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Staging the Psyche:
Representing the “Other Scene” in the Theater of Michel Tremblay, Marie NDiaye and Wajdi Mouawad

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Abstract
Staging the Psyche: Representing the "Other Scene" in the Theater of Michel Tremblay, Marie NDiaye and Wajdi Mouawad
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This dissertation examines the possibilities of and the meaning of theater in the wake of the discovery of the unconscious. By exploring the ways in which three contemporary Francophone authors have created innovative and evocative theatrical representations of the dramas that unfold in the mind, it contributes to the discussion of several questions. How does our contemporary understanding of the unconscious change the ways in which playwrights use theatrical space? What is the function of theater for the spectator and for society, most particularly in the contemporary French and Francophone context? Why does theater still attract spectators despite the fact that contemporary visual culture offers numerous other creative outlets both for spectators and artists?

The first chapter explores the theoretical links between psychoanalysis and theater via a discussion of shared terms and an analysis of the theatrical metaphors that have been present in psychoanalytic discourse since its origins with Freud. The subsequent chapters analyze three playwrights who have integrated the concept of psychic space into their writings, using the theatrical space to stage metaphors for the otherwise invisible actions of the mind. Chapter two discusses two plays by Québécois playwright Michel Tremblay, *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* and *Le vrai monde?,* arguing that the use of *mise en abyme* structures demonstrates metaphorically the ways in which Tremblay's characters experience psychic distress. Chapter three addresses French playwright Marie NDiaye's first theatrical work, *Hilda*. It argues that the absence of the title character from the stage becomes a metaphor for the destructive fantasy structure that eventually removes her from her own life. The final chapter analyzes the embodiments of dreams on the stage in Lebanese-Québécois playwright Wajdi Mouawad's *Littoral*. Charting the trajectory of the play's main character, Wilfrid, from living within his own mind to living within the world, it points to the necessity of the encounter with "the other" in order to come to an understanding of the self.

By representing both directly and metaphorically the disastrous effects of unconscious living, Tremblay, Ndiaye and Mouawad plead for conscious recognition of the unconscious structures that can govern our lives.

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Introduction

At the historical moment when Sigmund Freud was developing his theories of psychoanalysis, the literature of the same era gave him a fruitful field of study for questions of human psychology. The fiction of authors like Zola, Maupassant, and Poe explored disruptions and disturbances of the human mind in short stories and novels while Scandinavians Ibsen and Strindberg dissected disturbed characters on the stage. In his Preface to the 1888 play *Miss Julie*, Strindberg suggests that these examinations of the workings of the human mind are a *sign of the times*:

> I think that the modern audience is mostly interested in the psychological events and our knowledge-hungry souls cannot be content to watch events before us without finding out the reason why. We want to see the strings, the machinery, examine the box with the false bottom, touch the magic ring to find the join, look at the cards to see how they are marked. (93)

Sigmund Freud, whose *Studies on Hysteria* with Josef Breuer was published in 1895 and whose monumental *The Interpretation of Dreams* first appeared in 1900, spent his entire life trying to uncover the "strings and machinery" of the workings of the human mind. His scientific endeavors, however, were immediately admired by the literary minds of his own Vienna; and literature, which he had used to demonstrate many of his theories, was in turn affected by its own readings of his work. This dissertation will examine innovative works in contemporary French and Francophone theater that have been concerned not so much with *uncovering* Strindberg's "strings and machinery" of the human mind, but with exploring different means of *representing* them.

It is clear that theatrical concepts contributed to the development of psychoanalytic theory. Even at the very early stages of his reflections, Freud turns to the theater in order to elaborate many of the key concepts of psychoanalytic discourse. If Freud refers to the unconscious as the "other scene,"[1] it is because he sees the psyche as a stage on which unconscious dramas are enacted. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen theater evolve in many ways. If the psyche, through Freud, came to be represented as a theatrical space, it was only a matter of time before certain theatrical spaces would become metaphors for the psyche and its functioning. In some cases to be discussed in the following pages, such as Freud's Vienna, we can definitively claim that psychoanalytic theory changed the way authors wrote for the theater. This claim, however, is not necessary in order to hypothesize that psychoanalytic concepts have opened new and different ways of thinking the theater—and vice versa that theater gives psychoanalysis an artistic form through which it can reflect on itself.

While this dissertation reads particular plays as metaphors for psychic life, it also addresses how authors may use theater as a metaphor for the psyche because the concept of the psyche, as elaborated by psychoanalysis, is inherently theatrical. The first chapter explores both the use of theatrical metaphors by practitioners of psychoanalysis and reflections on the experience of the human psyche as elaborated by practitioners of theater. By examining three spaces—theatrical space, psychic space, and analytic space—in their relation to the *world* space—it contributes to the discussion of several questions. What is the function of theater for the spectator and for society, most

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[1] In German, "Der andere Schauplatz," a phrase Freud borrowed from German psychophysicist Gustav Fechner and cited in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, is a concept that has been translated as "the other scene" in English and "l'autre scène" in French and picked up by scholars in many fields. In psychoanalysis, it has been elaborated upon by Jacques Lacan and written about extensively by his student Octave Mannoni in *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire ou l'Autre scène*.

particularly in the contemporary French and Francophone context? Why did it, and why does it still, attract spectators despite the fact that contemporary visual culture offers numerous other creative outlets both for spectators and artists? How does our contemporary understanding of the unconscious change the ways in which playwrights use theatrical space?

The first chapter explores the theoretical links between psychoanalysis and theater, including both the presence of these links at the birth of psychoanalysis and their importance for the evolution of theater. It begins by addressing the concept of catharsis as the initial link between theatrical and analytic spaces. It turns next to a reading of certain psychoanalytic writings that have theorized both psychic space and analytic space via theatrical metaphors. These discussions will allow us to deepen our readings of the particular plays that the dissertation addresses.

Historically, while Strindberg pointed out as early as 1888 that psychological concerns were preoccupying dramatic authors and their audiences, the new science of psychoanalysis was to have an immediate impact on the artistic world around it. Perhaps the world of artistic creation was already primed for the innovations that psychoanalysis would justify and encourage, but the first concrete evidence that psychoanalytic thought changed the way that some authors wrote theater can be found in Freud's Vienna. The *Studies on Hysteria* were read not only by medical practitioners, but also by the literate public and by the world of artists. Richard Armstrong points out that Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote a highly successful version of *Elektra* in which the heroine's symptoms imitate those of Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O.):

> By the time Elektra returned to the Viennese stage in Hofmannsthal's version (first as a play on May 14, 1905, then reworked as an opera with the music of Richard Strauss on March 24th, 1909), she had taken on all the colors of Bertha Pappenheim's *fin-de-siècle* hysteria. A telltale copy of the *Studies on Hysteria* from Hofmannsthal's library shows that he read Breuer's theoretical section and case study of Anna O. intensively, and not surprisingly we find Elektra emerging with a series of familiar symptoms. Every evening she obsessively mourns her father, has periods of "absence" when she compulsively replays the memory of her father's murder, and falls into a kind of autohypnosis. This is exactly the "hypnoid" state that Breuer theorized in the *Studies*, coupled with the extreme fixation on the dead father that stood behind the particular "pathogenic ideas" of Bertha Pappenheim. It is important to note that Hofmannsthal had specifically underlined the word "private theater" [*Privattheater*] in his copy of the *Studies*, a theme that is radically written into his version. (Armstrong 102)

Thus theater, in the early twentieth century, had already begun looking to the new science of psychoanalysis in order to feed its innovation. This was a process that Freud found disconcerting, and he elaborated on his frustration with authors pilfering from scientific texts at the 1909 session of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society:

> […] the art of the poet does not consist of finding and dealing with problems. That he should leave to the psychologists. Rather, the poet's art consists of obtaining poetic effects out of such problems; experience

> shows that these problems must be disguised if they are to produce such effects; furthermore, that the effect is by no means diminished if one merely suspects what the problems are and none of the readers or listeners can make out clearly what the effect is. Thus the poet's art consists essentially in covering over. What is unconscious ought not, without more ado, be rendered conscious; of course, it must become conscious to a certain degree—that is, to the point at which it still affects us, without our occupying ourselves with it in our conscious thoughts. At the point where this becomes possible, art leaves off. We have the right to analyze a poet's work, but it is not right for the poet to make poetry out of [*poetisieren*] our analyses. Yet, this seems to be a sign of our times. The poets dabble in all possible sorts of sciences, and then proceed to a poetic working up of the knowledge they have acquired. The public is fully justified in rejecting such products. (Nunberg and Federn 189)[2]

Interestingly, Freud's language mirrors Strindberg's. Art's preoccupation with psychic events (or psychoanalysis) is indeed a sign of the times. Yet, as Richard Armstrong points out, Freud is himself behind the times because the public did *not* reject these modern explorations of psychology on the stage (105). After Freud, the stage as a scene of innovative representations of psychic space continued to prosper.

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen many evolutions in theatrical representation. Since this dissertation deals in its subsequent chapters with contemporary French and Francophone authors, the rest of this introduction will present some of the

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[2] I owe my own encounter with this quotation to Richard Armstrong's aforementioned article: "Theory and Theatricality: Classical Drama and the Early Formation of Psychoanalysis."

ways in which French-speaking dramatists and theater practitioners have contributed to parallels between theatrical and psychic spaces. The twentieth century facilitated these parallels by a focus on the concept of *mise en scène*. Theater, apart from a few exceptions, is meant to be staged, and thus it has a unique capacity to *show* rather than *tell* that other literary genres lack.[3] Its staging within space and time, visible and audible, allows it to speak in different ways. If critics generally refer to the twentieth century as the century of *mise en scène*, it is because it was the first century to explore widely the implications of theater's potential energy as a literary form that comes to life on a stage. Historically, the term *mise en scène* first became commonly used in the 1880s. We will take it to mean both the process of passing from the stage to the page (i.e. *mettre en scène une pièce*), and the culmination of that process (i.e. a particular *mise en scène* of a particular play). Twentieth-century French theatrical thought has been largely preoccupied with the concept of *mise en scène*, and with the idea that the staging of a play releases its full potentialities in ways that a text on the page cannot. The plays to be examined in later chapters are interesting not because of a specific *mise en scène*, but instead because of the "potential energy" contained within the texts as works of literature to be voiced and embodied on a stage.

In this century of *mise en scène*, the text constituted the "jumping off point" for theatrical production, but it was no longer esteemed to be sufficient in and of itself. It contained the potential energy that the *metteur en scène* was meant to reveal. Roger Planchon, an important director from the sixties and seventies, characterized the changes in theater by distinguishing between two different types of "writing" involved in

[3] We may think of Musset's *Théâtre dans un fauteuil* in which we find *Lorenzaccio*, impossible to stage in the era in which it was written. The multiple stagings it has seen since, however, seem to suggest that even theater written to be read in an armchair is also, perhaps in spite of itself, written for the stage.

theatrical productions: "l'époque contemporaine a découvert un nouveau comportement face au théâtre: elle établit la différence entre une écriture dramatique qu'on appelle le texte et une écriture scénique, c'est la mise en scène […] [B]ien évidemment, ces deux écritures ont toujours existé, mais pendant des siècles on ne s'en rendait pas compte" (Biet et Triau 657). ["The contemporary era has discovered a new attitude towards theater: it establishes the difference between dramatic writing which we call the text and scenic writing, which is the *mise en scène*. Of course, these two forms of writing have always existed, but for centuries we didn't realize it."] Two types of writing, dramatic and scenic, and two types of authors, the writer and the *metteur en scène*. The latter's writing reads the former's and releases its energy in the form of scenic representations.

Alongside the rise of the *metteur en scène*, playwrights themselves proved to be interested in exploring the metaphorical potentialities of theater. Some of the first French-speaking authors to do so were the writers of the Theater of the Absurd.[4] Authors like Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov and Jean Genet turned away from realism towards other types of scenic expressions of human experience. Esslin quotes Ionesco's vision of his own theater:

> I have, for example, tried to exteriorize the anxiety…of my characters through objects; to make the stage settings speak; to translate the action into visual terms; to project visible images of fear, regret, remorse, alienation; to play with words…I have thus tried to extend the language of the theatre….Is this to be condemned? (Esslin 104)

[4] The term "Theater of the Absurd" was coined by critic Martin Esslin in his 1961 book *The Theater of the Absurd*. In the French context it is most often applied to dramatists Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugène Ionesco and Jean Genet.

Ionesco's "exteriorization" of the anxiety of his characters and the "visible images of fear" can be seen as attempts to render psychic space visible on the theatrical stage. In plays like *Amédée ou comment s'en débarrasser* or *Rhinocéros*, the ever-growing corpse in the bedroom and the constantly proliferating beasts metaphorically represent the monstrous elements of individual psyches.

Over the past fifty years, many other authors have written plays that can be seen as representations of psychic space. Nathalie Sarraute's *Le silence* of 1967 or Hélène Cixous's *Portrait de Dora* of 1976, and works by Valère Novarina, Marguerite Duras, and Bernard-Marie Koltès have all explored and tested the limits of the theatrical form. An exhaustive study of twentieth-century and contemporary French theater's explorations of theatrical space as psychic space is beyond the scope of this project. The chapters that follow examine the importance of the concept of psychic space in the works of three contemporary Francophone playwrights: Michel Tremblay, Marie NDiaye, and Wajdi Mouawad. Each of these playwrights has enjoyed international acclaim, and each has a different approach to the French language, the theatrical text, and to the work of *mise en scène*. Freud often spoke of authors of literature as bearers of certain unconscious knowledge of human psychic function—and he turned to their works as proof of his theories. Tremblay, NDiaye, and Mouawad seem not only to have a certain sensitivity to psychic processes, but also a recognition of the ways in which theater can be used to demonstrate, via the bringing to life of powerfully evocative texts, the mind's power to influence so-called objective reality. This is not to say that their texts *must* be read psychoanalytically, but that reading them with an eye toward the functioning of the psyche allows us to read the social and historical contexts of their works in more

profound ways. While Tremblay is the only one of the three authors who explicitly references psychoanalytic terms, NDiaye's and Mouawad's works also constantly engage with underlying psychic structures.

Michel Tremblay exploded onto the Québécois stage in 1968 with his play *Les Belles-sœurs*, and his career as a successful playwright has just entered its fifth decade. Over the past forty years, in near-constant collaboration with director André Brassard, he has experimented both with the theatrical form and with the language of the theater. His theatrical works have been translated into many different languages (and dialects) and performed all over the world. Also a renowned novelist, he develops his theatrical characters in novels and vice versa, creating a fictive world in Montréal that is Balzacian in scope. While *Les Belles-soeurs* (1965) was the first play written entirely in joual,[5] demonstrating Tremblay's desire for linguistic freedom, his innovations have branched into other realms as well. In *Sainte Carmen de la Main* (1975), Tremblay gives an air of Greek tragedy (including two Choruses of pimps, prostitutes and transvestites) to the story of the brutal murder of a lounge singer. In *Albertine en cinq temps* (1983), Tremblay's main character, aged thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, and seventy, holds a conversation with herself (at different ages) and with her sister Madeleine. In a more recent play, *Impératif présent* (2003), the first act consists of the monologue of a fifty-year-old man to his wholly debilitated father, telling him all the things that he never said when they could exchange words. The second act represents the opposite situation: the younger man is debilitated, and the older father speaks. Their monologues read like inverted mirrors, opposite stories in which they attempt to justify to each other the

[5] Joual is the popular Québécois dialect. The name comes from the Québécois pronunciation of the word "cheval."

miscommunication of their lives together as father and son. The spectator is left to decide where lies the "truth."[6] Michael Cardy comments that: "Tremblay's refusal of interpretive closure is a constant of his philosophy of theatre" (42). This lack of closure allows his plays to open a space for reflections on larger human truths that are often suggested by the structures of the plays themselves.

In the two plays analyzed in the chapter dedicated to Tremblay, the playwright superimposes two versions of a single "story" which together reveal truths that neither could reveal separately. Each play is structured in such a way as to call into question any form of objective reality and to point out the distinctly subjective nature of psychic life. In the first play, *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* (1970), he collapses time; in the second, *Le vrai monde?* (1986), he collapses fiction and "reality." The readings of these plays in the second chapter will seek to explore the result of his use of simultaneity in each case.

Marie NDiaye, contemporary French author born in France of a French mother and Senegalese father, began writing plays many years after she had established herself as an acclaimed novelist at the age of sixteen with *Quant au riche avenir* (Minuit, 1985). While critics have often written on NDiaye's novels, most notably her Prix Femina-winning *Rosie Car*pe, little critical attention has been paid to her theater as of yet. Each of the two longer critical works dedicated to the entirety of NDiaye's oeuvre, Dominique Rabaté's 2008 book *Marie NDiaye* and the January 2009 special issue of the *Revue des Sciences Humaines* edited by Shirley Jordan and Andrew Asibong, contains only one

[6] Interestingly, this play is a return to the characters Claude and Alex from *Le vrai monde?* (which will be analyzed in the next chapter). Michel Tremblay undertook its writing at the suggestion of his friend Wajdi Mouawad.

section devoted to her theater. Rabaté's article "Le théâtre: economies des relations (in)humaines," addresses the inhuman exchanges of goods, identities, and affects that abound in NDiaye's theatrical works. Christophe Meurée's article in the *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, "Au diable le sujet: le concave et le convexe dans le théâtre de Marie NDiaye" examines her characters in terms of the "shapes" of their disturbingly shifting subjectivities. There is no doubt that the relatively small amount of critical work written on NDiaye's theater will expand in the coming years, as NDiaye's presence beside Marguerite Duras as only the second woman author to have a work taken into the repertory of the *Comédie Française* (*Papa doit manger*) promises that much remains to be said about her dark and intriguing theatrical works.

Written primarily for the radio, NDiaye's theater has a unique relationship to contemporary ideas of *mise en scène*. Because of the particular context for which she writes, NDiaye admits rarely envisioning the possible *mises en scène* of her texts—yet directors continue to stage them. Since the production of *Papa doit manger* in 2003 at the Comédie Française, there have been no fewer than eight different stagings of three of her other theatrical texts in Europe alone.[7] This is astonishing given that she first turned to the theatrical form only eleven years ago, and writes, as mentioned above, primarily for the radio. Even when NDiaye's bodiless theater (bodiless in that it was initially a theater of voices) is staged using in-the-flesh actors, it retains the aura that someone or something is "missing." Michel Tremblay's theater has also been called a theater of

[7] *Hilda*: a) October 2005 by Christophe Perton at the Comédie de Valence; b) July 2006 by Guila Clara Kessous at Avignon Off; c) March 2008 by Elisabeth Chailloux at the Théâtre des Quartiers d'Ivry. *Les serpents*: a) February 2005 by Georges Guerreiro at La Poche Genève in Switzerland; b) April 2006 by Marcel Delval at the Théâtre Varia in Brussels; c) March 2008 by Julia Zimina at the Théâtre des Quartiers d'Ivry. *Rien d'humain*: a) March 2008 by Christian Germain at the Théâtre des Quartiers d'Ivry; b) January 2009 by Olivier Werner at the Théâtre de l'Est parisien. This information can be found at: http://www.theatre-contemporain.net/biographies/Marie-NDiaye/textes/

voices, but his voices speak from every imaginable dimension of time and space, fiction and reality. Marie NDiaye's theater of voices often evokes an offstage figure whose absence determines all of the action that takes place on the stage. These figures, absent from the theatrical stage, are nonetheless omnipresent on the psychic stage, constantly occupying the thoughts and discourse of the speaking characters. Aside from *Papa doit manger*, each of NDiaye's plays operates around and refers to at least one character who never appears on the stage. In *Les serpents*, the son of Mme Diss, husband to France and ex-husband to Nancy, is felt by the audience as an offstage menace; in *Providence*, *Rien d'humain*, and *La règle* (an as-yet unpublished work written for France Culture), children occupy the minds and words of the characters onstage while never appearing themselves. As the action of these plays unfolds, the audience witnesses how each character *on* the stage carries an obsessive preoccupation with a character that the audience never sees. In *Hilda*, NDiaye's first play which will be examined in the third chapter, the title character never appears on the stage: she exists only in the discourse of her employer Mme Lemarchand, her husband Franck, and her sister Corinne. The plays themselves are dialogues, arguably *dialogues de sourds,* because her characters show a shocking incapacity to take other human beings into account (a trait that will be discussed in more detail in the chapter). NDiaye's characters evoke images of what supposedly occurs just beyond the gaze of the spectators, but the stage itself remains remarkably denuded of physical action. What, then, do her audiences see and hear? Bizarre in its lack of physical and visual action, the stage becomes the place where NDiaye's characters divulge the actions of their minds. The reality of psychic events displaces any sort of objective reality of world events. NDiaye's spectators can take nothing for granted,

because they never witness anything but her characters reporting on events that take place beyond their field of vision. The examination in chapter three of the theatrical functioning of *Hilda* will reveal how NDiaye offers up to her spectators a "theater of the mind."[8]

Born in Lebanon in 1968, living in Québec since 1983 and often working in France, Wajdi Mouawad is a transatlantic Francophone playwright, director and actor whose theatrical works have received international acclaim since the staging of *Littoral* in 1997 at the Festival des Francophonies in Limoges. Having studied theater at the *École nationale du théâtre de Canada*, his career has included an artistic investment in every part of the process of bringing a play to the stage. Co-founder with his friend Isabelle Leblanc of the Théâtre Ô Parleur in Montreal, which he directed with her from 1990 to 1999, he has since directed Montreal's Théâtre de Quat'Sous (from 2000 to 2004), and is currently the Artistic Director of the National Arts Centre French Theatre in Ottawa. In 2005, he made the controversial decision not to accept the prestigious Prix Molière for the best Francophone playwright, and explained his decision based on his personal discomfort at being placed in competition with other writers. During a statement read on his behalf at the ceremony, however, he also voiced his disappointment with the theatrical establishment's relative indifference towards new contemporary authors:

> Pour que ce prix ne soit pas perdu totalement, je désire en faire un tout petit symbole pour tous ces textes que les auteurs envoient dans les théâtres et que la plupart des directeurs ne lisent jamais, [...] pour tous ces textes perdus auxquels les théâtres n'ont même pas retourné un accusé de

[8] The expression "theater of the mind" is borrowed from psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall, whose work will be discussed in Chapter One.

