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French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

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In order to introduce Quebec, the initial pages of this article present a brief introduction to the demographic, social and political situation in Quebec.

Subsequent pages present a description and analysis of drama in Quebec.

French Colonization in Canada

It was Jacques Cartier the French explorer who, during his second voyage, traveled through the St. Lawrence River and reached Mount Royal, which is now known as Montreal. In 1608 the city of Quebec was founded. But with the arrival of the British there was constant conflict between the two races. French colonization continued with intermittent wars with Britain. Two important wars were fought between the French and the English - one in 1759 on the Plains of Abraham, and also the Seven Years' War in 1763, which led to the Peace of Paris by which Quebec along with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland came under the British rule.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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In 1837 the rebellion led by Louis Riel was crushed by the British troops and in 1867 under the terms of the British North America Act, the Canadian Confederation was established. More political autonomy was given to Quebec and was recognized as a distinct society within Canada. But Canada has already been emerging as an Anglophone country with the arrival of thousands of Loyalists fleeing from the United States, and also immigrants from Scotland and Ireland. As a result the French settlers found themselves a minority, but a minority determined to survive.

Anglo-French Conflict

In his Report in 1839 Lord Durham observed that Canada was “two nations warring in the bosom of a single state” (qtd. in Martin 120). This conflict continues even today. As Hugh Mac Lennan observed, “Quebec refuses to forget her past... Quebec has not forgotten the conquest. She has not forgotten 1837. She has not forgotten Louis Riel. She has not forgotten and will never forget what was done to her in 1917 by the Anglophone majority” (291). Its history has been a story of national self-assertion by its people. Their dilemma is, as J.M. Weiss puts it, “a French “nation” within an essentially English speaking entity” (2).

Political Autonomy and Aesthetic Creation

Many Quebec intellectuals felt that the act of aesthetic creation presupposes cultural and political autonomy, and that Quebec literature and art would have no meaning in an English dominated society. As the poet Jean Guy Pilon wrote in 1969, “If, sooner or later, we're condemned to disappear, that is, to speak English, to live in English (even if, in the evening by candle light, we still whisper a few French words), the efforts going on today at every level of creation and of intellectual activity are useless and of no avail” (qtd. Weiss, 2).

In Quebec the very act of artistic creation in French, is itself an assertion of independence from English Canada, a struggle to find their identity. As Bouthillette writes, “wherever we look inevitably we meet the eyes of the Other-in this instance the English Canadian-whose gaze troubles our own” (Ibid.).

Quebec – A Distinct Society

Quebec has always been a distinct society, with its own customs and folk loric and rural tradition, social institutions, economic organizations and government. In the early years the parish priests emerged as the leaders of the society, projecting a French

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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identity by promoting Catholicism and French language. An extremely high fertility rate and overpopulation caused a great number of francophone to migrate to other provinces as employment from industrialization became available there.

Anglophone dominance went unquestioned as long as Quebec remained rural and agrarian. By the beginning of the twentieth century significant changes like greater urbanization, growth of industry, hydro-electric power and capitalist demands for natural resources brought the French community into more contact with the Anglophone elite, and capitalist structures. This contact, which increased as the century progressed, became the source of a sense of group consciousness and a sense of relative deprivation among the francophone Quebecers.

Quebec's Quiet Revolution

The period from 1960 to 1966, during which Jean Lesage led Quebec into modern era, is generally referred to as Quebec's Quiet Revolution. Several economic and social reforms were introduced and it brought Quebec into the main stream of modern western economic development. Greater urbanization resulted in the growth of a working class of industrial workers and a new middle class of white-collar workers who resented Anglophone dominance and sought changes in French-English relations. Quebec Hydro was nationalised and French Language Bureau was established. The newly created provincial Ministry of Education in 1964 replaced the church control of education with a new emphasis on engineering and technology. Parti Quebecois, founded in 1968 by Rene Levesque, advocated the independence of Quebec. Nationalism became a strong political force, which united the French-speaking population of the province, and the appellation "Quebecois" no longer denoted only a resident of Quebec City, but designated the whole province of Quebec, replacing the more general, less nationalistic "French-Canadian".

The Clear Message of the Revolution

The message of the Quiet Revolution was very clear—a truly modern francophone society. By the mid-sixties a better control over the fields of social-security, cultural affairs, immigration and international relations, and of course the capacity to raise revenues to fulfill those responsibilities was achieved. Such was the new conception of Quebec to be shared, as public opinion polls would consistently indicate.

