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Family, Identity and Love:
The Meaning of Pleasure in Michel Tremblay's
"rue Fabre" Play Cycle

by

© Gérard Lepage, Bachelor of Fine Arts

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

March 15, 1989

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ABSTRACT

Sexuality as it is presented in Michel Tremblay's "rue Fabre" cycle may be examined under three categories of inquiry: the family, identity, and love. When we apply certain ideas found in Michel Foucault's History of Sexuality to the plays, we discover that they further social control of sexual pleasure by giving it specific values and meanings. Tremblay's attempt to question the meaning of sexuality, and to evolve a theatrical image of sexual freedom, is limited by his dependence upon the sexual mythology of his culture.

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NOTATION CONVENTIONS

1. Ellipses

As is the standard procedure for ellipses, any time there is an omission from a text that is being quoted, it is indicated in double-spaced format.

Lepage states that he " . . . has an interest in Canadian Studies."

Any case where ellipses occur within a quotation itself, the single-spaced format is used.

"Lepage wondered...and then said . . . that he might leave it for another day."

2. Translations

All of Tremblay's interviews are cited in the language in which they appear in print.

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INTRODUCTION

Michel Tremblay is one of Canada's most popular playwrights and one of its best-known authors. Michel Foucault was a French historian and social critic who, at the time of his death in 1984, was writing a history of human sexuality that he never completed. After a lifetime spent examining a wide range of social issues, Foucault turned to the same subject that gave the strongest impetus to Tremblay's early dramatic writing. Foucault published the first volume of his history in 1976, and Tremblay brought his cycle of eleven plays to a close the following year. The following discussion will compare sexuality and gender as they are presented in Tremblay's plays to certain concepts that Foucault explores in the History of Sexuality.¹ In the case of Tremblay's work, these themes will not be examined for their literary value, but as evidence of the way sexuality is understood in contemporary western society.

Tremblay has been extraordinarily prolific so far in his career, and much of his output is marked by a concern for sexuality, but I have concentrated my research on the plays

¹ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction (New York, 1980); The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure (New York, 1986); The History of Sexuality, Volume III: Confessions of the Flesh (New York: 1986).

written between 1968 and 1977.² Most of the characters refer to childhoods spent on the rue Fabre in Montréal, and I therefore refer to the cycle as the "rue Fabre" cycle, although nearly half the plays are actually set on the rue St. Laurent, known as "the Main." One reason for my concentration on the "rue Fabre" plays is that the cycle, written with passion and speed while Tremblay was in his twenties, expresses a less restrained, less analytical approach than that found in subsequent plays such as L'Impromptu d'Outremont³, Les Anciennes odeurs⁴ or Le Vrai Monde?⁵ Tremblay said in 1981 that he tried not to examine his writing while in the process of creation,⁶ and that he portrayed the mémoire collective of his culture. The sexual themes of the "rue Fabre" cycle, drawn as they are from Tremblay's perception of collective experience, clearly represent his culture's sexuality. Tremblay was concerned throughout the cycle with sexual repression, the definition

² An excellent bibliography of Tremblay's works for the years 1965 to 1978 appears in Renate Usmiani, Michel Tremblay (Vancouver, 1982), pp. 169 - 174.

³ Michel Tremblay, L'Impromptu d'Outremont (Ottawa, 1980).

⁴ Michel Tremblay, Les Anciennes odeurs (Ottawa, 1981).

⁵ Michel Tremblay, Le Vrai Monde? (Ottawa, 1987).

⁶ "J'ai souvent parlé de choses que je ne connais pas pour les avoir vécues mais que je peux très bien m'imaginer parce que tout le monde a une mémoire collective tout le monde a un bagage collectif Je ne mets jamais de vitre entre ce que j'écris et moi." Quoted by Donald Smith, "Michel Tremblay et la mémoire collective," Lettres québécoises no. 23 (automne 1981), p. 56.

of gender, women's oppression, homosexuality, and sexual freedom. These are the major topics in his criticism of his culture's sexuality.

Tremblay's drama, though theatrically innovative and always entertaining, is not entirely successful in its goal of criticizing society's sexual structure. While the plays do foster sympathy for unloved, oppressed or marginal members of Québec society, or raise questions regarding the justice of the culture's sexual structure, the "rue Fabre" plays support that structure as often as they challenge it. This becomes apparent when we compare the plays to Foucault's work on sexuality.

Michel Foucault's approach to the subject of sexuality helps to explain many of the collective experiences so crucial to Tremblay's sexual themes. Foucault shows how the mémoire collective has been socially defined. His approach is not psychoanalytical, nor is it purely historical or sociological. Foucault's explanations are more in the nature of conjecture: part history, part political analysis, part social theory and part fiction.⁷ To say that his writing "explains" collective perceptions of sexuality is to

⁷ Vincent Descombes describes how the apparent opposition of science and fable is no longer as certain, philosophically speaking, as it once was (p. 91). Foucault is part of a generation of writers who, like Nietzsche, recognize that the "world is a fable, something told" (p. 170). Therefore, "[f]iction and truth are expressive of one another because they show the same set of relations." Vincent Descombes, Modern French Philosophy (Cambridge, 1980), p. 184.

oversimplify the case. The History of Sexuality shows how we think about our sexuality in contemporary western society, how we have thought about it in the past, and how those thoughts have imposed a meaning upon what are, basically, simple physical pleasures.

Describing the social processes that give meaning to physical sensation is at the heart of Foucault's project. Whenever Foucault uses the term "pleasure" we must imagine physical experiences without relationship to gender, moral value, or "meaning" of any kind. "Pleasure" refers both to those experiences that are simply sensual, and also to those that are more explicitly sexual. Foucault asserts that putting pleasure into words, into "discourse,"⁸ is part of the process that causes pleasure to be controlled. The act of thinking about pleasure is "problematization," and sexual problematizations occur within various discourses throughout history, such as those of philosophy, medicine, and justice. Problematization is the process through which " . . . being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought" ⁹ The notion of problematization figures in Foucault's work on topics other than sexuality. For example, in other studies, Foucault shows how the problematization of madness and illness arose from social and medical practices, and how the problematization of crime and criminal behaviour emerged from

⁸ See Appendix under "Discourse."

⁹ Foucault, Vol. II, p. 11.

punitive practices.¹⁰ Historically, sexual activity and pleasures have been problematized " . . . through practices of the self "¹¹

Foucault wished to discover the ways pleasures were thought about, made into problems, and socially controlled. There is no direct causal relationship between problematization and social control; one does not necessarily precede the other. The terms "problematization" and "social control" describe areas of interest in Foucault's description of the history of sexuality. Physical sensations are another area of this description. In the following chapters, I use the word "pleasure" to describe physical experiences before their entry into discourse. Perhaps it is not possible for physical pleasure to exist "purely," outside of discourse and meaning; nonetheless, the idea that it might is necessary to Foucault's project. It allows him to uncover which pleasures are problematized, which are not, and why this differentiation has been made.

With such a profound rejection of so many accepted ideas, the History of Sexuality becomes a kind of philosophical exercise.¹² What it offers to a discussion of

¹⁰ See Foucault, Vol. II, p. 12.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Foucault hesitates to describe the work as "philosophical." He does not wish to ally himself with a specific discipline: "There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how

Tremblay's plays is a new way to think about the characters in Tremblay's sexual mythology, and the meanings that that mythology is understood to convey. Tremblay was certainly not entirely content with the sexuality he found in the mémoire collective, and which is inscribed into the heart of his plays. Tremblay's remarks concerning the "rue Fabre" cycle, particularly those made subsequent to its completion, attest to his goal for radical change in contemporary definitions of sexuality. Foucault's historical "story," when compared to the plays, reveals that the kind of liberation to which Tremblay aspired does not come about easily, if at all. "Freedom" does not rest simply on giving oneself, or others, the permission to experience prohibited sexual pleasures. This idea is basic to Tremblay's social critique. Sexual freedom, in Foucault's terms, arises from questioning the meanings of pleasure, and the way these meanings fit into discourses of sexuality. While the plays of the "rue Fabre" cycle challenge the apparent structures of sexual oppression such as the family and church, they reinforce the traditional meanings of pleasure in the way they portray three areas of sexuality: the family, identity, and love. The result of the comparison between Tremblay and Foucault will show that Tremblay's desire to free sexuality is hampered by his continued reliance on some very traditional meanings of sex in contemporary society. The plays rely on these meanings

to find it " Michel Foucault, Vol. II, p. 9.

for their theatrical, social and political effect, and in doing so fail to foster sexual freedom in Foucault's definition of the term.

To examine all eleven plays of Tremblay's cycle in relation to Foucault's ideas would be a task beyond the limitations of this discussion. More than twenty years have passed since Tremblay began his prolific professional career, and during that time an enormous amount of critical material has appeared in newspapers, journals, radio and television interviews, and other documents relating to the hundreds of productions that have taken place to date. I have therefore limited my examination to those six plays that I consider to be the most important, making reference to the others when appropriate.

There is little new ground left to cover in an exploration of the cycle as dramatic literature. Renate Usmiani has done an admirable job of researching the plays' histories, and other writers such as Michel Bélair, Kathleen O'Doherty, Raymond Joly and Jean-Cléo Godin have provided numerous interpretations of the cycle's themes and theatrical value. This discussion, however, takes the cycle as a kind of artifact that exhibits evidence of how sexuality is understood, of how it can be used allegorically and theatrically. The plays are examined only insofar as they illustrate a sexual mythology. The family, individual identity, and love are the themes that occur most often in

Tremblay's rendering of the sexual mémoire collective, and these themes are the focus of Chapters One, Two, and Three respectively. In Chapter One, I will set the plays in the context of the first volume of The History of Sexuality, which examines historical materials from the seventeenth century to the present. In this volume, Foucault shows how pleasure, over the last three hundred years, became a religious, medical and legal concern. Chapters Two and Three take up Foucault's exploration of "identity" and "true love," and relate them to Tremblay's use of these themes in his plays. By proceeding in this manner, I am roughly following Foucault's own exploration, which underwent important changes in focus between the first and second volumes. The second volume of Foucault's history, The Use of Pleasures, was published several years after the first volume. It uses documents from Greek civilization, and probes more deeply into the "self." In this volume, Foucault was particularly concerned with those processes that make pleasure into something that " . . . can, and must, be thought."¹³ Finally, I will conclude by comparing Tremblay's perspective on sexual freedom with Foucault's.

¹³ Foucault, Vol. II, p. 7. Volume III: Confessions of the Flesh continues the same theoretical principles established in the first two volumes, but uses later historical documents.

CHAPTER ONE: THE FAMILY

Michel Tremblay and Michel Foucault both found the family to be an important focus of attention in their critiques of sexuality. Each of Tremblay's plays seems to show that sexual problems in the family cause children to disguise or misunderstand their true nature. Tremblay's particular perspective of the Québec family reinforces many contemporary notions concerning the conditions necessary for psychological health. Foucault shows that the family and the criteria for psychological health that define and are defined by it, are socially and culturally constructed. He questions the conventional definitions of human nature and sexual identity, and relates these definitions to diverse social and political discourses. Insofar as Tremblay's plays reinforce the contemporary ideal of the healthy family, they also reinforce traditional ideas of masculinity, femininity and identity. In this chapter I will examine Tremblay's critique of the family and its problems, and compare it to Foucault's analysis.

1. A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou¹

Of the eleven plays in the "rue Fabre" cycle, five deal directly with the family. In terms of the sexuality of its members, the families are almost identical.

¹ Michel Tremblay, A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou (Ottawa, 1971).

A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou was first performed in the spring of 1971. It was the sixth of the "rue Fabre" plays to be produced, preceded by Les Belles-Soeurs² in 1968, En pièces détachées³ in 1969, La Duchesse de Langeais⁴ in 1969, Trois petits tours,⁵ a work for television, in 1969, and Demain matin, Montréal m'attend⁶ in 1970. A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou summarizes the Québec family as seen throughout the cycle.

Sex is the central problem of the play,⁷ and is also central to the definition of each individual character. Raymond Joly describes the dramatic action as " . . . [une] mise à nu progressive."⁸ The common denominator in this progressive stripping-away is always sex, and as a result, the play draws a kind of sexual "road map" of the traditional Québec family. Each member defines and is defined by the sexuality of the other members. All the other plays in the

² Michel Tremblay, Les Belles-Soeurs (Ottawa, 1972).

³ Michel Tremblay, En pièces détachées et La Duchesse de Langeais (Ottawa, 1970). Rewritten for television, En pièces détachées (Ottawa, 1972).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Michel Tremblay, Trois petits tours (Ottawa, 1971).

⁶ Michel Tremblay, Demain matin, Montréal m'attend (Ottawa, 1972).

⁷ See Renate Usmiani, Michel Tremblay (Vancouver, 1982), p. 73; also Raymond Joly, "Une douteuse libération, Le dénouement d'une pièce de Michel Tremblay," Études françaises, vol. 8, no. 4 (novembre 1972), p. 374.

⁸ Joly, p. 367.

cycle echo these definitions. As Michel Bélair writes:

Avant cette dernière pièce, on devinait déjà cette situation qui semble être celle de toutes les familles mises en scène par Tremblay. Dans Marie-Lou cela est clairement exposé pour la première fois.⁹

Although only five of the plays in the cycle deal directly with the family, all the plays in the cycle refer to the prototypical family described in Marie-Lou. Whenever characters in the other plays refer to their childhood, the reference always describes conditions very similar to those in Marie-Lou's family.

The characters are Marie-Louise, a devoutly religious housewife; her husband Léopold, a factory worker; and their daughters: Carmen, a Country-and-Western singer, and Manon, a religious recluse. Roger, the youngest child, is spoken of but does not appear.

The story of the play is simple, its execution complex. The stage action involving the parents is separated from that of the daughters by a span of ten years. In 1961, Marie-Lou and Léopold spend a morning bickering before leaving for a car ride that ends in a crash killing themselves and their young son, Roger. In 1971, Carmen has returned to the family home to encourage Manon to abandon her decade-long vigil. At a few chosen moments, the sisters speak in the past, as if they are again hearing Marie-Lou and Léopold in the next room (p. 43; p. 50; p. 73; p. 82). Marie-Lou is a play of voices,

⁹ Michel Bélair, Michel Tremblay (Montréal, 1972), p. 43.

not physical action. The conversation between Manon and Carmen is interwoven with that of Marie-Lou and Léopold. None of the four characters inter-acts physically.

2. Marie-Lou

Marie-Lou is the central character in the play, and her personality is central to the play's action. As Yolande Villemaire writes:

. . . dans A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou, le problème central, exposé par Léopold, est un problème de cul. C'est surtout le problème de Marie-Lou, emprisonnée dans les tabous sexuels que lui a transmis sa mère. . . .¹⁰

Like her mother before her, Marie-Lou has a problem: she cannot enjoy sexual pleasure, and this is a direct result of the church's repressive influence. Tremblay stated:

Le contexte religieux a longtemps empêché les Québécoises de jouir; elles se soumettaient mais menaient la maison.¹¹

The play is structured in a way that reinforces the theme of Marie-Lou's sexual repression. During the climax of the play, she shouts,

. . . Pour moé, faire ça, c'est cochon! C'est bon pour les animaux...Pis tu me verras jamais faire ça avec plaisir Léopold, jamais, jamais! (pp. 85 - 86)

Marie-Lou is Tremblay's most complete portrait of the

¹⁰ Yolande Villemaire, "la scène érotomane," Cul-Q, no. 2 - 3 (hiver - printemps 1974), p. 13.

¹¹ Quoted by Jacques Larue-Langlois, Le Droit (supplément), 20 décembre, 1969, p. 7. "Perspectives."

sexually repressed female figure he portrays throughout the cycle. In 1969, he discussed the important role that sexually repressed women played in Québec society:

Les Canadiens français sont un peuple foncièrement malheureux. C'est dû à tout le monde qui nous a entouré, autant aux Français qu'aux Anglais, et c'est surtout dû -- comme on était un peuple rural -- c'est surtout dû au clergé, à cause du sexe. On est un peuple qui a été frustré. C'est pour ça que les Canadiennes françaises des générations d'avant nous sont des femmes frustrées -- ce que sont "les Belles-Sœurs" d'ailleurs. La plupart, ça part du sexe. Elles veulent des timbres: c'est une espèce d'envie, de jalousie, qui est bien canadienne-française...¹²

It is important to take note of how completely Tremblay attributes Québec's political and social problems to the existence of sexual repression.¹³ Like other social critics who begin their political analyses with a critique of sexuality, such as Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse,¹⁴ Tremblay suggests that the capacity to experience unrepressed sexual pleasure is a necessary condition for the reformation of society.

Marie-Lou holds the power in the family. Her repression manifests itself in frustration and destructiveness. "J'ai hâte que tu soyes fou pour vrai...", she says, taunting Léopold with what she knows to be his biggest fear (p. 73).

¹² Claude Gingras, La Presse, 16 août 1969, p. 26. "Mon Dieu que je les aime, ces gens-là!"

¹³ I am using this word in the sense of "suppression" or "restriction".

¹⁴ I will return to the writings of Reich and Marcuse in Chapter II and in the Conclusion.

A moment later, we witness his first attack of madness, as if Marie-Lou had summoned it up herself. When Léopold loses control, she screams for assistance: "Y va me tuer!" (p. 74) When the girls arrive, they find Léopold sitting in his chair. Marie-Lou, as usual, has manipulated Léopold in order to get the maximum sympathy for herself. Once we know how Marie-Lou's game works, we recall Marie-Lou's references to Léopold's other instances of violence,¹⁵ and realize that we have seen them mostly through Marie-Lou's eyes. An exception is Manon's account of Léopold's attack on Marie-Lou (p. 57), but Carmen points out that Manon shares Marie-Lou's tendency to exaggerate in order to elicit pity (p. 60). Léopold is almost powerless against Marie-Lou's manipulations, until the final moments of the play when, finally taking action, he deliberately initiates the fatal car crash. Throughout, Marie-Lou's behaviour is reminiscent of that of Hélène in En pièces détachées, whose challenge to arm-wrestle Henri is a taunting reminder of the loss of his former strength (pp. 36 - 38).

