

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 9 September 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Assistant Managing Editor: Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.

## Isolation, Alienation and Search for Identity in Michel Tremblay's Play *Hosanna*

Mrs. G. Sripriya Ramu, M.A. (English), M. Phil., M.A. (French),  
RBT (Hindi), Ph.D. Research Scholar in English

A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D.

S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

---

### Transvestite Play - *La Duchesse de Langeais*



Courtesy: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La\\_Duchesse\\_de\\_Langeais](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Duchesse_de_Langeais)

Tremblay has written two transvestite plays: *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1970) and *Hosanna* (1973). The former is a grotesque tragic-comedy, in the form

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 9 September 2012

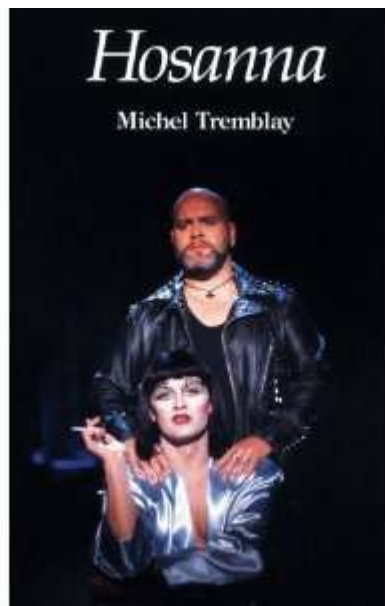
Mrs. G. Sripriya Ramu, M.A. (English), M. Phil., M.A. (French), Ph.D. Research  
Scholar in English, A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

Isolation, Alienation and Search for Identity in Michel Tremblay's Play *Hosanna*

of a dramatic monologue in two acts. Through the speeches of a single character La Duchesse, Tremblay is able to create for the audience a vivid and enormously pathetic personality and an entire life experience. The setting is the terrace of a café “down South”. It is siesta time. Duchesse de Langeais sits alone in the blazing sun, halfway through a bottle of whiskey. Thus, the sense of loneliness and isolation is created from the very beginning.

La Duchesse is about sixty years old. After a long and successful career as a transvestite prostitute, she is now suffering the ultimate indignity; she is rejected by a young partner with whom she has allowed herself to fall genuinely in love. As she analyses her present situation and reminisces about her past, the audience becomes aware of the central problem of decline and the pathos of an older person who suffers rejection by one who is younger and more attractive. The sense of isolation and alienation is reinforced by La Duchesse’s transvestism which pushed her into a position that is marginal beyond that of an ordinary old person. In Quebec this aspect of alienation and marginality carries specific overtones of cultural colonialism, as does the role playing which La Duchesse has developed to perfection.

#### **Transvestite Play – *Hosanna***



*Hosanna*, first produced in 1973 and translated with the same title by Van Burek and Glassco in the following year, can be said to be “the most ambitious and political of Tremblay’s transvestite plays” (Usmiam, 571). Usmani further observes that the identity crisis, undergone and eventually overcome by Hosanna reflected the identity

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 9 September 2012

Mrs. G. Sripriya Ramu, M.A. (English), M. Phil., M.A. (French), Ph.D. Research Scholar in English, A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D. Isolation, Alienation and Search for Identity in Michel Tremblay’s Play *Hosanna*

crisis of the Quebec people. “We have been transvestites for 300 years, that's no joke” (qtd. In Cloutier 64), says Tremblay.

*Hosanna* is a typical play in the Main cycle in which Claude (Hosanna the transvestite) slowly recounts the betrayal and humiliation to which he had been subjected earlier in the same evening. A two-act play, *Hosanna* presents just one moment of crisis in the life of Hosanna and her lover Cuirette (Raymond). The whole action takes place in the single room apartment of Hosanna, which has an atmosphere of “sadness and solitude” (129). The whole atmosphere is filled with Hosanna's perfume. The audience is also able to smell the “cheap heavy, disgusting perfume; a perfume so strong that it smells of stuffiness; a perfume that has imprisoned Hosanna for years, and which leaves rather sickening traces wherever she goes” (129 — 30).