When Parti Quebecois came to power in 1975, the victory was a sure sign that

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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independence was just around the corner. But, seven years later, when it became obvious, after the successive blows of referendum, the constitution patriation and the economic crisis, that independence was not actually round the corner. The general attitude of the elder people was disenchantment coupled with an almost universal rejection of values and an orientation towards the "good life". The younger generation has rejected the elders nationalism in large part. They feel that the elders were content to secure good jobs for themselves, protect their own tenure and let the door close for those who come after them. Many of them were inclined to think the nationalistic movement as a total failure.

Some Achievements of Quebec Nationalism

But in spite of its decline and severe misfortunes, Quebec nationalism has realized a certain number of objectives. The old inferiority complex is gone to a great extent and they have gained a new confidence. They are much more self-assured than they were in the early sixties. The city of Montreal has almost become multi-lingual and multi-ethnic. Quebec has better control over immigration and has been accepted by the immigrants as a francophone society.

Quebec still enjoys a special status de facto if not de jure. The changes within Quebec reflected an intense desire to forge a new identity. All said and done, nationalism is bound to appear in Quebec one day or other, under one form or other, for the very reason that a francophone society in North America is bound to be a fragile phenomenon. The linguistic issue has always been at the heart of nationalistic manifestation in Quebec.

Language and Nationalism

If the Charter of French Language is not maintained in word and spirit by the government, if other provinces fail to recognize Quebec's conditions for an agreement to the Canadian Constitution, Quebec nationalism is bound to appear again. 1992 referendum suggests that support for sovereignty has dropped significantly. But if left unaddressed, the whole problem will rise up again. If Quebec can have a sovereignty association relationship (or political independence accompanied by economic association with the rest of Canada) with Canada, which is a reasonable possibility in the long run, then a politically independent Quebec will become a real possibility—perhaps a probability.

Early French-Canadian Drama

Drama has always been the most neglected form in Canadian literature. The

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

factors that inhibited the development of drama are a sparse population over a larger area, lack of a metropolitan centre, competition of plays from London and New York, lack of a national character etc. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries drama was confined to military barracks (garrison theatre) where amateur artists performed well-known English and French plays. The first theatrical production was in 1607; when Marc Lescarbot's *Le Theatre de Neptune en la Nouvelle France* was staged at Port Royal, Acadia, to celebrate the arrival of Jean de Poutrincourt from his overseas explorations. It was only by the middle of the twentieth century that theatre emerged as a distinct and dynamic national form.

Theatre under the Control of the Clergy

Theatre was completely under the control of the clergy who enforced strict censorship - boys played female roles to avoid sinful contacts. In 1694 the Arch Bishop of Quebec banned the performance of Moliere's *Tartuffe*, put the director of the play in prison for blasphemy and threatened to excommunicate those who attended the play. Subsequently plays were confined to the seminaries or schools.

Resumption of French Drama

After the British conquest, the performance of French classical plays resumed, performed by English officers in Montreal. Fidelity to the race and to the land, and the complexities of French-Canadian life were the main themes. Historical plays presented an idealized image of Quebec and preached patriotism, nationalism and cultural survival.

After the middle of the nineteenth century drama became popular. Business and commerce began to develop, leading to the rise of the merchant class.

Canada's first native born playwright, Pierre Petit Clair's *Griphon on la Vengeance d' un Valet* was published in 1837. The play was not performed, and went unnoticed. He wrote light comedies in the vein of Moliere, while other dramatists tried melodrama, vaudeville and folklore sketches. (Vaudeville is a mixture of comic, musical, magic, acrobatic, dances, often accompanied by short films or audience, participation, illustrated with slide projection). The church was not so strict as before. Touring French and American, and sometimes European troops came to Canada. Theatre became a popular mode of entertainment for the middle class.

Emergence of Professional Theatre

Amateur productions slowly gave way to professional theatre by the turn of the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

century. By 1902 there were three important professional theatres presenting French plays in Montreal: Theatre des Varieties, Theatre National and Theatre des Nouveautes. There were also a number of permanent theatres. Light comedies with strong melodramatic elements became popular. History plays were also produced. The growing popularity of cinema and radio affected the growth of the drama. Burlesque remained very popular until television replaced it in the 1950s. Radio popularized burlesque sketches.

During the inter War years actors and writers earned their living by working for CBC and Radio Canada. During the 1930s and 1940s the plays of Gustave Larocque were frequently staged and attracted huge audience. Most of them were pageants based on Biblical themes. Laurent Tremblay wrote a dozen plays that he described as social dramas.

