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LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL TRANSFER IN  
MICHEL TREMBLAY'S *LES BELLES-SOEURS*

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critique of the Canadian translation of Michel Tremblay's landmark play, *Les Belles-Soeurs*. It is divided into three parts. Parts I and II focus on the translation of Tremblay's language and Part III on the "translation" of his subject matter.

*Les Belles-Soeurs* is written entirely in the Montreal working-class dialect *joual*. In Part I of this thesis, we take a detailed look at the various features of this dialect and examine whether or not they have been retained in the Canadian translation. When a given feature has not been retained, we determine to what extent the fault lies with the translators and to what extent it can be attributed to insurmountable cultural and linguistic differences between English Canada and Quebec and can thus be said to have been beyond the translators' control. Finally, we suggest possible ways in which any weaknesses in the translation could have been prevented or, at the very least, minimized.

In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay combines the everyday speech of working-class Quebec with a number of language strategies, each of which serves a highly specific function within his text. In Part II of this thesis, we discuss the problems involved in transposing each of these strategies into English and establish whether the translators have successfully met such a challenge in their translation. When they have not, we suggest possible ways of dealing with the problem.

No study of *Les Belles-Soeurs* would be complete without a discussion of Tremblay's subject matter. In Part III of this thesis,

we take a look at the social and political connotations of the play, determining if and to what extent they are "translatable" into an English-Canadian context. Finally, we discuss the possibility of adaptation as a means of making Tremblay's subject matter more "accessible" to an English-Canadian audience.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse est une critique de la traduction canadienne de la célèbre pièce de Michel Tremblay, *Les Belles-Soeurs*. Elle se divise en trois parties. Les deux premières portent sur la langue de Michel Tremblay et la troisième sur la "traduction" de son thème.

*Les Belles-Soeurs* est rédigée entièrement en *joual*, dialecte de la classe ouvrière à Montréal. Dans la première partie de cette thèse, nous faisons un examen détaillé des diverses caractéristiques de ce dialecte, afin de déterminer si elles ont été retenues dans la traduction canadienne. Lorsqu'une caractéristique quelconque n'a pas été retenue, nous déterminons dans quelle mesure la faute en est attribuable soit aux traducteurs, soit aux différences culturelles et linguistiques insurmontables qui existent entre le Québec et le Canada anglais. Enfin, nous faisons quelques propositions quant à la façon dont on aurait pu pallier aux faiblesses de la traduction.

Dans *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay combine le langage quotidien de la classe ouvrière québécoise avec un certain nombre de stratégies linguistiques, dont chacune a une fonction très précise dans le texte. Dans la deuxième partie de la thèse, nous discutons des problèmes que pose le transfert de chacune de ces stratégies en anglais et nous jugeons si Van Burek et Glassco ont réussi à relever les défis posés par cette traduction. Dans le cas où ils n'y sont pas arrivés, nous proposons des solutions.

Aucune étude de *Les Belles-Soeurs* ne serait complète sans une discussion du thème de Tremblay. Dans la troisième partie de la

thèse, nous nous penchons sur les connotations sociales et politiques qui ponctuent le texte, dans le but de déterminer dans quelle mesure elles sont "traduisibles" dans un contexte anglo-canadien. Enfin, nous parlons de la possibilité du recours à l'adaptation comme moyen de rendre le thème de Tremblay plus "accessible" à un public canadien anglais.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

*L'oeuvre de Tremblay n'est pas une oeuvre marginale, dont on peut disposer en l'associant à quelque courant minoritaire; elle est au contraire centrale, à la fois dans notre théâtre et dans notre société. C'est une oeuvre 'miroir', dans laquelle se reconnaît un peuple, en même temps qu'une oeuvre 'modèle', qui a entraîné derrière elle des dizaines d'auteurs, s'imposant comme une façon très particulière de concevoir le théâtre. Si d'autres styles se sont développés au Québec depuis vingt ans, aucun n'a encore eu un impact aussi grand sur le public et sur la dramaturgie.<sup>1</sup>*

Michel Tremblay is without a doubt one of the most important figures in the history of Quebec theatre. The youngest of five children, he was born on Fabre Street in the working-class district of east-end Montreal on June 25, 1942. His family was one of three who shared a small, seven-room house. "We were poor, we had our problems," Tremblay says now. "But we were not an unhappy family, we were not heavy people."<sup>2</sup> In 1955, having attained the highest French-language marks in the province, he won a scholarship to a "collège classique"<sup>3</sup> only to quit and return to public school a few months later. "J'ai abandonné ces études", he says, "parce

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<sup>1</sup>Carole Fréchette, "Les femmes de Tremblay et l'amour des hommes," *Jeu*, vol. 2, no. 47 (1988): 93.

<sup>2</sup>Michel Tremblay quoted in Marianne Ackerman, "Sweet Jesus! Who's That, Ma?," *Saturday Night*, June 1980: 43.

<sup>3</sup>An educational establishment at the secondary and college levels that offers an eight-year course, mainly in the classics and liberal arts, leading to a B.A. degree. Walter S. Avis et al, eds., *Gage Canadian Dictionary* (Toronto: Gage Publishing Limited, 1983): 213.

qu'elles étaient, d'une certaine manière, la négation de mon milieu. On tentait de m'acheter dans le but au fond de m'obliger à renier mes parents. En simplifiant à peine on me disait: 'vous êtes intelligent et vous deviendrez la crème de la société mais à condition que vous changiez de camp.'"<sup>4</sup> In 1959, after finishing high school, Tremblay followed in the footsteps of his father and became a linotype operator. At the same time, he became an avid reader, movie- and theatre-goer. His first break as a writer came in 1964 when his one-act television play, *Le Train*, written five years earlier, won a Radio-Canada contest for young writers. Since that time, Tremblay has achieved international renown, producing 28 plays, nine novels, two musical comedies, an opera libretto as well as numerous short stories and screen plays. Several of his works have also been adapted for television. Despite his success, Tremblay has always remained loyal to his roots. In fact, eleven of his plays - referred to as the cycle of *Les Belles-Soeurs* and in which most of the main characters appear over and over again - are set in the same blue-collar area of Montreal where he grew up. His works have been translated into at least twenty languages and have been staged not only in English Canada and the U.S. but in various other parts of the world as well, including South America, Scandinavia, France, Italy, Japan and India. In addition to his original work, Tremblay has also done numerous adaptations and

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<sup>4</sup>Michel Tremblay, interview with Pierre Boncenne, "Les Français nous traitent souvent comme des auteurs folkloriques. Pour nous, Québécois, c'est réciproque," *Lire*, no. 90 (février 1983): 90.

translations such as *Lysistrata*, from the play by Aristophanes, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and Paul Zindel's *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* and *And Miss Reardon Drinks A Little*. He has also won several major awards including the Chalmers Award (Toronto) in 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1976, the Prix Victor Morin (Montreal) in 1974, the Canadian Film Festival Award for best scenario (for *Françoise Durocher, Waitress*) in 1975, and the Ontario Lieutenant Governor's Medal in 1976 and 1977.

It was *Les Belles-Soeurs*, a two-act play about a working-class housewife who has just won a million trading stamps and invites her relatives and friends to a stamp-pasting party, which established Tremblay as one of the major Quebec playwrights of his generation. The play, now considered a landmark in Quebec theatre, created an instant sensation when it premiered at the Théâtre du Rideau Vert on August 28, 1968, first, because of its language and second, because of its themes.

#### **LANGUAGE:**

*Les Belles-Soeurs* was the first Quebec play written entirely in the Quebec working-class dialect *joual*. The term *joual* was invented in the late 1950's by André Laurendeau, editor of *Le Devoir* who, appalled by what he perceived as the "decline" of the French language in Quebec, observed that the current Québécois pronunciation for the word "horse" was not "cheval" but rather "joual".<sup>5</sup> Laurendeau's editorial in turn inspired an anonymous

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<sup>5</sup>Elaine Nardocchio, Theatre and Politics in Modern Quebec (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1986): 49.

critic who called himself "le Frère Untel" to write a series of articles in which he outright blamed *joual*, "un cas de notre inexistence, à nous, les Canadiens français,"<sup>6</sup> on the total failure of the educational system.<sup>7</sup> *Les Belles-Soeurs* is written in Montreal *joual* but other varieties of the dialect can be found throughout the province. As le Frère Untel proclaimed, "C'est toute notre civilisation qui est jouale."<sup>8</sup>

Tremblay's use of *joual* sent shock waves throughout the province, launching critics and the public alike into what would seem like a never-ending debate. Many people, particularly the nationalists, saw *joual* as the hero of the play, a symbol of the cultural individuality of the Québécois.<sup>9</sup> Others, however, vehemently denounced Tremblay's choice of dramatic idiom, claiming the use of working-class language was flat-out inappropriate for the stage. As one critic declared, "... c'est la première fois de ma vie que j'entends en une seule soirée autant de sacres, de jurons, de mots orduriers de toilette." She goes on to say: "... devant la grossièreté et la vulgarité de son texte, je ne puis m'empêcher de penser que la direction du Rideau Vert a peut-être rendu un mauvais service à l'auteur en acceptant de produire sa

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<sup>6</sup>Pierre-Jérôme Desbiens, Les Insolences du Frère Untel (Montréal: Les Editions de l'Homme, 1960): 24-25.

<sup>7</sup>Desbiens 37.

<sup>8</sup>Desbiens 26.

<sup>9</sup>Bert de Vries, "Michel Tremblay, *Les Belles-Soeurs*," Quarry, vol. 25, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 78.

pièce."<sup>10</sup> (Bear in mind that up until the première of *Les Belles-Soeurs*, theatre-goers in Quebec were, for the most part, used to hearing the *français de France* on stage). Still others saw *joual* as a symbol of cultural defeatism, the embodiment of the alienation, lack of identity, inability to communicate and powerlessness of Quebec society at large.<sup>11</sup> For the revue *Parti Pris*, however, this was precisely why the artist must use it. In André Brochu's words, *joual* had to be used "dans un but essentiellement critique, dans le but de dévoiler un état de désintégration de la langue analogue à celui de la société."<sup>12</sup>

Because of his controversial use of *joual*, it took Tremblay three years to find a theatre to agree to stage his play. Then, in 1972, the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs refused to pay travel expenses for a Paris engagement of *Les Belles-Soeurs* on the grounds that the characters in the play would present a distorted image of Quebec.<sup>13</sup> Ironically enough, when the play was performed in Paris the following year, not only did it receive rave reviews, Tremblay was also presented with the *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres de France*. The reason? "Pour avoir bien utilisé la

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<sup>10</sup>Martial Dassylva, "L'Amour du 'Joual' et des Timbres-Primes," Appendix to *Les Belles-Soeurs*: 133.

<sup>11</sup>Renate Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1982): 4.

<sup>12</sup>André Brochu, "D'un faux dilemme," *Parti Pris*, vol. 2, no. 8 (avril 1965): 58.

<sup>13</sup>Renate Usmiani, "Hyperrealism: Michel Tremblay and Franz Xaver Kroetz," *Canadian Drama*, vol.13, no. 2 (1987): 207.

langue française."<sup>14</sup>

While Tremblay was certainly not unaware of the political implications of his choice of language, his primary reason for writing in *joual* was artistic and not political.<sup>15</sup> He wanted first and foremost that his characters come across as realistically as possible. Ironically enough, Tremblay himself started out writing in the *français de France*. He now refers to these works - which include two short plays, *Les Socles* and *Les Paons*, a collection of short stories, *Contes pour buveurs attardés* and a novel, *La Cité dans l'Oeuf* - as "foreign subliteration".<sup>16</sup> Then, in 1965, he came to a realization which would change the face of Quebec theatre forever. He and his longtime friend André Brassard had just been to see yet another disappointing French-Canadian movie when they suddenly recognized the problem: the characters were speaking a "foreign", artificial language. "I just don't think that people, ordinary people, talk that way," he says. "It was geared to a small elite."<sup>17</sup> Tremblay's decision to write in *joual* thus stemmed primarily from the characters and milieu he was putting on stage. In other words, working-class people in Quebec speak *joual* therefore so must his *belles-soeurs*. Perhaps Tremblay sums it up

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<sup>14</sup>Elaine Kalman Naves, "Tremblay gives epic quality to Quebecers' struggle," The Montréal Gazette, August 21, 1993: I4.

<sup>15</sup>Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 48.

<sup>16</sup>Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, eds., The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre (Toronto/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 568.

<sup>17</sup>Michel Tremblay, interview in The Time, January 29, 1973: 7.

best when he says: "Je suis un témoin, et je parle la langue du monde que je décris et que je connais."<sup>18</sup>

Tremblay's use of *joual* thus fulfils two functions in *Les Belles-Soeurs*. First, it reflects the social status of his characters and second it enhances the local colour or "Québécoisité" of his text. Now the translation must aim to do the same.

In Part I of this thesis we shall take a detailed look at the various features of *joual* that lend to the milieu portrayed in Tremblay's text its distinct flavour and examine whether or not these features have been retained in the Canadian translation by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco. When a given feature has not been retained, we shall determine to what extent the fault lies with the translators and to what extent it can be attributed to insurmountable cultural and linguistic differences between English Canada and Quebec and can thus be said to have been beyond the translators' control. Last but not least, we will suggest possible ways in which any ensuing loss of flavour could have been prevented or, at the very least, minimized.

We would like to mention two important points before we move on. First, two versions of Van Burek and Glassco's English translation exist at present: the original, published in 1974, and a revised version, published in 1992.<sup>19</sup> It is the latter which

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<sup>18</sup>Michel Tremblay quoted in Marc Gélinas, "Je pense en joual," Le Magazine MacLean, vol, 19, no. 9, 1970: 46.

<sup>19</sup>Van Burek and Glassco revised their original translation for two reasons. First, they wanted to improve it. The 1974 version was done too quickly due to a production deadline and they thought it could "do with some tightening" as a result. Second, they

will be the focus of this thesis. Second, because *Les Belles-Soeurs* was originally translated for the stage, it can be argued that Van Burek and Glassco did not make a strong effort to retain the specificity of Tremblay's setting - geographic or social - because they knew that production could, to some extent at least, make up for such a loss. We do not dispute this assertion. In fact, according to Van Burek himself, "I rely a great deal on the actors ... a sensitive actor can bring to his performance a feel of something that may have been in the original, but which doesn't translate on the page."<sup>20</sup> Our interest in this thesis, however, is in a *textually autonomous* translation, ie. a written text which does not have to rely on any compensatory theatrical devices or production techniques in order to reveal the full richness of Tremblay's *joual*.

#### LANGUAGE STRATEGIES:

Not surprisingly, most critics, too caught up in the wave of nationalism which had swept over the province during the Quiet Revolution, found it difficult to see beyond Tremblay's controversial use of *joual* to another, equally important, aspect of his dramatic idiom. In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay combines the everyday speech of the working-class Québécois with a number of

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wanted to refresh it. As Van Burek himself said, "You have to understand that a translation needs this about every 10 years. Language changes constantly, and a translation needs bringing up to date." John Van Burek, interview with Don Rubin, "Tremblay in Translation," Canadian Theatre Review, no. 24 (1976): 45.

<sup>20</sup>Van Burek 46.

language strategies, each of which serves a highly specific function within his text. Some, such as the use of impersonal pronouns and repetition, are designed to complement the various social realities presented. Others, such as the use of word-play, lend humour to his characters. They all pose a problem to the translator.

In Part II of this thesis, we shall take a detailed look at each of these language strategies and examine their function within Tremblay's text. We shall then discuss the problems involved in transposing each of these strategies into English and establish whether Van Burek and Glassco have successfully met such a challenge in their translation. When they have not, we will suggest our own solutions to the translation problem in question.

**THEMES:**

*Les Belles-Soeurs* was designed as a work of social analysis and, implicitly, social animation for a specific time and place: Quebec during the Quiet Revolution.<sup>21</sup> The Quiet Revolution, launched following the death of Premier Maurice Duplessis in 1959, marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Quebec. Duplessis, who was elected in 1936 and, except for one five-year gap, held power until 1959, was a staunch traditionalist and a conservative who feared industrialization, urbanization and all other social change and thus sought to keep Quebec the traditional,

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<sup>21</sup>John Ripley, "From Alienation to Transcendence: The Quest for Selfhood the Michel Tremblay's Plays," Canadian Literature, no. 85 (Summer 1980): 58.

rural society it was in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> His period in office is often referred to as "la Grande Noiceur". Following Duplessis' death, the Liberal party under Jean Lesage won a sweeping victory in the provincial election of 1960 with the buoyant campaign slogan *Il faut que ça change*, opening the way for a series of rapid and extensive reforms which shaped the Quebec we know today. For example, electricity was nationalized and the provincial government took from the Church control over education, social services and health care.<sup>23</sup> The modernization of Quebec's institutions brought with it a renewed nationalism as well as a change in morale. The people of the province no longer defined themselves as *French Canadian* but as *Québécois*.<sup>24</sup> They came to see change as good, not bad.<sup>25</sup>

The cultural dimension of the Quiet Revolution was a "clearing of the air", so to speak.<sup>26</sup> According to Renate Usmiani, "For the intellectuals, artists and writers of French Canada, it had now become possible to undertake a wide-reaching *prise de conscience*, a search into the collective self. They were free to diagnose the

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<sup>22</sup>Denis Monière, Ideologies in Quebec: The Historical Development, trans. Richard Howard (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1981): 233.

<sup>23</sup>Robert Sibley, "Quebec Nationalism's Deep Roots," Ottawa Citizen, Sunday, September 11, 1994: B2.

<sup>24</sup>Denis Monière, Ideologies in Quebec: The Historical Development, trans. Richard Howard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981): 256.

<sup>25</sup>Monière 256.

<sup>26</sup>Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 12.

ills affecting the community and to offer remedies."<sup>27</sup>

In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay attacks two of Quebec society's most sacred and traditional institutions: the family and the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional French-Canadian literature, or the so-called "littérature du terroir", which flourished from the middle of the nineteenth century up to the 1950's, was deeply rooted in the value system of conservative Catholicism.<sup>28</sup> As Usmiani points out, "Novels, poetry, and even radio drama drew an idyllic picture of country life, complete with pure maidens, devoted mothers of large families, and hard-working men, all of whom speak Parisian French and live together in perfect harmony due to their observance of the guidelines laid down by Mother Church."<sup>29</sup> In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, however, Tremblay reverses the traditional values of French-Canadian literature, giving us angry and frustrated women who bemoan the unbearable drudgery of working-class life; victims of unhappy marriages; "devout" Catholics who lie, swear and steal. Tremblay's harsh vision of Quebec society shocked and angered many people. And this is exactly what he intended. By forcing his audience to take stock of their condition, he wanted them to react and, ultimately, take action. As he told Fernand Doré in 1969, *Les Belles-Soeurs* is "(un théâtre) de 'claquer sur la gueule,'", qui vise à provoquer une prise de

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<sup>27</sup>Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 12.

<sup>28</sup>Renate Usmiani, The Theatre of Frustration: Super Realism in the Dramatic Work of F.X. Kroetz and Michel Tremblay (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990): xi.

<sup>29</sup>Usmiani, Theatre of Frustration xi.

conscience chez le spectateur. Voyons nous, une bonne fois, tels que nous sommes, pour un jour, peut-être, dépasser tout cela."<sup>30</sup>

*Les Belles-Soeurs* is a case study not only of the social problems plaguing Quebec society in 1965, but the political problems as well. Tremblay, an ardent Separatist, has always been quite vocal about his views on Quebec independence.<sup>31</sup> Although *Les Belles-Soeurs* is not a "political" play in the true sense of the word, it does carry heavy political overtones. These are to be found not, as many nationalists were so quick to believe, in the playwright's use of *joual*, but rather in the situation of his characters. Through them, we see Tremblay's dedication to the cause of the Parti Québécois and his cries for the political independence of Quebec.

It is important to establish what kind of *experience* we, the English-Canadian audience, have in reading a play whose subject matter is as deeply embedded in a given culture as *Les Belles-Soeurs*. Do we identify with the social and political realities being portrayed or, as Vivian Bosley suggests, do we find ourselves to be "observers of an ethnological situation which strikes us as interesting and amusing and quaint"<sup>32</sup> yet foreign and unfamiliar?

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<sup>30</sup>Michel Tremblay, interview with Fernand Doré, "Michel Tremblay, le gars à barbe sympathique," Le Magazine Maclean (June 1969): 60.

<sup>31</sup>Judith Rudakoff, "Michel Tremblay," Profiles in Canadian Literature, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath, vol. 6 (Toronto: Dundern Press Limited, 1986): 69.

<sup>32</sup>Vivian Bosley, "Diluting the mixture: Translating Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*," T.T.R., vol. 1, no. 1 (1988): 139.

In other words, is Tremblay's subject matter "translatable" into an English-Canadian context?

In Part III of this thesis, we shall take a more detailed look at the social and political connotations of Tremblay's play, determining if and to what extent they are "translatable" into an English-Canadian context. This, of course, will require that we compare the social and political realities in which the ST is rooted with those in which the TT is being read. Finally, we shall discuss the possibility of adaptation as a means of making Tremblay's subject matter more "accessible" to an English-Canadian audience.

#### LITERARY CONSTRUCTION:

Before we begin we should mention that, while Tremblay's use of *joual* and his vision of Quebec society are certainly important innovations, the genius of *Les Belles-Soeurs* lies in the way it is written and put together. Tremblay, a lover of classical music, has likened the structure of the play to a symphony and his characters to musical instruments. There is an ensemble (chorus) as well as a number of important solo parts (monologues). The "maudite vie plate" choral recitation is a quintet enhanced by a solo voice which shouts out the days of the week. The "Ode to Bingo" choral recitation, also a quintet, is supplemented by the voices of four more women who call out bingo numbers in counterpoint. The chorus, of course, is used to draw the audience's attention to one particularly important idea, whereas the monologue, in which individual characters are singled out by a

spotlight while the others remain frozen in the background, serves to bring out the real and hidden selves of each individual character.

While the artistic merit of *Les Belles-Soeurs* would certainly warrant a thesis in itself, we do not want to stray too far from the topic at hand. No further mention of this aspect of Tremblay's play will therefore be made from this point on.

**PART I**

**CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF TREMBLAY'S LANGUAGE**

## CHAPTER 1

### JOUAL AS A DIALECT

*MYTH: A dialect is something that someone else speaks.*

*REALITY: Everyone who speaks a language speaks some dialect of the language; it is not possible to speak a language without speaking a dialect of the language.<sup>33</sup>*

Before we can take a look at the various features of *joual* which lend to the milieu portrayed in Tremblay's text its distinct Québécois flavour, we must first know a bit about dialects in general. To keep from straying too far from the topic at hand, our discussion will focus primarily on the theoretical framework of linguist J.C. Catford.

Each language exists in a number of varieties.<sup>34</sup> According to Catford, a variety of a language is "a sub-set of formal and/or substantial features which correlates with a particular type of socio-situational feature."<sup>35</sup> To put it more simply, a variety is a sub-set of linguistic features (phonological, grammatical and lexical) which we can associate with some external factor.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Walt Wolfram, Dialects and American English (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1991): 4.

<sup>34</sup>Ronald Wardhaugh, An Introduction to Sociolinguistics (Oxford, Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986): 22.

<sup>35</sup>J.C. Catford, A Linguistic Theory of Translation (London: Oxford University Press, 1965): 84.

<sup>36</sup>Wardhaugh 22.

Catford points out that language varieties can be divided into two major classes: those which are more or less *permanent* in the case of each performer, and those which are more or less *transient* in that they change with the immediate situation of communication.<sup>37</sup> As it is the former which is pertinent to our discussion, no further mention will be made of *transient* language varieties from this point on.

According to Catford, one type of permanent language variety is *dialect*. There are three types of dialect: *temporal*, *geographical* and *social*.<sup>38</sup> (These are the socio-situational features Catford mentions in his definition of language variety.) *Temporal* dialect refers to a language variety used at a specific point in time. Contemporary English and Elizabethan English are two examples.<sup>39</sup> *Geographical* dialect refers to a language variety characteristic of some particular geographic region, such as British English, American English and Canadian English. Such a variety, however, is never completely homogeneous. Within these broad, inclusive categorizations there are what Catford calls *sub-varieties*<sup>40</sup> (also referred to by Michael Gregory and Susanne Carroll as *regional varieties*).<sup>41</sup> For example, British English can

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<sup>37</sup>Catford 84.

<sup>38</sup>Catford 85.

<sup>39</sup>Catford 85.

<sup>40</sup>Catford 87.