> réception, pour tous ces théâtres qui n'ont même pas la décence d'avoir un comité de lecture, pour tous ces appels placés par les auteurs auxquels on ne répond jamais.[9]
>
> [In order that this prize not be a total loss, I want to make it into a tiny symbol for all of the texts that authors send to theaters and that most directors never read, […] for all of the lost texts that theaters never even acknowledge receiving, for all of the theaters that don't even have the decency to have a reading committee, for all of the calls made by authors that never get responses.]

In 2005, the same year of his Molière refusal, he founded two theater companies dedicated to producing new plays, *Abé carré cé carré* in Montreal (with young Québécois playwright and actor Emmanuel Schwartz) and *Au carré de l'hypoténuse* in Paris. His dedication to helping new plays be produced is a testament to his belief in the importance of theater as a vibrant and evolving form of artistic expression. He continues to write, act, and direct both his own works and the works of other authors to critical and public acclaim both in Canada and Europe. In 2008, he was chosen to be the *Artiste associé* at the 2009 Festival d'Avignon.[10]

The final chapter of this dissertation addresses *Littoral*, the first of Mouawad's plays to gain international acclaim, and also the first play of a promised tetralogy, including *Incendies* (2003) and *Forêts* (2006). The final installment, *Ciels*, will premier at Avignon in July 2009, where the first three plays will also be produced in their entirety, directed by the author. Where Tremblay's and particularly NDiaye's plays might be described as minimalist in their reliance on voices, Mouawad's could be called epic in its grand stories, transatlantic voyages, and interminglings of realities, ghosts, and dreams.

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[9] http://www.radio-canada.ca/culture/modele-document.asp?section=theatredanse&idEntite=3224

[10] Biographical information on Mouawad can be found in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, online edition: http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0010388

By examining these contemporary works by Tremblay, NDiaye, and Mouawad, we hope to demonstrate the continued relevance of theater as an artistic medium that permits unique forms of enjoyment and insight into the human condition. Freud and many psychoanalysts who followed him recognized the evocative power of theatrical space, and have used it to figure both psychic spaces and analytic spaces. The following chapters will argue in turn that these authors' use of the theatrical space to figure psychic space offers powerful proof that theater opens a provocative and necessary space for exploring and encountering otherwise invisible aspects of human experience.

Chapter One:

On Theaters and the Mind

Before proceeding to our analyses of these contemporary authors, it will be helpful to examine some of the historical links between theatrical spaces, analytic spaces, and psychic spaces that one could argue make the theatrical art form uniquely powerful. Several terms shared by practitioners of theater and psychoanalysis hint that the two fields share certain common elements and an investment in engaging the mind.

Catharsis: Linking Theatrical and Analytic Spaces

In 1857, Jacob Bernays, classics scholar and uncle to the yet unborn Martha Freud, published a discussion of the term catharsis in a work entitled: "Fundamentals of Aristotle's Lost Essay on the 'Effect of Tragedy'." Bernays's reading of catharsis in the famous passage from *Poetics*, "Tragedy... is the imitation of a good action, which is complete and of a certain length, by means of language made pleasing for each part separately; it relies in its various elements not on narrative but on acting; through pity and fear it achieves the catharsis of such emotions" bases its interpretation of the term not only on its use in the *Poetics* but also on its more expanded use in the *Politics*. Bernays's detailed analysis reinscribes it in the medical context from which the term catharsis, often translated as "purgation," was first borrowed (Bernays 319).

Bernays first gives two options for a literal translation of the term: "[Catharsis] in the Greek language means only two things: either an expiation of guilt brought about by certain priestly ceremonies, a lustration, or a lifting or alleviation of illness brought about by means of medical relief" (Bernays 326). He then goes on to explain that the first

meaning is impossible in Aristotle's text, because it relies on a metaphorical use of catharsis to explain another metaphorical use (since catharsis as expiation of guilt is already a metaphorical extension of its original medical meaning). As Bernays explains rather condescendingly:

> For had he [Aristotle] yet had in view not the ceremonies themselves, the intoxications and ablutions, but at most the agreeable effects experienced by one who has undergone lustration, then he would have wanted to explain one manifestation of the mind—the calming down of one who is enraptured by means of intoxicating songs—by comparing it to another manifestation of the mind that was from the outset not at all clearer—the feeling of being unburdened of guilt by one who is expiated. No sensible person can impute to Aristotle such a fruitless and obvious conjuring trick. (327)

As he analyzes Aristotle's use of the term catharsis in the *Poetics* and the *Politics*, Bernays comes to a definition of the term as it seems to have been meant by Aristotle: "a designation transferred from the somatic to the mental for the *type of treatment* given to an oppressed *person that does not seek to transform or suppress the element oppressing him, but rather to arouse and drive it into the open, and thereby to bring about the relief of the oppressed person*" (329).[11] Bernays' phrasing here bears a striking resemblance to the language that would eventually characterize early psychoanalytic practice.

The "cathartic method" was the method used by Breuer and Freud in their treatment of hysterical patients. It relied on the use of hypnosis to reveal and release the hidden affects that were dictating their patients' symptoms. Freud writes: "In cases of

[11] Italics mine.

hysteria, according to this theory, the affect passed over into an unusual somatic innervation ('conversion'), but could be given another direction and got rid of ('abreacted'), if the experience were revived under hypnosis. The authors gave this procedure the name of 'catharsis' (purging, setting free of a strangulated affect)" (Freud V. 19, 124)[12]. The name "cathartic method" was in fact the first name given to Freud and Breuer's attempts to *render unconscious mental processes conscious*: "Under the treatment, therefore, 'catharsis' came about when the path to consciousness was opened and there was a normal discharge of affect" (Freud V.18, 236).

The way in which the "path to consciousness" was opened in the initial work with hysterical patients differed significantly from what would come to be known as the psychoanalytic "talking cure."[13] In his introduction to the republication of the Bernays essay in *American Imago*, Nicholas Rand points out the similarity of Bernays' thinking to what Breuer stated of Anna O: "I have already described how completely her mind was relieved when, shaking with fear and horror, she had reproduced these frightful images and given verbal utterance to them" (Freud V. 2, 29-30). Yet the verbal utterances, the reviving and reproducing of affects in the hysterical patients, were not evoked under the same conditions as later psychoanalytic practice would embrace.

The term "catharsis," as used by Freud and Breuer, evolved into "psycho-analysis" when their practice changed:

> The theory of repression became the corner-stone of our understanding of the neuroses. A different view had now to be taken of the task of therapy.

[12] All citations from Freud are from the Standard Edition. They are noted by volume number (V. X) followed by the page number. (V. X, pg.)

[13] While the term "talking cure" was coined by Anna O., its exercise in her case was evoked under a state of hypnosis. The later psychoanalytic version would be based on a conscious (unhypnotized) patient's free associations.

> Its aim was no longer to "abreact" an affect which had got on to the wrong lines but to uncover repressions and replace them by acts of judgement which might result either in the accepting or in the condemning of what had formerly been repudiated. I showed my recognition of the new situation by no longer calling my method of investigation and treatment catharsis but psycho-analysis. (Freud V. 20, 30)

The term "psychoanalysis" evolved because both the word and the concept of catharsis as defined by Freud and Breuer's practices showed themselves to be insufficient to describe the process of healing undertaken by psychoanalytic treatment. As a concept, however, adopted by Aristotle and later by Freud and Breuer, catharsis links theatrical and analytic spaces. Both the theatrical space and the analytic space of treatment become sites of a process of relieving the mind of certain "oppressions" (as Bernays would have it). This relief comes not from a purgation of these emotions, but from a reliving of them: the theatrical spectator is relieved of his own excess fear and pity by reliving these emotions empathically via his witnessing of and identification with the hero's trials; the analysand revives and brings forth into meaningful speech the repressed emotions that cause his psychic distress. As psychoanalysis continues to elaborate its idea of the psyche, and as the world begins to take notice of psychoanalytic thought, the first parallels between psychoanalysis and theater created by the concept of catharsis become more and more elaborate as a near-constant dialogue develops between the two fields.

Psychoanalytic Theory: Psychic Space and Analytic Space as Theatrical Spaces

As psychoanalytic theory moves from its embryonic state in the late nineteenth century into a twentieth century clinical practice theorized by many analysts after Freud, theatrical metaphors abound. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud's first major "psychoanalytic" text, theater is the privileged literary genre from which he draws examples to elaborate his most important theories. We rarely acknowledge the ways in which Freud's foundational concepts of psychoanalysis transformed traditional notions of the term "space," in a sense giving location to a concept that does not exist tangibly in the physical world. Biologically housed within the brain, the unconscious, the "other scene," can nonetheless not be located. Modern neuroscience may be trying to erase the gap, and Freud himself once dreamed of doing the same, but psychoanalysis makes a clear distinction between brain and mind.

The mind, as it is modeled and remodeled by Freud throughout his work, is figured as a distinctly theatrical space. When he moves from the topographical model of the psyche, with its unconscious, preconscious and conscious, to the structural model, of the ego, the id, and the superego, he theatricalizes his description of psychic functioning. The ego, the id, and the superego are described as if they were functioning entities within us that can be seen as each playing specific roles. In his essay "The Ego and the Id," Freud describes the ego:

> We have formed the idea that in each individual there is a coherent organization of mental processes; and we call this his ego. […] From this ego proceed the repressions, too, by means of which it is sought to exclude certain trends in the mind not merely from consciousness but also from

> other forms of effectiveness and activity. In analysis these trends which have been shut out stand in opposition to the ego, and the analysis is faced with the task of removing the resistances which the ego displays against concerning itself with the repressed. (Freud V. 19, 17)

This idea of something "standing in opposition to the ego" reinforces the conceptualization of the ego as a role or an independent agency. Furthermore, the ego is explicitly anthropomorphized and inherently theatrical in relation to the id:

> […] in its relation to the id it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go, so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own. (Freud V. 19, 25)

Here the id is also described as an agency with a will of its own.

Finally, we come to the third member of the Freudian triad, formed, according to Freud, at the moment of repression of the Oedipus complex: "The super-ego retains the character of the father […]" (Freud V. 19, 34). Although it would be inaccurate to state that Freud believed the ego, id, and super-ego to be characters housed within our psyche, they are certainly more theatrical than the concepts of unconscious, preconscious and conscious. He describes them as agencies in constant dramatic conflict with one another, and the human being's life in the external world is determined by the dramatic conflicts of these agencies.

Freud's imagining of the psyche opened the door for other analysts to take the theatrical metaphor even further. In her 1982 book *Theaters of the Mind: Illusion and Truth on the Psychoanalytic Stage*, contemporary psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall places the theatrical metaphor at the center of her reflection about clinical psychoanalysis. For McDougall, the *I* is itself a complex theater full of many different characters, who are most often unknown to the patient when he or she comes to analysis:

> Each of us harbors in our inner universe a number of "characters," parts of ourselves that frequently operate in complete contradiction to one another, causing conflict and mental pain to our conscious selves. For we are relatively unacquainted with these hidden players and their roles. Whether we will it or not, our inner characters are constantly seeking a stage on which to play out their tragedies and comedies. Although we rarely assume responsibility for our secret theater productions, the producer is seated in our own minds. Moreover, it is this inner world with its repeating repertory that determines most of what happens to us in the external world. (McDougall 3-4)

McDougall designates our psyche, and its psychic space, as the living quarters for an entire troupe of players who all contribute to making us who we are. McDougall conceptualizes the psyche itself as a creative space in which internal dramas are constantly *mis en scène*. When she states that the actors within us are "constantly seeking a stage on which to play out their tragedies and comedies," she speaks of the conflicts that occur in the external world, when one or another character shows itself in our relations with others. In the case of an analytic patient, the manifestations of these inner

characters are obviously not performing appropriately on the world stage. Their acts in the world render the patient's life conflicted and difficult, and the patient is unable to determine why because he or she is under the influence of an invisible "producer." The key to McDougall's theatrical conceptualization of the psyche is its secretive, i.e. unconscious, nature. Either the patient does not recognize that he is creating the dramas of everyday life, or he sees it and yet is still unable to stop the cycle. McDougall asserts that, through analysis, the patient is finally able to allow all of the characters to manifest themselves in a more controlled and productive environment, demystifying the theatrical process of living.

The goal, then, of analysis, is to create the environment, the "stage," where these inner roles can come forward, be acted out, and reveal the primitive psychic conflicts that trouble the adult subject:

> On the psychoanalytic stage the different theaters and their varied cast of characters slowly emerge. As an analysand begins to have confidence in the analyst's interest and ability to contain the conflicting emotions of love, hate, fear, anger, anxiety and depression that come to the force, particularly when fantasies about the analyst and the analytic relationship develop, the *I* begins to reveal the different psychic theaters in which its conflicts are expressed. It also allows the inner characters to be recognized by both analyst and patient (McDougall 13).

Here psychic, theatrical, and analytic spaces seem to have melded into one. The psyche, a virtual space, holds a theater full of characters who, instead of performing on an appropriate stage, perform in the external world to disastrous effects, and are almost

never recognized for their performances. Analysis, then, creates a space for them to come forth, perform openly, and "take a bow," so to speak, in order that they might eventually either be able to retire, or be recognized for every performance that they make.

These metaphors of retirement and recognition involve the analysand's capacity, through analysis, to evaluate the characters that comprise his or her *I*. Some of those characters, playing the roles of the patient's inner child whose infantile sexual impulses have been repressed since childhood, may stop appearing in the performances of everyday life after they have been properly acknowledged and dealt with in the analysis. But if they do not retire, then the analytic stage crafts a space where they can be recognized for who and what they represent, evaluated, reflected upon, and dealt with accordingly. In the ideal analytic space, all of the analysand's inner characters are welcome, because the analyst is *trained* to recognize them, meet them, and interact with them. McDougall's metaphor of containment is an interesting one, for once again it reiterates this idea of space. *Where* does the analyst "contain" the conflicting emotions emanating from the analysand? In his or her *own* psychic space—they become aspects of his or her own repertoire, and it is on the stage of analysis, through the functioning of the transference, that they can be brought forward to perform in such a way as to reduce, eventually, the psychic conflicts of the analysand. Thus the theatrical space of the psyche is explored in the theatrical space of the analytic session.

McDougall's model of the psyche as a theater troupe is an evocative one, but we must turn back to Freud in order to understand how this ragtag group of performers in the "Theater of the Mind" comes together. According to psychoanalysis, how is the self formed, and what, exactly, is a self? Another term that links psychoanalysis to theater in

Freudian reflections will be the foundation of the creation of the self: identification. Identification has a specific meaning as a technical term in psychoanalysis, and it is part of what makes theater an art form that continues to draw spectators. Psychoanalysis first used the term identification when speaking of hysterical patients whose physical symptoms were often "borrowed" from people in their entourage with whom they "identified." French analysts Laplanche and Pontalis define the term as follows in their dictionary of psychoanalytic terms, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*: "Psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified" (205). They go on to specify the importance of identification to Freudian psychoanalytic theory:

> In Freud's work the concept of identification comes little by little to have the central importance which makes it, not simply one psychical mechanism among others, but *the operation itself whereby the human subject is constituted*. This evolution is correlated chiefly, in the first place, with the coming to the fore of the Oedipus complex viewed in light of its structural consequences, and secondly, with the revision effected by the second theory of the psychical apparatus, according to which those agencies that become differentiated from the id are given their specific characters by the identifications of which they are the outcome. (206)[14]

If the human subject is constructed by a series of identifications, then there is no essential self. These identifications that serve to construct the personality (as Laplanche and Pontalis would have it) create a self that is inherently and infinitely multiple. The "cast

[14] Italics mine.

of characters" of McDougall's theater of the mind is created by a lifetime of identifications, and the concept of the psychic space as theatrical space reveals the possibility of the self's multiplicity.

Freud also posits that it is via the possibility of identification that theater is both a powerful form of artistic expression and a metaphor for psychoanalytic practice. When he first turns to the play *Oedipus Rex* in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, it is not immediately to define the Oedipus complex, but to invite us to consider the functions of both theater and clinical practice: "The action of the play consists in nothing other than the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement—a process that can be likened to the work of psychoanalysis—that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laïus […]" (Freud V. 4, 261-262). What is revealed, in the play and in the analytic cure, is a type of self-knowledge that was formerly inaccessible. Many years later, Freud would restate the same proposition slightly differently in his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*:

> I hope many of you may yourselves have felt the shattering effect of the tragedy in which Sophocles has treated the story. The work of the Athenian dramatist exhibits the way in which the long-past deed of Oedipus is gradually brought to light by an investigation ingeniously protracted and fanned into life by ever fresh relays of evidence. To this extent it has a certain resemblance to the progress of a psychoanalysis. (Freud V. 16, 330)

Once again Freud draws the parallel between revelation on the stage and revelation in analysis. In each case, the revelation is gradual, protracted, and exciting, and it also

exists on more than one level. The audience who went to see Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* always already knew that Oedipus was the murderer of Laïus. The play represents Oedipus' own coming into the knowledge of the truth of his life. Nothing is actually revealed to the audience in this play. Freud, however, does evoke some reaction on the part of the audience when he expresses the hope that they might have "felt the shattering effect" of the Oedipian tragedy. Here lies the seeming paradox: how can Oedipus's tragedy shatter us if we know going into the theater what is to be revealed?

According to Freud, it is not precisely Oedipus's revelation that moves us, but our own unconscious identification with him. Identification: a term shared by practitioners of both theater and psychoanalysis, and one that can help explain in Freudian terms why *Oedipus Rex* might shatter us.

In "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," Freud examines the reasons behind the pleasure that theater affords, while also commenting (as the title of the essay indicates) on the degree to which psychopathological characters can be successfully represented to an audience. Never published by Freud himself, it first appeared in 1942 in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, prefaced by Dr. Max Graf, to whom Freud had given the text. Graf states that Freud wrote the text in 1904, but since Freud mentions in it a play that was not staged until November of 1905, Strachey concludes that it was most likely written in late 1905 or early 1906. Freud opens the essay by discussing the described purpose of theater according to Aristotle, and Strachey's translation offers us a slightly different metaphor for the cathartic process: "the process of getting rid of one's own emotions by 'blowing off steam'" (Freud V. 7, 305).[15] In this essay Freud begins by

[15] This metaphor suggests that the enjoyment comes from release, and that that release comes from actually reliving or feeling these emotions through identification with the hero. This echoes the Aristotelian

looking at theater in Aristotelian terms, but turns to a distinctly psychoanalytic view of its importance:

> Being present as an interested spectator at a spectacle or play does for adults what play does for children, whose hesitant hopes of being able to do what grown-up people do are in that way gratified. The spectator is a person who experiences too little, who feels that he is a "poor wretch to whom nothing of importance can happen," who has long been obliged to damp down, or rather displace, his ambition to stand in his own persona at the hub of world affairs, he longs to feel and to act and to arrange things according to his desires—in short, to be a hero. And the playwright and actor enable him to do this by allowing him to *identify himself* with a hero. (Freud V. 7, 305 italics in original)

Here "identification" no longer belongs entirely to the clinical realm. It is no longer a question of total or partial reconstitution of the self, as in the Laplanche and Pontalis definition, but of a temporary re-imagining of the self along the lines of the hero. Freud goes on to state that the pleasure of this identification comes from several different contributing factors, all of which are based on a certain illusion: "[...] that, firstly it is someone other than himself who is acting and suffering on the stage and, secondly, that after all it is only a game, which can threaten no damage to his personal security" (306). He can thus identify himself with a great man without living through all of the dangers of suffering that that implies. He takes pleasure from his own imaginative interaction with

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metaphor as understood by Bernays, although Bernays might have said "getting relief from" rather than "getting rid of."

the characters on stage. Freud continues by saying that another piece of the pleasure afforded by the theatrical experience is masochistic:

> Heroes are first and foremost rebels against God or against something divine; and pleasure is derived, as it seems, from the affliction of a weaker being in the face of divine might—a pleasure due to masochistic satisfaction as well as to direct enjoyment of a character whose greatness is insisted upon in spite of everything. (306)

Suffering thus becomes an outlet for a form of pleasure, but only suffering under certain conditions:

> Thus we arrive at a first precondition of this form of art: that it should not cause suffering to the audience, that it should know how to compensate, by means of the possible satisfactions involved, for the sympathetic suffering which is aroused. (Modern writers have particularly often failed to obey this rule.) (307)

We will return to Freud's last parenthetical observation later, but what must be taken away from his statement here is that any suffering caused by art should be compensated for by other satisfactions within the work. One of those satisfactions may be that theater, via identification, opens the mind to greater possibilities. Freud will address this later in his 1915 essay "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death": "In the realm of fiction we find the plurality of lives which we need. We die with the hero with whom we have identified ourselves; yet we survive him, and are ready to die again just as safely with another hero" (Freud V. 14, 291). The iteration: "the plurality of lives which we need" is a poignant description of the human condition. For Freud, this identification with the

hero is a necessary element of living (psychic survival). In his book *Clefs pour l'imaginaire, ou l'autre scène*, Lacanian Octave Mannoni takes this reflection one step further, going beyond the hero to the actor who plays him:

> On dirait que si quelqu'un (un acteur) nous montre qu'on peut jouer ce personnage comme rôle; il nous révèle d'un même coup bien d'autres choses : la possibilité même de jouer un personnage, toute notre réserve de rôles imaginaires, toutes les vies que nous ne vivons pas, tous les remèdes à l'ennui […] (Mannoni 182).
>
> [It would seem that if someone (an actor) shows us that we can play this character as a role, he reveals to us at the same time many other things : the possibility itself of playing a character, our entire reserve of imaginary roles, all the lives that we are not living, all the remedies for boredom […]][16]

According to Mannoni, there is something about seeing someone else play a role that reminds us that we too have that capacity and gives us access to the "plurality of lives that we need." We are not condemned to play only one type of character in the play that constitutes our own lives; both imaginary and real roles can bring us joy, every "real" role is grounded in our imagining of it. Let us not forget that Freud tells us that theater represents for adults what play represents for children. Watching a play may be the adult way to "play," but taking on different roles in different situations is called living. Perhaps the theater also teaches us that not all of the roles must be serious, and that many may be more provocative than the ones in which we habitually cast ourselves. Thus why might we go to the theater? To enjoy the playing of roles and to remind ourselves that all sorts of roles are open to us. Theater may be the ideal artistic form and psychoanalysis an ideal type of self-exploration that can each reveal that *we script* the constricted roles of

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[16] My translation

our lives that may or may not be as "real" as they seem. Uncovering the hidden playwright who is casting us in all the roles of our own lives seems at least to be how Joyce McDougall envisions the analytic situation.