Popular Theatre and Avant-garde Theatre

After 1935 theatre in Quebec began to divide itself into two distinct directions: Popular Theatre and Avant-garde theatres. Popular Theatre put up what is called the “sketches” or humorous “revues” which addressed itself to the common man and reflected "popular culture" which was noted in French-Canadian life. These sketches and revues were a mixture of song, dance and dialogues that provided an outlet for criticism of government, church and society. In 1937 Gratien Gelinas created Fridolin, the comic character who poked fun at contemporary Quebec society through satiric revues called *Le Fridolinades*. The enormous popularity of Gelinas made it clear that in order to be successful, Quebec Theatre had to reflect its own context had to speak to the audience about their shared experience and in their own language, which Michel Tremblay did after twenty years with tremendous success. Gelinas transformed one of his sketches into a full-length play and thus introduced an era of dramatic realism in 1949 with *Tit-Coq*, the nickname of the hero, Arthur Saint Jean, and it means “the little rooster”. Many critics hailed this drama as the beginning of modern Quebec theatre.

Tit-Coq

Tit-Coq depicts the story of a soldier whose romantic ideals were shattered by his illegitimate birth, and his search for identity. Brought up in an orphanage, he earns to become part of a family. He falls in love with Marie-Ange who breaks up her promise to wait for him, while he is overseas fighting the war. She gives in to family pressures, and marries another man, Leopold Vermette. When Tit-Coq returns, he asks her to run away with

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

him. But the priest persuades them not to do so. It would lead them to further unhappiness. In addition to being alienated from the family, they would be cut off from the society that would condemn them as adulterers and their children as bastards. Thus the play reveals the important role the religion and church play in the lives of the average French-Canadian and the repressive nature of the conservative social institutions. The play also reflects Quebec's profound sense of alienation and marginality.

Tit-Coq presents many of the ideas and themes that were to dominate the French-Canadian theatre for the next twenty years. For the first time audiences were seeing one of their own for whom close family ties formed an integral part of their value system. In his next play *Bousil and the Just* (1959) Gelinat attacks the oppression of the underdog, and brings out man's inhumanity to man. Bousil is a God fearing, pious and innocent orphan, with a weak knee and an ailing heart. He was forced by his relatives to tell a lie in the court. The thought that he did not tell the truth drives him to suicide, soon after his appearance in the court. The play is an indictment of the Duplessis government, Catholic Church and the system of justice.

Yesterday the Children were Dancing

Gelinat's last play, *Yesterday the Children were Dancing* (1966) dramatizes the conflict between a federalist father and a separatist son and their opposing views on Quebec. The son intends to make his mark in politics by destroying symbols of English-Canadian domination. The play depicts the intellectual and spiritual havoc wreaked within a family by the separatist dilemma. Gelinat's plays are now undoubtedly dated. But he has played a major part in the development of a Canadian professional theatre. His *Fridilindes* created the revue genre in Canada and attracted record audiences. As a playwright and actor Gelinat and later Marcel Dube helped in laying the foundation of a truly Quebecois theatre. Their heroes are unmistakably French-Canadians who are closely linked to aspects of French- Canadian social, religious and political life.

Marcel Dube's Plays

If Quebec's modern theatre was borne with Gratien Gelinat, it matured with Marcel Dube, who is its most prolific playwright, having written some forty plays for stage, radio and television, including TV serials. Marcel Dube became popular through his play *Zone*, which won the first prize at the 1953 DDF. The play depicts the tragedy of a youth who is the leader of a gang engaged in the smuggling of American cigarettes to Canada in order to avoid poverty. He accidentally kills a customs officer, is denounced by one of the gang-members, is

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

imprisoned and is finally killed in an escape attempt. The tragedy of *Zone* is that of a generation of young Quebecers betrayed by their elders; it is also a tragedy of all youth forced by social conditions to become prematurely old.

Dube's plays have formed part of Quebec's cultural life. His early plays dealt with universal themes like lack of love, education and communication, boredom and the individual's struggle against society. His later plays dealt with the pursuit of material pleasures of the upper class, as well as their hypocrisy, infidelity and corruption. Both Gelinat and Dube turned from questions of social and economic problems to the political question of separatism and showed the moral vacuum of Quebec society that has lost its sense of collective destiny. It seems that personal freedom depended on Quebec's independence. Both used the vernacular of the slums in Montreal's East end.