Mothers like Marie-Lou appear throughout the cycle, and all manifest the same frustrated sexuality. Tremblay considered the first three family plays of the cycle to be a progressively deepening exploration of this topic. Concerning the women of Les Belles-Soeurs, Tremblay said:

Le sujet de ma pièce, c'est la frustration

¹⁵ Such as his beating of Roger (p. 57).

sexuelle. Au Québec, il n'y a rien de plus important, tout part de là. Les Belles-Soeurs étaient une fresque; dans En pièces détachées je me sers d'une loupe.¹⁶

Marie-Lou continues Tremblay's examination of women's sexual repression, but the play concentrates on the way the anger and frustration that are a result of that repression dominates the entire family. In Les Belles-Soeurs there are direct references to issues such as child care and housework, but in Marie-Lou, Tremblay exposes what he feels to be the cause of women's anger, the absence of sexual love thanks to the clumsiness and cowardice of husbands. Marie-Lou blames Léopold's clumsiness for her sexual terror (p. 89), but the play is not structured to show that Léopold is at fault. Of the two points of view that are shown, his seems to carry the most weight:

LEOPOLD: Quand j'm'approche, des fois, dans le lit... quand j'te demande tranquillement pourquoi tu veux pas que j'te touche... parce que ça arrive que j'm'approche tranquillement, tu le sais... Marie-Louise, j'ai pas les mots pour t'expliquer ça...

MARIE-LOUISE: Ben ferme ta yeule, maudit sauvage. (Léopold donne un grand coup de poing sur la table.) (p. 84)

It is important to distinguish between two areas of sexual repression in the plays. The first is the church's repression of women. In the second, the effects of that repression are passed on to the family. As I will show,

¹⁶ André Major, Le Devoir (supplément), 14 novembre 1969, p. vi. "A joual donné, il faut (quand même) regarder les dents."

Tremblay was equally critical of both. He defended women's rights, but always returned to the effects of their sexual frustration on the household:

Les femmes mènent chez nous parce qu'elles sont tellement frustrées sexuellement, explique l'auteur.¹⁷

One particular incident in Marie-Lou shows how completely Tremblay felt sexual repression to be fundamental in women's oppressed condition. In the context of the play, Marie-Lou's fear of pregnancy seems to be one of the few justifiable reasons she has for refusing to have sexual intercourse. When Léopold suggests an abortion to deal with her latest pregnancy, it is apparent that Léopold is not demanding that she bear him children, as a man of another generation might have done. Marie-Lou replies that birth control is "contre la nature" (p. 55), but it is clear that her obedience to the laws of the Catholic church is largely an excuse to avoid having sexual intercourse. The result of this situation is to reduce Léopold's responsibility for his rape of Marie-Lou, and to increase our feeling that Marie-Lou is responsible for much of her own oppression.

Although Tremblay's allegiance to feminism is evident in the plays, he returned repeatedly and in detail to a depiction of women's suffocating domination when presenting the sexual problems of the family. This may or may not have

¹⁷ Jacques Larue-Langlois, Le Droit, 20 décembre, 1969, p. 7.

reflected the real condition of the Québec family; that is not the issue. What is of interest here is Tremblay's interest in women's sexual repression as a focus for his consideration of sexual conditions in the family.

3. Léopold

Tremblay was also critical of Québec men, as his portrayal of Léopold demonstrates. Just as Marie-Lou can be considered prototypical of the cycle's mothers, so is Léopold prototypical of the cycle's fathers. Crushed by a repetitive factory job (p. 63; p. 64) and suffering from hereditary insanity (pp. 73 - 75), Léopold is Tremblay's most complete version of a character who appears also as Henri in En pièces détachées, and Gabriel in Bonjour, là, bonjour.¹⁸ Unlike his portrayals of dominating, powerful women, however, Tremblay's criticism of men focuses on their absence and incapacity.

Léopold is defined by failure both in the world of the family and in the world at large. At home, Léopold is virtually useless. First of all, he is rarely there, preferring to spend most of his spare time in the bar (p. 64). When he is there, he is impatient and selfish, and spends no time with the children (p. 66). Also, as Laurent Mailhot states, "[f]rustration et impuissance sont

¹⁸ Michel Tremblay, Bonjour, là, bonjour (Ottawa, 1974). Léopold's mental instability is also reminiscent of that of Claude in En pièces détachées; his "impotent" violence is much like that of Johnny in Trois petits tours, and of Maurice and Toothpick in Sainte Carmen de la Main (Ottawa, 1976).

corrélatives."¹⁹ The fact that Marie-Lou is sexually frustrated seems to imply that Léopold is impotent. His apparently failed masculinity is also evident in the way the play portrays Léopold's expressions of anger.

Although Léopold's temper is frightening to Roger and the girls, Tremblay makes Léopold's outbursts seem more like weakness than strength, the expression of a kind of "impotent" rage. Occasional bursts of anger with life lead him to lash out, but, as Marie-Lou rightly points out, he does so only when he is in a position to win (p. 63). As a result, he seems both a coward and a victim. Throughout the cycle, whenever men demonstrate violent behaviour, Tremblay makes sure to undermine their power by making them simultaneously ridiculous in some way. Usmiani adds that in Léopold's case, his " . . . streak of hereditary insanity . . . threatens at any moment to lead him to the absolute impotence of the asylum."²⁰

Tremblay's criticism of men's impotence at home relates to his use of characters such as Léopold as political symbols. Tremblay encouraged audiences, readers and critics to interpret these characters as symbols for Québec. Léopold's weakness and cowardice are meant to represent Québec's passive assimilation of foreign culture, and

¹⁹ Laurent Mailhot, Le Devoir, 7 juin 1975, p. 18. "Femmes et Littérature, sur les femmes dans l'oeuvre de Michel Tremblay..."

²⁰ Usmiani, p. 56.

Québec's social and economic powerlessness. Tremblay made this clear in 1971, when he was questioned on his theatrical use of the impotent male character:

Q. Le monde que tu as habité, le monde qui t'a marqué est surtout un monde de femmes, l'homme est un être mou...

R. L'homme est une nouille. Il n'y a pas d'homme au Québec. Tout le monde le sait, je ne veux pas m'expliquer là-dessus Le père de "En pièces détachées" c'est vraiment une nouille, un légume.²¹

Although he portrayed Léopold as a failure, Tremblay considered him to be the first really male character to appear in the cycle.²² But why would Tremblay consider Léopold to be a man, and not Henri from En pièces détachées? Both characters are mentally unstable, alcoholic, crushed by repetitive jobs and ridiculed by their wives, who see them as worthless. An answer to this question can be found in the characters' symbolic function. Léopold, unlike Henri, directs his violence to a concrete political act. Tremblay considered Léopold's murder/suicide to be something of a positive gesture, in the political sense: "La seule chose positive qu'ils font, c'est partir se tuer Tout ça,

²¹ Rachel Cloutier, et al., "Entrevue avec Michel Tremblay," Nord, no. 1 (automne 1971), pp. 58, 59, 60.

²² M.B. -- Et comment se fait-il qu'il n'y ait jamais d'hommes dans vos textes ou que, lorsque certains sont présents ce sont toujours des êtres diminués ou encore des homosexuels?

M.T. -- Ah, ben, ça c'est clair, c'est simple. Y'a pas d'hommes au Québec. Quoique Léopold est vraiment un homme..." Bélair, p. 78.

c'est dans un but très, très, très politique "23

While this statement is somewhat surprising, it makes sense if we compare Léopold's act to the idea of manhood found in the sexual mythology Tremblay presents. O'Doherty notes the sexual connotations of Léopold's act:

Once and for all he asserts himself over his family, renouncing his emasculated status and taking his destiny in his own hands.²⁴

Léopold, unlike Henri, makes the masculine gesture of taking matters in hand. O'Doherty's interpretation accurately reflects the contents of the play and the symbolic portrayal of male characters elsewhere in the cycle. I will question the values inherent in this sexual symbolism in Chapter Two, but for the moment it seems clear that, in the world of the cycle, Léopold's action is at once masculine and politically commendable, marking Léopold's transition from a state of impotence to one of action. Another indication of Tremblay's ambivalence toward men may be found in the way the play presents the subject of Léopold's work. It is apparent that Léopold is oppressed by a competitive system of production, and by the resulting repetitive factory jobs the system creates (pp. 63 - 64). Tremblay intensely disliked the kind of male competitiveness that is so necessary to the

²³ Cloutier, et al., "Entrevue avec Michel Tremblay," Nord, p. 57.

²⁴ Kathleen O'Doherty, Disguised Realities, Religion and Sexuality: The Struggle for Identity in Three Plays by Michel Tremblay. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, (Carleton University, 1986), p. 52.

world of business:

. . . I feel contempt for men. Of course, I can love men individually . . . but I don't think men are very respectable people in groups That's what I don't like about society: it's based on competition between men. . . .²⁵

Nonetheless, in A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou, Léopold's refusal to fight his alienating working conditions is seen as an understandable but not entirely justifiable abdication from the system of male competition. Like Henri before him, who at the end of En pièces détachées is left chanting "Chus pas kebab . . . ," Léopold's inability to fight the system appears to be a failure to fulfil his role, a failure of strength:

MARIE-LOUISE: Vous êtes toutes pareils! Vous nous chiez sur la tête parce qu'on est en-dessous de vous autres, pis vous vous laissez chier sur la tête par ceux qui sont au-dessus de vous autres! C'est pas sur nous autres que vous devriez vous venger, pourtant! Pourquoi t'essayerais pas de le débarquer lui au lieu de nous autres. (p. 63)

In this passage, Marie-Louise could be speaking directly to the masses of Québec workers whose condition Léopold symbolized. Despite his opinion that men were contemptible because of their competitiveness, the men Tremblay criticizes for withdrawing from the competition are seen to be failures because they do not fight for better conditions. Tremblay does not quite exonerate them for this failure; men's

²⁵ Quoted by Marianne Ackerman, The Gazette, 12 October 1985, p. C1. "Albertine in English: Tremblay's latest on stage at Centaur."

softness and fear seems to be part of the Québec problem.

It would be a mistake to interpret these somewhat conflicting points of view as a conscious endorsement by Tremblay of the dominant, competitive male figure. Nonetheless, there is a sense that the "real men" of Québec would never allow such conditions as Léopold experiences to continue. Bourque's criticism of Henri, who is also without dignity at work or at home, applies equally to Léopold and other male characters in the cycle: " . . . il a abdiqué sa virilité, son autorité, sa place de père, de chef de famille"²⁶ The kind of man that Tremblay implicitly recommends for the good of Québec would be self-controlled and loving at home, but a fighter in the world at large; in short, the very epitome of the traditional, protective father.

The combination of Marie-Lou's dominance and Léopold's "impotence" and "emasculatation" creates the conditions for the prototypical Québec family. Here can be found the basis for the children's future unhappiness. In families throughout the cycle, women's frustrated sexuality is the most apparent feature of the sexual mythology; it is returned to repeatedly. As Léopold says, " . . . si tu avais laissée faire, un peu, des fois, ça irait peut-être mieux dans'maison, Marie-Louise!" (p. 84) Judging from Tremblay's

²⁶ Paul-André Bourque, "Le rêve triste et la triste réalité," Nord, no. 1 (automne 1971), p. 44.

comments concerning the importance of women's frustration, it seems that he agreed. Tremblay's men are contemptible and insufficient in relation to women, and helpless in relation to the world at large, and yet there is an enormous yearning for a "real" man. Paul-André Bourque states that Tremblay implicitly holds men responsible for the catastrophe of the Québec family.²⁷ This is because of their inability to be loving, attentive fathers.²⁸ Into the characters who are the product of this complex of family relations, Tremblay always inscribes the legacy of the frustrated mother and absent father, as we will now see in relation to Roger, Carmen and Manon.

4. Roger

Within the sexual mythology of the cycle, one casualty of this troubled family is young Roger, who dies in the car crash with Marie-Lou and Léopold. Although he does not appear in the play, and his line of action is incidental to the play as a whole, the way he fits into the prototypical Québec family is consistent with the childhood of all the cycle's homosexuals. On the Saturday morning of the play's action in 1961, Roger is on the sofa, in his usual bed in the

²⁷ Bourque, p. 44.

²⁸ See Jean-Cléo Godin, "Tremblay: marginaux en chœur," in J. - C. Godin, Laurent Mailhot (eds.), Le théâtre québécois II: Nouveaux auteurs, autres spectacles (Montréal, 1980), pp. 165 - 188. Godin considers Tremblay's search for a male figure to be the strongest overall theme in the cycle.

cramped family apartment (p. 51; p. 55). According to Marie-Lou, Léopold recently beat Roger for finishing off a jar of strawberry jam (p. 51). Marie-Lou defends Roger's innocence, but uses the incident to push Léopold to the limits of his self-control, making him seem a brute and herself a victim (p. 51). When Marie-Lou suggests that Léopold wanted to kill Roger in the cradle (p. 79), her accusation is so exaggerated that the validity of her complaints about Léopold's physical violence is called into doubt. As the play goes on it becomes clear that Marie-Lou is using Roger in her games with Léopold; her apparent solicitude about Roger's welfare²⁹ implicitly condemns Léopold as a child-abuser. When Marie-Lou tries to get Léopold and Roger to switch beds (p. 56), she is inviting Roger in the most unambiguous way to displace his father in the marriage bed. Ripley, having recognized that this childhood situation is common to the cycle's other homosexuals, applies a psychoanalytical interpretation for which Tremblay has provided all the necessary pieces:

The relationship of both parents to their young son, Roger, is particularly significant; for it throws valuable light on the identity crisis of the Duchesse and the dilemmas of the protagonists of the next two plays[, Hosanna and Sainte Carmen de la Main] . . . Marie-Lou . . . capitalizes upon Roger's terror of Léopold in order to force an unhealthy identity bond with him. Léopold's refusal to allow Roger to share her bed evinces a justifiable fear of the sexual consequences for his

²⁹ When Léopold mentions her "problème de cul," she shouts "Léopold! Roger est trop p'tit pour entendre parler de ça!" (p. 83)

son³⁰

Ripley's psychoanalytical analysis states a popularly-held belief about the causes of homosexuality. I will examine the psychoanalytical model later in this chapter, but whether or not that model is valid is not yet at issue. What is important here is that in order to demonstrate the problems of the Québec family, Tremblay repeatedly portrayed this Oedipal scenario in the childhood conditions of each of his homosexual characters. Homosexuals, as they appeared in the cycle, were representative of an absence of sexual freedom. He did not wish his portrayals to represent all homosexuals, but he intended that his homosexual characters be seen as symbols for Québec's crisis of identity.³¹ With clarity and precision, he showed how the traditional family, characterized by a sexually repressed mother and an absent father, shaped the son's troubled identity. Sexual freedom could apparently be achieved only by reversing the mother's sexual repression and re-establishing ties with a loving father.

5. Carmen

The importance Tremblay attributed to sexuality in

³⁰ John Ripley, "From Alienation to Transcendence: The Quest for Selfhood in Michel Tremblay's Plays," Canadian Literature, no. 85 (summer 1980), p. 51.

³¹ See Pierre Boncenne, "Interview: Michel Tremblay," Lire, no. 90 (février 1983), p. 94.

defining the characters' identities is no less apparent in the character of Carmen. Tremblay viewed Carmen as a liberated woman and a symbol of freedom for Québec.³² She appears in both Marie-Lou and Sainte Carmen de la Main, and in both plays, sexual freedom plays a role in her ability to be free in other areas. In Marie-Lou, the structure of the play emphasizes the importance of sexual freedom in Carmen's liberation. Throughout the play, Manon shows her disregard for sexual pleasure, which is a part of Carmen's lifestyle. Echoing her mother, Manon considers such pleasure immoral. Carmen encourages Manon to give up her religiousness, and thereby avoid her mother's "problème de cul." Finally, just before the moment in the play when we hear Léopold's revelation of Marie-Lou's problem, Carmen sets herself apart from Manon and the rest of the family. She defines her freedom in sexual terms: "Y'a pas rien que ça dans le monde, c'est vrai, mais ça aide a vivre quelque chose de rare!" (p. 82) Carmen, unlike Manon and Marie-Lou, can enjoy sexual pleasure, and her declaration occurs at the exact point in the play's structure where the theme of sexual repression is made explicit. Carmen's escape from the household was achieved by casting off the sexual repression that destroyed her mother's life. Only when she had done so was she able to be herself.

³² See Cloutier et al., "Entrevue avec Michel Tremblay," Nord, p. 60.

In Sainte Carmen de la Main, Bec de lièvre interjects three times with information about Carmen's childhood (p. 16; p. 44; p. 74). Léopold is mentioned only in passing, but Marie-Lou's abuse of Carmen is detailed.³³ This fact is consistent with Tremblay's statements concerning women's sexual frustration and their control of the Québec family.

Tremblay originally intended Carmen's career as a Country and Western singer on the Main to symbolize a state of freedom unheard of in his previous characters.³⁴ She left home for a somewhat tacky profession, but one that seemed a step toward freedom nonetheless. Five years after writing Marie-Lou, however, Tremblay wrote Sainte Carmen de la Main, in which he showed that Carmen's cowgirl persona reflected Québec's cultural assimilation.³⁵ Tremblay apparently did some re-thinking regarding the political aspect of Carmen's liberation. Raymond Joly presents an interpretation of Carmen's character that reflects another aspect of her apparent sexual liberation. Joly considers that the family's sexual machinery has left its mark on Carmen's sexuality as much as on that of the other children, but he focuses more on Léopold's absence than on Marie-Lou's dominating influence.

³³ For example, Marie-Lou is reported to have said at Carmen's birth, "Si les enfants passent par là, c'est que les enfants sont sales!" (p. 16) For a year afterwards, Marie-Lou refused to see Carmen.

³⁴ Bélair, p. 33.

³⁵ See O'Doherty, p. 53.

He notices that there is a sexual element in Carmen's choice of profession that is particularly apparent when we compare her to characters who resemble her. Joly ties together Carmen's career and her sexuality, demonstrating how her career expresses a need for sexual attention:

Nous savons d'elle un petit nombre de choses: qu'elle n'est sans doute plus innocente (p. 62), qu'elle est trop attachée à son indépendance pour songer à "rendre un homme heureux" (p. 86), qu'elle "frôle du monde" tant qu'elle veut (p. 89) mais qu'elle n'est pas putain pour autant (p. 68); et, surtout, qu'elle s'est débarrassée de tout son passé, en se faisant pour ainsi dire un trou dans la tête, et qu'elle a trouvé le bonheur dans un métier qui lui plaît: "J'aime c'que j'fais, Manon . . ." (p. 91).