As Freud continues his discussion of the conditions of possibility for the enjoyment of certain types of theater in "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," he makes particularly interesting distinctions between what he calls "psychological drama" and "psychopathological drama." Psychological drama stages the struggle within the hero's mind of two conflicting impulses, and must end "in the extinction, not of the hero, but of one of his impulses; it must end, that is to say, in a renunciation" (Freud V. 7, 308). Psychopathological drama differs from psychological drama in that the conflict is no longer "[...] between two almost equally conscious impulses but between a conscious impulse and a repressed one" (308). Yet no character ever willingly renounces a desire, and thus the conflict on which the drama is based takes shape. Freud continues by making an important distinction about the type of person who can derive enjoyment from this (psychopathological) type of drama:

> Here the precondition of enjoyment is that the spectator should himself be a neurotic, for it is only such people who can derive pleasure instead of simple aversion from the revelation and the more or less conscious recognition of a repressed impulse. In anyone who is *not* neurotic this recognition will meet only with aversion and will call up a readiness to repeat the act of repression which has earlier been successfully brought to bear on the impulse: for in such people a single expenditure of repression has been enough to hold the repressed impulse in completely in check.

> But in the neurotic the repression is on the brink of failing, it is unstable and needs a constant renewal of expenditure and this expenditure is spared if recognition of the impulse is brought about. Thus it is only in neurotics that a struggle can occur of a kind which can be made the subject of a drama, but even in them the dramatist will provoke not merely an *enjoyment* of the liberation but a *resistance* to it as well. (309)

Here Freud seems to be saying that only neurotics can derive pleasure from a drama that stages the conflict of a neurotic. He goes on, however, to comment on one of the most beloved and important dramas in the history of the stage: *Hamlet*. We must look more closely at his actual statement in order to see its truth. The key to this statement about neurotic spectators and enjoyment is the qualification "the revelation of the more or less conscious recognition of a repressed impulse." As Freud discusses *Hamlet*, he specifies that:

> It appears as a necessary precondition of this form of art that the impulse that is struggling into consciousness, however clearly it is recognizable, is never given a definite name, so that in the spectator too the process is carried through with his attention averted, and he is in the grip of his emotions instead of taking stock of what is happening. A certain amount of resistance is no doubt saved in this way, just as, in an analytic treatment, we find derivatives of the repressed material reaching consciousness, owing to a lower resistance, while the repressed material itself is unable to do so. (309-310)

Recognition is possible, but not naming. The strength of the repression will not allow the naming of the hidden impulse. Thus the process of revealing central to this type of drama does not necessarily reveal *all*. According to Freud, successful theater and successful clinical psychoanalysis arrive at a parting of ways. Psychoanalysis seeks to name each repressed impulse, bringing it into meaningful speech. Theater, however, in order to conserve its power, must conceal its own process of revealing. Samuel Weber addresses this in his evocative essay "Psychoanalysis and Theatricality" where catharsis takes a secondary role to the plot concepts of perepeteia and anagnorisis—or the twist in the plot and the recognition, or learning, (Weber 261). In his essay, Weber also reflects on the status of the audience's enjoyment of a play. For Aristotle and for Weber, the pleasure theater affords is in its capacity to allow us a certain recognition, but a recognition that might not always be entirely clear to us: "What one "learns" in beholding a tragedy such as Oedipus could therefore be that as a mortal being, one always sees without knowing just what one is seeing. And therefore that the irreducible secret of whatever one sees is that it could mean something entirely different from what one expects" (264). The pleasure of theater is then "the pleasure of recognizing, in the lives of others, what we will never be able to see in our own" (Weber 264). In theater, and in analysis, something is revealed about the self. In watching a play that moves us, we may never be able to pinpoint why—the recognition may stay unconscious; we may remain blind to ourselves. Or, as Freud would have it, our enjoyment may even hinge upon our blindness. Armstrong beautifully translates Freud's imagining of the theatrical art form:

> Art is fundamentally a compromise formation, a form of concealment (*Verhhullung*), denial and deception that can only hint at the deeper truths

> of the psyche. In sum, for the analyst to play the part of heroic Oedipus, art must remain the Sphinx—authoritative yet enigmatic, treating the central questions of life, yet never giving clear answers. (107)

Psychoanalysis, however, attempts to open a stage for exploring and reducing the blind regions that art evokes without explaining.

Freud concludes "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage" with the following thoughts: "In general, it may perhaps be said that the neurotic instability of the public and the dramatist's skill in avoiding resistances and offering fore-pleasures can alone determine the limits set upon the employment of abnormal characters on the stage" (V. 7, 310). This quality, the "neurotic instability of the public," can obviously change, varying geographically and historically. Freud's writings themselves have had an impact on the entire western world's neurotic instability, and knowledge of the existence of the unconscious has changed our understanding of and experience in the theater. It has also contributed to changing the way that authors imagine and write for the theater. The following chapters will address the impact of Freud's writings on the theatrical spaces imagined by Michel Tremblay, Marie NDiaye, and Wajdi Mouawad. Each of the theatrical works examined takes on the concept of psychic space in a different way. In each case, however, the playwrights recognize the power of the theatrical art form to engage the mind of its spectators by representing the minds of its fictional characters.

Chapter Two:

Michel Tremblay: Staging the "Other Scene"

Introduction:

When a playwright's career spans several decades, it could be difficult to imagine choosing two plays as representative of his creativity in the realm of theatrical structure. The plays that this chapter addresses, from two different decades of Tremblay's work, demonstrate his commitment to making theatrical space speak to audiences in innovative ways. *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* was first staged in 1971, and is Tremblay's third published and performed play. After the huge polemic surrounding 1968's *Les Belles-soeurs*, related both to the language (joual) and the subject matter, *À toi…* was performed in 1971 and "aroused great interest and considerable admiration, but provoked relatively little controversy" (Cardy 12). Between 1968 and 1971, Tremblay had become an established playwright.[17]

Sixteen years later, *Le vrai monde?* was first performed in Ottawa at the French Theater of the Canadian National Arts Center in 1987. Between the two plays, Tremblay had received critical and public acclaim for *Hosanna* (1973), *Bonjour, là, Bonjour* (1975), *Sainte Carmen de la Main* (1976) (which continues the story of Carmen from *À toi…*), *Les Anciennes Odeurs* (1981), and *Albertine, en cinq temps* (1984). The latter could also find its place in this chapter's discussion of the Tremblay's use of simultaneity

[17] Cardy continues, citing a review of the play by Michel Bélair: "Bélair, reviewing the play in *Le Devoir* of 1 May 1971, correctly predicted that the play 'devrait connaître un succès à sa mesure, c'est-à-dire, hors mesure'. The full emergence of Tremblay as a major new force in the Quebec theatre was thus virtually complete. One important contributory factor in silencing negative criticism of Tremblay in Quebec was the triumphant success of *Les Belles-sœurs* in Paris in 1973" (Cardy 12-13).

in time, since the main character speaks to herself from ages thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, and seventy; but the diversity of Tremblay's experiments with theatrical simultaneity is better revealed by the discussion of *Le vrai monde?*. In *À toi…*, Tremblay collapses time; in *Le vrai monde?*, he collapses worlds of "reality" and "fiction." His use of simultaneity in each case establishes the theatrical space on another plane of "realism." While they defy naturalistic tendencies (despite their realism in subject matter and linguistic style), the two plays open a space for the understanding of psychic reality as it coexists beside "objective" reality.

I. Inescapable Trauma: *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou*

When *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* was first staged in 1971, it was interpreted by contemporary audiences as a commentary on the political situation of Québec within Canada. This interpretation was reinforced by its proximity to the events of the *Crise d'octobre* in 1970, right after which the play was written.[18] Tremblay has confirmed that even before the *Crise* he wanted to write a play about Québec: "[…] j'avais eu l'idée d'écrire une pièce sur le passé du Québec confronté à deux possibilités d'avenir : l'espoir et la résignation. J'imaginais mettre en parallèle deux personnages aux antipodes. Le premier, Carmen, ouvre la porte et s'en va ; le second, Manon, reste engoncé dans les jupes de sa mère" (Boulanger 52). Yet as the play has aged and its original political context distances itself from each subsequent production, the human elements of its tragedy can be recognized as universal.

[18] The *Crise d'octobre* in 1970 took place when a radical independantist party, the Front de Libération du Québec, kidnapped the British Trade Attaché, James Richard Cross, and the Québecois Minister of Labor, Pierre Laporte. Laporte was killed, and the incident provoked the Canadian government to extreme measures against anyone related to the independence movement, despite the fact that the vast majority of sovereignists condemned the actions of the FLQ.

À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou presents the traumatic effects of the ambiguously "accidental" death of both parents in a severely dysfunctional family. Upon the deaths of their parents, Marie-Louise and Léopold, when they were aged sixteen and fifteen, Carmen and Manon's lives took entirely different paths. The play's structure is a *mise en scène* of the psychic reality whereby traumatic events return from the past to invade the victim's psychic present. Cathy Caruth describes Freud's "traumatic neurosis" as the "unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (Caruth 2). Each performance of Tremblay's play stages on one level this unwitting reenactment. The simultaneous presentation on the stage of the last conversation between the parents, Leopold and Marie-Louise, on the day of their violent death in 1961, and a conversation ten years later between their two daughters, Carmen and Manon, opens up the text's central problem: Manon has never been able to move on with her life. Manon tells her sister Carmen that she is unable to get rid of the voices of her parents—that she hears them constantly in her head. The past invades the present through its simultaneous representation on the stage. Marie-Louise and Leopold's final conversation intertwines with the conversation between their daughters, and the audience finds itself in the position of experiencing Manon's haunting. Exploring the text of the play and reflecting on its staging will allow us to see how Michel Tremblay weaves together a rich family drama that poignantly depicts the repercussions of unresolved psychic conflict.

The scene

The play is constructed as a single act which renders its structure of crossed conversations an unrelenting assault on the audience. Its dialogue consists of two intertwining conversations. The (spatially) central conversation is between Carmen and

Manon, and takes place in Manon's kitchen in 1971. The second conversation, which constantly interrupts and intermingles with the first, takes place between Marie-Louise and Léopold in 1961. The stage directions that open *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* evoke a theatrical world whose scenic structure mirrors the structure of psychic life. Tremblay's indications for the stage décor suggest a space in which the past lives foggily side by side with a sharply defined present:

> Le décor se divise en trois parties: au centre-fond, une cuisine très propre mais très sombre, ornée exclusivement d'images pieuses, de statues, de lampions, etc. ; à gauche, un salon avec un sofa, une télévision et une petite table ; à droite, une table de taverne avec trois chaises. La cuisine doit être le plus réaliste possible, mais les deux autres parties du décor peuvent être incomplètes et même seulement suggérées. (Tremblay 98)
>
> [The set is divided into three parts: the centre-backstage is a very clean, but very dark kitchen, decorated exclusively with pious images, statues, candles, etc; on the left is a living room with a sofa, a television and a small table; on the right, a tavern table with three chairs. The kitchen should be as realistic as possible, but the two other parts of the set may be incomplete or even merely suggested (7).][19]

Carmen and Manon's conversation takes place in the realistic decor of the kitchen, surrounded by the religious baubles that we come to learn are both reminders of Marie-Louise's piety and props for her daughter's own obsessive religious practices. The kitchen space represents the "present" of the play, and its realism marks the environment that Manon's character now inhabits.

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[19] All citations in French are from: Tremblay, Michel. *Théâtre I*. Montréal: Léméac/Actes Sud, 1991. They are hereafter noted only by the page number. All citations in English are from: Tremblay, Michel. *Forever Yours, Marie Lou*. Translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco. Vancouver/Los Angeles: Talonbooks, 1975. They are hereafter noted only by the page number. A footnote indicates if the translation has been modified.

Marie-Louise and Léopold speak from the periphery, from two incomplete and ill-defined places that hint of their past existences. The actual conversation upon which Manon fixates, and which makes up the dialogue between Marie-Louise and Leopold in the play, took place in the kitchen. On the stage, however, they are each seated in the place where they are "le plus heureux au monde:" in front of the television for Marie-Louise and at the tavern for Léopold (98). They do not ever look at each other, except during the very last exchange of the play. Thus the conversation, as the audience experiences it, does not seem to be a re-presentation of the past event as it occurred, but a reconstruction of it through emotionally-charged memory. In this staged afterlife, Marie-Louise and Léopold are each reduced to the essence of what they once were. They are transported to the place where they were happiest. Thus the stage represents simultaneously the physical reality of Manon and Carmen and also a certain version of their psychic reality. The play suggests this psychic reality to be more Manon's than Carmen's, but it is clear that the conversation between Marie-Louise and Léopold affected and continues to affect them both. Their parents speak from the periphery of the stage as if from the depths of Manon's memory. Carmen and Manon are also quite literally surrounded by their past, since Marie-Louise is seated on their right (the audience's left) and Léopold on their left (the audience's right). The fact that Marie-Louise and Léopold never look at each other until the last lines of the play underlines their lack of communication in life, just as their physical distance from each other on the stage emphasizes the emotional distance between them. Scenically, Manon and Carmen, the fruits of their (dis)union, are in the center of the stage as representatives of their only connection to each other.

Above theses three spaces, kitchen, tavern, and living room, hangs the photo whose dedication is also the title of the play:

> Au fond, au-dessus des trois parties du décor, une immense photo est accrochée, qui représente quatre jeunes filles des années quarante souriant de toutes leurs dents à la caméra. Au bas de la photo, on peut lire : « A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou. » Au-dessus de la tête d'une des jeunes filles, un enfant a fait une petite croix et a écrit : « Maman, à dix-huit ans ». (Tremblay 98)

> [In the back, above the three parts of the set hangs a huge photograph of four young girls in the 40s, beaming at the camera. At the bottom of the photograph, one can read "Forever Yours, Marie-Lou". Above the head of one of the girls, a child has made a cross [or an X] and written: "Mama, age 18." (7)]

Much can be derived from this photo's domination of the entire décor. The meaning of the inscription that lends its title to the play can be interpreted in many ways. Originally, the "A toi" was addressed to Léopold. As the play progresses, we see that Manon has taken on that address. It is she who displays the photo, she who carries her mother's memory. The audience is also addressed by the "A toi," as they are the ones for whom the photo and the play are *mises en scène*. This "toi," an informal, singular "you," seems to address itself not to the audience as a whole, but intimately to each member of the audience—as if it were asking them to bear witness to the effects of family trauma.

The small cross marked above Marie-Louise's head by a child's hand also raises certain questions. Why would Manon have felt the need to mark the space of her mother? She certainly would have known her without the mark. When did she mark the cross on the page? We can read "une petite croix" in two different ways also: "croix" can mean "X," but it also means, literally, "cross." Could this "cross" above the picture be a

memorial to Marie-Louise? A sort of "Rest in Peace" inscribed on her youthful self by her daughter?

The time of the photo is also significant: Marie-Louise was eighteen when the photo was taken—the age of majority—and also an age that neither of her daughters had reached at the time of her death. Marie-Louise addressed herself at this age to a man that she loved, Léopold, and that address promised forever, "toujours." The place and time of the photo are fixed, unchanging, and this unchanging quality is underlined by the "toujours" inscribed on the photo. Implied in the "forever" of the photo, however, is also the idea of a "never again." The photograph itself captures a moment that can never be recreated. This "forever" attached to a relic from the past seems to predict that omnipresence of the past in the present life of the characters of the play, especially Manon. Manon grasps at her past, a "forever" that is never again attainable, and yet she is also forever trapped by her memories of that past.

Finally, the signature, "ta Marie-Lou" reminds us that the photo offers a certain reconstruction of Marie-Louise—not her own self, but a version of her who belongs to someone else, to "toi." The nickname "Marie-Lou" and the smiles on the photo belong to a happier time; it is the youthful version of the adult and careworn "Marie-Louise" who speaks on stage.[20] This vision of her in the photograph is not her own; it belongs to someone, to the "toi" who is addressed: originally, Léopold; next, Manon; finally, each member of the audience of the play. A large part of the play is consecrated to the

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[20] Louise Vigeant has aptly commented the disconnect between the happiness promised by the photo and the despair of the play's dialogues: "L'avantage de placer cette photographie dans le décor est donc double. Parce qu'elle "couvre" les trios espaces dramatiques: le salon et la taverne de 1961 et la cuisine de 1971, elle contribute à "aplanir" le temps et, ainsi, à accentuer le poids du passé sur le présent, comme le fait le procédé de l'entrelacement des conversations. De plus, parce qu'elles connotent le bonheur, la photographie et sa dédicace-titre forcent la comparaison entre le passé apparemment heureux et le présent que le spectateur découvrira malheureux" (36).

determination of the identity of Marie-Louise. To whom does she belong? What version of her is the true one? What does the play reveal about her, and about memory? The audience is left to determine whether or not the Marie-Louise who speaks in the play is Marie-Louise as she actually was in life, or Marie-Louise as she is reconstructed in the memories of her daughters. The play seems to point to the importance of psychic reality in determining the way human beings live and interact in the world.

The dialogue

If the set offers a visual image of the past inhabiting the present, the intertwining structure of the play's dialogue (Carmen and Manon's conversation in 1971 and Marie-Louise and Léopold's in 1961) demonstrates a conscious effort on the part of Tremblay to make the play's structure speak. An initial analysis of key moments from the two separate dialogues reveals the thematic concerns that occupy the four characters. Analyzing their interweaving nature captures the spectators' and readers' experience and understanding of the play as a *mise en scène* of both spoken and lived memory, demonstrating how the two differ. The two young women speak their memories in their conversation with each other, but they and the audience both live those memories as their parents' conversation is also staged.

Carmen and Manon

Carmen and Manon's conversation is wholly different in nature from that of their parents. While Marie-Louise and Léopold speak about the present and future, Carmen and Manon's discussion is focused on the past. The young women recount and relive moments from their childhood. Unlike their parents, Carmen and Manon's characters speak from two different times. While their conversation is situated in their 1971 present,

at several moments in the play, they become their sixteen and fifteen-year-old selves. In his stage directions, Tremblay insists that the audience must recognize when the two young women speak as their adolescent selves: "Il est aussi important (par un changement d'éclairage, peut-être) qu'on s'en rende compte lorsque Carmen et Manon deviennent des personnages du passé, donc des jeunes filles de quinze ou seize ans" (98). ["It is also important (perhaps through a change in lighting) that the audience realize when CARMEN and MANON become characters in the past, in other words, girls fifteen or sixteen years of age" (8).] Theater is perhaps more limited than film in its capacity to transport the spectator visually into the characters' past, because it does not have access to the various visual effects of film editing, such as fading in and out. One could imagine a context in which younger actors would enter the stage to represent younger versions of their adult selves. Here, however, it is through the lighting that Tremblay suggests directors make apparent the return to the past. The fact that the same immobile actresses represent themselves ten years younger merely by the suggestion of lighting deepens the impression that the two young women have barely evolved in the past ten years. The flashbacks, interrupting the continuity of Manon and Carmen's reminiscing, further advance the idea that they cannot move beyond the traumatic moments of their past. These flashback moments will be analyzed in more detail during the discussion of Marie-Louise and Léopold's conversation.