<sup>41</sup>Michael Gregory and Susanne Carroll, Language and Situation: Language varieties and their social contexts (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978): 17.

be broken down into several sub-varieties, among them Scots English and Irish English.<sup>42</sup> Some linguists, such as R. Hasan, take this sub-division one step further, identifying, for example, Glaswegian English as a type of Scots English.<sup>43</sup> Finally, social dialect refers to a language variety characteristic of a particular social class or status. Catford cites U (Upper class) and non-U English within British English as examples.<sup>44</sup> Before we move on, let us make one last point regarding dialects, the relevance of which will become clear later on. Temporal, geographical and social dialects, as we have seen, are characterized by departures from the norm. They are thus said to be *marked* dialects.<sup>45</sup> However, as Catford points out, most major languages also have a *standard* or *literary* dialect which shows only slight variation from one locality to another and over long periods of time. Unlike *marked* dialects, standard dialects are defined as the norm and are thus considered to be *unmarked*.<sup>46</sup>

Based on the above discussion we can say that *joual* is a regionally and socially marked dialect - regionally because it is spoken in Montreal and socially because it is spoken by the

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<sup>42</sup>Catford 87.

<sup>43</sup>R. Hasan, "Code, Register and Social Dialect," Class, Codes and Control: Applied Studies Towards a Sociology of Language, vol. 2, ed. Basil Bernstein (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1971): 256.

<sup>44</sup>Catford 85.

<sup>45</sup>Wolfram 11.

<sup>46</sup>Catford 87.

working-class. Now let us take a closer look at the various components of *joual* and see what peculiar flavour they lend to Tremblay's text.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRONUNCIATION AND GRAMMAR

*By our speech we are all betrayed,  
and the translator must never ignore  
this basic fact of life, for any  
inaccuracy in this respect will  
stand out like a wrong note in  
music.<sup>47</sup>*

According to Laurent Santerre, *joual* is characterized primarily by "des règles de réduction de surface phonétique et leurs applications."<sup>48</sup> Let us take an example from early on in the text to illustrate what this means. In this excerpt, Germaine Lauzon is describing her complete state of disarray when her trading stamps arrived that morning:

Ben, non, hein? Moé aussi j'ai resté surpris! Tu v'nais juste de partir, à matin, quand ça sonné à'porte! J'vas répondre. C'tait un espèce de grand gars. J'pense que tu l'aurais aimé, Linda. En plein ton genre. Dans les vingt-deux, vingt-trois ans, les cheveux noirs, frisés, avec une petite moustache ... Un vrai bel homme. Y m'demande, comme ça, si chus madame Germaine Lauzon, ménagère. J'dis qu'oui, que c'est ben moé. Y m'dit que c'est mes timbres. Me v'là toute énarvée, tu comprends. J'savais pas que c'est dire ... Deux gars sont v'nus les porter dans'maison pis l'autre gars m'a faite un espèce de discours ... Y parlait ben en s'il-vous-plaît. Pis y'avait l'air fin! Chus certaine que tu

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<sup>47</sup>L. W. Tancock. "Some Problems of Style in Translation from French," Aspects of Translation: Studies in Communication, vol. 2 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958): 46.

<sup>48</sup>Laurent Santerre, "Essai de définition du *joual*: aspects du français parlé au Québec," Langue et identité: Le français et les francophones d'Amérique du Nord, ed. Noël Corbet (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1990): 267.

l'aurais trouvé de ton goût, Linda ... <sup>49</sup>

The phonetic reductions we spoke of above are of three main types. First, there is the loss of one or more sounds or letters at the end of a word, known technically as *apocope*.<sup>50</sup> For example, "il" is reduced to "y". Other examples found throughout the text include the reduction of "notre" to "notr", "l'autre" to "l'autr" and "pauvre" to "pauvr". A second type of phonetic reduction characteristic of *joual* is the omission of interior sounds or letters in words or phrases, known technically as *syncope*.<sup>51</sup> For example, "je suis" is reduced to "chus", "voilà" to "v'là", "venus" to "v'nus", "c'était" to "c'tait", "puis" to "pis" and "à la" to "à". A final type of phonetic reduction telescopes two vowel sounds without pause or intervening consonantal sound.<sup>52</sup> For example, "ça a sonné" is reduced to "ça sonné".

Another phonological feature of *joual* is that it has a tendency to represent high vowels as more open and slightly back or vice versa,<sup>53</sup> as evidenced in "énarvée" for "énervée" or, on the contrary, "creyable" for "croyable" and "perler" for "parler".

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<sup>49</sup>Michel Tremblay, Les Belles-Soeurs (Montréal: Editions Leméac, 1972): 15.

<sup>50</sup>Lise Gauvin, "Le théâtre de la langue," Le Monde de Michel Tremblay, eds. Gilbert David and Pierre Lavois (Montréal: Editions Lansman, 1993): 343.

<sup>51</sup>Gauvin 343.

<sup>52</sup>Gauvin 343.

<sup>53</sup>Gauvin 434.

*Joual* is also given to substituting one phoneme for another,<sup>54</sup> as evidenced in "tu-seule" for "toute-seule", "entéka" for "en tout cas" and "tu-suite" for "toute-suite" as well as adding a vowel sound to facilitate the pronunciation of certain consonant clusters<sup>55</sup> such as the use of "esquette" for "squelle" and "exiprès" for "exprès". Other common additions include that of the "t" sound (eg. "j't'écoeurée", "chus t'obligée", "chus t'énarvée") and the use of "là" at the start or end of a word or phrase (eg. "Oui, ça s'ra pas long, là", "Là, là, j'travailleur comme une enragée").

Although *joual* is characterized primarily by phonetic reductions, syntactic reductions are by no means infrequent. This is evident from the very first lines of the play when Linda Lauzon exclaims in astonishment "Misère, que c'est ça? Moman!" (p. 15) instead of "qu'est-ce que c'est que ça". A similar process of syntactic reduction in *Les Belles-Soeurs* can be found in the elimination of the "ne" part of the negative, for example when Linda says "ça pas pris de temps" (p. 4) or when Germaine angrily tells her daughter "Parle-moé pus" (p. 17). *Joual* also has a tendency to eliminate subject pronouns. For example, "elle n'est pas là" is reduced to "est pas là" (p. 26).

Other grammatical peculiarities characteristic of *joual* include the use of the auxiliary "avoir" instead of "être", as

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<sup>54</sup>Mark M. Orkin, Speaking Canadian French, Revised edition (Toronto: General Publishing Company Ltd., 1971): 77.

<sup>55</sup>Orkin 76.

evidenced in "J'ai resté surpris" (p. 8), and "J'ai déjà sorti avec" (p. 26), and a certain redundancy, as evidenced in "Les femmes portent seulement que des jupes" (p. 27) and "Y faudrait toute répété vingt fois, ici-dedans!" (p. 18).

There are several other instances of non-standard grammar found throughout the play. We will cite only a few more examples:

"l'autre gars m'a faite un espèce de discours" (p. 15)

"le monde reviennent" (p. 23)

"du vieux linge que j'avais pas besoin" (p. 40)

"J'ai-tu l'air de quelqu'un qui a de besoin de ces affaires-là ..." (p. 44)

Before we proceed any further, we should mention one important point. It can be argued that many of the features of pronunciation and grammar discussed above are not truly unique to working-class speech in Quebec. This is indeed a valid point. As linguist Fernando Penalosa points out, however, social dialects differ from each other not in terms of discrete sets of features but rather in terms of the frequency with which certain features occur.<sup>56</sup> According to Penalosa, "Social dialects are distinguished from each other not by one dialect using a certain pronunciation or a certain word or syntactic construction not used in other dialects but rather by using such features more frequently or less frequently. In other words, the differences are matters of degree and not kind."<sup>57</sup> Thus, in Quebec French, both middle- and working-class

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<sup>56</sup>Fernando Penalosa, Introduction to the Sociology of Language (Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, 1981): 94.

<sup>57</sup>Penalosa 94.

speakers may omit certain sounds or letters in a word, or use "là" at the start or end of a word or phrase, but such occurrences are much more frequent among working-class speakers.

Because Tremblay grew up in a milieu where *joual* was the normal form of expression, it is safe to assume that what we see before us is a relatively accurate transliteration of the *joual* spoken in real life. We say "relatively" because Tremblay is a writer and not a linguist and, as such, his aim is not to produce a scientific and exact transcription but rather to write in a dialect which seems realistic or plausible. In other words, his "dialect" does not have to be *rigorously authentic*, it only has to *sound authentic*.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, as a writer Tremblay obviously had another important factor to take into consideration and that was his audience. As William Faulkner once wrote:

If the writer puts too much attention to transcribing literally the dialogue he hears, it's confusing to the people who have never heard that speech. (...) You can go only so far with dialect and then there's a point where for the simple reason not to make too much demand on the (reader) to distract his attention from the story you're telling you've got to draw the line.<sup>59</sup>

This is, in fact, precisely what Tremblay had to do. As he once told André Turcotte:

De toute façon, le *joual* que j'emploie n'est absolument pas exagéré, même que c'est un *joual* très sage. S'il fallait que j'écrive en vrai *joual*, ça serait beaucoup plus terrible que

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<sup>58</sup>Annick Chapdelaine, "Transparence et retraduction des sociolectes dans *The Hamlet* de Faulkner," *T.T.R.*, vol. VII, no. 2 (1994): 15.

<sup>59</sup>William Faulkner, Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia 1957-1958, eds. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner (New York: Random House, 1965): 181.

ça. Mais quand on fait du théâtre, il faut toujours transposer.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, the *joual* we see before us on the page is as only as accurate or "authentic" as was needed to create the impression of a realistic language without detracting in any way from the "hearability" of the text itself. We shall return to this question of authenticity of dialect and its relevance to the translation of *joual* into English at a later point.

We have already broken *joual* down into some of its various parts or components. Now let us take a look at the effect created when the various parts come together. In this excerpt, Germaine Lauzon is lashing out at her daughter for not wanting to stay home and help her paste stamps. The French text runs thus:

J'comprends rien pantoute pis j'veux rien savoir! Parle-moé pus ... Désâmez-vous pour élever ça, pis que c'est que ça vous rapporte? Rien! Rien pantoute! C'est même pas capable de vous rendre un p'tit sarvice! J't'avertis, Linda, j'commence à en avoir plein le casque de vous servir, toé pis les les autres! Chus pas une sarvante, moé, icitte! J'ai un million de timbres à coller pis chus pas pour les coller tu-seule! Après toute, ces timbres-là, y vont servir à tout le monde! Faudrait que tout le monde fasse sa part, dans'maison! ... Ton père travaille de nuit, pis si on n'a pas fini decoller ça demain, y va continuer dans' journée, y me l'a dit! J'demande pas la lune! Aide-moé donc, pour une fois, au lieu d'aller niaiser avec c'te niaiseux-là! (p. 17)

The language used in Tremblay's play pigeonholes his characters with perfect accuracy. As Vivian Bosley points out, "As soon as we see on the page this accepted form of transliteration of local speech, we make various kinds of assumptions on a semiotic basis even before we know anything at all about the content of the

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<sup>60</sup>Michel Tremblay quoted in André Turcotte, "Les Belles-Soeurs en révolte," Voix et Images du pays, III (1970): 199.

speech."<sup>61</sup> First, we know that the women belong to a specific and limited linguistic group. Secondly, we know that this specific and limited linguistic group is in Quebec. And lastly, we know that the women are from the working-class level of society.<sup>62</sup>

Now the translator is faced with the problem of finding a suitable equivalent in English. As David Homel says, "We don't write dialect, we represent it and like the writer, the translator has to make a choice of dialects to stand for *joual*."<sup>63</sup> Obviously, not just any dialect will do. *Joual*, as we have seen, is the language spoken by the working-class of east-end Montreal and can therefore be considered a geographically and socially marked dialect. According to Franz Link, a play written in a socially marked dialect, "must always be translated into the dialect which is recognized by the audience as being used by the corresponding social group in their part of the country."<sup>64</sup> As for geographical dialect, Catford is of the opinion that the translator must select a geographical dialect in the TL that corresponds to the geographical dialect of the SL.<sup>65</sup> He points out, however, that this

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<sup>61</sup>Bosley 141.

<sup>62</sup>Bosley 141 - 142.

<sup>63</sup>David Homel, "The Way They Talk in *Broke City*," Translation Review, no. 18 (1985): 23.

<sup>64</sup>Franz H. Link, "Translation, Adaptation and Interpretation of Dramatic Texts," The Languages of Theatre: Problems in the Translation and Transposition of Drama (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980): 29.

<sup>65</sup>Catford 87.

correspondence is one of human geography rather than mere location.<sup>66</sup> For example, Cockney English is a dialect found in south-eastern England. The dialect most often used to render Cockney into French, however, is *Parigot*, the dialect of northern France. The correspondence between the two dialects is not based on location (ie. south-eastern dialect to southeastern dialect), but rather on human geography (ie. dialect of the SL metropolis to dialect of the TL metropolis).<sup>67</sup> Eugene Nida also discusses the importance of maintaining dialect forms in a text: "... the dialect forms used by writers," he says, "are either horizontal (geographical) or vertical (socio-economic) dialects, and rarely do authors or translators consistently represent all the details of such dialects ... The problem for the translator is to find in a foreign language a dialect with approximately the same status and connotations."<sup>68</sup> Thus, what the translator is looking at matching in the TL are not the purely linguistic features of *joual* itself (ie. pronunciation and grammar), but rather the *connotations* with which such linguistic features are invested (ie. geographic and social milieu). In other words, his goal is to provide his TL audience with an English-based equivalent they can easily recognize as being particular to a specific and limited region of Canada while at the same time representing a similar social class within

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<sup>66</sup>Catford 88.

<sup>67</sup>Catford 88.

<sup>68</sup>Eugene Nida, "A Framework for the Analysis and Evaluation of Theories of Translation," Translation: Applications and Research, ed. R.W. Brislin (New York: Gardner, 1976): 55.

that English-speaking community.

Theoretically, therefore, Van Burek and Glassco should have been looking for a big-city, working-class dialect in Canadian English as a suitable equivalent for Tremblay's *joual*. Instead, however, they chose an unmarked dialect, ie. one which is not associated with any one city in Canada nor unique to any one social class: standard Canadian English. Let us take a look at the effect this had in English:

I don't want to be reasonable, I don't want to hear about it! I kill myself for you and what do I get in return? Nothing! A big fat nothing! You can't even do me a little favour! I'm warning you, Linda, I'm getting sick of waiting on you, you and everyone else. I'm not your servant, you know. I've got a million stamps to paste and I'm not about to do it myself. Besides, those stamps are for the whole family, which means everybody's got to do their share. Your father's working tonight but if we don't get done he says he'll help tomorrow. I'm not asking for the moon. Help me for a change, instead of wasting your time with that jerk.<sup>69</sup>

Semantically, this is a faithful translation. Aside from a small, unimportant omission ("Parle-moé pus" has not been translated), the translators have followed the pattern of the original text and the meaning comes across effectively. However, the task of the translator of a literary work is not to match a text and its translation merely on the level of denotation but also on the level of sociolinguistic information and semiotic function - something which Van Burek and Glassco have obviously not even tried to do. When we compare the original and the translation, what strikes us first and foremost, of course, is the fact that the English text

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<sup>69</sup>Michel Tremblay, *Les Belles-Soeurs*, trans. John Van Burek and Bill Glassco (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991): 7.

lacks the power of the original. It is utterly flat. The words have no colour or texture. After this initial reaction come others, namely the fact that while the French text contains features specific to a relatively small linguistic group - features like "j'comprends", "j'veux", "pus", "pis", "p'tit", "sarvante", "dans'maison" and "tu-seule" - the translation does not. As a result, not only do we have no idea where the woman speaking these lines is from, we are not even aware that she is from the working-class level of society. In other words, the perfect fit between form and content that is so evident in the original is completely lost in translation. Indeed, statements such as "I'm getting sick of waiting on you" and "I'm not your servant, you know" could, to quote Vivian Bosley, "be said anywhere from Sydney to Seattle or Manchester to Medicine Hat without provoking the slightest *frisson* of linguistic recognition."<sup>70</sup> Multiply this example several times over and you get a completely altered tone from the original. Basil Hatim and Ian Mason point out that "rendering ST dialect by standard TL dialect has the disadvantage of losing the special effect intended in the ST."<sup>71</sup> This is precisely what has happened in Van Burek and Glassco's translation of Tremblay's play. We have already seen that Tremblay's intention in using *joual* was to localize the action and characterize the social status of his characters. By rendering this language into standard or unmarked

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<sup>70</sup>Bosley 142.

<sup>71</sup>Basil Hatim and Ian Mason, Discourse and the Translator (London/New York: Longman, 1990): 39.

English-Canadian dialect, the translators have lost the specificity of Tremblay's setting - both geographic and social. It should be noted at this point that production could make up for these losses to some extent. In Canada, for example, the loss of geographic milieu has generally been overcome by casting French-speaking actors in English productions of the play. In fact, according to Martin Bowman, "the accent alone seems to provide the necessary linguistic element and the illusion that the speakers are in a kitchen in the Plateau Mont-Royal speaking French is complete."<sup>72</sup> As for social milieu, factors like the set, the clothes the actresses wear, even the raspiness of their voices, can prevent or at least diminish a loss in this respect. But since we are dealing here with a written and not a performance text, such compensatory devices are not available to us.

To illustrate the importance of finding a geographical and social equivalent of *joual*, compare the translation of the above excerpt into standard Canadian English with that done in modern Scots, the urban, working-class dialect of Glasgow:

Ah dinnae want tae understand. Ah dinnae want tae even hearaboot it. Ye caw yir pan oot bringin thum up an whit dae ye git? Damn all! Jist sweet bugger all! An you cannae even dae me a wee favour. Ah'm warnin you, Linda. Ah've hud it up tae here wi servin you hand an fit. You an the rest o thum. Ah'm no a skivvie, ye ken. Ah've goat a mullyin stamps tae stick an if you think ah'm gaunnae dae it aw masel, you've goat anither thoot comin. An whit's mair, thaie stamps are fur the haill faimly, sae yese huv aw goat tae dae yir shares. Yir faither's oan the night-shift but that didnae stoap him

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<sup>72</sup>Martin Bowman, "Joual/Scots: The Language Issue in Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*," Image and Identity: Theatre and Cinema in Scotland and Quebec, ed. Ian Lockerbie (Stirling: The John Grierson Archive/University of Stirling, 1988): 42.

fae oafferin tae help the moarn if we dinnae git finished the night. Ah'm no askin fur the moon. Whey d'ye no help me fur wance instead ae wastin yir time oan that waster.<sup>73</sup>

The translators of *The Guid-Sisters*, Martin Bowman and William Findlay, chose a dialect with similar regional and social markers for their translation, being of the opinion that "since Tremblay uses non-standard language, then non-standard language is the best medium for translating him. *Point final*. If you translate it into standard language, you've lost something."<sup>74</sup> As a result, their translation effectively conveys the impression that Tremblay's characters are working-class people from a limited and specific linguistic group. (Whether or not the TL reader has trouble accepting that this group is situated in Quebec and not in Scotland, however, remains to be determined).

The problem which Van Burek and Glassco faced, however, was that, unlike Scottish English, Canadian English does not have a vernacular which is in any way parallel to *joual*. "We realized quite soon that there was no point in trying to translate it," admits Van Burek. "There's no equivalent .... We just have to rely on the situations and Tremblay's talent for characters."<sup>75</sup> According to the *Oxford Companion to the English Language*, in the traditional view, the English of Canada has four major sub-

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<sup>73</sup>Michel Tremblay, *The Guid-Sisters*, trans. William F. Findlay and Martin Bowman (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1988): 8.

<sup>74</sup>Martin Bowman, interview with Doug Babington, "The Shared Voice of Michel Tremblay," *Queen's Quarterly*, vol. 99, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 1079.

<sup>75</sup>John Van Burek quoted in Urjo Kareeda, "A Splendid Version of Les Belles-Soeurs," *Toronto Daily Star*, March 26, 1974: 26.

dialects: *Atlantic*, covering the Maritime Provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island) and the island of Newfoundland as a distinctive sub-area; *Quebec*, with Montreal and the Eastern Townships as focal areas; the *Ottawa Valley*; and *General Canadian* from Toronto westward to the Pacific.<sup>76</sup> More recent studies, however, regard *General Canadian* (also referred to as *standard Canadian English* and *Heartland Canadian*) as a class-based urban dialect of broadcasting and educated speech and reveals the existence of four additional regional dialects: the *West* (British Columbia), the *Arctic North* (the Yukon, Northwest Territories, northern Quebec and Labrador), the *Prairies* (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) and *southern Ontario*.<sup>77</sup> As J.K. Chambers points out, however, "recent research indicates that local or regional Canadian dialects are receding quite rapidly before the intrusive heartland dialect .... It is safe to state that the heartland Canadian speech can be heard in all regions of the nation now, as a minority dialect in some parts of the Atlantic coast and many rural areas but as a majority dialect elsewhere."<sup>78</sup> Van Burek and Glassco could therefore not use a dialect particular to any one city in Canada, nor any one region for that matter, because the majority of the population speaks General Canadian (or Heartland

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<sup>76</sup>Tom McArthur, ed., The Oxford Companion to the English Language (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 296.

<sup>77</sup>McArthur 296.

<sup>78</sup>J.K. Chambers, ed., Canadian English: Origins and Structures (Toronto: Methuen, 1975): viii.

Canadian or standard Canadian English). Unfortunately, however, General Canadian English is very similar to General American English, hence the difficulty in producing a precise geographic anchoring.<sup>79</sup> As for finding a dialect with similar social markers, the problem from the translator's point of view is not that Canadian English does not have a working-class dialect (it's hard to imagine that socio-economic disparities could exist without giving rise to linguistic correlates), but rather that the clusters of socio-linguistic features are by no means as highly codified in Canadian English as they are in Quebec French and are therefore not as immediately recognizable.

The lack of a single, codified class-related dialect in Canadian English places a heavy burden on the translator and, inevitably, he must accept a certain loss. Yet we see no reason why Van Burek and Glassco could not have found some other way to characterize the social status of Tremblay's characters. Moreover, we saw above that their translation into standard Canadian English sounds extremely flat in comparison with *joual*. Yet this too could have been avoided to some extent.

Syntactic deviations would, in our opinion, be the most effective way of conveying, in writing at least, the impression that Tremblay's characters are from the working-class level of society. This important fact, as we have just seen, tends to go

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<sup>79</sup>Some scholars have even suggested that in linguistic terms Canadian English is, for all intents and purposes, no more than a variety of General American English. (McArthur 179).

unnoticed in the existing translation. While Van Burek and Glassco have used the occasional syntactic deviation in their text, [eg. "Chus pas t'allée en Urope, moé" (p. 25) is translated as "I never went to Europe" (p. 15) and "T'as toujours le nez fourré où c'est que t'as pas d'affaire" (p. 43) is rendered as "You're always sticking your nose where it don't belong" (p. 35)], such non-standard forms are few and far between. If look at the excerpt cited above, for example, we see that "J'ai un million de timbres à coller pis chus pas pour les coller tu-seule!" has been rendered in English using the grammatically correct sentence "I've got a million stamps to paste and I'm not about to do it myself". Granted, Van Burek and Glassco have used contractions to lower the formality of the dialogue, but contractions in and of themselves can hardly be considered "deviant" syntax. Instead, they could have used something like "I got a million stamps to paste and I ain't about to do it myself". Similarly, "chus pauvre comme la gale" (p. 22) has been translated as "I haven't a cent to my name" (p. 12) and "Moi, je dis qu'il n'y aura jamais rien pour remplacer la vraie fourrure véritable" (p. 48) as "I don't think real fur's worth buying anymore" (p. 41) whereas something like "I don't got a cent to my name" for the first and "I don't think real fur's worth buying no more" for the second would have been far more evocative of working-class speech. In addition to characterizing the social status of Tremblay's characters, the use of syntactic deviations would undoubtedly add a bit of colour or flavour to the speech of Tremblay's characters, thus making it sound less flat.

Another way of more effectively characterizing the social status of Tremblay's characters as well as adding a little colour to their speech would have been to include certain phonological features of spoken English and mark them graphologically. This is a strategy often employed by both writers and translators alike. Luis de Céspedes, for example, uses "'em" for "them", "'n" for "and", "didn'" for "didn't", "fr'm" for "from", "'r" for "or" and "'bout" for "about" in his translation of Antonine Maillet's *La Sagouine* (written in Acadian French).<sup>80</sup> Similarly, in *Balconville*, a bilingual play set in working-class Montreal, David Fennario uses such phonological/graphological features as "'cause" for "because", "wanna" for "want to", "gotta" for "got to", "ya" for "you", "gimme" for "give me" and "I dunno" for "I don't know".<sup>81</sup> Van Burek and Glassco have used the occasional phonological/graphological feature in their text as well. For example, "Faudrait que tout le monde fasse sa part" has been translated as "everybody's gotta do their share" (p. 7), "Le boss m'a même dit qu'y pourrait embarquer dans les grosses payes, ben vite, pis devenir p'tit boss" as "Even the boss told me he might start making big money 'cause they'll put him in charge of something" (p. 8) and "C'est ben put dire, hein? Un million!" as "How 'bout that? A million of 'em!" (p. 9). The problem, however, is that they have not been consistent. Thus, when Thérèse Dubuc, learning of the many prizes her

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<sup>80</sup>Antonine Maillet, *La Sagouine*, trans. Luis de Céspedes (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1985): 15-26.