Quand j'monte sur le stage, le soir, pis que j'me place devant mon micro, pis que la musique commence, j'me dis que si y seraient pas morts, eux autres [les parents], j's'rais probablement pas là . . . Pis quand j'commence ma première chanson de cow-boy, chus tellement heureuse qu'y soient morts! [. . .] 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! [. . .] J'pense . . . que chus t'une bonne chanteuse, Manon! (p. 93)

Il me semble que tous ces traits composent, au point de vue psychologique, le tableau d'une régression. Ce que le chant offre à Carmen, ce sont des joissances exhibitionnistes -- pendant des émois voyeuristes de Manon -- et le sentiment narcissique de dominer en séduisant. Elle vit son métier, qui est le pivot de sa vie, comme une activité sexuelle; mais c'est un sexualité qui n'est créatrice d'aucun lien humain complet. Carmen reste la digne fille de Léopold, qui définissait ainsi l'érotisme conjugal: "Moé, j'prends mon plaisir, prends le tien!" (p. 89)³⁶

³⁶ Joly, p. 369.

Joly's perception of Carmen provides insight into Tremblay's sexual mythology. The Main, Carmen's new home, is always pictured as a site of sexual permissiveness that never provides the lasting relationship that the characters always desire, but that is always just beyond their grasp. For Carmen to go to the Main puts her in the same camp as Pierrette (Les Belles-Soeurs), Carlotta (Trois petits tours), Lola Lee/Rita and Louise (Demain matin, Montréal m'attend), who also fail to find love on a personal level, and settle for a sense of love that they get from performing. I will examine the theme of love in Chapter Three, but in the cycle as a whole the absence of love is a major theme, and the connection between performing and erotic pleasure cannot be ignored. It is not necessary to subscribe to Joly's psychoanalytical interpretation to observe that the absence of a male love object has apparently affected the identities of the prototypical family's children. Tremblay himself did not consciously focus on men's absence as the most important force in defining the children's identity. As Bourque states, Tremblay implicitly held men responsible for the "catastrophe" of the Québec family³⁷ because of their absence, but it was women's frustration he blamed explicitly. Again, I am not proposing that one of these psychoanalytical analyses should be chosen over the other. I am simply showing how completely characters throughout the cycle

³⁷ Bourque, p. 44.

manifest apparent identity problems because of the sexual conditions in their families. All other aspects of their lives reflect those conditions.

6. Manon

Manon is the only remaining character of A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou. For the most part, she is like her mother, but with the character of Manon Tremblay added an interesting twist to his critique of religious repression. Carmen suggests that Manon's religiousness is itself a warped manifestation of repressed desire:

CARMEN: . . . [t]u souffres un bon coup, là, pis ensuite tu vas te réfugier aux pieds du Sacré Coeur, j'suppose! C'est un homme, lui aussi, pourtant...

MANON: Tu commences à aller un peu loin, là, j't'avertis...

CARMEN: C'est vrai qu'y'est pas ben ben dangereux, lui! (pp. 65 - 66)

Tremblay elaborated upon this manifestation of Manon's sexual repression in the last play of the cycle, Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra.³⁸ Here, Manon is one of the two central figures. She is joined by the transvestite, Sandra. Sandra, whose real name is Michel, has returned to the rue Fabre and to the world of the women who raised him. His childhood was much like that of all the homosexuals in the cycle: " . . . moé je gravitais autour de mon énorme moman, généreuse à l'excès pis étouffante comme une journée de canicule"

³⁸ Michel Tremblay, Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra (Ottawa, 1977).

(p. 62) Tremblay's two strongest images in the cycle are united here: the sexually repressed woman and the smothered, homosexual son.

In this play, both characters obsessively seek an ultimate experience that is strongly sexual. The play follows Sandra as he elaborately prepares for the arrival of his lover. His plans become increasingly baroque as the play progresses, and he finally describes his lover's impending visit as a religious rite (p. 56). For her part, Manon imbues her faithfulness with a goodly portion of sexual frustration. For example, she describes her religious experience as if it were a sexual orgasm:

Ha! Plus haut! Chus prête! Plus haut! Ecrasez-moé sous votre poids, faites de moé une chose difforme, bancale, mais sainte. Laissez-moé boiter dans la frange de votre volonté! (p. 65)

Manon's ecstatic humiliation is an unmistakable expression of the struggle between her need for a man and her fear of sexual pleasure. Like Carmen and Roger, she apparently suffers from Marie-Lou's sexual fears and Léopold's absence in her childhood. In Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra, the conditions in the prototypical Québec family continue to be central to Tremblay's depiction of the children's sexuality, whether it takes the form of homosexuality, exhibitionism, or religious obsession. The cycle ends with Tremblay's two strongest images from the sexual mythology, the sexually repressed woman and the homosexual son, returning to their origins on the rue Fabre.

7. Repression, freedom and the family

Before turning to Foucault's analysis of the family, it is necessary to define further Tremblay's particular perspective on the family's sexuality. As the discussion of A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou makes clear, Tremblay understood repression to be the driving force in the family's problems. There are two aspects of repression that Tremblay portrays: the repressive effects of the church on women, and the effects of women's resulting frustration on their families. Women convey to their children a fear of sexual enjoyment, or burden family members with by-products of their sexual frustration such as destructiveness or overbearing need. The way Tremblay characterized families began with this figure of the repressed and frustrated women that he drew from Québec's sexual mythology. Men are despised when they display the traditional male traits of a tendency to physical violence and a desire for deferential treatment, yet they are equally despised when they fail to manifest other male traits, such as assertiveness in work and politics. Their weakness and absence jeopardizes the identities of the family's children, many of whom express a yearning for a strong male figure.

Usmiani writes that in all the plays of the cycle we " . . . find a plea for sexual liberation . . . ,"³⁹ and this opinion is echoed by all the major critics of Tremblay's

³⁹ See Usmiani, p. 22.

work. The question at hand is, how did Tremblay conceive of sexual freedom? What kind of society would result were repression to be overcome?

It would seem that, in the world of the cycle, if pleasure were released from repression then the unhappiness of Tremblay's characters would be resolved. Women would be satisfied and their destructiveness would cease. If men stood up for themselves and were more loving to their families, their wives and children would not find themselves with confused identities and obsessed with sexual longing. This newly-found balance in the parents' psyches would allow the children to express their real sexual feelings, and they would not be obliged to disguise and mask their "true" identities. Tremblay's prescription for sexual freedom demands a family with a strong father figure and a sexually-satisfied mother. This family configuration would apparently ensure psychological health and, by extension, social and political well-being.

However, one of Tremblay's goals for the cycle was to demonstrate that sexual roles were socially invented. Speaking in 1981 four years after he had completed the cycle, he stated that a normal society, for him, would not differentiate between the male role and the female role.⁴⁰ One would therefore expect the family plays to express an

⁴⁰ See Smith, p. 50.

approval of traditional feminine qualities in men, and masculine qualities in women. But if, as he claimed, questions of masculinity and femininity bear no relation to a person's psychological health, why would the unfortunate family configuration that he presents always guarantee a crisis in identity? Surely, if Tremblay always considered femininity to be a welcome attribute, at least one of his many homosexuals might have combined effeminacy, sexual passivity and happiness. And if the male role was so despicable, why did its absence imperil Québec's individual and social autonomy? Why did so many characters in the cycle suffer from the absence of a strong male figure? Why would Tremblay return repeatedly to the description of the family typified in Marie-Lou as an explanation for Québec's many ills? After the cycle was completed Tremblay may have wanted to relativize the difference between masculine and feminine, but during the writing of the cycle itself his idea of sexual freedom was tied to the re-establishment of relationships typical of the traditionally normal family. Tremblay's critique of the family, at least as he saw it in the late sixties and early seventies, took issue with gender roles not in the normal family, but in the abnormal family. His criticisms were not intended to destroy the family, but to create one that was more balanced and loving:

Q. Tu dis que tu détruis la famille dans "A toi, pour toujours ta Marie-Lou," est-ce ça veut dire que tu ne crois plus en la famille?

R. Non. C'est la famille telle qu'elle était ici .
 . . . C'est la famille commandée par le curé,
 écrasée par l'ignorance...Faut le lire!⁴¹

Of course, Tremblay might reply to this discussion, as he did to critics who deplored his depressing characterizations, that he was portraying a sick society in need of change. But what makes these characters sick is precisely the confusion in their sexual identity; Tremblay showed that confusion in their sexual identity had been the result of their experience of dominating women and absent men, and that their happiness could be achieved by correcting that situation.

A biographical note helps us to understand Tremblay's particular perspective on repression, as he conveyed it in the cycle. Tremblay stated that proximity to women, in combination with the absence of his father, were factors in his own homosexuality. The following is an excerpt from an interview with James Quig in 1977:

I mention that he always seems to be writing about women -- and in some cases, transvestites. "I have instant empathy with women. My father was a pressman at La Patrie and worked nights all the time I was raised by my mother and grandmother, two aunts and a cousin. The house was full of women And let's face it. I don't consider myself very masculin and I have absolutely no complexes about it. I found out when I was 10 years old."⁴²

⁴¹ Cloutier et al., p. 56.

⁴² James Quig, The Canadian (supplement to the Ottawa Citizen), 14 May 1977 p. 19. "The Joul Revolution, Playwright Michel Tremblay: works of art from working-class French."

The conditions that Tremblay believes contributed to his own homosexuality bear important similarities to those portrayed in the characters of Roger, Sandra, Hosanna, and Serge:⁴³ his household was dominated by women, his father was mostly absent, he did not consider himself particularly masculine, and he was homosexual. Tremblay's analysis of his homosexuality demonstrates a belief, common to the mémoire collective of which his family was no doubt a part, that homosexuality arises from a surplus of womanliness and an absence of maleness.

Tremblay always portrayed the community of women as a "société non permissive."⁴⁴ In 1983, he remarked upon how thoroughly the cycle had been shaped with this image in mind:

Comme j'étais dans une société très fermée, non permissive, et que j'étais homosexuel, qui était impossible à vivre ouvertement, le théâtre a été une façon détournée de dire mon mal de vivre en me cachant, en prétextant que ces problèmes là, ceux des femmes comme ceux de l'homosexualité, étaient vécues par d'autres et non par moi.⁴⁵

It is fairly easy to see how women and homosexuals might share the problem of being denied the right to enjoy sexual pleasure. For centuries, Catholic theology has apparently

⁴³ I will discuss Serge's sexuality on page 42 of this discussion.

⁴⁴ Quoted by Boncenne, p. 94.

⁴⁵ Boncenne, p. 93.

helped to repress sexual pleasure.⁴⁶ What is harder to grasp, and more interesting, is the way in which the repressed, frustrated women whom Tremblay portrays are apparently responsible for the identity crises of their children.

Of course, Tremblay intended his portrayal of homosexuals to be symbolic of Québec's identity crisis,⁴⁷ and not a statement that homosexuals in general do not know who they are. I will address that symbolism in Chapter Two. In terms of the family's sexuality, the questions that arise at this point are: What effect is the close mother/son relationship considered to have on the son's identity? How is her predominant influence understood to shape sexual desire? In the case of characters such as Marie-Lou and Manon, how is a woman's sexual desire constitutive of her identity? The answers to these questions hold the key to the cycle's prescription for sexual freedom, individual identity, and social freedom. To better understand the apparent connection between these phenomena, we must look at the orthodox psychoanalytical model of sexual normality. Once we have been very specific about terms such as maleness and femaleness, activity and passivity, and identity and

⁴⁶ Foucault takes issue with the idea that sex has been repressed by the church or other social institutions. To fully explain his critique of repression is beyond the scope of this discussion, but the important underlying principles of his analysis appear in the Conclusion.

⁴⁷ See Boncenne, p. 94.

alienation, we will turn to Foucault's historical work on the family, and finally to Bonjour, là, bonjour.

8. The psychoanalytical model

The traditional Québec family that Tremblay portrays duplicates exactly the processes that are described in orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis:

Freud's psychoanalytic theory holds that the very young boy and girl are not masculine and feminine but bisexual (that is, they have both passive and active libidinal aims); the boy who renounces most of his passivity becomes masculine and the girl who renounces most of her activity becomes feminine . .
 . .⁴⁸

The renunciation of the boy's passivity and the girl's activity takes place in a series of psycho-sexual stages, in which the mouth, anus and genitals are successive focuses of sexual pleasures. The mature, normal adult is defined by his or her success in channelling these erotic urges exclusively to the genital area; this accomplished, the individual can be said to have achieved "genital primacy."

Psychologically normal sexuality depends not only on the correct configuration of passivity and activity, but on a particular sequence of identifications with, and fears of, both parents. This sequence results in the male child identifying with the male figure, and focusing his love on the female figure. Thus:

⁴⁸ Gad Horowitz, Repression, Basic and surplus repression in psycho-analytic theory: Freud, Reich and Marcuse (Toronto, 1977), p. 87.

Loving the male, just as much as being loved by the male, is equated with castration. And there is no possibility, in 'normal' cases, of directing passive desire to females either In avoiding the identification with his passive-castrated mother, the boy identifies totally with the image of his active-phallic father.⁴⁹

For a boy to enjoy passive intercourse, he must have identified with his mother and not with his father. If his taste for that particular pleasure persists, several psychoanalytical metaphors can be applied to describe his condition, the most famous being the "Oedipus complex."

Horowitz, like Foucault, points out that a male's desire to be penetrated is only culturally associated with feminine behaviours; nothing about being like a woman in any given area necessarily implies a desire to be penetrated. And yet,

. . . femininity was equated with submission to the father-right, that is, to might. Increasingly, from this point onward, one could not be feminine, i.e., desire penetration, without becoming submissive, renouncing activity, the liberty to "master things in general, to act and become."⁵⁰

Femininity, or more importantly in this discussion, effeminacy, has almost come to imply that one does not exist. The desire to be penetrated is, in contemporary western sexual mythology, a symptom of that non-existence. Existence, for both men and women, is defined by the male model of identity:

⁴⁹ Horowitz, pp. 98 - 99.

⁵⁰ Horowitz, p. 115.

A 'normal' man is active, aggressive, independent, exclusively heterosexual, more or less restricting his heterosexuality to the active thrusting of his penis into the passive, receptive vagina.⁵¹

The metaphor of "castration" implies that a man is submissive on all levels because he does not actively thrust with his penis during intercourse. The latter activity defines maleness, and has come to be associated with productivity, independence, autonomy and strength.

The psychoanalytical interpretation of Tremblay's characters by Godin, Joly, O'Doherty and Usmiani reinforces the implicit assumptions of what pleasure means, in contemporary thinking, in relation to personal and social identity. For example, when O'Doherty and others describe Léopold as "emasculated" and Marie-Lou as "castrating," they are making reference to the psychoanalytical system, and to all of its underlying values. Léopold's act of murder/suicide can be considered a masculine act only if we subscribe to the principle that masculinity is defined by sexual and psychic "activity." Marie-Lou's behaviour is only "castrating" if we assume that she has the power to define the other characters' maleness. The castrating world of women can be thought so only if phallic "activity" defines maleness. Transvestitism can be considered as symbolic of alienation only if we understand that traditionally feminine pleasures such as softness, allure, and sexual passivity

⁵¹ Horowitz, p. 87.

disguise a man's "real" identity. Similarly, homosexuality can be used as a symbol of identity crisis only if we understand that its implied submissiveness threatens the "true" male identity. When Raymond Joly takes note of Carmen's need for a man, he calls that need "regression,"⁵² a return to one of the personality's "unfinished," "pre-genital" stages, the finished stage of course requiring a woman to engage in a "genitally-primal" sexual relationship with one man.

Where do the "rue Fabre" plays stand in relation to the tenets of psychoanalysis? Tremblay certainly provides all the necessary ingredients for a psychoanalytical interpretation, but does he accept the underlying values of that interpretation, or reject them? In fact, Tremblay cannot be said to purposefully accept the meanings of sexual pleasures as defined by psychoanalysis. We can certainly state that the plays demonstrate a struggle with these definitions. However, when we examine Foucault's history of the family, it becomes apparent that in the "rue Fabre" plays, Tremblay demonstrates the "truth" of psychoanalytical processes. The plays suggest that a return to the psychoanalytically normal family will ensure the achievement of identity and love. Foucault shows how this prescription reinforces a way of thinking about sexuality that extends control by legal, medical and political institutions over

⁵² Joly, p. 369.

individual experiences of pleasure.

9. Foucault's model of the family

When compared to Foucault's work in the History of Sexuality, Tremblay's presentation of the Québec family can be seen to define sexual pleasure⁵³ in a way that furthers the social control of sex. Foucault takes issue with the analysis of the family that posits that sexuality is repressed. In the History of Sexuality, Volume I, Foucault writes:

The family, in its contemporary form, must not be understood as a social, economic and political structure of alliance that excludes or at least restrains sexuality, that diminishes it as much as possible On the contrary, its role is to anchor sexuality and provide it with a permanent support.⁵⁴

Foucault's analysis shows how the social institution called the family attributes specific meanings to pleasures, and helps to extend the effects of social control in conjunction with institutions of medicine, government and law.

In the last three hundred years, sexuality has been, to use Foucault's metaphor, "deployed" as an instrument of social control. Foucault uses the phrase deployment of sexuality to refer to a set of discourses that controls pleasure by defining the way we think about or "problematize"

⁵³ See above, Introduction, p. iv.

⁵⁴ p. 108.

it:⁵⁵

The deployment of sexuality has its reason for being . . . in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way; and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way.⁵⁶

Foucault sometimes refers to this process of deployment as a "technology of power"⁵⁷ or as the "sexual technology,"⁵⁸ but his goal is to show how power controls pleasure, not by repressing it, but by defining its meaning through discourses.⁵⁹ In Volume I, Foucault concentrates on the legal, political and medical discourses that began in the seventeenth century. The deployment of sexuality is the sum of all these discourses, and the contemporary family combines the deployment of sexuality with the "deployment of alliance."

The phrase deployment of alliance describes " . . . a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions."⁶⁰ Like the deployment of sexuality, it too is based on relations of sex, but only in a very general way. It relies on a system of social conditioning in which men become the owners of

⁵⁵ See above, Introduction, pp. iv and v.

⁵⁶ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 107.

⁵⁷ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 109.

⁵⁸ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 123.

⁵⁹ See Appendix under "Discourse."

