation at the end of the play: unhappy and alone in a foreign country, he has deliberately drunk himself into a state of unconsciousness with round after round of whisky. The society which has thwarted the development and expression of love in his life is too great an obstacle for him to surmount. He chooses, therefore, to destroy his awareness of it for a few hours. Then he will resume his role and, like his sister Robertine, "continuer."

For forty years the Duchesse has been a fictitious character living in a fictitious world. Whether in Montreal or Mexico, he lives on the margins of society, mainly in the company of other men who, like him, have been unable to fulfill conventional male roles, or have found those roles unrewarding. Some of his friends have ordinary jobs, but the Duchesse apparently makes his living as a prostitute. Cut loose from the conventions of society, he and his friends have created a world of their own, a sub-culture which nevertheless reflects the organization and values of the dominant society, and is just as confining. The Duchesse chose a role which made use of his dramatic talents, and which provided a certain amount of automatic status and a built-in authoritarian point of view. Duchesses, after all, are meant to dominate! The Duchesse played his role to the hilt, and encouraged his friends to do the same. One example of their collective fiction is the "Ladies' Morning Club, Junior," a parody of society women pretending to be cultivated. The Duchesse uses his impersonations of actresses to make his partners feel

sexually desirable, and to give them the illusion of being "real men" according to Hollywood's standards, which are also largely based on illusion. Thus the Duchesse, through his role-playing and prostitution, reflects the authoritarianism, imitativeness, disguise, and general lack of integrity which is prevalent throughout conventional society. But because he thinks he has chosen his roles, he is under the illusion that he is free.

In fact the Duchesse has been in bondage since childhood. His first lessons in authoritarianism taught him the pleasure and power to be derived from pain and submission. In an environment which prevented the development of inner strength, he soon began to measure his power by his success in manipulating other men. Moreover, since sexual gratification was generally treated as something to be bought and sold, the Duchesse decided to take advantage of what appeared to be his only asset. He tries to justify his decision, but what he calls service is clearly servitude from the moment he first introduces himself as a prostitute. Taking a Marlene Dietrich pose, he boasts: "Oui, votre honneur, quarante ans de service et toutes mes cartes de compétence! A la française, à la grecque, tout c'que vous voudrez! Et de première classe!" (82). Later, in discussing his repertoire of movie star impersonations, the Duchesse explains: "Une putain comme moé, même si elle est duchesse, ça doit savoir se plier à toutes les exigences!" (89). The use of "ça" eliminates the humanity of the "putain," and the verb "se plier" emphasizes servitude. The blunt and vulgar language with which he finally sums up his career leaves no doubt as to the nature of "plaire," and his substitution of "cul" for "amour" in the expression "faire l'amour" is a further admission that prostitution has

been degrading and humiliating.³ After years of elaborate role-playing to repress the knowledge of his servitude, one brief experience of spontaneous, generous love has made him acknowledge that his values were not valid, and that during his forty years of "experience" he denied himself the very experiences which would have made his life worthwhile.

La Duchesse de Langeais focuses on social roles and how they simultaneously regulate and disguise behavior. Although the Duchesse likes to think that his imagination has freed him from confining social norms, he is not a creative artist, but an impersonator whose talents have been used to reproduce an authoritarian system similar to the one which victimized him in the first place. His roles, chosen for their glamour and prestige, partially disguise the loss of integrity, but the Duchesse is too perceptive not to distinguish between illusion and reality, especially after discovering that he is still capable of genuine, spontaneous feelings. Although he is the first Tremblay character to understand the significance of love, he is too deeply enmeshed in his role-playing to achieve true selfhood. The Duchesse nevertheless exercises a degree of freedom by playing his roles in a deliberately self-conscious way. Since he cannot be himself, he openly acknowledges that he is not who he pretends to be.

* * *

In this play, as in the first two, Tremblay explores life in a society where roles, not individuals' choices, determine how people live. Almost all of the characters he portrays have been conditioned to view themselves as performers who have no personal will, and whose identity is determined by others. Les Belles-Soeurs leaves no doubt

that at the center of this society is the Church. People have forgotten Quebec's religious mission, perhaps, but the social structure which the Church developed in the name of "la survivance" still exists, and long outmoded, has become confining. Those who seek to escape it--Angéline, Pierrette, Thérèse, the Duchesse--fail, partly because they have internalized certain authoritarian values, and do not fully appreciate their individual human worth, and partly because wherever they go, rue Fabre or the Main, the social structure is always authoritarian. Society does not have places for non-conformists, certainly not for homosexuals, but not even for bright and lively young women who want careers. In the next three plays, protagonists will take matters into their own hands. Instead of trying to find ready-made situations which suit their needs, they will insist on making their own choices, rejecting not only social conventions, but also the underlying notion that rules and roles are more important than the individuals themselves.

Notes

¹ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay et la mémoire collective, by Donald Smith, Lettres québécoises Automne 1981:52.

² Michel Tremblay, Hosanna, suivi de La Duchesse de Langeais (Montréal: Leméac, 1973) 81.

³ See text 103.

PART III

**BREAKING THE FAMILY CIRCLE: SELF-DISCOVERY AND
RESPONSIBLE FREEDOM**

A Toi pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou: The Destruction of
"la cellule familiale" and the Emergence of the Individual

A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou, which opened on April 29, 1971, is Tremblay's third play about family life, and the first one to depict a protagonist who has the inner strength to use freedom in positive ways. The plot is quite simple. After years of quarreling and unhappiness, Léopold kills himself, his pregnant wife Marie-Louise, and their young son Roger in what appears to be a deliberate automobile accident. Ten years later, the two surviving daughters talk about the ways they have been influenced by the memories of their parents. Carmen has deliberately tried to put the past behind her, and has made a modest but satisfying career singing cowboy songs in a cabaret on the Main. She now tries to persuade her recluse sister to stop dwelling on the past and to make a life of her own, but Manon refuses to change. Believing her mother a saint and martyr, Manon wants only to perpetuate her mother's memory and emulate her piety. Looking to the past instead of to the future, her unspoken motto is "Je me souviens."

At one level, the play was surely an appeal to Quebec audiences of 1971 to make a definitive break with traditional authoritarian attitudes and policies, and to participate actively in the rebuilding of Quebec, a process which had begun following the deaths of Maurice Duplessis and Paul Sauvé some ten years earlier. Of particular interest to the present study, however, is Tremblay's description of forms of dependence

common in Quebec, and the ways they are fostered or refused within the family.

Because of the way Tremblay has treated time, space, and acting style, the play is experienced as a complex intertwining of present and past, of life and death. Two conversations are heard simultaneously; one occurs in 1961 as the parents talk at breakfast before the children are up. The second conversation, superimposed on the first, takes place in 1971 between the daughters as they recall their childhood and discuss what has happened to them since their parents' death ten years ago. In addition, on four different occasions, a change of lighting indicates that the sisters too are living in 1961; they are understood to be standing behind the kitchen door, eavesdropping on their parents' quarrels.

The words of the two couples mingle to form still another conversation in which all four voices echo and answer each other, constantly returning to issues which no amount of discussion can resolve. This chain of words links the generations and forms a heritage of defeatist attitudes and escapism. As the conversations converge, demonstrating that communication and reconciliation are impossible, a single voice emerges to break the chain and refuse the burdens of the family's past. Tremblay holds out hope for the individual, but the couple, and indeed the family as a whole, remain hopelessly entrapped in a mesh of words of their own making.

Tremblay provides a number of specific suggestions regarding the setting. The stage is divided into three areas. In the middle is a realistic-looking kitchen, the kind that might be found in any working class Montreal home. Clean but somber, it is decorated with pictures

and statuettes which reflect the religious devotions of Manon, and of Marie-Louise before her. It is here that Carmen talks with Manon who sits in her rocking chair holding her rosary. The audience is asked to remember that in 1961, the parents were in the kitchen, but in 1971, since they are not "really" present, they are permitted to occupy their favorite places. Marie-Louise is therefore seated with her knitting in front of a television set, while on the opposite side of the stage, Léopold sits alone at a tavern table which is well stocked with beer. Lacking the detailed solidity of the much more realistic kitchen, these two settings suggest escape from the real world, with Marie-Louise's television and Léopold's beer forming barriers to protect them, especially from each other.

Above the three areas hangs an immense snapshot of Marie-Louise and three sisters. Given to Léopold before their marriage, the photo is signed "A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou," and above one of the figures, a child has put a cross and has written "Maman, à dix-huit ans."¹ As the play progresses, the photo takes on increasing significance, evoking the time when Marie-Louise looked forward to marriage, unaware of the implications of "forever yours." The picture also speaks of a child's attachment which has grown into a cult.

The stage directions call for a minimum of movement. Marie-Louise and Léopold do not look at each other until their final exchange, a theatrical technique which effectively underlines their isolation, failure to communicate, and death. Carmen and Manon, not so completely immobile, look at each other, and Carmen, the more active of the two, changes position several times before her final exit. Body language

alone tells the audience that of the four protagonists, only Carmen is free.

Marie-Lou, "une cantate cheap" for four voices, has no chorus to proclaim and enforce social norms.² The single most important factor in shaping the characters' lives is the family, which in this case includes parents who conform, at least minimally, to their respective roles as père de famille and mère de famille. Because neither role is rewarding, Marie-Louise and Léopold seek to make life more bearable through two of the traditionally most popular forms of escape in Quebec: the role of martyr for her, and for him, drinking beer at the tavern. Counterproductive, both strategies contribute to the steady deterioration of family relationships. After the parents' premature deaths at forty-five, neither daughter chooses the role of mère de famille. Tremblay thus depicts the disintegration and disappearance of traditional roles, but offers no suggestion as to how society could methodically foster personal growth and responsible freedom.

Léopold feels completely imprisoned by his role as père de famille, and resents the fact that he must do work he hates for a man he detests in order to support a family he does not love. Léopold agrees with Marie-Louise that his wages are too low, but her solution--demand the raise he deserves--is one he dares not adopt. Bitterly he thinks about the job he has had for twenty-seven years, operating a machine which has taken over his life:

Tu viens que t'es tellement spécialisé dans ta job steadée, que tu fais partie de ta tabarnac de machine! C'est elle qui te mène! C'est pus toé qui watches quand a va faire défaut, c'est elle qui watche quand tu vas y tourner le dos pour pouvoir te chier dans le dos, sacrement! (63-64).

Humiliated and dehumanized at work, Léopold also finds little respect at home. The family quickly consumes his income, giving him the feeling that he too is being devoured: "Ta famille à toé! Une autre belle invention du bon Dieu! Quatre grandes yeules toutes grandes ouvertes, pis toutes prêtes à mordre quand t'arrives, le jeudi soir" (64). Marie-Louise has only contempt for him; he is a poor provider, and a brutal father and husband as well. She accuses him of being demanding and selfish, and of taking out his frustrations on their son Roger, whom he beats savagely. Furthermore, she announces, as a result of his drunken attack on her three months ago, she is once again pregnant. Angrily they blame each other; their entire sex life consists of four such encounters, each of which has resulted in pregnancy. As they consider the adjustments that will be necessary to accommodate the new baby, each one is determined that the other should suffer the most. Frustrated at home as well as at work, Léopold seeks release in hostility and destructiveness. But the pain he inflicts brings him no pleasure. More than anything else, he longs to break free of his burdens and enjoy a semblance of human dignity.

Probably nothing threatens Léopold's feeling of self-worth more than his family's history of insanity. Although he shrugs off Marie-Louise's cruel taunts about his resemblance to his father, Léopold admits to himself that he worries about it every day. Moreover, he knows from his doctor that he should not drink, but going to the tavern is his only pleasure, and his "chums" would laugh if he ordered 7-Up (71). At the word "chums" Léopold pauses, for he is far too lucid to pretend that he has friends: "J'en ai pas de chums... J'm'assis toujours tu-seul dans mon coin... à une table vide..." (72). His

routine is always the same: sitting at a table by himself, he drinks until a haze encloses him, blotting out the presence of everyone else. When no one is in sight to remind him of his failures, he feels at peace, and enjoys the ephemeral power of ordering more beer which is his to do with as he pleases: "Parce que c't'à moé, que je l'ai payée, pis que j'peux en faire c'que j'veux!" (73).

Imagining that he is not at home but in the tavern, he does what he "wants," and kicks the kitchen table over. Marie-Louise screams for the girls to come help her; their father is having another attack, she cries, and is going to kill her. Léopold's inner drama continues uninterrupted, however; hands seize him and throw him out of the tavern. His dream concludes as he picks himself up, bloody and angry: "Pis... j'vois toute en rouge! J'vois toute en rouge! J'prendrais le monde entier dans mes mains, pis je l'écraserais! (75). His power is an illusion; no matter what he does, he is a failure. He cannot even find temporary escape in an evening of drinking without the fear that each beer takes him closer to the brink of insanity. In fact, as Marie-Louise immediately points out, he is now beginning to have attacks even when he is sober.

Léopold has many reasons to feel hopeless about his situation: a monotonous job, mounting financial responsibilities at home, uncertain mental health, no friends, and essentially no sex life. He is less pessimistic about life for the younger generation, however. Better educated than he is, they may not spend their adult lives in dull, repetitive jobs. Léopold also thinks that young people have healthier attitudes toward sex. "Y'en a de moins en moins du monde comme nous autres," he tells Marie-Louise, "pis c'est tant mieux" (86). But

Léopold senses that for him and Marie-Louise, it is too late. Incapable of change, they have no future: "Nous autres... Nous autres, on ne sert pus à rien... A rien..." (91).

Overwhelmed by his problems, Léopold feels that he is part of a system over which he has no control. "On est juste des p'tits engrenages dans une grande roue," he observes, "Pis on a peur de se révolter parce qu'on pense qu'on es trop p'tits" (91). Léopold scarcely understands what revolt means, but he knows that he has reached the breaking point; "continuer" in the present system is impossible. And since he also feels incapable of improving his life, he accepts the alternative: death. As he begins to plan an automobile accident which will kill him, Marie-Louise, and Roger, the thought occurs to him that some good might result from his refusal to continue: "Mais si y'a un engrenage qui pète, la roue va peut-être bloquer... On sait jamais," he muses (91). From this perspective, death seems more meaningful to him than his present way of life. By ending their participation in a system which has crippled them, he and Marie-Louise might help weaken it, thus reducing the likelihood that it would cripple succeeding generations as well.

Marie-Louise also longs for an end to her present situation, dreaming of the day when Léopold will be committed to a mental hospital. He will not interfere with her activities, yet be a constant reminder to her and her family of her past misfortunes. So while Léopold, on his side of the stage, describes his lonely evenigs at the tavern, Marie-Louise imagines taking her new baby and sitting in front of the television to knit uninterrupted for the rest of her life. "J's'rais-tu ben, dans mon coin, avec mon tricot," she thinks (72). When visitors

came, she would tell them about all her hardships, whether true or not. "Pis," she concludes, "y'auraient pitié de moé. J'pourrais continuer de tricoter en paix, pis j'saurais qu'au moins le monde ont pitié de moé" (73).

Marie-Louise already seeks and receives pity from her mother, much to Léopold's irritation, and from Manon. She is less successful with Carmen, who realizes that her mother is sometimes lying when she claims that Léopold is hurting her. Now, however, Marie-Louise thinks she has suffered enough and feels entitled to a life of peace. As a recognized martyr and object of veneration, she would gladly tell her story to sympathetic listeners, reliving with pleasure her former suffering, real or imaginary, and enjoying her power to command the concern and respect of her audience.

The play does not say how much sympathy Marie-Louise receives from people outside the family, but Carmen and Léopold agree that she consistently blames others for whatever is wrong, feels sorry for herself, and tries to make others feel sorry for her, too. They also believe that her prayers and devotions at home are meaningless to her except as a way of earning a reputation for being pious and long-suffering. According to Michel Bélair, she is a recognizable type, well-known in Quebec:

Le Québec a déjà connu ses saints martyrs; il en commet pourtant encore à chaque jour, le martyr étant l'un des comportements de base de tout bon Québécois qui se respecte. Marie-Louise en est du moins une illustration concrète. Pour elle, la pitié a presque valeur de métier.³

Martyrs were understandably popular figures in Quebec, where many men and women made genuine sacrifices in order to serve and protect their religious ideals. Later, influenced by the authoritarianism of

19th century Church leaders, French Canadians began to view their poverty and powerlessness as the burdens which God called upon them to bear. Unlike the early martyrs who had worked for change in the face of hardship, succeeding generations resigned themselves to hardship as a sign of their obedience to God's commandments. The greater their suffering, the greater their hope of earning God's favor, and the esteem of men as well.

Although "martyr" lost much of its original meaning, it gained cultural approval and popularity throughout Quebec. For Marie-Louise, it is a masochistic strategy to excuse weakness and to represent herself as overwhelmed by superior forces which prevent her from carrying out her good intentions. The new baby, the crowded apartment, the lack of money--everything is Léopold's fault, not hers. "C'est toujours de ta maudite faute toujours," she insists; "J'ai beau tout essayer pour nous en sortir, on se retrouve toujours un peu plus bas" (59). Undeniably ineffectual, Léopold is a convenient scapegoat who can be blamed for her suffering. For a sympathetic audience, she has Manon, who is timid and insecure, and only too ready to believe that her mother endures much abuse from Léopold. Firmly established in her role as martyr, Marie-Louise has little reason to abandon it. Tremblay thus examines one of Quebec's time-honored strategies: martyrdom as an escape from responsibility and freedom.

Both Marie-Louise and Léopold recognize their sexual incompatibility, but Léopold, convinced that her almost complete refusal of sex is not normal, takes the offensive. She may call him "écoeurant," "raté," and "fou," he argues, but she has a problem, too: "le cul" (82-83). Léopold knows that the girls are listening, and is

glad to have them hear that some things are their mother's fault. "Y'est temps qu'y'arrêtent de me considérer comme un écoeurant pis un sans-cœur parce que tu cries au meurtre à chaque fois que j't'approche," he tells Marie-Louise (83). He also wants them to know that sex is for pleasure as well as procreation. When Marie-Louise insists that the pleasure is only for men, Léopold retorts, "Les femmes aussi, peuvent jouir," but she is not persuaded: "Pour moé, faire ça c'est cochon! C'est bon pour les animaux" (85).

Eventually Marie-Louise acknowledges that she might have enjoyed sex had Léopold been a better partner. An ignorant bride, she had only this advice from her mother: "'Quand ton mari va s'approcher de toé, raidis-toé pis ferme les yeux! Y faut que t'endures tout... c'est ton devoir'" (88). On her wedding night, she did as she had been told, and fulfilled her obligations as a wife. "Pis mon écoeurant," she adds, "tu m'as faite mal!" (88). She does not realize that she contributed to their problems, and Léopold refuses to accept any responsibility either, declaring: "Moé, j'prends mon plaisir, prends le tien" (89). Their experience of sex has never been and will never be a source of pleasure to either one of them.

The couple's discussion of sex includes a long, uninterrupted speech in which Marie-Louise thinks back to the time of her marriage. She has no illusions as to why she married: "C'que j'voulais: partir au plus sacrant d'la maison" (88). She concedes that she chose Léopold because he was "plus fin que les autres," but adds, "pis j'pensais qu'y me ferait juste changer de maison, pis que la nouvelle s'rait juste plus vide... plus propre... pis plus tranquille" (88). Her hopes were short-lived. Instead of improving her situation, she was confronted

with a new role for which she was totally unprepared. Her ignorance of sex was her mother's fault, she insists, but Léopold was to blame for the pain and humiliation of her wedding night. "Si c'est ça, le sexe," she told herself, "pus jamais! Jamais! Jamais!" (88). And in the years to come, although Quebec society supported the husband's "rights" in these matters, Marie-Louise usually had her way. She and Léopold were both too ill-informed and too insecure even to attempt a resolution of this painful issue.

As she thinks about what Léopold has just said, Marie-Louise is reminded of an article she read in Sélection. It compared the family to a living cell, with each member making a contribution. A prison cell would be closer to the truth, she implies. She then continues:

Nous autres, quand on se marie, c'est pour être tu-seul ensemble. Toé, t'es tu-seule, ton mari à côté de toé est tu-seul, pis tes enfants sont tu-seuls de leur bord... Une gang de tu-seuls ensemble, c'est ça qu'on est! (Elle rit.) Pis tu rêves de t'en sortir, quand t'es jeune, pour pouvoir aller respirer ailleurs... Esprit! Pis tu pars... pis tu fondes une nouvelle cellule de tu-seuls... 'Moé, j'prends mon plaisir, toé, prends le tien!' Sacrement! (90)

Somewhere families may live together in mutual love and support, but in the world of "nous autres," the only world Marie-Louise has ever known, family members live in hostile isolation, separated by impenetrable barriers. "Tu-seul" also involves powerlessness, for the confined individual is not only alone, but unable to act. Young people dream of escape, but in vain; they only establish more cells like the old ones. There is not even a breath of fresh air. Among all of Marie-Louise's acquaintances, the effects of this stifling, confining isolation are the same. What do people look like after twenty years of marriage, she asks herself? "Des cadavres," she replies (90). For the audience this speech is an admission of failure; for Marie-Louise,

however, it is a description of life as she sees it, an alienating experience from which there is no escape.

Although Marie-Louise has just described her isolation as inescapable, it is also unbearable; in desperation she turns to her one remaining chance for intimate human companionship: her unborn child. In her last major speech of the play, she thinks about how through this child she will experience the love which has been lacking in her life:

J'le (l'enfant) veux! Ah! oui, j'le veux! Les autres, j'ai pas pu m'en occuper parce que j'étais trop ignorante, que j'savais pas comment m'y prendre ou ben donc que j'étais trop occupée... Mais celui-là... Celui-là, j'vas donc l'aimer... Pis y'a personne qui va y toucher! Ca va être mon enfant à moé... C'est moé qui va l'élever... Pis y'a personne qui va y toucher... Ca va être mon enfant à moé... A moé tu-seule... J'vas enfin être capable d'aimer quelqu'un! (92).

This speech, by its vocabulary and style, conveys Marie-Louise's intense desire to dominate her child completely. Her obsessive repetition of "aimer" combined with numerous expressions denoting possession make it clear that she thinks love and possession are synonymous. If she has her way, the child who is now part of her will always remain bound to her in a dependent relationship. Her experience of "tu-seul" has taught her nothing about the nature of love, nor has she gained any insight into her own needs and motives. Her authoritarianism is a vicious circle from which she cannot free herself. She remains dependent herself and perpetuates dependence in her children. Only Carmen will escape.

Sitting in the kitchen that now belongs to Manon, and wearing her provocative cowgirl costume, Carmen hardly needs to say that she has become another woman since she left home ten years ago determined to be a western singer. For Manon, however, nothing has changed; to her the accident still seems like yesterday. She overheard what Léopold said to

Marie-Louise that fateful Saturday morning, and is convinced that Léopold is entirely to blame for what happened. She can neither forget nor forgive. "Chus pas capable d'arrêter d'y penser," she tells Carmen, and even if she moved out of her parents' home, as Carmen advises, that terrible conversation would haunt her. "Chus pas capable de me débarrasser de leurs voix!" she insists (42-43). Voices from the past have resonated with particular force in Quebec literature ever since Maria Chapdelaine obeyed the voices which told her not to change, but to follow in her mother's footsteps and fulfill her destiny as a devout and loyal woman of Quebec. In Marie-Lou, however, there is no hope of fulfillment for those who refuse to change.

In Manon's case, following in her mother's footsteps was not a deliberate choice made in adulthood. For as long as she can remember, she has wanted to be like Marie-Louise. At six or seven, she was already trying to imitate her, and was eager to have her undivided attention. Nothing angered or humiliated her more than to have people notice her marked resemblance to Léopold. "C'était un écoeurant de fou, lui, pis j'avouais pas y ressembler," she explains (50). Carmen has a different opinion of Léopold: "Y'était peut-être juste un peu plus écoeuré..." (50). Manon, however, blames him for all their problems: "J'avais réalisé qu'y nous rendait toutes malheureuses pis je l'haïssais," she recalls (54). Although Carmen points out ways in which Manon's behavior resembles Léopold's, Manon has no sympathy for her father and does not want to have anything in common with him. That the cost is high is suggested by Carmen's recollection of Manon looking at herself in the mirror as a child, and saying: "M'as te tuer, mon

écoeurant... M'as te tuer!" (54). As an adult, she is still trying to destroy that part of her which resembles Léopold.

The evidence thus suggests that from childhood, Manon was unsure of her mother's love, and conscious of the antagonism between her parents, she feared that her resemblance to Léopold would reduce Marie-Louise's love for her. Wanting to please her mother, Manon sought to imitate her, adopting her mannerisms and also her attitude toward Léopold. Carmen, who had no reason to feel rejected by either parent, developed the self-assurance needed to accept her growing separation from her parents. Not being particularly dependent on either one, she was able to form her own judgments about their way of life, and about how she wanted to live. Manon, however, attempted to repress her likeness to Léopold and heighten her resemblance to Marie-Louise, and in the process denied her individuality.

Manon's close identification with Marie-Louise probably explains why she never wanted to be far from her mother, and why she habitually eavesdropped, especially on her parents' quarrels. Obsessed with the cruel exchanges between her parents, she was constantly on the alert for any sign of violence. One scene in particular marked her for life, she tells Carmen. Overhearing Léopold say, "T'es ma femme, y faut que tu m'obéisses," and thinking that he was going to hurt Marie-Louise, she went to their bedroom where she saw them struggling (57). "Y se sont retournés tous les deux en même temps... Jamais j'oublierai leurs faces," she tells her sister (50). Carmen, unimpressed, asks if that is all. For Manon, it was too much: "Si t'es avais vus, Carmen! Si t'es avais vus! Y'étaient assez laids" (60). Carmen dismisses the violence

and ugliness with a casual "C'est parce qu'y savaient pas comment faire ça" (60).

Manon, of course, correctly perceived that her mother was being raped, a scene that would indeed be hard to forget. The fact that she feels "marked" by it suggests that she has been unable to resolve the feelings that were evoked as she identified with her mother's humiliation in an atmosphere of anger, fear, and powerlessness. Carmen thinks that Manon is overreacting; what Manon needs, she laughingly suggests, is a man. Carmen overlooks the fact that Manon, who has always avoided men, is not strong enough to participate in any kind of human relationship as an equal. Manon feels safe only in the solitary existence which Marie-Louise had once planned for herself.

Carmen's efforts to change Manon's outlook on life are fruitless. Using one approach after another, she tries without success to find some argument to make Manon reexamine the past from a fresh perspective. As a child, Manon had once said: "Quand j'vas être grande, j'veux être ben ben malheureuse, pis mourir martyre" (65). Her goals remain unchanged. Although she has no husband to cause her suffering, Manon does, however, spend much time in prayer. Challenged by Carmen to explain what she thinks about when she prays, Manon describes not thoughts, but sensations of dizziness, floating, and trembling: "C'est vrai... j'tremble comme une feuille, j'perds l'équilibre... Chus tellement ben! On dirait que... On dirait que j'flotte!" (78). Not satisfied with this reply, Carmen supplies her own interpretation: Manon secretly hopes that someone will see her, just as their mother wanted to be seen praying. Manon's description is significant, however, for it speaks of an unfocused, empty life. With no sense of self, and not even a role to

play, Manon seeks security through withdrawal into an experience which is more physical than spiritual, but which is independent of the physical world she wants to leave behind.

The final separation of the sisters arises from their differing reactions to their parents' quarrel on the subject of sex. Manon was the one who insisted on eavesdropping, but when she realized what her parents were talking about, she soon ran back to bed to hide beneath the covers. Carmen, who continued to listen, realized that this quarrel, like all the others, would bring no positive results. "C'te samedi-matin-là, j'ai réalisé la même chose que papa: j'ai réalisé qu'y resteraient toujours dans leur marde... pis j'ai décidé que j'm'en sortirais, moé," she tells Manon, adding that both parents were to blame, not just Léopold, as Manon wanted to believe (87). Concluding that her parents' quarrels would continue "jusqu'à ce qu'y crèvent," Carmen decided to leave home. Manon, however, withdrew, hiding from life much as she had tried to hide from the knowledge of sex by burying herself beneath the covers.

Still thinking that she may persuade Manon to lead a more active life, Carmen describes how she broke with the past. Her first step was to say to herself "'Le temps des lamentations est fini, ma belle Carmen! Fini! Oublie toute, pis recommence toute comme si rien s'était passé!'" (91). Forgetting meant to stop blaming others for the past, and to stop feeling sorry for herself; it meant ceasing to depend on others for things only she could do. She had always wanted to sing, and knew that it was up to her to try. Singing cowboy songs may not seem like much of an accomplishment, she concedes, "Mais quand c'est ça que tu voulais faire, pis que t'as réussi à le faire, t'es ben moins niaiseuse que ben

du monde" (91). And because she likes what she is doing, the hard work has been worth while. "Mais toé t'as jamais rien compris de ça... Tu t'es renfermée encore plus dans les lamentations au lieu d'essayer de t'en sortir," she contends, but Manon does not reply (92). Determined to complete her argument, Carmen bluntly states her opposition to the practices which encourage Manon's escape into a private realm of mysticism:

Y faudrait que tu comprennes qu'y'est temps que tu sacres ton chapelet à terre, que tu te débarrasses de tes saintes vierges en plâtre, que tu mettes la clef dans'porte, pis que tu te vides la tête de tout ça! Révolte-toé, Manon, c'est tout c'qu'y te reste! (92)

Before Manon replies, Carmen continues, urging her sister one last time to forget the past; "Sors de ton esclavage!" she cries, "Reste pas assis là, à rien faire! FAIS QUEQU'CHOSE!" (92). Manon refuses: "Non. Chus pas capable. Y'est trop tard" (92). When Carmen offers to help her, Manon again refuses, this time rejecting her sister as well: "Non! Tu m'écoeures! T'es sale!" (92). The shift in Manon's response shows her first admitting weakness, then taking refuge, as always, in a narrow morality which she uses to justify her refusal to act.

Carmen abandons her arguments, but cannot leave without affirming her freedom: "Moé... chus libre. Entends-tu? Libre!" (93). She acknowledges, however, that she probably would not be singing for a living if her parents were still alive. "Pis, quand j'commence ma première chanson de cow-boy," she tells Manon, "chus tellement heureuse qu'y soient morts!" (93). The words shock Manon, who repeatedly cries "Va-t'en!" as Carmen testifies to the personal satisfaction she takes in her singing (93). "J'pense... que chus t'une bonne chanteuse," she tells her sister, adding "Pis... chus... heureuse" (93). When she

leaves, she closes the door on her last tie to the past, her sister. Manon, on her knees, cries "Merci, mon Dieu," as if thanking God for giving her the strength to resist the temptation of freedom, for now she can perpetuate undisturbed the ways of her saintly mother (93).