<sup>81</sup>David Fennario, *Balconville* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980): 1-23.

neighbour will collect with her stamps, exclaims in astonishment "Tout ça vous coûtera pas une cenne?" (p. 42), the translation is "You mean it's not going to cost you a cent?" (p. 34). Similarly, "C'est ben parce que vous avez rien gagné" (p. 42) is rendered as "Just because you never won anything" (p. 34) and "J'vas toutes les avoir, madame Brouillette" (p. 21) as "And I'm getting them all, Madame Brouillette" (p. 11). The need for phonological/graphological features in the translation of *Les Belles-Soeurs* seems all the more necessary given the fact that we are dealing not only with the transcription of spoken language, but with the transcription of spoken, informal language. In informal or casual dialogue, for example, it is quite common to say "gonna" instead of "going to" "cause" instead of "because" and "I dunno" instead of "I don't know". If we go back to the same excerpt cited above, we see that there are several other instances where Van Burek and Glassco could have used phonological/graphological features, thereby not only adding a bit of colour to Germaine's speech, but also lowering its level of formality. For example, "want to" could have been written as "wanna", "and" as "'n", "you know" as "ya know" and "instead" as "'stead". Another effective strategy would have been to omit the apostrophes altogether. In David Homel's translation of Jacques Renaud's *Le Cassé*, for example, we find "can't" written as "cant", "I'm" as "Im", "won't" as "wont", "they'll" as "theyll" and "there's" as "theres".<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Jacques Renaud, *Broke City*, trans. David Homel (Montréal: Guernica Editions, 1984): 1-39.

Several important points need mentioning before we move on. First, many readers might find an author or translator's use of phonological/graphological features and syntactic deviations hard on the eye, distracting, even annoying, particularly if there are too many of them. This is certainly the case with Céspedes' translation of *La Sagouine*. (In addition to those examples mentioned above, Céspedes uses such phonological/graphological features as "cleanin'" for "cleaning", "'round" for "around", "jus'" for "just", "reco'nize" for "recognize", "pr'tend" for "pretend", "wanned" for "wanted", "couldn'" for "couldn't" and "the're" for "they're").<sup>53</sup> The translator therefore wants to make sure that he does not overload his text with so many phonological/graphological features and syntactic deviations as to create an adverse effect.

Secondly, it can be argued that not all working-class people use syntactic deviations such as double negatives or the word "ain't" and that, in an informal situation at least, it is common for non-working-class speakers to use such phonological features as "I got" instead of "I've got" or "gonna" instead of "going to". While this is certainly true, the fact remains that the use of syntactic deviations and phonological/graphological features undoubtedly lower the level of language on the printed page and, as such, are an indispensable tool for the writer or translator in conveying social status.

Finally, the use of syntactic deviations and phonologi-

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<sup>53</sup>Maillet 15-26.

cal/graphological features brings us back to the question of "authenticity". We saw above that, as a writer, Tremblay's aim was not to reproduce a rigorously authentic dialect, but rather one which was plausible and would thus portray his characters in a realistic fashion. In other words, he wanted to sprinkle his text with just enough linguistic features to trigger in his reader's minds the impression that his characters are from the working-class level of society. Now the translator must try to do the same. It goes without saying, of course, that he cannot go about haphazardly tossing in whatever syntactical deviations and phonological/graphological features come to mind. He must exercise extreme caution. We saw above that one disadvantage to using standard Canadian English as a translation equivalent for *joual* is the failure to produce a precise geographic anchoring. In other words, the action of the play *could* take place in Canada, but it could very well take place in the United States as well. But change "your" to "yer" and "get" to "git", for example, or use a construction like "them stamps is for the whole family" and the speakers end up sounding like characters in a John Wayne movie. Knowing which usages are common to several geographical areas rather than unique to any one requires that the translator have a fine ear for the English language. Of course, when unsure, it is better that he err on the side of caution rather than risk creating unintended effects.

Although Van Burek and Glassco use deviant grammatical constructions and phonological/graphological features only sparingly, they have still managed to create an extremely colloquial-sounding

dialogue. This in and of itself lends a considerable amount of flavour to their text. On occasion, however, they don't adhere rigidly enough to the French and some of this flavour is lost as a result. If we look at the above excerpt, for example, we see that "Aide-moé donc, pour une fois, au lieu d'aller niaser avec c'te niaiseux-là" has been rendered as "Help me for a change, instead of wasting your time with that jerk" whereas something like "Help me for a change, why don't you, instead of wasting your time with that jerk" would certainly have added that extra bit of flavour. (In addition, "niaser avec c'te niaiseux" is an alliteration whereas "wasting your time with that jerk" is not. We prefer Bowman and Findlay's translation, "wasting your time with that waster," or even "fooling around with that fool" instead). Similarly, later on in the text, Angéline Sauvé, trying to explain to her best friend of thirty-five years why she has been secretly spending her Friday nights in a nightclub, cries out "J'ai appris à rire à cinquante-cinq ans! Comprenez-vous? J'ai appris à rire à cinquante-cinq ans! Pis par hasard!" (p. 81). Van Burek and Glassco's translation, "I was fifty years old when I learned to laugh. And then it was only by chance" (p. 79), is by no means as dynamic, as flavourful as something like "I was fifty years old when I learned to laugh! Can you believe it? Fifty years old! And it was only by chance!". Nor is it as emotionally charged. In fact, whereas the former is merely a statement of information, the latter is truly a cry of despair.

Another way in which Van Burek and Glassco could have added

flavour to the speech of Tremblay's characters would have been to use more colourful words and expressions. To illustrate our point, let's take another look at the above excerpt. The translation of "Désâmez-vous pour élever ça" by "I kill myself for you" gets across the general sense, but wouldn't something like "I work my fingers to the bone" or, better yet, "I work my butt off" not only be more colourful, but also more suggestive of Germaine's toil? Moreover, "j'commence à en avoir plein le casque de vous servir" is rendered as "I'm getting sick of waiting on you". Granted, the expression "avoir plein le casque" can't be translated literally but it seems that something like "I've had it up to here with waiting on you hand and foot" or even "I've bloody well had it up to here with waiting on you hand and foot" would not only add a bit of spice to the line but also better evoke Germaine's anger and frustration.

This brings us to another possible way of adding some flavour to the speech of Tremblay's characters and that is the use of swearwords. We shall see later on that on several occasions Van Burek and Glassco have used swearwords in their translation where there are none in the original text. We shall also see that, for the most part, this can be attributed to an attempt to reflect the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in the lives of Tremblay's characters given the fact that most of the swearwords they insert are religion-based. However, we can see two other reasons for this as well. First, the use of swearwords - sacrilegious or not, definitely adds an element of flavour to the women's speech. For

example, the tone of "I've had it up to here with waiting on you! You and the whole goddamn lot of you!" is by no means as flat as that of "I'm getting sick of waiting on you, you and everyone else." Moreover, the use of swearwords adds to the working-class effect especially since, as François Lorrain points out, "in Quebec at least, swearing is considered to be a feature of social class more than anything else."<sup>4</sup> It goes without saying that in attempting to add flavour to the speech of Tremblay's characters, the translator must be very cautious as to the quantity and severity of the swearwords he inserts into his text. Any overcompensation in this regard will only have an adverse effect (a point to which we shall return in a later chapter).

Last but not least, Tremblay's text is permeated with exclamation marks yet they are few and far between in Van Burek and Glassco's translation. Leaving the exclamation marks in would have made a significant difference.

Now let us take a look at the difference each of these features make when they are put together. Compare Van Burek and Glassco's translation of the above excerpt with ours:

I don't wanna be reasonable! I don't even wanna hear about it! I work my butt off for you guys 'n what do I get in return? Nothing! A big fat nothing! Ya can' even do me a little favour! I'm warning ya Linda, I've had it up to here with waiting on you hand and foot! You 'n the whole goddamn lot of you! I'm not your servant, ya know. I got a million

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<sup>4</sup>François Lorrain quoted in Gilles Charest, Le Livre des Sacres et Blasphèmes Québécois (Montréal: Les Editions l'Aurore Inc., 1974): 75. Charest agrees. At the bottom of the social ladder, he says, "le sacre est l'élément de base." Moreover, "L'enlever, c'est faire taire l'individu et l'expression 'ne pas dire deux mots sans sacrer' s'applique rigoureusement." (74).

stamps to paste 'n I sure as hell ain't gonna do it by myself! Besides, those stamps are for the whole family, so everybody's gotta do their share! Your father's working tonight but if we don't get done he says he'll help tomorrow. I'm not asking for the moon. Help me for a change, why don't ya, 'stead of fooling around with that fool!

The above translation illustrates that, despite the lack of a single, codified class-related dialect in Canadian English, Van Burek and Glassco could have taken other measures to more effectively characterize the social status of Tremblay's *belles-soeurs* and compensate, to some extent at least, for the unquestionable lack of flavour in their speech. By failing to do so they have significantly weakened his play.

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We have just seen that the distinct pronunciation and grammar which characterizes the speech of Tremblay's characters signals to us that they are from the working-class level of society. But the various markers of *joual* reveal a great deal of other socio-cultural information about the people or society in Tremblay's play as well. Nowhere is this more clear than in perhaps the two most highly specific lexical features of *joual*: swearwords and anglicisms.

## CHAPTER 3

### SWEARWORDS

*Among the characteristics of a people none is more revealing than the way it swears.<sup>85</sup>*

We mentioned previously that Tremblay's main linguistic concern as a playwright is that his characters speak as realistic a language as possible. With this in mind, there are two principal reasons why it is not surprising to find a large proportion of swearwords in *Les Belles-Soeurs*. First, Tremblay's characters are from Quebec, a culture in which swearing has always been an integral part of life and language. Secondly, they are members of the working class, a level of society where, as we have seen, such language abounds.

An important distinction between English and French swearing in Canada should be noted at this point. English Canadian profanity is by and large a vocabulary of obscenity (sexual and scatological) whereas Québécois profanity is primarily sacrilegious. These linguistic differences are the natural result of cultural differences between English Canada and Quebec. Quebec, until recently, was essentially a theocratic society.<sup>86</sup> The strongest influence was the Roman Catholic Church and the most

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<sup>85</sup>J.S. Tassie, "The Use of Sacrilege in the Speech of French Canada," American Speech, vol. 36, no. 1 (February 1961): 34.

<sup>86</sup>Tassie 35.

important historical factor shaping the thought of Quebecers was thus religion.<sup>87</sup> English-Canadian society, on the other hand, was built on a puritan tradition. The most pervasive factor shaping the thought of English Canada was Scottish Calvinism and, as a result, high standards of sexual morality were traditionally the guiding light in that society.<sup>88</sup> In his article entitled "The Use of Sacrilege in the Speech of French Canada", J.S. Tassie draws an interesting conclusion from these cultural differences. "If," he says, "religion is the highest good of French-Canadian society, the very denial of that good would seem to be the normal channel for profanity to take and sacrilege its obvious expression."<sup>89</sup> Similarly, "because English Canada is built on a puritan tradition, profanity, therefore, in denying that tradition, finds its natural expression in obscenity."<sup>90</sup>

### English-Canadian Profanity

The terms of English-Canadian obscenity have to do with the human anatomy, particularly the genitals and the anus, and biological functions, including animal excretions and sexual practices.<sup>91</sup> Some of the more common oaths of this kind include terms such as *asshole*, *shit* and *fuck*. Religion also plays a role.

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<sup>87</sup>Tassie 34.

<sup>88</sup>Tassie 39.

<sup>89</sup>Tassie 35.

<sup>90</sup>Tassie 39.

<sup>91</sup>Tassie 39.

The words *God, Christ, Jesus* and *Hell*, for example, are often used as oaths and *God damn it* is one if not the most frequent oath in English Canada.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, due to the essential cultural differences noted above, the role of religion is much more important in French Canada than in English Canada.

### Québécois Profanity

The sacred objects and practices of religion and the persons of the Godhead comprise the main vocabulary of Québécois profanity<sup>93</sup> which, as Gilles Charest notes in his book *Le Livre des sacres et blasphèmes québécois*, can be divided into three distinct levels.<sup>94</sup> They are, in ascending order of force, the *juron*, which is simply an ordinary curse such as *maudite, sacrifice* and *baptême*, the *sacre*, which is the most widely used form of swearing and involves the use of religious expressions, the most common of these being *calice, calvaire, christ, ciboire, hostie, sacrement* and *tabernacle*, and finally the *blasphème*, which involves using the word *maudit* with one of the *sacres* (eg. *maudit christ, maudit tabernacle*, etc.). Although oaths in general have a remarkable degree of syntactic and morphological flexibility, this is especially true in the case of Québécois profanity. For example, the seven *sacres* listed above can appear in a variety of spellings (eg. *calice - câlasse, câlique, câlif*), be combined with two or

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<sup>92</sup>Tassie 39.

<sup>93</sup>Tassie 35.

<sup>94</sup>Charest 31.

more other *sacres* (eg. *hostie de christ*) or transformed into verbs and then conjugated (eg. *crisser, câlisser*). It should also be noted, however, that although Québécois profanity is primarily sacrilegious in nature, it is not entirely devoid of obscene elements, as Tremblay's play well demonstrates. Some of the more frequent obscenities are *bâtard* (p. 17), *agace-pissette* (p. 100), *guidounne* (p. 100), *puante* (p. 28), *chier* (p. 101) and the ever-familiar *manger de la marde* (*merde*, p. 21). However, although Tremblay makes good use of both sacrilegious and obscene language in his play, we will not be discussing the latter in this chapter as it is not embedded specifically in the cultural context of Quebec and, as such, does not pose as serious a problem to the translator.

English-Canadian profanity is thus essentially a vocabulary of obscenity whereas Québécois profanity is primarily sacrilegious. These linguistic differences in the profanity of the two cultures were an inevitable source of trouble to the translators of Tremblay's text, as we shall soon see.

### Translating Profanity

Before we turn to the translation of swearwords in *Les Belles-Sœurs*, let us first briefly discuss the problems raised by their translation in general. Firstly, not only must the translator find an English equivalent, because oaths vary in intensity he must also find one with roughly the same "strength" as that used in the French text. Unfortunately, dictionaries and glossaries - both

unilingual and bilingual - are not much help in this area.<sup>95</sup> As Basil Kingstone points out, swearwords are surprisingly often omitted from unilingual Québécois dictionaries and glossaries, "partly because their compilers have been reluctant to grant such words a place in their works and partly no doubt because it was difficult to decide how many of the vast number of variants to include".<sup>96</sup> However, even those dictionaries and glossaries that do list swearwords do not give a detailed gradation of their strength - either in relation to other swearwords or in terms of grammatical category. This no doubt can be attributed to the very complexity of Québécois swearing, which renders such a task highly difficult if not impossible. Gilles Charest, for example, points out that even the most skilled *sacreur* would be hard-pressed to tell which of the following girls is the prettiest:

- Une **hostie** de belle fille.
- Une **câlice** de belle fille.
- Une **christ** de belle fille.
- Une **belle-fille en christ**.
- C'est une **christ de câlisse** de belle fille.<sup>97</sup>

There exists only one bilingual Québécois-English dictionary at present, that being *The Québécois Dictionary*, published in 1982 and

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<sup>95</sup>It is not our intention to pursue a lengthy discussion of the extent to which Québécois dictionaries and glossaries do or do not deal with various swearwords as this topic was already given extensive coverage by Basil Kingstone in his M.A. thesis entitled "Commented Translation of 'Tipite Vallerand,' a Conte de Jos Violon by Louis Fréchette" (University of Ottawa, 1986). We will thus only recapitulate his main findings.

<sup>96</sup>Kingstone 53.

<sup>97</sup>Charest 46.

compiled by Léandre Bergeron. Unfortunately, however, it is no more helpful than unilingual dictionaries when it comes to indicating the strength of Québécois swearwords. Moreover, although it bravely attempts to give English equivalents, the outcome is rather disappointing. *Maudit*, *câlisse* and *crisse*, for example, are all rendered as *sonovabitch*.<sup>98</sup> Surely these words do not all mean the same thing, especially since, according to Charest, *maudit* is just a simple swearword whereas *câlisse* and *crisse* are considered to be much stronger. What is more, the dictionary does not take context into consideration. Rose Ouimet refers to her young grandchildren as *les p'tits maudits* (p. 38), yet despite the fact that she is by far the most vulgar character in the play, the word *sonovabitches* seems a bit too strong even for her, given the fact that she is using the term more or less affectionately. If we look at the TT, we see that the translators have opted for the more appropriate *little buggers* (p. 30) instead. The failure of this bilingual dictionary to deal adequately with the translation of Québécois swearwords should not come as a surprise, however, given the fact that, as we have seen, swearwords are a culture-bound item. As such, their translation into another language is *ipso facto* translation into another culture - a near if not entirely impossible undertaking.

Thus, given the failure of dictionaries and glossaries - both unilingual and bilingual - to deal adequately with the culture-

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<sup>98</sup>Léandre Bergeron, The Québécois Dictionary (Toronto: Hames Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1982): 49, 73, 135.

bound area of swearwords, the translator must exercise his own judgement in choosing a TL equivalent relatively equal in strength to that used in the ST. It goes without saying that the contexts in which these words are used will play an all-important role in his decision.

### The Translation of Profanity in *Les Belles-Soeurs*

Because Québécois profanity is primarily sacrilegious (or at least connected with religion in some way), whereas English Canadian profanity is by and large a vocabulary of obscenity, we expect to see most of the sacrilegious language in *Les Belles-Soeurs* translated by obscene language in English. To our great surprise, however, we find just the opposite. A good deal, if not most of the sacrilegious language in French has been translated by sacrilegious language in English. We thus see an effort on the part of the translators to maintain to some extent the religious component in the profanity of the *belles-soeurs* and, in so doing, keep this area of the women's speech embedded in the cultural context of Quebec. This task was facilitated to some extent by the fact that, as we mentioned previously, there are certain linguistic similarities in the profanities of the two cultures. In fact, the most common expletive happens to correspond in both languages, that being the adjective *maudit* in French and *damn* (or *goddamn* in its full form) in English." As a result, the two can more or less be considered translation equivalents, as the following examples from

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<sup>99</sup>Tassie 40.

the source and target texts illustrate:

**THE FIVE WOMEN:**

Toujours la même **maudite**  
affaire! (p. 23)

The same **goddamn** thing!  
(p. 13)

**ROSE:**

**Maudit** cul! (p. 29)

**Goddamn** sex! (p. 19)

**THE THREE SISTERS:**

**Maudit** Johnny! **Maudit** Johnny!  
(p. 69)

**Goddamn** Johnny! **Goddamn** Johnny!  
(p. 66)

**PIERRETTE:**

... y m'a pas laissé une cenne!  
Pas une **maudite** cenne noire!  
(p. 95)

He didn't leave me a nickel!  
Not a **goddamn** nickel! (p. 93)

Moreover, in English, as in French, several interjections have to do with the Deity. In addition to those examples we mentioned at the start of the chapter (ie. *God*, *Jesus* and *Goddamn it*), other commonly used oaths in English include *good God*, *good Lord*, *good Heavens*, *for God's sake*, *Holy God*, *Holy Christ*, *Holy Mary* and *Holy Mother of God*. Thus, given this linguistic similarity in the profanity of the two cultures, Lise Paquette's frustrated cry of "Mais **maudit**, y fallait que ça arrive" (p. 90) at finding herself pregnant and alone translates easily as "... but **Goddamn** it, this had to happen" (p. 88). Furthermore, when Rose exclaims "Bonyeu, y en a, des livrets!" (p. 41), the translation in English is "My God! Look at all these books!" (p. 33), although it could just as easily have been "Good God" or "Good Lord". The following are other instances where oaths having to do with the name of God in the source text translate easily into similar oaths in English:

GERMAINE:

Ma grand-foi du bon Dieu  
(p. 18)

Mother of God (p. 8)

Mon Dieu, la belle-mère de ma  
belle-soeur Thérèse qui vient  
de tomber en bas du troisième  
étage! (p. 31)

Oh my God! My sister-in-law  
Thérèse's mother-in-law just  
fell down three flights of  
stairs! (p. 22)

ROSE:

Mais bonyeu qu'y sont tannant!  
(p. 38)

But Jesus, do they drive me  
nuts. (p. 29)

Bonyeu, t'en avais pas acheté  
gros! (p. 104)

Jesus, you didn't buy much, did  
you? (p. 103)

Doux Jésus! (p. 76)

Good heavens! (p. 72)

We thus see that because of certain parallels in the profanity of the two cultures, namely the fact that the most frequent adjective corresponds in both languages (*maudit* and *goddamn*), and that a good number of interjections have to do with the Deity, the translators were able to maintain a certain religious element in the swearing of the *belles-soeurs*. This was not, however, sufficient to reflect the province's deep immersion in Catholicism and thus keep this area of the women's speech embedded in the cultural context of Quebec for, although religion does indeed play a role in English-Canadian profanity, as the above examples have well illustrated, its role is vastly more important in Québécois profanity. This becomes astonishingly apparent when we examine the source and target texts in more detail. For example, when Pierrette arrives at her sister's house at the end of Act I and sees Angéline, her friend from the club, she exclaims in astonishment "Ah, ben câlisse!" (p. 71). Later, when she learns that Angéline has reconciled with Rheana she blurts out "J'ai mon hostie de voyage!"

(p. 105). Finally, when Rose launches into her tirade about the injustices of living with a man who demands his conjugal due twice a day, every day of the year she begins by saying "Oui, la vie, c'est la vie, pis y'a pas une crisse de vue française qui va arriver à décrire ça!" (p. 101). Three different expressions in French are all rendered by one expression in English: "Well, I'll be goddamned Angéline!" (p. 70) is the translation for the first, "I'll be goddamned!" (p. 104) for the second and "Life is life and no goddamn Frenchman ever made a movie about that!" (p. 101) for the third. None of these, to quote Vivian Bosley, "give the impression of having the church as a constant living presence in one's life, such that it is absorbed into the familiar world of everyday speech and understood as a reference to a dominant truth of existence."<sup>100</sup> Similarly, when Germaine learns that her daughter plans to go to the movies rather than stay home and help her paste stamps she cries out in frustration "Maudit verrat de bâtard que chus donc tannée!" (p. 17)<sup>101</sup> and later, when Linda is late getting back she lashes out at her with "Tu veux me faire sacrer devant le monde? ... Ben crisse, tu vas avoir réussi!" (p.54). Again, two very different expressions in French are rendered by one expression in English: "Jesus Christ Almighty, I'm so fed up!" (p. 7) is the translation for the first, and "Well, Jesus Christ Almighty, you've succeeded!" (p. 48) for the second.

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<sup>100</sup>Bosley 143.

<sup>101</sup>The strongest part of this interjection is really the non-religious part, ie. *verrat de bâtard*.

The above examples clearly show that, despite Van Burek and Glassco's determined efforts to give religious equivalents, the lack of sacrilegious terms in English-Canadian profanity only gave them so much to work with. As a result, this area of the women's speech not only suffers linguistically in translation, it is also uprooted culturally. In other words, there is absolutely nothing about the way in which Tremblay's characters swear in English to suggest that they come from a closed and specific society dominated by the Church. Words and expressions such as *goddamn*, *goddamn it* and *Jesus Christ Almighty* are not specific to any one geographic setting. *Calice* and *hostie*, on the other hand, belong only to Quebec. Whether or not this cultural uprooting and the resulting linguistic impoverishment could have been prevented, however, still remains to be seen.

We should note at this point that on several occasions the translation uses sacrilegious language where there is none in French, obviously in an attempt to emphasize the religious component in the women's swearing.<sup>102</sup> For example, when Linda learns that instead of going out with her boyfriend she has to stay home and help her mother paste stamps, she exclaims "J'ai mon voyage! On n'est même pas capable de rien faire, icitte!" (p. 19),

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<sup>102</sup>We have already seen two other possible reasons why Van Burek and Glassco have used swearwords in English where there are none in French, ie. the addition of swearwords adds an element of flavour to the women's speech as well as enhances the working-class effect. It should be pointed out, however, that Van Burek and Glassco occasionally leave out certain swearwords as well so that, in the long run, their text really contains no more profanity than the original.

the translation for which is "Jesus, you can't do a thing around here!" (p. 8). According to both the *Dictionnaire Québécois d'Aujourd'hui* and the *Dictionnaire Général de la Langue Française au Canada*, however, the expression *avoir son voyage* is not an oath, and could just as easily have been translated by "I've had it up to here" or "I'm sick and tired of it" had the translator not been making a conscious effort to use religious language. Nonetheless, once again the translators get into trouble over the significant lack of sacrilegious equivalents English has to offer. Notice what happens:

ROSE:

On n'est pas pour laisser  
Germaine chicaner Linda pour  
rien! (p. 55)

Linda's getting bawled out and  
she hasn't done a **goddamn**  
thing! (p. 48)

On le sait que ton mari se fend  
le cul en quatre ... (p. 48)

We know **goddamn** well that your  
husband's up to his ass in debt  
... (p. 41)

Là, y'ont pris le papier de  
toilette, pis y l'ont toute  
déroulé. (p. 38)

They took the toilet paper and  
unrolled the whole **goddamn**  
thing. (p. 30)

YVETTE:

Mais j'l'ai ben connu, lui!  
J'ai déjà sorti avec! (p. 41)

But I knew him well! I used to  
go out with him for **Godsake!**  
(p. 33)

GABRIELLE:

Farme-toé, donc, Rose, tu  
comprends rien! (p. 44)

Rose, will you shut up for  
**Godsake!** (p. 36)

GERMAINE:

Où c'est qu'a l'a fourré, c'te  
radio-là, donc! (p. 30)

**Goddamn** it! Where did she put  
that frigging radio! (p. 21)

LINDA:

Vous auriez pas pu me le dire  
avant que j'étais demandée au  
téléphone, non? (p. 93)

For **Chrissake**, Aunt Rose, why  
didn't you tell me I was wanted  
on the phone? (p. 92)

ROSE:

Quand à l'a fini de travailler,  
le soir, à rentre dans sa  
grosse maison de cent mille  
piasses, pis à se couche dans  
son lit deux fois gros comme ma  
chambre à coucher! (p. 101)

And when she's finished work,  
she can go home and climb into  
her big fat bed that's twice  
the size of my bedroom, for  
**Chrissake!** (p. 101)

In the above examples the same words and expressions we saw earlier reappear with astounding frequency, particularly *goddamn*, for *Godsake* and for *Chrissake*. As a result, rather than give the impression of having the church as a constant living presence in one's life, the effect is one of mere redundancy and ultimately leads the TL reader to question the creativity of the translators.