⁶⁰ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 106.

possessions, and women are more or less exclusively bearers of children and keepers of the household. The deployment of sexuality is very specific; it " . . . is concerned with the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions"61

This interpenetration of the deployment of alliance and that of sexuality in the form of the family allows us to understand a number of facts: that since the eighteenth century the family has become an obligatory locus of affects, feelings, love; that sexuality has its privileged point of development in the family; that for this reason sexuality is "incestuous" from the start62

In a way, psychoanalysis is a science based on incest. It bases its investigation of the family structure on the assumption that the male holds the superior position, and then defines human nature and psychological health accordingly. Foucault notes, somewhat ironically, that the Oedipus complex was discovered at the same time that the father's authority was being replaced by that of other social institutions.⁶³ The Oedipus complex "elevated" the father into a "position of compulsory love" within the family.

By making the sexual feelings between adults and children both psychologically necessary and illegal, medical and legal institutions were apparently justified in examining

⁶¹ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 106.

⁶² Foucault, Vol. I, pp. 108-109.

⁶³ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 130.

and controlling the slightest erotic feelings in the family.

Thus,

. . . in a society such as ours, where the family is the most active site of sexuality , . . . incest . . . occupies a central place; it is constantly being solicited and refused; it is an object of obsession and attraction, a dreadful secret and an indispensable pivot. It is manifested as a thing that is strictly forbidden in the family insofar as the latter functions as a deployment of alliance; but it is also a thing that is continuously demanded in order for the family to be a hotbed of constant sexual incitement.⁶⁴

The correct attractions to the mother and father, the correct anxieties of castration, the correct refusals of maleness and femaleness, all guarantee psychological well-being. The deployment of sexuality had the effect of guaranteeing the continuation of the old alliance system by providing it with a scientific basis for its existence. Foucault considers the sexual deployment to have shaped the way individuals analyze and control their pleasurable experiences. The family structure controls pleasure by demanding that specific sexual feelings are necessary between adults and children. If one does not experience these feelings in childhood, one will not become a mature adult. In cases such as these, society offers a range of concerned experts ready to define and remedy the "problem":

In the family, parents and relatives became the chief agents of a deployment of sexuality which drew its outside support from doctors, educators, and later psychiatrists, and which began by competing with relations of alliance but soon

⁶⁴ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 109.

"psychologized" or "psychiatrized" the latter. Then these new personages made their appearance: the nervous woman, the frigid wife, the indifferent mother, . . . the impotent, sadistic perverse husband, the hysterical or neurasthenic girl, the precocious and already exhausted child, and the young homosexual who rejects marriage or neglects his wife.⁶⁵

The parallels to A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou are obvious. Families of dominating women, absent fathers, homosexual sons and exhibitionistic daughters may exist in the society, but in Foucault's view they are a result of the sexual technology.

To return to Tremblay's families, it is increasingly apparent that Tremblay's characters were actively struggling with the meanings of sex. However, Tremblay's portrayals of the Québec family indicate that in his view, sexual pleasure must not be re-defined so much as returned to its "true" meanings, as they are presented in the orthodox psychoanalytical model. As I have shown in the discussion so far, Tremblay returned repeatedly to the families of dominant mothers and absent fathers in order to explain Québec's "virility crisis," or collective lack of strength. Only by conforming to psychoanalytical processes would the political and social problems that the family represents be redressed. By referring in such a way to the psychoanalytical model, Tremblay unwittingly supported the sexual technology, the deployment of sexuality, by showing

⁶⁵ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 110.

that misunderstanding sex in the family was, indeed, the essential factor in defining a person's identity and happiness. By framing the Québec problem purely in terms of the family's sexuality, he was in effect agreeing that some experiences of pleasure are healthier and more valuable socially and politically than others.

For example when Tremblay limited his conception of women's oppression to sexual repression, he inadvertently confirmed a conception of women that helped to cause their oppression in the first place. Of course, Tremblay was disturbed by the general oppression of women that existed well before the deployment of sexuality; in the system of alliance women were already charged with the household and made responsible for children, but were denied access to authority in most other areas. The deployment of sexuality made women responsible, in addition to their usual duties, for children's mental health, their sexual identity, and their sense of themselves. In psychoanalytical terminology, Tremblay portrays women as sexually "hysterical" beings. Foucault explains that the deployment of sexuality included a "hysterization of women's bodies,"

a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed -- qualified and disqualified -- as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it; whereby finally, it was placed in organic communication with the social body ; . . . the Mother, with her negative image of "nervous woman," constituted the

most visible form of this hysterization.⁶⁶

Women's sexual frustration seemed adequately to symbolize Québec's condition, partly by virtue of women's place in society, but also by their sense of longing for one of the "real" men that Québec apparently lacked. The "rue Fabre" cycle continues the social process of defining women by their sexuality.

By directly relating psychological normality to the presence or absence of the father, Tremblay inadvertently restored the power of the patriarchal norm. This is ironic given his sympathetic understanding of the oppressive condition women have experienced for centuries under the system of family alliances, but the cycle's obvious expression of yearning for a loving male figure can only be read as an endorsement of the processes described in psychoanalysis. I will examine Tremblay's portrayal of men more thoroughly in Chapter Two.

By consistently showing his effeminate homosexuals referring to their dominating mothers, he is allowing a relationship to stand between the two; learned effeminacy and a desire for passive sexual pleasure seem to be naturally related. Tremblay himself believed that such was the case:

Avec La duchesse de Langeais je voulais décrire l'homme québécois c'est-à-dire mettre à nu les deux faces de sa personnalité, son côté féminin (fruit de sa domination par la femme) et son côté

⁶⁶ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 104.

masculin.⁶⁷

However, as Foucault explains, the idea of homosexuality is a product of the sexual technology that is embedded in the family. It is only through the workings of various discourses that we relate it to childhood causes:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.⁶⁸

Tremblay continually supports the deployment of sexuality by giving examples of how homosexuality, symbolically, leads to a crisis of gender and identity.

One must be careful to be specific in reference to sexual meanings in Tremblay's early plays. To say that Tremblay in some ways supported the orthodox psychoanalytical model is not to say that he wished to eradicate homosexuality, for example. Quite the contrary is true. However, his plea for compassion toward homosexuality has specific features with regard to the meaning of pleasure that I will examine more thoroughly in Chapter Two.

The cycle's proposal for sexual, social and political freedom in Québec continues to give the contemporary family power to define pleasure. Tremblay is not questioning the family's social position as the institution that defines

⁶⁷ André Vanasse, Magazine Maclean, septembre 1972, p. 39. "Michel Tremblay, '...les bibittes des autres'."

⁶⁸ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 43.

human sexuality; he is saying that the manner in which the Québec family defines sexuality is the source of Québec's social and political malaise, and should be corrected.

It still might be argued that Tremblay was only presenting conditions that existed in his society, showing them to be false, socially-created and in need of change. For example, the recognition of the oppressed state of women is an important source of the emotional and comic power of Les Belles - Soeurs. And in Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra, the issues of pleasure and punishment, effeminacy and sexuality seen throughout the cycle are seen finally to come from Tremblay himself. Tremblay was certainly questioning the definitions of masculinity, femininity and sex that he saw in the people around him, but if we examine one of the rare instances where a character finds love, we discover that the conditions for this happiness conform to the tenets of orthodox psychoanalytical normality in the family. Love and a sense of self are seen to require the presence of a loving male figure and rejection of the mother's "castrating" influence.

10. Bonjour, là, bonjour⁶⁹

Jean-Cléo Godin considers Bonjour, là, bonjour, first produced in 1974, to be crucial to an understanding of Tremblay's cycle. He writes:

⁶⁹ Michel Tremblay. Bonjour, là, bonjour (Ottawa, 1974).

. . . c'est vers Bonjour, là, bonjour que convergent la cellule familiale et le monde des marginaux, dans cette pièce que ces grands thèmes semblent enfin trouver leur cohérence⁷⁰

The play's action concerns Serge's love for his sibling Nicole, and the complex and contradictory influence of his family, now disapproving, now fostering that love. Serge is a handsome young man whose return from a trip to Europe, taken in the hopes of coming to grips with his love for Nicole, begins the action of the play. Like Marie-Lou, Bonjour is comprised of a series of conversational engagements; Usmiani writes that "the plot is almost exclusively psychological; there is no physical action."⁷¹ The play takes place on a single evening, and includes the characters of Serge and Nicole, their three sisters, their father, and their father's two sisters. The women, save Nicole, function entirely as demanding impediments to Serge's goal of finding love, a fact that has led to charges of misogyny on Tremblay's part.⁷² This accusation is harsh and inaccurate; the sexual needs of Québec women are seen to shape them and their families, and Tremblay's other characters resent this intrusion into their lives and the effects that it has had on their sexuality. Still, Tremblay cannot be accused of hating women. At worst, he can be said

⁷⁰ Godin, p. 181.

⁷¹ Usmiani, p. 65.

⁷² "C'était une nécessité pour l'oeuvre, au nom de quoi on m'a taxé de misogynie." Boncenne, p. 94.

to have defined them narrowly.

Lucienne, the eldest sister, needs Serge to help her conduct an affair with one of his friends (p. 45). According to Godin, she is actually expressing a desire to have a relationship with Serge himself.⁷³ Given the importance of incest in the play, this interpretation seems fairly obvious: the other sisters, Monique, a valium addict, and Denise, an over-eater, also barely sublimate their sexual desires for Serge (pp. 80 - 84). Along with the two maiden aunts who constantly demand Serge's undivided attention, this world of women characterizes a smothering, incestuous atmosphere where women's frustration controls the house. The father Gabriel, almost deaf and frequently at the tavern, is manipulated by his two sisters, and judging from the sisters' account of Serge's past, was apparently without influence on the young boy.

At the climax of the play (pp. 100 - 103), Serge defies the power of his sisters and aunts. Ignoring their disapproval and refusing to assuage their sexual frustration any longer, he returns from Lucienne's house to his family home. Taking Gabriel away, he declares for the first time his love for his father, and starts a new life. Godin writes,

Le "duo final" de cette pièce ne réunit pas, prenons-y garde, Serge et Nicole, mais le fils et son père: "duo" unique chez Tremblay, où les fils

⁷³ Godin, p. 181.

sont tous fous ou travestis et les pères veules, inexistants, étouffés par la famille matriarcale et castratrice. En somme, le dramaturge réunit pour la première fois les deux grands absents de son oeuvre, suggérant à la fois que les univers aliénés décrits jusqu'ici sont une conséquence de cette absence et que l'oeuvre toute entière, dominées par les femmes et les travestis, constitue une obscure recherche du père par le fils.⁷⁴

Godin suggests that in Bonjour, là, bonjour Tremblay has resolved the family problem outlined in A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou. Whether or not we choose to employ psychoanalytical metaphors such as "castrating" or "emasculated," the fact remains that the family plays share the underlying values and processes of the deployment of sexuality. Serge side-steps the women's collective "problème du cul," which seems to be an inescapable part of their "nature" as women. Only by escaping women's influence and re-establishing ties with a loving father can a son hope to come into his own or become his own man, and find love. In the only other case in the cycle where an individual establishes loving ties, that of Hosanna, it is under similar psychological conditions.⁷⁵

There is an interesting note to add to Bonjour, là, bonjour. The character of Serge was originally conceived as a homosexual; Nicole would have been his brother. Tremblay

⁷⁴ Godin, p. 183.

⁷⁵ I will examine Hosanna in Chapter Two.

stated, "Quand je l'ai écrit en 1974, j'ai pas osé."⁷⁶ That Serge, a product of the dominant female/absent male scenario, should be homosexual supports my contention that in Tremblay's sexual mythology, intense feminine influence, homosexuality, and a crisis of male identity are linked. Tremblay's promise of freedom from sexual repression always depended upon casting off that influence.

Making sexual freedom contingent upon the "correct" pattern of sexuality in the family reinforces the power of the psychoanalytical norm. As Bernard Dort said,

La réconciliation du père et du couple incestueux à la fin de Bonjour, là, bonjour m'a fait tressauter: c'est restaurer la "normalité" dans la marginalité, c'est souscrire au rétablissement de l'ordre (ancien).⁷⁷

One might be able to see Bonjour as a criticism of the traditional Québec family. After all, the play does focus on incest and makes us wonder at its apparent power. However, Serge does, in fact, find love and a sense of himself at the end of the play, which strongly suggests Tremblay's belief in the tremendous power of the father to influence his children psychologically for good or ill. The play shows that the "correct" use of sexuality, the family's return to its "true" meaning, ensures individual identity and love. This process duplicates Foucault's description of the way in which sexual

⁷⁶ Thérèse Arbic, "Entretien avec André Brassard et Michel Tremblay," Chroniques, no. 22 (octobre 1976), p. 17.

⁷⁷ Thérèse Arbic et al., "Sur le travail théâtral," Chroniques, vol. 1, no. 4 (avril 1975), p. 18.

deployment puts pleasure into discourse, and controls pleasure by giving it specific, universal meanings.

The definition of identity must be examined further in order to understand the connection, in the mémoire collective, between effeminacy and homosexuality, between the mother's influence and her son's sense of self. Once we have specified the basis on which the contemporary idea of identity rests, we will be able to examine in Chapter Three the theme of "true love," which can come into existence only once the individual has acquired a sense of self.

CHAPTER TWO: IDENTITY

Chapter One demonstrated that the "rue Fabre" plays mirror the orthodox psychoanalytical model of the family. This family structure apparently creates children with identity problems. Foucault's ideas show that what appears to be the effect of sexual repression is part of a deployment of sexuality that extends its power through religious, psychiatric, legal and governmental institutions. By conforming to the deployment of sexuality, the plays put pleasure into discourse, and encourage social control. In the second volume of the History of Sexuality, Foucault examines other discourses that define pleasure. These concern the contemporary definition of sexual identity. La Duchesse de Langeais is an example of a Tremblay character who is having a crisis of sexual identity.

1. La Duchesse de Langeais¹

Tremblay had an immense fondness for the character of La Duchesse, who was modelled upon a man he met in a Mexican bar.² The play was first performed in 1969, and is the first play in the cycle to focus on a transvestite character. La Duchesse is a one-character monologue delivered by La

¹ Michel Tremblay, En pièces détachées et La Duchesse de Langeais (Ottawa, 1970).

² See Jean-Claude Germain, "Michel Tremblay, un an après les Belles-Soeurs...", En pièces détachées et La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 8.

Duchesse directly to the audience, who witnesses his³ drunken boasting and hears his reminiscences. The action of the play is the character's struggle between telling or withholding an account of the incident that causes his distress. Only at the play's end does he reveal that his heart has been broken over the love of a young man (p. 93). Throughout the play, La Duchesse concocts, unconvincingly, but with gaiety and bravado, a splendid account of his sexual conquests, a decades-long feast during which he has "devoured" countless males (p. 70; p. 75; p. 89). Eventually, his drunkenness dissolves his resistance⁴ and he recounts his painful memory. His only real love, a much younger man named Peter, has left him. La Duchesse ends the play under a cafe table in a state of drunken helplessness, devoid of self-respect and utterly pathetic (p. 94).

There are two main subjects in the play: love and sex. La Duchesse makes a clear distinction between the two, for example when he quickly replaces his use of the word "amour" with the word "cul" (p. 91). Love would save La Duchesse from his self-destruction and loneliness. As in all of Tremblay's plays, love represents an ideal state that many of

³ In the stage directions, Tremblay refers to the character as "she," which implies that Tremblay felt the character's biological sex and psychological gender to be in conflict.

⁴ See Renate Usmiani, Michel Tremblay (Vancouver, 1982), p. 101.

the characters strive to attain.⁵ Tremblay's presentation of sex is multi-faceted. Sex relates to love, but in itself is not love. In the "rue Fabre" world, individual identity must be established before love is possible. Masculinity and femininity figure importantly in this process.

It is clear that Tremblay intended the audience to derive enjoyment from La Duchesse's effeminacy. La Duchesse spends a great deal of time describing his past pleasures: his former beauty and allure (p. 75; p. 77; pp. 78 - 79) and his enjoyment of passive intercourse (p. 70; p. 73; p. 75; p. 82; p. 91). These characteristics are common to every transvestite in the cycle.

In spite of the fact that effeminacy is pleasurable for La Duchesse, he understands his femininity to be a rapidly failing disguise, a "métier" (p. 76) that was fun at the time, but that has led him to a state of depressed confusion. As his beauty fades, he is less and less able to enjoy the feminine role. Sardonicly remarking on the size of his "mignon petit poignet," he is struck with his own self-deception, and turns to drink for comfort (p. 87). His path, however enjoyable, has been impossible to sustain: he is not a woman. Pretending to be one has left him without a sense of self, and apparently without a real identity. La Duchesse also has a masculine side that surfaces particularly when he is angry or threatened. When talking about society's

⁵ I will examine Tremblay's theme of love in Chapter Three.

disapproval of him (p. 74) he turns tough and vulgar. His expressions, such as "tirer une pisse" (p. 83) and "suçèuses de cul" (p. 74), are unmistakably Québécois. The humour of the play rests largely on the rapid juxtaposition of the masculine and the feminine: poetry is undercut with scatological reference (p. 72); his beauty with his undeniable male physicality (p. 90); his softness with his violence. Like much effective humour, La Duchesse de Langeais is often funny because it is based in a painful experience. The painful experience that this play deals with is an inescapable one in western culture: the separation of masculine and feminine traits in each individual.

Tremblay intended the play to be understood in several different ways. As we have seen, he said in 1981 that one of his intentions for the cycle was to show how sex roles were imposed,⁶ and that in a normal society there would be no differentiation between masculine and feminine. We can assume from this that La Duchesse was an attempt to show how role-playing is false, self-imposed, and a result of conditioning.

Tremblay also insisted that his plays be viewed as social allegories. He was angered by critics who took his

⁶ Donald Smith, "Michel Tremblay et 'la mémoire collective,' une entrevue de Donald Smith," Lettres québécoises, no. 23, p. 50.

portrayals of women and homosexuals literally.⁷ His characters were intended to stand for the whole of Québec, and for its social and political conditions. One of these conditions was Québec's refusal of its own identity in favour of American, French, or English culture. Tremblay was acutely aware of this refusal, and used socially marginalized characters to symbolize the conditions of his compatriots. When Boncenne questioned him about the way he used these characters, Tremblay replied only that the element of disguise was of interest to him as a political symbol:

Une autre partie de votre théâtre a gêné, et prête à malentendu, parce qu'il décrit le monde des prostituées, des homosexuels et des travestis.