Manon is psychologically incapable of following Carmen's example, and Carmen is unable to appreciate Manon's almost complete lack of inner strength. In Sainte Carmen de la Main (1976), Carmen will write songs which inspire self-confidence and hope among the Main's social outcasts. Confronting Manon, however, Carmen responds less to the woman than to what she represents: a refusal of life. At the same time, Carmen appears to be less a woman than a spokeswoman for growth and change. More objective than her sister, Carmen recognized that her parents' behavior was self-defeating. Furthermore, although she had made up her mind to leave home before the accident, she realizes that her parents' death gave her added freedom to develop her talents and achieve her goals. Manon, whose memories feed her self-pity and taste for violence, could never say that she is happy that her parents are dead; on the contrary, it makes her very unhappy. And being unhappy is one of her greatest satisfactions in life.

Carmen calls herself free; is her statement justified? Some would say yes, including Renate Usmiani, who describes Carmen's choice as "full recognition of the fact of freedom, assumption of that freedom and the moral responsibility that goes with it. In an absurd world, she has created meaning and purpose for herself."⁴ But because Carmen chooses a career as western singer, she is seen by others as having adopted an inauthentic role. Tremblay addressed this issue in an interview two months after Marie-Lou opened. To his dismay, western music had become

immensely popular, but if he considered it out of place in Quebec, he also noticed that it was often only a first step in a singer's career: "Y'en a jamais de cow-boy ici, pis pourtant quasiment tous les chanteurs ont commencé avec des chansons de cow-boy."⁵ He thus implies that singing western songs is an apprenticeship which may lead Carmen toward music which reflects her experience as a Québécoise.

Critic Jean-Cléo Godin, however, sees not growth, but disguise: "Triste libération, donc que celle de Carmen, liberté du naufragé qui a pu s'accrocher à un récif ou à une épave, trouvant son salut dans le travestissement de son identité."⁶ But does Carmen in fact disguise her identity? Does she repress her individuality, or does she make choices which help her realize her potentialities? The evidence suggests that she has made significant progress toward self-realization, beginning with her discovery at the age of sixteen that she was capable of independent thought. She also realized that if she made choices of her own, she was responsible for her decisions, and would have to accept the consequences.

Carmen knew that leaving home was not enough to ensure her independence; she also needed to leave behind the "heritage" of hatred and self-pity. It was from this demoralizing intellectual and emotional environment, "c'te maudite trappe à rats-là," that she wanted to free herself (86). From the time she walked out the door, Carmen was determined to be, as much as possible, a "voyageur sans bagage," unburdened by the family tradition of dependence and refusal of responsibility. "Pis j'ai réussi à me débarrasser de toute mon passé, pour un temps... un trou, dans ma tête," she tells Manon, "J'avouais rien savoir d'eux autres... C'est comme ça que j'ai réussi à faire c'que

j'voulais" (91). Carmen did not really forget her past, of course, but knowing that it could not be changed, she concentrated on changing herself and avoiding her parents' mistakes. Fortunately, she also had a career goal and the talent necessary to achieve it.

Tremblay often portrays the Main as a world of cheap cabarets and clubs where compromise is a condition of "success," but Carmen apparently has not manipulated others or lowered her standards in order to make her way. Manon calls Carmen's night club outfit a "disguise," and considers it immodest, if not indecent, but Carmen is not defensive, and attaches no special importance to it, conspicuous though it is. It goes with the job. Never self-conscious, Carmen is always herself, and displays no vocabulary or mannerisms which suggest that she is trying to conform to a preconceived notion of how a western singer should act. Just as the living room and tavern settings show where Marie-Louise and Léopold are happiest, Carmen's costume shows where she is happiest: in an admittedly third-rate night club. There, however, she is neither passive nor alone, but actively reaching out to her audience and sharing music she enjoys:

Pis chus tellement contente de m'être débarrassée de tout c'qu'y s'est passé dans c'te maudite prison-là... Les hommes dans'salle, y me regardent... pis y m'aiment... C'est jamais les mêmes, y changent à chaque soir, mais à chaque soir, j'les ai! (93).

Carmen cannot be called an artist, but she is a professional performer who takes pride in her work. Being a western singer has thus far permitted her to develop her potential without compromising her integrity. She has not lost her sense of who she is, and although she knows very well where she came from, she has not succumbed to the self-defeating behavior which characterized her parents, and which is now

paralyzing Manon. Carmen thinks and acts for herself, and is finding a place for herself in the world through her music.

If Marie-Lou had ended with the conversation between the two sisters in 1971, the play might be said to emphasize Carmen's progress toward independence. As it is, the final words go to Marie-Louise and Léopold, who speak not only for themselves but for "on" and "nous autres" in a world where most people their age are caught up in routines which diminish and demean human life. Considering himself incapable of improving the system, Léopold concludes that he has no choice but to continue or to say no to life itself. Marie-Louise feels equally trapped but blames only Léopold, whom she hates more than ever. "Tu pourrais jamais savoir comment j't'hais!" she exclaims, looking at him for the first time since the play began (94). His reply sounds almost affectionate as he asks "Viens-tu faire un tour de machine, avec moé, à soir, Marie-Lou?" (94). Marie-Louise is not deceived by the nickname used during their courtship; it is an ironic reminder that she had once wanted to marry him in order to escape the demoralizing situation in her parents' home. As it turned out, she found herself caught in a destructive relationship worse than anything she could have imagined. The play concludes as Marie-Louise rises to accept Léopold's invitation, challenging him to carry out his threat to end their lives in an "accident." For once he will not disappoint her.

With Léopold's suicide-murder, Tremblay destroys the most representative family he has portrayed to date, implying that nothing can be salvaged. In 1978, when asked if his plays contained a common theme, Tremblay called Les Belles-soeurs "un point de départ, une

manière de liquider des choses une fois pour toutes," and then explained:

Toutes mes pièces tournent autour du thème de la famille, de la cellule familiale que je voulais faire exploser. Mes personnages essaient toujours de s'en sortir, certains réussissent, d'autres non. La famille c'est pour moi l'image de l'inconscience, ceux qui sont conscients sont ceux qui essaient de briser le cercle."

In Marie-Lou, however, Tremblay does more than break the family circle; he completely eliminates the traditional Quebec family as he understands it. What is to replace the family? He offers some partial suggestions in his next two plays, as he considers ways in which personal relationships between men might be made rewarding. He does not, however, portray a complete family from which will emerge a strong, healthy, independent future generation.

Notes

¹ Michel Tremblay, A Toi. pour toujours. ta Marie-Lou (Montréal: Leméac, 1971) 35. All further references will be contained within the text.

² The expression is attributed to Hélène Loïselle, the actress who created the role of Marie-Louise. See Jean-Cléo Godin, "Tremblay: Marginaux en chœur," Théâtre québécois II, Jean-Cléo Godin et Laurent Mailhot (Montréal: Hurtubise HMH, 1980) 170.

³ Michel Bélair, introduction, A Toi. pour toujours. ta Marie-Lou 9.

⁴ Renate Usmiani, Michel Tremblay (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1982) 78.

⁵ Michel Tremblay, interview in Michel Tremblay, by Michel Bélair (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1972) 75.

⁶ Godin 172.

⁷ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay et le théâtre québécois," by Marc Kravetz, Le Magazine littéraire mars 1978: 90.

Hosanna: Replacing Social Roles with Personal Relationships

Hosanna, which opened in 1973, focuses on a homosexual couple introduced in Demain matin. Montréal m'attend (1972), a musical which suggests that few people succeed on the Main without sacrificing their integrity. In Hosanna, however, the protagonist takes a hard look at the ways in which he has compromised his individuality in hopes of becoming "une des plus grandes folles de Montréal."¹ Finally acknowledging that playing women's roles leads to self-denial rather than self-fulfillment, Hosanna decides that he no longer wants a life of pretense and imitation. "Chus t'un homme," he announces, thus becoming the first male figure in Tremblay's theatre to affirm selfhood (75).

The play takes place in Hosanna's apartment following a Halloween party sponsored by Sandra, a transvestite who owns a bar frequented by homosexuals. Tremblay describes the small apartment as typical of the "one-room expensive-dumps" popularly known as "batchelors" (11). Personal touches include a dressing table stocked with a variety of cosmetics and surmounted by a large mirror; over the sofa hangs an unframed "erotic" painting done by Cuirette, who once aspired to be an artist, and on the coffee table stands "un affreux 'David' en plâtre," which is large and frequently in the way (11). Two features of the room receive special mention: the light from a blinking neon sign on a nearby drugstore, and a huge bottle of perfume which the audience should not only see but smell throughout the performance. It is "très cheap, très

lourd, très écoeurant; un parfum tellement fort qu'il sent le renfermé; un parfum qui a emprisonné Hosanna depuis des années et qui laisse des traces un peu écoeurantes d'Hosanna, partout où elle passe"(12).

Although no belle-soeur would allow an erotic painting on her wall or a statue of a nude figure on her coffee table, Hosanna's apartment bears a resemblance to the homes of other Tremblay characters. The "art objects," like the "religious objects" in housewives' kitchens, suggest the superficiality of the inhabitants' thoughts, and the mediocrity of their tastes. The furnishings are cheap, the apartment is crowded, and it is unlikely that things will improve. The odor of the perfume recalls the stifling atmosphere of tradition and daily routines depicted in earlier plays. A weak show of force, an invisible presence, Hosanna's perfume is a constant reminder of attempted self-affirmation which has become self-confinement.

The play opens with Hosanna's quiet entrance. Wearing a woman's wig and a garish homemade costume, he is obviously supposed to represent Elizabeth Taylor as she appeared in the film Cleopatra. "Malgré ce déguisement grotesque, Claude-Hosanna-Cléopâtre ne doit pas être 'drôle,'" Tremblay writes; "C'est un travesti cheap avec tout ce que ça comporte de touchant, de triste, d'exaspérant et d'exaltant parce qu'exalté" (13). Hosanna examines himself carefully in the mirror, puts on some perfume, as if to bolster his spirits, but the remedy fails, and he begins to cry. He has been humiliated and blames himself: "Maudite kétaine! Maudite kétaine! Maudite kétaine..." (13). He calms himself, however, and again looks in the mirror, this time to inventory the damage to his make-up. It took three hours to apply, and he does not want to wash it away with tears. Ironically, Hosanna has been dreaming

of playing this role ever since he first saw Elizabeth Taylor's performance. "Toute une vie, ouan, toute une vie de préparation pour en arriver là! Félicitations! Très beau succès!" he tells himself (13-14). Fully aware that he looks ridiculous, he senses that his dream is absurd, but he is not yet able to abandon it altogether.

When Cuirette arrives a few minutes later, he is still laughing about what happened at the party. The situation is not fully explained until Act Two, but it is soon clear that Cuirette participated in a plan to ridicule Hosanna's impersonation. This has upset Hosanna, but although he feels betrayed, he also wants to know why he was treated this way. Despite their irritation and frustration, the two men attempt to understand each other better. To do so they must put aside their disguises, for "Cuirette" and "Hosanna" are false selves which repress the individuality of Raymond Bolduc and Claude Lemieux.

With great reluctance, Hosanna slowly begins to remove his costume in order to resume his daytime identity as Claude Lemieux, hairdresser. As Cuirette helps unfasten the numerous hooks up the back of the dress, he tries to initiate a discussion of their problems. He begins by remarking that the bleak apartment, the perfume, and the irritating neon sign combine to make "une p'tite maison écoeurante quequ'chose de rare" (23). When Hosanna observes that he has been left out of the picture, Cuirette's reply is pointed: "T'es t'exactement comme ta maudite maison. Tu sens le parfum à trois milles, pis tu clignotes comme l'annonce de la pharmacie...Pis j'ai pus besoin de te le dire, que tu m'écoeures..." (23). Thus Cuirette introduces his objections to the image which Hosanna tries to project. The attention-seeking, artificial Hosanna disgusts him.

Instead of confronting this criticism, some of which is familiar, Hosanna tries a diversionary tactic by assuming a provocative pose as he smokes a cigarette. Although seduction has undoubtedly been one of his most successful techniques for dealing with critics, it is ineffective this time. Since Cuirette is indifferent, Hosanna then imagines himself dead, hooked to the sofa "comme un papillon précieux et rare" (24). This too is an attempt to avoid the issue, and no more successful the first, for although Cuirette is amused, he is also reminded of something said at the party. Picking up on Hosanna's idea, Cuirette pretends to announce a nightclub number entitled "Hosanna l'agrafée," to be performed by "la pétillante 'Ose, Anna, ose'" (25). Hosanna, however, cannot joke about the evening's events, and responds by burning Cuirette with his cigarette. The burn, like their insults, is superficial, but it further postpones serious discussion.

Somewhat later, when the dress has finally been removed, revealing Hosanna in bra and panties, Cuirette tries another approach. "Claude," he begins, but the reply is sharp: "J'm'appelle Hosanna" (27). Even the mirror, however, denies the existence of a person by that name. Looking at his bizarre image, Hosanna pronounces himself "bête;" Cuirette, however, finds the incongruity amusing: "T'es drôle, comme ça, sans ta robe, avec ta tête de femme" (28). "Ah! non, chus pas drôle," Hosanna retorts, "Chus ridicule" (29). Cuirette demurs, but Hosanna insists:

Chus ridicule quand chus déguisée en homme, quand j'coiffe mes Juives jewish-renaissance. Des vrais gestes de femmes, qu'y me disent que j'ai... 'You should work in drags, Claude!' Pis si j'irais travailler en femme j'gage qu'y me laisseraient tomber parce qu'y veulent pas se laisser toucher aux cheveux par des femmes... Pis chus ridicule quand chus déguisée en femme parce que j't'obligée de faire la folle pour attirer l'attention parce que chus pas assez belle pour l'attirer

autrement...Pis chus t'encore plus ridicule quand chus poignée comme ça, entre les deux, avec ma tête de femme, mes sous-vêtements de femme, pis mon corps...(29).

Cuirette tries to assure him that he is not ridiculous, but Hosanna is overwhelmed by self-doubts. He knows all too well that he does not conform to conventional standards for either sex; in fact, as he looks at the nameless hybrid reflected in the mirror, he no longer recognizes himself. For years he has relied on mirrors and people's attention to assure him of his existence. But at the party that night, his attempts to "faire la folle" had blown up in his face as the spectators rejected both the impersonation and the impersonator. Then his lover reminded him that he is "really" Claude, but he knows that his clients at the beauty shop do not consider him a "real" man. As a final blow, his mirror has told him that he is a ridiculous composite creature, neither a man nor a woman. What then is he? Such a question is for the moment too frightening to pursue. To avoid further discussion, he brings up the subject of Cuirette's appearance.

Cuirette has been playing a masculine role, offering Hosanna a cigarette and lighting it, responding with a display of strength when Hosanna burns him, and taking pleasure in the way he and Sandra had out-manoeuvred Hosanna that evening. But even before he bursts noisily into the apartment, his masculine image has been gently mocked. Hearing him at the door, Hosanna announces: "V'là ton beu, Hosanna, ôte ta couvarte rouge!" (14). This ironic remark is followed by stage directions which leave no doubt as to the nature of Cuirette's masculinity:

De Cuirette, on pourrait plutôt dire que c'est un 'ancien' beu. En fait, du beu, il ne reste plus que le déguisement. C'est un beu qui a vieilli et qui a engraisé; sa veste de cuir, jadis moulante et provocante, ne ferme plus depuis longtemps et ses vieux jeans trop serrés moulent plus de suif

que de muscles. Mais du beu, Cuirette a gardé l'arrogance, l'assurance bornée, ce qui le rend parfois un-peu-beaucoup ridicule (14).

Cuirette's arrogance has been temporarily diminished, however, by an unsettling discovery. Coming home on his motorcycle, he could not resist riding through Lafontaine Park, the setting of his first sexual adventures. To his dismay, he found that lights had been installed everywhere, which means that he cannot resume his old practices whenever he wishes. This unforeseen limitation on his life as "beu" weakens Cuirette's position, making him especially vulnerable to Hosanna's counter-attack on the subject of role-playing and appearances.

Expert in the uses of disguise, Hosanna sees that Cuirette's clothes no longer fit, and also realizes that his behavior does not "fit" the masculine image he wants to project. Hosanna might add that even the name does not fit; like "leatherette," "Cuirette" implies imitation, and the suffix "ette" suggests something both small and feminine. According to Hosanna, Cuirette is not only afraid of women, but acts like a woman, for instead of being a wage-earner, he stays at home and does the housework. "Tu te vantes partout que j'te fais vivre," Hosanna observes, "mais tu contes à parsonne que c'est toé qui fait le lavage, par exemple! Tu te promènes en bicycle à gaséline dehors, mais c'est toé qui fait cuire le bacon en dedans!" (46-47). Indeed, there is no sign that Cuirette resents housework. He is quite matter-of-fact about wearing an apron and working in the kitchen; he also cleans up the perfume bottle that Hosanna smashes, and it is he who begins the nightly routine of opening the sofa to make the bed.

When he goes out, however, Cuirette tries to look the part of a "beu," although he knows that his clothes are too tight and that he has

no money for new ones. He is even conscious of how he tries to hide his embarrassment: "J'parle plus fort qu'avant pour faire à semblant que ça me fait rien," he admits (43). Nevertheless, he reminds Hosanna, "j'pogne encore, moé" (44). This assures him that he is still desirable. When he receives a call from Reynald, a new acquaintance, Cuirette is flattered but non-committal. Jealous, Hosanna not only urges him to join Reynald, but tells him to stay away for a few days. Hosanna then announces that his mother is coming, and pretends that he does not want her to know he is homosexual.

Cuirette apparently does not suspect that Hosanna's professed concern over his mother's visit might be only an excuse to "punish" him for his interest in Reynald. Nevertheless, having met Madame Lemieux once before, he is convinced that she understands and accepts his relationship to her son. Hosanna finally admits that she knows and tacitly approves. He then goes on to describe with great bitterness her response to his homosexuality. By the time he was in the seventh grade, he tells Cuirette, he was openly laughed at for looking so much like a girl, and the graffiti on lavatory walls labeled him a "tapette" before he knew what the word meant. Later, when he realized that he was sexually attracted to the older boys, he went to his mother, hoping that she would help him understand what was happening to him:

J'ai été assez naïf pour penser qu'a... m'aiderait... oubedonc qu'a m'expliquerait c'que ça voulait dire... Ma mère qui m'avait toujours dorlotée, pis embrassée, pis déguisée, pis qui arrêtaît pas de me dire que toutes les femmes sont dangereuses pis que j'devrais pas m'en approcher... parce qu'a voulait me garder avec elle... que j'étais son bâton de vieillesse, comme a disait... Pis qu'a l'avait peur qu'une femme vienne me voler un jour...(41-42).

But the mother who had seemed so devoted to her son showed no interest in his problems, and when he told her he had become an active

homosexual, she merely replied: "Si t'es de même mon p'tit gars, au moins, choisis-toé s'en des beaux!" (42). It was then that Hosanna realized that his mother had interfered with his normal development for her own selfish purposes. He does not go so far as to say that he would otherwise have been heterosexual, but he is convinced that his mother deliberately encouraged effeminate behavior hoping that he would be unable to establish intimate relationships with any woman but her. "Pis a pensait qu'a me garderait," Hosanna explains, but she was mistaken (42).

After finishing ninth grade, he went to Montreal, where he gradually established himself as "Hosanna, la fille à gars de bicycle! La coiffeuse à bums! La folle à motards! (...) ...une femme du p'tit monde... Du p'tit, p'tit monde..."(42). Although he took the initiative to leave home and free himself from his mother, he continued to believe that he could never be accepted as a man. In order to make a place for himself in Montreal's homosexual community, he exaggerated and distorted his feminine qualities, hoping to become a powerful drag queen. Now, since the familiar male roles--"père de famille," "beu," and "folle"--are all unsatisfactory, he must decide for himself how he will live.

The final portion of Act One focuses on the basic issue of gender. In a heated exchange with Cuirette, Hosanna stops abruptly as he is about to refer to himself as a woman. The reason is not lost on Cuirette:

T'étais pour dire 'pour une femme', hein, Hosanna? Tu t'es t'arrêtée juste à temps! Quand tu fais la folle, quand tu veux faire rire le monde, oubedonc quand tu veux te pogner un gars de bicycle, comme tu les aimes, tu parles de toé au féminin gros comme le bras! Pis même quand on revient icitte ... quand tu veux m'avoir pis que moé, moé, j'veux pas, tu continues à faire la femme, à minauder, à onduler des hanches, à parler trois octaves trop haut, à sentir fort,

pour m'agacer... Mais quand on s'engueule oubedonc qu'on a quequ'chose de sérieux à se dire, tu sais pus comment parler de toé, hein? Tu le sais pus si t'es un gars ou ben si t'es une fille, hein? (Author's emphasis, 45-46).

According to Cuirette, Hosanna's role-playing has two purposes. The main purpose is to exercise power over men by mimicking the behavior of the stereotypical temptress, or by imitating a specific role for which an actress is famous, as in the case of Elizabeth Taylor. Like Cuirette, Hosanna has an image to maintain, and must constantly attract men to demonstrate his power. Much to Cuirette's exasperation, however, Hosanna sometimes uses with him the same outrageous sexual signals that he uses in public. On these occasions, Cuirette keenly senses the loss of individuality and spontaneity. He also mentions that Hosanna uses his "femme" role to make people laugh. Act One contains several examples of this humor. Cuirette is particularly impressed with Hosanna's remarks to Sandra over the phone. In that instance, he uses his "humor" to put down and overwhelm his antagonist. Far more real and important to Cuirette is Claude, the man with whom he can be himself, without pretense or disguise. But while this is implied by his words, he does not realize the extent to which his own role-playing encourages the existence of "Hosanna la folle."

Promptly coming to the defense of his role-playing, Hosanna contends that many men like it. Is not Cuirette attracted to a man disguised as a woman? "Si c'est Hosanna qui t'excite, pour que c'est faire que tu couches avec un gars? Pis si c'est Claude, pour que c'est faire que tu couches avec un gars qui a l'air d'une femme? ... Ça s'rait pas par hasard parce que les femmes te font peur, hein?" (Author's emphasis, 46). Again pointing out that Cuirette does all of the housework, Hosanna scoffs at the idea that his lover is the man in

the family, and asks: "T'avais jamais pensé à ça que c'était toé, la femme, dans nous deux?" (47). Cuirette, however, argues that the difference between men and women is not what they do but the way they do it: "C'est vrai que tu mènes, dans'maison, mais tu mènes comme une femme!" (47). Even at home, Cuirette complains, Hosanna continues his role-playing, practicing in front of the mirror to perfect and memorize his gestures, and experimenting with make-up to conceal telltale signs of age. "T'es pus une p'tite cute depuis hier soir," he concludes (48). Then, as if sensing that their definitions are irrelevant, he adds: "Ben crisse, j't'aime," and goes out, slamming the door as he leaves (48). Hosanna shouts after him: "Moé aussi, j'aurais envie de t'enculer" (48). The motorcycle is heard, then silence. If asked, Cuirette would have stayed, but Hosanna needs time to think.

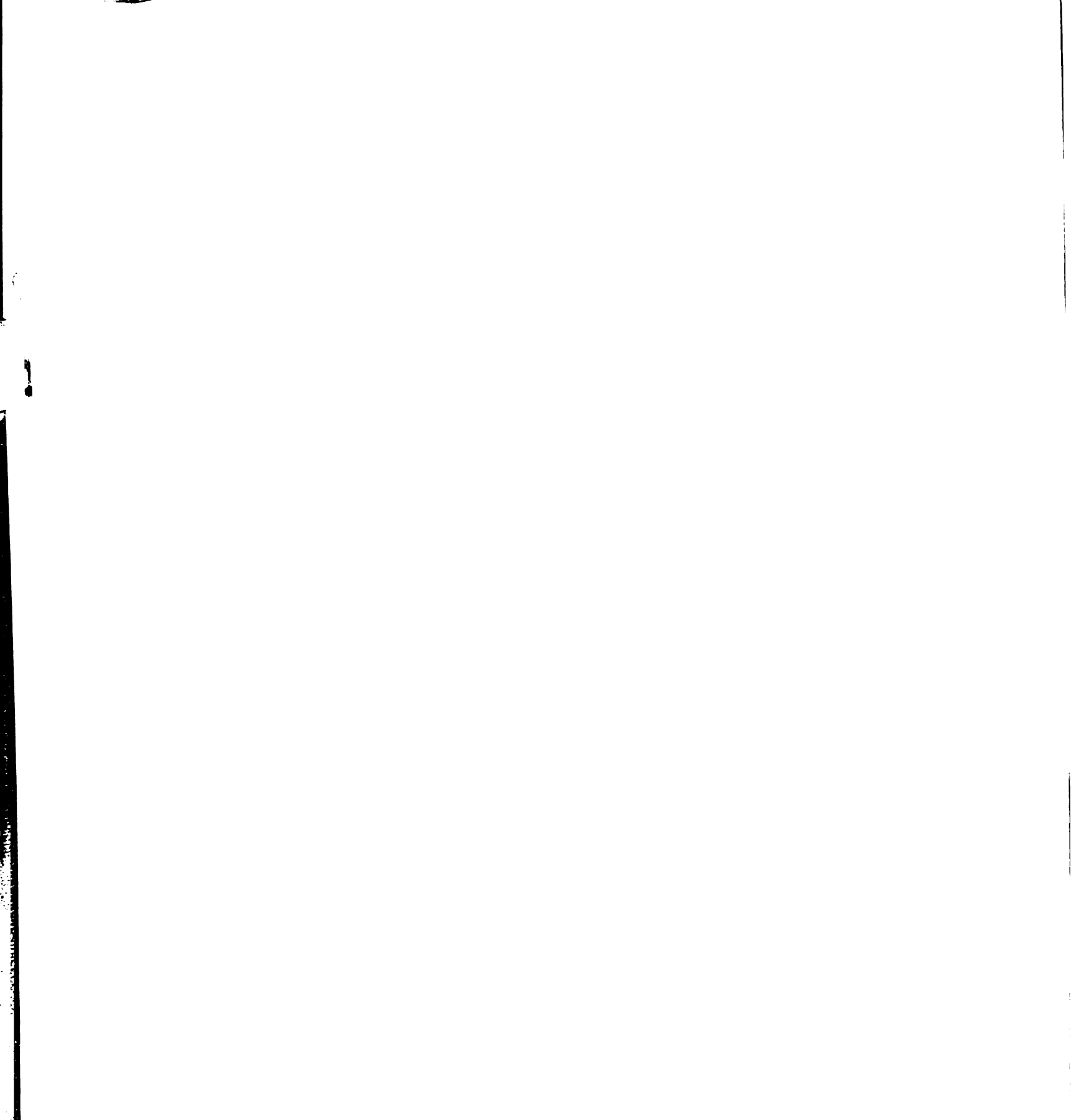
"J't'aime," an unusual exit line for any lovers' quarrel, is without precedent in Tremblay's theatre. "Tu pourrais jamais savoir comment j't'hais" had been Marie-Louise's final words; then she and Léopold had gone to their deaths (94). Having shown the destructiveness of hatred, Tremblay now shows how love may promote self-acceptance and self-strength. Cuirette's awkward yet reassuring declaration of love will provide the security Hosanna needs as he goes back to examine his behavior and consider the possibility of other, more satisfying ways of being a man.

Act Two begins with Hosanna alone. Still wearing his wig and make-up, he is trying to forget what happened that evening. Nothing helps: he runs out of cigarettes; he acts out conversations with Cuirette and pronounces them dull; he looks in the mirror, and having asked who is fairest, does not want to hear the answer. Exclaiming "shut up," he

begins to laugh (56). "Cré, Duchesse, va... a restera toujours la plus drôle," he announces; his own attempts at humor do not amuse him (56). When the phone rings, he hesitates, then answers. It is Sandra again. This time Hosanna listens, protesting mildly to some of the remarks; he finally ends the conversation by saying that Cuirette is on his way back to Sandra's. "T'as eu c'que tu voulais," he adds, as he hangs up, for he is well aware of Sandra's interest in Cuirette (57). Hosanna is not afraid of losing Cuirette to Sandra, but he knows that Sandra has won a significant victory in the competition for status and power. He also knows that he must now come to terms with his defeat.

Sitting astride a chair facing the audience, Hosanna begins to recount the evening's events. Although there is but one speaker, there are two voices: one belongs to the Hosanna who is naively preparing for a triumph, the other belongs to the Hosanna who has been humiliated. Through this technique, Tremblay shows the protagonist as he struggles to free himself from the confinement of his image as "folle," and find own voice as Claude.

Hosanna still remembers the night it all began two months ago, when he learned that the theme for Sandra's party was famous women in history. He could hardly contain his excitement: "Le coeur m'a bondi, les yeux m'ont crochi, les frissons m'ont pognée! Ma chance! Ma grande chance! Enfin!" (58). Nevertheless, he now thinks that he should have suspected something was wrong: "J'me sus laissée prendre au piège comme la dernière des débutantes!" (58). Then after a pause, he exclaims, "Mais j'pouvais-tu savoir qu'y m'haïssaient tant que ça, moé!" (Author's emphasis, 58). Although Hosanna appears surprised by such intense animosity, he does not try to explain it at this point. Instead, he



recalls the scene at the club as disguises and costumes were discussed --Scheherezade, Brigitte Bardot, and Marilyn Monroe. No one mentioned Elizabeth Taylor, however, "Parce qu'Elizabeth Taylor... c'est à moé! Pis ça, tout le monde le sait! Ca fait vingt ans qu'Elizabeth Taylor m'appartient!" (59).

In the speeches which follow, the naive Hosanna tells of his obsession with this actress whom he worships and with whom he identifies, especially as she makes her triumphal entry into Rome as Cleopatra. He never tires of watching her; "pis j'vendrai mon dernier dentier, s'il le faut, pour voir Elizabeth Taylor faire son entrée dans Rome," he declares (59). "D'la marde," exclaims the voice of experience, "D'la grosse marde!" (59). Then he continues, explaining that for years, he had only observed, waiting to be worthy of impersonating her. Clearly, Hosanna does not treat this as just another role; he wants to experience the kind of power which he thinks was hers as the world's most beautiful actress at the pinnacle of her career. Elizabeth Taylor, "celle qui a commencé dans une vue de chien pis qui va finir comme la plus belle chienne du monde" excites him, he admits, but rather than possess her sexually, he wants to imitate her, to enslave men as she does, with beauty and irresistible seductiveness (61).

Nights, as he lies in bed, Hosanna imagines a papier mâché décor in which he, dressed as Elizabeth Taylor, enters Rome in triumph. And as Cuirette sleeps, oblivious to his lover's dreams of glory, Hosanna vows to make his dream come true. His grand entrance will be small compared to Elizabeth Taylor's, but better than nothing. "Pis toutes les folles de Montréal vont chier du sang," he promises himself (61). But although Hosanna is prepared for a papier mâché décor, in contrast to the "real"

marble and gold which surrounded the "real" Elizabeth Taylor, he fails to understand that her seeming triumph is only an illusion, a mirage which tempts, but never becomes reality. The party-goers' laughter soon dissipates the illusion. "QUI C'EST QUI A CHIE DU SANG," cries the voice of experience, "QUI C'EST QUI A CHIE DU SANG!" (Author's capitals, 61).