Once the translators have run the brief gamut of religious words and expressions offered by the English language, it quickly becomes apparent that they have little choice *but* to fall back on obscenities. No better illustration of this can be found than in the translation of that ever-so-favoured oath *maudit*. We mentioned previously that, as an adjective, *maudit* translates easily as *goddamn* and, as an interjection, as *goddamn it* or even *for God's sake*. Unlike *goddamn*, however, *maudit* can also function in several other ways, among them as an interjection in tandem (eg. "**Maudit verrat de bâtard que je suis donc tannée!**" - p. 17) and as a noun with a variety of meanings. For example, when Rose hears that her teenage son was seen "necking" with the Italian neighbour's daughter, she angrily refers to him as a "p'tit **maudit**" (p. 28). Similarly, Germaine calls her daughter a "p'tite **maudite**" (p. 35) when she learns that she has snuck out with her friends instead of helping her mother paste stamps. Later, when Lise Paquette hears

Rose chastise young girls who become pregnant, she too uses this expression, accusing her of being a "grosse maudite sans desseine!" (p. 101). However, because English-Canadian profanity contains few religion-based nouns at all (*Jezebel* is the only one which comes to mind), let alone one which would suit each of the three contexts at hand, the translators must, of necessity, fall back on the more ample choices provided by the vocabulary of obscenity. Thus we see that the translation is "little bastard" (p. 19) for the first, "little bitch" (p. 27) for the second and "stupid fucking jerk" (p. 101) for the third. Although these equivalents may well be appropriate choices given the context in which they are used in the French, one cannot help but be taken aback by the harshness of the English, particularly the last expression. John Van Burek points out that this is precisely one of the problems with which the translator is faced. Québécois sacrilege, he says, "is colourful, it sings and it burns."<sup>103</sup> English obscenity, however, "runs the risk of being mere vulgarity" and seems only to "assault and deaden."<sup>104</sup>

It is interesting to note that there are some vulgarisms in the translation which could have been avoided. The expression "C'est le fun!" (p. 77), for example, which is not a curse,<sup>105</sup> is translated as "Holy shit, that's great!" (p. 74) whereas something

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<sup>103</sup>Van Burek 44.

<sup>104</sup>Van Burek 44.

<sup>105</sup>Jean-Claude Boulanger et al, eds., Dictionnaire Québécois d'Aujourd'hui (Saint-Laurent: DicoRobert Inc., 1992): 522.

like "That's great!" or even "Wow, that's great" would have sufficed. Similarly, the expression "Ah, pis sacre-moé donc patience!" (p. 93) is translated as "Ah, piss off!" (p. 68) whereas it could just as easily have been given a less crude, religion-based equivalent such as "Ah, leave me the hell alone".

Swearing was not the only form of speech in Quebec influenced by the Church. Québécois French also contains a surprising number of images and expressions based on religion. These have almost a poetic quality and lend to the language an element of the picturesque. For example, Thérèse Dubuc, describing her sister-in-law's reaction when she gave her some old clothes, says "A pleurait comme une Madeleine" (p. 40). The translation, "weeping with gratitude", is neither picturesque nor religiously-charged. The two expressions which are given religion-based equivalents in English - *gagner son ciel* (p. 34) and *c'est toute une croix* (p.33) - sound suspiciously alike: "we all have our crosses to bear" (p. 34) and "it's some cross to bear" (p. 25).

To sum up, despite certain linguistic similarities in the profanities of the two cultures, the fact remains that Québécois profanity is by and large sacrilegious whereas English-Canadian profanity is by and large a vocabulary of obscenity. Consequently, in translating the wide range of curses found in Tremblay's play, Van Burek and Glassco, in an attempt to give religious equivalents, were forced to use the same few words and expressions time and again and, when that failed, fall back on obscene language. This area of the women's speech was thus pried out of its specific

cultural context and, as a result, stripped of its linguistic richness.

Can the loss of this cultural component and the resulting linguistic impoverishment be attributed to insurmountable cultural and hence linguistic differences between English Canada and Quebec and thus be said to have been beyond the translator's control, or is there some way in which such a loss could have been prevented? We have already seen that because swearwords are a culture-bound item, their translation into another language is *ipso facto* translation into another culture, hence the failure of the English translation to keep this aspect of the women's speech embedded in the cultural context of Quebec. One solution to this problem might have been to translate the Québécois swearing literally. However, this would have been at best perplexing if not simply absurd. Translate *calice d'hostie de tabernacle* by *chalice of a host of a tabernacle*, for example, and the effect is one of mere gobbledygook. Sheila Fischman, in her translation of Roch Carrier's *La Guerre, yes sir!*, leaves all the religion-based swearwords in French, being of the opinion that "to translate them would have been to distort the values of the people who use them."<sup>106</sup> Moreover, she reduces any alienating or perplexing effect this may have on the TL reader to a minimum by providing a short introduction to her translation in which she explains the reasons for her choice. She even provides a brief glossary of some of the swearwords found

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<sup>106</sup>Roch Carrier, *La Guerre, yes sir!*, trans. Sheila Fischman (Toronto: Anansi, 1971): 2.

in the text. We believe that this would have been a much more appropriate way for Van Burek and Glassco to have dealt with the wide range of curses found in *Les Belles-Soeurs*, especially since the all-pervasive influence of the Church in the lives of the women is one of the most important themes of the play. In other words, the only way to have avoided this weakness in the translation would have been to *not* translate the swearing. By keeping the swearwords in French, the translators would also have avoided using the same few words and expressions time and again, reduced the vulgar effect created by using obscenities to translate religiously-charged oaths and have given an accurate picture of the range, complexity and colour of Québécois swearing. More importantly, however, they would have conveyed the religious fact noted above and thus kept Tremblay's text in Quebec.<sup>107</sup> Anyway, as Fischman so rightly observes, "whatever the results of attempts to make Canada officially bilingual, a little personal bilingualism never hurt anybody."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>It would have been possible to leave the numerous swearwords contained in Tremblay's play in French because, as interjections, oaths have no syntactical relationship to the rest of the sentence. Needless to say, however, this would not have been a viable solution to the translation of the religious images and expressions we mentioned above. The loss incurred in this respect, therefore, was inevitable.

<sup>108</sup>Carrier 3.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANGLICISMS

*... là où il y a un contact étroit entre deux langues, il y a forcément échange et dans la mesure où l'une domine l'autre, c'est cette dernière qui reçoit plus qu'elle ne donne: la langue dominée subit les interférences de la langue dominante.<sup>108</sup>*

Anglicisms, while not unique to the French spoken by any one region or social group in Québec, are also particularly frequent in the *joual* context.

There are two types of anglicisms, both of which are found in *Les Belles-Soeurs*. First, there is the complete borrowing in which the English word is planted in the French language as is and keeps its spelling and pronunciation almost practically intact. Examples of this type of anglicism include:

party	p. 16
boss	p. 18
set de cuisine	p. 20
set de mobilier	p. 20
chums	p. 28
cute	p. 37
shape	p. 46
fancies	p. 51

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<sup>108</sup>Jean Darbelnet, "La responsabilité du traducteur: Quel est son objet?," *Informatio*, vol. 13, no. 2-3 (avril-juin 1984): 20.

coke	p. 82
bingo	p. 86
bargains	p. 92
gang	p. 107

The second type of anglicism - called a *calque* - is an English word that is naturalized or assimilated in French. There are two main types of *calques* found in *Les Belles-Soeurs*: **phonetic** and **lexical**. The following are some examples of each:

**PHONETIC CALQUES:**

pinotte (peanut)	p. 16
stirio (stereo)	p. 20
béloné (baloney)	p. 24
smatte (smart)	p. 47
lousse (loose)	p. 57

**LEXICAL CALQUES:**

chambre de bain (bathroom)	p. 38
papier de toilette (toilet paper)	p. 38
amis de garçons (boyfriends)	p. 28

It is inevitable that English should have some influence on the French spoken in Quebec given the province's position within the Canadian Federation as well as its proximity to the United States. The large proportion of anglicisms found in Tremblay's play thus reveal an island immersed in an English sea. Anglicisms

permeate every facet of the *belles-soeurs'* lives. Linda Lauzon, for example, talks about her day at the "shop" (p. 19) and her boyfriend's "boss" (p. 18). Her friend, Lise Paquette, is sick of working as a "waitress" (p. 95). She wants to have some "fun" (p. 90) for a change. And, as Renate Usmiani so rightly observes, "Alienation insidiously pervades even the kitchen, traditional inner-sanctum of the Quebec housewife"<sup>109</sup> where lunch consists of "des sandwichs au béloné" (p. 24) eaten at the "set de cuisine" (p. 20).

In addition to pointing to the outside influence of English Canada and the United States in the lives of Tremblay's characters, there are two English words found in the original French text which point to an inside influence: that of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church, as is well-known, played an extremely important role in Quebec society for several centuries. This role had both a positive and a negative effect. On the positive side, the Church played a vital role in the survival of the French language and culture in North America.<sup>110</sup> On the negative side, however, it proved to be a very severe moral disciplinarian, warping the lives of several generations.<sup>111</sup> The previously mentioned Brother Anonymous, author of *Les Insolences du Frère Untel*, summed up French Canadian Catholicism as "crispé,

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<sup>109</sup>Usmiani, Theatre of Frustration 104.

<sup>110</sup>Thomas Sloan, Quebec: The Not-So-Quiet Revolution (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965): 28.

<sup>111</sup>Sloan 28.

apeuré, ignorant ... réduit à une morale sexuelle négative".<sup>112</sup> Tremblay's characters have been born Roman Catholics and, as such, show the ill-effects of this moralistic puritanism. Two English words used in the original text point to this in particular: "fun" and "club". As Vivian Bosley points out, both of these words are used "to refer to a state which in some way exceeds the normal expectations of the contextual society."<sup>113</sup> For example, when Angéline Sauvé, an older single woman, admits that, for the first time in her life, she has found "fun" (p. 81) at a night club where she has spent every Friday night for the past four years, her friends, horrified, immediately launch into a lecture about mortal sin: "On nous l'a assez répété: 'Mettre le pied dans un club, c'est déjà faire un péché mortel'" (p. 79). The English words "fun" and "club" imply a sinfulness, a "sexual licentiousness",<sup>114</sup> to quote Vivian Bosley, associated with the dominant Anglo-Saxon society, "pagan" and "hedonistic", and are thus entirely unacceptable in a culture like Quebec where respectable, Catholic values prevail.

Van Burek and Glassco have made no attempt whatsoever to render this influence of English on Quebec French. For example, "un party de collage de timbres" (p. 16) is translated as "a stamp-pasting party" (p. 6), "un set de cuisine" (p. 20) as "a new kitchen table and chairs" (p. 9) and "smatte" (p. 47) as "smart" (p. 40). As a result, yet another aspect of the women's speech has

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<sup>112</sup>Desbiens 72.

<sup>113</sup>Bosley 143.

<sup>114</sup>Bosley 143.

been pried out from its specific cultural context. In the previous chapter we saw how one linguistic feature which contributes to the distinct Québécois flavour of the source text - the swearwords - had not been retained in the English translation. Now yet another linguistic feature of the original text which we realize as being specifically Québécois falls away as well. For example, in trying to defend her boyfriend, Linda Lauzon's reassurance to her mother that "Le boss m'a même dit qu'y pourrait embarquer dans les grosses payes, ben vite, pis devenir p'tit boss!" (p. 18) has been rendered in English as "Even the boss told me he might start making big money 'cause they'll put him in charge of something" (p. 8). Yet this correct English translation cannot capture the alienation present in this one simple sentence. Similarly, when the women's outcry of "Le club! Un vrai endroit de perdition!" (p. 77) is rendered in English by "A club! The fastest road to hell!" (p. 75), we may well understand that they live in a society dominated by the Church but what we do not realize is that the use of an English word in fact implies a comparison with the dominant Anglo-Saxon pagan society, thus in a sense between good and evil, spiritual and carnal. The nuance is lost in translation.

Anglicisms cannot be translated into English, of course, because they already are English. So what does the translator do? In a 1976 interview with *Canadian Theatre Review*, Van Burek mentions that in the past he has inserted French expressions into

an English text to counteract the loss of the bilingual element.<sup>115</sup> There are both advantages and disadvantages to such an approach. One advantage would be that it would give the TL reader a feel for the extent to which English invades French in Quebec. Secondly, inserting French expressions might put some local colour back into the women's speech and remind the reader that the women are speaking French in Quebec, a fact which, for the most part, tends to go unnoticed in the existing translation. However, anglicisms carry meaning. They have a syntactical relationship to the rest of the sentence and we cannot assume that every TL reader will be bilingual and thus able to understand the French expressions. In fact, the translator should assume just the opposite. Take a simple sentence like "J'ai acheté des pinottes" (p. 16) and translate it by "I bought some *arachides*" and the effect is perplexing to say the least. To avoid this, the translator could randomly intersperse his text with French words and expressions that any English-Canadian reader, bilingual or not, would be likely to understand such as "oui", "non", "garçon", etc., rather than translate each and every anglicism in Tremblay's text into French. The problem with this however, is that the connotations evoked by the words "fun" and "club" would then be lost in translation. The use of gallicisms would also be an inappropriate solution due to the fact that Canadian English is not marked by a

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<sup>115</sup>Van Burek 47. He makes no mention, however, as to why he and Glassco chose not to use French expressions in this case.

large number of gallicisms.<sup>116</sup> Last but not least, the use of French expressions in the English translation would not be a suitable solution if for no other reason than the fact that, although English and French have been in contact with one another for a period of several centuries and have thus had a mutual influence on one another, by and large it is English that influences and alters French in Canada, not the other way around. To quote David Homel, "Domination is always a one-way street."<sup>117</sup>

It goes without saying that these cultural and linguistic differences make the "translation" of anglicisms into English a difficult if not impossible task. Yet given the importance of this linguistic feature in Tremblay's dialogue, there is no question that the influence of English on Quebec French ought to be rendered in some manner. The loss of the bilingual element could possibly be prevented by inserting French expressions into the English translation. However, given the fact that, in this case at least, the disadvantages to such an approach clearly outweigh the advantages, we do not believe this to be an appropriate solution. In light of this, only one other solution comes to mind and that is to render the presence of English elements in Quebec French by retaining the English features found in *Les Belles-Soeurs* and marking them graphically by the use of italics or quotations

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<sup>116</sup>James B. Norman, "Commented Translation of Three Excerpts from 'Maryse' by Francine Noël," diss. University of Ottawa, 1987: 91.

<sup>117</sup>Homel 23.

marks.<sup>118</sup> Granted, such artificial devices will inevitably render Tremblay's dialogue less natural and spontaneous. Nonetheless, they will give the TL reader a feel for the extent to which English invades French in Quebec.

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<sup>118</sup>Norman 91.

## CHAPTER 5

### LOCALLY ROOTED VOCABULARY

*Le lexique d'une langue vivante n'est jamais complètement établi; quand on l'a fini, c'est déjà l'heure de le recommencer.*<sup>119</sup>

In addition to swearwords and anglicisms, another feature of *joual* which enhances the local colour or "Québécoisité" of the source text is its locally rooted vocabulary. A large proportion of words and expressions within *Les Belles-Soeurs* are used exclusively in Quebec French. The following is a brief sampling:

achalante (agaçante)	p. 92
avoir son voyage (en avoir assez/marre)	p. 48
avoir son voyage (ce n'est pas vrai)	p. 27
c'est pas (ben ben) mêlant (il n'y a pas de doute)	p. 29
chenailier (se dépêcher)	p. 92
faire du mégasinage (faire des achats)	p. 24
guidoune (putain)	p. 100
magané (abîmé, détérioré)	p. 19
nono/nounoune (niaiseux, idiot)	p. 17
placoter (bavarder)	p. 35
pogné / poigné (défavorisé)	p. 102

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<sup>119</sup>Société du parler français au Canada. Glossaire du parler français parlé au Canada. Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1968: viii.

In addition to those words used exclusively in Quebec French, there are also a great many lexical items within *Les Belles-Soeurs* that are found in both European and Quebec French but not with the same meaning. The following are some examples:

appartement (pièce)	p. 86
bain (baignoire)	p. 38
catin (poupée)	p. 68
cadres (tableau)	p. 20
char (voiture)	p. 90
fête (anniversaire)	p. 82
fin (gentil)	p. 22
liqueur (boisson)	p. 16
patente (truc, machin)	p. 25
plate (nul)	p. 22
plate (moche)	p. 22
tannée (écoeuré)	p. 22
vues (cinéma)	p. 18

If we look at the translation, however, we see that there is nothing typically "Canadian" about the equivalents these words have been given in English. For example, when Germaine says to her daughter "J'savais que t'étais nounoune, mais pas à ce point-là" (p. 17), the translation is "Boy, I knew you were stupid but not that stupid" (p. 7); similarly "le jour du mégasinage" (p. 24) is given as "shopping day" (p. 13), "char" as "car" (p. 88), and "patente" as "thing" (p. 14).

It goes without saying that it would be next to impossible for the translator to render each and every one of the above words by a Canadianism. For example, while we in Canada say "soft drink" whereas our American neighbours say "soda" or "pop", there are no exclusively or even typically Canadian words for "car", "shopping" and "birthday". What the translator can do, however, is try to provide overall correspondence on the level of Canadianisms by using them in other places throughout his text.

According to the *Gage Canadian Dictionary*, standard Canadian English, although in large measure a blend of British and American English, contains "hundreds of words which are native to Canada or which have meanings peculiar to Canada."<sup>120</sup> Why, then, are there few if any Canadianisms in Van Burek and Glassco's translation (save the occasional "eh", that is)? The answer is that, generally speaking, most Canadianisms refer to topographical features, plants, trees, fish, animals and birds, and to social, economic and political institutions and activities,<sup>121</sup> thus making it extremely difficult if not impossible to incorporate them into a translation of *Les Belles-Soeurs*. Thus, albeit through no fault of the translators, the TT fails to retain yet another linguistic feature which accounts for the "Québécoisité" or local colour of the original, a serious loss to say the least.

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<sup>120</sup>Avis xii.

<sup>121</sup>Avis 99.

## CHAPTER 6

### NEWFOUNDLAND ENGLISH

*The language of Newfoundland is one of the most marvellous composites on earth ... For the first five minutes you are confident you are conversing with an Irishman - the next five minutes you are highly amused at your mistake. The man is a Scot - probably from Skye or Shetland or some remote community you have never visited. The next five minutes you ask him how long he has been away from Devonshire...*<sup>122</sup>

Before we conclude Part I of this thesis, we would like to suggest one other possible method of translating Tremblay's *joual* into a Canadian context and that is the use of Newfoundland English. Newfoundland English derives primarily from the speech of early settlers from the English West Country and later Ireland and is considered to be the oldest variety of English in the Americas.<sup>123</sup>

We mentioned in Chapter 2 that Canadian English has several regional dialects. However, of all of these, only Newfoundland English is so distinct that, rather than being a mere dialect of Canadian English, it is considered to be a variety with a standard and dialects of its own.<sup>124</sup> According to the *Oxford Companion to*

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<sup>122</sup>Beckles Wilson, *The Truth About Newfoundland* (London, 1901): 19.

<sup>123</sup>McArthur 689.

<sup>124</sup>McArthur 689.

*the English Language*, "Many Newfoundland townies have features of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary that are distinct from the rest of Canada, and the varied dialects of the baymen are possibly the most distinct in the country."<sup>125</sup> Some features of Newfoundland English pronunciation include the simplification of final consonant clusters (eg. "a soun in the loff" for "a sound in the loft"), the dropping of the "h" sound (eg. "eel" for "heel")<sup>126</sup> and the tendency to represent high vowels as open and slightly back (eg. "marnin'" for "morning", "alang" for "along" and "nard" for "north").<sup>127</sup> Features of Newfoundland English grammar include the use of "is" or "m" for present forms of the verb "be" (eg. "I is", "you is", "we is"; "you'm" "we'm", "they'm"), distinctive forms of the verbs "do", "have" and "be" ("They doos their work", "I haves a lot of books", "It bees cold in here in winter"), weak rather than strong forms in some irregular verbs ("knowed" for "knew" and "threwed" for "threw") and, in some areas, the use of "s" in all simple present tense verb forms ("I goes", "we goes").<sup>128</sup> Features of Newfoundland English vocabulary include words and expressions that are archaic or obsolete elsewhere (eg. "child" to denote a female child, "hat" to denote a bunch or a heap and "leary" to denote "hungry") and familiar English words used in

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<sup>125</sup>McArthur 689.

<sup>126</sup>McArthur 104.

<sup>127</sup>Mark Orkin, Speaking Canadian English (Toronto: General Publishing Company Limited, 1970): 100.

<sup>128</sup>McArthur 689.

peculiar senses (eg. "clever" to denote large and handsome).<sup>129</sup> Such distinct features of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary would undoubtedly lend a tremendous amount of local colour and flavour to a text, something which, as we have seen, standard Canadian English is more or less incapable of providing. Just as important, they would give the translation a specifically Canadian edge.

Despite these apparent advantages, however, Hatim and Mason point out that "rendering dialect by dialect runs the risk of creating unintended effects."<sup>130</sup> For example, will an audience reading a translation of *Les Belles-Soeurs* into a Newfoundland English dialect realize that the play is set in Montreal and that the characters are speaking Montreal French or is the local character of Newfoundland English so distinctive that they will automatically assume the action takes place in some remote part of Newfoundland?<sup>131</sup> Without ruling out such a possibility entirely, we should also not underestimate an audience's intelligence. As Bowman points out, people can read a translation of Chekov and realize that the characters are speaking Russian in Russia,<sup>132</sup> so we see no reason why they should not be able to understand that

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<sup>129</sup>Orkin, Speaking Canadian English 96-97.

<sup>130</sup>Hatim and Mason 41.

<sup>131</sup>Bowman brings up this possibility with respect to the Scots dialect. Bowman, Image and Identity: Theatre and Cinema in Scotland and Quebec 54.

<sup>132</sup>Bowman, Image and Identity: Theatre and Cinema in Scotland and Quebec 54.

Tremblay's women are speaking French in Quebec. Nonetheless, it seems that the translator rendering Tremblay's play into a Newfoundland dialect would do as Van Burek and Glassco and Findlay and Bowman have done in their respective translations - both of which retain the Quebec setting - and that is to keep the appellations "Madame" and "Mademoiselle" throughout in order to remind the audience that these are French-speaking women.

The translator could, one might argue, adapt Tremblay's play to a Newfoundland setting, but this would bring with it a whole new set of problems. First, the characters' names would have to be changed (what is the likelihood of finding a group of women in an Anglophone community with such names as Germaine Lauzon, Lisette de Courval and Des Neiges Verrette?) as would their references to European French culture (eg. p. 101) and their private jokes in the context of the relative masculinity of French and French-Canadian actors (p. 103). Finally, the play's ending - infused with political irony, in which Tremblay's characters stand at attention singing the Canadian national anthem - would also have to be altered so as to convey a similar political message immediately relevant and perceptible to an English Canadian audience. (We shall return to the question of adapting *Les Belles-Soeurs* to an English-Canadian setting and the problems involved therein in more detail in Part III).

Bowman and Findlay retained the Quebec setting in their translation of *Les Belles-Soeurs* into modern Scots for another reason. "We were never tempted to adapt locale," says Bowman.