Dramas of the 1960s

The dramas of the sixties often take the form of a search for personal identity, freedom and happiness within the family. While the dramas of Gelinat and Dube depended on American forms, the Avant-Garde in Quebec turned to Europe for its inspiration. Emile Legault, a Holy Cross priest, brought a European concept of theatre production to Quebec, with his troupe called Compagnons de Saint Laurent, which presented both classical and modern plays. During this period a number of professional companies were formed whose experimental plays were influenced by surrealism and the French theatre of the absurd.

The works of Claude Gauvreau and Jacques Languirand rejected conventional bourgeois realism and used the common man's colloquial French. Francoise Loranger, Robert Gurik, Rejean Ducharme, Roger Dumas, and Andre Laurendeau-all wrote interesting and provocative plays and brought about several innovations in the form and content of Quebec theatre. Francoise Loranger, for example, deals with the moral and social issues of modern society. She chronicles the painful decline of the past whose values and practices stand as a barrier to the present society.

Summer Theatres

Summer theatres flourished in the wake of government funding. In 1954 Quebec government created the Conservatoire d' Art Dramatiques with campuses in Montreal and Quebec. Montreal Arts Council began giving subsidies to struggling local troops. In 1958 Canada Council began giving scholarships to struggling young writers and artists. The 1960s proved to be the most remarkable decade in the history of Quebec theatre.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

The founding of Centre d'Essai des Auteurs Dramatiques in 1965, the establishment of a number of professional as well as small theatres and above all the change in the political and cultural atmosphere due to Quiet Revolution made the conditions favourable for the birth of a new Theatre in Quebec with the production of the plays of Michel Tremblay, Jean Barbeau, Jean Claude Germain, Michel Barbeau Roland Le Page and a host of others.

The Experimental Plays

The Experimental Centre for Dramatists organized round-table discussions of new plays, public readings, translations and publication. Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs* got its first reading, and the plays of Gurik, Millet, Garneau and many others got their first chances. It was a laboratory of dramaturgy, a place where a new form of dramatic discourse could evolve. Public readings of texts were followed by workshops and a vigorous effort to promote the text. The Centre also published texts and edited a News Letter entitled "Dramaturgies nouvelles". It was a principal force against commercialization of theatre and for increasing subsidies given to Quebec plays. This helped to create a sense of collective effort and aimed at the creation of a national theater. In 1960 Amateur Theatre Association was formed, which united all these groups and held yearly festivals and meetings.

Part Played by Social and Political Development

The conditions that helped the emergence of Quebec Theatre are social and political development, The Quiet Revolution, fall of the church from power, educational reforms, emergence of the middle class cultural elite, establishment of Canada Council, government subsidies and establishment of amateur and permanent theatres.

The year 1968 is a turning point in the history of Quebec. Rene Levesque founded Parti Quebecois, which radically changed the political game of the province. It was also in this year, on 28 August, that Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs* was performed at Theatre du Rideau vert in Montreal—the play that united the Popular and Avant-Garde theatre and thus created a new era in the history of Quebec drama. About this play Zelda Heller of the *Montreal Star* observed: "A turning point in Quebec theatre, in Quebec literature, even in Quebec thinking" (qtd.in Weiss 155).

The considerable dramatic innovations that appeared in this play and in the eleven others that were to follow would influence a whole generation of young dramatists, and

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12 : 9 September 2012

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A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

open a new era in French-Canadian theatre. But even more important than the theatrical innovations was the way Tremblay saw and depicted Quebec society. His vision gradually came to be an important part of the collective consciousness of French-Canada, and it is no coincidence that the period 1968-77, which culminated in the victory of Parti Quebecois, also marked the beginning and end of Tremblay's "*Cycle of Les Belles soeurs*." (J.M. Weiss).

Tremblay's Plays

Tremblay's plays are set on the plateau Mont-Royal—A working class neighborhood in Montreal's East end. It was here that Tremblay was born in 1942 and it was from here that he draws his inspiration. The play is written in "joual"—a French-Canadian slang common to the East-end—a kind of vulgar and crude language, full of curses. Tremblay believed that joual is the only language that can describe the working class Montreal from within. What happens in the play can be summarized thus: Germain Lauzon has won a million trading stamps and has invited a group of female relatives and friends to help her stick them in booklets. In Germain's kitchen fourteen women gather to help her. Germaine plans to furnish her apartment with luxury items mentioned in the premium catalogue. As they paste the stamps and gossip, the women become increasingly jealous of her good fortune. In monologues, dialogues and choruses they complain about the drabness of their household drudgery - too many unwanted pregnancies, coarse and drunken husbands, senile mother in laws, restrictive moral codes etc. They vent their frustrations, hatred and jealousies by quarrelling and exchanging insults. In the end they steal most of the stamps. The play ends with a virtual fight between these women over the stolen stamps that rain down over the stage as they go out singing 'O Canada'.