Là encore, il faut prendre cela comme une fable sociale. Je ne me suis servi des travestis lorsque je voulais parler d'un problème d'identification.⁸

Tremblay may have been attempting to indicate that there is nothing wrong with effeminacy per se, but that pretending to be a woman in order to justify one's effeminacy is an unnecessary self-deception. What if one did, however, pretend to be a woman in order to enjoy the pleasures traditionally denied to men? How could this conscious choice necessarily imply a crisis of identity? When questioned further about this matter later in the article, Tremblay only repeats, " . . . je ne me suis jamais servi de

⁷ See Pierre Boncenne, "Interview: Michel Tremblay," Lire, no. 90 (février 1983), p. 90, p. 94.

⁸ Boncenne, pp. 93 - 94.

l'homosexualité en tant que telle."⁹ Why does Tremblay include homosexuality in his symbolism? How are transvestitism and homosexuality connected? Clearly, these symbols can be understood only if the audience accepts the notion that a man must have a problem with self-identification if he enjoys pleasures associated with being a woman. The fact that the characters are disguised may contribute to the fact that they are successful symbols, but more important is the way their confused sexuality stands for Québec's condition.

La Duchesse's language use was meant to demonstrate the cultural problem of the Québécois, caught between French culture and its own culture. Every time La Duchesse cuts through his pretentiousness and undercuts his effeminacy, he does so in Québécois.¹⁰ This is a commonly-used symbol in the "rue Fabre" plays. Lisette de Courval, in Les Belles-Soeurs, is the first of the cycle's characters to use "le français pointu," which increases her status by making her more French and less Québécois. In addition, the belles-soeurs discuss Raymond, the effeminate son of madame Gladu. He also speaks "le français pointu" in a manner Rose describes in disparaging terms: " . . . Moé, j'trouve qu'y'a

⁹ Boncenne, p. 94.

¹⁰ Tremblay stated, " . . . I never wrote in joual and, of course, I never wrote in French either. . . . " Maureen Peterson, The Gazette, 19 April, 1980, p. 94. "Tremblay: Out of the East". Therefore, I am referring to his literary language as Québécois.

un peu trop l'air d'une fille avec sa p'tite bouche en trou de cul de poule..."¹¹ Speaking French in this way has unpleasant associations for Tremblay; as a youngster his correct French got him accused of being a homosexual.¹²

In his introduction to the play, Jean-Claude Germain notes la Duchesse's use of language, and interprets the character's symbolic effect:

En écrivant la Duchesse, Michel Tremblay a eu le génie de comprendre que cette sexualité linguistique dépravée se résumait, s'incarnait dans le personnage de la "tapette" québécoise. A moitié homme, à moitié femme, précieux et vulgaire, impuissant, marginal, incapable de s'assumer comme une personne et parlant de lui-même comme d'un objet, la Duchesse de Langeais incarne à son degré extrême l'aliénation de l'homme québécois.¹³

The tendency to see sex role characteristics in terms of oppositions makes possible the Duchesse's allegorical meaning. In Germain's introduction, the following traits are understood to be connected: effeminacy, affectation, impotence, self-objectification, alienation. In order to understand the allegory, we must reject the possibility that effeminacy in males might be a natural phenomenon; it must be understood as a false layer over the real male. Germain's

¹¹ Michel Tremblay, Les Belles-Soeurs, (Ottawa, 1972), p. 85.

¹² "... il n'y avait pas un enfant dans la classe qui était intéressé à la langue française, sauf moi. J'ai trippé sur le français, j'étais premier en français. J'étais la tapette de la classe parce que j'aimais le français." Quoted by Smith, pp. 55 - 56.

¹³ Germain, En Pièces Détachées et La Duchesse de Langeais, p. 9.

use of the word "impotent" is interesting; it may be defined as " . . . wanting in physical, intellectual or moral power; weak "¹⁴ As such, impotence describes the culturally assimilated, politically dominated Québécois of the period. But the word also means "unable to copulate," a meaning that can hardly be applied to La Duchesse. La Duchesse has frequent intercourse. Apparently, his type of intercourse is disqualified: he is sexually passive. Germain's assertion the La Duchesse speaks of himself as an object is reminiscent of the fact that in the sexual mythology of western culture, a man's identity is generally constituted as "subject," the woman's as "object." Despite La Duchesse's insistence that he himself has had control of his destiny (p. 82) and that he has made himself into a "star," Germain still considers him not to be his own "subject."

The contradiction between Tremblay's social goal of destroying sex roles and his use of those roles to symbolize a sexual and political identity becomes increasingly apparent. Take for example Ripley's analysis of Les Belles-sœurs:

. . . the stifling despair of Germaine Lauzon's kitchen mirrors allegorically Québec's cultural alienation during the Duplessis régime's final years. The traditional male traits-- independence, adventurousness, and strength -- are absent. Creativity, nurture, and love-- customarily associated with the female -- have

¹⁴ Webster's New School and Office Dictionary (New York, 1943).

degenerated into sterile authoritarianism.¹⁵

It is true that Ripley is speaking from a particular psychoanalytical perspective: nonetheless, his criticism certainly agrees with Tremblay's remarks concerning women's frustration and with his symbolic usage of language. Critics have taken the symbolic interpretation of male/female opposition to great lengths in their discussions of the plays. Usmiani, for example, states that the cycle's homosexuals become " . . . universal archetypes of emotional alienation . . . [by] denying or reversing their real identity "¹⁶ It is not just the homosexual men who are widely interpreted in this way, however: O'Doherty asserts that Henri from En pièces détachées represents the " . . . passive Québécois being assimilated "¹⁷ No matter what the exact interpretation, the feminine characteristics of the characters are always presented in a politically negative way. This is not to say that homosexuality is considered completely undesirable, as we will see in the discussion of Hosanna. When the homosexual characters are examined for their symbolic value, however,

¹⁵ John Ripley, "From Alienation to Transcendence: The Quest for Selfhood in Michel Tremblay's Plays," Canadian Literature, no. 85 (summer 1980), p. 48.

¹⁶ Usmiani, p. 81.

¹⁷ Kathleen O'Doherty, Disguised Realities Religion and Sexuality: The Struggle for Identity in Three Plays of Michel Tremblay, Unpublished M.A. Thesis (Carleton University, 1986), p. 33.

their "crisis of identity" clearly has to do with their enjoyment of femininity. The apparent tragedy of La Duchesse is that he is helpless in the face of his enjoyment of pleasures usually restricted to women's experience. Evidently, he is not being what he really is. His femininity has led him into an impossible life, doomed him to a state of limbo in which no resolution can be found, and where no love is possible. To understand how "effeminate" pleasures come to convey these meanings, we must examine Foucault's notion of sexual rationality.

2. Rationality

Many different discourses have contributed to western civilization's definition of individual identity. Sexual rationality is an important part of these discourses. Foucault, like other French philosophical writers such as Lyotard and Derrida, criticizes the power that reason has had in shaping human behaviour.¹⁸ The opposition of masculine and feminine is one effect of western culture's rationalization of experience. Masculinity and femininity are familiar examples of sexual opposition, but Foucault notes many others as well:

[W]ith the great series of binary oppositions (body/soul, flesh/spirit, instinct/reason, drives/consciousness) that seemed to refer sex to a pure mechanics devoid of reason, the West has

¹⁸ See Vincent Descombes, Modern French Philosophy (Cambridge, 1980), p. 170.

managed not only, or not so much, to annex sex to a field of rationality , . . . but to bring us almost entirely -- our bodies, our minds, our individuality, our history -- under the sway of a logic of concupiscence and desire.¹⁹

Rationality controls pleasure by causing it to be categorized in a binary way within medical, legal, and political discourses. In the second volume of his history, Foucault directs this notion to a study of the individual, or in sociological terminology, the subject.²⁰ He examines evidence of the discourses surrounding sexuality in Greek culture of the fourth century B.C. The writings of Plato, Hippocrates, Xenophon and Aristophanes provide clues to the development of western sexual behaviours and ethics.

Foucault finds that rationality has always played an important role in defining pleasure because it is the mechanism by which subjects evaluate their pleasurable experiences. He refers to this evaluation as a game of " . . . truth and error through which being is historically constituted . . . as something that can and must be thought."²¹ Diverse pleasurable experiences come to be rationalized because of the subject's desire to evaluate, to classify experience, and to know. Individuals are encouraged

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction (New York, 1980), p. 78.

²⁰ See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure (New York, 1986), pp. 6 - 7. See Appendix below, under "Subject".

²¹ Foucault, Vol. II, pp. 6 - 7.

to apply rational thinking to pleasure for many different reasons, within many different discourses. The individual, in Foucault's view, has a will to know the truth.²² Every discourse has a different set of truths. The subject's desire to think and understand these truths encourages him to examine, order and control his experiences of pleasure. The concepts of masculinity and femininity are the rational result of the subject's will to shape himself or herself according to the apparent truths of human nature. The division of masculinity and femininity appears to be natural, but Foucault suggests that the idea of human nature is one of the apparent truths that encourage the subject to rationalize his or her pleasurable feelings. This problematization of pleasure takes place within various discourses, such as medicine, philosophy and law.

Foucault explains how the rationalization of pleasure developed in the discourses of Greek civilization. In that culture, all sexual intercourse was conceived of " . . . in terms of the schema of penetration and male domination."²³ To be penetrated was a sign of submission. Phallic sexual pleasure, activity, continues to be definitive of the male identity, as witnessed by the fact that when critics use metaphors such as "castrated," "passive" and "emasculated," we understand them to be referring to conditions of social

²² See Appendix under "Will to Truth".

²³ Foucault, Vol. II, p. 220.

and political submission.

These oppositions, man/woman, penetrator/penetrated, dominant/submissive, have been such an accepted part of so many civilizations that their acceptance seems almost too natural a phenomenon to challenge with any degree of success. Feminism has offered a challenge to the association of sexual penetration with social submissiveness. As well, other cultures have viewed sexual oppositions with much less reverence; for example, Buddhist and Hindu Tantrism considered liberation to lie in the abolition or fusion of contrarities such as masculine and feminine, subject and object.²⁴ Each of these examples offers a challenge to the dominant/submissive scenario, and to western rational thought. Our mythology is built on opposition. For example, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who explored the myths of many cultures, translates these myths into sets of oppositional relations.²⁵ Western thought does not simply differentiate among two or more terms -- soft, strong, relaxed, productive -- it opposes them, in order to impose a system of values on lived experience.²⁶ Myths control experience by rationalizing it.²⁷ Tremblay's mythological symbols also have a

²⁴ See Octavio Paz, Conjunctions and Disjunctions (New York: 1982), p. 45 - 87.

²⁵ See Descombes, pp. 82 - 92.

²⁶ See Descombes, p. 165.

²⁷ See Descombes, p. 108.

rationalizing effect on experience. Tremblay was aware of the socially constructed nature of gender, and yet he chose to employ mythological symbols, common to the mémoire collective, in which effeminacy is to virility as "français pointu" is to "joual," and as cultural assimilation is to cultural identity.

3. Discourses of the self: the creation of the male identity

Foucault's contribution to this discussion is that he shows the rationalization of pleasure to be involved in the discourses of the "self." All his models of discourse describe social interactions of power, knowledge and pleasure.²⁸ In the second volume of The History of Sexuality, Foucault shows how these discourses shaped the "practices of the self,"²⁹ and the contemporary conceptions of gender, identity and love. In the discourses of health, the household, and man-boy love in Greek society, men³⁰ came to place systems of judgement and evaluation between themselves and their pleasure. They decided, rationally, which pleasures had to be problematized and which did not. They ascribed different values to different pleasures, and

²⁸ See Appendix under "Power/Knowledge".

²⁹ See Foucault, Vol. II, p. 12.

³⁰ Foucault, Vol. II, p. 253. These discourses developed exclusively around men's experiences.

developed from this value system a philosophical system³¹ and set of social practices. Many of these values and practices remain unchanged today.³²

For example, in Greek culture, a man's sense of self, what we might today refer to as his "identity," relied on a masterful attitude toward pleasure. This attitude of self-mastery ensured the correct use of pleasure. In Foucault's words,

Self-mastery was a way of being a man with respect to oneself; that is, a way of commanding, of coercing what was not capable of self-direction, of imposing principles of reason on what was wanting in reason; in short, it was a way of being active in relation to what was by nature passive and ought to remain so. In this ethics of men made for men, the development of the self as an ethical subject consisted in setting up a structure of virility that related oneself to oneself. It was by being a man with respect to oneself that one would be able to control and master the manly activity that one directed toward others in sexual practice. What one must aim for in the agonistic contest with oneself and in the struggle to control the desires was the point where the relationship with oneself would become isomorphic with the relationship of domination, hierarchy, and authority that one expected, as a man, a free man, to establish over his inferiors; and it was this prior condition of "ethical virility" that provided one with the right sense of proportion for the exercise of "sexual virility," according to a model of "social virility." In the use of male pleasures, one had to be virile with regard to oneself, just as one was masculine in one's social role. In the full meaning of the word, moderation was a man's virtue.³³

³¹ See Foucault, Vol. II, pp. 229 - 246. This system, "True Love," is the subject of Chapter Three.

³² See Foucault, Vol. II, p. 250, p. 251, p. 253.

³³ Foucault, Vol. II, pp. 82 - 83.

This self-mastery was the rational basis for a set of discourses concerning pleasure. Acts such as passivity in anal intercourse were gradually understood to threaten self-mastery because they placed one man in a position of apparent submissiveness in the schema of penetrator/penetrated, dominant/submissive. Of course, like all pleasures, the pleasures of anal intercourse mean nothing in relation to an individual's ability to function in other areas, his ability to hunt, fight, or administer, for example. But since the rationalization of all sexual acts was necessarily based on the opposition of penetrator and penetrated, sexual passivity came to be understood as submission, a position unfitting to a man's natural position as ruler, and an impediment to his abilities.

Effeminacy did not, in Greek times, necessarily indicate a desire to be sexually passive. It was, however, a failure of self-mastery because it was an abandonment to pleasurable pursuits rather than an imposition of self-disciplined austerity.³⁴ It suggested submission. Effeminacy was characterized, as it is in Tremblay's plays, by an enjoyment of "perfumes and adornments, [and] softness" ³⁵ It is difficult for us to imagine these pleasures without their connotations of femininity, but in Tantric culture,

[t]he images of the Indian gods, even though they

³⁴ See Foucault, Vol. II, pp. 84 - 86.

³⁵ Foucault, Vol. II, p. 85.

are always virile, radiate an almost feminine languor and softness.³⁶

In Greek culture, while the enjoyment of adornment and perfume did not yet imply sexual passivity, it still suggested a failure of masculinity, defined as the pursuit of mastery in oneself and over others. Self-mastery was very effective in ensuring the continuation of rational oppositions: strength/weakness, mind/body, austerity/permissiveness.

When Foucault's description of Greek sexual discourse is compared with the discourse of orthodox modern psychiatry, it is apparent that the definition of male identity has not changed significantly. Men are still defined by their activity in the social as well as the sexual spheres, and by their success in repressing feminine characteristics. As Horowitz points out,

Freud teaches that sexual life is first experienced in terms of not the antithesis of masculinity and femininity but that of activity ('the...instinct of mastery, which we call sadism when we find it in the service of the sexual function') and passivity (which is 'fed by anal erotism').³⁷

The division of pleasurable experience into dichotomies is

³⁶ Paz, p. 74.

³⁷ Gad Horowitz, Repression, Basic and surplus repression in psycho-analytic theory: Freud, Reich and Marcuse (Toronto, 1977), p. 94. Horowitz, like Herbert Marcuse, whose work he is interpreting, is aware that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed ideas. Where he and Marcuse differ most strongly from Foucault is in their interpretation of sexual and social freedom. I will return to this difference in the Conclusion of this discussion.

still the basis of our sexual norms. If we return for a moment to Chapter One, we can see how important these dichotomies are in the "incestuous" relations of the normal family. Foucault's analysis allows us to understand the problematic relationship between the homosexual son and his domineering mother and absent father.

In Chapter One, I posed the questions "How are effeminacy and a desire for sex with men related?" and "If Tremblay is trying to establish the value of the 'feminine', why does the boy's sexual freedom depend upon casting off the mother's femininizing influence?" Foucault answers these questions by showing that the rationalization of pleasure has caused effeminacy, a desire for passive pleasure, and submissiveness to be related in western consciousness. The struggle to escape women's influence that is evident in the plays is not an attempt to escape homosexuality, but an attempt to escape the politically and psychologically undesirable attributes that seem inherent in femininity. The plays often demonstrate the "age old difficulty" of reconciling the "inversion of sexual roles and intercourse between individuals of the same sex."³⁸ This continuing difficulty is evidence that pleasure remains firmly controlled by the process of rationalization. Tremblay's preoccupation with sexually passive characters, and the fact that only they speak of their sexual experiences, demonstrate

³⁸ Foucault, Vol. II, p. 18.

that Tremblay wished to validate feminine experiences in his society. Tremblay's important characters experience passivity, effeminacy, and promiscuity as pleasurable. This is one side of his struggle. The other side is seen in the way Tremblay's plays continue the tradition of sexual mastery. Québec's nationhood seems to depend on an identity that is defined, in sexual terms, by activity. This supports the discourses that place a rational ethical system between physical pleasures and the self. All of the transvestites and homosexuals have evident identity problems. Although they frequently describe their passive sexual experiences as pleasurable, they remain unfulfilled. Their incorrect use, their misunderstanding, of pleasure seems to be part of what is keeping them from knowing who they "really" are. The transvestite Sandra in Damnée Manon, Sacree Sandra³⁹ is a case in point. After a lifetime spent in the pursuit of pleasure, he states,

J'ai l'honneur de déclarer officiellement qu'y
reste pus aucune trace de l'homme que j'ai été . .
. . Mon visage à moé existe pus. (p. 53)

It might still be possible to see the plays as an attempt to question all definitions of masculinity and femininity. Tremblay does raise, in a general way, the question, "What is it to be masculine and what is it to be

³⁹ Michel Tremblay, Damnée Manon, Sacree Sandra suivi de Surprise! Surprise! (Ottawa, 1977).

feminine?" In Hosanna,⁴⁰ the struggle with the undesirable social connotations of effeminacy and passivity is again apparent. We will examine the play with particular attention to sexual passivity, effeminacy, and the way they are apparently connected in Hosanna's search for love and a sense of himself.