"The whole point of the enterprise was to say of Scots that it can be used in this way to translate another play into a modern vernacular language... We wanted, in a sense, to challenge the maturity of Scottish theatre goers, to accept that the play could legitimately be done in the Scottish vernacular while retaining its Québec milieu."<sup>133</sup> And so it could. *The Guid Sisters* was both a critical and popular success. Robert Lévesque of *Le Devoir* announced: "Attention événement! Pour la première fois à Montréal, on peut voir une production étrangère du 'classique' de Michel Tremblay, *Les Belles-Soeurs*. Et cette production est superbe!"<sup>134</sup> while Pat Donnelly of *The Gazette* commented that *Les Belles-Soeurs* "loses nothing by translation into Scots dialect ... The language is a revelation."<sup>135</sup> Similarly, Tremblay himself has translated a number of foreign plays into *joual*.<sup>136</sup> His aim in doing so was not only to challenge the automatic assumption in Quebec that foreign plays - both classical and contemporary - had to be translated into standard French and adapted to France but, like Findlay and Bowman, to test the resources of the language, to

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<sup>133</sup>Martin Bowman and William Findlay, interview with Denis Salter, "Who's Speaking Here? Tremblay's Scots Voice," Canadian Theatre Review, no. 74 (Spring 1993): p. 44.

<sup>134</sup>Robert Lévesque, "D'Ecosse, une grande production des *Belles-Soeurs*," Le Devoir, vendredi, 2 octobre 1992: A4.

<sup>135</sup>Pat Donnelly, "Scots version of *Les Belles-Soeurs* loses nothing in translation," The Montreal Gazette, Saturday, October 3, 1992: E14.

<sup>136</sup>William Findlay, "The Scots Language Context to Translating *Les Belles-Soeurs*," Image and Identity: Theatre and Cinema in Scotland and Quebec, ed. Ian Lockerbie (Stirling: The John Grierson Archive/University of Stirling, 1988): 38.

see what it was capable of.<sup>137</sup> Initially, his audience had trouble disassociating *joual* from Quebec so he had to adapt his plays to a Quebec setting.<sup>138</sup> After a while, however, they came to accept non-adapted translations into *joual* just as they had adapted translations into standard French.<sup>139</sup> It would certainly be interesting to do as Bowman and Findlay have done with Scots and Tremblay with *joual* and test the resources of Newfoundland English, see if it, too, can transcend its specific geographical limitations and get closer to capturing the unique flavour of the original than does standard dialect.

There are other foreseeable disadvantages to using a non-standard Canadian dialect such as Newfoundland English as a translation equivalent for Tremblay's *joual* that deserve mentioning as well. First, the language might prove to be a barrier for Canadian audiences outside Newfoundland. Once again, however, while a Newfoundland dialect would undoubtedly require a little effort on the part of the TL reader, it seems that if the Scots translation is not overly difficult to understand,<sup>140</sup> then neither would a translation into Newfoundland English. Yet even if it

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<sup>137</sup>Findlay, Image and Identity: Theatre and Cinema in Scotland and Quebec 38.

<sup>138</sup>Findlay, Image and Identity 38.

<sup>139</sup>Findlay, Image and Identity 38.

<sup>140</sup>Bill Findlay points out that "Not only did critics in Canada stress that the Scots was not unduly difficult for Canadians to understand, but critics in the USA did, too." Bill Findlay, "Translating Tremblay into Scots," Theatre Research International, vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 145.

were, the TL reader, to quote Douglas Mance, "humbly recognizing that he isn't as familiar with this (dialect) as a 'native speaker' of it would be, will allow his imagination to fill in the meaning from the context and be able to go right on - after having experienced for a moment that imaginative projection of significance which is fundamental to all literature, and perhaps in a lesser scale to all languages."<sup>141</sup> We should also bear in mind that, just as Tremblay had to transpose his *joual* so as not to make too much a demand on his audience, so most likely would the person translating the play into a Newfoundland English dialect.

Finally, the use of a Newfoundland English dialect as a translation equivalent for Tremblay's *joual* might automatically lead some people to infer that Newfoundland English is associated with low status. It is therefore important that the translator be aware of any possible social implications associated with whatever Newfoundland English dialect he chooses.<sup>142</sup>

Van Burek and Glassco are not only professional translators but very competent ones as well, so it seems unlikely that the possibility of using Newfoundland English as an equivalent for Tremblay's *joual* did not cross their minds. As professionals, however, they obviously knew better than to try to reproduce a dialect that was not their own. In Chapter 2 we saw that in order for dialect to come across in a literary work as being believable,

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<sup>141</sup>Douglas Mance, "Acadjén, Eh? On Translating Acadian Literature," Canadian Drama, vo.. 2, no. 2 (Fall 1976): 191.

<sup>142</sup>Hatim & Mason 40.

it does not have to be rigorously authentic. It only has to *look* authentic. The same applies to a translation of that literary work. In other words, for a translation of *Les Belles-Soeurs* into Newfoundland English to be believable, it too must be appear to be authentic. It goes without saying that this is a feat which can be achieved only by a native speaker of the language or, at the very least, someone who has had considerable exposure to it.

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Each of the preceding chapters has dealt with an aspect of Tremblay's idiom that is particularly vulnerable in translation. Losses are inevitable, and the translator's task is to minimize them. Michel Tremblay himself, asked whether or not he agreed with the classic Italian expression "Traduttore, traditore?" ("He who translates betrays"), replied: "Of course, it's true for everyone, even the greatest genius on the planet. I very much hope that Chekhov is an even greater writer in Russian than he is in French or English... But we cannot say 'no' to world literature. It's wonderful to be betrayed in the language of another person."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>Michel Tremblay quoted in Alexander Craig, "Traduttore Traditore? The work of Michel Tremblay translated into Scots," Performing Arts and Entertainment in Canada, vol. 28, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 9.

**PART II**

**LANGUAGE STRATEGIES**

## CHAPTER 7

### LANGUAGE STRATEGIES

In Part I of this thesis we focused on Tremblay's use of *joual*. But there is another, equally important aspect to his dramatic idiom as well. In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay deploys a number of language strategies, each of which serves a very specific function within his text. These include the shifting of language levels as well as the use of repetition, impersonal pronouns and word-play. Such highly imaginative use of language renders the translation of his play all the more challenging, as we shall soon see.

#### Shifts in Language Levels

Perhaps the most obvious language strategy employed by Tremblay is the shift in language levels for purposes of social satire. Like any working-class dialect, *joual* has a certain stigma or sense of shame associated with it, the attitude that it is socially inferior to the "français de France". Tremblay violently rejects such a way of thinking. "Quelqu'un qui a honte du joual," he says, "c'est quelqu'un qui a honte de ses origines, d'être Québécois."<sup>144</sup> In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, like many of his other plays, he mocks such a "colonized mentality"<sup>145</sup> outright by

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<sup>144</sup>Michel Tremblay quoted in Augustin Turenne, Nous parlons français (Montréal: Editions la Presse, 1973): 11.

<sup>145</sup>Denis Salter, "Ancestral Voices," Brick, no. 46 (Summer 1993): 54.

drawing a contrast between the articulation of *joual* and that of the French of France.

The language of one of the *belles-soeurs*, Lisette de Courval, is distinct from that of the other fourteen women. Self-conscious about being stigmatized as poorly educated and lower-class, Lisette attempts to speak what she thinks is the French of France. The following exchange between Lisette de Courval and Marie-Ange Brouillette on page 25 illustrates the sharp contrast between the former's language and the *joual* spoken by the fourteen other women:

- MARIE-ANGE BROUILLETTE: Moé, chus pas contre les timbres, c'est ben commode ... Mais chus contre les concours, par exemple!
- LISETTE DE COURVAL: Pourquoi, donc? Ça rend une famille heureuse!
- MARIE-ANGE BROUILLETTE: Peut-être, peut-être, mais ça fait chier les familles qui vivent alentour, par exemple!
- LISETTE DE COURVAL: Mon Dieu, que vous êtes donc mal embouchée, madame Brouillette! Regardez, moi, j'perle bien, puis j'm'en sens pas plus mal!
- MARIE-ANGE BROUILLETTE: J'parle comme que j'peux, pis j'dis c'que j'ai à dire, c'est toute! Chus pas t'allée en Urope, moé, chus pas t'obligée de me forcer pour bien perler!

Although Lisette occasionally forgets she's trying to speak "good" French and lapses into *joual* (a point to which we shall return shortly), it is quite easy to distinguish her speech from that of her neighbour. For example, Marie-Ange says "moé", "pis" and "ben" whereas Lisette uses "moi", "puis" and "bien". In translation,

however, these differences are by no means as pronounced, thus making it more difficult for the TL reader to recognize what Tremblay is doing. Let us take a look:

MARIE-ANGE BROUILLETTE: Mind you, I've got nothing against stamps, they're useful ... What I don't like is the contests.

LISETTE DE COURVAL: But why? They can make families happy.

MARIE-ANGE BROUILLETTE: Maybe, but they're a pain in the ass for the people next door.

LISETTE DE COURVAL: Mme. Brouillette, your language! I speak properly and I'm none the worse for it.

MARIE-ANGE BROUILLETTE: I talk the way I talk, and I say what I got to say. I never went to Europe, so I can't afford to talk like you. (p. 14)

Van Burek and Glassco have, of course, made some attempt to differentiate between the speech of the two women. For example, Lisette uses the expression "I'm none the worse for it" which, in addition to being quite formal, would likely be used by a more educated speaker. Marie-Ange, on the other hand, uses incorrect forms of the verbs "to go" and "to have" when she says "I never went to Europe" and "I say what I got to say", as well as the vulgarism "a pain in the ass". Apart from that, however, there is little to indicate that Lisette is speaking a more standard language than her neighbour.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>Once again we might mention the fact that Van Burek and Glassco were more than likely relying on the actors' diction to compensate for such weaknesses.

The lack of a single, codified class-related dialect in Canadian English makes it extremely difficult to capture in translation Tremblay's manipulation of different linguistic registers. However, Van Burek and Glassco could have conveyed the contrast between *joual* and "standard" French more adequately had they used more phonological/graphological features and syntactical deviations in rendering the speech of Tremblay's characters in the first place. In doing so, they could then have shown that Lisette is speaking a more standard French than her neighbours simply by omitting these features from her speech. Let us take a look at the difference this would have made:

LISETTE DE COURVAL:           Mme Brouillette, your language! I speak properly, and I'm none the worse for it!

MARIE-ANGE BROUILLETTE:   I talk the way I talk 'n I say what I gotta say! I never went to your bloody Europe, so I can' afford to talk like you!

The use of phonological/graphological features would have constituted a visual and thus easily identifiable means of differentiating between the speech of Lisette de Courval and that of the other fourteen women. As for the use of swearwords, we have already seen that they can be a way not only of adding a bit of colour or flavour to the language of Tremblay's characters but also of helping convey their social status. The most appropriate place to insert swearwords would thus have been in those instances where the speech of Lisette de Courval is being contrasted with that of the other fourteen women, as in the above example. As before, it

goes without saying that the translator must be very cautious as to the quantity and severity of the swearwords he inserts into his text.

There is also a sense of irony in the fact that Lisette often trips herself up by forgetting that she is trying to speak a "superior" French compared with her neighbours. Once again, however, the English translation fails to adequately capture this nuance. A look at the following passage and its translation will illustrate our point:

... A Paris, tout le monde perle bien, c'est du vrai français partout ... C'est pas comme icitte... J'les méprise toutes! Je ne remettrai jamais les pieds ici! Léopold avait raison, c'monde-là, c'est du monde cheap, y faut pas les fréquenter, y faut même pas en parler, y faut les cacher! Y savent pas vivre! Nous autres, on est sortis de là, pis on devrait pas jamais revenir! Mon Dieu que j'ai donc honte d'eux-autres! (p. 59)

... In Paris, you know, everyone speaks so beautifully and there they talk real French ... Not like here. I despise everyone of them. I'll never set foot in this place again! Léopold was right about these people. These people are cheap. We shouldn't mix with them. Shouldn't talk about them... They should be hidden away somewhere. They don't know how to live! We broke away from this and we must never, ever go back. Dear God, they make me so ashamed! (p. 54)

The French passage contains several features which are out of register with Lisette's mannerisms and affectations, including the use of "perle" for "parle", "y" for "il", "pis" for "puis", "icitte" for "ici" and "pus" for "plus". Moreover, like the other *belles-soeurs*, Lisette has the tendency to omit the "ne" part of negative (eg. "y faut pas", "y savent pas", etc.), and use anglicisms (eg. "cheap"). As Martin Bowman points out, "Make no

mistake about it. Lisette de Courval is one of the *belles-soeurs*, but her sense of shame leads her to deny her identity and develop a pathetic and frail mask of respectability."<sup>147</sup>

When we look at the English, it becomes clear that while Van Burek and Glassco have attempted to convey the fact that Lisette occasionally forgets she's trying to speak "good" French, the subtlety with which this nuance comes across in the source text is completely lost in translation. Statements like "In Paris, you know, everyone speaks so beautifully and there they talk real French" and "Léopold was right about these people. These people are cheap," only sound awkward and unnatural. Any English speaker for instance, poorly educated or otherwise, would more than likely say "Léopold was right about these people. They're cheap". The absence of a subject pronoun in "Shouldn't talk about them" only adds to this unnaturalness, especially since it is the one and only time throughout the entire translation that a character uses such a construction. In other words, Van Burek and Glassco have obviously omitted the subject pronoun as a means of conveying the impression that Lisette occasionally reverts back to talking like her neighbours. This would have been an appropriate translation strategy were it not for the fact that her neighbours never omit subject pronouns.

We mentioned above that Van Burek and Glassco could have more adequately conveyed the impression that Lisette is speaking a more

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<sup>147</sup>Bowman, Image and Identity: Theatre and Cinema in Scotland and Quebec 52.

standard French than her neighbours by omitting from her speech certain phonological/graphological features, syntactical deviations and swearwords used by the other women. In doing so, they could then have more adequately conveyed the fact that she occasionally betrays her command of the language she seeks to imitate simply by reinserting some of these features back into her speech.

Another instance where Van Burek and Glassco have failed to adequately distinguish the speech of Lisette de Courval from that of the other women can be seen in the following exchange between Lisette and the ever-vulgar Rose Ouimet, in which the latter is vigorously defending her way of talking. The French text runs thus (p. 31):

LISETTE: C'est vous, madame Ouimet, qui disiez tout à l'heure qu'on n'est pas venues ici pour se quereller?

ROSE: Vous, là, mêlez-vous de ce qui vous regarde! D'abord, j'ai pas dit quereller, j'ai dit chicaner!

And the English translation is (p. 21):

LISETTE: Wasn't it you, Mme. Ouimet, who just said we didn't come here to quarrel?

ROSE: Hey, you mind your own business. Besides, I didn't say 'quarrel.' I said 'fight'.

The French verbs "se quereller" and "chicaner" belong to two different registers in French: "se quereller" is more formal whereas "chicaner" is colloquial<sup>146</sup>. If we look at the transla-

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<sup>146</sup>Henri Cottez et al, eds., Le Petit Robert (Montréal: Les Dictionnaires Robert-Canada S.C.C., 1987): 304.

tion, however, we see that the same relationship does not hold between "quarrel" and "fight" in English. While "fight" may indeed be more colloquial than "quarrel", it is by no means as colloquial as "chicaner" is in comparison with "quereller". Thus, when Rose says "I didn't say 'quarrel'. I said 'fight'", the fact that Tremblay is in fact holding Lisette's speech up to ridicule is lost in translation and the TL reader is simply left to wonder why Rose is making such a big fuss over which word she did or did not use. This could have easily been avoided had the translators used an equally colloquial equivalent for "chicaner" such as "scrap".

#### Frequently-repeated words

We have already seen that the phonetic reductions, syntactical deviations and the large proportion of the swearwords characteristic of *joual* convey the impression that Tremblay's characters are poorly educated, working-class people. Tremblay further emphasizes this point through the use of frequently repeated words.<sup>149</sup> Each of the *belles-soeurs* has the tendency to milk a word for all it's worth. A case in point is Germaine Lauzon who, in the following excerpt, is on the phone with her sister Rose explaining the array of prizes she will collect with her trading stamps:

... Oui, y'a assez des belles affaires, tu devrais voir ça! C'est pas croyable ... J'vas avoir un poêle, un frigidaire, un set de cuisine ... J'pense que j'vas prendre le rouge avec des étoiles dorées. J'sais pas si tu l'as déjà vu ... Y'est assez beau, aie! J'vas avoir des chaudrons, une coutellerie, un set de vaisselle, des salières, des poivrières, des verres en verre taillé avec le motif 'Caprice' là, t'sais si y sont

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<sup>149</sup>Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 49.

beaux... J'vas avoir un set de chambre style colonial au grand complet avec accessoires ... Ah! j'te dis, j'vas avoir une vraie belle chambre! Pour le salon, j'ai un set complet avec le stirio, la tv, le tapis de nylon synthétique, les cadres... Ah! les vrais beaux cadres! T'sais, là, les cadres chinois avec du velours ... C'tu assez beau, hein? ... Pis tiens-toé ben ma p'tite fille, j'vas avoir des plats en verre soufflé! Ben oui, pareil comme ceux de ta belle-soeur Aline! Pis même, j'pense qu'y sont encore plus beaux! ... Tu devrais voir c'qu'y ont pour les chambres d'enfants, c'est de toute beauté de voir ça! (pp. 19-21)

In this one passage, Germaine uses the word "beau" (or some variation of it) *eight* times, her inability to express herself beyond the most basic level thus coming across with perfect accuracy. Now let's take a look at the translation:

They've got the most beautiful stuff, wait til you see it. It's unbelievable! ... I'm gonna get a new stove, new fridge, new kitchen table and chairs. I think I'll take the red one with the gold stars. I don't think you've seen that one, ... Oh, it's so beautiful, Rose. I'm getting new pots, new cutlery, a full set of dishes, salt and pepper shakers... Oh, and you know those glasses with the 'caprice' design. Well, I'm taking a set of those too ... I'm getting a Colonial bedroom suite with full accessories ... I'm telling you Rose, it's gonna be one beautiful bedroom. And the living room! Wait till you hear this ... I've got a big TV with a built-in stereo, a synthetic nylon carpet, real paintings ... You know those Chinese paintings I've always wanted, the ones with the velvet? ... Aren't they though? Oh, now get a load of this... I'm gonna have the same crystal platters as your sister-in-law, Aline! I'm not sure, but I think mine are even nicer ... Have you seen what they've got for kids' bedrooms? Rose, it's fabulous! (pp. 9-10)

Van Burek and Glassco do not seem to have been aware of Tremblay's repeated use of the word "beau" as a means of emphasizing the linguistic limitations of this character for they have only used the word "beautiful" on three occasions in their translation. As a result, they have failed to convey to the TL reader the impression which is rooted in the source text passage, ie. that Germaine

is an ill-educated, working-class woman who lacks the linguistic skills to express herself adequately. This, of course, could have been avoided had they used the word "beautiful" repeatedly throughout the passage. For example, instead of rendering the lines "Pour le salon, j'ai un set complet avec le stiro, la tv, le tapis de nylon synthétique, les cadres... Ah! les vrais beaux cadres! T'sais, là, les cadres chinois avec du velours ... C'tu assez beau, hein?" by "I've got a big TV with a built-in stereo, a synthetic nylon carpet, real paintings... You know those Chinese paintings I've always wanted, the ones with the velvet? ... Aren't they though?", they could have used something like "I've got a big TV with a built-in stereo, a synthetic nylon carpet, and paintings ... Real beautiful paintings! You know, the Chinese ones with the velvet? Yeah, they're just beautiful, aren't they?"

This is not the only instance where Van Burek and Glassco have failed to recognize Tremblay's intent in using the same word repeatedly. A closer look at two other passages from the source text and their translations into English will illustrate our point.

In this first excerpt, Des-Neiges Verrette is announcing the prizes to be expected at her brush demonstration: "Vous savez," she says, "y donne des belles tasses fancyes à celle qui fait la démonstration ... Des vraies belles tasses de fantaisie ... Vous devriez les voir, sont assez belles!... (p. 51), the translation for which is "You know, they give away those fancy cups to the one who holds the demonstration ... Fantasy Chinaware ... You should see them, they're gorgeous" (p. 45). We prefer Renate Usmani's

translation - "He gives out lovely cups and saucers to the one who hosts the demonstration, really lovely fancy ones ... just lovely ... you should just see them, I tell you, lovely!"<sup>150</sup> - although we would replace "lovely" with a less British, more North American word such as "gorgeous".

Here is another example from *Les Belles-Soeurs* and its translation. In this passage Des-Neiges reveals her fondness for dirty stories. The French text runs thus:

J'trouve que ça fait du bien de conter des histoires cochonnes, des fois ... Ah! sont pas toutes cochonnes, ses histoires, ah! non, y'en a des correctes! .... Des histoires osées, ça fait pas longtemps qu'y m'en conte ... Des fois, sont tellement cochonnes, que j'rougis... (p. 53)

And the translation is:

I must admit, I've always liked stories that are a bit off-colour... And it's good for you to tell them sometimes. Not all of his jokes are dirty, mind you. Lots of them are clean. And it's only lately that he's been telling me the spicy ones. Sometimes they're so dirty I blush! ... (p. 46)

The word "dirty" appears only twice in the translation whereas Tremblay has, quite intentionally, used "cochonne" three times in his text. What is more, it seems highly unlikely that a poorly educated, working-class person would even use a word like "off-colour" in the first place.

The translations of the above passages clearly indicate that Van Burek and Glassco failed to realize Tremblay's intent in repeating certain words. In so doing, they have let slip by yet

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<sup>150</sup>Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 49.

another chance to accurately reflect the social status of his characters.

### Impersonal manner of expression

In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay violently condemns family life for several reasons, one of the most important being that it gives rise to a lack of communication and, consequently, a deep sense of alienation. Tremblay has found a linguistic counterpart for this state in the use of third person and impersonal pronouns.<sup>151</sup> Germaine Lauzon, for example, talks to her own daughter Linda in the following manner, revealing, as Renate Usmiani points out, "a profound psychological dysfunction"<sup>152</sup>: "Désamez-vous pour élever ça, pis que c'est que ça vous rapporte?" (p. 17). Similarly, she uses the third person pronoun with her when she says "Tiens, r'gard-la! J'viens d'y dire que j'peux pas le sentir, pis a veut l'inviter à soir! (p. 18). The translation is "I kill myself for you and what do I get in return?" (p. 7) for the first and "Mother of God, I just told you I can't stand him and you want to bring him home tonight" (p. 8) for the second, neither of which, of course, reflect any lack of communication or alienation between the characters. This weakness in the translation could easily have been avoided by using the more impersonal third person pronoun rather than the second (ie. "I kill myself for her and what do I get in return?" and "Mother of God, I just told her/the girl I

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<sup>151</sup>Usmiani, Theatre of Frustration 106.

<sup>152</sup>Usmiani, Theatre of Frustration 107..

can't stand him and she wants to bring him home tonight").

### Word-play

Tremblay also makes abundant use of word-play in *Les Belles-Soeurs*. When Yvette Longpré, for example, is telling the women about her daughter's honeymoon in the Canary Islands, the wise-cracking Rose, true to form, cuts in with the following remark: "Les îles Canaries? Ça doit être plein de serins, par là!" (p. 27). The humour lies in the fact that the French word "serin" can refer to either a "canary" or a "silly, stupid, idiotic person".<sup>153</sup> Van Burek and Glassco have rendered this line by "The Canary Islands? A honeymoon in bird shit, eh?" (p. 16) which, although a clever and witty translation, does not contain a pun. Moreover, "serin" in the sense of "a stupid person" is not considered to be vulgar usage in French whereas "shit" in English is.<sup>154</sup> While it is by no means uncharacteristic of Rose to use such language, the translator should try to avoid unnecessary vulgarisms whenever possible. Thus, something like "The Canary Islands? Nothin' but birdbrains over there, I'll bet!" or even "The Canary Islands? I hear it's for the birds!", might have been more suitable given the fact that, like the French, both contain puns but no vulgarisms. The first of the two even contains the

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<sup>153</sup>Peter Collin et al, eds., Harraps's Shorter French and English Dictionary (London/Paris: Harrap, 1982): 685.

<sup>154</sup>Diana Feri et al, eds., Le Robert & Collins Senior (Paris: HarperCollins Publishers and Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1993): 729.

same pun as that found in the source text (ie. both "serin" and "birdbrain" refer to a stupid person).

Another example of Tremblay's use of word-play can be seen in the following example. Each of the *belles-soeurs* has a certain penchant for entering contests. In this excerpt, taken from page 43, Lisette de Courval is trying to get her friends to figure out the mystery word in last month's issue of *Chatelaine* magazine. She gives them three clues:

LISETTE: ... Mon premier (syllable) est un félin ...

ROSE: Un flim?

LISETTE: Un félin ... bien voyons ... 'chat' ...  
Mon second est un rongeur ... bien ... 'rat'

ROSE: Mon mari, aussi, c't'un rat, pis c'est pas un rongeur ...

LISETTE: Mon troisième est une préposition ... Mon tout est un jeu de société ... C'est pas pourtant difficile ... Chat-rat-de ... Charade!