Whereas Marie-Louise and Léopold speak to and at ("at" in the sense that their words are often violent and do not demand a response) each other, Manon and Carmen tell stories. The stories that they tell reveal moments from their pasts that continue to torment them (particularly Manon) in their present lives. The evolution of their initially

banal conversation triggers these stories, the first of which exposes Manon's severely ambivalent feelings towards Léopold. The play's progression reveals that Manon has idealized her mother and hated her father since her own childhood. These feelings persisted and became even stronger after the death of her parents. Manon demonstrates violently extreme emotions toward her parents, even ten years after their deaths. Not only does she insist that their death was not accidental, but a premeditated murder-suicide perpetrated by her father; she also blames Léopold for their entire family's unhappiness and all of her parents' marital problems. In her mind, her mother was a saint. Carmen's interpretation of her parents' unhappiness seems, at least, to be more objective. She argues that they were both to blame and that they suffered from mutual flaws in understanding. Unlike Manon, Carmen has removed herself from the site of their shared childhood trauma, and it seems that her physical distance has allowed an emotional distance conducive to a more balanced interpretation of her parents' life. Yet she too is attached to the past in that she cannot help returning to it in order to try to help her sister overcome it.[21] Carmen and Manon's conversation focuses entirely on their differing interpretations of their parents' existences and of what happened to them ten years before. They can speak of nothing else—Manon because she cannot move beyond her trauma; Carmen because she hopes to help her sister move beyond it.

Manon first makes her hatred of her father apparent when she recounts an incident at a family function where her grandfather compared her to her father and sent her into a violent rage. She was six or seven years old:

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[21] Critics have often read Carmen as Tremblay's *first* character who expresses any sort of hope for the future. All of his characters from previous plays represent utter stagnation, but Carmen at least makes an attempt to "s'en sortir." See, on this point, the critical introduction to the play by Michel Belair entitled: "*A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* ou quand Michel Tremblay se permet d'espérer" (1971) and the critical guide to the text by Michael Cardy: *Les Belles-soeurs and À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* (2004)

> Toé, tu tenais popa par la main, pis moé j'me tenais à côté de moman…J'essayais de marcher comme elle…de sourire comme elle…J'essayais d'y donner la main, aussi, mais a'me lâchait tout le temps…On aurait dit qu'a'l'oubliait qu'a'me tenait la main, pis a'me lâchait, tout d'un coup... […] Pis tout d'un coup, grand-popa est arrivé pis y nous a pris toutes les deux dans ses bras, en riant. J'étais tout excitée parce qu'y'était ben grand pis que j'me sentais ben haute…Toé, y t'as regardée, pis y t'as dit : « Damnée p'tite bougraise que tu ressembles donc à ta mère, toé ! » Tout le monde riait…Quand y m'a regardée, moé, j'ai arrêté de rire, parce que j'savais c'qu'y'était pour me dire. J'me sus mis à me débattre parce qu'j'voulais pas qu'y le dise ! J'voulais pas qu'y le dise ! « Pis toé, Manon, le vrai portrait de ton père ! » J'aurais pu y arracher la face ! (108)

> [You were holding Papa's hand…I was with Mama…I'd try to walk like her….to smile like her….And I kept trying to give her my hand too, but she'd always let it go….It's like she'd suddenly forget she was holding it, and she'd let it go…. […] Then suddenly Grandpa arrived, and he swept us both up into his arms, laughing all the time. I was all excited because he was so big, and he made me feel so tall. He looked at you and he said "Why you little bugger, if you don't look just like your mother." Everyone laughed….When he turned to me I stopped laughing because I knew what he was going to say. I started fighting to get down because I didn't want him to say it. "And you, Manon, the spitting image of your father". I could have torn his face off! (27-28)]

Manon's repeated use of emphatic pronouns to distinguish between herself and her sister further exaggerates the connections that she desires to make. *You* were with father; *I* was with mother. Her emphasis on her connection to her mother is belied, however, by the fact that Marie-Louise continually drops her hand.

Almost twenty years after the original incident, Manon's anger at her grandfather's comparison is still strong enough for her to shout that she could have "torn his face off." The English translation does not capture the painful adamancy in the repetition of "J'voulais pas qu'y le dise!"—"I didn't want him to say it!" The violence of Manon's emotions in this passage seems inexplicable. Right before Manon recounts this moment, Carmen goads her by saying: "M'as te dire une chose qui te fera pas plaisir, Manon. C'est vrai que tu y ressembles! T'es pareille comme lui! […] C'est pour ça que tu l'haïssais tant, hein ? parce que t'étais pareille !" (107). ["I'm gonna tell you something you're not going to like, Manon. You do resemble him. In fact, you're just like him. […] That's why you hated him so much, isn't it? 'Cause you're just like him" (25, 26).] Carmen suggests here that Manon does not hate the resemblance she shares with her father, but that she hates her father *because of* that resemblance. The nature of this hatred becomes clearer as the conversation continues.

When the two girls were children and played "house" together, Manon categorically refused to play the father. If Carmen insisted on playing "mommy," Manon flew into a violent rage:

> CARMEN: Quand on jouait au père pis à la mère, toé tu voulais toujours faire la mère…Des fois, j'me tannais pis j'te forçais à faire le père…Là, tu piquais des crises, tu me donnais des coups de pied, tu criais que t'étais pour me tuer, un jour! […] Tu devais ressentir les mêmes affaires que lui quand y'était fâché, hein ? Pis même des fois, tu te regardais dans le miroir pis tu te disais : « M'as te tuer, mon écoeurant…M'as te tuer ! » (111)

> [CARMEN : Whenever we played house, you always had to be the mother. Then when I'd get fed up and make you play father, all hell would break loose, remember, with you kicking and screaming, threatening to kill me some day…[…] I bet you felt like he did when he got mad, eh? Remember when you used to look at yourself in the mirror and say, "I'm gonna kill you, you bastard?" Eh? "I'm gonna kill you!" (33)]

Manon's violent outburst towards her sister (which Carmen says resembled Léopold's uncontrolled and uncontrollable rages) shows a double determination on her part. Manon's outbursts become more comprehensible if they are considered in terms of the unconscious. A psychoanalytic reading might argue that in attempting to keep up a perfect identification with her mother (as in the scenes cited above), she places herself in the *position* of being the sexual object of her father. In identifying with her mother, she is manifesting the Oedipal desire to become her, to take her place. For obvious reasons, this desire is unacceptable to the ego and undergoes an elaborate transformation through several defense mechanisms. First, the desire is repressed. Manon's id-impulses are then reversed through a process of reaction formation in order to be acceptable: her jealousy of Marie-Louise becomes overwhelming love and identification, and her incestuous love for Léopold is transformed into hatred.[22]

This interpretation, however, can only take us so far in the analysis of Manon's psychic state. Manon's disturbing behavior in front of the mirror is a death threat aimed both at herself and at her father. As Manon examines herself in the mirror, seeing both herself and her father, the murderous promise she makes is also a suicidal one. She hates both her father and the image of him that she sees in herself. She hates him for the "conscious" reasons that the play supports: he is violent, slovenly, and sometimes mean.

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[22] See Anna Freud, *The Ego and Mechanisms of Defense*.

But she also hates him and herself because she is an imperfect copy of him.[23] On one level it is as though Manon wanted to kill the vision of her father *in herself* in order to be more closely identified with her mother whom she admires (but who is also his object of desire). On another level, her behavior signifies a desire to kill her own imperfection. And on yet still another level, her violent words are an outlet for the roiling unconscious negative emotions that she feels towards both of her parents.

The text of the play demonstrates indisputably that Manon's confused emotions about her parents are linked to sexuality (which is also one of the most important points of contention between her parents). When she describes the hatred she feels for Léopold, she tells Carmen openly that it dates from a particular moment: "Quand j'étais petite, y avait pas d'autre chose…j'avais realisé qu'y nous rendait toutes malheureuses pis je l'haïssais. Mais après…après y'a eu d'aut'chose…[…] Y' a eu UNE autre chose…Pis quand j'y pense, Carmen…" (113). ["When I was a kid there was nothing else….I knew he made us miserable and I hated him….But later….Later on, there was something….[…] There was one other thing, Carmen….And when I think about it…." (34-35).] Manon trails off here at the end of her speech as if it were impossible to voice the feeling that comes over her when she thinks back to this moment. She recounts the scene shortly thereafter in the play's dialogue:

> Ça faisait pas deux minutes qu'y'était couchés quand maman s'est remis à y crier des bêtises…a'le traitait de tous les noms possibles-imaginables, pis…j'ai entendu des coups…[…] J'me sus levée

[23] We could make an argument here that Manon suffers from severe penis envy, which would explain her feelings toward Léopold. She cannot stand to be compared to her father: why? As the little girl who wants a penis (her father's and/or another one for herself), the constant comparisons that everyone makes between her and her father serve to remind her painfully of her lack. She is like him in physique and in personality, but she does not have a penis.

> *tranquillement*…J'pensais qu'y'était après la battre…[…] J'me sus glissée dans le passage, pis j'me sus collé l'oreille contre leur porte…[…] La porte était mal fermée pis a's'est ouverte…*J'voulais pas vraiment voir c'qu'y se passait, t'sais*…J'savais qu'y fallait pas que je regarde dans'chambre…Mais…j'les ai vus, Carmen…J'les ai vus ! […] Maman, a'se débattait, pis a'criait, pis lui y y disait des affaires…J'entendais pas les mots…J'les voyais juste se débattre…J'ai pensé qu'y'était après la tuer, pis j'me sus mis à pleurer sur le pas de la porte… (114-15)

> ["They weren't in bed two minutes and she was yelling again, calling him every name you can think of. Then the blows started… […] I got out of bed quietly…I thought he was beating her….[…] I tiptoed down the hall and put my ear to the door…[…] It wasn't closed all the way and it opened up….I didn't really want to see what was happening, you know…I knew I shouldn't look into the room….But….I saw them, Carmen….I saw them! […] Mama was struggling and yelling….He was saying stuff to her… I couldn't hear the words….I could just see them struggling…I thought he was killing her, and I started to cry in the doorway…." (38-39)[24]]

The spectator and reader of the play cannot know for certain how old Manon was when she saw the sexual act she describes. If we take as fact the conversation between Marie-Louise and Leopold then it could have been either several *years* before their death (before the birth of their son Roger) or just a few *months* before (i.e. at the conception of the child with which Marie-Louise was pregnant when she died).[25] Her description of her thoughts and of what she witnessed can be heard on two different levels. The word "tranquillement" can be variously translated as "quietly" or "calmly." Manon hears her parents fighting, and she gets up to check on them. Calmly or quietly? Certainly quietly,

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[24] Translation modified ; italics in original mine.

[25] Marie-Louise and Leopold both state that they only had intercourse four times in their married live, and all four of the times Marie-Louise became pregnant: Carmen, Manon, Roger, and the fetus that died with Marie-Louise were the products of those sex acts.

in order not to be heard, but the double meaning of the word "tranquillement" fits the ambivalence of Manon's emotions towards her mother. Under the guise of worry, there is also a calm satisfaction that her rival is being beaten, or killed. The sentence "I didn't really want to see what was happening, you know," can also be heard on two levels. Some part of Manon's mind was aware that what was occurring between her parents was sexual. Consciously, she does not want to witness it, because she knows that she "should not," but part one part of her feelings, to which she cannot give voice, can be read as jealousy. For the same reasons, her crying is also ambivalent. It can be read as stemming *simultaneously* from an honest fear for her mother's safety *and* from an unconscious jealous desire to interrupt the sexual act.[26]

The play's flashbacks take us back to the day of Marie-Louise and Léopold's death, and to their fateful final conversation. These moments reveal that Manon has curious reactions to her parents' arguments. The explanations that she gives for these reactions are far from wholly satisfactory. As a teenager, upon hearing her parents argue, she would "worry" when they yelled and (perhaps more tellingly) worry when they were quiet. When Carmen and Manon are awakened by their parents' arguing voices, Manon urges Carmen to go listen at the door of the kitchen to hear more clearly what they are saying. "J'veux savoir c'qu'y disent. J'veux pas qu'y l'insulte, encore" (105). ["I want to know what they're saying. I don't want him to insult her again" (21).] The spectator cannot help but feel a little skeptical toward Manon's concern for her mother's dignity. After all, how could her listening at the door keep Léopold from insulting Marie-Louise? When the play returns to the flashback a few moments later, Manon expresses worry at her parents' suddenly hushed voices: "Carmen, y'ont arrêté de parler fort... [...] Ça

[26] Cf. Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*.

m'inquiète, Carmen!" (109). ["You can't hear them now... [...] I'm worried Carmen." (29).][27] Manon's worries for her mother are sincere, but they also point to another possible level of understanding: not *hearing* her parents raises questions about what they might be *doing* together.

Another flashback reveals that Manon cannot bear to witness any reference to the sexual nature of her parents' relationship. Although she is initially the one who pushes Carmen to go listen at the door, when the conversation turns to sex, she flees. Léopold calls to his daughters through the closed door: "votre mere, là, a'l'a toujours eu un problème, pis a'l'aura toujours: le cul!" (132). ["Your mother here's got a problem. She's always had it and she always will. It's her CUNT" (72).] She cries to her sister: Carmen, j'veux pas l'entendre! J'veux pas l'entendre!" (132) ["I don't want to hear it, Carmen, I don't want to hear it!" (72)] before running back to their room and hiding under the covers on the bed (134). Manon cannot stand to hear anything relating to her parents' sexuality. These two moments, Manon's witnessing of her parents' sexual intercourse and her overhearing of their final conversation in which they discuss the sexual problems of their marriage, emerge as life-defining events for Manon. She cannot move beyond her morbid dwelling on them, and the play's structure demonstrates that they continue to have a profound impact on her life.

Marie-Louise and Léopold

The conversation between Marie-Louise and Léopold further develops the play's "play" with memory. There are two key moments in Marie-Louise and Léopold's conversation that explain its haunting of Carmen and especially Manon. When Léopold

[27] Carmen points out Manon's illogical worries: "Ca t'inquiète quand y parlent fort, ça t'inquiète quand y parlent pas fort…Arrête de t'énarver de même !" (109). ["You worry when they shout, you worry when they whisper….Relax, for God's sake…" (30).]

cries through the closed door, "Votre mère, a'l'a toujours eu un problème, pis a'l'aura toujours: le cul!" (132) ["Your mother here's got a problem. She's always had it, and she always will. It's her CUNT" (72)], the conversation between them turns to the sexual dissatisfaction that has plagued their marriage from its beginning. Léopold turns from vulgarity towards an honest attempt to make Marie-Louise aware that many of their marital problems might have been helped if she had been more sexually receptive to him. She calls him a savage, and his anger returns.

During the course of this conversation, Marie-Louise reveals her own ambivalent feelings about sexuality. When Léopold confronts her with the fact that "her" God put pleasure into intercourse for a reason, she responds that that pleasure is only for men. Léopold retorts that women can also experience it, and Marie-Louise responds: "Chus pas une cochonne, Léopold! […] Pour moé, faire ça, c'est cochon! C'est bon pour les animaux…Pis tu me verras jamais faire ça avec plaisir Léopold, jamais ! Jamais !" (134) ["I'm not a pig, Léopold. […] For me to do that is to be a pig. It's fine for animals, Léopold, but not for me. I could never enjoy it! Never!" (75)][28] In this passage Marie-Louise condemns sexuality as something unclean and inhuman, but a few moments later in the play, she demonstrates an opposite attitude that Léopold is quick to point out:

> MARIE-LOUISE: J'arais peut-être été capable de le faire, pis j'arais peut-être, peut-être, aimé ça, si toé t'arais été capable, Léopold. […] T'es toujours plein de bière pis tu pues quand tu m'approches, Léopold! T'as toujours mauvaise haleine ! Chus t'un être humain, moé aussi, t'sais! Tu dis que les femmes peuvent jouir…Mais as-tu déjà essayé une fois, une seule fois dans ta vie, de…

[28] Punctuation in translation modified.

> LÉOPOLD : T'es pas une cochonne, mais t'es pognée mal, hein, Marie-Louise ? T'es pas une cochonne, mais t'aimerais ben ça en être une, hein, ma belle Marie-Lou ? Mais tu sais pas comment ! Moé, j'prends mon plaisir, toé prends le tien! (135-136)

> [MARIE-LOUISE: I might have been able to do it, and who knows, I might have enjoyed it, if you'd known how, Léopold. […] You're always full of beer when you come near me, and you stink, Léopold. You've got bad breath. I'm a human being too, you know. You say women can enjoy it, but have you tried, just once in your life, to….
> LÉOPOLD: You're not a pig, but you're plenty screwed up, eh, Marie-Louise? You're not a pig, but in a way you'd like to be one, eh, my sweet Marie-Lou? But you don't know how, do you? Me-I get my kicks. Get yours! (77, 80)][29]

Marie-Louise's attitude towards her sexuality is as conflicted as Manon's. She condemns sex as being for pigs because she has never been able to receive any pleasure from it. In order to survive the lack of sexual satisfaction in her marriage, Marie-Louise has had to deny its importance. Like her daughter who ends up following in her footsteps, Marie-Louise's sexuality is sublimated onto her religion, which she also uses as a crutch, sanctimoniously condemning the satisfaction that she has never been able to experience herself. This is the only moment in the play that Marie-Louise honestly reveals her own sexual frustration, and Léopold throws it back into her face. There seems to be little chance of redemption or mutual understanding after twenty years of unhappy miscommunication between them.

Their irreparable misunderstanding of each other culminates in Léopold's expression of a murderous wish:

> "Sais-tu c'que j'aurais envie de faire, des fois, ma belle Marie-Lou? Poigner la machine, vous mettre dedans, toé pis Roger, pis aller me sacrer

[29] Translation slightly modified.

> contre un pilier du boulevard métropolitain…Carmen pis Manon sont assez grandes pour se débrouiller tu-seules…Nous autres...Nous autres, on sert pus à rien…A rien." (137)
>
> ["You know what I feel like doing sometimes, my sweet Marie-Lou? I feel like grabbing the car, throwing you inside, you and Roger, and driving that son of a bitch right off the parkway….Right into a concrete wall…Carmen and Manon are old enough to look out for themselves….But the rest of us….The rest of us aren't worth bugger all." (82)]

The translation "The rest of us aren't worth bugger all" only captures half of the meaning of Léopold's statement. "Ne servir à rien" does mean to be worth nothing, but in the sense of "serving no function," or of being unable to perform any action on the world. Léopold is expressing the futility of his existence, recognizing that he and his wife are incapable of improving their family situation because they do not know how *not* to harm each other emotionally, and after so many years of thinly veiled contempt, neither of them is really willing to try.

The two girls had opposite reactions to overhearing this conversation. Carmen recognized that her parents could never make each other happy, and she swore to herself that she would escape from their miserable influence as soon as she could. Manon, however, fled from behind the door and hid under the covers of her bed in order to avoid hearing the rest of the conversation as soon as her mother mentioned the animality of sex, specifically referring to pigs and implying not only that sex is for animals, but that it is for *dirty* animals.

Carmen always brings the discussion of her parents back to those moments when Léopold expressed plaintively his twenty years of sexual frustration. Manon, however, chooses to focus on the final moments of the conversation. She insists that Léopold

committed suicide, killing Marie-Louise and Roger at the same time as himself. Carmen is adamant that there was never any proof of the validity of that assumption. She reproaches Manon for her selective memory: "Y'a une grande partie de c'qu'y'ont dit que tu veux pas te rappeler…T'exagères tous les boutes où moman fait pitié pis tu passes ceux où c'est popa" (131). ["They said a lot of things you don't want to remember. You exaggerate all the parts where Mama's to be pitied, and you pass over all the ones where it's Papa…"(69).[30]]

Part of the play's ambiguity rests on the fact that the reader/spectator has no way of really knowing if the conversation that they are witnessing between Marie-Louise and Léopold is the conversation reported as it actually took place, or if it is instead the conversation as it has been reconstructed in Manon's (and/or Carmen's) memories over the past ten years. The spectator *does* witness Léopold expressing a suicidal/murderous wish, and the wish he expresses coincides with the way in which he, Marie-Louise, and their son actually died.

Whether or not the conversation took place as it was reported above, Manon certainly *believes* that it did. She defends this belief so strongly that we must assume that she has a libidinal investment in its truth. What does Manon stand to gain from believing that Léopold murdered Marie-Louise? Looking at her ambivalent relationships to both parents offers several reasons why she would cling to her idea. First of all, she is probably suffering from a great deal of unconscious guilt because she herself unconsciously desired the death of her mother who stood as her oedipal rival. Secondly, her oedipal desire for her father is *validated* by believing that he wanted to kill her mother; she projects her *own* hatred of her mother onto *him*. Finally, the projection onto

[30] Translation modified.

her father of her *own* emotions of hatred allows her to maintain the perfect splitting in her conscious mind of an all-good idealized mother and an evil devaluated father. In this way, she is never obliged to confront the ambivalence of her emotions.

In his depiction of Manon, Tremblay writes a character whose motives can be read as both conscious and unconscious. Unconsciously, Manon hated her mother and loved her father while consciously believing (and authentically feeling) the opposite emotions for each of them. A psychic conflict of this magnitude is exponentially worsened by her simultaneous loss of both her love/hate objects. She is unable to escape from her own unconscious. In achieving her unconscious desire of ridding herself of her oedipal rival, she suffers from the guilt as if she herself had murdered her mother. She pays the ultimate price for her "victory," in that she loses the objects of all of her libidinal investments before she can resolve any of her conflicts with them. This psychoanalytic reading of Manon, however, merely captures Tremblay's astute characterization, leaving aside the play's full profundity. It is the intertwining nature of the play's two dialogues that demonstrates his perceptiveness about the nature of psychic trauma.