"Trois semaines; ça m'a pris trois semaines complètes de ma vie pour préparer mon flop," Hosanna comments bitterly as he tells how hard he worked to make a beautiful costume, the dress which he now refers to as "C'te maudite guenille cheap-là!" (62). He finally admits, however, that neither his costume nor his make-up was to blame for his "flop;" the real problem was the way he had treated his companions at the club. "Ben oui, c'est vrai que j'ai faite mon chemin à Montréal en étant bitch," he concedes (64).

When he first came to Montreal, he watched and imitated the Duchesse, who was "la reine incontestée des folles de Montréal" (65). Sandra was also a model, and his rival for Cuirette. People first took notice of Hosanna when Cuirette became his lover; at the same time, his "talent pour des vacheries" also began to attract widespread attention (64). "Y'a rien que j'ai pas dit," he boasts, "y'a rien que j'ai pas faite d'abord pour garder Cuirette, pis ensuite pour clouer le plus grand nombre de yeules possibles!" (65). To get a laugh, he would say anything about anyone, whether it was deserved or not. But Hosanna wanted more power, and dreamed of a bold stroke, a dramatic entrance which would eclipse even Sandra. "Ah!" he tells himself, "farme-toé donc, tout ça est fini astheur! Toute a fouerré, Hosanna, toute a fouerré" (65). Worst of all, he cannot forget that even when he finally

began to suspect that something was wrong, he still decided to go. "J'avais pus y aller, mais...j'me sus r'gardée... pis j'me sus trouvée belle!" (67). He was indeed trapped--by his own loss of objectivity.

Just before Hosanna begins to tell about the party itself, Cuirette returns. Obviously subdued, he enters quietly this time. Hosanna, absorbed in his memories, pays no attention as Cuirette announces that instead of going to the party, he returned to Lafontaine park to confirm his earlier observations. Although he talks as if he were concerned about not finding partners there as he once did, his real worry is losing Hosanna. Their relationship has come to mean more to him than he had realized: "Y'a rien qu'icitte que toute reste toujours pareil...Y'a rien qu'icitte que le temps passe pas...j'pense. J'veux pas que les affaires changent! (Tout bas) Comprends-tu?" (69). Hosanna does not reply; he is recalling his growing sense of foreboding as he went up the steps to Sandra's. "J'pensais pas que ça irait si loin que ça," Cuirette tries to explain, "C'est pas de ma faute" (69).

Then Hosanna describes the event which he had thought would establish him as the reigning "folle" of Montreal. The club door opened, he entered, and all the lights went up: "Tout le monde," he says slowly, "était habillé... en Elisabeth Taylor dans Cléopâtre" (70). He also saw at a glance that their costumes and make-up were much better than his; his humiliation was complete. But everyone acted as if nothing had happened, and so did he: "j'avais le coeur dans'gorge... mais j'ai pas bronché! Pas d'un poil!" (70).

According to the stage directions, the two men now speak at the same time. Cuirette pours out the story of his involvement in the party--his motives, the satisfaction he felt at first, and then his regrets:

Y m'avaient juste dit qu'y voulaient te faire une farce... (...) J'commençais à avoir mon hostie de voyage de tes grimaces, de tes niaiseries, pis de tes maudites scènes qui finissent pus... J'pensais qu'y voulaient juste... te donner une leçon... (...) Pis j'ai trouvé ça drôle quand t'es t'arrivée, sûre de toé, contente comme une reine de ta p'tite robe cheap... Pis j'ai trouvé ça drôle quand t'es rentrée pis que les lumières se sont allumées... Parce que j't'haïssais! Mais là... J'ai compris c'qu'on t'a faite, Hosanna..." (70-71).

During Cuirette's speech, Hosanna tells of his struggle to maintain his poise in the face of public ridicule. As he describes how Cuirette, smiling broadly, came to sit at his table, Hosanna looks at his lover for the first time since his return, and asks for a cigarette. The request is also a sign of forgiveness and a plea for understanding. Cuirette gives him the cigarette, lights it, and then stands behind him with his hands on Hosanna's shoulders. With this, the two men are reconciled. When Hosanna continues, he speaks directly to Cuirette, strengthened to know that his lover understands his pain.

First he describes his intense humiliation and also his determination not to leave: "y fallait que j'reste! Y fallait que j'prouve que chus... que chus forte, pis que j'me sacre de toutes vos farces plates! Y fallait que j'leur prouve qu'Hosanna, c'est pas n'importe qui, pis qu'a peut passer à travers toute!" (73). It was not easy to sit calmly at his table, but the worst was still to come: the judging of the costumes. Hosanna readily acknowledged that the three Cleopatras who preceded him were good. When his turn came, the crowd began to chant and pound the tables: "Ose, Anna, ose!" (73). But it was seeing Cuirette laugh that gave Hosanna the determination to face his mocking friends--and the image which he had tried to substitute for Claude Lemieux, the non-entity from Saint-Eustache:

Pis là, au milieu du stage, pendant que tout le monde riaient de moé, pis me sifflaient, pis me criaient des niaiseries, j'me sus dit: 'Cléopâtre est un gros tas de marde! Elisabeth Taylor est un gros tas de marde! Tu l'as voulu, ton gros tas de marde, Hosanna-de-Saint-Eustache, ben le v'là, ton gros tas de marde!' Ecoute ben ça, Cuirette: j'étais pus Cléopâtre, cibole, j'étais Samson! Oui, Samson! Pis j'ai toute démoli mes décors en papier mâché! Vous avez toute démoli ma vie en papier mâché! (Pause.) J'savais pas que vous m'haïssiez tant que ça... (Très long silence.) Chus t'un homme, Cuirette! Si j'me sus sauvée, comme ça, après, (...) c'est parce que chus pas une femme... Va falloir que tu t'habitues à ça, aussi...(73-74).

Sampson, after being seduced and enslaved by a woman, had nevertheless found within himself the strength to assert his integrity. Hosanna, at last able to identify with a male figure, breaks free from the image which had seduced and confined him. Having declared himself a man, Hosanna has nothing more to say about the party.

Quickly the two men restore order to their lives. Cuirette is only too glad to forget about Reynald, and Hosanna decides that his mother will have to sleep on the floor if she wants to spend a night in his apartment. Cuirette would like to apologize, however: "J'suppose que ça sert à rien de m'excuser," he begins; "En effet," Hosanna replies (75). Awkwardly Cuirette continues, for there is still something he wants to say. Admitting that saying it makes him feel "niaiseux," he finally blurts out: "L'important, c'est que tu soyes toé. C'est tout. J'pense que c'est toute. Claude... c'est pas Hosanna que j'aime..." (75). Hosanna, looking at himself in the mirror, announces: "Cléopâtre est morte, pis le Parc Lafontaine est toute illuminé!" (75). Then standing nude before his lover, he calls, "R'garde, Raymond, chus t'un homme!" (75). As he repeats these words, the two men embrace. Even the stage directions, which until now have read "Hosanna" and

"Cuirette," indicate the discovery of selfhood: "Raymond se lève, se dirige vers Claude et le prend dans ses bras" (75).

With his announcement that Cleopatra is dead and that Lafontaine Park is brightly lighted, Hosanna signals the end of a way of life for both him and Cuirette. He had undertaken his impersonation not as a game but as a means to real power, believing that by resembling a famous Hollywood queen in her role as Queen of the Nile, he too would be seen as a queen, and be recognized as the reigning "folle" in Montreal. Thus Claude Lemieux willingly disappeared in order to represent Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra. When he found himself surrounded by Cleopatras at the club, he realized the price of imitation: he had covered up what was distinctive and vital, and as a result, looked like every other transvestite at the costume party. Failing to make a reputation for his impersonation meant losing the status and power he had acquired over the years. Suddenly, however, status seemed unimportant; he discovered the existence of Claude Lemieux who was determined to be himself without disguise. It was then that Cleopatra died and Claude Lemieux began to live.

In the bright lights at the club, Hosanna recognized himself as a man, and rejected his "femme" roles. In the bright lights of Lafontaine Park, Cuirette recognized himself as a man in love with a man, and rejected his role as "beu." When he discovered that he could not find partners in the park as he once did, his first reaction was a sense of loss. Then he realized that shadowy encounters were no longer important; his relationship with Hosanna was all that mattered. Later reflecting on their quarrel about who was the "real" man, he saw that such definitions were irrelevant; as a couple, they were free to arrange

their activities according to their own needs and preferences. Thus discarding preconceived notions about how men and women should live, Cuirette freed himself to make choices that promote spontaneity and integrity.

The play concludes with a simple but confident declaration of selfhood. Cuirette acknowledges that it is important for Hosanna to be himself, and in telling Hosanna this, Cuirette also indicates his readiness to accept the fact that Hosanna is a man. Hosanna resolves his own dilemma by defining "man" according to given physical characteristics. Behavior involves choice, and to define behavior as either masculine or feminine would be arbitrary and confining. By defining "man" in only physical terms, Hosanna accepts his body and asserts his freedom from the confining social norms and roles which have traditionally determined how men and women should act.

Hosanna and Cuirette are the first Tremblay characters whose transformation occurs on stage. Carmen's decision to leave home is shown, but we do not see her in the process of establishing her freedom. Hosanna explores the experience of two men as they free themselves from confining roles and self-images. They have chosen to withdraw from conventional society, and therefore are not subject to some of its standards; nevertheless, as active members of the homosexual community, they have accepted the values of their group and conform to its expectations. Not unlike the belles-soeurs, they have begun to feel confined, but their revolt is carefully thought out. Initially, Hosanna's dreams are not too different from Thérèse's; if he eventually sees that his goals are inappropriate, and selects new ones, it is because he has learned that he alone is responsible for his life. He

and Cuirette waste little time in self-pity, nor do they seriously blame either themselves or others for the choices which they have made. They think about what has happened in order to understand; then they accept responsibility for mistakes and decide what to do next. In short, they are very ordinary human beings who learn to exercise freedom. Their achievement is far from spectacular; it is significant, however, for it suggests that freedom is available--not for the asking--but to everyone who is willing to take responsibility for exercising it.

Notes

¹ Michel Tremblay, Hosanna suivi de La Duchesse de Langeais (Montréal: Leméac, 1973) 40. All further references will be contained within the text.

Bonjour, là, bonjour: Surviving Family Bondage,
Reviving Family Bonds

Bonjour, là, bonjour, which opened August 22, 1974 in Ottawa, focuses on the transition from dependence to freedom in family relationships. The central figure is Serge, who is under pressure to decide how he will relate to each of seven family members. He resists the attempts of his two aunts and three married sisters to manipulate him, and in doing so, consciously refuses strategies and goals which he had not questioned as a child and youth. On the other hand, he acknowledges his incestuous relationship with Nicole, his youngest sister, and although he condemns the circumstances which promoted it, he declares his intention to live with her permanently, whatever the social penalties may be. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, Serge overcomes the barriers which have separated him from his father, and establishes meaningful communication with him for the first time in their lives.

By raising the issue of incest, Tremblay invites spectators to look beneath conventional moral labels to determine whether a given relationship fosters dependence or self-realization and responsible freedom. Serge and Nicole apparently feel incapable of establishing independent families of their own, but believe that they have established a mutually satisfying and responsible relationship as a couple, and therefore are entitled to continue it, even though it is not sanctioned by society. Tremblay further complicates the issue by

showing how the mother, or mother substitute, in this case, may control or use her children in order to meet her own unrecognized needs, even ones which are sexual in nature. Thus, another aspect of the moral code is questioned as certain child-rearing practices are examined and shown to interfere with the healthy development of children's sexuality. Since incest is a subject about which people have strong feelings, Tremblay minimizes the emotional aspects; Serge and Nicole embrace, but their love-making is not shown. Descriptions which emphasize the couple's tenderness and happiness further distance the sexual element which many theatre-goers might find disturbing. Above all, attention is given to the way this unorthodox couple has tried to determine personal values and lead lives consistent with those values. The play thus deals with a potentially controversial subject in a very reasoned manner.

There are no stage directions to specify the time and setting of this one-act play, but the conversations indicate that the events take place on the evening of Serge's return from a three-month vacation in Europe. As the play opens, Serge is eating an evening meal with his father and two aunts, Charlotte and Albertine. He then visits each of his four sisters, and finally returns to his father's home at the end of the play. All characters remain on stage throughout the performance. The lack of realistic details in the staging of the play serves as another distancing technique. Audiences are invited to listen and then reflect on what they have heard, and yet see that none of it is "real."

Instead of organizing the text into scenes which follow each other in chronological order, Tremblay treats the play as if it were a piece of vocal music, with thirty-one numbered sections which are also labeled according to the number of voices heard, from "Solo" to "Octuor." The

voices, once introduced, progress in chronological order, except for Serge's. He moves back and forth in time according to the person with whom he is talking at the moment. For example, the conversation which takes place at supper with Gabriel and the two aunts is heard in eight installments, from Section 1 to Section 29; in Section 29, Serge concludes his conversation with his father, says goodbye to everyone whom he has visited, and discusses with Nicole the need to find Gabriel a different place to live. This interweaving of voices brings out the complex network of values and attitudes within which Serge must act, and forces the audience to experience some of the tension and confusion which make it difficult for Serge to maintain his perspective and keep his goals in clearly in mind.

The most insistent voices are those of Serge's aunts and married sisters, who all demand his attention and help. Although they feel no obligation to conform to traditional roles, they have developed their individuality in only the most superficial ways, and are not strong enough to identify and pursue meaningful goals. Tremblay has called them "des produits parfaits de la société de consommation de femmes."¹ Since they have not experienced the satisfactions which they think should be theirs, they try to dull their disappointment with pills, food, and extra-marital affairs. Still dissatisfied, they want Serge to be their "magic helper," a term coined by Erich Fromm to indicate someone who enables others to obtain what they expect from life. For the person who depends on a "magic helper," Fromm explains, "the question then is no longer how to live oneself but how to manipulate 'him' in order not to lose him and how to make him do what one wants,

even to make him responsible for what one is responsible oneself."² And manipulate is exactly what these women try to do.

Serge is not duped by the strategies used to enlist his services as "magic helper." His two aunts, for example, claim that he owes them a debt of gratitude because ever since his mother died ten years ago, they have run his father's home. Although it is not clear that their help was either wanted or needed, each one points to her "sacrifice" to justify her request: Albertine wants Serge to come back home, whereas Charlotte would like to have a room with him and Nicole. (Neither one is fully aware of the incestuous relationship between Serge and his sister.) Complaining of poor health, boredom, and each other, they often sound like traditional martyrs. In fact, however, they want more than a sympathetic audience; they want someone to transform their lives, a "magic helper" who will enliven their dull existence, giving them a sense of purpose and a feeling of accomplishment.

Initially, the aunts' requests are unobtrusive, for neither one wants the other to know her plans. Then, hearing Serge invite Gabriel to live with him and Nicole, the two women join forces to protest that they are being abandoned. Serge briefly loses patience, commanding "Vos yeules!"³ He apologizes for his sharp words, but the women are upset by the change in store for them. They have been in charge at Gabriel's; now they will be obliged to live with their children, a situation which will undoubtedly be more confining than their present one. Serge knows that they prefer to remain where they are, and will blame him for upsetting their lives, but is willing to pay that price in order to free his father from their domination.

Although Serge's mother lived until he was fifteen, the three older sisters participated in his care and recall with pleasure their role in his life. Lucienne, twenty when Serge was born, bought him gifts of candy, clothes, and even his first record player. She was his "deuxième moman," and he was her "p'tit soldat" (81-82). Monique especially liked giving him and Nicole their baths, while Denise preferred rough-housing and telling scary stories. "Pis j'aimais ça te faire peur parce que j'pouvais te tripoter comme j'voulais," she remembers (83). Thus through Serge, Denise and Monique found an outlet for their own emerging sexuality, while Lucienne enjoyed the feeling of dominating her brother through her economic power. In the process of meeting their own needs, all three sisters made manipulation a habit.

Merely by visiting Monique and Denise, Serge recognizes their existence and gives them a little of the attention they both long for. Listening patiently to familiar complaints, Serge repeats advice he has given many times before, but because he suggests what they must do for themselves, they do not listen. They want to hear only what he or someone else can do for them. Both sisters comment on his good looks and sex appeal, obviously hoping that he will treat them as sexually attractive, and therefore important in a system which values women as sex objects. Monique, having taken a tranquilizer just after his arrival, is in no condition to press her case, but Denise persistently tries to draw Serge into the kinds of games they played when he was small. Only after repeated objections, does he finally make her understand that he does not enjoy her suggestive remarks and behavior.

In talking to both sisters, Serge avoids criticism and blame, gives advice only if asked, and does not allow himself to be pushed into doing

things against his will. He has little hope that they will ever understand their own situation, much less his, and while he does not want to break his ties to them, he is prepared for that possibility. He does not, however, tell them that he and Nicole are lovers. Monique is shocked when she learns of it from Lucienne, but when she in turn tells Denise, Denise refuses to believe her. Given their inability to face the facts of their own lives, it seems likely that they will choose to ignore the fact of incest. This would permit them to keep on thinking of Serge as a potential "magic helper."

Lucienne represents Serge's most formidable obstacle to the exercise of his freedom. An observant, but unprincipled woman who expects to dominate her younger brother through a combination of money and blackmail, she is used to having her own way. Early in life, determined not to be "toute nue dans'rue" like her mother, she set economic security as her top priority in life, and did not hesitate to renounce her cultural heritage in order to succeed (42). Instead of marrying "un p'tit crotté de Canadien français" whose children would be "complexés," she wanted to be "du bon côté d'la clôture, du côté de l'argent," which meant marrying an English Canadian (43). To achieve this goal, she "invested" in a medical student too poor to pay for dates, but who now has a very good income. "Je l'ai voulu, mon Anglais successful, ben je l'ai!" she boasts (43). The problem, she claims, is that her plans have all gone like clockwork, and now she is bored. She and her husband have little to say to each other, and her children do not interest her; even the pleasure of spending money has its limits. Serge listens, unimpressed by her success, and untouched by her appeals for sympathy. Moreover, he refuses to let himself be provoked by the

criticisms and high-handed commands to which she feels entitled as eldest sister. Realizing that Serge is no longer her obedient "p'tit soldat," Lucienne simply increases the pressure, confident that he will eventually yield.

The more Lucienne calls attention to signs of her power and authority, the more it becomes apparent that she has none. She controls neither Serge nor her husband and children. This would explain her choice of lover, a young man who is one of Serge's friends, and whose name is Robert--like her husband Bob, and son Bobby. If she can dominate Robert, she can enjoy the illusion of dominating all the men in her life--husband, son, and brother. Serge, however, wants no part in her schemes for meeting Robert. Her love affair, he insists, must be her responsibility. Not to be refused, Lucienne threatens that unless he helps her, she will tell the other sisters about his incestuous relationship with Nicole. Although she holds Monique and Denise largely responsible for having encouraged Serge's intimacy with Nicole when they were children, Lucienne expects Serge to feel guilty for violating one of society's strictest taboos. Assuming that he is in a weak and vulnerable position, she tries to diminish still further his sense of self-worth:

C'que j'fais, moé, c'est pas malade, Serge! I was so ashamed!
C'est vous autres, les malades! Vous avez pas honte, quand
vous vous retrouvez face à face? Hein? Ca vous fait rien?
Ca vous excite, peut-être? J'gare que tu serais même pas
capable de bander devant une fille qui serait pas ta soeur!
(66).

Lucienne's original goal is all but forgotten as she assaults Serge's masculinity. His independence is an intolerable reminder of her own weakness, and intensifies her desire to dominate him. She therefore attacks what she thinks is his weakest point, his sexual conduct. She

treats incest as proof that he is an inadequate male, seeking to emasculate him further and render him impotent. Later, for the same reason, she will refer to him as "une tapette manquée," adding "Ouan, j'en ai rêvé, mon p'tit gars, j'en ai rêvé! J'me sus dit pendant longtemps que c'était c'qui pouvait t'arriver de mieux" (87). This remark introduces a Duo in which Lucienne continues to belittle Serge's manliness, arguing that he should have been a homosexual, while Nicole recalls the couple's love-making and their happiness together. These speeches, addressed to Serge, suggest by their juxtaposition that despite Lucienne's comments, Serge has no doubts about his sexuality, and finds his relationship with Nicole deeply satisfying.

Lucienne's failure to manipulate Serge casts doubt on everything she claims to have achieved, and on all of her basic assumptions and values as well. From childhood she equated money with power; as a young woman, there was no better evidence of her success than giving Serge the presents no one else in the family could afford, and to have him listen to her and respect her wishes. "Tu t'en rappelles," she reminds him, "tu faisais toute c'que j'avouais (80). More than a display of power, her gifts were also intended to shape Serge's tastes and values, and to make him feel indebted to her. But as he grew older, Serge became aware of himself as an individual, and finding that he did not share Lucienne's goals in life, he resisted her control. The more independence he displayed, the more she wanted to dominate him, and prove that no French Canadian male was any match for her, especially after she had so successfully allied herself to a prosperous English Canadian. Although Serge is far from wealthy or morally perfect, he

does not fear her power, and by not yielding to her, he shows the limits of her authority.

Serge is not eager to discuss what he considers to be personal matters, so when Lucienne first brings up the subject of incest, he merely acknowledges that she is right and that he is in love with Nicole. Then, when she persists, he tries to make her understand his values and the self-questioning and thought that have gone into his final decision. He assures her that he and Nicole were aware of the gravity of their situation, and explains that the purpose of his long and expensive trip to Europe was to allow him and Nicole time alone to make a responsible decision. After noting that as children they had not had much choice about their relationship, he continues:

Ben là, j'y suis, dans les bras de Nicole! Pis a l'a trente ans, pis moi j'en ai vingt-cinq! Ca fait qu' imagine-toé donc que j' me sus posé des questions, un moment donné! Okay, j'y suis dans les bras de Nicole, mais c'est-tu ça que j' veux vraiment? Chus-tu ben dans les bras de Nicole? Ben après trois mois passés sans elle, j' te dirai, Lucienne, que oui, chus ben dans les bras de Nicole, pis que oui, j' vas y rester le plus longtemps possible! Que t' ayes honte de moé ou non, qu' on soye obligé de déménager ben loin ou non, on est ensemble, Lucienne, pis tant qu' on va pouvoir, on va rester ensemble! Pour moé, tout est clair, tout est simple, astheur, chus sur de mon affaire: moé, c' est de l' amour, Lucienne, du vrai, sans histoires d' intérêt pis de sécurité en arrière; c' est de l' amour, pis c' est beau! C' est beau! (Author's emphasis, 90).

The decision making-process begins with a "prise de conscience" as Serge faces the facts of his behavior and examines his personal values. He realizes that in the past he had been influenced by his sisters, and knows that he must now decide for himself how he wants to live. Fully aware that society condemns incest and can ostracize offenders, Serge is nevertheless mainly concerned with the interaction between him and Nicole, and the quality of their life as a couple. Convinced that their

love for each other is spontaneous, not calculating and self-serving (as is Lucienne's, he implies), and prepared to accept the consequences of their behavior, Serge believes that he and Nicole have made the best choice for their future happiness. "On va s'aider à vivre, tou'es deux," he tells Lucienne, "pis on va vieillir ensemble, c'est-tu assez beau, on a décidé qu'on vieillirait ensemble sans se faire de mal!" (91).

Implicit in their choice is a refusal of authoritarian relationships and conventional family relationships as well. The reciprocal verbs and terms such as "tou'es deux," and "ensemble" emphasize shared purpose and mutual concern. Serge and Nicole have also eliminated the notion of sex roles; gender is part of their identity, but it is irrelevant to many aspects of their behavior. Their relationship is free of socially determined expectations of how men and women should act, and is constantly monitored by a skillful and sensitive communication process. Conspicuous by its absence is any expression of regret at the thought that they should remain childless. Perhaps because as children they experienced manipulation in the guise of love, they fear that if they established conventional families of their own, they would unconsciously resort to the same kind of authoritarian behavior to which they were subjected.

Nicole, quiet and unassuming, displays none of the authoritarian traits which characterize her aunts and sisters. The contrast between her and the other women is emphasized from the moment she tries to speak in Section 3, an "Octuor." Twice she begins, but stops, as if excluded by a wall of words. Finally, on her third attempt, she speaks, and Serge hears her as she asks: "Vas-tu r'venir rester avec moé?" (40). After a long embrace, which itself is an answer, he assures her that his

mind is now made up: "Oui... oui... oui!" (40). Reunited at last, they reaffirm in person the decision already announced in their letters.

Like her sisters and aunts, Nicole believes that words are important, but whereas the other women try to monopolize the power of words by speaking more often than they listen, Nicole listens, even to herself. Hearing unintended criticism in one of her remarks, for example, she quickly revises her statement. As a good listener, Nicole gives the speaker time to formulate an answer. When Serge was in Europe, impatient as she was to hear from him, she waited until he wrote first, allowing him time to reach his decision without interference from her. Her aunts and sisters intercede in favor of the answers they want to hear, and many never hear the actual response. Thus Denise thinks Serge has agreed to come live with her family, and does not realize her error until Monique phones. Even then, Denise does not listen to everything Monique has to say, and hangs up on the unwelcome news. Nicole is the only one of the sisters to notice that the aunts not only talk incessantly, but also never listen, and she alone realizes the consequences for Gabriel. "Y peut pas rester tu-seul avec eux autres plus longtemps, là," she tells Serge, "C'est pus possible, y vont le rendre complètement fou!" (92). A world where no one listens is dehumanizing; a speaker is a non-person until he is heard.

Despite her joy at Serge's return Nicole discovers that she feels "gênée," and aware that this reduces the spontaneity of her welcome, she tries to explain her behavior: "Mes vieilles peurs me reviennent... J'ai l'impression que j't'ai trop tripoté... J'sais qu'on avait dit qu'on parlerait pus de ça... mais j'voudrais tellement pas que tu te sentes comme un p'tit gars avec sa mère (83). In her happiness and

excitement, Nicole is afraid of returning to patterns of behavior established in childhood. Old habits are not easily broken, and even now she must consciously exercise her will to avoid the once-automatic responses of her youth.

Having been reminded of their past, Nicole cannot stop until she has thought through the whole sequence of events leading to the present situation. For years, she had neither foreseen nor willed their eventual union; the family is to blame, she insists. Then she recalls the moment she realized that their relationship had changed: Serge was looking at her not as a brother looks at his sister, but as a man looks at a woman. "J'ai eu tellement peur!" (88). Yet she concedes that without admitting it to herself, she too had desired this. After the consummation of their love, "tellement effrayant, pis tellement beau en même temps," she wished they could both die so no one would know, and especially so that she would not have to remember. The following day, to her surprise, she felt happy, and soon their relationship seemed normal and above all, "beau" (88, 89). Nicole then describes her anxiety as she waited to hear from Serge, and her happiness when she finally learned of his decision. She ends her recapitulation of past events by concluding: "T'as ben faite de toffer tes trois mois... Là, on est sûr" (92). Nicole feels reassured. She regrets the circumstances which brought them together, but believes that they have transcended their situation through love.

During the course of the play, the relationship between Serge and his father undergoes a change which is indicated by their progress from one-way conversations to genuine dialogue. In Section 1, although Serge is present, he never speaks. In the opening line, Gabriel asks Serge

"Pis, toujours, comment c'était, l'Europe? (25). Before Serge can reply, however, Gabriel begins talking about the trip as an exciting adventure in which he has participated vicariously through Serge's letters. He took pride and pleasure in thinking that his son was seeing places which he had read about, but which no family member had visited. In his enthusiasm, he sometimes told his companions at the tavern about the places Serge described in his letters. Not everyone believed him, but dismissing the skeptics as "ignorants," "une gang de jaloux," he adds that these are men who will never amount to anything (26-27). As Gabriel continues to talk about his interests and activities, it is clear that he does not feel that he is a powerless victim of forces beyond his control. Unlike Gérard and Léopold, the fathers in previous plays, he has not been demoralized by physical limitations or his job. Moreover, through friends at the tavern and his reading, Gabriel has remained in touch with the outside world, thus avoiding the intellectual and emotional atrophy which marks his two sisters, whose inane comments and questions have served as counterpoint to Gabriel's remarks throughout Section 1.

Serge soon discovers that his father's hearing has recently grown worse, and even with the most powerful hearing aid, he can scarcely hear. Nevertheless, Gabriel wants to thank Serge for the hearing aid which the family gave him six or seven years ago. This brings up the whole subject of communication. Gabriel notes that although he could talk to the men at the tavern, he and Serge have never talked easily to each other. His hearing was not the only problem. "J'ai pas été élevé pour ça, j'suppose," he explains, "J'ai toujours été gêné avec vous autres, pis j'pense que j'veus ai gênés avec ça" (76). Too proud to say

how much the hearing aid meant at the time he received it, he still finds it hard to talk about. "Pis ça me prend tout mon p'tit change pour te parler, à soir," he admits (76). Although ill at ease, he continues. Thanks to the hearing aid, he heard his children's voices for the first time, and heard music again for the first time in forty years. "C'est le plus beau cadeau... Le plus beau cadeau de toute ma vie," he tells Serge (79). The aunts at this moment are complaining about having to listen to each other. "Des fois j'envie assez Gabriel d'être sourd," Albertine remarks, showing how unaware she is of her own deafness to those around her (79). Gabriel, who has finally found words to express his feelings, is pleased with his accomplishment. "Tu pourrais dire... que ton vieux père t'aura parlé, une fois, dans sa vie," he concludes (79).

Despite his impaired hearing, Gabriel has apparently always been aware of what was happening in his family, and is concerned with his children's welfare, whether he shares their goals or not. Convinced that Lucienne thinks him a "gros épais," Gabriel never offers her any advice; nevertheless, he does not want to see her ruin her life by having an affair with Robert (46). He also realized what was happening to Serge and Nicole, but did not feel he could intervene. Gabriel's main "handicap" is the upbringing which has made it hard for him to talk to his children. He alludes to it only briefly, yet his remark "J'ai pas été élevé pour ça" pinpoints the problem: men are traditionally expected to be strong and authoritative; they should decide, not discuss. Gabriel has neither conformed to the usual authoritarian male role, nor has he known how to initiate with his children the kind of relationship which would both protect and respect them, and also express

his love. In his thank-you speech to Serge, Gabriel takes an important step toward being the kind of father he has always wanted to be: he acknowledges his handicap and reveals his love for his children. The existence of love in this authoritarian milieu is all the more remarkable in that Gabriel is under no illusions as to his children's strengths and weaknesses. His love is freely given and non-coercive; he asks nothing in return.