Van Burek and Glassco have found an intelligent solution to this word-game by keeping the word "charade" in English and providing clever clues as to the meaning of each syllable (pp. 36-37). Thus, Lisette's first syllable is "a Persian King" (a "shah"), her second is "for killing bugs" ("Raid") and her whole word is "a social game" (ie. "shah-raid" = Charade). They have also very deftly handled the humour in Rose's quick-witted interjections. For example, when Lisette tells the women that her first clue is "a Persian King", Rose cuts in "Onassis?" (p. 36). When she tells them that her second is "Raid", she replies "My husband's a worm,

do you think it would work on him?" (p. 36).

Des-Neiges Verrette recently entered a contest as well. *Hachette* books, she tells her friends, was looking for a new slogan and she came up with "Achète bien qui achète chez Hachette" (p. 46), a clever idea given the resemblance between "achète" and "Hachette" in both sound and form. Once again Van Burek and Glassco have successfully met the challenge of finding an appropriate solution to the witty word-games played by Tremblay with their translation "Hachette will chop the cost of your books" (p. 39) which, of course, contains the play on words between "hachette" in French and "hatchet" in English and between "hatchet" and "chop".

There is another play on words during the conversation about Monique Bergeron. When Rose describes Monique's dress, she says "J'sais pas si vous vous rappelez de ses shorts rouges ... y'étaient short all right!" (p. 99). The translation "Remember those red shorts she had on, those short shorts?" (p. 99) neither conveys Tremblay's use of an anglicism nor the play on words with "short". As a result, the line is completely devoid of humour. While, as we have seen, there is little the translators could have done to prevent the loss of the bilingual element save marking the English word graphically by the use of bold characters, they could well have retained the word-play, hence the humour, had they rendered the line by "Remember those red shorts she had on? They were short all right!" instead.

There is also an element of unconscious humour to be found in the following conversation on page 48 in which Rose mistakenly uses

the word "étoile" for "étole" during a heated discussion of the pros and cons of real furs:

Rose: On sait ben, elle, a l'a la grosse étoile de vison.

Lisette: D'ailleurs, j'vas changer mon étole de vison  
l'automne prochaine. Ça fait trois ans que je  
l'ai, puis elle commence à être pas mal maganée...

The humour lies in the fact that Rose mispronounces the word "étole" because it is a concept that is beyond the context of her everyday life.<sup>155</sup> It seems that Van Burek and Glassco have either failed to take note of this element of humour in the source text or chose to disregard it, as they have translated Rose's statement by "Sure, we all know who's got a fat mink stole!" (p. 41). This could easily be corrected by having Rose mispronounce the word "stole" in English or by having her misuse the word in some other way, as in "Sure, we all know who's got a fat mink shawl!". Although "shawl" and "stole" share similar features (eg. both are articles of women's clothing worn as a covering for the shoulders), they also differ in several respects, including the fact that the former is usually made of cloth whereas the latter can be made of cloth or fur (a little detail which, incidently, just might be unfamiliar to someone who has never owned a mink stole).

Perhaps the most obvious example of Tremblay's use of word-play is the title of his play which suggests two meanings, the first and most obvious being "sisters-in-law". Although there is only one sister-in-law in Tremblay's play, that being Thérèse

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<sup>155</sup>Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 49.

Dubuc, the sister of Germaine's husband, it is important to understand that *Les Belles-Soeurs* deals with the notion of "family" in several different senses. In the narrow sense of the term, "family" encompasses the traditional nuclear unit of parents and children. However, it also used in the extended sense to include the larger family unit comprised of a host of other relatives - sisters-, mothers- and fathers-in-law, aunts, uncles and cousins - most of whom we hear about throughout the course of the play but do not see. It quickly becomes apparent that what little social interaction Tremblay's characters do have with the outside world consists largely if not entirely of their circle of relatives. According to Jean LeMoyne, this is precisely one of the problems with the family in Quebec society:

... la parenté est arrivée pour ne plus s'en aller. Parce que nous sommes toujours en famille et que notre maudite famille nous réduit tous à la même expérience aliénante. Nous nous connaissons par coeur les uns les autres et qui d'entre nous peut nous surprendre.<sup>156</sup>

Tremblay's title is thus, as Bosley points out, "a kind of shorthand to indicate the complex social network which is portrayed in the play."<sup>157</sup> Finally, the play deals with the notion of "family" in the figurative sense. The fifteen women in the play may not all share a physical bond, but they do share a spiritual one. Prisoners to their husbands and children, they are frustrated, bored and trapped. According to Renate Usmiani, "Tremblay's title

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<sup>156</sup>Laurent Mailhot, "Les belles-soeurs ou l'enfer des femmes," Etudes françaises, no. 6 (1970): 99.

<sup>157</sup>Bosley 144.

emphasizes their sisterhood of women and the closed world in which they live: "belles-soeurs", "sisters-in-law", implying that all of them, the four sisters, the sister-in-law and the assorted friends and neighbours who join the party, share a life so similar they might as well be sisters."<sup>158</sup>

The second meaning evoked by Tremblay's title is "belles-soeurs" (ie. "beautiful sisters"). The irony, of course, lies in the fact that throughout the course of the play the women show themselves to be vulgar, catty, backstabbing and jealous. In other words, a far cry from the "beautiful" women the play's title refers to.

Van Burek and Glassco have made no attempt to translate Tremblay's title. In Bosley's view, to try to do so would be "to ask us in an Anglophone society to look more closely at the relationships between the characters in the play ... If the title is left in a foreign language, then somehow the vagueness of the (complex social network portrayed in the play) also remains, and the very title serves as a kind of door between two worlds."<sup>159</sup> We disagree. A title like *The Sisters-in-law* or *The Beautiful Sisters*, although it might lead to some confusion, would at least have some significance for the TL reader. The French title, on the other hand, has absolutely none (assuming, of course, as the translator must, that the target audience has no knowledge of the source language). Thus, rather than serve "as a kind of door"

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<sup>158</sup>Usmiani, Theatre of Frustration 44.

<sup>159</sup>Bosley 144.

which allows the TL reader to gain insight into Tremblay's world, the French title becomes instead a roadblock denying him any access.

In all fairness, the pun makes Tremblay's title extremely difficult to translate into English. Both *The Sisters-in-law* and *The Beautiful Sisters* can thus be ruled out. But what about something like *Sister-hoods*? Not only is it a pun but, more importantly, its two meanings - "sisterhood" and "sister hoods" - are similar to those reflected in the French original. "Sisterhood" draws the TL reader's attention to the spiritual or "sisterly" bond which exists between the fifteen women in the play while "sister hoods" points to the "unsisterly" way in which they treat one another. Finally, the fact that "hoods" is used in the figurative sense lends an additional element of humour to the title.

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The various language strategies employed by Tremblay combine to lend to his work artistic craftsmanship. The fact that Van Burek and Glassco have unaccountably overlooked most of these devices in their text not only seriously diminishes the quality of their translation, but also leads us to question their attentiveness to all those little nuances which make Tremblay's text the masterpiece it is.

**PART III**

**CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF TREMBLAY'S SUBJECT MATTER**

## CHAPTER 8

### SOCIAL CONNOTATIONS

*Les Belles-Soeurs* was a hit in English Canada - both in production and in print. What is more, it has stood the test of time. The première at the St. Lawrence Centre in Toronto on April 3, 1973 played to sold-out crowds and a revival at the Shakespearean festival in Stratford, Ontario in 1991 drew larger audiences than any other play except Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*.<sup>160</sup> The original translation, published in 1974, went into at least 10 printings and the revised version, published some twenty years later, is already in its second printing.<sup>161</sup> Curiously enough, however, Tremblay has often insisted that "When I speak about an audience, I always mean the québécois audience, the Montreal audience even. I don't write for the whole world, I've never wanted to write for the whole world, I write for the people who live right here."<sup>162</sup> Because of this highly local quality of his work, he has often been referred to by his critics at home as "le plus québécois de nos auteurs."<sup>163</sup> The people of Quebec strongly identify with the struggles and aspirations of Tremblay's characters. They are part of their world. But to what extent are

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<sup>160</sup>Brian Willer, "Michel Tremblay: A Writer With a Global Reach," Maclean's, vol. 104, no. 52: 36.

<sup>161</sup>Information provided by an employee of Talonbooks in Vancouver.

<sup>162</sup>Michel Tremblay, interview with Renate Usmiani, Canadian Theatre Review, no. 24 (1976): 31.

<sup>163</sup>Usmiani, "The Tremblay Opus: Unity in Diversity," Canadian Theatre Review, no. 24 (1976): 12.

they also a part of ours?

**The Family:**

In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay uses Germaine Lauzon's stamp pasting party as a backdrop to present a panoramic view of everyday family life in working-class Montreal. However, rather than portraying the family as a happy unit, Tremblay depicts it as a prison cell, a trap from which there is seemingly no escape. Tremblay's negative view of the family stems from the way in which family life developed in Quebec under the influence and pressures of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>164</sup> Because of these pressures, he says, members of a family in Quebec are denied the right to determine their own lives and thus their own happiness:<sup>165</sup>

I most often write about the family because I want to put a bomb in the family cell ... Society decides what the family should be. The members of the family do not decide. A family has unwritten laws to obey, rules to fulfil, and these rules are decided by outsiders.<sup>166</sup>

Tremblay's *belles-soeurs* are a group of women who have been shaped and dominated by rigid sanctions imposed upon them by the traditional society in which they live.<sup>167</sup> They have been taught at an early age to accept the Catholic notion that a woman's main purpose in life is to get married and have a family. But family living is

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<sup>164</sup>Usmiani 205.

<sup>165</sup>Usmiani, Canadian Drama 205.

<sup>166</sup>Michel Tremblay quoted in G. Anthony, ed., Stage Voices: Twelve Canadian Playwrights Talk about their Lives and Work (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1978): 282.

<sup>167</sup>Rudakoff 66.

a breeding ground for alienation - both physical and emotional. This alienation crystallizes itself in anger, despair and a deep sense of frustration and completely destroys inner contentment.

The *belles-soeurs* are literally enclosed in the house, alienated from the outside world. This hermetic environment, however, has left them deeply frustrated and they complain bitterly and endlessly about the monotony and drudgery of their daily existence. Tremblay has formulated a key phrase which the women use to describe their lives and which sums up all of their anger and frustration over their alienated condition: "une maudite vie plate" (p. 24). Monday they do the laundry, Tuesday the ironing and Wednesday the shopping. Every day starts and ends the same: "J'me lève, pis j'prépare le déjeuner. Toujours la même maudite affaire! Des toasts, du café, des oeufs, du bacon. J'rveille le monde, j'les mets dehors ... Pis le soir, on regarde la télévision" (p. 23-24). Tremblay presents us with a truly hellish picture of the prison of family life. The mother is exhausted and miserable, husbands are never around to help out and children are ungrateful little monsters who eat like pigs and wreck the house. Poverty and unemployment loom in the background. The women's greatest pleasure in life and their only means of escape from the emptiness of their daily existence is the weekly parish bingo: "Moé, j'aime ça, le bingo! Moé, c'est ben simple, j'adore ça le bingo! Moé, y a rien au monde que j'aime plus que le bingo!" (p. 86). As Renate Usmiani so rightly observes, "A better illustration of the *maudite vie plate* could hardly be found: life must be arid indeed when a bingo

game comes to represent the peak of excitement!"<sup>168</sup> What is more, the monotony and drudgery of everyday family living creates a wall between family members. Lost in their private worlds, Tremblay's characters speak *past* each other, never really at one another. In fact, the only time they communicate is when they are fighting. This lack of communication results in an extreme emotional alienation, one far more deadly than its physical counterpart.

Sadly enough, there is no escape for any of the *belles-soeurs*. Tomorrow will be no different than today because although Germaine and her friends may feel the inadequacies of their lives, they are so steeped in tradition that they are unable to realize the cause of their alienation and frustration, let alone the cure. Germaine Lauzon is ecstatic when she wins a million trading stamps for, in her eyes, the prizes she will collect will relieve the unbroken dreariness of her daily existence. Her friends and neighbours, also desperate for an escape route, spend countless hours each day guessing mystery voices on the radio and solving puzzles in *Chatelaine*. "Moé, là, c'est les mots mystérieux, les mots inversés, les mots cachés, les mots croisées, les mots entrecroisés que j'aime," says Rose. "... Chus spécialiste là-dedans! J'envoie mes réponses partout ... Ça me coûte quasiment deux piasses de timbres par semaines, c'est pas ben ben mêlant" (p. 44). Tremblay seems to be implying that it is not so much the women themselves who are to blame for their materialism but rather a society which encourages such thinking by convincing consumers that material

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<sup>168</sup>Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 43.

well-being is the one and only key to happiness and success.<sup>170</sup> Unfortunately, neither the million trading stamps and the useless "luxuries" they can be exchanged for, nor the cheap junk won at the bingo will alter the lives of these women, for their misery lies not so much in the fact that they are poor but in the fact that they are set in a rigid social mold. Until they realize this, life for them will not change. The younger generation think the same way. Lise Paquette, for example, "écoeurée de travailler au Kresge" (p. 90), is determined to make something of herself. However, she too equates happiness with material well-being:

J'veux arriver à quequ'chose, dans'vie, vous comprenez, j'veux arriver à quequ'chose! J'veux avoir un char, un beau logement, du beau linge! ... J'ai toujours été pauvre, j'ai toujours tiré le diable par la queue, pis j'veux que ça change! ... Attends deux-trois ans, pis tu vas voir que Lise Paquette va devenir quelqu'un! Des cennes, a va n'avoir, O.K.? (p. 90).

Yet there is still hope for Lise. Although she is pregnant and alone, abandoned by the baby's father, she has decided to seek an abortion. By taking charge of her condition, she has the chance to start life anew. The other *belles-soeurs*, meanwhile, never even contemplate breaking free from the prison of family life, rebelling against society and "tradition". "Les femmes, sont poignées à gorge, pis y vont rester de même jusqu'au bout!" (p. 102), cries a resigned Rose. Because of this, they shall remain condemned to an eternal *maudite vie plate*. As we have seen, this means not only a life of domestic drudgery, but one of alienation - both physical

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<sup>170</sup>Martine R. Corriveau, "Le drame des Belles-Soeurs dont on rit si facilement," Le Soleil, 26 juin 1984: C 11.

and emotional - frustration and impotence.

Although Tremblay has himself stated on several occasions that he writes specifically for the Québécois and not for the whole world, his international success attests to the fact that his work does indeed reflect a universal reality. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in *Les Belles-Soeurs*. Many of the social problems which Tremblay deals with in his criticism of working-class family life have an impact far beyond the borders of Quebec and thus come through with strong force in translation. As Jacques Cotnam points out:

Les personnages qui peuplent l'univers dramatique de Tremblay sont humains avant d'être québécois... Les gens 'pognés à la gorge', on les retrouve partout, n'en doutons pas, et ils sont tout aussi malheureux. Québec n'a pas le monopole de la souffrance ni de la solitude. On pourrait facilement présenter *Les Belles-Soeurs*... sur une scène américaine, par exemple, et on comprendrait ce dont il s'agit, sans qu'il soit besoin d'une longue introduction sur le Québec contemporain.

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Poverty and unemployment, for example, are problems faced by the working-class throughout the world not just those in Quebec. The unmitigated exploitation of working-class women is also a problem which cuts across all lines of race and language, as are the loneliness, anger and frustration which are the result of being caught in the grip of a stifling and seemingly inescapable routine. Furthermore, within families everywhere there is alienation, quarrelling and non-communication. As one critic so rightly observes, Tremblay's characters may live in Quebec, but they also

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<sup>170</sup>Jacques Cotnam, Le Théâtre québécois: Instrument de contestation sociale et politique (Montréal: Editions Fides, 1976): 101.

live in the world.<sup>171</sup>

Germaine's friends and relatives, jealous of her good fortune, scheme to steal her stamps. They demand to know why only one member of the poor should be allowed an escape route while the rest are forced to endure a life of endless drudgery and poverty. "Que c'est qu'a l'a tant faite, madame Lauzon, pour mériter ça, hein?" cries Marie-Ange Brouillette. "Rien! Rien pantoute! Est pas plus belle, pis pas plus fine que moé! ... Moé aussi, j'travaille, moé aussi j'les torche, mes enfants! ... Chus tannée de m'esquinter pour rien!" (p. 22). There is a great deal with which the reader outside Quebec can identify here as well. Greed and envy, for example, are universal vices.<sup>172</sup> The view propagated by society that material wealth is the only key to happiness is also a universal one. Tremblay's characters are the reflection of all those who, to quote Bert de Vries, are "powerless victims of the television-ideology material acquisition."<sup>173</sup> When Germaine cries "Mes timbres! Mes timbres" at the end of the play, we can empathize for we see in her a person who has come within an inch of realizing her lifelong dream of luxury only to see it stolen away at the very last moment. The fact that she lives in Quebec is irrelevant.

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<sup>171</sup>Irene Howard, "Time we got together for a healing," Vancouver Sun, Saturday, July 2, 1994: D6.

<sup>172</sup>Keith Garebian, "Liberation in the Rag-and-Bone Shop," Canadian Literature, no. 66 (Autumn 1975): 115.

<sup>173</sup>de Vries 78.

The Roman Catholic Church:

The second social institution which comes under Tremblay's harsh attack in *Les Belles-Soeurs* is that of the Roman Catholic Church. Religion plays an extremely important role in the lives of Tremblay's characters. As the women begin pasting stamps into their booklets, Germaine turns on the radio to listen to the nightly family rosary (p. 30-31). Her friend, Rhéaunna Bibeau, cannot bear the thought of dying without making her final confession. She begs her best friend Angéline to promise she will call the priest the minute she takes ill. "J'ai tellement peur de mourir sans recevoir les derniers sacrements!" she cries (p. 65). (At that time, a Catholic who died without the final sacraments could have been refused burial in a Catholic cemetery.)<sup>174</sup> Parish activities - concerts, annual retreats and, most importantly, the weekly bingo - represent the high point of their social calendar (p. 83-86).

It is impossible to understand the importance of the Catholic Church in the lives of Tremblay's characters without referring to the past. From the very beginning, the colonization of French Canada was restricted to conforming members of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>175</sup> As New France grew, so did the influence of the Church, culminating in the establishment of the Canadian Church in 1659 by Bishop Laval. According to historian Mason Wade, "Under

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<sup>174</sup>Beckles Willson, Quebec: The Laurentian Province (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1913): 83.

<sup>175</sup>Sloan 25.

the regime of Laval, who had an inflexible will and an instinct for domination, ultramontaniam was built into the very fabric of the Church in Quebec, which assumed a position very different from that which it held in gallican France."<sup>176</sup> Nevertheless, there was still a basic sharing of power between the religious leaders and the King's representatives in the colony.<sup>177</sup> Things changed, however, with the defeat of Montcalm and the capture of New France by Protestant England in 1763. A number of nobles and officials as well as almost all the members of the high clergy returned to France, leaving only 138 priests left to minister to a population of about 70,000 French Canadians in 118 parishes.<sup>178</sup> As Thomas Sloan points out, "With the suppression of political leadership two things conspired to help the Church. At the top it no longer had any rivals for power with the French-Canadian society; and at the bottom, the mass of colonists had never been in greater need of leadership if they and the French community were to survive in the new and alien political environment created by the conquest. Literally, the only educated leaders who remained with the colony in its hour of despair were the clergy."<sup>179</sup> This clergy believed that the key to the survival of French Canada lay in the preservation of its traditional institutions and values, particularly

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<sup>176</sup>Mason Wade, The French Canadians (Toronto: Macmillian, 1956): 37.

<sup>177</sup>Sloan 26.

<sup>178</sup>Jean-Charles Falardeau, "Rôle et Importance de l'Eglise au Canada Français," Esprit (août-septembre 1952): 218.

<sup>179</sup>Sloan 26.

religion, parish life and the family. Threatened with the danger of assimilation and extinction and cut off from all ties with the motherland, the people of French Canada came to accept the mission of the Church as a fight for the survival of their nation.<sup>180</sup> To allow the clergy to accomplish this mission, they accorded them a special place both in and above the society they were going to "save".<sup>181</sup>

The unique relationship which developed between the Catholic Church and Quebec society had both a positive and a negative side, as we saw in Chapter 3. On the positive side, the Church played a vital role in the survival of the French culture and language in North America.<sup>182</sup> On the negative side, however, it kept Quebec a society closed in upon itself, a fortress against modern influences.<sup>183</sup> In addition, it proved to be a strict moral disciplinarian, warping the lives of several generations in the process and giving rise to strong anti-clerical reactions on the part of a large number of Quebecers.<sup>184</sup>

*Les Belles-Soeurs* contains several references to the negative effects of this moralistic puritanism in the lives of the Québécois. Tremblay's characters are rigidly ruled by the dogmas of the Church. Take, for example, their reaction when they learn that a

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<sup>180</sup>Sloan 26.

<sup>181</sup>Sloan 26.

<sup>182</sup>Sloan 28.

<sup>183</sup>Sloan 28.

<sup>184</sup>Sloan 28.

member of their clan, Angéline Sauvé, has been spending her Friday nights in that den of all iniquities: the nightclub. "On nous l'a assez répété", they cry out, "'Mettre le pied dans un club, c'est déjà faire un péché mortel!" (p. 79) Poor Angéline only wanted to brighten up her boring, conventional existence, have a little fun for a change. "Tu sais comment j'sus faite!", she tells her best friend Rhéaunna. "J'aime ça avoir du fun! J'ai été élevée dans les sous-basements d'églises, pis j'veux connaître autre chose! J'ai envie d'connaître du monde! J'ai jamais ri de ma vie, Rhéaunna!" (p. 79). But, as we saw in Chapter 3, the "club" is a place of dance, drink and loose women. It belongs to the dominant Anglo-Saxon society, "pagan" and "hedonistic", and is thus wholly condemned in traditional, Catholic Quebec. Angéline must therefore go to a priest and confess her "sin" or she will be banished from her circle of friends forever.

Sex outside of marriage is another sin. The Catholic Church condemns it so, naturally, Tremblay's characters do as well. "Tu sauras que chus pas pour l'amour libre, moé! Chus catholique!" cries Rose Ouimet (p. 100). Unwed mothers are "des bon-riennes pis des vicieuses qui courent après les hommes" (p. 100), "des agace-pissettes" even (p. 100). Young women, in fact, were encouraged by the Church to marry young so as to protect their chastity.<sup>185</sup> Once they married, however, the rules changed. Sex was no longer condemned but rather preached. Rose Ouimet, as Renate Usmiani points out, expresses the basic tragedy of women in 1960's Quebec,

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<sup>185</sup>Nardocchio 35.

"a tragedy which they would not dare verbalize openly at the time, and of which they are often only dimly aware: their total helplessness against a husband who 'demands his due' whenever he pleases, thus forcing them into the permanent slavery of child rearing."<sup>186</sup> Her despair is heartbreaking:

Quand moé j'me réveille, le matin, y'est toujours là, qui me r'garde ... Y m'attend. Tous les matins qui le bonyeu emène, y se réveille avant moé, pis y m'attend! Pis tous les soirs que le bonyeu emmène, y se couche avant moé, pis y m'attend! Y'est toujours là, y'est toujours après moé, collé après moé comme une sang-sue! Maudit cul! ... J'l'ai-tu assez r'gretté, mais j'l'ai-tu assez regretté. J'arais jamais dû me marier! J'arais dû crier 'non' à pleins poumons, pis rester vieille fille! Au moins, j'arais eu la paix! ... Moé, l'épaisse, j'pensais rien qu'à 'la Sainte Union du Marriage'! Faut-tu être bête pour élever ses enfants dans l'ignorance de même, mais faut-tu être bête! (p. 101-102)

Sadly enough, there is no way out of this tragic situation for Rose. As a married woman, it is her sacred, Catholic duty to have sexual relations with her husband and bear as many children as possible and she must accept this fate wholly and without question. Contraception and abortion, of course, are strictly condemned by the Church and therefore not even pondered.

The unique relationship that developed between the Catholic Church and Quebec society has no equivalent in English Canada. We do not inhabit a world where we put on the radio in the evening to listen to the rosary, nor where every aspect of our behaviour and our belief system is dictated by the strict moral guidelines issued by the clergy. In translation, therefore, we do not identify with the role which religion and the moral authority of the Catholic

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<sup>186</sup>Usmiani, Theatre of Frustration 110.

Church plays in the lives of Tremblay's characters. It is foreign and unfamiliar to us, hence "untranslatable" into an English-Canadian context.

Paul Socken suggests a possible way of getting around this problem, ie. of rendering the religious aspect of the *belles-soeurs'* lives more accessible to the English-Canadian reader, and that is to adapt Tremblay's play to an Irish-Catholic parish in Toronto's Cabbagetown. That way, he says, "the 'world' presented by the dramatist would project a more substantial and realistic presence than it does."<sup>187</sup> We must not forget, however, that, despite its strong underlying universality, *Les Belles-Soeurs* is first and foremost a play for Quebec, about Quebec. As Herbert Whittaker points out, it is a "historic document of some significance,"<sup>188</sup> a portrait of the problems - both social and, as we shall see in the next chapter, political - besetting the Québécois in the nineteen sixties. Adapt *Les Belles-Soeurs* to an English-Canadian setting, however, and it becomes a play about English Canada - something which Tremblay never intended. What's more, we would be robbing ourselves of an excellent opportunity to learn more about Quebec, to know and understand its differences. The all-pervasive influence of the Catholic Church in the lives of Tremblay's characters may be something which we in English Canada

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<sup>187</sup>Paul Socken, rev. of *Les Belles-Soeurs*, trans. John Van Burek and Bill Glassco, Queen's Quarterly, vol. 86, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 365.