The play depicts the oppression, degradation and alienation, and their search for some possible way out. It is particularly the catholic idea of family that Tremblay attacks in these plays. Women are condemned to a life of obedience to the sexual will of their husbands on the one hand, and the sexual prescriptions of the church on the other. Men are not helpful—they are often drunk, cruel and never understanding. Men are physically absent because they have no part in the emotional lives of their wives. Germain's sister Rose tells about her husband:

..a stupid slob of a husband who can't understand a thing, who demands

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

his “rights” atlas twice a day, 365 days of the year. When you get to be forty and you realize that you’ve got nothing behind you and nothing in front of you, it makes you want to dump the whole thing and start all over. But a woman can't do that... A woman gets grabbed by the throat and she’s gotta stay that way right to the end. (105)

In her monologue Marie Ange tells about her husband thus:

I live in shit and that’s where I'll be till the day I die... Believe me, I'm not gonna spend my life in this shit while Madam Faso here goes swimming in velvet. It’s not fair and I’m sick of it. I’m sick of killing myself for nothing. My life is nothing. A big fat nothing. I’ve’n’t a cent to my name. I’m sick to death, I tell you. I’m sick to death of this stupid rotten life. (14)

In such a situation the woman can never be the keystone of a happy integrated family life. Sex is their main concerns. Frustrated with their marital and sexual lives, Bingo becomes the only pleasure they have in their lives.

Angeline Suave, an unmarried woman of fifty, often goes to night clubs to get rid of her loneliness with a few drinks and a few laughs. The nightclubs of Boulevard Saint-Laurent (Main) represent another way of life-the life of cheap shows, country singers, prostitutes, transvestites and petty thieves.

Pierette, another club goer, feels that life on the Main has its own frustrations, and the only way she can exist after the loss of her man is to get drunk. But she is not willing to enter the family as Angeline did.

Two Opposite Worlds

As the play ends, two opposite worlds are presented: (i) the world of the family (Rue Fabre Plays) and (ii) the world outside (the Main). This is the dramatic structure that Tremblay establishes for the ten subsequent plays in the cycle of Les Belles-Soeurs. Some plays highlight the destruction of the family, while other plays in the cycle highlight the life on the Main. They show the replacement of family by relationships that have been condemned by society. In the Main what the society condemns is glorified, and evil becomes good.

Thus the eleven plays of the cycle form an integral dramatic world in that they

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

chronicle the destruction of the family and explores means of personal liberation—the Main and Religion.

‘Main’ Characters and Themes

En pieces detaches (1970), translated into English as *Like Death Warmed Over* or *Montreal Smoked Meat*, is a domestic tragedy in which Therese leads a life of frustration and alcoholism. *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou* (1973) is Tremblay's most severe attack on family life as well as a political parable. The parents in this play represent an impotent and hopeless past, while the two daughters Manon and Carmen represent a possible liberation.

Bonjour la Bonjour (1974) explores a father-son relationship against a setting of sexual frustration and lack of communication. Serge, the only son in the family with three elder sisters and two spinster aunts, is the victim of sexual and emotional turmoil. He has just returned from Europe. One of his sisters wants to use his apartment for her extramarital adventures, while another wants to use him to procure the drugs without which she cannot keep her sanity. The third sister simply wants him to walk around the house in his underpants so that she can get a good look at his body. Rejecting his aunts and three of the sisters, Serge goes to live with his fourth and younger sister, an unassuming young woman who loves him. The intimacy that Serge and his sisters shared in childhood finds its natural expression in physical love.

The Main cycle of plays presents characters that have escaped the family only to find disillusionment and frustration in the cheap show biz and other entertainments of the Main. *Trois Petits tours* (1969) deals with the theme of alienation in show biz. *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1969) is a transvestite play, a dramatic monologue in two acts that deals with the tragedy of aging and alienation. Through the speeches of the single character, Tremblay is able to create a vivid but pathetic personality, and an entire life experience. La Duchesse the transvestite prostitute, who is nearly sixty, is sitting alone on the terrace of a café, half way through a bottle of whisky. As she begins to speak, the pathos of her situation becomes clear. She suffers the worst indignity and humiliation when she is rejected by her young lover whom she adores. As she analyses her present situation and reminiscences about her past a strong, pathetic and admirable character emerges. The central problem is the decline and the pathos of an elder person who suffers rejection by one younger and more attractive. The sense of isolation and alienation is reinforced by his/her transvestism. In Quebec the sense of alienation and

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

marginality ethic exhibits specific overtones of cultural colonialism.