Serge's reply is heard eight sections later in a Trio in which the aunts talk as usual, and Gabriel listens. Serge's opening remarks parallel his father's: they have never had a serious conversation and consequently do not really know each other. Serge, too, has felt "gêné" in his efforts to communicate. As a schoolboy, he sometimes wrote letters to his father, but always threw them away, he explains, "parce que j'étais trop gêné pour te les donner" (94). At times he needed to talk to Gabriel just because they were the only two men in the house. Now he must shout intimate feelings; "Pis ça me bloque," he admits, but continues, because he wants Gabriel to hear that he is loved (94). The aunts also continue to talk, even though Serge is shouting, telling his father four times "J't'aime," words which he needs to say, and which he believes that his father needs to hear (95). The aunts' mindless conversation again heightens the significance of what is happening between father and son. Albertine, after telling about how hard it is to fix good meals, has concluded that it is not worth it to keep on trying. Three times remarking "Ca vaut pus la peine," she then concludes the Trio: "Y'est trop tard, pour se forcer, y'est trop tard!" (96).

Gabriel is seventy, and almost completely deaf, but as his tears testify, it is not too late for him: father and son have freed

themselves from their inhibitions and handicaps, and have expressed their love. With Serge and Gabriel, as with Nicole, communication is accompanied by a recognition of feelings which interfere with speaking. "Géné" is used by all three, and they understand that the listener may feel the same way. Serge and Nicole also use the term "bloqué" to describe their inability to put their feelings into words.

Such terms are noticeably absent from the final Section, where Serge and his father, now completely unself-conscious and at ease, discuss Serge's suggestion that Gabriel live with him and Nicole. Gabriel reminds his son that he is old, set in his ways, and not much help around the house, but Serge foresees no problems. Reassured, Gabriel acknowledges that he had hoped for this opportunity: "Si tu savais... Ca fait tellement longtemps que j'attends ça!" (104). There is one more thing to discuss, Serge begins, but Gabriel cuts him short: "Laisse faire, mon garçon... Laisse faire le rest. J'le sais, le reste..." (104). Gently deflecting a needless confession, he reminds Serge that the aunts are listening, and sends him home to bed. The play closes as Serge says good night, "Bonjour, là," and his father replies "Bonjour," a Québécois farewell which also serves to greet a new and long-desired relationship between father and son (105). They are united at last, each affirming the individuality of the other with love and respect.

The discovery of an independent, vital self has been the central event in the three previous plays. Through a brief experience of spontaneous love, the Duchesse realized that despite his years of role-playing and prostitution, he was still a living, feeling person in his own right. Carmen, observing that her parents' way of life was self-

defeating, saw that she was free to choose a different way of life, provided that she would be responsible for her choices. And Hosanna, surrounded by a roomful of Cleopatras, suddenly knew that his role-playing was ridiculous, and began to look for the man beneath the disguise. With this, he and Cuirette were able to move toward a more honest relationship.

In Bonjour, là, bonjour, the emphasis is on the process of forming relationships which respect the integrity and freedom of each person involved. When the play begins, Serge and Nicole have already discovered their freedom as individuals, and have chosen to share a way of life which they think will be mutually fulfilling. During the course of the play, however, several family members attempt to use Serge for their own purposes, thus testing his resolve to live according to the values important to him. Without resorting to the authoritarian strategies used by the others, he not only resists manipulation but also defends the decision to live with Nicole. Serge is unique among Tremblay's characters in his attempts to maintain communication with family members. At the same time, he is not intimidated by the threat of being repudiated by the family, for he knows that acceptance is meaningless if he is not accepted as he is. Integrity is essential to freedom.

The greatest test of Serge's integrity comes when he prepares to tell his father about his relationship to Nicole. By offering to share his life openly and intimately with his father, he not only maintains his integrity, but learns that his father is an even more sensitive and loving man than he had realized, one who respects the rights of his children to make their own choices. At the play's conclusion, the issue of incest seems somehow irrelevant, a false issue used mainly to

emphasize Serge's non-conformity to society's norms governing family relationships. The play's drama is in fact centered on the efforts of two men to find the words they need to express their inner feelings, and thus free themselves from outworn authoritarian definitions of "father," "son," "man." Discarding traditional male roles, they affirm the importance of love, communication, and mutual respect. In doing so, they attain the freedom they have both dreamed of: the freedom to be themselves with each other.

* * *

In this group of plays, through the death of a couple, Tremblay signals the end of two traditional roles: mère de famille and père de famille. Although by 1961, society was becoming less repressive intellectually and sexually, Carmen's liberation is shown to be primarily the result of her ability to identify personal values, and to assume responsibility for achieving the goals she has chosen. In the next two plays, Tremblay explores the problem of establishing non-authoritarian relationships which respect and encourage freedom. By acknowledging their mutual love, Hosanna and Cuirette resist social pressures which emphasize sexual domination, and free themselves from artificial, divisive gender roles. In the process, memories of a manipulative mother are exorcised. In Bonjour, the protagonist consistently refuses to be drawn into authoritarian relationships, choosing instead ones which are mutually supportive and based on love. Central to the play is the formation of a closer bond between father and son, thus ending the feeling of reserve which has separated them. Now, having replaced confining family roles with liberating relationships,

Tremblay will turn from the family to the artist, and to the issues of integrity, freedom, and the artist's place in society.

Notes

¹ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay et la mémoire collective," by Donald Smith, Lettres québécoises automne 1981: 53.

² Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (1941; New York: Discus-Avon, 1965) 199.

³ Michel Tremblay, Bonjour, là, bonjour (Montréal: Leméac, 1974) 103. All further references will be contained within the text.

PART IV
THE ARTIST, INTEGRITY, AND SOCIETY

Sainte Carmen de la Main: The Impossible Role

Sainte Carmen de la Main opened July 20, 1976 as part of a cultural festival associated with the Montreal Olympics. Staged in keeping with the stylistic conventions of Greek tragedy, the play was poorly received by audiences and critics alike, and closed after three performances. In June 1978 a revised version proved more successful, but the play has never enjoyed the popularity of the other plays in the cycle. Since Tremblay has not altered the published text, it stands as he first wrote it, an "opéra parlé" based on Carmen, the daughter who freed herself from her family to become a western singer in A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou.¹ In his 1976 play, Tremblay addresses the question left unanswered in 1971: will Carmen simply internalize her cowgirl role, or will she develop her individuality and become a freer, more creative person? Moreover, if she proves to be an artist, what kind of relationship will she establish with her audience? Using a variety of linguistic and theatrical devices, Tremblay explores these questions not only from Carmen's point of view, but also from the perspective of others who make their living on the Main, either as "bosses" or as prostitutes.

A strikingly theatrical work, Sainte Carmen combines elements taken from many sources. The play's title, one example of the Christian element, announces Carmen's eventual martyrdom and identifies her cause as holy. The religious atmosphere is further emphasized by

Bec-de-Lièvre, the devoted assistant and confidante who helps Carmen dress "comme un enfant de chœur aide un prêtre à revêtir ses derniers ornements avant une cérémonie importante," and who relates three events from Carmen's life as if reading passages from a sacred text.² The overall effect of these devices is to dignify seemingly ordinary events which lead first to self-affirmation and then to self-sacrifice.

Tremblay also makes use of techniques from classical Greek theatre and opera. A double chorus made up of transvestites led by Sandra, and prostitutes, whose leader is Rose Beef, speaks for the forgotten people of the Main whom André Brassard has described as "ces gens qui s'offrent en 'cheap labor,' qui ne survivent qu'en se vendant, et en se vendant mal. La sous-classe de la société".³ While the choral groups also provide information about events and people, their main function is reflect an oppressed people's initial experience of freedom. Because they are not consciously aware of freedom, and cannot discuss it in philosophical or political terms, they describe their experience through the use of a poetic language in which the sun is the central image. Speeches, carefully arranged with attention to rhythm, tempo, and variations of pitch and volume, effectively convey a wide range of emotions. Often the voices unite to express shared joy and hope, and a sense of community. At the play's end, however, the confused jumble of unintelligible sounds suggests that the community has completely disintegrated.

Sainte Carmen takes place on the day of Carmen's first performance at the Rodéo Café after an absence of six months. She has been in Nashville working with more experienced singers. As the play opens, the two choruses are discussing the dawn which they had witnessed earlier.

Usually so slow to rise, the sun had appeared suddenly, "comme un coup de poing rouge au bout d'la Catherine" (6). It was "une grosse boule de feu rouge," "rouge sang," striking, frightening, and yet "beau" (5,6). Neither group had had a profitable night; they were cold, tired, and discouraged, but their mood changed when they saw the sun. Then, in a "bruit d'enfer" Carmen appears before them, and they realize what makes that morning different: "C'est aujourd'hui que Carmen revient pis le soleil a décidé de fêter ça," they exclaim in unison (10). On the street, people joyously greet each other and embrace; at home, others begin to bathe and dress in their best for Carmen's concert. Even the neighborhood streets join in the preparations: "Aujourd'hui, la Catherine s'est fait faire un lifting pis la Main s'est lavée! Carmen est là!" (11). Everyone agrees: "Le soleil, c'est Carmen!" (12). She rose that morning, she warmed the Main all afternoon, and now they chorus, "C'est Carmen qui est au-dessus de moé pis qui me regarde" (12). And that night the sun will not really set over the Main because "c'est à soir que le soleil revient chanter pour nous autres! C'est à soir que le soleil revient chanter...pour moé" (13). Carmen has a message for them all and for each one personally.

Thus Tremblay depicts a people's awakening from a long night of passivity and despair. The sun's red fist suggests that a new day is not born without violence, but the climate has changed, making growth possible at last. Sensing that a significant change is under way, people soon put aside their usual routines and declare a holiday. There is a feeling of camaraderie, and as the sun rises higher, warming people and stimulating them to new activity, they think of Carmen. She could have better jobs if she wished, but she has chosen to return to the

Main, a decision which makes her fans feel as if they mattered to her. Strong and independent, she shares her energy with them, restoring their vitality and reviving their interest in the outside world. And although they do not know what will happen at the concert that night, they are certain that Carmen will help them.

Carmen is indeed determined to help her fans understand and improve their situation. She realizes that to do this, she must first be able to communicate with them successfully. While in Nashville, she translated the new songs herself; "Chus capable astheur," she comments with pride and satisfaction (14). Although the French may not be perfect, she is confident that her Montreal audience will understand her. Moreover, she feels as if the songs now belong to her: "C'est mes chansons à moé, astheur, parce que j'ai travaillé dessus!" (14). Her emphasis on meaning and the need for possessing the language she uses is significant in a community where language and communication have been abused and neglected. Carmen's purpose is thus quite different from the goal of Lisette de Courval, the belle-soeur who wanted to sound French in order to conceal her Québécoise identity. For Lisette, the value of language lay in its power to deceive; for Carmen, the value of language is its power to communicate accurately and honestly feelings as well as ideas. She realizes that truth is necessary for independent thought and action. There is no freedom for people who do not confront reality and distinguish it from disguise and illusion.

During her six months of regular practice with good musicians, Carmen has done more than polish her performance. She has learned that music too has power; it can inspire, lift, and free the spirit, but like

language, it must be controlled and made to serve. Her experiences have given her a new perspective:

Faut dire que j'ai tellement changé en six mois, si tu savais! J'ai une nouvelle chanson, Bec-de-Lièvre, là, que quand j'commence à faire les yodles, à'fin, j'ai pus l'impression que c'est moé qui chante! J'ai l'impression d'être... quequ'chose de grand pis de fort... qui plane, pis qui regarde en bas en suivant le vent... La musique, Bec-de-Lièvre, c'est comme le vent... Faut que t'apprennes à la suivre. Pis faut que t'apprennes à t'en servir! A la dompter! Pis quand tu réussis... t'es pus pareil (15).

In the process of "taming" her music, Carmen found that she was free to be herself, free to create something unique, completely her own. It was an experience which gave her fresh insight into the problems of the Main; equally important, it was an experience which she believed would enable her to communicate with her audience in a direct and powerful way.

But an artist must also be free to perform. In Tooth Pick, Carmen has an enemy determined to prevent her from reaching her audience. Appearing suddenly before her, Tooth Pick reminds her of a threat made before she went to Nashville: "J't'avais dit que j'aurais ta peau si tu r'venais icitte, Carmen. T'es r'venue. J'trouverai ben un moyen de t'avoir" (16). Carmen leaves without replying. Wordlessly Tooth Pick remains on stage for a moment, "comme après une victoire" (16). Then he too exits. The lack of explanation makes his threat seem even more ominous.

Alone on stage, Bec-de-Lièvre recites the first "passage" from the life of Carmen, an account of her birth. Carmen's mother, it seems, understood nothing of childbirth until she entered labor. She assumed that the baby would be delivered through her navel, and was horrified to learn the truth. After Carmen's birth, she is quoted as having said:

"Si la première chose qu'un enfant voit en venant au monde c'est le cul de sa mère, demandez-vous pas pourquoi c'que le monde est dans'marde!" (16-17). Then, it is said, she refused to see her baby for a year.

Misinformed and ignorant, Marie-Louise believed that her child was impure from birth, and rejected her, thus separating herself from life and love as well. In view of her mother's alienation, Carmen's capacity for love is indeed remarkable. She recognizes the human worth in society's pariahs, and through the song which her love for them has inspired her to write, she has experienced transcendence and the joy of creativity. Nevertheless, Tooth Pick's threat is a reminder that Carmen is still physically vulnerable, regardless of her inner strength and the power of her love.

Once again the choruses enter. First Sandra, Rose Beef, and Bec-de-Lièvre discuss Carmen's beauty, her songs, and the rumor that it will be a special evening. Then the choruses describe the scene outside. The Main, with its bright lights, is empty and calm, awaiting the people who will soon be on their way to the Rodéo. Only Hosanna is staying home; "Est trop orgueilleuse," the choruses explain (20). They also mention that the Duchesse will not be there, either. "La duchesse de Langeais est morte assassinée dans un parking, y'a deux semaines," they announce matter-of-factly (20). Unobtrusively mentioned among the Main regulars, these two familiar figures are distinguished in the present context only by their absence. The reference to Hosanna's pride is ambiguous; perhaps he wishes to show that unlike Carmen's admirers, he is strong and does not need her help. The brief report of the assassination is also ambiguous, for it implies the passive, unquestioning acceptance of the system which oppresses them all.

In the past, Carmen gave little thought to how the Main was governed. Concentrating on her music, she did not concern herself with the way Maurice managed his numerous business interests. Now, however, fearing that Tooth Pick will laugh at her and disrupt her concert, Carmen turns to Maurice for help. Since he is Tooth Pick's employer, she tells him that she wants Tooth Pick kept away from the club when she sings, even if he has to be killed. "J'veux que tu le cloues comme t'as cloué Dum-Dum, y'a quatre ans," she insists (21). Carmen sees no reason why Maurice should not take care of this potential problem in the usual way--by force.

Sensing that Maurice is reluctant to do as she asks, Carmen accuses him of being afraid: "Tout le monde tremble devant toé parce que tu peux leur faire du mal, mais des fois j'me demande si tu trembles pas devant tout le monde pour les mêmes raisons" (22). Someday, she predicts, Maurice will be caught and destroyed by the very system which he has created to bring the Main under his control: "T'as mal tissé ta toile, Maurice, pis un bon jour l'araignée pourrait ben mourir étouffée au milieu de ses mouches" (22). He rules the Main "comme un rat sur un corps à vidange," she adds contemptuously; in him, the Main inherited "un roi de seconde main" (22, 23). As for Tooth Pick, "Y'est gros comme une pinotte," she says, implying that he is too small and insignificant to be a threat to Maurice (23).

Maurice denies being afraid of Tooth Pick, but as he reveals the nature of their partnership, it is clear that Carmen has misjudged them both. Maurice uses Tooth Pick to enforce his authority on the Main; he stops at nothing, including murder. Five victims are mentioned specifically, including Dum-Dum and the Duchesse, but there are more.

Although Tooth Pick may look harmless, Maurice explains, he uses his small size to advantage: "C'est ben ça qui fait sa force... Y passe partout. Pis y vise juste. Pis... y'a ben de l'imagination" (25). And because each man knows about the other's crimes, Maurice concludes, "On est pognés ensemble comme deux charognes" (25). The expression aptly describes their unsavory mutual dependence.

Carmen does not disguise her contempt for Tooth Pick, but understands that Maurice would neither fire nor kill him. Nevertheless, she insists that he must not be permitted to interrupt her concert because she has something special to say to her audience: "j'me sus rendu compte que j'avais des affaires à dire au monde parce que moé aussi j'les aime. Ca fait que j'veux pas, entends-tu, j'veux pas qu'un p'tit tueur s'assoie à première table en avant pis qu'y me rote dans'face!" (Author's emphasis, 25-26). Making no promises, Maurice merely asks the reason for Tooth Pick's enmity. Carmen explains that while drunk, he had exposed himself, and she had laughed heartily at the sight. "J'sais pas si c'est de là que ça vient," she concludes, "mais y le porte ben, son nom!" (26). Unperturbed, Carmen treats the whole incident as inconsequential.

The issue undoubtedly involved more than virility, however; Carmen represented a threat to Tooth Pick's control over the people of the Main. Not only had she begun to awaken her audiences to the possibility of change, she possessed an inner strength which Tooth Pick might well have envied and feared. Although she worked for Maurice, she was not dependent on him; Tooth Pick was. She set her own standards as a performer, worked, studied, and now has hopes of going to the top as a singer. Her professional growth has been accompanied by the realization

that the dispossessed people of the Main also have potential for growth. And she believes that she can give them the help they need to get out of their seemingly hopeless situation. Tooth Pick, forever tied to Maurice, has no existence of his own, and is alienated from the society in which he lives. His only power is the power to destroy. In taking a life, he has a brief moment of control which allows him to transcend his dependence and weakness. His vow to "get" Carmen may have been provoked by her laughter at the unimpressive evidence of his manhood, but ultimately he seeks to destroy her because she is self-possessed and unafraid. Somewhat less perceptive than Tooth Pick, Maurice has yet to learn that although Carmen is his mistress and his employee, she is also strong and determined to be free.

The arrival of Gloria initiates further discussion of the entertainer's role. A singer once popular for her Latin American songs, she is "une vraie reine déchue," according to the choruses (28). They say that her songs were enchanting, but when she was no longer present, her magic disappeared, too, "comme si Gloria voulait garder pour elle tu-seule sa musique envoûtante" (28). "Quand Gloria me regarde chus t'un feu d'artifice," they explain, "mais quand Gloria regarde ailleurs... chus pus rien" (28). Now they prefer Carmen's music, and Gloria has not forgiven them for their disloyalty. The purpose of Gloria's visit is to undermine Carmen's confidence just before her concert. First ridiculing western music as inauthentic and trivial, she then asserts: "Nashville, aujourd'hui, kid, c'est rien à côté de Miami Beach en cinquante-cinq" (31). In her mind, success is not measured by music or authenticity, but by the size of the orchestra, the wealth of the audience, and the flamboyant stage effects. In all these ways, she

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boasts, she has surpassed Carmen's achievements. Calling Carmen an amateur, she announces her own plans for a comeback and sweeps out.

In response to Gloria's outrageous remarks, Carmen expresses more compassion than anger. She respects Gloria's achievements, but her own goals are different: "a comprendra jamais que ça m'intéresse pas de descendre du plafond au milieu des balounes en chantant en espagnol" (33). Once again Carmen emphasizes the importance of communication. Gloria, true to her name, seeks glory and personal power. By dazzling her audiences, she hopes to dominate them, but she is the first to be deceived by the empty glitz and glitter of her shows. The choruses, however, have already declared their loyalty to Carmen; the fleeting enchantment of Gloria's music is no match for Carmen's songs, which give them renewed hope.

The relationship between Carmen and Bec-de-Lièvre effectively illustrates the message in her songs. Taking an interest in Bec-de-Lièvre, who was a lavatory attendant at the time, Carmen taught her to help with costumes. But now, impressed with Carmen's progress and plans for songs which she has written herself, Bec-de-Lièvre is afraid that Carmen will no longer want the help of someone with so little talent, and will send her back to her former task. Carmen assures her that there will be no change. Happy to know that she still is wanted and has a contribution to make, Bec-de-Lièvre begins to massage Carmen's neck, using her special technique which helps Carmen relax before a performance. United by mutual affection and respect, the star and her maid work constructively together in a relationship free of the manipulation which binds Maurice to Tooth Pick.

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As the choruses and leaders describe the crowd which is gathering in the Rodéo, they notice that Tooth Pick has taken the best table and ordered champagne. "Y parle à parsonne," they observe in unison, "Y'attend. Mais quoi?" (39). Their question is followed by silence. The tension and alarm now mount rapidly, but despite Bec-de-Lièvre's warnings to be careful, Carmen is confident. "A soir va être un grand soir," she says, repeating the words of the choruses (41). Then she looks out at the audience, sees Tooth Pick and Gloria, and is frightened: "J'y vas pas! J'ai peur de lui! Chus pas capable de monter sur le stage! Chus pas capable!" (42). Panic-stricken, Carmen nevertheless gives the signal for the overture to begin, and stands ready to make her entrance, as Bec-de-Lièvre relates another event in the life of Carmen: her first communion.

It seems that when Carmen tried on the dress she was to wear at her first communion, Marie-Louise exclaimed: "Maudit que t'es laide! Une première communiant, c'est beau, mais toé, t'es laide" (43). Convinced that her daughter was not in a state of grace, she decided to postpone the ceremony for a year. "Si tu fais ta première communion pis que t'es pas en état de grâce, tu vas aller en enfer tout drette," she warned her daughter (43). Frightened, Carmen agreed with her mother's decision to wait, exclaiming "Chus pas capable!" (44). Carmen the singer cries out the same words, then calls for help as she had as a child: "J'veux pas y aller! Moman! Aide-moé!" (44). This overlapping of Bec-de-Lièvre's narrative and Carmen's present behavior emphasizes the similarity of the two situations, but in the case of Carmen's first communion, the warning proved to be unfounded. Without telling her family, she got up early, took communion alone, and resolved that she

would "partir de c'te maison de fous-là au plus sacrant pour se débarrasser de sa mère folle" (44). Then, since it was still early, she went back to bed. "En rêve, Carmen chantait, c'te matin-là. Y paraît," Bec-de-Lièvre concludes (44). In the background, the overture ends; Carmen takes a deep breath, again implores her mother's help, and goes on stage to give her long-awaited concert at the Rodéo.

In this recitation, Bec-de-Lièvre celebrates Carmen's precocious display of independence. Although she was only seven, she refused to be defined as an ugly and unacceptable human being, and took full responsibility for her actions. She found that she was "capable," after all. Then she sang for joy; she had discovered the meaning of freedom.

The night of the concert, however, the situation is different. She knows that she is not in Tooth Pick's good graces, and that sooner or later, he will try to harm her. Yet the waiting audience calls her name, and she cannot refuse them. The special music she has prepared will make possible a new experience of sharing, their first real communion. Although Carmen is afraid, she refuses to be deterred. As Act One comes to a close, Carmen goes ahead with her concert, making a deliberate choice to affirm human worth and freedom, whatever the risk may be.

Tooth Pick opens Act Two as he crosses the stage with a gun under his arm, wordlessly announcing his intention to kill Carmen. When he has exited, Bec-de-Lièvre enters to relate the amazing events which have just taken place.

"Carmen a parlé de moé," Bec-de-Lièvre begins, "Carmen a dit des affaires dans ses chansons qui venaient de ma vie, à moé!" (49). Carmen said that the story of her affair with Hélène was not ugly but beautiful, and that she, Bec-de-Lièvre was "une chanson d'amour endormie

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dans une taverne" (49). Carmen also said of her that she might awake someday and make her mark in the world. "Carmen a dit qu'au fond de moé j'étais forte," she exclaims, amazed at the thought (49).

Soon Bec-de-Lièvre's words are being repeated by Rose Beef, Sandra, and both choruses. The remarks pass from one speaker to another, as they all make the same discovery of self-worth and share the same hope and joy:

TOUS: Carmen a dit qu'au fond de moé j'étais forte!

BEC-DE-LIEVRE: Tout le monde m'a toujours dit que j'étais laide!

SANDRA: Que j'étais vulgaire!

ROSE BEEF: Que j'savais pas parler!

CHOEURS I et II: Que j'étais sale!

TOUS: Tout le monde a toujours eu honte de moé! Mais Carmen m'a dit que j'étais belle pis que je pourrais sortir de la taverne! (Silence.) Sortir de la taverne!

CHOEUR I: Réveille-toé, qu'a l'a dit!

CHOEUR II: Lève-toé qu'a l'a dit!

SANDRA, ROSE BEEF, BEC-DE-LIEVRE: Reste pas effouerrée de même!

TOUS: Reste pas assis! Reste pas assis! J'vas t'aider! (Silence.) Carmen m'a offert de m'aider. Ah! J'oublierai jamais sa dernière chanson! (53).

These simple expressions take on excitement and intensity as they are woven into first one pattern of sounds and then another. The message is the same, yet the arrangement varies, suggesting that while the group shared a common experience, each individual's response was unique. Hearing that they are beautiful and strong encourages them to think of leaving the bars and clubs, and freeing themselves from their sordid lives on the Main. Thus Tremblay represents a people's first glimpse of

themselves as individuals with potential which, although undefined, is within them, to be developed and used by them, for their own purposes.

When Carmen enters, she is being questioned by Maurice about her final number. She admits including a song that was different from the others, but asks:

Penses-tu vraiment que les yodles peuvent faire crier, hurler, siffler, piocher le monde de même? Penses-tu que si j'étais r'venue avec le même genre de paroles qu'avant, que le monde serait monté sur leurs chaises pis même sur leurs tables pour m'empêcher de sortir du stage? Y'a jamais personne qui les a rendus fous de même, Maurice, parce qu'y a jamais personne qui leur a parlé d'eux autres! (57).

Knowing that Maurice does not care about her listeners' needs, she quickly returns to her original argument: she will attract large audiences to the Rodéo.

Maurice, however, sees change as a potential threat. At present, his clientele is weak and easily manipulated; he knows exactly how to profit from the situation. "C'est toute une gang de sans-dessein, pis de sans-coeur, pis de soûlons, pis de dopés," he insists (61). If these people take Carmen's advice, they will grow stronger and more independent, and ultimately stop coming to the Rodéo, he argues; if they are too weak to improve their situation, they will leave anyway because they do not want Carmen to know of their failure. "T'es as secoués, à soir, t'as réussi à les faire brailler, okay, c'est ben beau, chus ben content pour toé, mais tu restes rien qu'une plotte pareille," Maurice continues, thus reinforcing his initial comment that she is "a piece of ass," hired to encourage escapism (61). The people who end up on the Main do not want to be changed or saved; "Y'a rien d'autre à faire avec eux autres que de leur faire cracher leur cennes" (61). That is where she comes in, he explains:

Comprends donc une fois pour toutes que t'es-t-icitte pour faire de l'entertainment, pas plus! On n'est pas à l'armée du salut! Ton rôle consiste à te déguiser en cow-girl à tous les soirs en montrant tes jambes le plus possible, à grimper sur le stage pis à faire baver les hommes en te faisant aller, en sentant fort pis en chantant fort! N'importe quoi, mais fort! Ton talent est dans tes yodles, pis moé, ton boss, tout c'que j'te demande c'est d'être la meilleure du genre, la reine du yodle, une fille que le monde du dehors vont venir entendre chanter parce qu'y vont avoir entendu dire qu'y'en n'a pas une autre comme toé pour se faire aller le gorgoton! (en riant) 'La Main a besoin qu'on y parle de la Main!' La Main a besoin qu'on pogne le cul, c'est toute! (61-62).

Maurice is no philosopher, but he can see that Carmen opposes the system from which he derives his power, and as her "boss," he does not hesitate to tell her what she is to sing: "demain tu reviens à ton ancien répertoire ou ben donc tu chantes pas," he warns (62).

Carmen persists in her arguments, however, claiming that Maurice is part of the problem, since he supplies the alcohol and drugs which are ruining people's lives. She implies that eventually Maurice will destroy his customers, and thus cut off his own source of income. But quite aside from the economic considerations, Carmen is convinced that the people who live and work on the Main are capable of much more than Maurice thinks. She cites the example of his sister, Bec-de-Lièvre, and argues that others would blossom too, once given encouragement and the chance to learn useful skills. "Pendant que j'étais partie, j'ai compris des affaires que j'veux essayer de leur expliquer. Y sont à terre, mais y faut qu'y se relèvent! On n'a pas le droit des laisser là! J'sens que chus capable d'les aider à se relever," she tells Maurice (63-64). She foresees the time when the Main regulars will want to stand up and be seen, to laugh and sing, and to shout: "R'gardez, chus là, me v'là!" instead of whispering: "Oubliez-moé, chus laide!" (64). People will discover that they do not have to live in shame, that despite what they

have been told, they can make something of their lives. Moreover, she declares, now that she has begun, she will not give up:

La Main mérite de vivre mais y faut l'aider à s'en rendre compte! J'ai commencé à soir, Maurice, pis j'm'arrêterai certainement pas là! Si tu veux m'aider, tant mieux. Sinon, tant pis. J'me sens assez sûre de moé pis assez forte pour te tenir tête. J'pourrais ben passer du creux de ton lit à la tête de tes ennemies (64).

Maurice only laughs and repeats his earlier ultimatum: unless she returns to her former repertoire, she is fired. Then he leaves.

Carmen and Maurice have come to the heart of the problem: their differing views of human nature. Maurice sees people as objects to be used: Carmen is "a piece of ass," the customers she attracts are "sans-coeur," to be exploited for every penny they have. He does not perceive anyone, himself included, as an individual with inner potential. Power lies outside the self, to be seized and used for the domination of others; self-mastery has no meaning for Maurice. Carmen, on the other hand, realizes that her fans have internalized the definitions applied to them by society, and believing their situation hopeless, have never considered ways of improving their lives. The example of Bec-de-Lièvre, however, assures Carmen that she can help foster a sense of personal worth. This is the first step in a process which brings release from confinement and leads to a spontaneous, creative way of life.

Reflecting on Maurice's predictions that her fans will inevitably disappoint, even abandon her, Carmen resolves to be so good that they will always want more. Once she has explained this to Maurice, she tells herself, "y va finir par comprendre, chus sûre" (65). But she realizes that she has taken a stand; whether or not she succeeds in helping the people of the Main, she cannot return to the songs she used to sing: "J'peux pus leur parler de mes fausses peines d'amour après

leur avoir chanté leurs vrais malheurs!" (65). To give up now would mean denying her faith in her fans' worth and in their potential achievements. Furthermore, her sense of self is too strong; she must maintain her integrity, and she must continue to grow:

Pis viendra peut-être un jour où j's'rai pus obligée de me déguiser en cow-girl pis de faire des yodles! Peut-être que petit à petit j'vas pouvoir abandonner tranquillement le western pour me trouver un style à moé. Un style à moé! J'ai commencé avec des paroles des autres pis des musiques des autres mais peut-être que j'pourrais finir avec des paroles de moé pis de la musique de moé! Aie! Monter sur le stage sans sentir le besoin... de me déguiser! Aie! (66).

Carmen thus dreams of a quiet revolution during which she will cast off her former disguise and find a style of her own. She does not know what that style will be, but she looks forward to it as a process of self-discovery which will strengthen her and make a genuine contribution to the world in which she lives.