<sup>188</sup>Herbert Whittaker, "Les Belles-Soeurs milestone play," Globe and Mail, April 5, 1973: 12.

cannot easily understand, but it does provide us with a window on Quebec, a glimpse of a social reality we might not have known existed otherwise. After all, is translation not, as David Homel and Sherry Simon suggest, "a vehicle through which cultures travel"?<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup>David Homel and Sherry Simon, eds., Mapping Literature: The Art and Politics of Translation (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1988): 9.

## CHAPTER 9

### POLITICAL CONNOTATIONS

*Les Belles-Soeurs* had the effect of a bombshell when it premiered at the Théâtre du Rideau Vert in 1968. Although such a reaction can in part be attributed to Tremblay's controversial use of *joual* as well as his vivid and realistic portrayal of the ugly social realities plaguing Quebec society at the time, it cannot be denied that his play contained something more, something which really "hit home" with the Québécois audience and caused them to react so strongly. This "something" was a level of political symbolism which spoke directly to them. In order to better understand this special layer of Tremblay's play, however, we must first understand the specific political situation to which it refers.

We saw in the introduction to this thesis that when Tremblay wrote *Les Belles-Soeurs* in 1965, Quebec's Quiet Revolution was in full swing, bringing with it an unprecedented wave of enthusiasm and confidence. As one author writes, "C'était l'époque de l'explosion des espoirs de toute une génération. On croyait fermement pouvoir changer les choses, secouer les vieilles habitudes, construire une nouvelle société, un autre pays."<sup>190</sup> This sudden release of energies and acceptance of change brought with it a renewed sense of nationalism. As political scientist Stephen Brooks points out, whereas traditional French Canadian

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<sup>190</sup>Martine Corriveau, "Un rêve intact: changer le monde," Le Soleil, 8 décembre 1984: B3.

nationalism had always defined *la nation* in terms of language and religion, the nationalism of the Quiet Revolution was "state-centred", portraying Quebec as a society whose evolution was "shaped and distorted by the economic and political domination of English Canadians".<sup>191</sup> The new, more assertive, Quebec, however, was now ready to take matters into their own hands. They had come to see their relationship with English Canada in a new light, realizing, as Brooks points out, "that if their problem was the economic and political domination by *les Anglais*, then the solution was to take control for themselves."<sup>192</sup> They therefore began demanding special status within Confederation, more money and more constitutional powers.<sup>193</sup>

By the mid-1960's, however, a large section of the population had become disenchanted over the political limitations of the Quiet Revolution.<sup>194</sup> Many went on to become separatists, rejecting the position of leading Quebec politicians of the time such as Jean Lesage and Daniel Johnson that Quebec's chances for survival were best served within Confederation, and advocating instead political separatism for Quebec within the framework of an agreed economic

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<sup>191</sup>Stephen Brooks quoted in Sibley B2.

<sup>192</sup>Stephen Brooks quoted in Sibley B2.

<sup>193</sup>Janet Kerr Morchain, Search for a Nation: Canada's Crises in French-English Relations 1759-1980 (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1984): 62.

<sup>194</sup>Michael D. Behiels, "Quebec: Social Transformation and Ideological Renewal: 1940 - 1976," Quebec Since 1945, ed. Michael D. Behiels (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1987): 39.

interdependence with Canada.<sup>195</sup> This form of Quebec nationalism was epitomized by the Parti Québécois and its leader at the time, René Lévesque. As Monière points out, the aim of the P.Q. was to "carry to its conclusion the process of change that had begun with the Quiet Revolution, and turn Quebec into a complete society, one that could decide its own political future."<sup>196</sup>

Tremblay was a staunch separatist himself when he wrote *Les Belles-Soeurs*. Although *Les Belles-Soeurs* is not a "political" play in the true sense of the word, it does carry heavy political overtones, ie. characters and situations invested with political symbolism. Through them, we see Tremblay's dedication to the cause of the P.Q. and his cries for the political independence of Quebec.

*Les Belles-Soeurs* can be seen not only as a cruel indictment of family life, but also as a political parable in which the family becomes symbolic of the unhappy union of Quebec and English Canada. Consequently, the alienation and frustration which Tremblay's characters experience as a result of family living, their *maudite vie plate*, is, by extension, symbolic of the political alienation and frustration experienced by the Québécois.

Also on the level of political symbolism, we notice that there are only women in the play. Tremblay has stated on several occasions that this is because "There are no men in Québec."<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup>Monière 265.

<sup>196</sup>Monière 262.

<sup>197</sup>Michel Tremblay, interview with Rachel Cloutier, Marie Laberge and Rodrigue Gignac, *Nord*, no. 1 (automne 1971): 58.

Independence, adventurousness and strength, traits which are customarily associated with the male, are absent in *Les Belles-Soeurs*.<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, as is the case in most of Tremblay's plays, *Les Belles-Soeurs* contains a host of truly marginal characters: Germaine Lauzon, grotesquely obese, ninety-three year old Olivine Dubuc, senile and wheel-chair ridden, and Rhéauna Bibeau who, after seventeen operations, "n'a pus rien qu'un poumon, un rein, un sein..." (p. 63), are a few examples. On the political level, these marginal characters become symbolic of the political, economic and cultural marginality of the Québécois.<sup>200</sup>

There is also a political symbolism inherent in the lack of communication exhibited by the *belles-soeurs*. As Tremblay himself explains:

Les québécois ne se parlent pas. Alors 75 p. cent des *Belles-Soeurs* est fait de propos stupides et 25 p. cent de monologues et chœurs. Les femmes sont si peu capables de se parler entre-elles que lorsqu'elles pensent la même chose d'un même sujet, elles doivent le dire au public et en chœur. Si au lieu de dire leur vie 'plate' en quintette, elles se le disaient entre-elles, peut-être réussiraient-elles à sortir de leur impasse.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>Ripley 48. There are, of course, other reasons why there are only women in *Les Belles-Soeurs*. Firstly, Tremblay was raised primarily by women and, as a result, developed a special understanding of their world. To this must be added the fact that traditional French Canadian theatre had always assigned a secondary role to women, never allowing them the chance to voice their opinions and concerns. Tremblay was thus the first artist to break away from convention and give dramatic expression to this major dimension of Quebec society.

<sup>200</sup>Usmiani, *Canadian Drama* 206.

<sup>201</sup>Michel Tremblay, interview with André Vanasse, "Michel Tremblay: 'Les Bibittes des Autres'," *Magazine Maclean*, septembre 1972: 20.

The least subtle political point is made in the play's concluding moments when the *belles-soeurs* stand at attention singing the national anthem. In ending his play in such a matter, Tremblay is ridiculing the loyalty of the Québécois to Canada in general and to Canadian unity in particular. As Elaine Nardocchio points out, "S'associer à un Canada uni s'avère ainsi... une folie aussi grande que la volonté de certains individus de rester attachés à un mode de vie traditionnel et étouffant."<sup>201</sup> By presenting his fellow Québécois with a group of women who are unable to take action and escape their alienated and frustrated condition, Tremblay wants to rouse his audience to object, to say "No, that's not true. We can change!" As he told *Canadian Composer* magazine in 1977, "... when I was writing about all this - saying that people couldn't get out - I was doing so precisely to convince them that they could."<sup>202</sup> Tremblay wants to communicate to his audience that, unlike Germain Lauzon and her friends, neither the individual nor the Québécois as a whole need be condemned to an eternal *maudite vie plate*. There is one means of escape and one means only and that is to break free from the prison of "family life".

Interestingly enough, reviews of the English premiere of *Les Belles-Soeurs* at Toronto's St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts in

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<sup>201</sup>Elaine F. Nardocchio, "Les Belles-Soeurs et la Révolution Tranquille," *L'Action Nationale*, vol. 70, no. 4 (décembre 1980): 348.

<sup>202</sup>Michel Tremblay, interview, "Michel Tremblay: Quebec's superstar playwright-songwriter," *Canadian Composer*, no. 122 (June 1977): 20.

April 1973 completely overlooked the political connotations of Tremblay's play. According to David McCaughna of the *Toronto Citizen*, for example:

At the centre of *LBS* is the working-class dream of winning some huge sum, like the lottery, but in this case a Montreal housewife wins one million trading stamps ... As they proceed to put the stamps into the books, they reveal the frustration that rules their lives, anger and bitterness, poverty, washed-up dreams and religious fervour that has locked them into their corners.<sup>203</sup>

Herbert Whittaker of the *Globe and Mail* wrote that "Tremblay is plainly a writer with a rare instinct for dramatic selectivity. His conflicts include the tussle of young against old age, of moral against disreputable, of envy against possessiveness (which leads to theft), of the overmarried against the virginal. Through them are created for us a very real community ..."<sup>204</sup> Finally, Dubarry Campeau of the *Montreal Gazette* describes the play as "an exploration of how a blowsy housewife's good fortune affects her nearest of kin and her neighbours." The whole play evolves around this simple device, he says, "but it manages to expose the personalities, problems and piques of each of the women".<sup>205</sup>

It is highly unlikely the above-mentioned critics were unaware of the level of political symbolism contained in Tremblay's play. Rather, they probably chose not to write about it because they

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<sup>203</sup>David McCaughna, rev. of *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Toronto Citizen, April 30 - May 3, 1973: 10.

<sup>204</sup>Herbert Whittaker, "Les Belles-Soeurs milestone play," Globe and Mail, Thursday, April 5, 1973: 12.

<sup>205</sup>Dubarry Campeau, "Les Belles-Soeurs 'turns on' Toronto," Montreal Gazette, Saturday, April 7, 1973: 45.

judged it to be of little "relevance" to their audience. Jane Koustas, in an interesting article which examines the critical response to translated Quebec theatre in Toronto from 1970 to 1982, argues a similar point. Toronto critics, she says, suffer from an "ethnocentrism" which leads them "either to appropriate or dismiss work that is culturally different."<sup>207</sup> Critical response to Tremblay's plays in translation therefore "dismisses the political, Quebec message while appropriating the universal elements." Hence, she says, "Tremblay, the ardent Québécois Nationalist, becomes "'Toronto's favourite Canadian playwright'."<sup>208</sup>

Theatre critics, of course, can be said to constitute an "informed" audience. Like the translator, they should be armed with a solid knowledge of the social, political and literary background of the ST as well as a deep understanding of the playwright's mind. The general public, on the other hand, will likely not bring to their reading of Tremblay's text the same knowledge or "cultural baggage" as the theatre critic and, unfortunately, might very well fail to take note of the political layer contained in the play. Van Burek and Glassco could easily have compensated for this lack of knowledge on the part of the TL audience had they included a brief introduction or "Translator's Note" to their translation explaining the existence of this layer and providing a brief background on the political situation to

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<sup>207</sup>Jane Koustas, "Made in Quebec, Reviewed in Toronto: Critical Response to Translated Quebec Theatre," *Meta*, vol. 40, no. 4 (décembre 1995): 537.

<sup>208</sup>Koustas 537.

which it refers.

It goes without saying, of course, that the political realities portrayed in *Les Belles-Soeurs* are not something which we, the anglophone majority, can readily identify. In the eyes of its French-speaking citizens, Quebec is a nation unto itself, one united by a common language, culture and religious background.<sup>208</sup> This type of identification does not occur in the other provinces. As Peter Desbarats points out, "Compared with Quebec, Canada is a young nation. Its people have no common background, religion, or long-standing tradition. They have been drawn from almost all the nations of the world and the process of assimilation has just begun." Although regionalism may be highly developed in Canada, separatism - not in the political sense, but in the sense of belonging to a separate group - has no real equivalent in English Canada.<sup>209</sup> Nor, consequently, does the profound sense of alienation, frustration and powerlessness which the Québécois have felt for more than two centuries, having been colonized first by Great Britain and then by English Canada. Granted, Quebec audiences today might not necessarily identify with the various political realities portrayed in *Les Belles-Soeurs* either. In 1965, the struggles and aspirations of Tremblay's characters seemed to mirror the political struggles and aspirations of francophone Quebec.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup>Peter Desbarats, *The State of Quebec: A Journalist's View of the Quiet Revolution* (Toronto/Montréal: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1965): 178.

<sup>209</sup>Desbarats 182.

<sup>210</sup>Ackerman 42.

But Quebec society has undergone many changes since then and still continues to evolve. Although they are still fighting for independence, as Dennis Kucherawy points out, "people are finally talking to one another, no longer are they alienated... Most important, people are finally proceeding to find and establish their identities and to be satisfied with them."<sup>211</sup> As Tremblay sees it:

It isn't that the characters don't exist any more, they do; it's because the reality of the situation has changed too much. Now you have to situate it, state that the action takes place in the Montreal of 1965. It doesn't make sense now to make a nation say that it can't get out of the mess it's in when, in fact, it's in the process of doing just that.<sup>212</sup>

Thus, while some of Tremblay's analogies may very well still apply to Quebec society today, it is also true that a good deal have become dated, clichés even. In other words, the level of political allegory in *Les Belles-Soeurs* has taken on more of a historical rather than a political dimension throughout time. Tremblay himself agrees:

I not only think, I certainly hope that any political allegory, if it refers to a specific political situation, would be the first thing a play would lose as it ages! In other words, when you write political allegory, the important thing is that the allegory should be useful and exact at the time it is produced. If it becomes obsolete after three or four years it means that the play has been effective. If the allegory would remain effective all the time, it would mean that nothing has changed in society.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup>Dennis Kucherawy, "Michel Tremblay: Dry rot at the grass roots," *Performing Arts in Canada*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 45.

<sup>212</sup>Michel Tremblay, Canadian Composer 20.

<sup>213</sup>Michel Tremblay, interview with Renate Usmiani, Canadian Theatre Review (1976): 31.

The political allegory may have lost its immediate significance, but it is still very much an integral part of Tremblay's play - for the Québécois, yes, but for us in English Canada as well. As John Ripley so rightly observes, "If as a nation we are to understand Quebec's present, we must comprehend its past."<sup>214</sup> And what better place to start than with *Les Belles-Soeurs*?

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In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay provides us with a glimpse of a closed and specific society while at the same time creating a timeless, universal experience. In other words, although his play deals with certain problems - both social and political - which are deeply rooted in their own time and place and, as such, might be less easily understood outside the province, it also deals with certain timeless, universal problems which the TL reader can readily identify. This unique blend of both "québécoisité" and universality has no doubt been one of the main reasons why *Les Belles-Soeurs* has been such a success, not only here in English Canada, but throughout the world.

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<sup>214</sup>Ripley 58.

## CONCLUSION

Tremblay's use of joul fulfils two functions in *Les Belles-Sœurs*. First, it reflects the social status of his characters and second it enhances the local colour or "Québécoisité" of his text. The Canadian translation by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco, on the other hand, does neither. In other words, there is little about the speech of Tremblay's characters to suggest that they are members of the working-class level of society and, apart from their names, really nothing to suggest that they are from Quebec. Perhaps Myron Galloway sums up their work best when he says that "The translation is an unseasoned potage. The meat and vegetables are all there, but the salt and pepper and all the other things which go into the making of a *bonne soupe* are missing."<sup>215</sup> To what extent is this the fault of the translators themselves and to what extent can it be attributed to insurmountable cultural and linguistic differences between English Canada and Quebec and thus be said to have been beyond their control?

In all fairness, Van Burek and Glassco's failure to effectively characterize the social status of Tremblay's characters can be attributed primarily to the lack of a single, codified class-related dialect in Canadian English. Having said that, however, they could have compensated for this linguistic constraint somewhat had they used more syntactical deviations and phonological/graphological features - two devices which, on the printed page, lower

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<sup>215</sup>Myron Galloway, "Tremblay in English a disaster," The Montreal Star, Wednesday, April 4, 1973: H1.

the level of language. It goes without saying, of course, that the translator must exercise extreme caution when it comes to using such features in his text. Because his aim is not to produce a scientific and exact transcription of dialect but rather to write in a dialect which seems realistic or plausible, he wants to sprinkle his translation with just enough syntactical deviations and phonological/graphological features to trigger in his reader's mind the impression that his characters are from the working-class level of society. Using too many features can be distracting and hard on the eye. Using a feature not typically associated with Canadian speech can also have serious consequences. In Chapter 2 we saw that the use of standard Canadian English as a translation equivalent for Tremblay's *joual* fails to produce a precise geographic anchoring. In other words, the action of the play could take place in Canada, but it could very well take place in the United States as well. But change "them" to "dem" and "get" to "git", for example, and the action of the play is immediately transferred to the United States. Knowing which usages are outside of one's own geographical dialect requires that the translator have a fine ear for his language. When unsure, it is always better to err on the side of caution rather than risk creating any unintended effects.

The use of syntactical deviations and phonological/graphological features would not only have enabled Van Burek and Glassco to more effectively characterize the social status of Tremblay's characters, but would also have added a significant amount of

flavour to their speech. Standard Canadian English, as we have seen, sounds extremely flat in comparison with *joual*. The translator needs to spice it up somehow. Tossing in the occasional swearword, as Van Burek and Glassco have done in their translation, is simply not enough and other measures need to be taken. We have suggested adhering more rigidly to the source text, as well as using more colourful words and expressions and exclamation marks. On their own, these features might not make that considerable a difference. When combined, however, they would lend to the translation a considerable amount of flavour.

While Van Burek and Glassco certainly did not go to any great lengths to characterize the social status of Tremblay's characters, they did make a considerable effort to reflect the all-pervasive influence of the Roman Catholic Church in their lives by maintaining the religious component in their swearing. Unfortunately, however, this was where they went wrong. Because English Canadian profanity has little recourse to sacrilegious language, Van Burek and Glassco were forced to use the same few words and expressions time and again and, when that failed, fall back on obscene language. Consequently, this area of the women's speech was not only stripped of its linguistic richness, but, more importantly, pried out of its specific cultural context. In other words, there is absolutely nothing about the way in which Tremblay's characters swear in English to suggest that they come from a closed and specific society dominated by the Church. Swearwords, as we have seen, are a culture-bound item. As such, their translation into

another language is *ipso facto* translation into another culture - a near if not entirely impossible undertaking. Thus, the only way in which Van Burek and Glassco could have avoided this weakness in the translation would have been to leave all the religion-based swearwords in French. In doing so, they would not only have avoided using the same few words and expressions time and again, reduced the vulgar effect created by using obscenities to translate religiously-charged oaths and have given an accurate picture of the range, complexity and colour of Québécois swearing, but also have conveyed the religious fact noted above and thus some of the local colour of the original.

Another serious shortcoming in Van Burek and Glassco's text is that it fails to reflect the large proportion of anglicisms which appear in the French original. In translation, therefore, we completely lose sight of the fact that Tremblay's characters live in a community immersed in an "Anglophone sea". But how does one go about "translating" into English words that already are English? Van Burek and Glassco certainly could have counteracted the loss of the bilingual element by inserting into their translation words and expressions that any English-Canadian reader, bilingual or not, would be likely to understand such as "oui", "non", "garçon", etc.. The problem with this, however, is that the additional nuances carried by the words "fun" and "club" - ie. the fact that they imply a comparison with the dominant Anglo-Saxon pagan society, thus in a sense between good and evil, spiritual and carnal - would be lost as a result. More importantly, however, in Canada it is by

and large English that influences and alters French, not the other way around. The translator thus finds himself in a difficult situation, since the SL is the "influenced" language and the TL the "influencing" language. Such cultural and linguistic constraints place a heavy burden on the translator and, inevitably, he must accept a certain loss. Yet given the importance of anglicisms in Tremblay's play, there is absolutely no question that the foreign influence in *joual* must be rendered in some manner. In our opinion; the one and only way to accomplish this would be have been to retain the English features found in *Les Belles-Soeurs* and mark them graphically by the use of italics or quotation marks. Granted, such artificial devices would inevitably have rendered Tremblay's dialogue less natural and spontaneous. On the positive side, however, they would have given the TL reader a feel for the extent to which English invades French in Quebec.

So as not to perplex the TL reader, the translator could always explain his decision to leave the swearing in French and graphically mark the anglicisms in a "Translator's Note" placed at the start of the play.

Last but not least, the Canadian translation fails to reflect the locally rooted vocabulary of Quebec French. There is a valid reason for this, however: while standard Canadian English does contain hundreds of words which are native to Canada or which have meanings peculiar to Canada, most of these refer to topographical features, plants, trees, fish, animals and birds, and to social, economic and political institutions and activities, and would thus

be extremely difficult if not impossible to incorporate into a translation of *Les Belles-Soeurs*.

We can thus conclude that while Van Burek and Glassco's translation of Michel Tremblay's *joual* into an English Canadian context contains several weaknesses, these are by and large cultural and linguistic weaknesses and, given the inextricable link between language and culture, were therefore difficult to avoid.<sup>216</sup> That is not to say, however, that the damage caused by these linguistic and cultural constraints could not have been minimized. To make no attempt at doing so is to significantly impoverish the play. As Myron Galloway remarked, *Les Belles-Soeurs* "has nothing to say if the 'French Canadian' flavour is missing, for it is essentially a raw portrait of a very special segment of French Canadian urban life."<sup>217</sup>

Douglas Mance, in an article on the difficulties inherent in the translation of Antonine Maillet's *La Sagouine*, has written: "... any good translator can translate a smooth, standard way of expression into its equivalent in another language any time, but it takes a special genius to translate literature as colloquial as *La Sagouine*. The normal, standard - and sometimes boring method of translation will not do. One has instead the excitement and the challenge of finding a new vehicle for translating a colloquial idiom - a vehicle particularly suited to the unique context from

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<sup>216</sup>Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 26.

<sup>217</sup>Galloway

which the original came."<sup>216</sup> For Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Sœurs*, this vehicle might very well be Newfoundland English. Like *joual*, Newfoundland English has features of pronunciation (eg. "marnin'" for "morning", "alang" for "along" and "nard" for "north"), grammar (eg. "I is", "you is", "we is"; "you'm" "we'm", "they'm") and vocabulary (eg. "child" to denote a female child, "hat" to denote a bunch or a heap) that are distinct from the rest of Canada. Such distinct linguistic features would not only convey some of the richness of Tremblay's language, but also lend a specifically Canadian edge to the translation.

Despite these apparent advantages, however, the translator always runs the risk of creating unintended effects when he renders dialect by dialect. For example, given its distinct character, Newfoundland English might prove to be a barrier for Canadian audiences outside Newfoundland. It seems to us, however, that if William Findlay and Martin Bowman's translation of Tremblay's play into modern Scots is not overly difficult to understand, then neither would a translation into Newfoundland English. We should also bear in mind that, just as Tremblay had to transpose his *joual* to make it easily accessible to his TL reader, so would the translator rendering his play into Newfoundland English. This, of course, is a feat which can be achieved only by a native speaker of the language or, at the very least, someone who has had considerable exposure to it in the past.

Another foreseeable disadvantage to translating Tremblay's

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<sup>216</sup>Mance 189.

*joual* into a non-standard Canadian dialect such as Newfoundland English is that the TL audience might automatically transfer the action of the play out of Quebec and into Newfoundland. In our opinion, however, if an audience can read a translation of Chekov and realize that the characters are speaking Russian in Russia, they should have no problem understanding that Tremblay's women are speaking French in Quebec. Nonetheless, the translator rendering Tremblay's play into a Newfoundland dialect would more than likely do as Van Burek and Glassco and Findlay and Bowman have done in their respective translations and keep the appellations "Madame" and "Mademoiselle" throughout in order to remind the audience that these are French-speaking women.

Finally, the use of a Newfoundland English dialect as a translation equivalent for Tremblay's *joual* might automatically lead some people to infer that Newfoundland English is associated with low status. It is therefore important that the translator be aware of any possible social implications associated with whatever Newfoundland English dialect he may choose.

Just as disappointing as Van Burek and Glassco's failure to catch the peculiar flavour of Tremblay's *joual* is their response to the challenges of translating the wide array of language strategies which he employs throughout his text. First, they have failed to adequately distinguish the speech of Lisette de Courval from that of the other *belles-soeurs*, thereby diminishing the satirical effect so evident in the original. They have also failed to effectively convey the irony in the fact that Lisette occasionally

trips herself up by forgetting that she's trying to speak a "superior" French compared with her neighbours, as well as the subtlety with which this nuance comes across in the source text. In all fairness, the lack of a single, codified class-related dialect in Canadian English makes it extremely difficult to capture Tremblay's manipulation of different linguistic registers in translation. However, Van Burek and Glassco could have gotten around this problem, to a certain extent at least, had they used more deviant syntactical deviations and phonological/graphological features to render the working-class speech of the *belles-soeurs* in the first place. They could then have shown that Lisette is speaking a more "standard" language than her neighbours simply by omitting these features from her speech. Conversely, they could have shown that she occasionally trips herself up simply by reinserting some of these features back into her speech.