4. Hosanna

Hosanna, the seventh play of the cycle, was first performed in 1973. The two characters are Hosanna, a transvestite, and Cuirette, an aimless biker nearing middle age. The play begins when Hosanna, dressed as Elizabeth Taylor in Cleopatra, returns after a party to his cheap apartment in a state of obvious distress. After a short monologue, he is joined by Cuirette. The two, we discover, are lovers, although judging by their conversation their relationship has become an ongoing game of teasing and humiliation. In the first act, Cuirette taunts Hosanna for his arrogance (p. 44) and femininity (p. 28), while Hosanna attacks Cuirette's financial dependence, his household servitude and the cracks in his macho image (pp. 46 - 47). Act One ends when Cuirette leaves, presumably in order to engage in sexual relations with Hosanna's rival, Sandra. Cuirette's enjoyment of frequent casual sex has been

⁴⁰ Michel Tremblay, Hosanna suivi de la Duchesse de Langeais (Ottawa, 1984).

established from the outset, but this activity is being curtailed by police surveillance of his cruising grounds in the Parc Lafontaine (p. 14), and by his own sense of emptiness and futility (pp. 68 - 69).

In Act Two, we discover that the reason for Hosanna's earlier distress was a practical joke that had been played on him by the other transvestites and Cuirette. In an effort to destroy Hosanna's arrogant self-delusion, they planned an elaborate scheme. They invited Hosanna to come to a party in his favorite outfit, which they knew to be that of Elizabeth Taylor in the role of Cleopatra. When Hosanna arrived, all the transvestites were dressed in like manner, some of them more successfully than Hosanna himself (pp. 55 - 67). His pride destroyed, he ran home, and it is at this point that the action of the play begins. The end of the play finds Cuirette returning humbly, giving up casual sex in favour of his relationship with Hosanna, and accepting the defeat of his macho image. Hosanna in turn gives up his transvestitism and, in his own words, becomes "a man" (p. 75).

Again, like La Duchesse, Hosanna is a symbol for Québec's lack of identity. More exactly, Hosanna is a symbol of lack of identity, whereas Claude, the man beneath the makeup, is a symbol of identity and strength. As Usmiani writes,

Hosanna represents the alienated man in search of an identity. Her attempts to "build" a personality . . . illustrate . . . [the need] to compensate for the absence of a solid, stable, "absolute"

identity.⁴¹

To repeat, Tremblay focused on Hosanna's layers of disguise when explaining the play's symbolic meaning,⁴² and did not consider himself to be commenting upon real homosexuality or transvestitism. The presentation of passive pleasure and effeminacy in the play adheres to the discourse of rational identity described above, and in so doing makes clear statements regarding real sexuality.

5. Passive Sex

The issue of sexual activity and passivity is addressed in very specific terms by the characters when they argue openly about who is "the man" in bed and who is "the woman." The fight is one of many concerning the characters' masculinity and femininity. Such conflicts act as constant reminders that the play's political meaning rests on the play's sexual themes:

CUIRETTE: . . . Pis quand on es couché aussi, tu continues à faire la femme En quatre ans, t'as pas faite un seul geste d'homme, au lit, ma chérie, pas un seul! Tu vis comme une femme, pis tu fourres commes une femme!

HOSANNA: Moé aussi j'aurais envie de t'enculer, des fois, Cuirette! Moé aussi j'aurais envie de

⁴¹ Usmiani, pp. 94 - 95.

⁴² ". . . dans l'une de mes pièces, Hosanna, il y a un petit Québécois qui a toujours rêvé d'être une femme et cette femme a toujours rêvé d'être une grande actrice et cette grande actrice a toujours rêvé d'être Elizabeth Taylor dans un film américain, et ce film tourné en Espagne aurait pour sujet le mythe égyptien Cléopâtre." Boncenne, p. 94.

t'enculer! (pp. 47 - 48)

Hosanna's reply to Cuirette marks the end of the first act, and makes the question of activity and passivity an important element in the structure of the play. The climax of the play sees the resolution of Hosanna's dilemma. Hosanna, as mentioned, strips off his layers of disguise and re-adopts his real name, Claude. In his own words, he becomes a man, and he and Cuirette end the play united in an embrace (p. 75). One assumes that Hosanna will no longer live like a woman now that he is Claude, and it is apparent as the play ends that he will now be able to make "un geste d'homme" toward Cuirette. Hosanna has not only put aside his disguise, he has come into his own as a man.

One might argue that the play calls attention to the falsehood of the active and passive roles, showing them to be without meaning. But what if we were to reverse the scenario, making Cuirette the main character? Let us imagine that Cuirette's conflict is that he cannot be sexually passive. He is sexually confused. Only by becoming passive can he achieve his own identity. This scenario is obviously absurd, but it puts into relief the fact that sexual passivity has a specific meaning in the play in relation to maleness and identity. Despite the fact that we may understand Hosanna as a critique of socially defined gender roles, it still implies that there are correct and incorrect uses of pleasure: it is necessary that Hosanna adopt the

active sexual role if he is to assume his identity as Claude, and he must assume that identity as a condition of his being able to give and receive love. Of course, if Hosanna, as Claude, is going to be sexually active, we assume that Cuirette will at some point have to be passive. But why was Hosanna forced to change his preference in the first place? Why can he not be "a man" and remain exclusively passive? Hosanna is not an isolated case in the cycle. If we return to La Duchesse de Langeais, or Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra, we find the same associations of passive pleasure with identity and love.

6. Effeminacy

Hosanna's relationship to his mother conforms to the psychological relationships outlined in Chapter One. By demonstrating the connection between Hosanna's effeminacy, his homosexuality, and his mother, the play supports the deployment of sexuality. Like Serge in Bonjour, là, bonjour,⁴³ Hosanna must put aside the influence of a dominating woman in order to come into his own. He feels that she caused his homosexuality:

HOSANNA: Mais c'qu'à m'à faite, "elle", par exemple 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'à voulait me garder avec elle.
 . . . (pp. 41 - 42)

⁴³ Michel Tremblay, Bonjour, là, bonjour (Ottawa, 1974).

Again, in Tremblay's family world, the mother is sexually frustrated and lonely, and burdens her son with her need for affection. Hosanna, like Serge, breaks free of a woman's dominating influence and finds a man's love.⁴⁴

Early in the play, Hosanna announces that his mother is coming for a visit. Hosanna tells Cuirette that he will have to find somewhere else to sleep when she arrives (p. 37). At the play's climax, it becomes clear that Hosanna and Cuirette will be reconciled. As Cuirette undresses he reminds Hosanna of his mother's impending visit:

CUIRETTE: Pis, ta mère...

HOSANNA: Quoi, ma mère...

CUIRETTE: Ben, c'tu vrai qu'à vient?

HOSANNA: Ben, oui...

CUIRETTE: Que c'est qu'on va faire?

HOSANNA: A couchera à terre... Viens t'en

(p. 75)

Hosanna then immediately removes his makeup and remaining articles of women's clothing, and returns to the bed where Raymond awaits. "Chus t'un homme!" he says, joining Raymond, who has called him Claude for the first time. Hosanna has simultaneously rejected his mother, removed all traces of femininity, discovered his real identity and found love. There seems to be no more place in Claude's life for the

⁴⁴ As we saw, Serge's most intensely loving relationship in the play is not with Nicole, but with Gabriel.

pleasures of feminine adornment such as perfume and makeup.⁴⁵ Now that he has become a man, it seems, he will no longer desire to be soft and alluring. We might be willing to consider Cuirette's role change to be similar to Hosanna's, but Cuirette's removing his leathers has hardly the same dramatic power as Hosanna removing his feminine clothing. It was never Cuirette's identity that was in question, only the psychological healthiness of his pastimes. Finally, if Tremblay's political symbolism has been effective, it would tend to negate his attempt to relativize masculinity and femininity. His political symbolism relies on the audience's acceptance that Hosanna's feminine characteristics are a false layer over his real, masculine ones. Only if this is so do the culturally foreign elements of Hosanna's disguise become an important element of the play's meaning.

There is one more area of the cycle that relates to Foucault's discussion of pleasure: this concerns Tremblay's presentation of love. We have seen two of the three cases in which a character finds love, that of Serge and Gabriel, and of Raymond and Claude. Carmen is the only remaining character of the cycle who can be said to experience love, but, as we saw in Chapter One, the childhood conditions in her family seem to prevent her from finding this love as a

⁴⁵ " . . . [the use of] makeup and face paint . . . is an important theme in ancient morality, for adornment posed the problem of the relationships between truth and the pleasures" Foucault. Vol. II, p. 161.

member of a couple. Carmen's experience of love can be informed with reference to Foucault's discussion of "true love." Once we have examined love as it is presented in the cycle, the picture of Tremblay's sexual mythology will be complete; the Québec family has endangered individual identities, but under certain conditions these individuals can still love and be loved. Once love exists, we are told, Québec's sexual, social and political well-being will be guaranteed.

CHAPTER THREE: TRUE LOVE

In Chapter Two, we saw how Tremblay's vision of sexual, social and political freedom for Québec is contradicted by the way the plays symbolically attribute specific meanings to pleasure. In this chapter, we will examine another facet of sexuality in the cycle, love. All of the characters in the cycle exist in a state of political and cultural dispossession, and this dispossession is represented by the characters' dissipation and lovelessness. By presenting images of dissipation and lovelessness in a culturally dispossessed society, the plays imply a complementary image of a loving society that is culturally and politically strong. The plays suggest that love would redress these problems, and lead to sexual, social and political liberation. Foucault's description of the philosophy of love shows how that promise can come to be made. The cycle suggests that in order for love to exist, pleasurable pursuits must conform to the ethical system of True Love. The plays that best present the parallel between love and social freedom are Demain matin, Montréal m'attend¹, and Sainte Carmen de la Main.²

¹ Michel Tremblay, Demain matin, Montréal m'attend (Ottawa, 1972).

² Michel Tremblay, Sainte Carmen de la Main (Ottawa, 1976).

1. Demain matin, Montréal m'attend

Demain matin, Montréal m'attend, which opened in August, 1970, unites a wide array of Tremblay's favourite character-types: prostitutes, transvestites, homosexuals, and an overbearing mother. It was the fifth play of the cycle to be produced, and was produced again in 1972 in a more complete version. The story of the play owes much to American musicals of the 1930's and 1940's, in which a small town girl goes to the city in order to "make it big" in showbusiness. The main character, Louise Tetreault, is leaving the intolerable conditions of the traditional Québec family in the hope that she will find happiness in the city. But the city, as Tremblay paints it, is a trashy, second-rate version of the American dream. The plot allegorically presents the problem of Québec society, which has left behind an unacceptable set of traditions only to adopt a way of life that is culturally foreign and equally unacceptable.

The play begins when Louise wins the local talent show, where she has just sung, in Tremblay's words, "a peu près bien" (p. 9). Louise is not to be regarded as a talented winner, but as a self-deluded girl with unrealistic ambitions. Louise returns home from the talent show to tell her mother of her plans to follow in the footsteps of her older sister, who has changed her name from Rita to Lola-Lee and become a nightclub performer in Montréal. Her mother's attempt to dissuade Louise from this immoral way of life

guarantees Louise's departure from what has clearly been a brutal and loveless childhood. As she leaves the house, she sings:

. . . Donnez-moé de l'air!
Même si est polluée!
L'air sale de Montréal
Les rues sales de Montréal
C'est tout ça que j'veux connaître
Pis j'y vas!
Je m'en sacre!
S'y faut être sale pour vivre
J'vivrai sale, maman, j'vivrai sale.
(p. 15)

With her mother's protest ringing in her ears, " . . .
[j]'t'ai pas élevée pour faire de toé une putain . . . "
(p. 16), Louise leaves, taking the chance that she might have to "live dirty."

This scene, depicting Louise's relationship to her mother, was one of the two added for the 1972 production, and it continues Tremblay's mapping of Québec's sexual landscape.³ This addition to the play shows that Louise's actions are a result of sexual repression in the family, a characteristic common to many of Tremblay's protagonists. As we have seen in Chapter One, families, and particularly the women in them, suffer from sexual frustration, the effects of which they inflict on all those around them. Louise's frustrated mother and weak, drunken father (p. 13) ensure that there is no love to be had at home. These conditions

³ See Michel Beaulieu, Le Devoir, 22 mars 1972, p. 10. "'Demain matin...au Maisonneuve' Tremblay, de la parodie au sens tragique".

are so overpowering that Louise seems forced to take extreme action. We know from the start that her disregard for herself will have unfortunate consequences.

Louise's arrival in Montréal begins an exploration into a world where evidence of sex is everywhere and love is still unattainable. Usmiani writes that the marginalized world Louise encounters on her arrival in Montréal is comprised of people who, like Louise, have internalized the conditions in the family⁴. Their conflicts, both with themselves and with each other, always concern some aspect of sexual pleasure or gender.

The theme of love is evident again when Louise arrives in the city. The loving feelings that the sisters express upon their reunion proves highly fragile when Louise declares her desire for stardom (p. 26). Rita/Lola, threatened by this newcomer, seeks to destroy Louise's ambitions even though she is her sister. Tremblay makes it clear that the ties that bind Québec together are easily broken in the face of the offerings of the American dream.

The play follows Rita/Lola in her attempt to dissuade Louise from a career in showbusiness by showing her the seamy side of Montréal's nightlife. The first stop in this odyssey is "The Meat Rack," a sleazy gay bar where the boys in

⁴ "The characters . . . cope with a 'maudite vie plate' which differs in detail but not in essence from that described in Les Belles-Soeurs." Renate Usmiani, Michel Tremblay (Vancouver, 1982), p. 83.

Rita/Lola's chorus are revealed to be transvestites, homosexuals, transsexuals, and prostitutes. In contrast to how attractive they appeared in Rita/Lola's show, they now appear sleazy and dissipated. Their bar, the Meat Rack, is the setting for their jealous battles, bitching, and sexual promiscuity. The drag queens parade before the more masculine homosexuals in the hope of getting a bit of attention, in an exact parody of Rita/Lola and Louise. For them, too, showbusiness glamour is a means to sexual attention. Their various escapes from the family, however necessary, manifest a lack of self-respect.

Topics of concern to the clientele make it clear that sexual life in this second-rate version of the American dream has become hopelessly muddled. Male and female differences have become blurred, sometimes, as in the case of Slim's surgery (p. 30), quite literally. All sense of sexual morality has been abandoned, with unpleasant results. Promiscuity is the norm, and even those who succeed in establishing loving ties fail to maintain them. Cuirette, for example, has gotten "crabs" from Brigitte when he was supposed to be dating only Babalu (p. 30).

Throughout this scene, the dramatic action is Louise's decision as to whether or not she will be assimilated into this terrifying milieu. Rita/Lola has shown her some of the underbelly of the American dream, and Louise is suitably horrified. Finally, despite her cries of "Va t'en!" (p. 53),

the group surrounds her in a frightening, ritualistic dance, and she finds herself becoming one of them (pp. 54 - 55). Rita/Lola, having failed in her attempt to discourage Louise, brings her a step further in their journey through this unappetizing world: they visit the bordello where she herself found a first foothold in Montréal. At this point occurs a solo scene by "La Duchesse de Langeais." As we saw in Chapter Two, La Duchesse is the quintessential Meat Rack habituée: he is alcoholic, promiscuous, and deluded with the notion that he is a showbusiness star. La Duchesse admits that this life of entertainment and gaiety has been nothing but a cover-up for his loneliness and misery (pp. 58 - 59). He has sold himself in every possible sense of the word, and lovelessness is the apparent result of his actions.

The next scene, at Betty Bird's bordello, underscores these associations point for point, using prostitutes as the source for Tremblay's allegory. The scene shows Betty Bird's revenge on Rita/Lola for the latter's having stolen her "Johnny." She gets even with her former protégée by revealing to Louise that her sister is trying to get rid her, and Louise finally recognizes the real purpose of her odyssey.

Particularly notable is the way in which this scene portrays women's experiences of love. The character of "Johnny" is a ubiquitous figure in the cycle. Often unseen, he is nonetheless an important symbol, and many of the

cycle's inhabitants fall for a man by that name. Various "Johnnys" appear in Les Belles-Soeurs,⁵ Trois petits tours,⁶ and Lemain matin,⁷ and other characters, such as Maurice, the bar owner in Sainte Carmen, fulfil the same dramatic role, only by a different name. Johnny brings to mind Hollywood "B" movies in which the heroine falls for a no-good two-timer. Despite his abusiveness, the heroine cannot help herself; she is crazy about him and he leads her to her ruin. In keeping with Tremblay's theme of cultural domination, Johnny, the American symbol of virility, promises love but delivers only sex at best and, at worst, abuse. Nonetheless, his attraction is irresistible, and the women find themselves rendered powerless by their desire. Women seem, as they do elsewhere in the cycle, to be imbued with and controlled by sexual frustration.

Tremblay is certainly casting doubt on the value of this new world. The adoption of an American-style cultural identity, Tremblay says, is a kind of prostitution. It is a chosen flight from Québec's own identity, and hardly better than what was left behind. The characters' desperation to leave the old Québec causes them to go too far in the opposite direction; they have escaped from repression, but

⁵ Michel Tremblay, Les Belles-Soeurs (Ottawa, 1972).

⁶ Michel Tremblay, Trois petits tours (Ottawa, 1971).

⁷ Villemaire, Yolande, "La scène érotomane", Cul-Q, no. 2-3 (hiver/printemps 1974), p. 12.

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are trapped in excess. The play ends, as do many of the cycle, in an image of despairing gaiety as the entire cast joins in a Carmen Miranda-style show-stopper entitled "Brasilia braille" (p. 90). Nothing has been able to convince Louise to return home, and she decides that even a life of "gay dissipation" and prostitution is preferable to the vestiges of old Québec she has left behind her.

Tremblay's symbolism is absolutely clear: on the one hand, Québec's false identification with the American showbiz dream, characterized by sex role confusion, permissiveness, the pursuit of momentary pleasures and the absence of true love; and on the other hand, a potential identity that seems impossible to achieve and barely imaginable, an identity characterized by self-determination, in which sex is an expression of love and symbolic of social cohesion and political strength. Tremblay's allegory is successful; the lack of sexual self-respect, witnessed on every page, is symptomatic of a country eager to be gratified at the cost of its own real identity.