The choruses bring more news of the astonishing response to Carmen's final song. Out on the street, everyone is singing it, they say, "Même les beus. Y savent pas au juste c'qu'y chantent, mais y chantent!" (70). The song's lack of meaning to the "beus" calls attention to the fact that Carmen's message is mainly intended for a very specific group, male and female prostitutes, who all see themselves as worthless, and turn to alcohol and cheap entertainment for temporary escape from their degradation. As Carmen had told Maurice earlier, this is the group which, if helped, "arait envie d'être quelqu'un qu'on écoute pis qu'on respecte au lieu d'être une trainée qu'on viole pour vingt piasses la nuit pis qu'on ignore le jour sauf de temps en temps pour dire d'elle qu'on n'a honte pis qu'a mérite pas de vivre!" (64). These words apply to the Sandras as well as to the Rose Beefs.

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Not surprisingly, then, the members of the chorus are the ones to be most deeply touched by Carmen's song. "J'chanterais de même jusqu'à la fin de mes jours," they exclaim (70). Just as Carmen had predicted, people feel like singing, for they have discovered that the degrading definitions imposed on them by others have no validity. They must decide for themselves who they are and what they can do. As the street empties, they remember that it is time for them to go to work, but suddenly change their minds: "Oui, c'est ça," they declare in unison, "j'vas prendre congé! Tout le monde va fêter, c'te nuitte!" (72). Bec-de-Lièvre, Rose Beef, and Sandra repeat these words as they urge Carmen to join them in the celebration which is ready to begin, but Carmen will not leave until she has showered and changed: "C'est pas la Star qui va aller prendre un verre avec vous autres, c'est juste Carmen," she tells them (73). Twice gun shots have been heard only by the audience; the three people with Carmen sense that she is in danger, but cannot explain their apprehension. Carmen has apparently heard nothing, just as she has not heard the warnings which were stated so plainly earlier by Tooth Pick and Maurice.

When the others have left, Bec-de-Lièvre begins her third and last passage from the life of Carmen. It seems that on the day Carmen's parents died, Carmen had gone to three westerns. As she left the theatre, she saw Gloria, and asked her if she had ever thought of singing western songs in French. Gloria replied--in English--that she did not speak French. By the time Carmen reached home, she had decided to try to talk to her mother, to tell her that she wanted to leave her factory job and become a western singer. Upon learning that her parents were dead, and that she was free to pursue her goal, Carmen rejoiced.

It was a sign from heaven, she told her sister, "aujourd'hui est notre jour de délivrance!" (74). Her words, repeated by the choruses, are followed immediately by two more gunshots. Then Bec-de-Lièvre concludes: "Y paraît... y paraît qu'à l'enterrement de ses parents Carmen avait l'air d'une mariée" (74).

Even as Bec-de-Lièvre relates Carmen's discovery of her vocation, the sound of shots leaves no doubt that Carmen is doomed. If she dies now, will the Main's day of deliverance really come? The members of the double chorus are already watching the horizon, waiting for the sun to rise: "Un jour de délivrance, ça se fait attendre longtemps, mais quand ça se lève, watch out!" (75). But the first light they glimpse is lightening; then they notice that the sky is growing cloudy. Suddenly Tooth Pick comes rushing in to report "un grand malheur." (75). "Le soleil ne se lèvera pas," he announces (75). As he begins the story of Carmen's death, the stage lights take on a yellowish cast and steadily grow dimmer "comme si le double chœur s'éteignait peu à peu" (76).

Careful to present himself as a friend of the Main, Tooth Pick portrays Carmen as a fraud, a master of disguise who had deceived them all, and who deserved to die. Carmen's singing had touched him deeply, he begins, but when he looked for Carmen to congratulate her, he was appalled to overhear Carmen screaming terrible insults at Bec-de-Lièvre. "Carmen ah! si vous l'aviez vue," he tells his listeners, "Carmen était tellement laide!" (77). Now that her success was assured, Carmen had only contempt for Bec-de-Lièvre, and for everyone else on the Main, as well. To make his account more convincing, Tooth Pick pretends to quote Carmen at length:

J'veus ai eus, toute la gang, hein, qu'a disait, Carmen, vous avez toute pris c'que j'veus ai dit pour du cash! Là, vous

vous êtes mis dans'tête que vous pouviez vous en sortir, j'suppose? J'pensais pas vous avoir aussi vite! Mais j'aime mieux ça de même! J'vas faire mon argent plus vite, pis j'vas pouvoir sacrer mon camp plus vite! (78)

Repeatedly Tooth Pick emphasizes Carmen's scorn for her fans; she laughed "comme une folle" to think of their credulity (78). Not only had they believed her when she told them that they were "beaux," "fins," and "intelligents;" they had even thought they could lift themselves out of their present situation. Then Carmen revealed what she really had in mind:

Ecoute ben ça, Bec-de-Lièvre: à partir de la semaine prochaine, ça va coûter le double pour venir m'entendre vous faire accroire que vous allez vous en sortir! Vous allez cracher, mes hosties, vous allez vous saigner à blanc pour m'entendre chanter que vous êtes beaux! Pis j'espère même que vous allez vous endetter pour m'entendre rire de vous autres! Vous vous en sortirez jamais, Bec-de-Lièvre, parce que vous êtes trop mous! (78-79).

Finally, Tooth Pick reports, Carmen said that she was sending Bec-de-Lièvre back to her job as lavatory attendant. It was then that Bec-de-Lièvre seized the gun which Maurice kept nearby, and fired the fatal shots. Quietly the double chorus exclaims "Ah!" and disappears from sight as stage lights are completely extinguished (79).

Holding the gun at arm's length, Bec-de-Lièvre enters slowly. Her whole world has collapsed: "Quand Carmen est morte, assassinée par Tooth Pick, y'a juste une p'tite lesbienne... innocente... qui est restée à côté d'elle" (80). She does not resist as Tooth Pick takes the gun from her.

Now in command of the situation, Tooth Pick tells Maurice that he has once more done a job for him, thus increasing Maurice's indebtedness to him. Tooth Pick, not Maurice, announces that the Rodéo will close for a week, then reopen with Gloria back in her rightful place. When

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Tooth Pick has left, Maurice tells his sister: "Si tu vends Tooth Pick, tu me vends" (81). There is a moment of silence; then, "au milieu de criailleries, de hoquets, de borborygmes, de sons inarticulés," Gloria appears in garish stage lights (81). Above the sounds of the Latin American music, "anémique et souffreteuse," only two words are audible: "mi coraçon."⁴

The final events seem to suggest that Carmen's efforts were futile, and that the situation on the Main is hopeless. Tooth Pick has murdered Carmen, discredited her memory, and replaced her with a singer whose music is tasteless and trite. Who will defend her memory and sing her song? Who will help the people of the Main? Not one of Carmen's fans challenges Tooth Pick's statements, and Bec-de-Lièvre, her hagiographer in the past, is nearly speechless. She names the real murderer, but does nothing to defend Carmen against the character assassination already under way. Tooth Pick, not Bec-de-Lièvre, now controls Carmen's story, and is doing everything in his power to destroy her reputation.

Opening just months before the Parti québécois was voted into power, Sainte Carmen did not reflect the general mood in Quebec, and the pessimistic ending in particular is cited as a factor in the play's initial failure. As director André Brassard later commented: "one had the impression that Carmen's entire life, spirit, message were wiped out by that ending."⁵ For the revised version, which was well accepted by audiences, he transposed lines from Carmen's dialogue, and ended the play on a more positive note. "Otherwise," he explained, "we would have ended in a kind of black hole."⁶ When Tremblay wrote the play, however, he thought that the promise of the 60s had not been fulfilled. Thus after Marie-Lou, which showed Carmen's successful break with the past,

he wrote a sequel in which her attempt to exercise freedom soon led to a dead end, as had the Quiet Revolution, in his opinion.⁷ The issue relevant to the present discussion, however, is not Tremblay's judgment of the Quiet Revolution, but rather the way in which he has depicted the experience of freedom and the forces within society which oppose freedom.

Carmen the singer is portrayed as an exceptional but believable individual who achieves personal freedom despite her home environment and the milieu in which she works. Only when she begins to distinguish her experience of self from the self ascribed to her by her mother, she is soon ready to take responsibility for her decisions. Initially ignoring the hoodlum tactics of the man who is both her lover and her employer, Carmen retains her individuality and independence, and steadily continues to develop her talents as a singer. Nashville marks a turning point: through a transcendent experience of beauty, truth, and freedom, she gains a new perspective on her music and on her friends along the Main. Fully conscious of her individuality and of the world in which she lives, she actively defines her role in society. At last in complete "possession de soi," she returns to Montreal eager to help her fans make the same kind of progress. Their response to her songs confirms her judgment and strengthens her resolve. She is Carmen the sun; her songs have enlightened her listeners. Totally committed to the people who need her help, she refuses to compromise her integrity or that of her audience. But the Main is an authoritarian world where those who have power defend it; Carmen must therefore die, a martyr to her cause.

Through the double chorus, Tremblay gives powerful expression to a people's rising hopes as they begin to realize that they possess inner resources which, if developed, could transform their lives. Their initial mood of festive anticipation becomes an exultant celebration of release from definitions which had once seemed irrefutable and final. They are free, not subject to fate, as they had believed. Then their hopes vanish when they hear of Carmen's death; disappearing from sight, they make their presence known only through inarticulate sounds heard in the background. Their loss of speech implies that they are no longer human, no longer capable of thought, choice, or freedom. Once again worthless "no-goods," drunks, and dope addicts, they will be easy prey for Maurice and Tooth Pick. Already forgotten, will Carmen the martyr become a saint?

Carmen's death is consistent with what we know about her and her assassin, but while we might expect her fans to be in a state of complete despair, Tremblay goes too far in portraying the entire group as still unable to voice a coherent thought when the Rodéo reopens a week after her death. To do this is to deny their basic humanity--which is what the play has until then so effectively demonstrated. Although inconsistent with what preceded it, the final scene is too sketchy to invalidate the powerful and insightful portrayal of Carmen's freedom and her fans' first awareness of their individuality. Sainte Carmen also contains a forceful reminder that while the artist may have an important role in bringing about a people's "prise de conscience," this experience is only a first step toward "possession de soi" and freedom.

Notes

¹ Renate Usmiani, Michel Tremblay (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1982) 114.

² Michel Tremblay, Sainte Carmen de la Main (Montréal: Leméac, 1976) 14. All further references will be contained within the text.

³ André Brassard, interview in L'Envers du décor 10.7 (mai-juin 1978): 5, quoted by Usmiani in Michel Tremblay 18.

⁴ "Coraçon" is presumably the way Gloria spells "corazón."

⁵ André Brassard, interview, "Discovering the Nuances," by Renate Usmiani, Canadian Theater Review 24 (Fall 1979): 39-40.

⁶ Brassard, interview by Usmiani 40.

⁷ See Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 110-111.

Damnée Manon sacrée Sandra: Body and Soul,
Playwright and Novelist

Damnée Manon sacrée Sandra opened February 24, 1977, bringing back to the stage two familiar figures: Manon, Carmen's younger sister in Marie-Lou, and Sandra, the transvestite chorus leader in Sainte Carmen. Now neighbors on rue Fabre, Sandra and Manon devote their lives to their respective obsessions, sex and religion, but their needs prove to be surprisingly similar in this playful and often bawdy treatment of Quebec's dualist heritage. Even the title provides a context which transforms the traditional dichotomy "damnée/sacrée" into synonyms. Then in the play's closing lines, attention is drawn from the characters to the playwright as Manon announces that she was "invented by Michel;" Sandra too declares that he was invented.¹ Once thought to mark "la fin de Manon et la fin du monde de Michel Tremblay," this ambiguous finale now appears to have signaled not an end, but renewal.²

The many contrasts between Manon and Sandra give the play its drama, while the plot, if it may be called that, brings out the similarities between the two protagonists. At first, however, only their differences are obvious. On one side of the stage, the pious Manon, dressed in black, sits in a rocking chair in a corner of her white kitchen. Sandra, a transvestite prostitute, is wearing white; he lives near Manon in a black "loge" not unlike an actor's dressing room (27). As they talk to themselves, they state the basic assumptions on which they have built their lives. "La solution à toute... c'est le bon

Dieu," asserts Manon, while Sandra announces with equal conviction: "Y'a pas de qui, y'a pas de quand, de où, de pourquoi, la réponse c'est toujours le cul" (27). After discussing their differing value systems, they conclude in unison: "Des fois j'me demande à quoi j'pouvais ben penser avant de penser à ça! J'm'en rappelle pus... j'tais trop petite!" (30-31). This introduction is followed by a series of alternating monologues ("confessions," as they are called in the text) in which Sandra and Manon discuss their day's activities, showing that they both experience a combination of sexual and spiritual needs, but cannot explain what accounts for their feelings of dissatisfaction (31).

Manon

During the introductory exchange of remarks, Manon describes her relationship to God as personal and intimate, the result of meditation rather than formal instruction or study. "J'me sus rendue compte par moé-même que c'est vrai que le bon Dieu existe, " she declares (29). Then in a five-part monologue, she talks about her experiences that morning, revealing her efforts to satisfy unacknowledged physical desires and yet maintain her self-image as a saintly woman with a special calling in life. Manon is, of course, Catholic, but her religious experiences are not mediated by the clergy or formal church services. They are instead the result of a life of private prayer and devotion, a way of life inspired by her mother, Marie-Louise. At one time Manon had hoped to become a nun, but that was not to be her destiny. Speaking directly to God, Manon recalls: "Vous m'avez dit vous-même en dedans de moé, vous m'avez doucement mais fermement murmuré à l'oreille que ma place était (...) icitte! A la place de ma mère, dans la chaise berçante de ma mère, dans le lit de ma mère, dans la Vie

de ma mère... Vous avez exigé de moé que je perpétue ma mère qui était une sainte" (57). Manon's prayers are now the central experience of her life, but she has begun to notice that she no longer feels God's presence as she once did. The problem, she decides, is her rosary: "Chus tannée des petits chapelets cheap qui pèsent rien pis qui ont l'air de rien, j'ai pus l'impression de prier quand j'les ai dans les mains" (31). To solve this problem, she goes shopping for a rosary which will lend greater substance and weight to her religious life.

A large rosary obviously meant for institutional use immediately catches Manon's attention, and as soon as she touches it, she knows that it is special: "Quand j'y ai touché, là... même si y'est pas bénit, c'est drôle, hein, mais quand j'y ai touché j'ai senti comme quequ'chose de vivant, dedans... Y'était ... chaud. (Silence.) Les grains sont gros comme la moitié de mon poing... pis quand on en prend quatre ou cinq dans nos mains... c'est pesant, pis chaud, pis vivant" (33). She tells the saleswoman that she must have it, regardless of the price: "J'le veux. Tu-suite. J'en ai de besoin" (33-34). As she unhooks it from the wall, she again notices its weight. "C'est peut-être la présence du bon Dieu qui est si pesant," she thinks, and holding it in her arms feels inexplicably happy (34).

To give her life meaning, Manon interprets everything that happens to her from the perspective of Biblical history and Church doctrine. Unable to admit that her happiness results from the sensuous pleasure she derives from the rosary, Manon begins to feel guilty. On her way home, noticing a discarded missal in a trash barrel, she interprets it as a sign that she should "sacrifice" her new purchase. Protesting to God that His demands are excessive, Manon nonetheless puts the rosary

into the garbage can with the missal, only to be ridiculed by a passing child. She thereupon retrieves her rosary and runs home, where she locks the door, closes the blinds, and through prayer attempts to reconcile her behavior with her self-image.

Placing the rosary at the feet of a life-sized statue of the Virgin, Manon complains: "Votre Fils m'en demande vraiment trop," and begs the Virgin to intercede in her favor (43). Manon then touches each bead of her new rosary; by the time she finishes, she is convinced that "la Vierge Marie avait tout arrangé avec son Fils" (43). Next she touches the crucifix, and finds it warm with "la chaleur du bon Dieu, pas celle du Diable," a sign that she has indeed been forgiven (43). Suddenly, however, she is overcome by a different feeling:

J'ai senti comme un besoin... j'ai senti un besoin effrayant de l'embrasser... (Silence.) J'comprendais pas... J'avais la croix dans les mains, pis... (Silence.) Tout d'un coup j'me suis mis à embrasser le corps de Notre-Seigneur comme si ça avait été la dernière affaire que je ferais dans ma vie! J'tais sûre que j'étais pour mourir... foudroyée, après! La joie! La joie pure! J'avais comme des boules de bonheur qui m'éclataient dans le coeur pis j'avais de la misère à respirer! (43-44).

Remembering how God had tested Abraham, Manon decides that God had been testing her, too, and because she had been willing to sacrifice her most precious possession, her new rosary, God is pleased with her. Having temporarily explained away a profoundly disturbing experience, Manon then falls asleep.

Having been deeply influenced by dualist teachings, Manon thinks that to gratify the senses is to risk corruption, and cannot help but suspect that her pleasure in handling her rosary is somehow sinful. However, alone in the dim and artificial light of her bedroom, she addresses the Virgin freely, without mentioning what really troubles

her, and soon feels forgiven and returned to favor with God. Her silences as she relates her ecstatic experience of kissing the crucifix suggest that she now perceives the erotic element, but cannot admit it. Turning to the Bible, she finds a way to justify her behavior and cover up the physicality which she believes is evil.

Successful though her conscious efforts may be in repressing feelings which frighten her, Manon is forced to admit that she cannot control what happens when she is asleep, and, she declares, "des affaires qu'on peut pas contrôler, c'est mauvais" (49). Despite her desire to forget the dream she had that morning, she can forget neither the dream nor the memories which it evoked of Hélène and her young cousin Michel, who was Manon's favorite childhood playmate. Hélène, she recalls, "est-tait ben belle, mais a faisait peur, comme un ange déchu (...) que le bon Dieu nous avait envoyé pour nous rappeler que l'enfer existe, pis que des fois y'est pas ben loin" (49). Once Hélène had terrified Manon by appearing in green lipstick and fingernail polish, and had laughed as Manon ran home screaming, "Le diable! Le diable! J'ai vu le diable!" (49-50). Agreeing, Marie-Louise had knelt with her daughter, and together "on avait prié le bon Dieu pour qu'y nous en débarrasse au plus sacrant!" (50). Another day, when Manon and Michel were playing together, Hélène had warned them to avoid the balcony because "y pourrait vous venir l'envie de vous glisser en-dessous pour aller jouer aux fesses comme on l'a toutes faite à votre âge" (50). "Démone," Manon exclaims, "Démone!" (50). At this point in the play, since Sandra has already talked about his cousin Hélène and her green make-up, the audience realizes that Sandra was once the little Michel whom Manon remembers with such affection.

In Manon's dream, the Virgin Mary was wearing green make-up; her smile was sweet, but her laughter echoed Hélène's demonic laugh. Even more shocking was the obscene way the Virgin handled the rosary beads. Although Manon cried out "Vade, retro, Satanas," the painted figure carressed her as she had carressed the body on the crucifix (51). "C'est laid! C'est péché! C'est sale! C'est pas comme ça que j'le fais, moé," Manon protested (51). Then the statue underwent a second transformation. "Chus t'habillé comme eux autres, mais c'est moé," the figure said, and for a moment Manon held Michel tightly in her arms (52). Then releasing him, she asked why he had followed his corrupt cousin. "Regarde ce que t'es d'venu," she exclaimed, "Un dégénéré!" (52).

This dream is more than Manon can bear. After a moment of silence, she addresses God, angrily objecting to all that has happened to her that day:

Pourquoi vous remettez sur mon chemin c'te p'tit gars-là que j'aimais tant pis qui a suivi sa cousine folle dans son enfer! Pourquoi vous m'avez pas envoyé un rêve rempli de votre présence plutôt que celle de l'autre! Pourquoi ses caresses m'ont tellement faite de bien! C'est à vous que j'ai sacrifié ma vie! Toute ma vie! Toute ma vie! (Author's emphasis, 52)

Reminding God that she believes in Him because He is good, she then accuses Him of sending her a bad dream and making her commit a sin while she slept and could not defend herself. Then after a pause, she asks to be forgiven, adding "Reprenez-moé. Reprenez-moé. Dans votre sein" (53).

Manon tells little about Michel except that they were born the same day and were apparently kindred spirits until, as Manon sees it, he followed his cousin into a life of sin, at puberty, no doubt. Until then, her love for Michel was spontaneous and unreserved; there was no

self-consciousness and nothing to fear or repress in her relationship with him. But she was afraid of Hélène, who had a reputation as a demon, and whose bold, unconventional make-up seemed a sure sign that she was indeed the devil. Marie-Louise then reinforced Manon's ignorance and fear, and taught her to use prayer to call on God to punish the disobedient and avenge the injury done to those who in their complete submission to God's will have no power of their own.

What frightened Manon the most, however, was Hélène's casual warning not to "play doctor" under the balcony. Hélène obviously saw it as part of growing up, but Manon believed that such behavior was wicked. Following her mother's example, she turned to prayer, not to help her accept her physical nature, but to help her repress it. Nevertheless, although she says that what she experienced in her dream was "bad," she acknowledges her pleasure, and although she blames God for letting it happen to her, she finally assumes a certain responsibility as she asks to be forgiven. But she cannot come to terms with her sexuality as an acceptable part of her self, and so pursues her goal of isolating her spirit from the body's sinful influence.

In the fourth part of her monologue, Manon talks to God about her obedience, her weaknesses, and her needs. She also talks about her expectations, for she believes that God too has obligations. Lately she has noticed that God has come to her less often, and when He does, she must concentrate in order to feel His presence. "Avant, j'avais juste à penser à vous pis votre vent m'emportait," she recalls; "Vous étiez là tu-suite pis on se mettait à flotter tous les deux en souriant" (57). Manon's sister Carmen, in describing her singing, had also spoken of being lifted up as if by the wind, but she had been challenged to master

her music rather than let herself be carried away by it. Although claiming to have learned by being in God's presence, Manon describes her behavior as largely passive: "Les journées complètes qu'on a passées ensemble entre ciel et terre, vous me racontant le Monde de façon à ce que je le comprenne pis que je pardonne, moé vous écoutant au bord de l'évanouissement" (58). Manon does not say what she understood and forgave; her feeling of euphoria was clearly more important to her. Carmen, on the other hand, gained a new perspective, and understanding herself and others more clearly, had decided that she could help change things which she thought were unpardonable. Thus while both women describe experiences which lift them out of their everyday existence, Carmen's experience sharpens her awareness of self and world, while Manon's reduces her critical faculties and sense of self.

Having entered easily into this euphoric state of bliss for years, Manon now expects it. "J'ai droit à mes jouissances! J'y ai droit! Chus t'habituée, astheur," she protests (58). Admitting that she is close to blasphemy, she nevertheless insists that she desperately needs to feel God's presence; if she is abandoned, she will be lost. The Devil is not far away, she warns, and would be easy to find. Reminding God that He alone controls her destiny, she tells Him:

Vous devez savoir aussi ben que moé qu'y'a une partie de moé qui demande pas mieux que de se jeter dans le Grand Vide la tête la première! Choisissez! C'est à vous de choisir! Moé, j'me laisse aller. C'est toujours vous qui a faite les choix, continuez! C'est toujours vous qui a pris ma destinée en mains ben je vous le dis une fois pour toutes: c'est votre responsabilité! J'me lave les mains de toute responsabilité pis si j'me perds, c'est vous qui me perds! (59).

There is a long silence, and then, smiling, Manon announces that she feels God approaching: "Haaa... oui... Prenez-moé par la main. Emmenez-moé..." (59).

Manon's naive and unself-conscious conversation with God shows to what extent she uses her religious life as an escape from responsibility. Feeling entitled to her "jouissances," she wants to rise painlessly above the world where she feels out of place. If God will not help her, she will turn herself over to the Devil, who also has the power to control people's lives. Manon has stifled her individuality so long that she has become incapable of directing life for herself. Nevertheless, although she asks God to take charge of her life, she fully expects God to listen to her, and also considers herself free to choose between good and evil.

In the final portion of her monologue, Manon describes the free-floating experience of ecstasy which she had been waiting for:

Ma tête a des ailes! J'ai l'esprit comme une cage à moineaux avec les portes ouvertes! Toutes mes idées sortent de moé en même temps! Comme des oiseaux qu'on libère. Toute coule en dehors de moé! J'me vide! J'détruis toute sur mon passage! Mes pensées pulverisent la rue Fabre pis je reste deboute au milieu des ruines comme un jet d'eau! Chus les chutes Niagara! (64).

Having "found her wings," Manon next describes her sensation of soaring in God's shadow, where, protected from sunlight, she can savor the light of God which leads her to the truth:

Seule votre Lumière à Vous, qui se goûte dans le noir le plus profond, dans les ténèbres les plus secrètes, qui déchire l'âme à grand coups de sabre, qui pourfend l'oeil, le fait éclater, l'ouvre et ressuscite, seule votre Lumière qui mord la peau pis qui laisse des traces comme des blessures, seule votre Lumière qui fait exploser la Vérité, la seule Vérité, Votre Vérité, seule votre Lumière à Vous est la bonne! La seule possible. (64).

Begging for an even more intense experience, Manon cries: "Plus haut! Ecrasez-moé sous votre poids, faites de moé une chose difforme, bancale, mais sainte" (65). Then sensing God's withdrawal, she pleads: "Laissez-moé pas comme ça au milieu du vide j'ai l'impression de pas

exister!" (65). At this point Tremblay introduces the first hint of the way he intends to conclude the play, for Manon adds: "j'ai l'impression d'exister juste dans la tête de quelqu'un d'autre" (65). Moreover, she says, if God lets her fall back to earth, she will have green lips and nails. "Aidez-moé à renier mon corps! Le plus longtemps possible!" she cries, protesting: "Que c'est que j'ai faite pour être punie de même!" (65). Manon's final confession of faith is similar, but not identical, to her statement at the beginning of the play:

R'prenez-moé avec vous, vous êtes la seule chose qui me reste dans'vie! Vous êtes la réponse à toute... dans ma vie! J'ai tué le doute... y me reste rien que la Foi! Y me reste juste les récompenses que me prodigue ma Foi en Vous! Y me reste juste les récompenses que je me prodigue à moé-même dans ma Foi en Vous! J'crois en vous! Croyez donc en moé! (65).

The sentence which concludes the above speech is a confession of a different sort, and will be introduced later in relation to Sandra's monologue.

Manon's description of her mystical flight begins with a rush of images which suggest her illusion of great freedom and power. Rising above rue Fabre and the world which had confined her, she enters a holy realm where God's dazzling light reveals His truth in an experience of intense physical sensations which tear her apart and then make her whole. She gains no knowledge or insight; in fact, God does not even appear to speak to her, but because she feels that God is present, she can take pure pleasure in her physical being. If God abandons her, Manon will find herself once again on rue Fabre, where such physical sensations are thought sinful, and where her green lips and nails are an outward sign of her inner corruption. Manon's mystical experiences are therefore essentially physical, but disguised to eliminate conflict with

her self-image as a pious daughter devoted to "perpetuating" her saintly mother.

The audience is now in a position to understand Manon's first words: "La solution à toute...c'est le bon Dieu" (27). Believing that only God is good, Manon has gladly relinquished her will and freedom to make her own decisions; God will direct her and save her from sin. And because in God's presence, orgasm becomes a mystical and holy experience, the issue of sinful sexuality is resolved.

Sandra

In the opening lines in the play, Sandra declares sex to be the answer to all of life's questions. Soon, however, he qualifies his statement, saying that he does not know the "pourquoi" of anything, nor does he want to (28). "Pourquoi te demander pourquoi," he asks himself, "C'est niaiseux. Surtout quand t'as le cul pour t'empêcher d'y penser" (28). And while some partners are more desirable than others, ultimately sex is the only thing that makes his life worth living.

As he begins his monologue, Sandra recalls that the first activity of the day was to review his physical assets. Although he found himself desirable, he remembers that he did not feel entirely satisfied: "C'est ben beau tout ça mais des fois en se réveillant, hein, on a beau se trouver potable on sent comme un creux dans l'estomac... Y'a comme... de l'insatisfaction dans l'air" (37). Then while studying himself in the mirror, he was reminded of the green make-up his cousin Hélène had once used. Acting on impulse, he bought some, and now, although his original enthusiasm has waned, he has decided to "(s)e beurrer le kisser pis les ongles avec d'la marde verte," if only to see the reaction of Christian, his black lover from Martinique (40).

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In style and subject matter, Sandra could hardly be more different from Manon. Whether describing his "super-duper quequette queen size et si tant belle," or imitating the accent of his "Mawtiniquais" lover, Sandra proves to be a witty and uninhibited narrator (37,39). Never at a loss for words, he is also not afraid to use them, however offensive they might seem to his listeners. But the fact remains that his reason for buying green make-up is the same as Manon's reason for buying her wine-red rosary: they are both dissatisfied with life as it is now, and want to experience it more fully.

First Sandra thinks about how he will look in green lipstick; then he imagines using it to write on his lover's back. One idea leads to another until he envisions writing his own Bible: "J'vas écrire un livre pornographique sur son corps. Ma Bible à moé. La Genèse selon Sandra la Martienne! Le Pentateuque, le Cantique des cantiques, l'Ancien Testament pis le Nouveau Testament selon Sandra-la-verte! Pis surtout, l'Apocalypse selon moé!" (46). Once his Bible is written, he will smear the words to keep the message for himself; then wrapping Christian in a sheet, he will preserve "une empreinte verte du premier Dieu Noir" (47). On second thought, he decides to mummify Christian, as well as lovers who succeed him; he wants to be their last partner. "Chus tannée d'être pour eux autres c'qu'y sont pour moé: une parmi tant d'autres. Un numéro! Une botte trois étoiles, ou deux étoiles, ou une étoile" (47). Sandra laughs, thinking of the uses he might make of his preserved lovers, but becomes serious again as he weighs the humiliation of "les viols-minute de speedy Christian" against the pleasure he takes merely in looking at his lover's beautiful body (48). Resigning himself to Christian's eventual departure, he murmurs: "Ca fait que... Next!

Au suivant!" (48). Rather than analyze the situation, he resumes his usual ironic tone, observing that green is associated with certain venereal diseases. "Mon Dieu," he exclaims, "mon chum s'en vient pis chus déguisée en dose!" (48).

At one level, Sandra's behavior is a mirror image of Manon's: he begins by imagining erotic uses for his green lipstick and ends by imagining a sacred use, while she first treats her rosary as sacred and then derives erotic pleasure from it. But although Sandra says he is writing his personal Bible, it has less to do with the "religion" of sex than with feelings of loneliness and isolation, and with his disappointments over relationships which provide only physical gratification. At the beginning of the play, Sandra had said that he did not know the "why" of anything, and that sex helped keep him from thinking about it. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the words he imagines writing are smeared to leave a mark, but offer no message of enduring wisdom. At best they symbolize a moment of ecstasy, an experience which leaves the "why's" in his life still unanswered. Instead of being an unending source of satisfaction, his sexual activities are beginning to seem mechanical. He does not remember his individual lovers, and knows that he too is equally faceless, one among many, rated by his partners according to his performance, but having no lasting presence for them. Although he dreams of touching their lives in some permanent way, his fantasy of mummifying his lovers is an indirect admission that his way of life, despite its short-term pleasures, is essentially dehumanizing. As usual, Sandra turns his thoughts to disguise, for playing a role allows him to be someone else. Only then can he forget that he does not exist.