Hosanna (1973), the most ambitious and political of Tremblay's plays, suggests the political/cultural transvestism of Quebec. The identity crisis undergone and overcome by Hosanna reflects the identity crisis of the Quebec people. "We have been transvestites for three hundred years, that's no joke" (qtd. in Cloutier 64) says Tremblay. Hosanna has spent endless efforts to dress up as Elizabeth Taylor in "Cleopatra" for a Halloween party. When her scheme fails and her lover Cuirette also joins in the ridicule, she is deeply humiliated. Each Act can be seen as an emotional crisis; each ends in an affirmation of life, the first tentative, and the second a final acceptance of Hosanna as he turns his nude body towards Cuirette. The transvest symbolizes the sexual dualism of the homosexual who is both male and female, but forced to play alienating and artificial gender roles. Finally there is an affirmation of masculinity—Claude strips off the gaudy costume to reveal the male body beneath the doubly constructed female persona.

The last three plays of the cycle describe the destruction of the family and explore two possible means of personal liberation: the Main and religion. *Forever yours, Marie - Lou* (1971) consists of two scenes presented concurrently. On one side of the stage sits Marie-Louise, the mother alone in front of the television, and Leopold, the father in his tavern. On the other side, ten years later, sit the two daughters. Carmen, who has left the home and is now a "western" singer in a nightclub on the Main, and Manon, a religious fanatic, who sits alone in the kitchen. As the play begins it becomes clear that the marriage between Leopold and Marie-Louise is sheer hell. Marie-Lou has let Leopold make love to her four times in more than ten years of marriage; each time he was drunk and virtually raped her, and each time Marie-Lou found herself pregnant. The children are caught in the web of their parents' relationship. Manon, who resembles her father physically, tries to emulate her mother's religiosity, while Carmen, who resembles her mother physically, attempts to break out of the family like her father. Marie Lou's solution is self-inflicted martyrdom. She yearns for the day when her husband would be in the asylum and she would be able to knit in peace.

Sainte-Carmen of the Main (1976) describes the revolt of Carmen who becomes a cabaret singer, and her murder by her boss. The play follows the pattern of a Greek tragedy. Carmen's death not only signifies the artist's freedom and mission, but also is definitely - a

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

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A. K. Mohamed Amin, Ph.D. and S. Gunasekaran, Ph.D.

French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

call for more authentic culture, rather than cheap imitations of foreign models, a criticism of the defeatist element in Quebec society—even a call for political self-determination. The play also destroys the myth of the Main as a place of hope.

The last play in the cycle, *Damnee Manon, Sacree Sandra* (1977) presents two disparate but contemporary characters pursuing their separate search for ecstasy—one through sensual pleasures and the other through mysticism, until the two become one in their quest. The conflict between masculine and feminine, and religion and sex are summed up in the existence of Manon and Sandra. Both are born on the same day, and in the same house. The play reflects the tension between surface Puritanism and repressed sexuality, which is typical of Quebec. What Tremblay wants to say is that both religion and sex take the source in one and the same need for the absolute.

The theme is expressed through an elaborate system of complementary images—Sandra in white, in a room painted black, and Manon in black in a room painted white, red rosary versus green lipstick, sensual use of a religious object versus religious use of a sexual object etc. Manon, daughter of Marie-Lou still lives in her mother’s room relentlessly pursuing the delights of mystical union. Sandra, a transvestite, returns to her birth place after wandering in the United States. She follows Manon’s activities from, her window across the street as he/she tries to create perverted ecstasies. In the end they realize that they have been created by Michel Tremblay, and have to return to their author’s mind, the opposites finally resolved.

The Popularity and Success

The popularity and success of the plays of Tremblay and his contemporaries the New Quebec Theatre may be due to various factors. These plays raised the question of nationalism at the centre of problems and conflicts besetting Quebec society. By mixing Avant-garde dramaturgy and Quebecois subject matter, these dramatists created some of the best dramas of Quebec Theatre. With the election of Parti Quebecois, playwrights abandoned a nationalistic interpretation of Quebec society and turned to the individual problems in the modern society, dehumanizing city life and the charm of rural life.

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12 : 9 September 2012

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French-Canada to Quebecois: Changing Perspectives in Quebec Drama

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