### **Dream in Life**

For many years Hosanna dreamed of assuming the role of Elizabeth Taylor playing Cleopatra. In fact she has been preparing for a whole life time to dress up as Cleopatra for the annual transvestite Halloween party, She says:

Elizabeth Taylor's been mine for twenty years. The first movies I ever saw were Elizabeth Taylor movies. And the last movies I'm ever going to see will be Elizabeth Taylor movies. And someday, when I'm old-old-old and rich-rich-rich, I'm going to buy me a movie project that will run non-stop, and I'll sit and I'll watch Elizabeth Taylor make her entrance into Rome until I croak. (174)

For three weeks Hosanna has been going all over the city buying special creams, pan cakes, eyeliners, the fabrics, jewelry, etc. She has designed the dress and got everything ready. On the day of the party she has made elaborate dressing up. Cuirette also helped her to get dressed. At last Hosanna was ready to make her entrance into Rome.

Hosanna arrived at Sandra's party by a taxi. Cuirette, who started earlier in his bike was waiting for her at the door. La Duchesse too was there in the dress of a man. She warned Hosanna not to go in. But as she ascends the stairs of the night club, she is puzzled by the surrounding darkness until the spotlight suddenly comes on and reveals a host of other drag queens dressed as Elizabeth Taylor in ‘Cleopatra’:

The whole gang! Every single one! Babalu, Candy, Mimi, Lolita, Brigitte,

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 9 September 2012

Mrs. G. Sripriya Ramu, M.A. (English), M. Phil., M.A. (French), Ph.D. Research Scholar in English, A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

Isolation, Alienation and Search for Identity in Michel Tremblay's Play *Hosanna*

Carole, and ... Sandra! Every bitch in the place! And every one of them dressed up better than me. (*pause*) I looked like a beggar! (*pause*) They all acted as if nothing was wrong.... Me, too ... I acted as if nothing was wrong. Christ, I felt my whole body was exploding, I felt like I was falling into a pit, I could hardly breathe for Chrissake! But I didn't flinch. I just stood there staring into the room. (185 - 186)

### **Facing the Ridicule**

Hosanna is deeply hurt and humiliated when her scheme fails. Even her lover Cuirette joins in the ridicule. Hosanna rushes home, pouring out bitter accusations against Cuirette, whose behaviour she considers high treason. Cuirette says that they only wanted to play a joke on Hosanna. He too laughed at her because he began to hate her those last few months. Hosanna wonders, "I never knew you all hated me so much" (189). She tells Cuirette, "If I ran out of there like that, tumbling down the stairs, almost breaking my bloody neck, if I ran out, Raymond, it's because .... I'm not a woman .... And you are going to have to get used to that ...." (189). Cuirette now feels sorry, and confesses. "The important thing is that you be yourself, that's all. I think that's all ... Calude ... it's not Hosanna that I love ...." (Ibid).

### **Long and Painful Monologue**

Hosanna thus recounts her bitter and painful experience in a long and painful monologue that comprises much of the second act of the play. As she comes to the end of her monologue, slowly Hosanna discards the elements of her Cleopatra drag one by one, and she takes the final step of removing her briefs and confronting her lover in the nude and proclaims: "Look, Raymond, I'm a man .... I'm a man, Raymond.... I'm a man" (191).

### **Crisis in Relationship**

The play depicts an emotional crisis in the relationship between two lovers Hosanna and Cuirette. Each act can be seen "as an emotional boxing - match; each ends in an affirmation of love — the first tentative; the second, a final acceptance of Hosanna as he turns his nude body towards Cuirette"(Usmiani, 571).

Hosanna and her lover share real moments of tenderness when Hosanna's disguise fails and the sordidness of hetero sexual relationships are completely absent from the homosexual love experienced by Hosanna. "The transvestite symbolizes the

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 9 September 2012

Mrs. G. Sripriya Ramu, M.A. (English), M. Phil., M.A. (French), Ph.D. Research Scholar in English, A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D. Isolation, Alienation and Search for Identity in Michel Tremblay's Play *Hosanna*

possibility (or even the necessity) of a definition of love that is not only outside the traditional family but also outside the accepted heterosexual content” (Weiss 39). It appears as though the only characters who, through their assumed identity on the Main, have moments of happiness are the transvestites. In his original programme not Tremblay wrote: “I began to think of the crisis of identity that was wracking Quebec, and to search for a character through whom I could speak about it and what it was like not to know who you are, or to try and resemble someone else because you didn’t have your own identity” (qtd. Schwartz Wald, *American Review*, 502). Apart from these questions of identity and national oppression, Tremblay is also preoccupied with the problems of gender roles and gender performances, and the impossibilities of the heterosexual coherence.