In the third section of his monologue, Sandra describes his thoughts and feelings as he progresses from an acute awareness of non-existence to the adoption of a temporary role. Before deciding "who he will be" that evening, Sandra yields to a familiar impulse: he studies himself in the mirror hoping to discover "who he is." Although he scrutinizes his image with care, he finds no vestige of a recognizable self. His findings are more disturbing than he is willing to admit:

J'ai l'honneur de déclarer officiellement qu'y reste pus aucune trace de l'homme que j'ai été. Rien! J'ai eu beau chercher, fouiller, scruter... j'me sus pas trouvé. Mon visage à moé existe pus. Y'a complètement disparu sous les tonnes de maquillages que j'y ai faite subir, y'a disparu derrière les dizaines, les centaines d'autres visages que j'ai dessinés à sa place" (53-54).

In fact, he continues, "J'existe pus" (54). Then amending his statement, he adds: "la seule chose que j'ai jamais déguisée... eh oui, c'est ma queue" (54). Everything else about him, he says, was invented to attract "les mille victimes convoitées par (s)a queue aux appétits voraces et aux instincts féroces" (54). Declaring that he is not a woman by choice but by necessity, he calls himself a slave to sex, a slave to his senses. He does not live except when he is engaged in some aspect of sexual activity.

In this portion of his monologue, Sandra reports but does not explain his lack of self. Instead, he turns to his mirror as a guide in creating new disguises, and uses his imagination to furnish excuses for having betrayed the man he was, but is no more. But while the sight of his nude body may reassure him that he possesses male sexual organs, the fact remains that he does not really possess his body -- he prostitutes it. He has chosen a way of life which limits the meaningful expression of sexuality, and has interfered with his development as a complete,

unified human being. By exaggerating the force of his "appétits voraces" and his "instincts féroces," he tries to conceal his fundamental weakness and lack of will.

After rationalizing his role-playing, Sandra then announces his next disguise:

En faisant mon premier doigt, t'à l'heure, j'ai trouvé le visage que la changeante Sandra va porter à soir: j'ai décidé que ce serait la Vierge Marie elle-même qui recevrait un Martiniquais dans son lit, cette nuit! Un rôle nouveau. Une nouvelle composition. Notre Mère à tous. Jouer le rôle de notre Mère à tous dans les bras de la Race montante. Se soumettre au Noir en lui cédant, en lui sacrifiant l'image la plus pure, la plus sacrée de notre civilisation dégénérée (55).

Sacrilegious though they may be, Sandra's comments reveal some unsuspected values as well as profound despair. Briefly he imagines a Mary who willingly receives lovers from every race; rather than being defiled by her behavior, she is ennobled as "Notre mère à tous." Her holiness is centered in her loving acceptance of all men, and in her universal motherhood, which guarantees the unity of the human family. But such ideals cannot be realized; love is an illusion, unobtainable on earth, where nothing exists, he thinks cynically, unless it can be bought and sold.

Turning from what the Virgin represents to how the Virgin is represented, Sandra decides to model his appearance on the statue which Manon bought after a fire in the parish church. Like Claude Lemieux, who became Hosanna and then imitated Elizabeth Taylor in her role as Cleopatra, Michel as Sandra imagines imitating not the Virgin, but a statue of the Virgin, a second-hand one, at that. That he is aware of his dehumanization is obvious from the way he imagines the sex act which would be in keeping with his role: "C'est une statue de la Vierge Marie

achetée dans une vente de feu qui va se faire enculer à soir par la gigantesque pine du Martiniquais victorieux!" (55). Forgotten is the earlier image of loving acceptance; instead he sees himself standing in the rigid, upright posture of the statue, with a frozen smile (but green!) and a fixed, blank stare. He will be "Sainte Sandra la Verte de la Vente de Feu," he exclaims, summing up the grotesque image which he has imagined for himself (56). Then he concludes the third section of his monologue with a sober, even bitter, admission of failure: "Je suis l'Immenculée Conception! Pis c'est à soir que le Moineau Noir de l'Esprit Saint va venir me visiter... pour m'apporter la Grande Nouvelle! Pis la Grande Nouvelle c'est que le Nouveau Messie va être un enfant ben faible! (56). These words leave no doubt that he understands only too well the meaning of prostitution, and realizes the futility and emptiness of the roles which he has created as a substitute for self.

In the final portion of his monologue, Sandra talks about his place in the neighborhood. His presence will not go unnoticed when he appears on the balcony to wait for Christian: "J'vas continuer mon numéro, perpétuer mon rôle de travesti drôle pour les voisines qui doivent déjà m'attendre en se demandant que c'est que j'vas leur sortir aujourd'hui" (60). Despite the variety of his costumes, Sandra finds his routines dull and more than a little absurd, but he knows that he is responsible for his present way of life. In this he is different from the belles-soeurs, for instance, and from his Aunt Robertine, whose philosophy of resignation was contained in the word "continuer." He also realizes that in perpetuating his role as an amusing transvestite he is betraying his individuality; such a thought would never occur to Manon, who believes that she can accomplish nothing more worthwhile than to "perpetuate her

mother." Nevertheless, Sandra's insight does not help free him from the role which condemns him to perpetual disguise.

True to his motto of "pas de pourquoi," Sandra never explains why he returned to rue Fabre, but the opportunity to rent an apartment across from the house where he grew up was, he says, "Un signal du Ciel" (60). "Pis... depuis ce temps-là je regarde à nouveau la rue Fabre vivre. J'me sus remis à ma tâche," he remarks (60). As he watches the children play, it seems to him that little has changed:

J'ai souvent l'impression de voir ma gang jouer dans'ruelle... pendant qu'une voisine avec qui j'ai joué aux fesses y'a un quart de siècle tricote à côté de moi en me racontant c'que j'sais quasiment mieux qu'elle sur son enfance qui est par le fait même la mienne: nos jeux, nos joies, notre grand bonheur d'être petits pendant les années cinquante et bruyants et Maîtres du Monde! (61)

But the child who was part of the happy neighborhood gang has become Sandra, who dares not identify himself as Michel, and who therefore cannot claim his place in that happy past. He does not belong. True, the women confide in him as they did when they were girls, but now they say that he understands them because he is homosexual; before they said it was because he took the time to listen. He would like to tell them who he is, remind them that he was the leader of the gang, the one who organized picnics, the one who played Batman to frighten them, the one who pretended to be brave when he was afraid. Then he comments: "J'jouais au brave pis vous pensiez que j'tais brave; j'joue aux femmes, pis vous pensez que chus des femmes! J'vous ai toujours possédés à contretemps mais si vous saviez... si vous saviez comme j'vous aime!" (62). He knows, however, that he will never say this. To express personal feelings and treat them as important would invalidate his basic premise that sex is everything in life. Moreover,

he has repressed his individuality so long that he has lost his spontaneity, he cannot speak to his friends from his heart.

There is, however, one childhood friend he has not spoken to at all: "Manon, ma soeur... ma jumelle... (...) à qui j'ai donné toute la passion dont j'étais capable (...) Manon, mon antithèse, ma contraire (62). When he first saw her, he wanted to take her in his arms and ask about her, but he did not. "Ma seule présence la tuerait," he declares, "Chus la négation de sa vie. (Silence.) De sa Foi" (63). From what he hears, however, he is convinced that she is happy. He takes comfort in looking at her lowered blind, where a light can sometimes be seen between the metal slats, "les barreaux de sa prison" (63). The flickering light, "Une lumière de Ciel qui s'éteint pis d'Enfer qui s'attise," tells him that Manon has left on "un de ses longs voyages vers le jour" (63). Her happiness reassures him about everything in life, and, he concludes, "Si Manon avait pas existé, je l'aurais inventée" (63).

In this final portion of his monologue, Sandra speaks with love and understanding. He recognizes that he and Manon share a common heritage. As children, their spontaneous affection for each other united them, and although they had been born of different mothers, they were twins. But as they matured, they both stifled important aspects of their personality, and now are confined by habits which make completeness and fulfillment impossible. Nevertheless, Sandra can see past the differences which separate him from Manon, and still recognizes and loves her as his twin. The only way he has of expressing his love is to permit Manon to live undisturbed in her dream world. Surely he has no illusions about the narrowness and aridity of her life, but although he

has been watching her "sécher comme un raisin sec" for two years now, he says: "J'ai trouvé quelqu'un de vraiment heureux à regarder vivre sa petite vie heureuse de souris heureuse au milieu du décor de mon enfance heureuse" (62, 63). Sandra takes comfort in thinking that happiness is possible, even though it is dependent on withdrawal from society and denial of self.

Only at the play's conclusion does Sandra address Manon directly. She has declared her faith in God, and asks God to believe in her, "Même... si... j'ai... été... inventée... par... Michel," she adds (65). Crying "Vas-y Manon... monte," Sandra lends him support (65). He understands her desire for perfect joy:

Continue... jusqu'au bout! Va jusqu'au bout de ton voyage!
Monte! Monte! Monte! Pis tire-moi avec toi! J'veux partir!
(Elle hurle.) Amène-moi avec toi parce que moi non plus
j'existe pas! Moi aussi j'ai été inventée! R'garde, Manon!
R'garde! Sa Lumière s'en vient! (66).

According to the stage directions, Sandra's final speech is followed by an intense light which lasts five seconds. The dazzling light suggests the joy of body and soul united at last to form a single, complete being. But the characters' words tell another story: Manon and Sandra are mere inventions, brought together in a moment of ecstasy only in their creator's imagination.

In their parallel lives, Manon and Sandra complement each other as red complements green. Influenced by her mother, who equated sex with sin, Manon, a black figure on a white background, has tried to repress her sexuality, while Sandra, a white figure on a black background, has chosen to express sexuality as fully as possible. Incomplete and dependent, they think of each other and remember the time when nothing divided them. But convinced that sex and religion are separate, they

remain apart. The joy of their reunion is invented by Michel, who apparently believes that if sex and religion were not imagined to be in conflict, they would complement each other, and together be a source of human happiness.

The finale also confirms what the spectators have no doubt been suspecting: the play contains not two, but three, "confessions." Manon and Sandra confess that neither religion alone nor sex alone is enough to make life complete. Tremblay's confession, found in Sandra's fourth monologue, suggests that one genre alone, theatre, does not completely satisfy his needs as an artist.

Earlier in his career, Tremblay had said that he did not discuss personal matters through his characters.³ In Manon, however, he makes his presence felt through Sandra/Michel, whose happy childhood on rue Fabre during the 1950s resembles his own. Therefore, when Sandra begins to reflect on his relationship to his public, "les voisines qui doivent déjà m'attendre en se demandant que c'est que j'vas leur sortir aujourd'hui," he introduces issues which apply equally to Tremblay himself. Sandra knows that his reputation sets him apart. Although he has made friends with most of his neighbors, he is accepted, not as an individual, but as "un travesti drôle" who understands women because he is a "tapette" (60, 62). They do not know that he is Michel, their childhood playmate, nor do they recognize, as they once did, that he understands them because he takes the time to listen to their problems. Tremblay too, in print and on television, has acknowledged his homosexuality, and undoubtedly has sometimes felt unfairly defined and judged because of it.⁴

Like Sandra, who wants to tell his former playmates how much he loves them, but cannot abandon his role to reveal personal feelings, Tremblay also wants to express himself more directly than is possible as a playwright. He is not the characters he creates, their words are never entirely his, and the roles are always subject to the interpretation of those who perform the play. In theatre, the author and actor are secondary to the illusion they create. Although Tremblay has used theatrical endings before, in this case, after calling attention to the play as fiction, he identifies Michel as the inventor, the creator who is free to change and grow, in contrast to Manon and Sandra, who are fixed by their roles.

* * *

Sainte Carmen records Carmen's liberation as an artist and as an individual, and conveys her fans' exhilaration as they listen to her message of hope. The play also depicts an establishment above the law, led by unscrupulous men (the name Maurice is not without significance) who have the power to destroy Carmen and her message with impunity. Nevertheless, Tremblay's first heroine, a figure of artistic integrity and symbol of hope for a dispossessed people, is vanquished too easily, and her listeners are reduced to inarticulate despair, as if she had never lived. As a result, the play is seriously weakened. Although praised for its composition,⁵ this work about an artist's liberation and perfect communication did not enable Tremblay to communicate successfully with his audiences, and its short life was a great disappointment to him.⁶

In the next play, Tremblay treats his characters' "soif d'absolu" in a distinctly ironic fashion. Sympathetic to Manon's quest for sainthood, he nevertheless shows her bliss to be an illusion, and suggests through Sandra/Michel that friendship and shared memories might be a greater source of happiness than endless role-playing which ultimately effaces the self. Calling Manon "le point final" of the Belles-soeurs cycle, Tremblay announced in 1977 that he wanted to write a novel, and had, in fact, nearly finished the research.⁷ The novel developed into a series which was set on the Plateau Mont-Royal, in the neighborhood where he grew up, and which emphasized the background of the characters who had appeared in the plays.⁸ As narrator, Tremblay enjoyed the feeling of talking directly to his reader; he also liked being able to show his affection for his characters.⁹ While Sandra could never reclaim his place among his former neighbors, Tremblay returned to his childhood through fiction, and in the process discovered--and affirmed--his solidarity with the people of Quebec. In 1984, after writing four Chroniques, he added Albertine, en cinq temps to the supposedly completed play cycle, cheerfully conceding "Ça m'apprendra à déclarer des choses."¹⁰ Thus, when Manon is viewed in light of later works, the play's ambiguous ending can be read as foreshadowing a new phase in the career of Michel Tremblay; it was not the end of a "world," but an artist's attempt to maintain freedom and integrity.

Notes

¹ Michel Tremblay, Damnée Manon sacrée Sandra, suivi de Surprise! Surprise! (Montréal: Leméac 1977) 65. All further references will be contained within the text.

² Pierre Fillion, introduction, Damnée Manon sacrée Sandra 21.

³ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Entrevue avec Michel Tremblay," by Rachel Cloutier, Marie Laberge, and Rodrigue Gignac, Nord 1.1 (automne 1971):54-55.

⁴ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay: une société qui s'éveille," by Yves Tachereau, Actualité avril 1978: 14.

⁵ See Renate Usmiani, Michel Tremblay (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1982) 127.

⁶ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Quand Michel Tremblay traite au fanatisme en religion et en sexe," by Martial Dassylva, La Presse 26 fév. 1977.

⁷ Tremblay, interview by Dassylva.

⁸ See text 4-5.

⁹ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay et la mémoire collective," by Donald Smith, Lettres québécoises automne 1981: 55.

¹⁰ Lévesque, Robert, "Michel Tremblay, le dramaturge," Le Devoir 10 nov. 1984: 31.

PART V

SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND INDEPENDENCE IN THE NEW QUEBEC

Albertine, en cinq temps: From "Continuer" to "Choisir"

Albertine, en cinq temps opened in Ottawa October 12, 1984. The Montreal debut took place the following month, as did the publication of Des Nouvelles d'Edouard, the fourth novel of Les Chroniques du Plateau-Mont Royal. Although Albertine and her children are mentioned only briefly in this novel, which is devoted to Albertine's brother, the Duchesse, they were major figures in the first two Chroniques. Earlier, Albertine had appeared in two plays, first as Robertine in En Pièces détachées, and then as Gabriel's sister Albertine in Bonjour, là, Bonjour. She is not exactly the same individual from one work to the next, but within any given play or novel, she makes essentially no progress toward greater self-understanding. In Albertine, en cinq temps, Tremblay shows Albertine at five points in her life, from 1942, when she is thirty, until she is seventy in 1982. By using a different actress to portray Albertine at each decade, Tremblay simultaneously shows what Albertine was like, and how she has changed. The result is a dramatic yet realistic representation of a dependent individual who eventually acquires the strength to exercise personal freedom.

The play opens with Albertine à 70 ans, "une vieille toute menue, presque trottinante," as she enters her room in a "centre d'accueil" for the elderly, and begins to acquaint herself with her new surroundings.¹ Although not entirely satisfied with her accommodations, she is pleased to have a rocking chair, and taking a seat, begins to rock. Albertine à

30 ans is the next to enter. Going to a rocking chair on the porch of a house in rural Duhamel, she too sits down, and the two women rock in unison. "Je reviens de ben loin," remarks Albertine à 70 ans, explaining that she nearly died six months earlier (17). Her life was saved, but she laughs to think that the treatment was almost as dangerous as the problem for which she was being treated. "Tant qu'à ça, vaut mieux en rire que de me lamenter jusqu'à ma mort... ma deuxième... la bonne, j'espère," she continues, laughing again (17). Determined to laugh rather than complain, Albertine seems resolved to make the best of her present situation.

As Albertine à 70 ans continues to describe her recent health problems and slow recovery, Albertine à 40 ans settles on the balcony of the Montreal apartment which she and her children share with her mother and her brother Gabriel and his family. Then Albertine à 50 ans takes her post behind the counter of the restaurant where she works in Lafontaine Park. The next to appear, Albertine à 60 ans goes to her bedside table and automatically takes a pill. Finally Madeleine, her only sister, enters and sits down beside Albertine à 30 ans. It is now time for Albertine à 70 ans to come to terms with her past.

After introducing all six characters, with Albertine à 70 ans as the play's central figure, Tremblay presents the major events of Albertine's life in chronological order. As each Albertine recounts the experiences of her decade, the others comment according to their particular perspectives. The ageless Madeleine adopts the same perspective in time as her interlocutor. Her death in the 1960s is acknowledged, but communication continues, a sign of Albertine's enduring affection for her sister.

Albertine à 30 ans

A recent crisis has revealed family problems which Albertine cannot ignore. The week in Duhamel, her first trip away from home, is intended to give her a more positive outlook on her situation. Instead, it makes her more aware of how limited and difficult her life has been. After watching the sunset, for example, she tells Madeleine: "J'avais jamais rien vu de si beau" (19). The lovely countryside contrasts sharply with the crowded apartment on rue Fabre, where peace and harmony are unknown, and buildings block her view of the sky. As she looks at the stars which are beginning to appear, she marvels at the thought of other worlds, and then exclaims: "Pis y fallait que j'tombe ici, oùsque tout va mal!" (24). The remark surprises Madeleine. "Où est-ce que tu voulais tomber?" she wonders, but Albertine does not answer (24). During the course of the play, however, it becomes increasingly clear that at thirty she considers herself a victim doomed to lead an unhappy life, no matter where she is.

As she continues to observe the sights and sounds of nightfall in the country, Albertine is impressed not only with the beauty, but with the vitality and spontaneity of this unfamiliar world of nature. Even the birds overhead "avaient tellement l'air d'avoir du fun," she remarks (32). This world is so different from her urban milieu that she cannot always describe it. J'ai pas les mots pour t'expliquer ça... c'est trop bon," she tells Albertine à 70 ans as she takes a deep breath of the evening air (32). Supplying the words which her sister cannot find, Madeleine enumerates the scents which can be detected. "Ca sent la vie," she concludes (33). The implication is clear: never having experienced life, Albertine can neither identify nor describe it.

Being in Duhamel not only makes Albertine realize how stifled her life has been, it also inspires thoughts of escaping the painful situation which she has temporarily left behind. How much better it would be if they were all habitants living in Duhamel. As it is, she dreads returning to Montreal, and wishes she could stay in the country. "J'le sais que ça se peut pas," she quickly adds, "que mes enfants m'attendent même si y'ont peur de moi comme du bonhomme sept heures, que tout ça c'est juste une semaine de repos parce que chus fatiguée..." (38). Albertine apparently takes her responsibilities to her children seriously, and cannot understand what has gone wrong, for it has not been her intention to make her children fear her.

Albertine's anxiety is intensified by her own fear of being judged a bad mother, which would mean social rejection. This thought is so troubling that she wants no one to know what happened. Finally, however, she turns to Madeleine for help, admitting "j'ai envie de me vider le coeur" (52). Slowly the story begins to unfold. Recently Albertine gave her eleven-year-old daughter Thérèse a savage beating, and now the memory of her violence appalls her. "J'ai failli tuer Thérèse," she tells Madeleine; "Si Gabriel était pas arrivé, j'pense que je l'aurais tuée pour vrai" (52). But while she condemns her behavior, she also feels that it was not her fault, for she was impelled by feelings over which she has no control:

Madeleine, j'ai en dedans de moi une force tellement grande! Une... J'ai une puissance, en dedans de moi, Madeleine, qui me fait peur! (Silence.) Pour détruire. (Silence.) Je l'ai pas voulue. Est là. Peut-être que si j'avais été moins malheureuse j'aurais fini par l'oublier ou la dompter... mais y'a des fois... y'a des fois oùsque j'sens une... une rage, c'est de la rage, Madeleine, de la rage! Chus t'une enragée! (Silence. Elle lève un peu les bras.) R'garde... la grandeur du ciel... Ben la grandeur de c'te ciel-là arriverait pas à contenir ma rage, Madeleine! (Silence.) Si j'explosais,

Madeleine... Mais j'exploserai jamais... A c't'heure, j'sais que j'exploserai jamais... C'que j'ai faite à Thérèse m'a trop fait peur! (53).

Frightened by the destructiveness of her rage, Albertine knows she must never "explode." Nevertheless, she perceives herself as the victim of an outside force which has invaded and overpowered her. Her thoughts and actions, triggered by her anger, are no longer her own.

At first, Madeleine does not realize that Albertine's anger is too deeply rooted to be dismissed easily. She therefore begins by trying to persuade her sister that her problems are not unusual, that every mother has to cope with difficult situations. "C'est notre rôle, Bartine," she tells her, but Albertine disagrees: "Notre rôle! C'est pas notre rôle! C'est notre lot!" (55). She is persuaded that all women share a common fate which allows no freedom, no leeway, no choice. Not every woman may be in a situation as difficult as hers, but surely, she insists, they are all confined. "Toi, t'es tombée sur un meilleur lot que le mien," she tells her sister, "Okay, mais même à ça... Tu te sens pas... tu te sens pas dans un trou, des fois, Madeleine, dans un tunnel, dans une cage!" (55). Since Madeleine does not understand, Albertine continues: "Dans dix ans, dans vingt ans, on va être encore là, dans notre cage avec des barreaux! Pis quand on va être vieilles, quand y'auront pus besoin de nous autres, y vont nous mettre dans des cages de vieilles! Pis on va virer folles d'ennui!" (56). This is as close as Albertine can come to expressing her view of life: all women are doomed to a confined existence which culminates in madness.

Albertine apparently does not see a connection between being "caged" and feeling frustrated and angry. When Madeleine asks what makes her think such things, Albertine can only reply: "Je le sais pas. J'ai

pourtant pas l'habitude de me révolter" (57). But as she reflects on her present situation, she once again feels the force of her anger. "C'est ma rage, Madeleine, c'est ma rage qui veut frapper," she begins, adding: "Mais j'sais pas qui, pis j'sais pas où, pis j'sais pas comment" (58). This unfocused rage, "une boule de feu dans (s)a poitrine," is always present, intense, inexplicable, and undiminished by her outbursts (61). Everything upsets her, she says, even good things, because something bad is sure to follow. Although she is aware that her conduct is often inappropriate, she cannot control it. Her behavior is automatic; it controls her and leaves her feeling powerless.

Any mother would indeed be alarmed to learn that a man had been following her young daughter. Any mother would also be disturbed to have her daughter enjoy such an adventure. Albertine takes a still more extreme position, however, treating the incident as further evidence that men, motivated by sexual desire, are responsible for women's servitude and humiliation. Moreover, she is convinced that despite the harm they do, men go unpunished; women are always the ones who suffer the consequences. The thought of such injustice enrages Albertine. "As-tu déjà eu envie de toute détruire autour de toi? As-tu déjà senti la force de toute détruire," she asks her sister (66). Then she continues: "Les hommes... les hommes... les hommes... C'est eux autres, Madeleine. Eux autres. Pas nous autres" (66). Once again Albertine represents women as victims, but this time she identifies men as their oppressors. Madeleine's response is to take her sister in her arms, but Albertine pulls away, too angry to be comforted.

Since Thérèse was not harmed, and since the man disappeared in early June, after following Thérèse for only a short time, the incident

might seem closed. From Albertine's perspective, however, it foretells a terrible fate: her daughter not only attracts men, she is attracted to them and will therefore always be at their mercy. Albertine recalls with horror overhearing the conversation in which Thérèse and a friend casually discussed the handsome young man who had followed Thérèse. "Y'avaient tellement pas l'air de comprendre... le danger... le danger des hommes," Albertine tells her sister (68). When she heard Thérèse say that the last time she saw the man, she let him put his arms around her, Albertine completely lost her self-control. "J'ai fessé, Madeleine, j'ai fessé," say all five Albertines one after another (68). Despite cries, tears, and staring neighbors, Albertine kept on: "C'est pas Thérèse que je frappais, je pense, c'est... c'est toute la vie... J'avais pas les mots pour expliquer le danger, ça fait que j'fessais!" (68). She had never talked much about men to Thérèse, she adds, "les mots que j'aurais employés auraient été trop laids" (68).

This long-awaited account of what took place reveals that Albertine's violence erupted when she realized that Thérèse was flattered by the attentions of her follower. "A'l'aimait ça," Albertine tells her sister, "C'est elle qui me l'a dit. C'est pour ça que j'ai fessé!" (67). She also realizes that her violence was not really intended for Thérèse. She wanted to warn her, but lacked the necessary words. How was she to impart her understanding of sex as the means by which men use women for their pleasure and then leave them to their fate? How was she to explain that marriage, which was supposed to protect the family, could trap women instead? Indeed, how could she discuss any aspect of sexual relationships until she understood her own

sexuality? And so, not knowing how to attack the real problem she attacked her daughter instead.

Aware that she has overreacted, Albertine looks for ways to minimize her responsibility. She begins by suggesting that she will be considered insane, perhaps even be committed to an asylum. Madeleine rejects this notion, but Albertine continues to insist: "Mais je le suis, t'sais. Battre sa fille parce qu'a'frôle un danger au lieu de y'expliquer, c'est pas de la folie, tu penses!" (70). Refusing to consider the suggestion that her problem is due to ignorance, and can be solved, Albertine replies that she is "pas comme les autres;" what may work for some does not work for her (71). She has tried to talk with Thérèse and to understand Marcel, she adds, "Mais on est tou'es trois pareilles... trois têtes de cochons... pis le contact est pas possible" (72). After claiming that she is not able to behave as others would, Albertine now calls herself and her children pig-headed, which suggests that they are incapable of change, and that further conflict is inevitable. Albertine also implies that even if force is necessary, she must make her children obey. It is the right thing to do, and she should not be punished for it. "Si j'me mets à varger sur mes enfants de même parce que j'sais que c'est pas possible de leur parler, y vont-tu m'enfermer? Même si j'ai raison?" she asks (73). Albertine leaves little doubt that her authoritarian behavior will continue.

In this play, as in Les Belles-soeurs, there are no men, but their influence on women's lives is readily apparent. Although Albertine à 30 ans does not specifically mention her husband, the other Albertines make it clear that they loathed him. Finally realizing that Albertine's violence stems in part from her feelings about her husband, Madeleine

comments: "C'est pas parce que t'as connu un écoeurant que ça veut dire qu'y sont toutes pareils" (79). Citing her husband Alex as an example of "un homme bon," Madeleine then describes her own marriage, which is as happy as it is conventional. It exemplifies marriage as defined by her society, and represents the model which Albertine has failed to achieve.

Perfectly aware that her marriage has been a failure, Albertine implies that the fault is her husband's. Alex may be a good man, but he is the exception; men usually do more harm than good, and she wants to protect Thérèse from that harm. Admitting that she has no specific goal in mind for her daughter, she is nonetheless adamant about what she does not want for her: "J'veux pas qu'i y'arrive la même chose qu'à moi! Pis j'veux pas non plus qu'a se révolte pis qu'a devienne une tête brûlée!" (81). Furthermore, she has little time left to influence the important decisions that her daughter will soon make: "Ben vite, ça va être une femme, pis première chose qu'on va savoir, a'va être enfarmée comme nous autres! Ou ben donc a'va être rejetée avec les parias" (81). Before Madeleine can comment, Albertine adds bitterly: "As-tu déjà pensé à ça, toi qui es si intelligente, qu'on avait juste deux choix, nous autres?" (81). Then, when asked whether she would have been happier if she had chosen the alternative, revolt and the life of the pariah, Albertine retorts: "C'est pas ça, le problème! Si j'étais plus jeune, j'essaierais peut-être de m'en inventer un troisième... (Silence.) C'est ça qu'y faudrait que j'dise à Thérèse... Si j'arrivais à y parler, un jour..." (82).

"Le problème," as Albertine sees it, is that women do not have genuine choices. Once married, a woman loses her individuality and becomes a wife and mother, and is expected to live for her husband and

children. The woman who sacrifices her reputation in order to have greater freedom is likely to find that being a pariah is also confining. Because she realizes that women have too few opportunities for self-fulfillment, Albertine is ahead of the monolithic Quebec society of 1942. She senses that the women in her world lead narrow and unrewarding lives whether they are housewives on rue Fabre or working in the clubs on the Main. But while she can see the need for choice, she does not understand that choosing is an independent act of will.

The problem facing Albertine is thus more complex than she realizes. Much of what she experiences as confinement is in fact the result of dependence fostered by a society more concerned with conformity than with the integrity of the individual. It is true that Albertine has too few choices, but she is also too weak to take advantage of the choices which are available to her. To take a small example: if she perceives herself as not free to go to the park to enjoy the sunsets, it is not because she is too busy, but because that is not what housewives are supposed to do. Even in matters which deeply affect her, she conforms without looking for alternatives. She obviously resented her socially prescribed duties to her husband, yet apparently performed them as if she had absolutely no choice. In respect to her children, she seems to regret the absence of love, but in defining her responsibilities as a mother, she considers social norms, not her children's needs.

The task of child-rearing is indeed a constant source of frustration, for Albertine knows that she is expected to teach her children, especially her daughter, to respect norms which she has found demeaning. When she discovered that Thérèse had permitted a situation

which might well have compromised her entire future, Albertine was beside herself with frustration and rage. If she did not make Thérèse conform, they would both become social outcasts. On the other hand, conformity meant that her daughter would experience the same kind of humiliations which she has endured. Caught in a vicious circle of endless dependency, Albertine sacrifices integrity in order to gain social acceptance. Anything or anyone who interferes with conformity is regarded as an obstacle to be overcome by force, if necessary. But since conformity provides only an illusion of security, Albertine often feels powerless and completely alone.