Of more serious concern is the fact that certain language strategies seem to have escaped Van Burek and Glassco's attention altogether. For example, they have failed to recognize Tremblay's use of third person and impersonal pronouns to illustrate his characters' alienation and lack of communication. They have also ignored his use of frequently-repeated words to emphasize the fact that his *belles-soeurs* are poorly educated, working-class people who lack the linguistic skills to express themselves adequately. In so doing, have passed up yet another opportunity to compensate, to some extent at least, for the lack of a class-related dialect in Canadian English and better convey the social status of Tremblay's

characters.

Finally, Van Burek and Glassco have made no attempt whatsoever to translate Tremblay's title which, as we have seen, not only contains an element of irony, but, more importantly, points to the closed circle in which they live and move. Granted, the title is extremely difficult to translate given the pun in French. Having said that, however, Van Burek and Glassco have found witty and intelligent solutions to the other word-games played by Tremblay, so it comes as a surprise that they were unable to do so this time. Van Burek once explained that he and Glassco felt partly justified in leaving a title in its original language because, "in this country at least, we'd like to think that people won't go bananas when they see a title in French."<sup>219</sup> In our opinion, however, an English title, regardless of whether or not it fully captures the original, might at least have had *some* significance for the anglophone reader. A French title, on the other hand, has absolutely *none*. While it is certainly not uncommon to see the title of a literary work left in its original language, Van Burek and Glassco could at least have done as other translators have in the past and explained the relevance of Tremblay's title as well as their decision to leave it in its original language in a "Translator's Preface". The need for such an "introduction" has become increasingly apparent throughout this thesis.

By combining the everyday speech of the working-class Québécois with a number of highly imaginative language strategies,

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<sup>219</sup>Van Burek, Canadian Theatre Review 45.

Tremblay has created a colourful mode of expression which lends both life and originality to his characters.<sup>220</sup> Van Burek and Glassco's less-than satisfactory response to the challenges of translating this language - whether due to the fact that they were more concerned with the stage production or simply because they did not take the time - is disappointing, even surprising, and seriously diminishes the quality of their translation. Nonetheless, we are inclined to agree with Vivian Bosley when she says that "the world stage is considerably enriched ... by however pale an imitation we may have of the original"<sup>221</sup> for, if nothing else, it allows us the opportunity to participate in a truly great literary experience. This is an opportunity which we would not have had without translation.

This brings us to our last point and that is Tremblay's subject matter. In *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay has managed to create a highly successful blend of both the local and the universal in theme. He provides us with a glimpse of a closed and specific society, while at the same time creating a timeless, universal experience. The unique relationship which developed between the Catholic Church and Quebec society, for example, has no equivalent in English Canada. We do not inhabit a world where we put on the radio in the evening to listen to the rosary, nor where every aspect of our behaviour and our belief system is dictated by

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<sup>220</sup>Renate Usmiani, "The Tremblay Opus: Unity in Diversity," Canadian Theatre Review, no. 24 (1976): 24.

<sup>221</sup>Bosley 140.

the strict moral guidelines issued by the clergy. The various political realities portrayed in *Les Belles-Soeurs* - alienation, frustration, powerlessness, etc. - are also deeply rooted in the culture of Quebec. Tremblay's play tells us, the anglophone majority, what it is like to be a French island in an English sea, a stranger in one's own country and even one's own province. More importantly, it provides us with an answer to that much-asked question: "What does Quebec want?". Many of the social problems which Tremblay deals with in his criticism of working-class family life, on the other hand, have an impact far beyond the borders of Quebec. Poverty and unemployment, for example, are problems faced by the working-class throughout the world not just those in Quebec. The unmitigated exploitation of working-class women is also a problem which cuts across all lines of race and language, as are the loneliness, anger and frustration which are the result of being caught in the grip of a stifling and seemingly inescapable routine. Furthermore, within families everywhere there is alienation, quarrelling and non-communication. It is precisely this undeniable synthesis of both "québécoisité" and universality, the foreign and the familiar which, in our opinion, has been one of the major reasons for *Les Belles-Soeurs'* unparalleled and long-lived success, not only here in English Canada, but throughout the world.

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX I<sup>222</sup>

### Chronology of Plays and Productions, in French

- **Le Train:** one act; written in 1960; first published by Leméac, Montréal, in 1990, 40 pp.; unproduced; winner of the 1964 CBC competition for young writers.
  
- **Messe noire:** adaptation for the stage of selections from Tremblay's short story collection, *Contes pour buveurs attardés*; written in 1965; unpublished; first produced by the "Mouvement contemporain" troupe at the Théâtre du Gesù, Montréal, in 1965, under the direction of André Brassard.
  
- **Cinq:** six one-act plays; written in 1966; they include *Berthe*, *Johnny Mangano and his Astonishing Dogs* and *Gloria Star* which are later published by Leméac, Montreal, 1971; first produced by the "Mouvement contemporain" troupe on December 16, 1966, under the direction of André Brassard.
  
- **Les Belles-Soeurs:** full length; written in 1965, first published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Montreal, in 1968, 70 pp.; subsequently published by Leméac in 1972, 70 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre du Rideau Vert, Montreal, on August 28, 1968, under the direction of André Brassard.
  
- **Les Socles:** written in 1967; first published in the Canadian Theatre Review, no. 24 (fall 1979), pp. 58-60.
  
- **En pièces détachées:** full length; revised version of *Cinq* including two new sketches; written in 1968; first published by Leméac in 1970, in same volume as *La Duchesse de Langeais*, 94 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre de Quat'Sous, Montreal, on April 22, 1969, under the direction of André Brassard.
  
- **La Duchesse de Langeais:** monologue; written in 1968; first published with *En pièces détachées* by Leméac in 1970, 94 pp.; subsequently published with *Hosanna* by Leméac in 1973, 106 pp.; first produced by Les Insolents de Val d'Or, Montreal, in 1969, under the direction of Hélène Bélanger.

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<sup>222</sup>Appendices I and II have been compiled from the following four sources: D.W. Russell, "Biographical Checklist: Michel Tremblay," Canadian Theatre Review, vol. 24 (1976): 47-51; Pierre Lavoie, "Chronologie de la vie et de l'oeuvre de Michel Tremblay," Le Monde de Michel Tremblay, eds. Gilbert David and Pierre Lavois (Montréal: Editions Lansman, 1993): 445-468; Don Rubin and Alison Cranmer-Byng, eds., Canada's Playwrights: A Biographical Guide (Toronto: Canadian Theatre Review Publications, 1980): 173-176; and Centre des Auteurs Dramatiques (CEAD), Théâtre québécois: 146 auteurs, 1067 pièces résumées (Montréal: VLB, 1994): 263-271.

- **Demain matin, Montreal, m'attend:** musical-comedy with music by François Dompierre; written in 1969; first published by Leméac in 1972, 90 pp.; first produced by Jardin des Etoiles à la Ronde, Montreal, on August 4, 1970, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **A toi pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou:** full length; written in 1970, first published by Leméac in 1971, 94 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre de Quat'Sous on April 29, 1971, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **Les Paons:** one-act fantasy; written in 1970, 55 pp.; unpublished; first produced by l'Atelier d'Ottawa on February 11, 1971.
- **Ville Mont-Royal ou "Abîmes":** "Une belle pièce d'un acte en bon français dédiée à Madame Claire Kirkland-Casgrain"; written in 1972; first published in Le Devoir on October 28, 1972, p. XVII.
- **Hosanna:** full-length; written in 1972; first published by Leméac in 1973, 106 pp., in same volume as *La Duchesse de Langeais*; first produced by the Théâtre de Quat'Sous on May 10, 1973, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **Bonjour, là, Bonjour:** full-length; written in 1973; first published by Leméac in 1974, 105 pp.; first produced by the National Arts Centre, Ottawa, August 22, 1974, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **Surprise! Surprise!:** one act; written in 1974; first published by Leméac in 1977, 120 pp., in same volume as *Dannée Manon, Sacrée Sandra*; first produced by Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, Montreal, on April 15, 1975, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **Les Héros de mon enfance:** musical-comedy with music by Sylvain Lelière; written in 1975; first published by Leméac in 1976, 88 pp.; first produced by Théâtre de Marjolaine, Eastman, Quebec, on June 26, 1976, under the direction of Gaétan Labrèche.
- **Sainte Carmen de la Main:** full-length; written in 1975; first published by Leméac in 1976, 82 pp.; first produced during the Olympics at Place des Arts, Montreal, on July 20, 1976, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **Dannée Manon, Sacrée Sandra:** long one-act; written in 1977, first published by Leméac in 1977, 120 pp., in same volume as *Surprise! Surprise!*; first produced by the Théâtre de Quat'Sous on February 24, 1977, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **L'impromptu d'Outremont:** full-length; written in 1979; first published by Leméac in 1980, 115 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde on April 11, 1980, under the direction of André Brassard.

- **Les Grandes Vacances:** written in 1981, 40 pp.; unpublished; first produced at the Théâtre de l'Oeil, Montreal, on September 10, 1981.
- **Les Anciennes Odeurs:** written in 1981; first published by Leméac in 1981, 92 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre de Quat'Sous on November 4, 1981.
- **Albertine, en cinq temps:** written in 1983; first published by Leméac in 1984, 103 pp.; coproduced by the National Arts Centre and the Théâtre du Rideau Vert, October 12, 1984.
- **L'Impromptu des deux "Presse":** written in 1985; first published by VLB, Montreal, in 1985; first produced by the Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui, Montreal, on January 27, 1986.
- **Le Vrai Monde?:** written in 1986; first published by Leméac in 1987, 106 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre du Rideau Vert at the National Arts Centre in 1987.
- **Nelligan:** Opera Libretto; written in 1990, with music by André Gagnon, 90 pp.; first produced by the l'Opéra de Montréal on February 24, 1990, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **La Maison suspendue:** written in 1989; first published by Leméac in 1990, 119 pp.; first produced by the Compagnie Jean Duceppe on September 12, 1990.
- **Marcel poursuivi par les chiens:** written in 1992; first published by Leméac in 1992, 67 pp.; first produced by the Compagnie des Deux Chaises, Montreal, on June 4, 1992.
- **En circuit fermé:** written in 1994; first published by Leméac in 1994.

### Novels and Short Stories

- **Contes pour buveurs attardés:** collection of short stories; written in 1965; first published by Editions du Jour, Montreal, in 1966, 158 pp.
- **Manous:** short story; written in 1965; first published in *La Barre de Jour*, January-February 1966, pp. 29-30.
- **La Cité dans l'oeuf:** novel; written in 1968; first published by Editions du Jour in 1969, 181 pp.
- **C't'a ton tour, Laura Cadieux:** novel, written in 1972; first published by Editions du Jour in 1973, 137 pp.

- **La grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte:** novel; written in 1977; first published by Leméac in 1978, 329 pp.
- **Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Anges:** novel; written in 1980; first published by Grasset et Fasquelle, Paris, in 1983, 368 pp.
- **La Duchesse et le Roturier:** novel; written in 1982; first published by Leméac in 1982, 387 pp.
- **Des nouvelles d'Edouard:** novel; written in 1984; first published by Leméac in 1984, 312 pp.
- **Le Coeur découvert:** novel; written in 1986; first published by Leméac in 1991, 318 pp.
- **Le Premier Quartier de la lune:** novel; written in 1989; first published by Leméac in 1989, 283 pp.
- **Les Vues animées, Les Loups se mangent entre eux:** collection of short stories; first published by Leméac in 1990; 187 pp.
- **Douze Coups de théâtre:** collection of short stories; first published by Leméac in 1992; 265 pp.
- **Le Coeur éclaté:** novel; written in 1993; first published by Leméac in 1993, 311 pp.

#### Adaptations/Translations by Michel Tremblay

- **Lysistrata:** adaptation of the play by Aristophanes; written in 1968; first published by Leméac in 1969, 93 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde at the National Arts Centre on June 2, 1969, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **L'Effet des rayons gamma sur les vieux garçons:** translation of Paul Zindal's *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*; written in 1969; first published by Leméac in 1970, 71 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre de Quat'Sous on September 18, 1970, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **Et Mademoiselle Roberge boit un peu:** translation and adaptation of Paul Zindel's *And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little*; written in 1970; first published by Leméac in 1971, 95 pp.; first produced at Place des Arts on September 14, 1971, under the direction of André Brassard.
- **Au pays du dragon:** four one-act plays translated and adapted from Tennessee Williams; written in 1972; unpublished; first produced by the Théâtre de Quat'Sous on January 13, 1972, under the

direction of André Brassard.

- **Mistero Buffo:** translation and adaptation of the play by Dario Fo; written in 1972; unpublished; first produced by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in 1973, under the direction of André Brassard.

- **Mademoiselle Marguerite:** translation and adaptation of Roberto Athayde's *Aparaceu a Margarida*; written in 1974; first published by Leméac in 1975, 96 pp.; first produced by the National Arts Centre, 1976, under the direction of Jean Dalmain.

- **Camino Real:** translation and adaptation of Tennessee William's play; written in 1979, 110 pp.; unpublished; first produced by the Ecole national de théâtre du Canada on March 27, 1979.

- **J'ramasse mes p'tits pis j'pars en tournée:** translation and adaptation of Gretchen Cryer's musical comedy *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It on the Road*; written in 1981; first produced by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde on June 17, 1981.

- **Oncle Vania:** translation of Anton Chekhov's play, in collaboration with Kim Yaroshevskaya; written in 1982; first published by Leméac in 1983, 123 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde on March 11, 1983, under the direction of André Brassard.

- **Le Gars de Québec:** adaptation of Nicolas Gogol's *le Revizor*; written in 1985; first published by Leméac in 1985, 171 pp.; first produced by the Compagnie Jean Duceppe on October 30, 1985.

- **Six heures plus tard:** adaptation of Marc Perrier's play; written in 1983; first published by Leméac in 1986, 128 pp.; first produced by the Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui on November 13, 1986.

- **Qui a peur de Virginia Woolf:** translation and adaptation of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*; written in 1987, 418 pp.; unpublished; first produced by the Théâtre du Rideau Vert on March 3, 1988.

- **Les Trompettes de la mort:** adaptation of Tilly's play (*Acteurs*, Paris, no. 36, mai 1986); written in 1991; first produced by the Théâtre du Café de la Place, Montreal, on September 4, 1991.

- **Premières de classes:** translation and adaptation of Casey Kurtti's *Catholic School Girls*; written in 1992; first published by Leméac in 1993; first produced by the Théâtre de Marjolaine on June 27, 1992.

#### Films and Television Adaptations and Works

- **Trois Petits Tours:** film; three sketches, *Berthe*, Johnny Mangano

and his *Astonishing Dogs* and *Gloria Star*; televised by the French CBC network, 1969, as part of series "Les Beaux Dimanches".

- **En pièces détachées:** film; adapted for television in 1971; produced by the French CBC network, 1971, as part of series "Les Beaux Dimanches".

- **Françoise Durocher, Waitress:** film; 29 minutes; written in 1971; scenario by Tremblay; produced by the National Film Board of Canada, 1972, under the direction of André Brassard; televised by the French CBC network, 1972; winner of the 1975 Canadian Film Festival Award for best scenario.

- **Backyard Theatre:** film on Tremblay and Brassard with characters from *Les Belles-Soeurs* and *Demain matin, Montréal m'attend*; produced by the National Film Board of Canada, 1972.

- **Il était une fois dans l'est:** feature film; 100 minutes; written in 1973 in collaboration with André Brassard; directed by Brassard; official Canadian entry to the 1974 Cannes Film Festival.

- **Le Soleil se lève en retard:** film; 112 minutes; written in 1974; scénario by Tremblay, directed by André Brassard; televised by the French CBC network, 1979.

- **Parlez-nous d'amour:** film; written in 1974; scénario by Tremblay, directed by Jean-Claude Lord.

- **Bonheur d'occasion:** television script; written in 1977; adapted by Michel Tremblay from the novel of the same name by Gabrielle Roy.

- **Les Belles-Soeurs:** adapted for television; produced in English by CBC, 1978.

## APPENDIX II

### Chronology of first productions and publications, in English

- *Cinq: Berthe, Johnny Mangano and his Astonishing Dogs and Gloria Star*, along with *La Duchesse de Langeais*, published in English by Talonbooks, Vancouver, 1976, 125 pp., with translation by John Van Burek.

#### - OTHER TRANSLATIONS<sup>223</sup>:

- *Johnny Mangano and his Astonishing Dogs* also translated into English by Arlette Francière under the title *Cues and Entrances* (Henry Biessel, 1977) and into German by Hubert Von Bechtolsheim.

- *Les Belles-Soeurs*: first published in English under the same title by Talonbooks, Vancouver, 1974, 114 pp., with translation by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco; Van Burek and Glassco's revised English translation first published by Talonbooks, 1991, 111 pp.; first produced in English under the same title by the St. Lawrence Centre, Toronto, on April 3, 1973, under the direction of Brassard.

#### - OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Translated into London English by Ayshe Raif under the title *Jam*;

- Translated into Northern English Dialect by Noel Greig under the title *The Good Sisters*;

- Translated into Haitian Creole by Marie-Yardly Kavanagh under the title *Tripotay*;

- Translated into modern Scots by Martin Bowman and Bill Findlay under the title *The Guid Sisters* (Exile Editions, 1988);

- Translated into German by Hanspeter Plochev under the title *Schwesterherzchen* (Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1987);

- Translated into Spanish by Morgan Desmond and J. Fuster Retalli under the title *Las Cunadas*;

- Translated into Italian by Jean-René Lemoine and Francesca Moccagatta under the title *Le Cognate*;

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<sup>223</sup>Complete information regarding these translations (ie. title of the translation, translator, publisher and date of publication) was not always available.

- Translated into Polish by Jozaef Kwaterko under the title *Siostrzyezki* (*Dialog* 8, 1990);
- Translated into Roumanian by Petre Bokor under the title *Cumnatele*;
- Translated into Yiddish by Goldie Morgentaler and Pierre Anctil under the title *Di Shvegerins*.
- Adapted for London by Ayshe Raif under the title *Hen Night*.
- **Les Socles:** first published in English under the title *The Pedestals* in *Canadian Theatre Review*, no. 24 (fall 1979), pp. 53-56, with translation by Renate Usmiani.
- **En pièces détachées:** first published in English under the title *Like Death Warmed Over* by Playwrights Co-op, Toronto, 1973, 110 pp., with translation by Allan Van Meer; same translation also published under the titles *Montreal Smoked Meat* and *Broken Pieces* by Talonbooks in 1975; first produced in English under the title *Like Death Warmed Over* at the Manitoba Theatre Centre, Winnipeg, on January 17, 1973, under the direction of Brassard.
- **La Duchesse de Langeais:** first published in English in *La Duchesse de Langeais and Other Plays* by Talonbooks, 1976, 125 pp., with translation by John Van Burek.
- **A toi pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou:** first published in English under the title *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou* by Talonbooks, 1975, 86 pp., with translation by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco; first produced in English under the title *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*, by Tarragon Theatre, Toronto, on November 4, 1972, under the direction of Bill Glassco.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Also translated into English by Merwan P. Mehta under the title *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*;
- Translated into London English by Jill Morris under the title *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*;
- Translated into German by Rainer Escher under the title *Für dich, ewig, deine Luise* (1990);
- Translated into Danish by Lars Willum under the title *Din for evigt, Marie-Louise*.
- Translated into Italian under the title *Tua per sempre Marie-Luisa*;

- Translated into Polish by J. Lagowska and A. Zakrzewski under the title *Twoja na zausze Marie-Lou*;

- Translated into Portuguese by Roger Ramalhete and Carole Galaise under the title *Tua para sempre, Marie-Lou*.

- *Hosanna*: first published in English under the same title by Talonbooks, 1974, 102 pp., with translation by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco; revised translation by Van Burek and Glassco published by Talonbooks, 1991, 87 pp.; first produced in English by Tarragon Theatre on May 15, 1974, starring Richard Monette and under the direction of Bill Glassco.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Translated into German by Reiner Escher under the title *Stuck in zwei Akten*;

- Also translated into Portuguese by Maria Pompeu, Dutch and Hebrew.

- *Bonjour, là, Bonjour*: first published in English under the same title by Talonbooks, 1975, 93 pp.; first produced in English by Tarragon Theatre on February 1, 1975, under the direction of Bill Glassco.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Translated into Portuguese by Maria Pompeu;

- Also translated into Scots, Japanese, Turkish and Latvian.

- *Surprise! Surprise!*: first published in English by Talonbooks, 1976, 125 pp., in the same volume as *La Duchesse de Langeais, Berthe, Johnny Mangano and his Astonishing Dogs* and *Gloria Star* with translation by John Van Burek; first produced in English by the St. Lawrence Centre on October 20, 1975, under the direction of Eric Steiner.

- *C't'a ton tour, Laura Cadieux*: first published in English under the title *It's your Turn, Now, Laura Cadieux*, with translation by John Van Burek.

- *La grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte*: first published in English under the title *The Fat Woman Next Door is Pregnant* by Serpent's Tail, London, 1981, 336 pp., with translation by Sheila Fischman.

- *Sainte Carmen de la Main*: first published in English under the

title *Saint Carmen of the Main* by Talonbooks, 1981, 77 pp., with translation by John Van Burek; first produced in English by Tarragon Theatre on January 14, 1978, under the direction of Brassard.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Adapted for France by Michel Ouimet under the title *Sainte Carmen de Montréal*;

- Translated into Dutch by Gerard Willegers under the title *Heilege Carmen von de Kaap*;

- Translated into Finnish.

- *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra*: first published in English under the same title by Talonbooks, 1981, 43 pp., with translation by John Van Burek; first produced in English by Mount St. Vincent University, Halifax, in 1978.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Also translated into Canadian English by Renate Usmiani and John Brown and into New Zealand English.

- *L'impromptu d'Outremont*: first published in English under the title *The Impromptu of Outremont* by Talonbooks, 1981, 86 pp., with translation by John Van Burek; first produced in English by Tarragon Theatre in 1980.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Translated into German by Hanspeter Ploscher under the title *Requiem für maman* (1993);

- Translated into Turkish by Serge Sanli under the title *Dört Kizkardes*;

- Translated into Latvian (AVOTS, 1993);

- Translated into Portuguese by Maria Pompeu.

- *Les Anciennes Odeurs*: first published in English under the title *Remember Me* by Talonbooks, 1984, 58 pp., with translation by John Stowe; first produced in English by the MTC Warehouse Theatre, Winnipeg, on January 11, 1984.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Adapted for Belgium by Roland Mahauden;

- Adapted for France by Christian Bordeleau under the same title (Paris: L'Avant-scène, 1988).

- **Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Anges:** first published in English under the title *Thérèse and Pierrette and the Little Hanging Angel* by McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1984, 262 pp., with translation by Sheila Fischman.

- **Albertine, en cinq temps:** first published in English under the title *Albertine, in Five Times* by Talonbooks, 1986, 76 pp., with translation by Bill Glassco and John Van Burek; first produced in English by the Tarragon Theatre in 1986.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Adapted for France by Michel Ouimet;

- Translated into Danish by Lars Willum under the title *Albertine, fem gange* (1986);

- Translated into Spanish by Gerardo Sanchez under the title *Albertina en cinco tiempos* (1987);

- Also translated into Hindi and Swedish.

- **Le Vrai Monde?:** first published in English under the title *The Real World?* by Talonbooks, 1988, 75 pp., with translation by Bill Glassco and John Van Burek; first produced in English by Tarragon Theatre on May 24, 1988.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Also translated into English by Lisa Forrell and Alison Kean under the title *The Real World?*;

- Translated into modern Scots by William Findlay and Martin Bowman under the title *The Real Wurld?*;

- Translated into Italian by Jean-René Lemoine and Francesca Moccagata under the title *Il vero mondo?* (1993);

- Translated into Dutch by Walter Groener under the title *Het Ware Leven?* (1992);

- Translated into Portuguese by Katia Grumberg under the title *Overdadeiro mondo?*;

- Also translated into German by Piet Defraeye and Polish by Josef Kwaterko.

- **Le Coeur découvert:** first published in English under the title

*The Heart Laid Bare* by McClelland and Stewart, 1989, 249 pp., with translation by Sheila Fischman.

- **La Maison suspendue:** first published in English under the same title by Talonbooks, 1991, 101 pp., with translation by John Van Burek; first produced in English by the Canadian Stage Company, Toronto, on November 20, 1990.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Translated into modern Scots by Martin Bowman and Bill Findlay under the title *The House Among the Stars*.

- **Marcel poursuivi par les chiens:** first published in English under the title *Marcel Pursued by the Hounds* by Talonbooks, 1992, with translation by John Van Burek; first produced in English at the Winter Garden Theatre, Toronto, in 1992.

- OTHER TRANSLATIONS:

- Adapted for Belgium.

- **Le Premier Quartier de la lune:** first published in English under the title *The First Quarter of the Moon* by Talonbooks, 1994, 240 pp., with translation by Shiela Fischman.

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