2. Excess and lovelessness

Tremblay's symbolic use of homosexuals, prostitutes, and transvestites relies on socially-conditioned beliefs regarding pleasure. In Demain matin, Montréal m'attend, discrete and essentially meaningless pleasures have become implicated in an ethical discourse concerning morality and

love. Pleasure has acquired meaning. The play expresses the fear that the unrestricted pursuit of gratification can, and will, take on a life of its own. Failure to value sex as an expression of love has led the people to loneliness and loss of a sense of self. Tremblay's thematic use of these images is by no means restricted to this play: all the "rue Fabre" plays present this same picture to varying degrees. Trois petits tours and Sainte Carmen de la Main are the most similar to Demain matin with respect to their association of American showbusiness, cultural assimilation, and pleasure, but this image of the downtrodden Québécois who are too weak to halt their own self-destructive self-gratification extends past these specific examples. The family plays also make use of images of apparent dissipation. For example, En pièces détachées can also be seen as a parable of True Love gone awry. Exactly like Rita/Lola, Pierrette from Les Belles-Soeurs and others, Hélène has fallen for a "Johnny," in this case Henri, who now tries to assuage the loss of his own virility with a beer and Popeye fantasies on TV.⁸ Hélène, frustrated by his impotence and driven by her frustration, directs her sexual feelings first toward her mother during a drunken brawl (pp. 36 - 42)⁹, and then toward her brother (p.

⁸ Paul-André Bourque, "Masculin féminin; Le rêve triste et la triste réalité," Nord, no. 1 (automne 1971), p. 44.

⁹ Referring to the scene between them, Tremblay said: "C'est une scène d'amour, C'est presque de l'inceste, c'est presque une scène sexuelle!" Cloutier et. al., "Entrevue avec Michel Tremblay," Nord, no. 1 (automne, 1971), p. 73.

46; p. 56).¹⁰ A few references relate the family's problems to the alienation of labour,¹¹ but Tremblay's point of emphasis is always sex. When the family chants, at the play's end, "[c]hus pas capable . . . " (pp. 61-63), what remains in the mind's eye is an alcohol-sodden group who are unable to muster any kind of self-control; their descent into dissipation is indissolubly associated with their inability to establish loving ties.

Wherever we find excess and uncontrolled sexuality in the cycle, we also find lovelessness. Two of the sisters in Bonjour, là, bonjour,¹² for example, fill their empty lives with food and drugs, and project their sexual needs onto their brother, Serge. The sisters' excesses stand in contrast to Serge's single-mindedness and self-control. He is rewarded with love at the end of the play.

Another example of excess is Sandra/Michel in Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra.¹³ He has given in to his desire for frequent sexual contact. Despite a lively sex life, he is intensely lonely and sees his lover as nothing but a victim caught in the trap of his allure (p. 54). His untrammelled

¹⁰ Hélène's solicitousness of Claude is reminiscent of the close ties between the siblings shown in Bonjour, là, bonjour.

¹¹ Henri's sign-carrying (pp. 16 - 18) and Hélène's waitressing (pp. 22 - 27).

¹² Michel Tremblay, Bonjour, là, bonjour (Ottawa, 1974).

¹³ Michel Tremblay, Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra suivi de Surprise! Surprise! (Ottawa, 1977).

pursuit of pleasure has led him only to sorrow and isolation.

Another important example is Cuirette in Hosanna,¹⁴ who gives up the casual sexual encounters in the Parc Lafontaine that he enjoys and is rewarded with Hosanna's love. At the point where the two characters are united, it becomes clear that Cuirette's promiscuity, like Hosanna's effeminacy, made love an impossibility for him:

HOSANNA: Cléopâtre est morte, pis le Parc
Lafontaine est toute illuminé! (p. 75)

In the sense that it prepares the path for love to exist, Hosanna's change is parallel to Cuirette's. In the ethical structure of the cycle, sexual excess is morally inferior to monogamy.

From all these examples, which are but a few of those one might choose, it is absolutely clear that the plays propose an attitude of self-control as a way to ensure love. It might seem strange to suggest that Tremblay is recommending sexual self-control. After all, so many of his characters, such as Manon and Marie-Lou, suffer as a result of the control that they themselves exert over their experience of sexual pleasure. Certainly their kind of control is seen as sexual repression and as a manifestation of guilt. Then what are the criteria Tremblay uses to separate "good" self-control from "bad" self-control? How

¹⁴ Michel Tremblay, Hosanna suivi de la duchesse de Langeais (Ottawa, 1984).

does this control guarantee love? The answers to these questions become apparent when we compare Tremblay's treatment of the love theme to Foucault's description of True Love.

3. True Love

In order to understand what Foucault means by True Love, we must first understand what he means by truth. First, truth is not something that can be determined for all time. There is no real truth on which ethical systems should be based, or against which human behaviour should be judged. Nonetheless, the idea of truth has been used to create these systems and to judge that behaviour. It is so indistinguishable from its effects, that it is, in itself, power.

Power/knowledge, or pouvoir/savoir, is the basic tenet of Foucault's thinking.¹⁵ Specific philosophical "truths" are a part of every discourse. One "truth" of the historical discourse, for example, is that events can be traced to their cause; history is the apparently orderly sequence that results. Foucault questions the certainties that underly the historical discourse, and his response is to write histories that are in the nature of conjectures or stories. His histories only suggest what might have taken place; they do not pretend to convey the truth. In Chapter Two, we saw how

¹⁵ See Appendix, under "Power/Knowledge".

Foucault's sexual history suggested that the rational perception of opposition has been applied to pleasurable experience. That events and sensations oppose each other might be considered a truth common to western civilization. Another such powerful "truth" proposes that that which is eternal is more valuable than that which is fleeting. Western culture places more value on a lasting love relationship than on short term experiences of love. To have maintained a lasting union between two people seems more right, morally, than to have had many different sexual relationships. To achieve long-lasting love becomes the reason for one's experience of pleasure. This love is "true." Foucault might suggest that the social emphasis on such unions furthers the power of reason over pleasure.

Choosing to be moderate in one's indulgence in pleasure has come to be a condition of true, eternal love. In The Use of Pleasure¹⁶ Foucault describes the process by which pleasure came to be questioned for its philosophical value, for its capacity to reflect principles of truth. He shows that this process had its origin in different areas of Greek life, such as health practices, a man's relationship to boys, and his relationship with his wife. In each of these areas, self-mastery, as we saw in Chapter Two, led to the gradual disappearance of passive pleasurable experiences among men,

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality: Volume II, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1985).

and helped to create our contemporary idea of identity. This system of valuing active pleasure over passive pleasure also contributed to the creation of an ethics of love, when it became linked to general philosophical principles. Self-mastery became not only a process that ensured a man's natural dominance, but it also became the process whereby pleasures could be evaluated in relation to many truths, or simply, to "truth."

In Greek society, in the area of an individual's health, sexual activities, including masturbation and nocturnal emission, came to be considered potentially dangerous. The orgasm came to be a subject of thought, something to be evaluated; the individual problematized this experience of pleasure.¹⁷ Foucault calls the process of evaluating sexual feelings "problematization."¹⁸ The intensity of orgasm seemed to threaten a man's sense of control over himself.¹⁹ To be the master of oneself, that is, to be moderate in one's enjoyment of pleasure, came to have an aura of ethical superiority, since it demonstrated one's ability to rise above bodily pleasure and appreciate the "true," eternal pleasures of reason. In this way, "truth" had the power to place order on experience.

The relationships between men and boys were an extremely

¹⁷ See above, p. iv.

¹⁸ See above, p. iv.

¹⁹ See Foucault, Vol. II, p. 49.

important feature of Greek society. True Love in Greek society did not develop out of marriage, as one might expect. It developed out of the man-boy relationship, out of a concern for a boy's autonomy and sense of self. To love a boy "truly" was never to impede him in his ascent to his natural place as ruler of himself and others. To resist physical pleasures with the boy indicated a concern to establish a lasting love: momentary physical gratification was rejected in favour of the lasting pleasure of helping the boy become a man. Such pleasure was ethically superior because this moderate relationship, based on friendship and the pursuit of beauty, would endure longer than physical attraction. The problem with man-boy love, as Foucault shows with reference to Plato,²⁰ was that the partners were unequal. One was the lover, the other loved; one the subject, the other object; one active, the other passive. Sexual austerity on the part of the lover guaranteed the boy's autonomy and his success as a social and political being. The indulgence of pleasures implied social irresponsibility and indolence, and came to be regarded as ethically inferior to sexual moderation or austerity. If we return for a moment to Demain matin, Montréal m'attend, we find the same connections between a character's individual experiences of pleasure and his social position. In Greek civilization, moderation demonstrated the individual's

²⁰ See Foucault, Vol. II, pp. 229 - 246.

knowledge of philosophical truths, and attested to the strength of his social and political identity. The Greek philosophical discourse of pleasure that concerned man-boy love is largely responsible for the creation of the sexual ethics evident in the present day.²¹

In marriage, unlike in the relationship of man and boy, " . . . the sexual behavior of the two spouses was not questioned from the standpoint of their personal relationship."²² Marriage reflected the ethical system that developed between men and boys. The wife's virtue was a result of her submission to the male, it was not yet the result of elaborate ethical considerations.²³ Gradually, however, the ethics of love that developed between men and boys became accepted as the standard, and extra-marital sexual activity came to be considered excessive. Monogamy in marriage became a sign of ethical superiority. Moderation became a mark of the strength of a couple's household and the truth of their love.

By making the experience of pleasure a philosophical problem, Greek civilization established the power of the mind over pleasures of the body.²⁴ In the discourses of health, man-boy love, and marriage, self-mastery was linked to

²¹ See Foucault, Vol. II, pp. 249 - 250; p. 251; p. 253.

²² See Foucault, Vol. II, p. 183.

²³ See Foucault, Vol. II, p. 184.

²⁴ See Foucault, Vol. II, p. 238.

principles such as freedom,²⁵ rationality,²⁶ and symmetry.²⁷ From this point onward, pleasure was now evaluated according to the truths of an increasing number of discourses.

To return to Tremblay's plays, the issue of promiscuity is particularly interesting in light of Foucault's work. Here is a perfect example of the ongoing power of True Love over pleasure. Foucault cites the case of a Greek man whose position as a city ruler was threatened by his promiscuous past. He was considered at the time to be an inappropriate ruler by virtue of his obvious disregard for ethical truths.²⁸ Contemporary psychiatry has attributed pathological value to promiscuous behaviour, sometimes labelling it a symptom of neurosis.²⁹ Such definitions of human behaviour justify legal, psychiatric and governmental intervention into all areas of human activity. When the "rue Fabre" plays show promiscuity to be an excessive behaviour that precludes love, they conform to the philosophical and medical discourses that control pleasure.

Other forms of gratification seen in the plays, such as drink and entertainment, are also portrayed unfailingly as an abandonment to pleasure. This abandonment is always a

²⁵ See Foucault, Volume II, pp. 252, 253.

²⁶ See Foucault, Volume II, p. 250.

²⁷ See Foucault, Vol. II, p. 233, 240.

²⁸ See Foucault, Vol. II, p. 218.

²⁹ See Horowitz, p. 79.

symptom of the character's disregard for him or herself, and of a lack of self-respect. The self, as suggested by the plays, is defined by the way the individual manages his or her experience of pleasure. Just as in Greek civilization, a fear was expressed that pleasure might take on a life of its own and imperil a man's identity, so do the "rue Fabre" plays suggest that gratification must be well-managed for the good of the individual and the society.

4. Love as a social panacea

Every play in the "rue Fabre" cycle depends, to varying degrees, on the theme of love as a symbol for Québec's social cohesion. Frustrated women, incestuous siblings, lonely drag-queens, in fact, all the characters in the cycle yearn for love. Tremblay intends this majority to stand for Québec as a whole, and he symbolizes them in the same ways repeatedly. Their dissipation and sexual promiscuity are evidence of their ignorance of the principles of True Love. The parallel between personal identity and political identity can be called the "isomorphism of sexual and social relations."³⁰ Since the western concepts of political responsibility and social cohesion are partly based on the same philosophical principles as "true love," one can successfully stand for the other as a symbol. Self-mastery, autonomy, and strength, are qualities that were and are

³⁰ Foucault, Vol. II, p. 215.

equally desirable both personally and politically. Tremblay's political symbolism always relies on the discourse of True Love, and in so doing, supports the idea that sex must be carefully controlled.

Published criticism of the plays reflects the ongoing power of this isomorphism. John Ripley, for example, voices the widely-accepted connections between political identity and strength on the one hand, and assimilation and sexual permissiveness on the other:

Québec's virility crisis, Tremblay graphically argues, cannot be solved by an effeminate surrender to North American materialism and its meretricious cultural trappings. Such a course amounts to prostitution and evokes an even greater alienation. Tremblay is not yet prepared to suggest a viable alternative; but his rejection of the ludicrous, and ultimately pathetic, strategy adopted by the Duchesse, and thousands of his Québec compatriots, is virulent and total.³¹

Prostitution, alienation, and Québec's crisis of identity co-exist. Just as Foucault's model predicts, sexual austerity is thought to be necessary to ensure first selfhood and then political strength. Ripley demonstrates that the people of "the Main" manifest a "negative identity"³² that they must overcome if they are to cultivate love and self-respect. The pursuit of love, he adds, is the basis of Tremblay's political fable: love and respect for oneself precedes love for others, and therefore, "[o]nly through confidence in its

³¹ Ripley, p. 50.

³² Ripley, p. 50.

own integrity can [Québec] achieve ties of solidarity with the world outside."³³ The people of Québec were shown to have little integrity of this kind. Tremblay's portrayals were intended to shock the public into self-recognition. He wanted his audience to realize how bad conditions were in the areas of society they chose to ignore. His examination of the characters' subconscious sexuality is the psychological parallel to this political goal.

Like Ripley, Renate Usmiani also notes the symbolic use of sexuality in Tremblay's parables of absent love. Her interpretations of the plays seem in themselves to express the opinion that failure to manage pleasure has repercussions on many levels. Throughout her book, she uses the word "alienation" to describe, variously, madness,³⁴ transvestitism,³⁵ loneliness,³⁶ absence of a distinct culture,³⁷ and the settings of Demain matin, Montréal m'attend,³⁸ to name only a few instances. For Usmiani, as for Tremblay, political, social, economic, and emotional phenomena are all reflected in sexual phenomena. The fact that the critics and the public understand Tremblay's

³³ Ripley, p. 53.

³⁴ See Usmiani, p. 60.

³⁵ See Usmiani, pp. 79-80.

³⁶ See Usmiani, p. 81.

³⁷ See Usmiani, p. 82.

³⁸ See Usmiani, p. 102.

allegories of alienation attests to the presence of sexual and social isomorphism; uncontrolled pleasures are widely understood as signs of weakness in the face of American domination.

Michel Bélair's book on Tremblay is another example of how the relationship between sexual identity and political strength is understood. Tremblay's plays, he writes, unite the goals of sexual and political liberation that are necessary to Québec. Bélair notes that characters such as Pierrette, La Duchesse, and Carlotta³⁹ always begin their revolt against the established order out of a concern for their sexual freedom. Just as it did in the Greek tradition of self-mastery, liberation requires that individuals first focus attention on themselves, on the way they express their sexuality.⁴⁰ Liberation is contingent upon the assertion of individual wills over pleasure. When the characters fail, it is they themselves who take responsibility for it: "[l]eur seule consolation est d'être responsable de leur échec."⁴¹ The failure of freedom is a failure of will, and the triumph of dissipation. Bélair admires the revolt of the characters as one step in Québec's freedom, but until characters like La

³⁹ See p. 30. Pierrette from Les Belles-Soeurs, La Duchesse from La Duchesse de Langeais, and Carlotta from Trois Petits Tours.

⁴⁰ Foucault, Vol. I, pp. 7-8. As Foucault writes, sexual freedom promises "a new day to come," in this case, a new day for Québec. This promise is so widely accepted that the critics rarely think to question it.

⁴¹ Bélair, p. 30.

Duchesse are able to regulate the ways in which they indulge their pleasures,⁴² they will never be masters of themselves, either sexually or politically. Nor, clearly, will they experience love. This becomes apparent in the only case in the cycle where the people do find a sense of love and social cohesion.

5. Sainte Carmen de la Main

Tremblay's second-last play of the cycle, produced in 1976, was Sainte Carmen de la Main. It distinctly incorporates True Love and pleasure in all of the ways we have come to expect in our examination so far. True Love in this case is symbolized by Carmen, both by her personal qualities and by what she has to offer to the downtrodden people of Québec.

The plot of the play is quite simple and is modelled after Greek tragedy. The chorus is represented by Montréal's hookers and drag-queens. This element of the play serves to refer the issues that follow to images of sexuality, and the use of sexual pleasure. The street people anxiously await the return of Carmen (p. 11), who is about to return from Nashville where she has been perfecting her cowboy songs (p. 14). Maurice, the club owner and Carmen's "Johnny," has planned a triumphant return performance. Carmen's success sends Gloria, Maurice's former star, into a rage, and she

⁴² Bélair, p. 30.

vows that she will return to the limelight and into Maurice's arms (p. 32). She is successful when Toothpick, Maurice's right-hand man, kills Carmen (p. 74). Carmen has had the chance to give the people a brief taste of freedom (pp. 67-69): in defiance of Maurice, her performance is sung, not in English, but entirely in the people's language. Carmen announces her plans to put foreign songs aside entirely in favour of her own compositions (p. 66). The tragedy is complete when the people slip back into their dissipation and cultural assimilation to the tune of Gloria's rhumba beat (p. 81).

Even from this short summary, it is apparent that Tremblay did not modify his mythology in any significant way relative to Demain matin. What the later play shows is the relationship of sex to love. The transvestite and prostitute symbols still imply the various "alienations" noted above, but in this case True Love allows them briefly to experience a sense of self.

Carmen is "the sun" (p. 19) whose light brings the characters out of the perpetual night of street walking into a daytime of pride and strength. Before Carmen, dawn was met with eyes bleary from the night's exertions (pp. 8-9). Her light sees through the makeup to the real faces beneath, ensuring the return of the people's true selves. One moment of love has engendered cultural definition, a sense of self, political strength, and the correct use of sex. All of these

qualities are based on an austere relationship with oneself; they suggest phrases such as "shaping-up," "getting it together," and "standing up for oneself." All of these expressions speak of a desire to "act upon oneself,"⁴³ a desire for self-mastery. As Bec-de-Liévre says, "Carmen a dit qu'au fond de moi j'étais forte!" (p. 49), and this strength is directed at oneself as much as at one's oppression. Carmen's True Love is offered to all the promiscuous characters of the cycle. Of course, the prostitutes are working for money; their promiscuity is not really an abandonment to self-gratification. But we can see that if the society of "the Main" were a loving one, their sexual self-abuse could, and would, cease. The play duplicates the movement in western philosophy that establishes the universality of the precepts of love.⁴⁴ As Godin reports, the play's theme of love "rejoint l'identité profonde de chacun."⁴⁵

Carmen herself, as the symbol of love, reinforces these uses of sex. She belonged to the group of showbusiness women whose pleasure of being on stage had an exhibitionistic quality, a sense of displaced sexual energies.⁴⁶ Like Lola-

⁴³ Foucault, p. 28, Vol. I.