Interactions

Where the reader of Tremblay's play has the benefit of being able to analyze the two conversations separately, distinguishing the key moments from each, the spectator of the play must take them in simultaneously, and the theatrical form of the two intertwining conversations reveals more than the conversations taken separately from each other could ever reveal.

The play opens with an almost musical refrain of seemingly disconnected words, one utterance per character, repeated twice:

Marie-Louise: Demain…

Carmen: Aïe…

Léopold : Ouais…

Manon : Pis…

Marie-Louise : Demain…

Carmen : Aïe…

Léopold : Ouais…

Manon : Pis… (99)

[Marie-Louise: Tomorrow…
Carmen: Wow…
Léopold : Yeah…
Manon : Still…
Marie-Louise : Tomorrow…
Carmen : Wow…
Léopold : Yeah…
Manon : Still… (8-9)]

This "demain," "tomorrow," that comes back in refrain tempts the spectator to believe that there is a tomorrow for Marie-Louise and Léopold, but this promise of a tomorrow is a false one. They are to die that night in the car accident. It will slowly, as the play progresses, come to underline that for the daughters, especially Manon, there is no real tomorrow—the play bears witness to the fact that she has never been able to move beyond that "maudit samedi-là" (101). The word "aïe" evokes pain, shock and rupture (more than is suggested by the translation of "wow"), whereas "Pis" ("puis") signifies a continuation. It is ironic that Carmen, the daughter who seems to have been able to move forward in her life utters the word of pain, whereas Manon, who is paralyzed by her trauma, utters the word of continuation. As the play begins, each line spoken by one of the parents is interrupted by a line spoken by one of the daughters. The pattern, Marie-

Louise, Carmen, Léopold, Manon, continues for the first twenty-four speeches in the play, and is characterized by a great deal of repetition. The broken record of the first refrain is followed shortly by Marie-Louise's repetition of "Veux-tu d'autre café, Léopold? (Silence.) Veux-tu d'autre café, Léopold? (Silence.) Veux-tu d'autre café, Léopold?" (99). ["Want another coffee, Léopold? (Silence.) Want another coffee, Léopold? (Silence.) Want another coffee, Léopold? (Silence.) (10)] Tremblay has stated in an interview that they play's structure was inspired by his presence at a concert where he heard a Brahms string quartet: "En écoutant le quatuor, j'ai trouvé la structure de ma pièce : quatre personnages immobiles. Isolés sur la scène, ils deviendraient des instruments d'une partition musicale à cordes vocales" (Boulanger 54) ["Listening to the quartet, I found the structure of my play : four immobile characters. Isolated on the stage, they would become instruments in a musical score of vocal chords."][31] The immobility and isolation that Tremblay mentions are at once physical (in that the actors remain still and do not look at each other), psychic (for Marie-Louise, Léopold, and Manon), and initially vocal, as the dialogue is repeated like a broken record, as if the play itself has a hard time getting started.

Significantly, Marie-Louise and Léopold's conversation advances more rapidly than Carmen and Manon's. Ten years have passed since the death of their parents, but the two women are still having the same conversation. (Carmen points this out in the play) The daughters spend the first minutes of their time together talking about the passage of time since the death of Marie-Louise and Léopold. As the two girls discuss the fact that it has been ten years since their parents' death, Carmen focuses on all of the things that have changed: "Y'en a passé de l'eau sous les ponts" (100). ["A lot of water's

[31] Translation mine.

gone under the bridge…" (11).] Manon, however, stresses the monotony of her own existence: "Tout est resté pareil […] "On dirait que c'est comme un grand ruban gris en arrière de moé…Toute pareil" (100-01). ["Everything's still the same […] It's like a long grey ribbon behind me…all the same" (11, 14).] Carmen's insistence that everything has changed is undermined, however, by a striking repetition in Marie-Louise and Léopold's conversation before and after it. Marie-Louise and Léopold argue over Marie-Louise's capacity to make toast without burning it, and Marie-Louise cries out: "Chus pas infirme!" ["I'm not sick!" (11)] Right after this, Carmen insists "Tout a changé" only to have her mother repeat the same words "Chus pas infirme!" demonstrating that, no matter how much Carmen insists upon it, not *everything* has changed.

Carmen's desire, reiterated throughout the play, is that Manon move out of her childhood home and to stop dwelling on the last words of her parents. Her character believes that Manon chooses her own prison: "Tu restes icitte, dans'cuisine, comme une prisonnière, pis tu penses à eux autres" (102). ["You sit here in the kitchen, like a prisoner, and you think about them" (14).] The idea of Manon's imprisonment is reinforced scenically by the fact that Marie-Louise and Léopold are seated on either side of their daughters. While the parents' surrounding of the daughters suggests that there is no exit for the two young women, the image of the past in the form of Marie-Louise's photograph hovers over the entire scene. For Manon, certainly, escape seems impossible. She insists that the voices of her parents would follow her even if she moved out: "J'les entendrais pareil, Carmen! Chus pas capable de me débarrasser de leurs voix!" (104). ["I'd still hear them, Carmen. I can't get rid of their voices." (19).] We have already

analyzed how, as the play unfolds, the reasons for Manon's obsession become clearer. The structure of the play itself demonstrates Manon's primary symptom: that her past haunts her. The play reveals that this haunting stems from severely ambivalent relations with her parents—and that this ambivalence greatly complicated her reaction to the trauma of their death. With the death of Marie-Louise and Léopold, Manon lost all hope of resolving the psychic conflicts of her youth and became entrapped in her past.

Manon's obsessive reminiscing, in which Carmen participates whenever she comes to visit her sister, is constantly interrupted by the final conversation between Marie-Louise and Léopold. Where the conversation between their children is a belabored and painful recitation of memories, Marie-Louise and Léopold's exchange moves forward quickly, building momentum like a train and finally crashing into the wall of its final ambiguity. It escalates from morning bickering over the noise Marie-Louise made getting up to run to the bathroom to be sick to her announcement that she is going to have another baby. This announcement stimulates a violent discussion of their deep-seated hatred for each other leading to a candid discussion on both their parts of the frustrations they encountered in their sexual partnership, which we have already examined above.

Tremblay materializes Manon's haunting by the voices of her parents by making those voices omnipresent on the stage. Just as Carmen and Manon argue about the meaning of their parents' hateful exchanges, the audience witnesses the entanglement of each young woman's emotional investment in her own version of the truth. The play's spectator/reader finds him or herself at a loss to decide what "truly" happened on the night of Marie-Louise's and Léopold's death, and the play comes to an end without offering a definitive conclusion. Three moments or scenes determine the present life of

Manon: the primal scene in which she witnesses her parents in the act of sexual intercourse; their final conversation during which she hears her father's death wish; and the actual accident in which Marie-Louise and Léopold are killed. Tremblay's play stages only the conversation. Whether or not we interpret Marie-Louise and Léopold's conversation on the stage as a transcription of their fictional "reality" is not fundamentally important. The intertwining conversations of Tremblay's play stage a certain truth of psychic life. The closing lines and stage directions of the play perfectly demonstrate how trauma can doom its victims to an endless cycle of repetition, for what the traumatized person truly needs is for the event never to have happened:

> LÉOPOLD (*se lève, regarde Marie-Lou*). Viens-tu faire un tour de machine, avec moé, à soir, Marie-Lou ?
>
> *Après un long silence, Marie-Louise se lève*.
>
> *Noir*. (139)

> [LÉOPOLD: (*getting up*) You want to come for a ride in the car with me, tonight, Marie-Lou?
> *After a long silence, Marie-Louise gets up*. (86)]

Here we see that the closing lines of the play are the condition of possibility for its beginning. Marie-Louise and Léopold's final car ride condemns/condemned Manon to an eternally haunted existence. The musical nature of the dialogue as it begins in the first scene also reinforces the non-linearity of the play. Instead of staging the 1961 conversation in one act and the 1971 conversation in a second, Tremblay chooses to represent the two simultaneously. In this way, he is able to dramatize the vicious cycle of repetition created by the traumatic event: the trauma has always already happened and is always yet to happen. Once it is lived, it must always be relived. The play itself traps

both its characters and its audience in the psychic space of trauma—a present space eminently contaminated by past events—in which there is no possibility of a future.

This impossibility of movement or change captures the tragic nature of Tremblay's text. Critics have often mentioned Tremblay's avowed interest in Greek tragedy, and his use of a Chorus in many of his plays demonstrates his formal and thematic interest in ancient works. While there is no singular hero in *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* to inspire Aristotle's cathartic "fear and pity," all of the characters certainly evoke pity in the audience. Marie-Louise, Léopold, and Manon all clearly fit the description of the tragic hero, as defined by Corneille after Aristotle in his *Avertissement* preceding *Le Cid*. Each of the three trapped heroes is: "ni tout méchant ni tout vertueux, […] qui par quelque trait de faiblesse humaine qui ne soit pas un crime, tombe dans un malheur qu'il ne mérite pas" (Corneille 15). In his analysis of the text, Michael Cardy sums up the human weakness that plunged the family of *À toi…* into its tragic state: "In the case of Léopold and Marie-Lou, the fatal flaw has been their chronic inability, because of the dysfunctional nature of their marriage, to communicate on any but the most banal level" (73). Their incapacity to communicate led to the years of hateful discourse and final "accident" that left their daughters behind to deal with the consequences of their deaths. If a tragic destiny presupposes a confrontation with either death or the impossible, then Tremblay's play is a perfect contemporary *mise en scène* of this confrontation. It is no accident that the play ends, not in the 1971 present, but in the 1961 past: it ends with the anticipation of the deaths that will confront the survivors (or at least Manon) with an impossible future. Despite the fact that the play opens with the word "Demain," there is none. The "à soir" with which it ends dramatizes how Manon's

future became trapped, *pour toujours*, as the play's title indicates, somewhere in between the fateful "tonight" and the promised "tomorrow." Both the play and Manon's psychic life are forever contained in the space between these two words.

II. Michel Tremblay's *Le Vrai Monde?:* The Playwright and his « Autre Scène »

The introductory chapter of this dissertation cited psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall's theatrical imagining of the psyche, in particular the passage from her book *Theaters of the Mind: Illusion and Truth on the Psychoanalytic Stage* in which she speaks of an inner universe of characters carrying out "secret theater productions" that can "determine most of what happens to us in the external world" (3-4). What happens when these "secret theater productions" become actual theater? When the *autre scène* manifests itself on the theatrical stage? When a playwright's creation *is* his acting out, and his writing becomes precisely a way of avoiding self-knowledge?

Written in 1986 and performed at the National Arts Center of Canada in April 1987, *Le vrai monde?* continues Tremblay's exploration of the metaphorical capacities of theatrical space. If the unconscious has sometimes been dubbed *l'autre scène*, this theatrical metaphor is perhaps nowhere more appropriate than in this particular play. Tremblay creates the character of Claude the aspiring writer, whose first manuscript is a play about the relationships in his own family. As Tremblay's play unfolds, so does Claude's, and the simultaneous theatrical representation of the two plays allows the audience to question the motives of the budding young playwright as a character on Tremblay's larger *scène*. This *mise en abyme* structure juxtaposes Tremblay's play with his fictional playwright's, creating a complex interplay between the two scenes that

encourages both readers and spectators to reflect on the psychic function of artistic endeavor.

As the play(s) unfold(s), the word "scène" recurs with great frequency, and its meaning is multiple. Sometimes its referent is explicitly theatrical, translating either to "stage" or "scene." Other times it is used in the phrase "scène de ménage," indicating a family argument, closer to the meaning of "making a scene" as one might say in English. The recurrence of this word "scène" in its multiple manifestations in both Tremblay's and Claude's plays leaves room for ambiguity, and for the return of the repressed in the discourses of the characters or of the (fictional) author. Because of the structure of Tremblay's play, psychoanalysis and literary analysis seem to overlap; the interplay between Tremblay's *scène* and Claude's reveals what could be considered as the *autre scène* of Claude's unconscious.[32]

An Unwilling Heroine

It is through the characters Madeleine I (Tremblay's Madeleine) and Madeleine II (Claude's Madeleine, who is also, as we know, Tremblay's Claude's Madeleine) that the word "scène" takes on its multiple meanings in the play(s).[33] When Madeleine I reads her son's play, she is horrified, mostly by the depiction of herself, but also by the other

[32]A quick summary of the plot of Claude's play is helpful here: Alex II, Claude's "father" and a traveling salesman, comes home from a road trip to find his wife Madeleine II completely changed towards him. She confronts him for his womanizing, telling him that she knows he has fathered at least one illegitimate child and that she wants a divorce. She will no longer put up with the farce of their marriage. Claude's "sister" Mariette II, a go-go dancer, comes home to find her father brooding after his conversation with Madeleine II. She proceeds to tell him that she does not want him to come see her dance anymore with his salesmen friends because she finds it perverse to dance in front of her father, whose eyes on her resemble those of his friends. She also hints that at a past incident where, drunk, he forgot his familial relationship to her and nearly raped her, but was interrupted by Claude who came in and saved her. Alex II is outraged. Madeleine II also brings up this incident as the one time in her life where Alex II struck her in anger, and the moment that changed her feelings for him (and her life) forever. She then tells him to get out, and the last scene of the play that we see ends with Alex II breaking some of the knick-knacks she has decorating the living room. We are left to assume that this is the end of Claude's play.

[33] I will continue to use the word *scène* throughout, even when the English scene is its logical translation, in order to keep the ambiguity of the word that is offered by the French text.

events of the play. The first *scène* of confrontation between Madeleine I and Claude over the contents of his play is interrupted by the first *scène* of confrontation between Madeleine II and Alex II in *Claude's* play, one whose content Madeleine I finds highly objectionable: "Cette scène-là au sujet des femmes s'est jamais produite, pis a'se produira jamais, m'entends-tu? Aussi longtemps que je vivrai j'empêcherai cette scène-là de se produire !" (Tremblay 399). ["That scene about the other women never took place, and it never will, you hear me? As long as I live I'll keep that scene from happening!" (19-20)][34] The meaning of the word *scène* is already double in this passage, since Madeleine I is speaking of a family conflict, yet her words are being undermined by their theatrical frame and by the fact that in the theater, the "scène au sujet des femmes" of Claude's play has *just begun to be* enacted in Tremblay's frame. Even the verb "produire" allows a certain *double entente* through the idea of theatrical "production". Madeleine I cannot escape the frame of her own narrative; despite her anger, once Claude writes the scene, it has always already occurred.

Part of Madeleine I's anger stems directly from the fact that she *realizes* that her son's play has rendered impossible her determination never to let the *scène* with her husband occur. Whether or not she ever enacts it herself, her reading of Claude's play *does* enact it, and her attack on Claude is propelled by this realization:

> Quand j'ai lu ta pièce, c'est sûr que j'ai été ébranlée! J'ai douté. J'ai douté de moi. J'ai douté d'avoir raison ! J'me sus vue, là, dans le salon, en train d'engueuler ton père, de le crucifier avec un sens de la repartie

[34] All citations from the French original are taken from: Tremblay, Michel. *Théâtre I*. Montréal: Léméac/Actes Sud, 1991. They are hereafter noted only by the page number. All translated citations are taken from: Tremblay, Michel. *The real world?* Translated by John Van Burek and Bill Glassco. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1988. They are hereafter noted only by the page number.

> que j'ai jamais eu, pis j'me sus dit : quelle belle fin, quelle belle façon de mettre un point final à tout ça, mais les conséquences m'ont fait tellement peur ! (406)
>
> [When I read your play, of course I was shaken. I had doubts. About myself. I doubted I was right. I saw myself here, in the living room, crucifying your father, tearing a strip off him with a talent for smart answers I've never had, and I told myself: what a beautiful ending. What a splendid way to end it all. But the consequences terrified me! (29)]

In his book *Psychoanalysis and Fiction*, Daniel Gunn addresses the issue of the relation between an audience and a work of literature:

> When we leave the theatre (or lay down the text, or complete the novel or poem) we may well find ourselves changed. The Greeks envisaged this, with their theory of catharsis (a theory that psychoanalysis was quick to adopt). But however powerful the change, the basic fact is that we do leave the theatre, emerge from the novel or poem. We experience fiction (and art in general) within certain parameters; […]. (102)

In writing his play about his own family, and by going so far as to use their names for his characters, Claude transforms his mother's experience as a reader; she cannot experience her son's text as Gunn's audience does above. Unlike Tremblay's audience, Claude's audience (his mother) reads a play that *does* refer back to a *real* life, and inherent in the real-life references of Claude's play are critiques of the way that Madeleine is currently living her life. If, according to the theories of theater discussed in our introduction, theater provides us with relief because our empathic responses to the characters on the stage provoke emotional responses that can relieve our own mental "oppression," it is because the suffering on the stage is *only* lived by us via this empathic identification. In

most cases, at least, spectators are not engaged directly in watching their *own* lives being recreated on the stage. Furthermore, the reasons for our identification with characters on the stage may remain unconscious (and Freud would even have us believe that a certain amount of unconsciousness is necessary). This is not the case for Madeleine. Her son's direct representation of her life (even using her name) meets with her angry resistance where a character who merely vaguely resembled her might have inspired her pity.

Madeleine I is also angry because her son's play offers her a vision of her life that she knows to be impossible in the realm of her reality. A passage from Freud's essay "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," aptly describes the role that Claude gives to Madeleine II in his play: "One feature above all cannot fail to strike us about the creations of these story-writers: each of them has a hero who is the centre of interest, for whom the writer tries to win our sympathy by every possible means and whom he seems to place under the protection of a special Providence" (Freud V. 9, 149). This protected role is precisely the reason that Madeleine I reproaches her son for his creation. *Nothing can happen* to Madeleine II *because* she is a character in a play. She does not have to live with the consequences of her heated conversation with her husband. As Madeleine I points out:

> Ta femme, là, dans la pièce, là, qui porte mon nom pis qui est habillée comme moi, que c'est qu'a'va faire, le lendemain matin? Hein ? Après avoir joué l'héroïne ? On sait ben, ça t'intéresse pas, toi ! Quand a'l'ouvre la porte pis qu'a'sort d'la scène, a'l'arrête d'exister pour toi pis

> tu t'en sacres, d'abord que t'as écrit des belles scènes ! Mais moi, faut que je vive demain, pis après-demain, pis les autres jours ! (405)[35]
>
> [That woman there in your play, who wears my name and who's dressed like me, what's she going to do the morning after? Eh? After she's played the heroine? You couldn't care less about that! When she opens the door and leaves the stage, she doesn't exist anymore, and you couldn't care less, as long as you've written some wonderful scenes! But me, I have to go on living tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, and the day after that. (27-28)][36]

As Claude's heroine, Madeleine II is safe, but as his mother, Madeleine I cannot leave the *scène*, or stage, of her own life. Madeleine I uses the word *scène* twice here. The first enunciation refers to the stage, and to Claude's character's leaving of it; the second refers to a scene in a play. Her anger towards Claude here stems from the fact that he writes his theatrical scenes without regard for how his art might affect others—how it might touch life. In a monologue of remarkable honesty, Madeleine I reveals to her son how she continues to live her life despite her recognition of all that Claude wrote into his play. She fills her moments of silence with day-dreams, violent phantasies that provide her the necessary release of her frustrations:

> Pis là, dans le milieu du silence, la tempête arrive. J'la sens venir…Des fois j'ai pas le goût parce que chus trop fatiguée ou ben parce que j'ai mal au côté, mais a'vient pareil…peut-être parce que j'en ai besoin…pour passer le temps. Pis là…c'est sûr que tout c'que t'as mis dans ta pièce me

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[35] We can also read Madeleine's words here "demain, pis après-demain, pis les autres jours" as an echo of Baudelaire's poem "Le Masque," where the statue of the magnificently beautiful woman is discovered to be crying behind her mask because:
"C'est que demain, hélas! il faudra vivre encore!
Demain, après-demain et toujours! — comme nous!" Baudelaire finishes the poem with this "comme nous" that places the artistic object in the same arena as its human subject. In Baudelaire's poem, the artistic object is given the same difficulties as its human subject. In Tremblay's play, Madeleine complains to her son that he shows no regard for how the real human must continue to live. For Madeleine, art touches life, but life cannot touch art.

[36] Translation slightly modified.

> passe par la tête…J't'ai dit tout à l'heure que tout ça c'taient des choses que j'm'avouais pas à moi-même…c'est sûr que c'est pas vrai…Chus pas folle, je le sais la vie que j'ai eue ! Ça fait que j'fais des scènes qui durent des heures, des scènes tellement violentes, si tu savais…j'me décharge de tout mon fardeau, pis j'en remets…J'deviens…une sorte d'héroïne…J'démolis la maison ou ben j'y mets le feu, j'égorge ton père, j'y fais même pire que ça[37]…J'vous fais des scènes, à ta sœur pis à toi…Tout c'que j'ose pas vous dire au téléphone ou ben quand vous êtes là sort…par vagues plus hautes que la maison ! Mais tout ça, Claude, se fait dans le silence. T'arriverais au milieu de tout ça pis tu penserais que chus juste dans la lune ou ben que chus t'en train de me demander c'que j'vas faire pour le souper…parce que c'est l'image que je vous ai toujours donnée de moi…C'est ça ma force. Ça a toujours été ça. Le silence. J'connais rien au théâtre mais chus sûre que ça serait pas mal difficile de faire ça, une tempête dans une tête ! Mais laisse-moi te dire que c'est ben plus efficace que n'importe quelle scène de ménage ! parce que ça porte pas à conséquence ! (404)

> [And then, in the midst of the silence, the storm breaks. I feel it coming…Sometimes I don't want it to because I'm too tired or because my side hurts, but it comes anyway…because I need it, maybe…to pass the time. And then…it's true that everything you put in your play goes through my head…I told you earlier they were things I'd never admit to myself…Of course, that's not true. I'm not crazy, I know what my life's been like. So, I make up scenes that go on for hours, scenes that are so violent, you can't imagine…I throw off my burden, then I take it on again…I become…some kind of heroine…I wreck the house or I burn it down, I slaughter your father, even worse than that…[…] But it all takes

[37] It would certainly not be out of line here to consider that the « pire que ça » could refer to an imagined (yet unpronouncable in front of Claude) castration of Alex, considering that his greatest flaw is incessant marital infidelity.