By the end of the evening, Albertine à 30 ans has openly acknowledged her anger, and while she has not resolved any of her problems, she seems closer to understanding them. Her more relaxed and optimistic outlook is evident as she imagines being on the opposite mountain looking at the peaceful scene of two women talking on the veranda. They would appear happy, she thinks. She sees the world around her from a new perspective, too. "D'habitude j'ai peur du noir," she tells Madeleine, "mais là, j'aimerais ça rentrer dedans...J'ai jamais le temps de penser que le monde existe, immense pis épeurant, en ville. (Silence.) En ville, le monde est petit" (90). No longer synonymous with nothingness, as it is in the city, the darkness merely conceals the vast world of which she is a part. Although it is unknown, and therefore "épeurant," it exists, assuring her that she is surrounded by life. For a moment she thinks she will cry, but no tears come; her emotions are still too tightly controlled. As Madeleine gets up to go inside, the two women agree that they will continue their talk the following day.

Alone on the veranda, "tu-seule au milieu du monde," Albertine watches the August moon rise in the evening sky (101). Although the moon makes her painfully aware of her isolation, its beauty brings her pleasure, and its majesty inspires her. For a few brief moments, perhaps, she glimpses a life in which she charts her own course, alone, yet part of the world around her.

Albertine à 40 ans

By 1952, the week at Duhamel seems remote. As Albertine sits smoking a cigarette on her balcony overlooking rue Fabre, she is a little heavier, her face is harder, and her clothes show signs of wear. Now more alienated than ever, she looks up at the stars, observing that somewhere in the universe, there must be better places to live, for life on earth is unbearable. "T'aimes pas grand chose," remarks Albertine à 50 ans; "J'aime rien, nuance!" is the bitter reply (30). Life consists of nothing but problems: "La rue Fabre, les enfants, le reste de la famille...bâtard que chus tannée," she declares (31). The air, which had smelled of life at Duhamel, has an entirely different odor in Montreal: "Ici, ça sent le mélangeage de monde qui vont pas ensemble. Ça sent la chicane, pis l'hypocrisie, pis la jalousie, pis..." (35). But words are not enough to describe the atmosphere which prevails in the apartment on rue Fabre.

The problems of 1942, rather than being resolved, have steadily worsened, and new ones have developed. Albertine à 30 ans, reminded that her mother was born in Duhamel, remarks that the house is "pleine d'elle," but does not imply that her mother's presence is unwelcome (37). At forty, Albertine's attitude toward her mother is openly hostile. She complains of having her "su'l'dos à longueur de jour," and

after commenting "J'peux pus l'endurer ... pis elle non plus," she adds: "Mais a'l'achève... pis c'est tant mieux" (37,38). Albertine à 50 ans, calling this "effrayant," is quickly silenced when Albertine à 40 ans accurately predicts: "Quand a'va être disparue, on va être ben débarrassée, ici-dedans, toi la première!" (39).

If Albertine views her mother as a burden, it is not because she requires special care, but because she adds to Albertine's burden of self-doubt. "A'pense que chus pas intelligente," Albertine tells Madeleine (41). In fact, she complains, the whole family thinks so: "J'vous entends, tu sais ... pis j'vous vois faire! Pauv' Bartine par-ci, a'l'a pas compris telle affaire, pis pauv' Bartine par-là, c'est pas de sa faute, est tellement bouchée" (41). Madeleine tries to explain: "Tu sais comment c'que t'es, Bartine... Des fois tu fais pis tu dis des affaires qu'on a ben de la misère à s'expliquer" (42). Convinced that others consider her incompetent and dismiss her opinions, Albertine feels belittled and is constantly on the defensive. She deserves sympathy, she insists, not blame.

One of Albertine's most frequently-used strategies for self-defense is to blame others. "J'ai un garçon pas normal pis une fille exaltée mais ça veut pas dire qu'y prennent ça de moi," she protests, pointing to her husband as the real culprit (42). Because he was killed in action, she claims, people wrongly assume that he was a war hero. She thinks it far more likely that "y'est allé se saprer devant les autres pour faire le fanfaron pis qu'y'est pas pantoute mort en héros mais en bouffon" (42). "Un épais" as well as "un bouffon," her husband deserves a large share of the blame for the children's problems (42).

In defending her behavior, Albertine also argues that the fault lies not so much in what she says and does, but in the way others perceive it. The family does not try hard enough to understand her:

C'est pas ma tête qui marche, moi, c'est... mes instincts, on dirait... Des fois j'fais des affaires avant d'y penser, c'est vrai, mais c'est pas toujours mauvais, ça c'pas vrai! Depuis que chus p'tite que j'vois le monde me regarder d'un drôle d'air quand j'parle parce que j'dis tout c'que j'pense comme j'le pense... Vous portez des jugements sur tout c'que j'dis mais vous vous entendez pas, des fois! Y'a des fois où vous devriez avoir un peu moins de tête pis un peu plus de coeur! Pis vous m'écoutez jamais, à part de ça! Quand j'ouvre la bouche vous prenez tu-suite un air méprisant qui m'insulte assez! Vous êtes tellement habitués à penser que j'ai pas d'allure que vous m'écoutez même pus! (43).

Albertine is not being sentimental. She asks her family to listen less with their heads and more with their hearts because she is convinced that her feelings, which she cannot explain or justify, point to important truths. Something is wrong with the world she lives in; she cannot name it, but it causes her to rebel, and she thinks her family should understand.

Albertine's rebellion is clearly ineffective, however. First of all, as she realized a decade earlier, her rage is unfocused. She attacks people, not problems. Furthermore, she does not have a clear sense of who she is or what she wants to accomplish. Serge, her nephew in Bonjour. là. bonjour, had explicit values and goals, and was not intimidated by the authoritarian behavior of family members who sought to gain power over him by assigning him roles which would have made him as dependent and weak as they were. Not only did Serge know how others wanted to use him, he also realized that the bonds of dependency, which gave an illusion of strength, in fact resulted in the loss of self-esteem. He therefore concluded that authoritarian manipulation was harmful; human relationships must be founded on love and mutual respect

in order to protect the integrity of the self. Albertine, however, has no sense of selfhood, and it never occurs to her that people can help each other live more rewarding lives.

In sum, Albertine's rebellion fails because she cannot clearly identify the goals she wants to achieve. She is out-of-touch with herself and with the outside world. Years of frustration and failure have no doubt distorted her perceptions; wherever she turns, she automatically sees disappointment and hears nothing but blame. As soon as she speaks her mind, she complains to Madeleine, "vous m'envoyez chier" (44). Madeleine, however, insists that communication is impossible: "Tu te pompes aussitôt qu'on te dit quequ'chose pis tu fesses n'importe comment sans réfléchir!" (44). And indeed, Albertine sees no way of ending the continuous quarreling which weakens and isolates family members:

Si tu savais comme c'est dur de se sentir tu-seule dans une maison pleine de monde! Le monde m'écoute pas ici-dedans parce que j'arrête pas de crier pis j'crie parce que le monde m'écoute pas! J'dépompe pas du matin au soir! A onze heures du matin chus déjà épuisée! J'cours après Marcel pour le protéger pis j'cours après Thérèse pour l'empêcher de faire des bêtises plus graves que celles de la veille! Pis j'crie après moman plus fort qu'a crie après moi! Chus tannée d'être enragée, Madeleine! Chus trop intelligent pour pas me rendre compte que vous me méprisez pis chus pas assez prime pour vous boucher! (45).

Although Albertine recognizes that her behavior is counter-productive, she is too concerned with controlling her children's behavior to see their deep need for her affection and support. And because of her defensiveness, she treats every criticism as a threat. Not for a moment does she consider the possibility that she would feel less alone if she listened to what others were trying to say.

Embittered by her endless succession of failures, Albertine à 40 ans is more convinced than ever that she is a victim whose suffering is undeserved. "Mais comment ça se fait que c'qui m'arrive à moi est toujours pire que c'qui arrive aux autres," she demands (63). She has apparently given up all hope for Marcel; he is "un enfant fou" who cannot be helped (76). Thérèse's future had seemed more promising, but now Albertine's worst fears are being realized: rebellious and aggressively interested in men, Thérèse has become a "tête brûlée" (81). She will not invent a third choice, nor will she be free, and, Albertine assures her younger self, there is nothing she can do about it. "Toi, tout c'que tu vas pouvoir faire, ça va être d'la regarder aller en braillant parce que tu vas te sentir responsable. On est toujours responsables de toute, nous autres," she tells Albertine à 30 ans (81).

After using "responsable" to refer to her feeling of personal responsibility, which is too painful to explore, Albertine immediately uses it in reference to duties unjustly imposed on women by society. Here, speaking in generalities, she feels on safer ground. Society, which gives women no power, holds them responsible for their children, yet men have power, but are not held responsible for anything: "les hommes, y finissent toujours par nous avoir. Que c'est que vous voulez, c'est eux autres qui mènent. Tant qu'on les laisse faire, y'en profitent, sont pas fous. C'est leur monde, c'est eux autres qui l'ont faite!" (83). And now, just as she feared, Thérèse too has been trapped, taken advantage of by a man.

Choosing the path of non-conformity, Thérèse had dated a number of men who would have been unsuitable husbands. When at last she brought home a personable young man with a steady job, Albertine was relieved --

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until she realized that he had been Thérèse's mysterious follower. "Ça y'avait pris dix ans pour l'avoir, mais y'avait fini par l'avoir!" she exclaims sarcastically (84). Thérèse's failure to think through her choices before making decisions upsets Albertine even more: "Pis savez-vous c'qu'y m'écoeure le plus," she continues, "A's'est mis dans tête de le marier! Parce qu'y'est beau! Parce que les autres femmes sont jalouses! Pis pour me faire chier! Demandez-vous pas pourquoi j'ai toujours envie de tuer!" (84).

Although Albertine treats her future son-in-law as the main obstacle to the life she has wanted for her daughter, Thérèse herself is an obstacle, for she has knowingly chosen to marry a man who might have raped her. Nevertheless, Albertine insists that it is men, driven by sexual urges, who ruin women's lives. "Ma propre fille va marier un homme qui a failli la violer y'a dix ans pis qui pourrait recommencer n'importe quand avec n'importe qui," she exclaims, bitterly concluding: "C'est ça, les hommes! Y voyent un trou, y rentrent dedans!" (84).

The long, awkward silence which follows suggests both embarrassment and disagreement. Then, when Albertine adds that not even Alex is to be trusted, some of the others intervene, reminding her that she was once interested in Alex. But Albertine makes no concessions. Although she cannot fully explain her situation, she implies that she was sexually exploited and then abandoned by her husband to raise two problem children in a difficult family environment. Her complaints about men leave no doubt that love, respect, and supportiveness, as well as sexual gratification have all been absent from her life. The resulting insecurity has taken its toll. She had wanted a better life for her daughter, but clearly Thérèse is not headed in the direction of freedom.

Albertine blames it on sex and men, knowing, however, that Thérèse had some choice, and chose unwisely. Worse still, she cannot escape the feeling that she has failed her daughter just as her own mother failed her.

In her last long speech, Albertine à 40 ans sums up her frustrations and those of her mother and daughter as well. Explaining her lack of tears, she exclaims: "J'ai juste des raisons de hurler!" (91). The fact that all three women howl with frustration rather than quietly resign themselves to their difficulties is evidence of a self which exists despite the pressures of conventional society. Nevertheless, the rage which Albertine describes only adds to their confinement, and prevents them from seeing possible solutions:

Quand j'vois Thérèse arriver, les lendemains de la veille, poquée pis encore éméchée, trop fine avec moi parce qu'a'sent coupable d'avoir bu mais quand même baveuse parce que c'est sa seule façon de me montrer son indépendance, comment voulez-vous que je pleure? J'crie! Pis a' me répond sur le même ton! Pis j'crie plus fort pour l'enterrer! Là, moman se met de la partie, a'sort tout c'qu'a'l'a contre nous autres... On pourrait se planter ben droites au milieu du salon, toutes les trois, pis hurler sans arrêter en se regardant dans les yeux, pis ça donnerait exactement la même chose. On écoute pas c'qu'on dit, on s'écoute crier! (91).

Although Albertine understands that each woman's response is the result of her particular frustrations, she does not pursue the implications of "We don't listen." Instead she concludes that each one must deal with her own problems alone:

Thérèse a fini au French Casino, sur la rue Saint-Laurent, au milieu des guidounes, des drogués, pis des soûlons, c'est de ses affaires. Moi, j'ai élève deux enfants pour rien pis j'me sens coupable parce que j'ai l'impression que j'les ai mal dirigés, pis ça me tue, c'est de mes affaires. Moman a été obligée de quitter la maison de Duhamel pour venir s'installer à Montréal pis a'l' l'a jamais pris, c'est de ses affaires. Trois générations parfaites (91).

Albertine quickly dismisses the suggestion that it might help if she listened to what the others had to say, protesting that she already has enough problems of her own. Her main argument, however, reveals the very behavior which she has been complaining about: "Y m'écouterait pas, pourquoi j'les écouterais?" (92). Needless to say, Albertine does not see that her attempts to protect herself from other people's problems intensify her own feeling of isolation and helplessness.

Through the younger Albertines, Tremblay depicts early stages in the transition from a hierarchical, authoritarian social order to one in which the individual exercises greater freedom and takes more responsibility for the choices made. Rebelling against the existing society, in which people have assigned roles and relationships, Albertine nevertheless clings to traditional definitions of duties and responsibilities, too insecure to exercise what freedom she has. She resents being expected to conform to society's standards, but does not formulate standards of her own. Moreover, although she wants to be treated as an individual, she does not know how to relate to others in a personal way. In fact, she rarely perceives anyone, herself included, as an individual. She spent a week in Duhamel and wished that the family still lived there, yet shows no insight into her mother's failure to adjust to life in Montreal. Similarly, Albertine's primary concern is to control her daughter; she gives little thought to her daughter's needs, be they intellectual, emotional, or sexual. At forty, Albertine has yet to understand that if the old social order is to change, people must discard not only confining definitions of roles, but the authoritarian relationships which make individuals dependent and incapable of mutual support.

Albertine's feeling of isolation and confinement, which has been illustrated in many ways throughout the play, is further emphasized by her response to the growing darkness of nightfall. Wishing that the street lights would go on, she comments: "Ca m'étouffe, le noir. On dirait que le monde se referme sur moi!" (90). Life has never seemed blacker, and Albertine has never felt more completely alone. Extinguishing her cigarette, she gets up to go inside, hoping that for once, Thérèse will come home without making an ugly scene. Then, with the other Albertines, she looks at the sky and notices the rising moon: "Oui, c'est beau," she tells herself, "même d'ici, c'est beau" (102). The beautiful moon transcends the dark Quebec night, and while it can scarcely be said to give Albertine a new outlook, at least it reminds her that even in her life, there are moments of beauty.

Albertine à 50 ans

In 1962, Albertine appears to be a whole new person. "Joviale, chantonnante et maigre," she is eating a sandwich with gusto as she stands behind the restaurant counter in Lafontaine Park (17). Her pleasure in food seems to be matched by an interest in her appearance, for she has colored her hair and bought new clothes. Albertine makes her presence known in still other ways. When she goes out in the evening, she adds perfume to the odor of French fries which already clings to her clothing and hair: "J'sais pas comment on pourrait appeler ça, c'te mélange-là, mais moi j'aime ça! J'sens bonne pis forte!" (35). These aggressive, intrusive odors, which announce her presence, symbolize to Albertine the end of confinement and the beginning of freedom.

The change in her attitude is most striking of all. Rather than complain about her lot in life, Albertine asserts her rights and

actively seeks what she wants. In contrast to Albertine à 30 ans, who says she has no time to enjoy nature, Albertine à 50 ans declares: "J'le prends, moi, le temps" (21). Her memories from one week in the country are not enough, she continues; "Non, aujourd'hui j'prends c'qui passe pis quand un beau grand ciel tout en couleur se présente à moi, j'm'arrête pis j'le regarde!" (21). Painful memories, on the other hand, are deliberately repressed. She does not want to be reminded of her bitter remarks about her mother, for example, and urges Albertine à 70 ans to concentrate on the good times in her life, for she believes that memories can be controlled to prevent the past from intruding on the present:

Si le passé te fait trop mal, contruis-toi z'en un neuf...
Fais comme moi, oublie! Essaie, en tout cas. En fin de compte, tu vas voir, c'est pas si difficile que ça. Moi, quand un mauvais souvenir essaye de m'achaler, j'me pousse... Si chus à'maison, j'sors... Si chus au travail, j'chante... C'est comme si j'le laissais en arrière, tu comprends, pis que j'me sauvais (60).

These arguments do not persuade Albertine à 70 ans, but at fifty, Albertine is not yet strong enough to confront the memories which disturb her.

Albertine's new outlook on life began with a discovery: "J'pensais à mes enfants pis à ma famille qui m'ont jamais écoutée, qui ont toujours toute faite sans jamais s'occuper de moi, sans jamais me demander mon avis, comme si j'avais pas existé, pis j'ai découvert que dans la vie pour se faire entendre, faut désobéir!" (Author's emphasis, 74). Albertine has complained before that family members do not listen to her, but this is the first time that she has mentioned the need for action. While the term "désobéir" admittedly implies reaction, Albertine's discovery is important: she has never exercised her own

will. Learning to act without first seeking the approval of others was not easy, she recalls:

J'ai eu d'la misère à me faire à l'idée, au commencement, par exemple... J'avais tellement toujours dépendu de tout le monde! C'est pas des farces, c'était rendu que quand on me disait pas quoi faire je le demandais! J'quétais! J'ai passé ma vie à quêter! J'étais debout au milieu d'une maison pis avant de faire un geste j'voulais qu'on me dise que c'était correct! Ça alimentait ma rage pis j'étais toujours au bord d'exploser! (75)

After years of explaining her rage as the result of demands imposed on her by society, Albertine sees that her dependence also feeds her anger. Failing to probe the implications of dependence, however, she concludes that since obedience led to non-existence, disobedience must therefore be the key to existence.

Having chosen "désobéir" as her motto, Albertine began to examine her duties as the mother of two adult children. Thérèse, "disparue dans'brume," called only when she had been arrested for drunkenness, and needed someone to pay the fine (75). Marcel posed a different problem. "Un éternel enfant de vingt-cinq ans presque pas responsable," he had become difficult to control (75). As a result, she declares defiantly, "J'ai désobéi à mon rôle, Madeleine!" (76). "Si je l'avais pas fait," she continues, "j's'rais encore prisonnière d'un fou qui me tiendrait dans le creux de sa main pis qui deviendrait de plus en plus dangereux... c'est pas le rôle de parsonne, ça!" (76).

Albertine has finally concluded that her role is impossible. No longer can society tell her: "T'as mis au monde un enfant fou, c'est de ta faute, paye!" (76). She has done all anyone could do; no more can be asked of her. "J'ai cassé le moule de mère-poule," she proclaims (76). After a silence, she explains: "J'ai dit à Thérèse que j'voulais pus rien savoir d'elle... pis j'ai fait placer Marcel loin d'ici" (76). But

Albertine knows that more than terminate an impossible role, she has also terminated relationships which were important to her.

Madeleine does not reproach Albertine for her decision, but turns away, a gesture which symbolizes the rift which occurred between the two sisters. Although family relations were strained for several years, Albertine was determined to be independent, and set out to look for a job. "Une job," she exclaims, "La liberté!" (77). At the park restaurant Albertine now earns her living and is proud of her reputation for making good sandwiches. The job has other rewards. She enjoys the sunsets, for instance, and likes to watch the children skate in the winter. Happy at last, she sings from morning til night. "J'vis comme j'veux," she declares, "sans famille, sans enfants, sans homme!" (78).

Since Albertine admits that she sometimes sings to chase away unpleasant memories, she is no doubt exaggerating her present happiness, but she has made some significant changes in her life. In contrast to Thérèse, who sought escape from the life on rue Fabre by choosing the illusory glamour of rue Saint-Laurent, Albertine has invented the third choice which she had thought beyond her reach twenty years earlier. She has found a job which she can do well and which she finds meaningful. The fact that she is proud of work which is similar to her former tasks at home emphasizes the importance of choice. Environment is also shown to be important. The park encourages individual pursuits, yet fosters a certain community spirit. In this spacious, beautiful setting, Albertine has gained a new interest in life, and the compliments of her customers give her self-confidence. And because she is being heard, she believes that she is at last in control of her life.

But Lafontaine Park is a special place, a haven free from the pressures of life on rue Fabre or rue Saint-Laurent. Feeling secure and happy, Albertine wants to believe that the future will be equally untroubled. She has found the simple, safe world she had dreamed of as a schoolgirl: "j'rêvais, des fois, qu'y'avait rien en dehors de l'école... Que l'école c'était le monde. Un monde avec rien que des enfants. Juste des petites filles qui dansent à'corde" (90). Albertine had not wanted to join the adult world, no doubt sensing that she would be expected to follow in the footsteps of her mother, a visibly unhappy and dissatisfied woman. Then during the 1960s, when she severed her ties to her children, asserted her presence, and made herself heard, she thought she had found the carefree freedom she had imagined as a child. Albertine à 60 ans assures her, however, that her freedom is an illusion, and that she will be called back into the world to face the consequences of her behavior. Refusing at first to believe her, Albertine à 50 ans finally resolves to act; "J'vas toute faire, toute, pour que rien de tout ça arrive!" (101). Buoyed by her new-found confidence, she is sure that it is not too late.

As she looks up from her work at the restaurant counter, Albertine à 50 ans is the first to notice the moon. "On dirait qu'en étirant le bras on pourrait la toucher," she comments (102). Her remark sums up this period in her life when she is in touch with beauty and nature, when everything seems possible.

Albertine à 60 ans

"Courbée, vieillie, pâle," Albertine à 60 ans is the picture of defeat (18). Alone in her bedroom, withdrawn from the world, she goes to her bedside table and takes a pill without a glance at the lable on

the bottle. Habitual and unthinking, the gesture suggests inner collapse and chemical dependency. Agreeing with Albertine à 40 ans that life is unbearable, she bristles when Albertine à 70 ans tells her to be quiet. "Tout le monde m'hait," she complains, to which the older woman replies sharply: "Y'a de quoi" (26). Deriding the optimism of the previous decade, Albertine sometimes echoes the anger of the two younger women, but more often than not, she simply maintains that nothing matters. Human beings have no control over their lives, and to think that they can make things happen is just as ridiculous as to believe that the astronauts really went to the moon. She is surprised to learn that Albertine à 70 ans thinks that the moon landing took place, but remains indifferent to what is going on around her. When the others are trying to describe and identify certain birds they have noticed, she exclaims impatiently: "On s'en sacre, des hirondelles!" (32). Whether the subject is world events or the birds overhead, nothing interests her or is worth thinking about. Her mind is numb.

Albertine's senses are equally numb. As the others talk about the distinctive odors of their respective worlds, Albertine à 60 ans can only speculate: "C'est le renfermé que ça doit sentir, ici!" (35). "J'ai trop peur d'attraper mon coup de mort," she says to justify her habit of keeping the bedroom window shut, but life, not death, is what she fears most: "J'me suis enfermée dans la maison où j'ai venue au monde... même pas... dans une chambre de c'te maison-là... pour me protéger des senteurs du dehors. Y'a pas rien qui peut me toucher, j'ai perdu l'odorat" (35-36). Albertine has lost touch with the world in other ways as well. When Madeleine tries to put her arms around Albertine à 40 ans, the older woman remarks that sometimes she remembers

"des contactes physiques," but, she continues, "C'est dans ma tête que j'm'en rappelle. Pis ça me dégoûte tellement que je remercie le ciel de pus connaître personne" (50). She is of course the person she least wants to know. To avoid self-knowledge, Albertine isolates herself from the world and represses not only her intellect, but her senses and emotions, too. She then claims to share with Albertine à 30 ans the feeling of being caged, ignoring the fact that she chose confinement as a way to withdraw from life and forget the past.

Throughout the play Albertine à 60 ans maintains her basic argument that human freedom is impossible; life is shaped by fate. To the thirty-year-old Albertine, who mentions revolt, Albertine à 60 ans replies: "Ca sert jamais à rien, la révolte" (56). "La révolte, c'est enfantin," she continues, "Pis la punition est toujours trop grande!" (58). Thirty years ago she had said: "c'est ma rage qui veut frapper," but now she has learned that rage is futile: "Y'a pas de mots...pour décrire... l'impuissance de la rage!" (58). Experience has also taught her that the escapism of the previous decade cannot succeed, either: "C'est pour ça que j'me sus résignée! Tu peux jamais te sauver nulle part, jamais!" (60). Having lost all hope, Albertine is indeed resigned--to death.

The reasons for Albertine's resignation and withdrawal are revealed only after Albertine à 50 ans has admitted that it is painful to talk about breaking her ties to her children. Commenting, "Ca coûte cher de désobéir, hein," Albertine à 60 ans wants nothing to do with this "sans-cœur," and identifies instead with the intense anger and guilt of Albertine à 40 ans (76, 78). "De quoi tu peux ben te sentir coupable," objects Albertine à 70 ans, "t'es droguée jusqu'aux yeux!" (94). But

drugs do not protect Albertine à 60 ans from the thoughts that haunt her. Her hands shake and her mouth is dry as she tells of the day she was asked to identify Thérèse's body, which had been found in a room on rue Saint-Laurent. The sight of Thérèse's swollen face, her white skin, and the pools of blood horrified Albertine and filled her with guilt: "C'est-tu là que ma vie menait," she asked herself, "C'est-tu le prix que j'ai à payer pour quequ'z'années de tranquillité? (...) C'est-tu moi qui l'a rendue là... ma fille... que j'ai jamais su tenir?" (97). Looking at Thérèse's lifeless body, Albertine was painfully aware of her daughter's vulnerability and desperate need for help. No longer able to say with a shrug of her shoulders "C'est de ses problèmes," Albertine knows that beneath Thérèse's rebelliousness there was a valid desire for freedom. She also knows that she was among those who failed to give Thérèse the help she needed.

Rather than analyze her responsibilities to her daughter, Albertine merely repeats what was probably the opinion of her family and neighbors: she "disobeyed" and now must pay for her attempted revolt during the previous decade. Turning to Albertine à 50 ans, she scornfully berates her for thinking that she could choose freedom. The day will come when the world falls apart; then, predicts Albertine à 60 ans, "tu te retrouveras tu-seule devant absolument rien d'autre que la bonne vieille culpabilité" (98). This kind of guilt neither forgives nor understands.

To numb her thinking, feeling self, Albertine à 60 ans relies on pills: "Des fois j'ai pas le choix ... c'est ça ou la folie... J'la sens venir... Je revois Thérèse... Marcel, aussi, qui s'est définitivement retiré en lui-même... (Elle lève les bras en croix.) Le monde...

explose! La rage revient" (99). When told that one day, overwhelmed with guilt, she will take one pill too many, Albertine welcomes the prospect of escape: "Tant mieux! Tant mieux! On sait jamais! La porte que j'vas ouvrir va peut-être mener quequ'part d'endurable! Là où j'vas aboutir, ça va peut-être être moins pire qu'ici!" (99). The past is a terrible burden; she wants to rid herself of it, even if she must destroy herself in the process.

Sitting in her room, looking forward to nothing but the relief which her next pill will bring, Albertine does not immediately see the moon. Then putting on her glasses, she too watches it rise. To the others, it appears large, beautiful, and almost close enough to touch. Albertine à 60 ans first notices how red it is, as if reminded of the bloody scene of her daughter's death. Nevertheless, after observing that the moon "aussi est tu-seule," Albertine joins the others in a fleeting gesture of solidarity as they reach toward the moon (102).

Albertine à 70 ans

Because the play opens with Albertine à 70 ans, the audience knows from the beginning that in 1982 she is in a "centre d'accueil pour vieillards" (15). According to the author's description, Albertine has the appearance and gestures of an elderly woman, but while she is old and alone, she is clearly determined to be as independent as possible. Before deciding where to live, for example, she visited the Center and saw her room. On her arrival, she again evaluates the living arrangements, and concluding that she has made the right decision, she prepares to make herself at home. "Après toute," she declares, "chus chez nous, à c't'heure, ici" (16).

After months in the hospital, Albertine treats her move to the Center as an accomplishment. She has no illusions about the future, but knows that she has choices as to how she will live, despite situations which will undoubtedly weaken her resolve to be independent. There is, for example, the minor but annoying problem of adjusting to the unpleasant odor which permeates her room. Then there are her memories. She smiles to see Albertine à 30 ans, but the sight of Albertine à 60 ans mechanically taking a pill is so upsetting that she turns away. "Tant qu'à ça, à c't'heure, chus ben contente d'être revenue de tout ça," she declares, "Parce que ça va mieux. Parce que chus tranquille. Parce que j'vas être bien, ici. (Court silence.) Même si ça sent pas bon" (18). Her reluctance to face her behavior of the previous decade indicates that she is not so "tranquille" as she claims. Nevertheless, she is ready to begin listening to the voices of the past.

Ever since 1948, Quebec's motto, "Je me souviens," had officially encouraged the people of Quebec to remember and continue unchanged a heritage which had already become restrictive. In Albertine's case, however, remembering proves to be a liberating experience. For decades, she had listened to the voices of authority and tradition, voices which she had eventually internalized so thoroughly that by the time she was thirty, they were the only ones she heard. At seventy, however, Albertine discovers that she has, and has had, a voice of her own. She listens with amazement to younger selves describing the sunset at Duhamel and in Lafontaine Park, scarcely able to believe that she ever expressed herself so well: "Mais y me semble... que j'ai jamais parlé beau, comme ça" (22). She then realizes that the way she perceived herself was colored by what others said about her: "J'ai tellement été

élevée à me trouver laide que j'ai de la misère à penser que j'ai déjà dit des belles choses" (23). Now less influenced by others' opinions, Albertine is open to truths which she did not hear in the past.

Albertine à 70 ans has begun to uncover the truth in other ways. At sixty, refusing to consider the evidence, she insisted that the moon landing was a hoax. Ten years later, she accepts the facts; "J'ai ben changé," she explains, "J'ai lu. A c't'heure que j'vois clair avec mes lunettes neuves, j'm'informe pis j'comprends des affaires" (29). "J'vois clair," referring to her eyesight, applies equally well to her clearer vision of the world. After years of suspecting that her family was right in calling her unintelligent, Albertine has discovered that she can understand events and issues. She can therefore make her own decisions; she can even question tradition and the authorities whose dictates she had been taught to obey. She need no longer say, as she had at forty: "Faut ben jouer son rôle jusqu'au bout, hein? On nous l'a tellement dit" (76). Now the indefinite "on" seems much less intimidating, and confident that she can cope successfully with her problems, she finds the world less irrational and unpredictable.

One sign of Albertine's increasing strength is that instead of disguising problems, she acknowledges them without the self-pity or defensiveness typical of her behavior in previous decades. When Madeleine describes the many odors of the fields and woods at Duhamel, Albertine fights back the tears, for the stale odor in her room reminds her of the hospital, which smelled not of life, but of disease and disinfectant (33). But she asks for no pity; her room is clean, she reminds herself, and in time she will no doubt become accustomed to the odor. Then drinking a cup of warm milk to help her sleep, she adds that

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it is normal to be a little nervous the first night in a new place. In the past, Albertine had consistently failed to identify her problems. During her thirties and forties, for instance, she had seen her problems as part of a vast, nebulous, inescapable fate. Next, she tried to ignore her problems altogether, as if they did not exist. Failing in this, she turned to medication to make her impervious to everything, even life itself. Not until she is seventy, when she begins to "voir clair," is she able to identify and then attack her problems successfully.