⁴⁴ Usmiani states that the plays will outlive their political uses because their "psychological and philosophical themes have universal applications" (p. 96).

⁴⁵ Godin, p. 175.

⁴⁶ See above, p. 20.

Lee⁴⁷, Carlotta and Gloria Star, Carmen pursued glory as a substitute for love. But in Sainte Carmen de la Main, Carmen has changed. Her change is evident in the way Tremblay has incorporated her costume into the play. In a philosophical sense, to dress alluringly and to encourage sexual activity is an indication of the character's ignorance of life's true principles, and attests to his or her lack of self respect. In Sainte Carmen, Carmen's costume stands in contrast to that of the prostitutes, and although she is still in cowgirl garb, in contrast to her former self. Bec-de-Lièvre, Carmen's dresser, approaches her " . . . comme un enfant de chœur aide un prêtre à revêtir ses derniers ornements avant une cérémonie importante." (p. 14) Carmen's costume is a mark of her new "sainthood." There is no longer very much evidence of her exhibitionism. "Gloria," the symbol of American domination and sexual excess, is still represented, but Carmen has graduated out of the club. She is a "saint"; she performs the miracle of cultural re-awakening. She stands up to her "Johnny" (pp. 57-65), making it clear she is no longer swayed by his charms, and this is very different from her previous tendency to "frôle[r] du monde."⁴⁸ Also, her rejection of Toothpick's advances, which eventually destroys her, shows that she is no longer an "easy lay." Finally, and most importantly, she no longer sings, as Gloria

⁴⁷ See Godin, p. 175.

⁴⁸ See above, p. 20.

does, as a game of seduction. She sings, instead, for love. She knows who she is, and, knowing this, is set apart from the others by her ability to overcome what they cannot, the descent into dissipation. In exact contrast to the chant at the end of En pièces détachées, Carmen says "Chus capable, astheur!" (p. 14)

In the context of the cycle's predominant themes, her most remarkable escape is sexual. On one hand, she escapes the sexual repression of her mother and sister; on the other, the self-destructive vices of the Main. Carmen's strength is demonstrated by her judicious restraint, and her escape consists of being able to channel her exhibitionistic tendencies into love. "Je veux pas m'exhiber devant le monde" (p. 73), she says, her new attitude standing in contrast to Gloria and the world of prostitutes she is trying to save. The quality of her love is in direct proportion to the mastery of her pleasures.

Tremblay's allegory of the loveless, downtrodden people is successful because it connects pleasure with political critique. To do this, it must incorporate sex into the discourse of True Love as described by Foucault. The theme of love is the backbone of Tremblay's prescription to the Québec people; it promises a kind of utopia of cultural identity, political strength and sexual freedom. In all three areas, a common thread of austerity can be found. Tremblay makes cultural success rest upon the rejection of

gratifying American culture, symbolized by the characters of American showbusiness such as "Gloria" and "Johnny." He makes political strength contingent upon the power to reject the drinking and dissipation that is a common feature in all his downtrodden characters.

We began this discussion by showing how Tremblay's perspective of freedom from repression had shaped the plays in the cycle. We saw that families of dominant mothers and absent fathers were the family from which his characters attempt to escape. In Chapters Two and Three, we saw that sexual permissiveness, in itself, does not ensure identity and love, which are both necessary to Québec as a whole. Seen in its entirety, the cycle is a quest for sexual freedom. This is the topic of the concluding chapter.

CONCLUSION: SEXUAL FREEDOM

Tremblay's conception of sexual freedom is very different from Foucault's. There is no doubt that Tremblay wished to free the Québec people from the injustices that had been inflicted on them, and that they subsequently inflicted upon themselves. When we take the cycle as a whole, it is apparent that Tremblay considered the sexuality he found in the mémoire collective to be the greatest source of pain for his people. In its assumption that sexual freedom ensures all other freedoms, Tremblay's project resembles the work of two other important thinkers on the issue of sexual freedom. Rajchman describes the efforts of two writers of the Frankfurt School, Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse:

The Reich-Marcuse model of repression starts with the assumption that a basic misunderstanding of sexual desires (mystification) is at the root of our failure to achieve genuine autonomy To undo repression through self-criticism (demystification) is thus to discover the truth about our desires that we must know in order to be free (disalienation).¹

In this same way, Tremblay used the sexual mythology as a fable for all of Québec. In all areas, sexual, social and political, he conceived of social injustice in one basic way, as the relationship of oppressor and oppressed, one party with power and one without. The oppressor might change names, but always the relationship remained the same: the church was the oppressive institution against which women

¹ John Rajchman, Michel Foucault, The Freedom of Philosophy (New York, 1985), p. 88.

must revolt; repressed women were the "société non permissive" that had to be overthrown by their children; and alienating labour oppressed men who were too weak to defy the system. That oppressive relationship also had an "interior" dimension: the French domination of the Québécois was mirrored in the mother's dominating "feminization" of a man's identity; American domination of the Québécois was echoed in the way characters like Lola-Lee and Carmen repressed their need for a strong man and became narcissistic performers. But as we saw in the case of Carmen, if the "oppressor" could be overthrown, the individual would find his or her identity and be able to love.

The "rue Fabre" cycle was written at a time when revolution was in the air. The Quiet Revolution had passed, but separatism took its place, and the "sexual revolution" of the late sixties promised a new social order. As Bélair wrote in 1972,

. . . les pièces de Tremblay découpent toutes un même champ d'analyse mettant en relief les interdits à lever avant d'en arriver à une libération finale.²

Revolution on all fronts would guarantee une libération finale, a lasting freedom based on sexual pleasure, self-respect and love. Usmiani writes that the plea for sexual liberation evident in the cycle " . . . also signifies

² Michel Bélair, Michel Tremblay (Québec, 1972) p. 61.

liberation generally, of the individual as well as the community."³

Michel Foucault's conception of freedom is entirely different from Tremblay's. In the first place, his view of the phenomenon of sexual repression is completely at odds with that of Tremblay:

. . . between the two world wars there was formed, around Reich, the historico-political critique of sexual repression. The importance of this critique and its impact on reality were substantial. But the very possibility of its success was tied to the fact that it always unfolded within the deployment of sexuality, and not outside or against it. The fact that so many things were able to change in the sexual behavior of Western societies without any of the promises or political conditions predicted by Reich being realized is sufficient proof that this whole sexual "revolution," this whole "antirepressive" struggle, represented nothing more, but nothing less . . . than a tactical shift . . . in the great deployment of sexuality.⁴

For Foucault, Reich's promise of sexual and political freedom, the same promise found in the "rue Fabre" cycle, could not succeed because power had been incorrectly identified as the relationship between oppressor and oppressed. He writes that

. . . there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, . . . no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape . . . come into play in the machinery of production, in

³ Renate Usmiani, Michel Tremblay (Vancouver, 1982), p. 22.

⁴ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction (New York, 1980), p. 131.

families, limited groups, and institutions⁵

Foucault felt that " . . . [p]ower is everywhere . . . ,"⁶ that power had actively produced definitions of sex, of truth, of love. "The family" and psychoanalysis, two areas of the deployment of sexuality, furthered the effects of power over individuals by virtue of their ability to define them sexually. Thus, to believe that an escape from repression is an escape from power is to make a grave mistake. The idea of repression acts to control pleasure: the belief that we are, as a culture, sexually repressed has actually caused sex to be spoken of constantly, has in effect caused even the most minute pleasures to be put into legal and medical discourse. Tremblay's effort to dig ever deeper into the Québec subconscious, to make everything known, itself helps to put pleasure into discourse:

. . . Western man has been drawn for three centuries to the task of telling everything concerning his sex Not only were the boundaries of what one could say about sex enlarged, and men compelled to hear it said; but more important, discourse was connected to sex by a complex organization with varying effects, by a deployment that cannot be adequately explained merely by referring it to a law of prohibition . . .⁷

Tremblay no doubt felt that his unabashed and detailed descriptions of sex were a challenge to the repressive power

⁵ Foucault, Vol. II, p. 94.

⁶ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 93.

⁷ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 23.

of institutions like the church and family. As Foucault points out,

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom.⁸

Tremblay's first plays, written with passion in his twenties, are an immediate response to the two institutions that at first glance hold the power over sexual expression in his society, the family and the church.

But as Foucault shows, and as I have demonstrated in the areas of family, identity, and love, escaping the power that controls pleasure is not at all a question of overturning an oppressor and establishing a new order. After all, whether in sexual politics or politics generally, men have always recommended revolution in the name of "freedom," and each revolution has promised une libération finale, which has yet to take place. "The oppressor" is continually being re-named, overthrown, and replaced, in every area of social life. What, then, is sexual freedom? Would Foucault say that such a thing can exist at all?

Yes, Foucault does conceive of sexual freedom, but not in a way that would be permanent and the same for all people

⁸ Foucault, Vol. I, p. 6.

in all cultures. According to John Rajchman, Foucault conceived of freedom not as part of our "transcendental nature," nor as an ideal, but rather as residing in " . . . our capacities to contest and change those anonymous practices that constitute our nature."⁹ Freedom lies in the ability to conceive of oneself in new ways:

Foucault's "anti-humanist" philosophy . . . understands the problematization of subjectivity in historical terms as an issue about our real and not our foundational freedom. It attempts to replace the model of the unrepressed Freudian subject and the unalienated Marxist subject with a "Nietzschean" model of the nonfinalized problematization of forms through which the experience of the subject is constituted.¹⁰

Freedom, for Foucault, lies in this refusal to define a single form of human nature. Conversely, any time the promise of freedom is used in order to define "human nature" or "the subject," then it is also working to further social control. In this case,

. . . freedom is not an ideal we must make practical. It is already practical; it is extremely concrete. It resides in who is willing to do what in concrete situations of power.¹¹

The ideal of sexual "freedom" makes us believe that by restricting ourselves at the right times, for the right reasons, in the name of identity or of love, we will be eternally rewarded. Real freedom consists in countering

⁹ Rajchman, p. 105.

¹⁰ Rajchman, p. 124.

¹¹ Rajchman, p. 92.

specific definitions of sexual meanings at specific times. For Foucault, sexual freedom is a process of ongoing challenges to the way the sexual "self" is thought about. Pleasure must be freed from the meanings it has come to acquire in discourses of medicine, philosophy, and law.

The example of "homosexuality" demonstrates how the casting-off of apparent repression does not constitute real freedom. Even though "homosexuals" might no longer feel themselves to be inferior to other members of society, or may be granted civil rights, social institutions continue to exert their control over physical sensation:

Consider for example the history of what was once "the" great sin against nature. The extreme discretion of the texts dealing with sodomy -- that utterly confused category -- and the nearly universal reticence in talking about it made possible a twofold operation: on the one hand, there was an extreme severity (punishment by fire was meted out well into the eighteenth century, without there being any substantial protest expressed before the middle of the century), and on the other hand, a tolerance that must have been widespread (which one can deduce indirectly from the infrequency of judicial sentences, and which one glimpses more directly through certain statements concerning societies of men that were thought to exist in the army or in the courts). There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and "psychic hermaphrodisism" made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of "perversity"; but it also made possible the formation of a "reverse" discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically

disqualified.¹²

Freedom does not consist in allowing society's "marginals" some degree of legal rights, nor in acknowledging that they are able to love. No new order of pleasure, such as that proposed by Tremblay, can guarantee sexual freedom, social cohesion and political identity for all. Freedom consists only in allowing pleasure to be experienced, defined, or left undefined, for specific people in specific places at specific times.

To say that the "rue Fabre" plays further the effects of the deployment of sexuality is not to say that they have been entirely ineffective as instruments of real sexual freedom. A further study might be undertaken that examined the Québec theatre as discourse. This study could relate the play scripts, production histories, reviews and criticism in an attempt to discover how the actual performances of the plays might have effected change. For example, Tremblay correctly points out that before Les Belles-Soeurs was produced, women were rarely given the right to speak in Québec theatre.¹³ The mere existence of thirteen women speaking from a kitchen about children, housework and the absurdity of their condition could be said to have a really freeing effect, in the tactical sense. Les Belles-Soeurs might have made it

¹² Foucault, Vol. I, p. 101.

¹³ Cloutier et al., "Entrevue avec Michel Tremblay," Nord, p. 59.

easier for women playwrights to be produced on the Québec stage. In addition, one might be able to show that the social milieu was sexist, and that since the play shows women to resent their children, freedom results from this unusual depiction of mothers; it contributes to a re-definition of their sexual role. Therefore, to suggest that the plays unilaterally encouraged the social control of sexual pleasure would be an oversimplification.

Nonetheless, sexual freedom is an elusive quality that must be thought of not simply as freedom from repression, which is, in the main, the way it is presented in the plays. Real sexual freedom is the power to re-define or "un-define" pleasure in relation to ourselves; insofar as the "rue Fabre" cycle is an attempt to define sexual freedom, it fails to achieve Tremblay's goal.

APPENDIX: CONCEPTS USED BY FOUCAULT

The following descriptions are taken from Michel Foucault: Social Theory as Transgression, by Charles C. Lemert and Garth Gillan (pp. 127 - 138, *passim*). The authors warn that the descriptions should be used in conjunction " . . . with the book's index and text, and Foucault's own works." Such concise and coherent descriptions of Foucault's concepts are found rarely, however, and can only be written with considerable expertise in the social sciences, which I do not possess. In respect for their wishes I have used only those descriptions that were absolutely necessary in order to clarify complex ideas.

DISCOURSE. Roughly put, discourse is simply language practiced. In the lexicon of modern linguistics, discourse is distinguished from the formal aspects of language (Saussure's *la langue*) and the specifics of actual speaking (*la parole*). Discourse is understood to have its own rules of operation and, empirically, to have its own forms. However, as a more inclusive instance of language use, its analysis is limited neither to the customary elements of linguistics (semantics and grammar) nor to linguistic's basic units (the sentence, the proposition, or the speech act). Discourse, therefore, is susceptible to analysis in relation to the other aspects of social life: politics, culture, economics, social institutions. Generally speaking, Foucault adds no unusual meanings to the term, even though, in his method, it is the means by which he focuses attention on the analysis of specific social practices, namely discursive practices. Discourse is obviously central to Foucault, but it is also a troublesome topic in that he seems to relate discursive practices to social practices but without ever providing an explicit answer to the question, where does discourse end and social life as such begin, if at all? See also Discursive Formation.

DISCURSIVE FORMATION. This concept is discussed most explicitly in Archaeology of Knowledge (part 2). It is, generally, Foucault's means for acknowledging the fact that discourse is an empirical phenomenon situated in a field of complex social forces and their relations. The best-known,

but also troubling, use of the concept is the term episteme in The Order of Things. An episteme is a set of social conditions which require and permit particular historical forms of discourse and knowledge in the Renaissance, the Age of Reason, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As with his general theory of discourse, it is often difficult to determine the precise distinction between a discursive formation and a social formation, in the Marxian sense. See also Discourse.

POWER/KNOWLEDGE (Pouvoir-savoir). This concept appeared clearly with and after Discipline and Punish, though it is present implicitly throughout. Its most important consequences are the following: Power-knowledge assumes that power is not from the top down, from a dominant class upon a dominated class; power is immanent, diffused throughout society, on all levels. Second, knowledge (savoir) is not ideal and abstract, but material and concrete; it cannot be divorced from the workings of power throughout society, again at all levels. Third, as a consequence of the second, science cannot be arbitrarily divorced from ideology because science, as a form of knowledge (connaissance), is embedded in power relations (pouvoir-savoir). Readers would do well when they encounter in Foucault instances either of knowledge (savoir or connaissance) or of power and control to ask: Where is the effect of power in this knowledge, or the displacement of knowledge in this power tactic?

SUBJECT. Foucault understands the Subject to be one of a series of historical substitutions for the idea of a center which controls thought. It should therefore be placed alongside traditional metaphysical principles: God, Logos, Ousia, Reason, Being, and so forth. The Subject, however, is the central principle of the Modern Age, the nineteenth century. As such, it is a principle essential to the concept Man. In particular, Foucault's critique of the Subject is a critique of phenomenology and other subjectivist philosophies that dominated French thought in the post-World War II period. He shares the widely held and obvious view that modern subjectivisms are the extension of the Kantian notion of transcendental Subjectivity with which, in part, nineteenth century reasoning began. See also Analytic of Finitude; Anthropological Sleep; Anthropology; Man.

TRANSGRESSION. This concept is fundamental to Foucault's idea that power and knowledge cannot be divorced. If knowledge is implicated in power, then it follows that there can be no pure knowledge. Foucault's critique of anthropological thought is part of his critique of all traditional forms of thinking in which it is held that knowledge, or truth, can be a pure achievement apart from the conflicts of history. Traditional thought, therefore, relies

on purifying technical devices: the syllogism, deduction, induction, and interpretation, all of which assume it is possible to uncover the essential principles of the truth. If, on the other hand, one rejects these epistemological strategies (as one must if truth is related to power), then they are seen as attempts to control both thought and action. As an alternative, Foucault holds that knowledge is gained only by the criticism of knowledge. Thinking, therefore, is a continual transgression of established norms of truth. Thinking is a political act because these norms are socially constructed and maintained. See also Limit; the Other; Power-Knowledge; the Unthought; Will to Truth.

WILL TO KNOWLEDGE. See Will to Truth

WILL TO TRUTH. The will to truth is used interchangeably with the will to know (*la volonté de savoir*) or the will to knowledge when knowledge is understood as the pure knowledge Foucault criticizes. This is Foucault's most explicitly Nietzschean idea. Actual knowledge in society is a political activity which attempts to mask the role of power in knowledge. The ideal of the will to truth, hence, is a norm by which power seeks to protect itself by mystifying its control over knowledge. The critique of anthropological thought, therefore, is the most prominent of Foucault's deconstructions of social forms of knowledge. Behind the gentle mask of Man in the human sciences Foucault uncovers political tactics aimed at controlling persons in mental hospitals, hospitals, prisons, bedrooms, confessionals, classrooms, and psychological counselors' offices. In all these places the manifest activity is an attempt to instill, develop, or rehabilitate the truth of Man in men. In fact, they are the use of knowledge to control men's unreason, physical frailty, and moral defects to the end of producing a disciplined population of workers. See also Discipline; Limit; the Other; the Unthought.

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