> place in silence, Claude. If you were to walk in in the middle of it, you'd swear I was daydreaming or just planning tonight's supper…because that's the image of myself I always present…That's my strength. It's always been that. Silence. I don't know anything about theater, but I'll bet it's tough to do that, a storm in somebody's head! But I'll tell you this much, it's a lot more effective than some domestic brawl. Because it doesn't have consequences! (26-27).][38]

Madeleine's day-dreams are enactments of *scènes* from *l'autre scène*. Although they are not strictly fulfillments of unconscious wishes, they are certainly phantasies that serve wishes that are unacceptable in society. She accepts these day-dreams as ideal substitutes for actions that would jeopardize her precarious happiness; Madeleine I is unhappy, but she is not unhappy enough to risk finding a worse unhappiness, which is why she turns to these *scènes*: "J'aime mieux continuer à rêver des scènes qui sont belles pis que je peux reprendre quand je veux que de risquer d'en manquer une d'une façon irrémédiable et jamais me le pardonner!" (406). ["I'd rather go on imagining fabulous scenes that I can start and stop whenever I like, than risk making a permanent mess of a real one, for which I'd never forgive myself" (29).] Madeleine I day-dreams; her son writes. Her phantasies are silent; his are eminently verbal, written onto the page and then presumably acted out on the stage.

Speaking Through Others

Yet unlike Claude, Madeleine I admits her unacceptable vengeful desires to herself through her phantasies. Claude has not come to terms with his own *autre scène*, and Madeleine recognizes this when she points out that he does not write himself as a character in his own play. Madeleine II and Mariette II mention Claude in his play, but he never appears *sur scène*. Through Claude's justifications for this omission, and through his explanations of his need to write, we begin to see the *autre scène* take shape.

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[38] Translation modified.

Claude's discourse about his reasons for writing changes subtly as the play progresses. In his first conversation with Madeleine I, he explains his writing as a need to have all of his family's repressed emotions out in the open. In response to his mother's assurance that she has never said any of the things that Claude wrote into his play, he retorts: "J'le sais que tu les as jamais dites, ces choses-là…C'est pour ça que j'les ai écrites, justement. Moman, y'a des choses ici-dedans qui auraient dû être réglées depuis longtemps pis qui traînent encore… […] Je voulais pas les régler mais j'voulais que ces choses-là soient dites une fois pour toutes" (395). ["I know you never said them…that's why I wrote them. Mama, there are things in this house that should have been dealt with a long time ago, that should have been settled…[…] That's not what I was trying to do…I wasn't trying to settle them, but I wanted those things to be said once and for all" (13-14).] Madeleine I reproaches Claude for the voice that he gives her because she recognizes that, instead of speaking *for her benefit*, as he claims, Claude is actually speaking for himself *through* her. Claude believes that it would do Madeleine I good to say all of the things that Madeleine II says in his play, telling her that her silence filled with violent day-dreams is *malsain*. Yet she responds: "C'est à toi, que ça ferait du bien, Claude. C'est tes problèmes à toi avec lui que t'as réglés dans c'te pièce-là, pas les miens !" (405). ["It's you that needs to do that, Claude. It's your own problems with him you've put in your play, not mine" (28).]

Madeleine I guesses the truth of her son's play, but not the entire truth. Claude has written his mother Madeleine as the heroine of his drama, the one who releases onto his father the wrath of her contempt and scorn. On the surface, we can interpret this as Claude's venting his own frustrations towards his father without implicating himself

directly. The most obvious Freudian reading would point out that the unconscious wish fulfilled by the play is Oedipal in that through it Claude's father is thrown out of the house by his mother, and thus removed as a rival for Claude's affections. Claude's play is written with undisguised admiration for his mother and open disdain for his father, so this interpretation is simple enough to deduce.

Yet just as psychoanalysis would teach us that love and hatred can easily live side by side in a subject without canceling each other out, we realize through Tremblay's play that the spite with which Claude "writes" Alex II hides a longing for the withheld affections of Alex I. Much of the dialogue of Claude's play revolves around an incident of near-incest between Alex II and Mariette II when Mariette II was twelve or thirteen years old (making Claude ten or eleven). The incestuous incident in Claude's play is mirrored on a "real" event, but Tremblay's play allows us to wonder how much of the incestuous content of the *scène* is imagined by Claude. In both versions, Claude enters his sister's bedroom and sees his father on the bed beside her; his father is drunk. Claude imagines that his father is about to rape his sister, having forgotten in his intoxicated state that she is his daughter. Claude reacts by throwing a fit, and when his mother arrives home (she was out), she believes that the worst thing she could imagine had been about to happen. In Claude's play, the incestuous nature of the *scène* is born out; in Tremblay's the incident is explained by Mariette I and Alex I as a final warm father/daughter moment before Mariette's entry into adulthood: because Alex I had had too much to drink, he fell asleep on the bed beside her.

Revelatory *Scènes*

Reading the two versions of this *scène* allows us to make certain hypotheses about Claude's *autre scène*. When Madeleine I criticizes Claude for not revealing anything of himself in his play—for not writing himself as a character—he justifies himself by saying that he was taking her defense through his writing. When Madeleine I responds that she did not need to be defended, Claude answers that perhaps *he* needed to defend her:

> Si c'était ma façon à moi de m'exprimer! A travers vous autres ? C'est peut-être vrai que c'est du travail d'espion, en fin de compte, que j'me sus servi de tout c'que j'pensais savoir sur vous autres pour dire des choses qui sont pas agréables à entendre…que tu veux pas entendre…mais j'ai le droit ! Pis y faut me le laisser ! […] Veux-tu m'écouter juste un peu ? J'ai toujours eu une grande facilité…à me glisser à l'intérieur des autres. À les…sentir. J'fais ça depuis toujours. Vous autres, vous appelez ça de l'espionnage…Moi, j'appelle ça vivre. Quand j'étais dans mon coin à vous regarder faire, à vous écouter parler, j'vivais intensément tout ce qui se faisait, pis tout ce qui se disait, ici. Je le gardais en mémoire, j'me le récitais, après, j'y ajoutais des choses…je…je…c'est vrai que je corrigeais, après, ce qui s'était passé…J'devenais chacun de vous autres, j'me glissais dans chacun de vous autres, pis j'essayais de comprendre...comment c'était fait, à l'intérieur des autres…en interprétant, en changeant des fois ce qui s'était passé…parce que des fois ce qui s'était passé était pas assez révélateur…C'est encore ça que je

> fais…J'essaye…j'essaye de trouver un sens à ce qui se passe à l'intérieur des autres… (409)
>
> [But what if I needed to defend you? If that was my way of expressing myself? Through the rest of you? Maybe it is spying, and maybe I used everything I thought I knew about you all to say things that aren't pretty to hear…that you don't want to hear...but I do have the right! And you have to grant me that! […] Will you listen to me? It's always been very easy for me…to slip inside other people. To…feel them. I've always done that. The rest of you call it spying…I call it living. When I was in my corner watching you, listening to you, I was living intensely everything that was going on and everything that was being said. I'd record it in my mind, I'd recite it, afterwards I'd add things…I'd…I'd…it's true that after I'd correct it, what had happened…I'd become each one of you, I'd slide into each one of you and I'd try to understand...what it was like inside you…interpreting, sometimes changing what had happened…because sometimes what had happened wasn't revealing enough…That's what I still do…I try…I try to make sense of what goes on inside of other people. (33-34)]

Claude insists here that his work as a writer is his right. ("J'ai le droit!") He uses all that he believes he knows about the other members of his family to say things that no one wants to hear. What he does not say here is that he uses the voices in his play to say what he cannot speak himself. Whereas he seems to believe that he is speaking through his play on behalf of the women in his family, what he slowly reveals is that he uses the voices of others to speak what he is unwilling to say. It is perhaps from his unconscious awareness of his own need to speak that his cry "Il faut me le laisser!" emerges. This exclamation reveals an investment in the act of speaking that is too emotionally charged to be without meaning. This meaning reveals itself slowly as the two plays unfold.

This idea of slipping into the "interior" of his mother and his sister (even leaving aside the sexual connotations that the choice of vocabulary also suggests) is one that would have greatly interested Freud. Is not this phenomenon of "feeling" for others described by Claude sharply reminiscent of Freud's description of hysterical identification in *The Interpretation of Dreams*?: "Identification is a highly important

factor in the mechanism of hysterical symptoms. It enables patients to express in their symptoms not only their own experiences but those of a large number of other people; it enables them, as it were, to suffer on behalf of a whole crowd of people and to act all the parts in a play single-handed" (Freud V. 4, 149). The theatrical metaphor should not be lost on us here. Claude may not be *playing* all of the parts in the play he has written, but he is in fact incarnated in all of his created characters. As his father, he is the unique object of his mother's desire; as his mother and sister, he becomes the object of his father's. Claude truly believes that his father would have raped Mariette had he not arrived. What his character does not seem to realize is that his play reveals much more than his heroism and indignation; it also reveals his jealousy. His attempts to make sense of what goes on inside the members of his family hide the fact that he ignores what goes on inside himself.

Not only does Claude describe his practice of hysterical identification, he also hints at a rather twisted process of secondary revision. Where secondary revision in the dream-work helps stitch the dream thoughts together into a slightly smoother though still not immediately comprehensible surface, Claude's revision of the content of all that he observes is an attempt to render his life's events more important—more revelatory. Claude does not realize that the "revelations" unfolding from this process are more about himself than about the members of his family.

Several passages from Tremblay's play support a reading of Claude's unconscious desire for his father's. When Mariette I arrives on the *scène*, the conversation turns to their childhood, and Mariette I mentions the fact that Claude was always curious of his father's whereabouts when he was gone, constantly grilling his

mother for information. When Mariette I points out that *she* usually did not hound her mother with questions, the following exchange ensues: "CLAUDE: Non, J'te soupçonne plutôt de t'être directement adressée à lui… MARIETTE I: R'garde le jaloux… CLAUDE: Chus pas jaloux!" (421). ["Claude: No, knowing you, you'd go directly to him. Mariette I: Look who's jealous… Claude: I'm not jealous!" (52).] Claude's emphatic denial of his jealousy screams of Freudian negation. This repressed unconscious jealousy makes several "returns" in the interaction between Tremblay's play and Claude's.

Claude's feelings for his father are further revealed by another offhand comment of Mariette I's during her explanation of the (in some ways primal) *scène* of incest. Outraged at Claude's veiled suggestion that there was something perverse about Alex I's presence in her bed that night, Mariette I begins an explanation of her view of things, beginning with the statement that Alex I had always been very physically affectionate, but not only with her: "Ben oui, mais on était toujours comme ça, Claude… Toi aussi, papa te tripotait! Y faisait ça avec tout le monde…pis chus sûre qu'y continue encore même si y'a fini par nous laisser tranquilles…C't'un tripoteux, c't'un tripoteux, c'est toute! Faut pas en faire une maladie !" (424). ["Claude, we always did that…Papa played with you too! He did that with everyone…I'm sure he still does it, even if it's not with us anymore…He's a touchy-feely guy, that's all! It's not a disease!" (56).] According to Mariette I, Alex I's caresses were no more intense for her than for anyone else. She begins to explain the supposed incest *scène* by pointing out that a distance had grown between her and her father since her entry into puberty. Her own awareness of her changing body made her start to avoid the playful and roughhousing caresses that she and

her father had always exchanged (and that Claude also received): "Fini les becs pis les caresses ! J'laissais ça à Claude, qui en profitait pas mal, d'ailleurs, si j'me souviens bien…" (424). ["No more horsing around, eh! I left that to Claude, who kept himself quite busy, if I remember…" (57).] Thus with the advent of Mariette I's puberty, Claude became the unique receiver of his father's caresses. Claude's "crise," in light of Mariette I's speech, no longer points to a protective instinct for his sister, but to a jealous rage that she might have been receiving the type of attention from her father that Claude desired.

Claude's jealousy is made even more apparent by the juxtaposition of this scene of explanation from Tremblay's play with the scene of confrontation between Mariette II and Alex II over the same subject. Mariette II accuses her father of having become *more* interested in her once the changes of puberty began:

> Maman avait commencé à te défendre de jouer trop longtemps avec moi…J'comprenais pas trop pourquoi mais j'sentais qu'a'l'avait raison. Ça fait que tu te tiraillais avec Claude sans grande conviction. Tu t'es jamais tellement occupé de lui, hein ? Des fois, on avait l'impression qu'y t'intéressait pas parce qu'y s'intéressait pas aux mêmes choses que toi…Tu riais même un peu de lui, avec ses livres pis ses émissions de télévision que tu trouvais niaiseuses…En tout cas, t'as continué de me tourner autour sans trop…t'approcher de moi…jusqu'à ce soir-là… (425)

[Mama began telling you not to play with me so much…I wasn't sure why, but something told me she was right. So you horsed around with Claude, halfheartedly. You never paid him much attention, did you? Sometimes we thought it was because you weren't interested in the same things…You even laughed at him, at his books and T.V. shows you thought were stupid…Anyway, you were still buzzing around me without…getting too close…until that night… (58).]

Claude's jealousy of the relationship between his father and his sister is given free rein in his own play because he hides its signifier in Mariette II's mouth. Through Mariette II, Claude shows the ultimate ambivalence of his feelings for his father, reproaching him on two levels simultaneously: first for his supposed sexual liberties with Mariette, and second for his negligence and incomprehension of Claude. Consciously, Claude believes that the feelings he writes into his theatrical *scène* are the natural protective instincts of a brother for his sister and the disappointment at never having been understood by his father. He does not realize that his gestures as a budding playwright can be interpreted on another level as the signifier of *l'autre scène* of his own repressed jealousy.

As Mariette II's description of that night continues, however, we see that Claude did have *some* awareness of the feelings that motivate his fixation on that event.

> Ton odeur de bière, pis tes yeux fous…J'te dis que le père Noël était loin, hein ? […] Ça coupe une vie en deux ! Ça casse quequ'chose à tout jamais ! Ça a détruit tout c'que je pensais de toi…toute l'admiration…tout l'amour que j'avais pour toi. Tout d'un coup. J'ai vieilli tout d'un coup ce soir-là. Pis toi.. t'es mort. Pis là Claude est arrivé, juste au bon moment, pis y'a faite sa crise…Probablement une sorte de crise de jalousie, mais en tout cas…ça m'a sauvée…physiquement… (425-6)

> [Your smell of beer, your crazy eyes…Not much like Santa, that's for sure! […] That cuts a life in two! It breaks…something for ever! It destroyed everything I felt for you…all the admiration…the love. Just like that. In that one night, I grew older. And you…you died. Then Claude came in, just in time, and all hell broke loose…He was probably jealous, but never mind…it saved me…literally…. (59)]

Claude himself puts these words "crise de jalousie" in the mouth of his sister's character. We can read Mariette II's understanding of Claude's jealousy as a sort of confession on his part of the feelings that motivated his behavior. Juxtaposing this passage with Mariette I's description of the same evening gives further insight into Claude's motivation: "Sais-tu quoi? Quand t'es venu te coucher à côté de moi, ce soir-là, ç'a réglé bien des choses…Je retrouvais mon vieux popa pis ça me faisait du bien. Le père Noël était revenu. […] J'me sus sentie comme une p'tite fille pour la dernière fois de ma vie" (425). ["You know what? When you came and lay down beside me that night, everything felt right again…I had my old papa, and that made me feel good. Santa was back.[…] That was the last time in my life I felt like a little girl" (58).] In Claude's play, he is the savior that keeps Mariette from being raped by their father. It is interesting to note in the first passage that Mariette II says that this moment erased all of her former feelings for her father—changed her irrevocably. But we sense, because of what Mariette I has already told us, that it was actually Claude who was changed irrevocably by what he thought he might be seeing.

Another key reference to note in these two passages is the repetition of "père Noël." Since Québécois fathers are notoriously distant from their children and absent in literature, the fact that Mariette refers to her father as a "père Noël" type figure is telling; he spent much more time enjoying his children while he was around, even if he was often absent. This double reference also underlines the difference between Claude and Mariette I's points of view. For Mariette, her father *was* the père Noël at that moment; for Claude, the "père Noël" was further away than he had ever been. Claude's witnessing

of the physical and emotional closeness between his sister and father seems to have distanced him irrevocably from his own vision of his father as "père Noël."

In the final exchange of Tremblay's play between Claude and Alex I, the ambivalent nature of Claude's feelings for his father reveals itself more fully as the impetus for Claude's creative efforts. He admits to have begun writing in order to evacuate the pent-up emotions that he could never express aloud. The love between Alex I and his children always remained unsaid. It could be expressed in games and caresses, but never in words, and Claude was desperate for words:

> CLAUDE: On peut pas construire une enfance sur des devinettes! Pis du silence! On se rendait souvent tout près des aveux, papa, mais ça venait jamais ! On se tiraillait en masse, ah ! oui, ça, ça manquait pas, on se chatouillait, on s'épuisait à courir dans'maison, à se cacher, à se trouver, mais quand on était ben essoufflés pis qu'on se regardait dans les yeux comme on se regarde maintenant, quand quequ'chose de vraiment important se préparait…
>
> ALEX I : J'peux pas, j'peux pas, c'est toute ! Demande-moé-lé pas plus aujourd'hui !
>
> CLAUDE : J'te le demande pas ! Aie pas peur ! Ça fait longtemps que j'te demande pus rien. (*Il prend un feuillet*.) J't'explique juste pourquoi « ça » existe ! Quand tu peux pas parler, y faut que les choses sortent d'une façon ou d'une autre. (434)

[Claude: A child can't live on guesses! Or silence! We were often on the verge of saying things, Papa, but it never happened! We horsed around a lot, oh, did we ever, tickling each other, charging all over the house, exhausting ourselves playing hide and seek, but when we were all out of breath and we'd look each

> other in the eye like we are now, when something truly important might have happened between us…
> Alex: I can't, that's all! I can't! Don't ask me anymore!
> Claude: Don't worry, I won't. I don't ask you for anything now. *He picks up a page.* I'm just telling you why "this" exists. When you can't talk, things have to come out some other way. (71-72)]

We see here, as Claude angrily flourishes the pages of his work in front of his father, that Claude's writing serves the function of acting out his conflicted feelings for his father rather than bringing them into meaningful discourse. Over the years childhood adulation turned to adult disdain, and Claude's writings evolved from exalted pictures of his wonderful father to the detestable portrait of Alex II. In their moments of anger, the two Alexes do in fact resemble each other. Tremblay juxtaposes two angry tirades, the first from Alex II to Madeleine II, and the second from Alex I to Claude, and the comparison renders Claude's displacement of his problems with his father all the more flagrant. Whereas Alex II says to Madeleine II: "Tu t'es tellement toujours pensée plus intelligente que moé, hein? J'te connais ! Tu guettes chacun de mes gestes, tu juges chacune de mes paroles…" ["Always thought you were smarter than me, eh ? I know you ! You watch every move I make, judge everything I say […]"], Alex I makes similar remarks to Claude : "Tu m'as toujours jugé, tu t'es toujours pensé plus smatte que moé mais fais ben attention à toé !" (415). ["You've always looked down on me, always thought you were smarter than me, but you watch your step!" (43)] The mirroring in these two scenes, Alex I's accusations of his son coming out as accusations of Madeleine II in Claude's play, suggests that Claude is unable (and unwilling) to place himself in the position of the one who is seen to be judging his father.

Claude ironically calls this displacement of his own emotions onto his mother's character in the play a transference: "(*Ironique*:) J'ai fait ce qu'on appelle…un transfert,"

(436) [*Ironically*: I made what you'd call…a transference" (74)][39], yet the irony in his voice indicates that he is using the psychoanalytic term outside of its clinical context on purpose. Tremblay's introduction of the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, however, is not without meaning. If one might be tempted to describe literature as a symptom, then Claude's play is a symptom of his ambivalent feelings towards his father. Of what, then, is Michel Tremblay's play a symptom?[40] We have to ask ourselves why Tremblay writes a play about a playwright who is incapable of representing himself directly in his own plays, but instead "transfers" his thoughts and desires onto his characters. This *mise en abyme* cannot be wholly gratuitous. This is not to say that we should equate Tremblay to Claude and infer that Claude's unconscious desires are actually Tremblay's, but we are perhaps guided towards one of the truths of what it means to be a writer. As Soler reminds us, "artistic works are not products of the unconscious" (70); after all, the unconscious itself does not write. But could writing exist without the unconscious? And could the unconscious have been discovered if we did not, as human beings, have the capacity to invent? The act of dreaming and the act of writing fiction are both forms of storytelling, and both allow thoughts to be represented to the consciousness in a way that would not be possible if they were labeled as "truth." As Claude prepares himself for the destruction of his play, he tells his father: "Déchire-là, ma pièce, si tu veux, papa, mets le feu dedans, c'est plein de…(*Silence*.) mensonges. J'ai essayé, à travers des mensonges, de dire ce qui était vrai" (436). ["Tear up my play if you like, Papa, set fire to it, it's full

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[39] Translation modified.