As she begins to think about the past, however, Albertine does not immediately focus on the central events of her life. Instead, after listening to complaints and quarrels typical of previous years, Albertine turns to her sister: "Pauvre Madeleine... J't'en ai fait voir de toutes les couleurs, hein... mais j'sais pas si tu savais à quel point j't'aimais" (44). Surprised, Madeleine admits that no one in the family knew exactly how she felt, but at times she talked about her hatred so much that it was almost palpable. Not only does Albertine now recognize the importance of expressing love openly, she also realizes her need to feel respected. She might have discussed more and argued less, she thinks, if Madeleine had used a different tone of voice. Most important, however, was her need for affection: "j'aurais eu besoin que tu me prennes dans tes bras, que tu m'embrasses," she tells her sister (48). When she was younger, she had been afraid that any display of affection only made her vulnerable to more wounds, and had pushed Madeleine away.

For years, Albertine complained of her circumstances, but never wanted to discuss her own behavior, too insecure to admit any responsibility for causing or correcting her problems. By the time she

is seventy, Albertine concedes that discussing problems is difficult, but nonetheless favors telling Madeleine about punishing Thérèse. When Albertine à 30 ans instead talks of her inescapable lot in life, the older woman becomes impatient: "Chut... pas si fort," she admonishes, "Pense avant de parler" (55). As Albertine à 30 ans continues, adding that women are caged, and then discarded when they are no longer useful, Albertine à 70 ans becomes upset. "C'est pas parce qu'y'ont pas besoin de moi que chus ici... c'est parce que chus tu-seule," she protests (57). Nevertheless, she is keenly aware of being alone-- "Tu-seule! Comme un chien!" (57). She listens as the others talk of rage, revolt, and resignation; then, knowing that these kinds of responses will not solve her problems, she calls for help: "Non, faut pas que j'me laisser aller au découragement... Aidez-moi!" (58). Determined not to succumb to the old fears and self-doubts which once plagued her, Albertine seeks the support she needs to face a difficult situation.

Responding to the older woman's pleas, Albertine à 50 ans sits beside her and takes her hand. Comforted, Albertine nonetheless refuses the advice of Albertine à 50 ans, who recommends repressing painful memories and pretending that the events had never taken place. Objecting that escape is impossible, Albertine tells her: "Tu comprends, y'a pas de place, ici, pour se sauver, ni pour se révolter" (60). Nor is she willing simply to give up, as she had at sixty. "Tu t'es pas résignée," she tells Albertine à 60 ans, "Tu t'es juste laissé aller. T'as abandonné... la vie, c'est pas pareil" (60). Having thus faced, if only briefly, the worst period of her life, she feels more sure of herself. "Ca va aller mieux," she tells Albertine à 50 ans

(61). The next time Albertine à 60 ans attacks, accusing both Albertines of pretending to be happy and positive, Albertine à 70 ans retorts: "Moi, au moins, chus heureuse d'être en vie!" (64). Life itself is to be valued, even though the circumstances may be far from ideal. This does not silence Albertine à 60 ans, but Albertine now turns her attention back to Albertine à 30 ans, again encouraging her to talk about the recent crisis with Thérèse: "Vas-y," she tells her, "Ca va te faire du bien" (66).

All five Albertines participate in the account, sometimes "en alternance," as is the case for "J'ai fessé, Madeleine, j'ai fessé" (68). Clearly, they all view it as a critical event, but even at seventy, Albertine does not appear completely confident of how to deal with the issue. Rejecting the younger woman's notion that she must be insane, Albertine à 70 ans diagnoses the problem as a matter of ignorance. She then turns to Madeleine, asking her for confirmation. When Madeleine demurs, Albertine becomes insulting, even calling her sister "ignorante" for saying that it would not help to tell Albertine that her problems arise from ignorance (71). At one time, these differences would have led to a quarrel, but Albertine chooses instead to explain her reasoning: "si tu y dis que c'est juste de l'ignorance, pis que l'ignorance ça se répare, ça va peut-être l'encourager à... je le sais pas... à s'informer, à se poser des questions" (71). Albertine à 30 ans, as we have seen, refuses to consider this suggestion, convinced that nothing will help solve her problems.

Still hopeful that the young Albertine can be persuaded to look for ways of establishing a more positive relationship with both children, Albertine à 70 ans tries another approach: "On dépend toutes de toi,"

she tells her, "Essaye... de discuter avec Thérèse... pis de comprendre Marcel... quand y seront pus là, y va être trop tard" (71). Albertine à 30 ans assures her that she does try, but without success. Then addressing Albertine à 70 ans, she concludes: "Juge-moi pas. Tu dois pus te rappeler à quel point c'est dur" (72). With this, Albertine is forced to admit that she can neither change the past nor escape the consequences of her behavior:

Tant qu'à ça... Ca sert à rien de demander de changer quoi que ce soit... Quand on est jeune on est sûr d'avoir raison... quand on est vieux on se rend compte qu'on a eu tort... à quoi ça sert de vivre. On devrait avoir le droit de vivre une deuxième vie... mais on est tellement mal faite... on ferait probablement pas mieux (72).

In 1982, rather than presenting herself as a helpless victim caught up in events over which she has no control, Albertine acknowledges having made mistakes. But the appropriate response to human error, she now realizes, is not to deny or excuse it, but to understand it, even if there is no assurance that she will make fewer mistakes in the future. A change in Albertine's perspective is also reflected in her language. When she used "on" in the past, it usually referred to "them," the members of a society from which she felt excluded. Now, however, Albertine speaks of herself as sharing experiences common to all people; in doing so, she shifts the meaning of "on" from "them" to "us." In the process of accepting responsibility for her actions, Albertine has experienced a new sense of belonging as well as a clearer sense of self.

Seeing herself and society in a new light, Albertine begins to reconsider her former definition of freedom. As she listens to Albertine à 50 ans tell her story, the older woman smiles to remember her first and only job; for a few years, at least, she had the pleasure

of doing work which she had chosen, and which was rewarding. The decision which freed her to work is more difficult to justify, however. She refuses to go so far as Albertine à 60 ans, who calls her younger self "une sans-cœur" for abandoning her children, yet is not willing to give unqualified approval. This was the act which led to a cooling of relations with Madeleine, who had strongly disapproved of the way she finally shut Marcel and Thérèse out of her life. To be at peace with herself, Albertine must rethink the issues which she once discussed with Madeleine.

Madeleine is unique among Tremblay's women characters in being both conventional and happy, but like the majority, she has little sense of individuality, and does not distinguish, as does Albertine, between social role and personal choice. Listening as Madeleine uses examples from her own happy marriage to demonstrate that not all men are bad, Albertine à 70 ans remarks: "T'étais tellement naïve, Madeleine" (80). Admitting that she too is generalizing from just one individual, Madeleine nevertheless prefers to think that men are good. She also thinks that marriage offers women enough opportunities for fulfillment, and would not be sorry to see her daughter have a life like hers. At seventy, Albertine still believes that women must have other options, but she is better able to understand Madeleine's position and also her own feelings at the time:

Pauvre Madeleine. T'avais peut-être raison, toi aussi. Y'a peut-être pas toujours juste une vérité. Des fois y'a peut-être une vérité pour nous autres, pis une autre pour les autres... T'étais heureuse comme t'étais, Madeleine, pis au fond, j'devais être un peu jalouse de toi(82).

Albertine's observations elicit a varied response. The two younger Albertines, insisting that they are not jealous, are quietly overruled:

"Vous vous l'êtes peut-être jamais avoué," Albertine à 70 ans tells them (82). Albertine à 50 ans qualifies her denial; she likes her independence too much to be jealous, she says, "mais quand a' vient me voir au restaurant avec sa petite-fille qui est si cute pis si bien habillée, j'me dis que j'aurais peut-être aimé ça, moi aussi, gâter des petits-enfants, les catiner" (83). This is as close as any of the Albertines comes to expressing a desire to love and care for others in a nurturing relationship.

But Albertine à 70 ans is still thinking about marriage: "Tant qu'à ça, si j'avais pas marié un bouffon j'aurais peut-être pas pensé comme j'pense" (83). Her former attitudes are illustrated by Albertine à 40 ans, whose denunciations of men apply even to Alex: "y'est certainement pas parfait," she tells Madeleine, "Ca se peut pas. C'est sûr et certain qu'y cache quequ'chose" (84). Taking exception to these remarks, Albertine à 70 ans points out that no one is perfect, and warns against making such judgments. Then, despite the objections of Albertine à 40 ans, who calls Alex a "sans-dessein," Albertine à 70 ans declares that she was once interested in Alex herself: "Y'était sans-dessein mais c'est ça qui faisait son charme... C'est vrai! On sentait qu'y'était pas dangereux, lui... Mais Madeleine a été plus vite que moi" (85). As Albertine gains insight into earlier experiences, she realizes that mutual love and respect, not roles, are the basis for a happy marriage.

Albertine knows that her life was not without love, however, and again thinks of Madeleine. Their brothers, Edouard and Gabriel, were "ben fins," but Madeleine was "la plus fine de la famille" (86). During the 1960s, differences strained, but did not break, their relationship:

"Ah! on se voyait pas souvent depuis longtemps parce que t'avais pas pris que j'tourne le dos à mes enfants, comme ça... même si au fond j'pense que tu comprenais... mais on s'était remis à se téléphoner, juste pour se donner des nouvelles, au commencement, pis ensuite parce qu'on avait eu envie de se revoir" (87). One of Albertine's happiest memories is of the first day Madeleine came to see her at the restaurant in Lafontaine Park. They had both changed so much in appearance that they scarcely recognized each other, but they still loved each other as before.

No such expression of love and support was to be found in Albertine's relationship to either her mother or her daughter. At forty, she had known that these "trois générations parfaites" were alike in their powerlessness and rage, but when at seventy she realizes that by sharing their burdens, they could have reduced them, it is too late, for by then her mother and Thérèse are both dead. Nevertheless, the problems arising from the mother-daughter relationships are never far from Albertine's thoughts in her struggles to understand what happened as one generation succeeded the next. The memories of the older Albertines are particularly revealing in explaining how a heritage of dependence culminated in self-destructiveness.

While Albertine's mother was alive, the three generations were bound together in mutual dependence, but after her death, the relationship between Albertine and Thérèse began to change. At first, recalls Albertine à 60 ans, although "soulagée" to be relieved of her mother's presence, she felt "déséquilibrée," and her life seemed empty (39). Then she realized what was missing: "c'était ses bêtises... pis ça me manquait... parce qu'a' débloquent pus c'qu'y'avait en dedans de moi

comme avant!" (40). To fill the void, she said, "J'ai pris la place de monan pis c'est Thérèse qui a hérité des bêtises" (40). And so the cycle continued; cruel remarks, intended to make the hearer suffer as the speaker did, invited retaliation which inflicted fresh pain and punishment.

Although the two mother-daughter relationships were sado-masochistic, they were not identical. Albertine and her mother, both widows, were not only emotionally dependent on each other, they also depended on one another in practical matters, such as living arrangements. As a result, they took out their frustrations on each other, but were too insecure to break off their relationship entirely. When her mother died, Albertine then tried to make Thérèse depend on her as she had once depended on her mother, but failed. Her "bêtises" undoubtedly diminished her daughter's self-esteem, but instead of fostering the desired dependence, they provoked rebellion. Perceiving Albertine as the primary obstacle to her happiness, Thérèse resisted her mother's attempts to dominate her and left home. She quickly discovered her weakness, and having no one but herself to blame, became increasingly self-destructive. With less and less to live for, she may even have goaded someone into murdering her.

Trying to obliterate the memory, Albertine à 60 ans nearly took her own life, but now, ready to confront this final and devastating event, Albertine à 70 ans asks to hear it recounted aloud. She must do this, she says, "Pour vérifier... si mes souvenirs sont aussi effrayants que je pense... pis pour recommencer à choisir" (95). There is, however, nothing to diminish the horror. Her daughter, so weak and vulnerable beneath her defiance, is dead. Who is responsible? Not men, as

Albertine à 40 ans might say, and not a corrupt underworld, as was the case in Sainte Carmen. Tooth Pick may have engineered her death, but the important causes are related to a heritage which impedes human development, and promotes weakness, dependency, and ultimately, self-destructiveness.

Albertine too was weakened by this heritage, but thanks to the care of the medical staff who resuscitated her, detoxified her, and helped her find a suitable place to live, she has more than survived. As she tells Albertine à 60 ans, "Y vont te guérir de tout, sauf de tes souvenirs..." (99). Albertine's memories are in fact incurable, but in the course of regaining her physical strength, she has developed a clearer sense of self. For decades, influenced by conventional social definitions, Albertine had always felt inadequate. In the hospital, however, society was not organized to use her, but to serve her. Only then did she discover her existence as an individual. She, not her role, was important; her life was worth saving simply because she was a human being. Contrary to what she had predicted forty years earlier, she was not put in a cage with other old women and left to go mad, but was encouraged to grow strong and take control of her life.

Taking control of her life, Albertine soon realized, did not mean domination, as she once thought. Instead, control meant making choices freely and independently according to her own values and judgments. But before she could "recommencer à choisir," she had to know herself, including those selves she preferred not to think about. During the course of her conversations with the other Albertines, she has discovered that beneath the authoritarian behavior which had been like a second nature, there was also an inner self which had never been able to

make itself known. Furthermore, by listening, discussing, and explaining, Albertine proves to her own satisfaction that she is now able to confront former problems without resorting to the authoritarian strategies she had used in the past. Nevertheless, there is no escaping the consequences; she has been part of a society which, failing to recognize the individuality and worth of its own members, all too often destroyed the life which it meant to protect and nourish. Human freedom offers the possibility of beginning to choose again, but it cannot efface past choices or compensate for painful losses.

Perhaps Albertine has those losses in mind when she turns to Madeleine and remarks, as if to console her sister for her premature death: "De toute façon... Ca vaut pas la peine de vieillir" (100). Madeleine makes her final exit without comment, leaving the five Albertines alone.

At first, each woman thinks about her own immediate situation, including Albertine à 70 ans. "A c't'heure, rien va se passer," she muses, as if she had been hoping that some of her new neighbors might pay a visit (101). "Tant qu'à ça, c'est aussi ben de même," she continues, "Une femme vide devant une télévision vide dans une chambre vide qui sent pas bon. (Silence.) C'est-tu ça qu'on appelle une vie bien remplie?" (101). Looking up, she notices the moon. "Comme c'est beau," she observes; then, as they all begin to reach up toward the moon, she adds: "Touchez-y... c'est peut-être la même" (102). In unison the five women breathe "Haaa..." -- "comme si elles avaient un contact physique" (103). In the magic of the moment, Albertine à 70 ans is restored and made whole. Exhausted by her examination of the past, she had felt empty and lifeless. The sight of the moon, however, evokes a

spontaneous response which assures Albertine of her individuality and of her humanity as well. In touch with herself and with the world at large, Albertine is no longer "tu-seule."

According to the stage directions, when the last word has been uttered, "la lune, solitaire et rouge sang se lève," followed by "noir" (103). This final disturbing image, the blood-red moon which Albertine à 60 ans had described, emphasizes the tragic events in her life, and warns that there will be moments when she needs every available bit of strength, not only to endure her memories, but to continue making genuine choices. Nevertheless, the worst is over; during the evening, Albertine has faced a lifetime of doubts, fears, and guilt without sacrificing her integrity. In the morning, after a night's sleep, she will surely make choices that favor life. Opening her window to let in some fresh air, she will arrange her belongings, and when that is done, she may turn on the television to catch up on current events, or open her door and introduce herself to the other residents in the Center. Her past life cannot be called "bien remplie," but she has renewed contact with her younger selves, the selves whom she had once tried to destroy. Now reunited, the five Albertines have become a complete, integrated individual. Albertine knows and is herself; at last she is strong and free.

* * *

Through the character of Albertine, Tremblay reviews the problem of freedom and suggests that with help from society, even deeply ingrained attitudes and self-images may be unlearned and replaced. At thirty, Albertine feels caged and predicts that her confinement will eventually

become unbearable, but forty years later, as she moves into her room at the Center, she has never felt freer. Although her choices are limited, she is confident that she will be able to pursue some of her interests, and live comfortably and with dignity. And because she has confidence in her ability to cope with her problems, she looks forward to being more self-directed than she has ever been before. Most important, relieved of social pressure and strengthened by a new feeling of personal worth, she examines her past, painful though it is, and realizes that other choices have always been available. This discovery carries with it the bitter knowledge that her life could have been different, but also assures her that she is truly free, and can make new choices in the future. By accepting each of the younger Albertines as they were at the time, without abdicating her right to be the self-directed person she has become, she achieves the "possession de soi" necessary for the exercise of personal freedom.

Notes

¹ Michel Tremblay, Albertine. en cinq temps (Montréal: Leméac, 1984)

15. All further references will be contained in the text.

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CONCLUSION

The Conquest, ending French control in Canada in 1763, followed by the defeat of the Patriotes seventy-five years later, made it impossible for the descendants of French colonists to develop as an independent nation. Fearing assimilation, French Canadians accepted Church leadership and the policies which were developed to ensure "la survivance." In the name of survival, the clergy strengthened the already existing authoritarian, hierarchical social order, and called for French Canadians to fulfill a God-given religious mission in North America rather than seek the worldly wealth and power of their neighbors. By the 1950s, people from many walks of life were beginning to question Quebec's values and goals. Then came the Quiet Revolution, and the transformation of a monolithic, theocratic society into a pluralistic and secular one. During the 1970s, independence was much discussed, but in 1980 the proposal for Sovereignty-Association was defeated at the polls. This was a set-back for separatists, but Quebec has nonetheless continued to grow and develop as a distinct entity within Canada.

Although Michel Tremblay supported the separatist movement, as a playwright he focused on the meaning of personal freedom and ways of achieving it within the existing political system. He began his examination of Quebec's traditional society in Les Belles-Soeurs, in which he demythified the mère de famille, showing in her place alienated

women who saw themselves as having no choice but to continue roles which they perceived as meaningless and personally unrewarding. The remedy did not lie in revitalizing the myth of the Quebec mother, however, for it had arisen to promote population growth, and in emphasizing the woman's reproductive role, had gradually dehumanized her. In dramatizing this situation, Tremblay showed that the emphasis on specific roles for men and women reinforced couples' tendency to see themselves and each other as objects, functions, or even as enemies. Assuming that external forces controlled their lives, the belles-soeurs not only accepted, but supported, the system which repressed individuality and denied them any existence or purposes of their own. Although they never ceased hoping for a stroke of good luck, they did not believe that they could change their situation themselves. Escape from the family to the Main was no solution either, for there too an authoritarian system assigned roles and denied individual worth. Thus the conformist society of the belles-soeurs was part of a social order which systematically weakened and dispossessed its members.

In En Pièces détachées, the world of the belles-soeurs formed the backdrop against which Tremblay portrayed the disintegration of a family in the waning years of "la survivance." Tradition was still powerful, even in the mid- to late 1950s, discouraging the development of individual potential and limiting choices of lifestyle and career. As her family collapsed around her, Robertine's response was "continuer." Continuing was better than nothing, she told herself, which revealed how little choice she thought she had. Her daughter, convinced that change was possible, had rebelled, but soon became dependent on men who used her for their own purposes. Marcel's obsession with returning home and

making a new start as part of a united, supportive family underscored the need to rebuild society from its very foundations.

Tremblay broadened his analysis of role-playing in La Duchesse de Langeais, showing that being able to choose and successfully perform a role was not synonymous with freedom. The Duchesse had claimed to be free because rather than disguise his homosexuality in conventional society, he had joined a marginal society and established himself in a feminine role of his own choice. Unlike his sister Robertine, who had internalized her role as mère de famille, the Duchesse was aware of role-playing; nevertheless, not until he experienced spontaneous love did he acknowledge that he had used roles to conceal and repress the person he had never dared reveal for fear of being rejected. In brief, although he chose his roles, he was confined to role-playing; he never felt free to express himself fully.

Nowhere did Tremblay portray confinement more vividly than in A Toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou, where characters described the family in terms of imprisonment and entrapment. But perhaps the most appropriate image was suggested by Marie-Louise, who called the family "Une gang de tu-seuls ensemble" (90). Confined in separate, narrowly-defined roles, she and Léopold had nothing in common but their desire to be free of each other. Concluding that their relationship would never improve, Léopold ended their lives. His one hope, that the attitudes and beliefs which had governed their lives would not be perpetuated in their daughters, was partially fulfilled. Ten years later, Manon still identified with her mother, but Carmen, who understood that her parents' decisions did not reflect personal choice, had worked for and achieved goals that were meaningful to her. Although being a western singer

required her to play a conventional role, it did not stifle her individuality, and she was able to establish a personal relationship with her audiences. She was the first Tremblay character who recognized and refused the confinement of tradition, and chose instead a career which enabled her to grow as an individual and become a participating member of her community.

Dehumanizing though they were, traditional family roles were not the only ones that prevented people from knowing and being themselves. In Hosanna, Tremblay showed that the sex roles promoted by Hollywood also interfered with genuine self-understanding. The protagonist believed that he looked like a woman, and taking his cue from Hollywood films, assumed that he had no assets but his looks, and no access to power, except through sexual conquest. His unsuccessful attempt to impersonate a celebrated actress led him to examine the images which he and his lover had tried to create. He then realized that many social distinctions between the sexes served no useful purpose, and often inhibited the spontaneous expression of the inner self. Peeling away the clothes, makeup, gestures, and vocabulary of sexual disguise, Hosanna discovered a man whose career, if not ideal, allowed him to earn a living without losing his self-respect; a man who shared his life with someone he loved and who loved him; a man who was ready to free himself from gender roles and simply be himself.

In Bonjour, là, bonjour, Tremblay depicted the transformation of a father and son relationship. Inhibited by the tradition of the authoritarian father, Gabriel did not express his feelings to his family. Once he and Serge had acknowledged their mutual affection, however, they were able to behave unself-consciously, and offer each

other understanding and support. The father, who had been absent, collapsed, or self-destructive in previous plays, was thus restored as a wise, loving, non-authoritarian figure. The aunts, who reflected the legacy of survivalism, and the married sisters, who exemplified the values of the modern consumer society, were alike in their dependence. They were manipulators who took little, if any, responsibility for their own lives. Because of their irresponsibility, Tremblay implied, they, not the incestuous brother and sister, were the ones who were genuinely immoral.

The first character to reappear in a major role was Carmen, whose transformation from popular entertainer into socially committed artist was depicted in Sainte Carmen de la Main. While studying with musicians in the States, Carmen discovered unsuspected beauty and meaning in her music. She also gained fresh insight into the lives of the dispossessed inhabitants of the Main, and composed a song to assure them of their worth. Her listeners were inspired with new hope and confidence, but before they could begin to rebuild their lives, Carmen was killed. Her replacement was a singer whose music and words from another culture provided distraction, but did not offer a vision of change. This play might have been seen as a Greek tragedy or as a Christian drama. Instead, it was apparently seen as an unduly pessimistic reflection of the situation in modern Quebec. The play had much to recommend it, but it did not match the mood of Quebec audiences, who in 1976 had never felt less oppressed or more independent.

The problem of freedom was less clearly defined in Damnée Manon sacrée Sandra than in previous plays. Each of the two black and white characters claimed to have found the solution to life's problems, Manon

in religion, Sandra in sex, and refused to consider any other options in life. Their personal rituals were not as satisfying as they once had been, however, and as they sought to intensify their experiences, each one revealed an awareness, even need, of the other. But despite all they had in common, they perceived themselves as distinctly separate entities--body and spirit, sex and religion. Their shared ecstasy, and the suggestion of reconciliation, were quickly dissipated by the revelation that they had been invented by Michel. With this Tremblay left the problem of dualism still unresolved, and invited playgoers to reflect instead on the problem of the playwright's freedom to communicate with his audience.

With Manon, Tremblay announced that the cycle of Les Belles-Soeurs had come to an end. Criticisms of his work--that he was parochial and repetitive--undoubtedly influenced his decision to leave the theatre for a while, but did not deter him from the project he had begun: a novel which would show the background of the characters in his plays, and thus serve as the genesis of his theatre.¹ As the novel grew into a series, Tremblay seemed more convinced than ever that he would continue to be inspired by the neighborhood of his youth, whether he wrote novels or plays. "J'ai vraiment l'impression, après avoir essayé toutes sortes d'affaires, que je suis né pour perpétuer une rue," he commented in 1980.²

Tremblay was not new to fiction-writing, but he admitted that the change from writing for the theatre had been his "choc culturel" of the late seventies.³ Nevertheless, he welcomed the opportunity to talk directly to the reader; as narrator, he could express his own ideas and openly reveal his affection for his characters. The novel seemed to make

possible a personal, intimate relationship with the individual reader: "J'ai vraiment l'impression qu'au théâtre on est là pour crier des affaires au monde et que quand t'écris un roman tu racontes une histoire à l'oreille de ton meilleur ami."⁴ The playwright who had intended his first major play as a "claque sur la gueule" was clearly trying to communicate in a different way.

In renewing his writing, Tremblay did more than adopt a different tone and "parler de tendresse."⁵ He deepened his knowledge of family roles and relationships. In his novels, he was no longer trying to "explode" the family unit,⁶ but to explain how the vicious circle of dependency and confinement had developed. When Albertine, en cinq temps opened in 1984, Tremblay acknowledged that writing the novels, which were set mainly in the forties, had helped him better understand the characters in his plays.⁷ Certainly no previous play gave such careful attention to the influence of one generation on the next, or to the way social and psychological pressures led to dependence, madness, and self-destructive behavior. However, Albertine also reflected for the first time a supportive society which helped strengthen individuals and encouraged them to exercise personal freedom.

Albertine depicted a woman's struggle to reunite her divided self by resolving repressed inner conflicts that had been accumulating for years. Nothing had prepared Albertine for life, and at thirty, she was already having serious problems raising her children in conformity with neighborhood standards. Her authoritarian behavior only worsened the situation. For this, she was considered a bad mother by a society that was itself authoritarian. Furthermore, it offered no help for her retarded son, no choice of careers for her daughter, and no treatment

for her daughter's alcoholism. After enjoying a brief period of liberation, Albertine discovered that she had failed to distinguish between affective bonds and internalized bondage to duty. Judging herself as severely as society did, she became self-destructive. Her cure began with the good care she received in the hospital. For the first time in her life, instead of being blamed and made to feel guilty, she was encouraged to lead as independent a life as possible. Instead of being taught to obey, she was taught to choose. The health services represented only one segment of society, but nevertheless they acted on behalf of society to promote individual well-being and freedom, rather than conformity to social norms.

Albertine thus represents significant progress toward freedom, not only because a once-alienated individual achieves selfhood, but because it is achieved with the help of a supportive society. Until she was fifty, Albertine was not strong enough to seriously question the fundamental roles assigned to men and women. During the sixties, Albertine became more independent, but collapsed after her daughter's death. Society had no help to offer except medication to dull the pain. During the seventies, the Tremblay characters who became liberated did so by breaking the social code or defying authority. Only as non-conformists could they find happiness and self-fulfillment. Finally, in 1982, society made possible a character's recovery of self; it was a small but important step toward freedom.

Writing in 1941, social psychologist Erich Fromm described the kind of supportive environment which some forty years later was to help Albertine become strong enough to take possession of her self and her life:

The victory of freedom is possible only if democracy develops into a society in which the individual, his growth and happiness, is the aim and purpose of culture, in which life does not need any justification in success or anything else, and in which the individual is not subordinated to or manipulated by any power outside of himself, be it the State or the economic machine; finally a society in which his conscience and ideals are not the internalization of external demands, but are really his and express the aims that result from the peculiarity of his self.⁸

The goal which Fromm describes here is the goal toward which Tremblay's theatre has progressed in the Belles-Soeurs cycle. Beginning with authoritarian characters in an authoritarian society, where no one could imagine self as separate from social definitions, Tremblay went on to portray characters who chose to exercise freedom despite the risk of social rejection. Then, in Albertine, society helped an individual overcome her feeling of powerlessness and take initiative in managing her own life. "The victory of freedom is possible," even in a society which had a tradition of authoritarianism.

A final reading of Albertine concludes this study of the theme of freedom; it focuses on the parallels between Albertine's erratic progress toward freedom and that of Quebec itself.

In 1942 the feeling of helplessness was pervasive. Albertine felt powerless to help her daughter escape servitude in the male-dominated system. Similarly, French Canadians strongly opposed conscription, but nonetheless found themselves obliged to accept military service under the king who symbolized their own conquest. A decade later, authority was more often contested, but it was also enforced in increasingly repressive ways. In response to her children's non-conformity, Albertine redoubled her efforts to enforce the prevailing social code. The result, however, was not conformity but alienation. During this period, Quebec's major institutions also became more repressive as

social and economic problems continued to mount in an atmosphere of resentment, fear, and despair.

During the Quiet Revolution, when Albertine discovered the immense satisfaction of managing her own life, Quebec, under new leadership, took charge of matters once controlled by others (the Church, the federal government, foreign investors, English Canadians). And much like Albertine, some Québécois, in their zeal to liberate themselves and make a fresh start, felt justified in pushing aside any obstacle to immediate, personal freedom. Then came the 1970 October crisis, when a hostage was killed by FLQ terrorists, and Canada's Prime Minister, a French Canadian, sent federal troops to maintain order in Quebec. Opinion was divided, but many, concluding that the FLQ had behaved irresponsibly in the struggle for freedom, abandoned all thought of independence, and supported policies of law and order. This reaction was not unlike Albertine's guilt and self-destructiveness after Thérèse's death.

The failure of the Sovereignty-Association proposal to win support in 1980 was a final blow to separatists, but by then Quebec's institutions and economy had undergone such a far-reaching transformation that even without political independence, Quebec was in a position to direct its internal affairs more completely than ever before. It was also able to make its voice heard in Canada and in economic and cultural relations with other nations as well. Thus while not in agreement as to what was the best choice, the Québécois held fast to their right to choose. The play's final image, the rising blood-red moon, lends itself to a variety of interpretations; such ambiguity is disconcerting, but not inappropriate. Whatever the future holds, there

is reason to believe that solidarity and unity of pupose will give Quebec the strength it needs to exercise freedom.

Notes

¹ See text 4-5.

² Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay" une société qui s'éveille," by Yves Taschereau, Actualité avril 1978: 17.

³ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Du Théâtre au roman," 1980, Ecrivains contemporains, Tome 3, by Jean Royer (Montréal: Editions de Hexagone, 1985) 73.

⁴ Tremblay, interview by Royer 73.

⁵ Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay et la mémoire collective," by Donald Smith, Lettres québécoises automne 1981: 55.

⁶ See text 132.

⁷ Robert Lévesque, "Michel Tremblay, le dramaturge," Le Devoir 10 nov. 1984:31.

⁸ Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (1941; New York: Discus-Avon, 1965) 297.

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