Filled with a mixture of ethnic and social groups, Montreal’s St. Lawrence Boulevard, “the Main”, is the location of much of the action in Tremblay’s plays about demi-monde-the survivors of the respectable society’s ostracism-the prostitutes, transvestites, crime barons and petty thieves. With its night clubs and the colourful life, the Main provides a perfect background for Tremblay’s diverse types of characters, all seeking escape from lives they can no longer tolerate. The need to escape can often be traced to the inability to function in conventional society, or to the desire to find an individual identity. Judith Rudakoff observes:

Tremblay’s *Rebels* are almost exclusively women or homosexual men. His characters are frequently in the midst of periods of change, and are usually unable to free themselves completely from self-imposed prisons or from the constrictions of their previous life styles.... Tremblay’s condemnation of these forces is often evident in his depiction of characters who possesses a dual nature: their confusion reflects an inability to come to terms both with their emerging identities and with their restrictive environments. Donning masks in futile attempts to hide their self-doubt, many of Tremblay’s characters take the first steps in their personal rebellions. It is only when these characters begin to question the need for disguises, borrowed heroes, and second-hand mythologies that they can start to transform themselves into independent, confident human beings. (65-66)

## **An Allegoric Representation of Quebec's Struggle**

The play can also be interpreted as an allegoric representation of Quebec's struggle for recognition of her difference within Canada, and with Canada's fight for identity within North America. As Tremblay himself put it on one occasion, "We're Quebec. We're not a mixture of an English actress playing an Egyptian queen in an American movie made in Spain. We're Quebec" (qtd. Rudakoff, 70).

In terms of the political and allegorical interpretations often given to this play, one can assume that Hosanna can represent Quebec herself, striving to find an identity within a culture that is different from what she aspires to become and what she claims to be. Recognition of the political problem in Quebec is integral to an understanding of Tremblay's work. The parallels between Tremblay's characters' search for identity and Quebec's fight for sovereignty within Canada cannot be ignored.

=====

### **Works Cited**

#### **Primary**

Tremblay, Michel. *Hosanna in Heroines: Three Plays* ed. Joyce Doolittle, Red Deer College Press, 1992. Print.

#### **Secondary**

Moss, Jane. "Drama in Quebec". *Studies on Canadian Literature : Introductory and Critical Essays*. Ed. Arnold E Davidson, New York, MLA, 248 — 270. 1990. Print.

Nardocchio, Elaine, F. 1986. *Theatre and Politics in Modern Quebec*. Edmonton, Univ. of Alberta Press. Print.

Rudakoff, Judith. "Michel Tremblay", *Profiles in Canadian Literature*, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath, Toronto, Dunclum Press. 1982. Print.

Usmiani, Renate. "Michel Trembley", *Canadian Writers Since 1960*, Second Series, Ed. W.H. New, DLB, Vol. 60, Michigan, Gale Research Company. 1986. Print.

Usmiani, Renate. "Michel Tremblay," *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre*. Eds. Eugene Benson and L.W. Connolls, Toronto, OUP. 1989. Print.

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 9 September 2012

Mrs. G. Sripriya Ramu, M.A. (English), M. Phil., M.A. (French), Ph.D. Research Scholar in English, A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

Isolation, Alienation and Search for Identity in Michel Tremblay's Play *Hosanna*

Weiss, Jonathan, M. *French-Canadian Theatre*. Boston, Twane. 1986. Print.

=====  
Mrs. G. Sripriya Ramu, M.A. (English), M. Phil., M.A. (French), RBT (Hindi)  
Ph.D. Research Scholar in English  
Jamal Mohamed College  
Thiruchirapalli - 620 020  
Tamil Nadu  
India  
[sripriyaramu@yahoo.com](mailto:sripriyaramu@yahoo.com)

A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D.  
Head of department, Reader in English,  
Jamal Mohamed College  
Thiruchirapalli - 620 020  
Tamil Nadu  
India  
[aminkhattu59@rediffmail.com](mailto:aminkhattu59@rediffmail.com)

S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor in English,  
Anna University,  
Dindigul Campus,  
Dindigul - 624 622  
Tamil Nadu  
India  
[gunakundhavai@yahoo.com](mailto:gunakundhavai@yahoo.com)

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 9 September 2012

Mrs. G. Sripriya Ramu, M.A. (English), M. Phil., M.A. (French), Ph.D. Research  
Scholar in English, A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.  
Isolation, Alienation and Search for Identity in Michel Tremblay's Play *Hosanna*