[40] Colette Soler offers a complicated explanation of literature as symptom, which can be summarized as follows: "[L]iterary creation can be a symptom because a symptom is itself an invention" (Soler 71). This invention fills a lack, putting in place "an element proper to incarnate *jouissance*" (Soler 72). The symptom allows the subject a type of *jouissance* that he cannot achieve through "normal" relationships with other people because "the partner of *jouissance* is unapproachable in language" (Soler 72).

of … *Silence.* Lies. Using lies I tried to tell the truth" (74).] A *mise en scène* of Tremblay's play reveals a certain truth about the theatrical art form, and thus also about human experience. Somewhere in between the two simultaneous stagings of this family drama lies the truth of Claude's play, a truth which reveals itself through the complex interplay of the scène(s) théâtrale(s), but which comes from *l'autre scène*.

The stage directions that open Tremblay's play read: "Les personnages de la pièce de Claude sont habillés exactement comme ceux de la réalité avec, toutefois, quelque chose de transposé qui en fait presque des caricatures" (390). ["The characters from Claude's play are dressed exactly like those of reality with, nonetheless, some sort of transposition that makes them *almost* caricatures."[41]] How can we read the word *réalité* in the context of the theater, and even more, in the context of a theater within a theater ? And what of Tremblay's emphasis on the word "presque"? The "almost" caricatural appearance of Claude's players within Tremblay's play suggests that our psychic representations of the human beings with whom we share our lives are both exaggerated and simplified by our emotional (and libidinal) investments in them.

A certain truth is always revealed both by the creation of fictions and by our reactions to them. This is perhaps what we must infer from the interrogatory title of the play, *Le Vrai Monde*? For the truth of all of human actions in the real world is that they are propelled by objective reality and by psychic reality, and even when Claude's play is burned, Michel Tremblay's play lives on to reveal its truths to us.

Conclusion:

In each of these two plays Michel Tremblay experiments with the structural capacity of theater to show, rather than tell of, certain aspects of psychic life. His works

[41] Translation mine; this stage direction was not translated.

present an art of simultaneity, a theater that is both linear and circular. Both *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* and *Le vrai monde?* have two plot lines; they each tell two different "stories." Yet in each of the cases, one of the plot lines is in fact the condition of possibility for the other's existence. In *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou*, Carmen and Manon's conversation only occurs because of Marie-Louise and Léopold's. In *Le vrai monde?*, Claude's play is the reason that the dialogue of the frame exists. If we read the plays, we can quite easily separate the two plots: we can read Manon and Carmen's conversation separately from Marie-Louise and Léopold's, and keep Claude's play separate from Tremblay's. The theatergoer, however, does not have that option. To be in the audience of these two plays is to enter into another plane of understanding. The structure of these plays forces their audiences to see two separate visions of reality simultaneously. Each plot on its own reveals certain truths, but it is the overlapping and intertwining of the two that allows us to pose certain deeper questions about human experience.

Tremblay's metaphors for psychic functioning are revealed by the structure of the plays themselves. In *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou*, the simultaneous staging of past and present reveals the structure of trauma. In *Le vrai monde?*, a writer's work interrupts his reality and exposes the function his own writing serves for him. Tremblay's work on the psychic lives his individual characters demonstrates the unique capacity of theater to represent the complexities of certain universal aspects of psychic life.

Chapter Three:

Theaters of the Mind in Marie NDiaye's *Hilda*

Introduction:

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, Marie NDiaye's first excursions into theatrical writing were plays written for the radio. Radio theater relies on the spectators' capacity to differentiate between the voices of the characters, which defines characterization in different terms than theaters of the flesh. The dramatic action of radio theater is of necessity verbal. Words act and perform functions; bodies, if they are evoked at all, are secondary. NDiaye's theater is eminently a theater of voices, even more than Tremblay's, and yet her radio plays have been inevitably and frequently staged. *Hilda*, NDiaye's first play published in 1999, was originally broadcast by France Culture live from Avignon, directed by Marguerite Gateau. It has since been staged in France, the United States and England.[42] What it is about NDiaye's theater of voices that attracts directors of in-the-flesh actors to take on her texts?

Many of NDiaye's characters share the common trait of an utter incapacity to take other human beings into account, even, and perhaps most especially, when their actions have a direct impact on those around them. The effects of this incapacity become defining elements of the action in nearly all of NDiaye's plays.[43] She once stated about her characters: "Les personnages expriment sans volonté de provocation tout ce qu'ils pensent—et ce que leur inconscient pense—sans volonté de faire mal."[44] [The characters express without trying to provoke everything that they think—and that their unconscious

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[42] For a list of recent stagings of NDiaye plays in France, see the footnote on page 11 of the Introduction.
[43] Cf. *Hilda*, *Les serpents*, *Papa doit manger*, *Rien d'humain*.
[44] "La cruauté a une adresse," lecture given at Emory University on April 18, 2008.

thinks—without trying to be hurtful."] As NDiaye states, while her characters do not set out to hurt those around them, they also make no efforts to keep from doing so. She refuses to define her characters as cruel, stating that they make their sometimes crushing demands on others without the slightest hint of malice, taking absolutely no joy from the pain that they inflict. If the title of her lecture at Emory University in 2008 ("La cruauté a une adresse") can be an indication of her thoughts on her characters, it would seem that she does not define them as cruel because cruelty implies a consciousness and will to hurt the interlocutor. Her characters rarely address each other in any way that recognizes the other as a subject in his or her own right. It is perhaps because her simple dialogues lay bare the underlying selfishness and unconsciousness of contemporary society that directors find her works so compelling. Nowhere are the unconscious power struggles that underlie day-to-day exchanges of goods and services more distressingly revealed than in her first play, *Hilda*.

A relatively short play in six scenes, *Hilda* begins with an odd aura that intensifies as the play unfolds. The action of the play consists of six conversations between Mme Lemarchand and Franck Meyer; Franck's sister-in-law Corinne participates in one of the conversations. All of the conversations revolve around the contractual relationship between Mme Lemarchand, Franck, and Hilda, Franck's wife.

The question that opens the play when Franck presumably knocks on Mme Lemarchand's door is "Que voulez-vous?". This abrupt and impolite utterance, not "May I help you?" but "What do you want?" becomes a central question for the play. In taking this tone with Franck, Mme Lemarchand asserts her social status as superior to his. She greets him neither as an equal, nor as a prospective employee, but as someone seeking

something. This seemingly innocent question with which the play opens will come to frame its action. Franck believes he has come to enter into an economic exchange with Mme Lemarchand: his services for her money. As the play progresses, it becomes apparent that in forming this economic tie with Franck, Mme Lemarchand also seeks to form more personal ties.

Franck appears to be responding to a classifieds ad asking for someone who does odd jobs: "Je suis Meyer. Les petits travaux. On m'a dit de me présenter aujourd'hui"(NDiaye 7). ["I'm Meyer. Odd jobs. They told me to come today."][45] Immediately, however, Mme Lemarchand changes the terms of the work she needs and asks Franck about his wife, Hilda: "Je me suis laissé dire que vous avez une femme qui ferait mon affaire" (7). ["I heard you have a wife who would be just what I need."] This choice of words, literally "I let myself be told" is extremely bizarre, and seems to suggest the involuntary nature of her hearing about Hilda—as if finding a servant did not involve any will on her part. This is the only moment in the play when Mme Lemarchand lets herself be told anything. She does all of the telling: her verbal effusions are greeted by Franck's terse fragments, and her words monopolize the sonoric space of the play, establishing her as the character in the position to control all discourse.

In the first scene, Mme Lemarchand is extremely insistent that Hilda become her maid and nanny, but her next conversation with Franck expresses her dissatisfaction with the invisible Hilda's reticence to be more than her maid—to be her friend. Gradually,

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[45] All citations from the French original are taken from NDiaye, Marie. *Hilda*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1999. They are hereafter noted in the text only by the page number. *Hilda* was translated for the Act French Theater Festival in New York by Erika Rundle, and published in *PAJ*, Volume 82, (2006). The translation, while it works very well in the theater, is not always faithful to the strangeness of NDiaye's text, and omits several of the more difficult passages. In an attempt to stay as close as possible to the original text, I have given my own translations, fully recognizing that they would not necessarily always be satisfactory for theatrical performance.

Hilda is described as becoming more and more silent until, in the final tableau, Mme Lemarchand pronounces her dead. "Hilda est morte à présent, Franck, morte, morte. Il n'y a plus d'Hilda. La voulez-vous encore?" (88). ["Hilda is dead now, Franck, dead, dead. There is no more Hilda. Do you still want her?"] Mme Lemarchand claims that she is not, in fact, physically dead, yet the audience has no way of judging for itself since she never appears on the stage. These questions, the final "Do you still want her?" in opposition to the opening "What do you want?," surround a destructive process by which Hilda is gradually removed from her previous life, always remaining absent from the theatrical stage in body yet omnipresent in discourse.

Although there are several characters in the play whose names are mentioned but who never appear onstage (M. Lemarchand, the Meyer and Lemarchand children, some dinner guests to whom Mme Lemarchand refers in the fourth scene, and the police commissioner, about whom she speaks in the fifth), the status of their absence is not the same as Hilda's. While these absences may be more than circumstantial, Hilda's absence both gives its name to the play and motivates its entire action. In each of the play's six tableaux, Hilda's absence is the crucial motivating element of the interactions between Franck and Mme Lemarchand. With each scene, the reasons for Hilda's absence become more sinister. In fact, the second through the fifth tableaux all stage to some degree Franck's efforts to disengage Hilda from Mme Lemarchand's employment. Mme Lemarchand refuses to "let Hilda go," (in both senses of the phrase) until, in the sixth and final tableau, she declares Hilda useless and dead and offers to loan her back to Franck who is now living with Hilda's sister.

Every exchange between Mme Lemarchand and Franck demonstrates how Hilda, in *Hilda*, is an object of economic oppression and yet also somehow an agent of resistance. She is both the object of Mme Lemarchand's economic subjugation and a representative of a certain subjectivity that resists all of Mme Lemarchand's attempts to suppress it. As the play unfolds, the audience's only contact with Hilda is through Mme Lemarchand's complaints about her unwillingness to be her friend and Franck's statements that Hilda no longer wishes to work for Mme Lemarchand. Hilda's resistance to Mme Lemarchand's insistent offers of friendship leads, ultimately, to her removal from her own former life. Mme Lemarchand successfully "buys" Hilda's services and eventually even controls her body, but she never receives from Hilda the recognition of friendship that she seeks. The theatrical space of *Hilda* represents the psychic space of Mme Lemarchand's unfulfilled and limitless desires. Reading the status of Hilda's absent presence in each of the six scenes reveals that NDiaye's play stages a conflict between fantasy and reality.

Setting the Stage: Monetary Economies

The first scene of the play becomes emblematic of all that follows, revealing the existence of two different economies: a monetary economy and a libidinal economy.[46] Hilda is already absent in voice and body, yet present in name and imagination, even before she is employed by Mme Lemarchand. In this scene, Franck presents himself at

[46] Rabaté links the economy of NDiaye's plays to capitalism: "Le théâtre, je l'ai dit, poursuit le travail des romans, en mettant encore plus à nu cette structure terrifiante de l'âge du capitalisme avancé où nous sommes parvenus en ce début du XXIème siècle. Tout est devenu économique, tout se marchande et se régule comme de l'argent, s'échange et se troque, se dévalue ou s'estime, loin de toute sentimentalité. L'affectif est mis hors jeu, et cette éviction produit une inquiétante étrangeté de tous les rapports intersubjectifs" (47). While I would agree that there is something uncanny about the intersubjective relations in NDiaye's theater, excluding affectivity from our reflections limits their import. Desire governs NDiaye's intersubjective relations, and it cannot be understood without some recourse to affect, even if that affect is in itself strange and disquieting.

Mme Lemarchand's door because he believes she seeks *his* services. Any audience member who has not examined the "Cast of Characters" may think at this point that Hilda's absence is circumstantial; the conversation between Franck and Mme Lemarchand suggests that Mme Lemarchand was not initially seeking a maid/nanny. Yet even Hilda's seemingly circumstantial absence from this scene is tinted with its own bizarre quality, because Mme Lemarchand's character enters into negotiations with Franck about Hilda's contract without seeking to negotiate with Hilda herself. In this scene, and throughout the play, NDiaye invests a familiar situation with an uncanny strangeness. While the play's initial premise is one of simple economic exchange, the action of the drama is haunted by questions of desire and affectivity—which become irrevocably and disturbingly bound up with the economic questions. While NDiaye certainly stages a social drama, pitting Mme "The Merchant" (an incarnation of the French bourgeoisie) against Franc(k) "sincere" (and also, ironically, "free"), representative of the working class, she also addresses the unconscious paths of desire hidden within the capitalist structure.

While Mme Lemarchand and Franck negotiate the terms of Hilda's contract in the first scene, Hilda is treated as an object of economic exchange whose humanity is erased. This seems appropriate given Mme Lemarchand's name. Mme "The Merchant" does not so much bargain in this scene as she does order. She offers a salary that is five francs above the average pay of *femmes de service* in her town, fifty francs instead of forty-five. Her generosity, however, is not free. The text hints over and over again that the price of Mme Lemarchand's generosity will be steep, and will not benefit Hilda at all. First of all, she states that Hilda's pay will be given to Franck, and not to Hilda herself, and that not

all of Hilda's hours will be declared: "Je compte payer Hilda cinquante francs de l'heure, Franck. Je déclarerai la moitié des heures qu'elle effectuera réellement et c'est à vous, en personne, que je remettrai l'argent correspondant aux heures non déclarées. Chacun de nous y trouvera son bénéfice" (20). [I plan to pay Hilda fifty francs per hour, Franck. I will declare half of the hours that she actually works and I will give the rest of the money, corresponding to the undeclared hours, to you, in person. Each of us will benefit this way."] While the use of the word "chacun" suggests that all parties involved will benefit from these arrangements, it becomes clear that Mme Lemarchand's "chacun" does not include Hilda. At the end of this scene, she reiterates to Franck: "Vous aurez la moitié de la paye en mains propres, Franck, vous et pas Hilda. Au revoir" (27). ["You will have half of the money in your own hands, Franck, you and not Hilda. Goodbye."] Hilda has become the object of an economic exchange between Franck and Mme Lemarchand, since it is Franck who will receive the salary. Though it may be the case that domestic servants might work *au noir* for tax purposes that could benefit both employee and employer, here the audience cannot help but feel that the illicit nature of Hilda's employment hides something more sinister.

This feeling of the sinister strangeness of Mme Lemarchand's demands increases the more she speaks. She refuses to be precise about the nature of Hilda's tasks at her house. When Franck sums it up: "Cinquante francs de l'heure et trois enfants, le ménage, la vaisselle," ["Fifty francs an hour and three kids, cleaning, and dishes"] Mme Lemarchand does not precisely confirm his summary : "Oui, oui, tout cela. A quoi bon détailler ? Hilda verra bien" (21). ["Yes, yes, all of that. What's the point of spelling it out? Hilda will see."] Both Franck and the audience of the play will begin to see that the

demands made on Hilda will go far beyond children, cleaning, and dishes. Mme Lemarchand reveals this when she tells Franck that she expects that Hilda's salary will give her certain particular rights over Hilda:

> Ce sera donc cinquante francs. Mais j'aurai Hilda absolument, Franck. Hilda me sera acquise absolument, Franck, à ce tarif-là. Comprenez-le bien tous les deux, je vous prie. Ce n'est que justice, d'ailleurs, que la femme n'ait aucun droit à la protestation pour cinquante francs de l'heure. Mes femmes ne se plaignent jamais, Franck. De quoi se plaindraient-elles, et auprès de qui ? (22)
>
> [So it will be fifty francs. But Hilda will be absolutely mine, Franck. Hilda will be absolutely acquired, Franck, at that price. I beg you both to understand that. After all, it's only fair that a woman have no right to protest for fifty francs an hour. My women never complain, Franck. Of what would they complain, and to whom?]

Once again the vocabulary of commodity and acquisition dominates Mme Lemarchand's speech about Hilda. Despite the authoritarian tone of "absolument," Franck agrees to Mme Lemarchand's terms. Hilda will have no right to contest any aspect of what is asked of her. Not only does Mme Lemarchand assert her rights over Hilda, but she also underlines her absolute *possession* of the women who work for her--"*mes* femmes"—and her power over them by affirming that they have no one to whom they can complain—"auprès de qui" (22). Mme Lemarchand's affirmation that she will possess Hilda, underlined by verbs such as *avoir* and *acquérir*, will come to be understood as an expression of desire rather than of fact. The destructive effects of this desire will determine the *dénouement* of the play.

As she makes this economic arrangement with Franck without consulting Hilda, Mme Lemarchand also refuses to accept any impediment to Hilda's immediate employment. Each time that Franck mentions needing to speak with Hilda about the position before agreeing to its terms, Mme Lemarchand insists that refusal is an utter impossibility. When he mentions their own children, she dismisses them: "Les enfants ne sauraient être un obstacle pour me céder Hilda, Franck" (9). ["The children won't be an obstacle to ceding Hilda to me, Franck."] The use of the verb "céder" reinforces the fact that Mme Lemarchand considers her employment of Hilda to mean Franck's giving her up. It also increases the already prevalent objectification of Hilda, in that the verb "céder" is very rarely used with a human direct object.

In the subsequent scenes, as the dynamic of the play shifts from one of simple employment towards its sinister climax, Mme Lemarchand continues to insist on the importance of the economic relationship she has established with the Meyer family. In the third scene, Franck appears at her home bloody from a work-related injury. Instead of calling Hilda to his aid, as he requests, she pushes him into a taxi with three months' advance on Hilda's pay. He does not want to accept the money, but he does leave with it. This monetary advance extends Mme Lemarchand's rights over Hilda, and will be the means by which Mme Lemarchand will literally remove Hilda from her own life.

In Scene IV, Franck comes to the Lemarchand house complaining that Hilda did not come home the previous evening. From this point forward in the play, Hilda will not only be absent from the stage, she will also be absent from her home and from the lives of her children and husband. For the first time in the play, NDiaye uses exclamation points in the dialogue. Franck's anger erupts in this scene as he realizes the extent of

Mme Lemarchand's control over Hilda: "Hilda n'est pas rentrée!"; "Hilda doit rentrer!" (57). ["Hilda didn't come home!"; "Hilda must come home!"] Mme Lemarchand, however, is immune to Franck's pleas, and refers him back to the money that he had previously accepted as an advance on Hilda's salary. When he admits that he has already spent it and that he cannot reimburse her, she insists on their economic exchange:

> Pourquoi vous redonnerais-je Hilda avant qu'elle n'ait effectué le travail correspondant à la somme que je vous ai avancée et que vous avez déjà dilapidée ? Si vous voulez Hilda tout de suite, Franck, rachetez-moi Hilda en me payant ce que vous me devez. Hilda restera en ma possession tant que je ne serai pas remboursée. Pour quelle espèce d'imbécile me prenez-vous, Franck ? Je connais les affaires et mon intérêt, vous ne me volerez pas comme cela. Vous voulez à la fois l'argent et Hilda, l'argent sans le travail d'Hilda. […] Nous la garderons jusqu'à ce qu'elle ait fait son temps, jusqu'à ce qu'elle ait travaillée pour l'équivalent des six mille francs que je vous ai avancés. (61-62)
>
> [Why would I give Hilda back to you before she's done the work corresponding to the advance that I gave you and that you squandered? If you want Hilda now, Franck, buy Hilda back from me by paying me what you owe. Hilda will remain in my possession as long as I'm not reimbursed. What kind of imbecile do you take me for, Franck? I know business and my rights, and you won't steal from me. You want Hilda and the money, the money without Hilda's work. […] We will keep her until she's worked off the six thousand francs I paid you in advance.]

Once again the vocabulary of commodity reigns in Mme Lemarchand's discourse. Verbs like *redonner*, *racheter*, and *garder*, and nouns like *ma possession* and *les affaires* underline the point that Hilda has been both linguistically and physically (in that she is not allowed to leave Mme Lemarchand) reduced to an object of economic exchange.

Mme Lemarchand's statement “Vous voulez à la fois l'argent et Hilda” echoes the French proverb: “vouloir le beurre et l'argent du beurre,” and NDiaye plays with her audience’s cultural baggage while reinforcing the commercial aspect of the exchange.

In the fifth tableau, Mme Lemarchand brings Hilda to visit Franck at their apartment, but forbids her to leave the car. Inside the home she meets Hilda’s sister, Corinne. When Franck goes downstairs to speak with Hilda in the car (offstage and unheard), Mme Lemarchand states her position of power to Corinne:

> J’ai défendu à Hilda de sortir de la voiture, où sont mes enfants. Hilda m’obéit, à présent. Il n’obtiendra rien d’elle, ce gros malin. Hilda connaît son devoir et sait l’argent qu’ils me doivent. Il s’imaginait reprendre Hilda de cette façon, mais c’est sans espoir. Enfin, que se figurait-il, hein ? Hilda sait maintenant que le chef des gendarmes de notre petite ville compte parmi nos amis, que M. Lemarchand fréquente des juges, des avocats, des notaires. Hilda a bien compris qu’on ne pouvait, d’un côté, prendre l’argent, et de l’autre refuser de s’employer aux conditions du patron. (76-77)
>
> [I forbid Hilda to get out of the car with my children. Hilda obeys me, now. He won’t get anything from her, clever devil. Hilda knows her duty and knows the money they owe me. He thought he could get her back this way, but there’s no hope. I mean, what did he think, eh? Hilda knows now that the police chief of our little town is a friend of ours, that Mister Lemarchand is friendly with judges, lawyers, and notaries. Hilda understands that you can’t take money from your employer and then refuse the conditions of employment.]

Mme Lemarchand’s use of both nominal and verbal forms of the word “devoir” underlines her incapacity to take Hilda’s perspective into account. As she tells Corinne of Hilda’s knowledge of her “duty” or “obligation,” she speaks only in regards to herself

and her family. Yet the word "devoir" also implies Hilda's duties as a mother and wife. The obligation that Hilda knows is in direct conflict with the money that her family owes Mme Lemarchand ("doivent"). The juxtaposition of two forms of owing and two forms of knowing—*devoir* as a noun and verb and *savoir* and *connaître* as forms of knowing, open a space for multiple determinations of Mme Lemarchand's meaning and intentions.

Hanging over all of Mme Lemarchand's encounters with Hilda's family is the knowledge that she has money, power and influence that give her freedoms that the Meyer family does not have, and thus the most important verb that characterizes her discourse in the passages analyzed above is perhaps "avoir"—"to have" or "to possess." Mme Lemarchand uses her "avoirs"—her position in the socio-economic hierarchy—to impose her own will on Hilda, attempting to force her to conform to the fantasy Hilda that she has constructed. While the play allows her the power to "avoir" Hilda, the following analyses will show how it slowly undermines her capacity to make Hilda resemble her "vouloir," or the wishes and desires that she ties to her possession of Hilda.

Fantasy Structures

If the first scene of the play establishes Hilda as an object of economic exchange, a theme that the rest of the play bears out, it also presents her as the fantasized answer to all of Mme Lemarchand's desires. It is via this fantasy of Hilda that NDiaye transforms the play into something more than a social drama. Where the verb "avoir" dominates the economic discourse, the constant repetition of the verb "vouloir" reveals the existence of another type of economy. In this first scene, which sets the tone for the rest of the play, Mme Lemarchand expresses her desires as if they can and should be immediately fulfilled: "A présent je veux Hilda. Traitez-moi avec compassion et gentillesse, monsieur

Meyer, je vous l'ordonne. Et, de ceci, je vous prie : voyez en moi une amie avant tout. Je veux Hilda. Je vois donc Hilda demain, neuf heures" (15). ["Now I want Hilda. Treat me with compassion and kindness, Mister Meyer, I command it. And this, I beg you: above all, see me as a friend. I want Hilda. So I will see Hilda tomorrow, nine o'clock."] Mme Lemarchand's expressions are full of contradiction. She pleads while ordering, and she expects nothing less than to be satisfied. Her desires are stated as if they functioned within a realm of cause and effect: "I want Hilda. So (donc) I will see her tomorrow at nine."

Mme Lemarchand's expectation that her own wishes will be immediately fulfilled is coupled with assertions that negate any wishes or desires that might exist on Hilda's part. When Franck insists that he must speak with Hilda before agreeing to anything, she asks him: "Que voulez-vous demander à Hilda, Franck?" (15). ["What do you want to ask Hilda, Franck?"] When he tells her that Hilda will want to know the details of her work, both the payment and the age of her children, Mme Lemarchand balks at the idea that Hilda would have these questions: "Je suis certaine qu'Hilda ne demandera rien du tout à ce propos et je pense que vous me racontez des histoires en disant que c'est Hilda qui voudra savoir combien elle sera payee" (22). ["I am certain that Hilda won't ask anything at all about that and that you are making stuff up by saying that it's Hilda who will want to know how much she'll be paid."] In Mme Lemarchand's vision of things, Hilda is not permitted a desire to know her salary. Not only is she not permitted to negotiate for herself the terms of her own contract with Mme Lemarchand, the latter finds it inconceivable that she desire to. She operates a systematic erasure of Hilda's will, denying the possibility both of its existence and its being exercised. This erasure,

however, is not as simple as it might seem at first glance. Mme Lemarchand does not merely erase the "real" Hilda's will, she in fact states that she is certain of what Hilda's wishes would be; she claims a knowledge of Hilda that she cannot yet have, but that she will continue to claim in ever-broadening terms as the play progresses.

While the language of economic exchange permeates the negotiations between Franck and Mme Lemarchand, their first discussion also frequently addresses who and what Hilda is—her appearance, her behavior, her attitudes and her essence. Mme Lemarchand's insistence to Franck that Hilda will not ask any of the questions that he mentions serves not only to erase the *actual* Hilda's will, but to affirm the existence of an *imagined* Hilda who is already as real to Mme Lemarchand as Franck Meyer who stands before her. Hilda has constantly occupied Mme Lemarchand's thoughts since she first "let herself be told of" her existence.

Mme Lemarchand reveals to Franck and to the spectators that she has informed herself about Hilda in several small ways: her physical beauty: "On dit qu'Hilda est assez belle, Franck" (11) ["They say Hilda is fairly beautiful, Franck"]; her status as a smoker: "On m'avait dit qu'Hilda, jeune fille, avait fumé, puis arrêté avant même d'avoir ses enfants" (13) ["They told me that Hilda smoked when she was younger but that she quit even before she had her children"]; her past employment: "Avant de vous épouser, Franck, Hilda a été serveuse pendant quelques mois, à mi-temps" (16). ["Before marrying you, Hilda was a part-time waitress for a few months."] Mme Lemarchand claims omnipotence regarding Hilda based on this knowledge that she has acquired about her from unnamed sources: "Je sais tout. Qu'Hilda se rende compte que je sais à peu près tout et que peut-être personne ne s'est intéressée à elle comme je le fais. Je veux

maintenant une femme qui ne partira pas, une servante définitive" (14). ["I know everything. Let Hilda know that I know just about everything and that perhaps no one has ever been as interested in her as I am. I want a woman now who will not leave, a permanent servant."] The finality of the word "définitive" suggests not only that Hilda will remain with Mme Lemarchand forever, but also that she will be permanently defined as a servant. Mme Lemarchand goes on to attempt to confirm with Franck that no more children will come along to interrupt Hilda's employment: "Hilda utilise-t-elle un contraceptif? [And when she gets no response from Franck…] Hilda se confiera à moi et je la conseillerai à ce propos. Deux enfants suffisent à un couple" (14). ["Does Hilda use contraception? […] Hilda will confide in me and I'll counsel her on that score. Two children suffice for a couple."] Once again Mme Lemarchand erases any reality of Hilda that could conflict with her ideal imagining of her. She has a decidedly formed image of what her relationship with Hilda will be, which is reinforced by her constant use of the present and future tenses with rarely any recourse to the conditional. There is no doubt in her mind that Hilda will be as she imagines her.

Throughout this scene, Mme Lemarchand links her presumed knowledge of Hilda to her name. This name, in its difference, seems to hold some sort of mystical quality for Mme Lemarchand. When she first evokes it, she expresses her surprise:

> Est-il exact qu'elle s'appelle Hilda ? Comment cela est-il possible? Hilda. […] Celle que nous avions jusqu'à présent s'appelait Monique. Et nous avons eu Françoise, Consuelo, Brigitte, Yvette, Françoise, Brigitte. Jamais aucune de nos femmes ne s'est prénommée Hilda, jamais. Hilda. (7-8)

["Is she really called Hilda? How is that possible? Hilda. […] The one we had until now was named Monique. And we had Françoise, Consuelo, Brigitte,

> Yvette, Françoise, Brigitte. Never has one of our women been named Hilda, never. Hilda."]

Hilda distinguishes herself from all of the other women whom Mme Lemarchand has employed by the strangeness of her name. This name, Hilda, of Germanic origin (reinforced also by the Germanic surname "Meyer") nonetheless belongs to a woman that the play labels as "française."[47] Her words reveal, however, that it is the otherness of the name "Hilda" that attracts Mme Lemarchand. This name, Hilda, which envelops Mme Lemarchand's current knowledge of the woman Hilda, is a blank screen upon which she can project all that she desires in a "femme de service." By virtue of the fact that she is not an "énième Brigitte," Hilda will perhaps correspond to all of Mme Lemarchand's wishes that none of the other women she has employed has been able to fulfill (10). "Je suis fatiguée des Paulette et des Marie-Thérèse et, par ailleurs, il me faut absolument quelqu'un, une femme de corvée et de devoir, une femme de service" (10). ["I'm tired of Paulettes and Marie-Thérese's and, anyway, I have to have someone, a woman to work for me, a servant."][48] Perhaps Hilda, because she is not Paulette or Marie-Thérèse, will be the "definitive servant" that Mme Lemarchand has always been seeking.

It is not Hilda herself, but Hilda's name, that has created Mme Lemarchand's eager anticipation of her arrival: "Depuis hier, le prénom d'Hilda me tue à petit feu" (21). ["Since yesterday, the name Hilda has been killing me inch by inch."] "Je suis bouleversée, Franck, par la venue de ce prénom d'Hilda demain chez moi" (27). ["I'm overwhelmed, Franck, by the coming of this name Hilda to my home tomorrow."] Mme

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[47] As in many of NDiaye's texts, the question of race in Hilda is only evoked through subtle hints. Hilda, in the insistence that Mme Lemarchand places on her status as a "Française," (in opposition to "une toute jeune étrangère à la peau sombre et au français incertain […], une petite femme de l'île Maurice" that M. Lemarchand would have preferred (37)), must almost be presumed to have "la peau claire."

[48] The English language cannot to justice to the triple redundancy of Mme Lemarchand's utterance.

Lemarchand's repeated insistence on Hilda as a *prénom* is striking. It is not Hilda that Mme Lemarchand anticipates, but Hilda's name. Hilda, through her name, works *on* Mme Lemarchand before she ever works *for* her. The name contains the fantasy that Mme Lemarchand has developed around this woman whom she has never met, but whom she presumes will respond to all of her needs.[49] All of the aspects of this scene: the economic negotiations that take place concerning Hilda but without consulting her; the repeated negation of the possibility that Hilda might have a will of her own; the assumed omnipotent knowledge of Hilda based on hearsay; the enchantment of Hilda's name and its rendering Mme Lemarchand certain of her perfection, foreshadow the action of the play that is to come. Although she has not yet been pronounced "dead" by Mme Lemarchand, Hilda, on her *own* terms, has already been annihilated in Mme Lemarchand's discourse. Each scene that follows details Mme Lemarchand's gradual destructive removal of Hilda from her own life because of her refusal to conform to Mme Lemarchand's fantasy.

Conflicts between Fantasy and Reality

The rest of the play presents Mme Lemarchand's incomprehension and dissatisfaction with the fact that the Hilda who comes to serve her does not precisely correspond to her desires. Unlike the first scene in which Mme Lemarchand greets Franck as a definite outsider to her world with her "Que voulez-vous?," the second tableau stages Mme Lemarchand's penetration into Franck and Hilda's world. She refuses to stand on the *seuil* to deliver the owed money, but instead crosses the physical

[49] NDiaye reinforces this idea of the name bearing a fictional fantasy by titling the play *Hilda*. Giving a feminine first name as the title of a work evokes the entire history of the novel with its feminine protagonists—*Pamela*, *Emma*, *Corinne*, *Rebecca*—firmly establishing Hilda within a realm of *fiction*.

threshold which is also a metaphorical one.[50] She enters Franck and Hilda's space, and the terms of her speech gradually shift. In this scene, the spectators repeatedly witness Mme Lemarchand's conflation of economics and some other form of relationship as she reveals that the Hilda she employs does not live up to the expectations she had for her imagined Hilda.[51]

Once she is inside Hilda and Franck's apartment, she states that while she is satisfied with the work that Hilda accomplishes at her home, she is not satisfied with Hilda: "Je ne suis pas aussi contente d'Hilda, Franck, que je l'espérais. Hilda me déçoit passablement" (28). ["I'm not as happy with Hilda, Franck, as I had hoped. Hilda is a bit

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[50] Christophe Meurée comments on the fact that many of NDiaye's plays take place upon a literal or symbolic threshold: "Toutes les pièces de Marie NDiaye s'organisent autour d'un seuil. Le plus souvent, une porte doit s'ouvrir pour qu'une demande puisse être transmise ; [this is the case for Mme Lemarchand and Franck.] en tant que lieu d'ouverture, le seuil est l'endroit duquel doit sortir ou dans lequel doit pénétrer une chose (objet ou parole symbolique) ou un personnage. Tandis qu'un personnage s'efforce de le franchir, un autre lui en barre l'accès. Le franchissement du seuil s'accompagne, emblématiquement, d'une incorporation ou d'une tentative d'incorporation" (122). In some cases, this incorporation is literal, but in Mme Lemarchand's case, she attempts to make Franck see her as he sees Hilda by becoming more like Hilda herself and by dressing Hilda to resemble her. She effectively attempts to erase the boundaries between Hilda and herself.

[51] Her entry on the stage is worth noting for its bizarre nature:

> Bonjour, Franck. Je suis la maîtresse d'Hilda, l'employeuse ou la patronne d'Hilda, à votre guise. Je vous apporte l'argent, comme convenu. Cela m'ennuyerait, Franck, de vous remettre l'argent comme ça, grossièrement, sur le seuil, comme une tapineuse à son souteneur, comme un homme de main au chef des opérations. Regardez, j'ai l'argent. Deux mille francs, regardez. Franck, puis-je entrer? (27)

Mme Lemarchand introduces herself in this scene in terms of her relationship to Hilda, and seems to leave the choice of how to define this relationship up to Franck: "à votre guise." She chooses three synonyms for "boss" that all have slightly different meanings and can be read in different ways. "Maîtresse," the feminine of "maître," is both the word for "schoolteacher" and for "master" of slaves. Mme Lemarchand speaks in the first scene of her duty to educate Hilda: "Je tâcherai de former Hilda à la chose politique," and yet later in this scene she will make reference to Hilda's eating like a slave-"esclave" (16, 31). "Maîtresse" is also the word for "mistress" as in lover, and the sensual way in which she will describe Hilda's body will leave this definition open. "Employeuse" contains less ambiguity, and its placement in the middle of the three options she offers Franck downplays its significance. Finally, we come to "patronne," which, like "maîtresse," is the feminine form of a common word for boss, "patron." "Patronne" can mean both boss who happens to be female and boss's wife—both she who is in charge of Hilda and she who is married to the one in charge of Hilda. After this trilogy of terms, she evokes an interpretation of her relationship to Franck. By comparing herself to a whore bringing money to a pimp, she opens her dialog with Franck in terms that are both sexual and illicit, which sets the tone for what will follow. Her reference to an "homme de main" also places her in the role of he who does the "dirty work," while the audience imagines that the last thing Mme Lemarchand might do would be to get her own hands "dirty." An "homme de main" usually proceeds directly to fulfill his unseemly duties, whereas the violence that Mme Lemarchand inflicts is hidden behind a façade of supposed affection.

of a disappointment."] She soon reveals that the cause of this dissatisfaction is Hilda's refusal to interact socially with her. She complains that Hilda shows her complete indifference:

> Hilda refuse systématiquement ce que je lui offre, Franck! Connaissez-vous beaucoup de patronnes qui ait comme moi le désir sincère, généreux, gratuit, de prendre un petit café en compagnie de leur servante, toutes les deux assises à la table de la cuisine ou bien debout, Franck, un coin de fesse au comptoir de mon bar américain, et ainsi conversant et riant comme deux amies? Il me faut, Franck, de ces conversations de femmes qui rapprochent les esprits et unissent subtilement, quelle qu'en soit la légèreté. Je veux qu'Hilda soit mon égale. Je veux déjeuner avec Hilda et bavarder avec Hilda entre deux tâches ménagères. Enfin, Franck, comprenez-vous qu'Hilda ne veuille être qu'une domestique? Elle peut être mon amie: quelle servante refuserait? (30-31)
>
> [Hilda systematically refuses what I offer her, Franck! Do you know many bosses who, like me, have the sincere, generous, and gratuitous desire to have a coffee with their servant, sitting at the kitchen table or standing, Franck, leaning up against the bar, conversing and laughing like two friends? Franck, I must have these women's conversations that unite our spirits and bring us together, no matter how trivial they may be. I want Hilda to be my equal. I want to eat lunch with Hilda and chat with Hilda between her chores. I mean, Franck, do you understand that Hilda just wants to be a servant? She can be my friend: what servant would refuse?]

Mme Lemarchand's complaint is that Hilda apparently refuses to conflate her role of employee with the role of friend and companion. While Hilda efficiently accomplishes all of her domestic duties, she does not satisfy Mme Lemarchand's need for companionship. Apparently, this companionship is one of the requirements of

employment that Mme Lemarchand did not feel the need to “détailler” in her first conversation with Franck. She professes that her desire to share with Hilda is “sincere, generous, and gratuitous,” yet there is nothing free about it in that her relation to Hilda has already been established as economic. Mme Lemarchand’s own language undermines the sincerity of her proffered friendship. Her use of “il me faut,” and her insistence on the different roles that she and Hilda hold, “servante” and “patronne,” demonstrate that a semblance of friendship with Hilda is something that she considers as a requirement of Hilda’s employment. She reduces Hilda and herself to their roles rather than their individuality by the final two questions she poses Franck. Hilda is incomprehensible to Mme Lemarchand because Mme Lemarchand imagines her not as an individual with her own likes and dislikes, wishes and desires, but as a representative of her social class. As such, she finds Hilda’s distance incomprehensible.

As the passage continues, it becomes even more clear that the equality that Mme Lemarchand promises is distinctly problematic:

> Hilda me dédaigne. Hilda préfère bouffer, oui, bouffer, en même temps que les enfants, derrière leur chaise, debout, rapidement, se nourrir et en finir, comme une esclave. Hilda m'insulte, Franck. Merci bien, voilà tout ce qu'elle me répond. Merci bien, et elle s'éloigne. Hilda est payée et bien traitée. Pourquoi joue-t-elle à l'esclave? Hilda est ma servante, mon employée, ma femme à tout faire, et mon amie si elle y consent. Connaissez-vous, dans notre petite ville, Franck, beaucoup de dames qui voudraient faire leur amie de leur bonne? C'est un honneur et un privilège

que d'être considérée ainsi. Pourquoi Hilda me repousse-t-elle, Franck?

(31-32)

> [Hilda spurns me. Hilda prefers to gobble down her food, yes, gobble it down, at the same time as the children, standing behind their chairs, quickly, eat and be done with it, like a slave. Hilda insults me, Franck. Thank you very much, that's all she says to me. Thank you very much and then she goes on. Hilda is paid and treated well. Why is she playing the slave? Hilda is my servant, my employee, my right-hand woman, and my friend if she consents to it. Do you know very many women in our town, Franck, who would want to make their maid into their friend? It's an honor and a privilege to be considered that way. Why does Hilda push me away, Franck?]

Mme Lemarchand's evocation of slavery introduces a sinister element into her comments, and the notion of slavery will return several times in the text of the play. Mme Lemarchand's accusation that Hilda "plays the slave" is born out by the play's ending. By the final scene, Hilda lives with Mme Lemarchand and her family and is no longer being paid. Furthermore, when she questions Franck about the other "patronnes," she implies that there *is* something inherently inferior about Hilda that she is willing to overlook in proposing friendship to her. In Mme Lemarchand's view, her offer of friendship to Hilda is one that should be appreciated as a sign of Hilda's social equality. Yet in insisting to Franck that this offer of friendship be accepted, she is in fact undermining the equality she professes to find important. The true measure of Hilda's equality with Mme Lemarchand would in fact be Hilda's capacity to choose. She is thus exercising her equality in choosing *not* to engage in a superficial relationship that she does not desire with Mme Lemarchand. What Mme Lemarchand sees as a representation of Hilda's slavery—her choice to eat with the children "comme une esclave"—can be imagined by the audience as Hilda's resistance to being consumed by Mme Lemarchand's

demands on her time and energy. The audience's imaginings of Hilda's behavior, however, can never be confirmed or denied.

In the series of terms that Mme Lemarchand uses to describe Hilda, "servante, employée, femme à tout faire, et amie (si elle y consent)," her use of the word "si" seemingly offers Hilda a choice in the matter of their friendship. Yet the inequality of Mme Lemarchand's promised equality is further revealed by the demands she asks Franck to make on her behalf. She clearly states that she expects Franck to change Hilda's behavior towards her: "Alors voilà: je veux, Franck, que vous fassiez en sorte qu'Hilda se plie à ma sympathie" (35). ["So there you have it: I want you, Frank, to make Hilda give in to my friendship."] And a few moments later, in an even greater conflation of economic and emotional domains: "Je veux, Franck, que vous persuadiez Hilda de changer d'attitude à mon égard. Je veux, Franck, que vous persuadiez Hilda de devenir mon amie, qu'elle y consente. Alors je vous aiderai énormément" (42). ["I want you, Franck, to persuade Hilda to change her attitude towards me. I want you, Franck, to persuade Hilda to become my friend, to consent to it. And then I'll help you a great deal."] The exchange that Mme Lemarchand proposes is not on equal terms. She wants to exchange human values—friendship and love—for economic aid. She insists that Franck convince the real Hilda to conform to her fantasy image of her. She will loan Franck her Toyota if he convinces Hilda to be her friend. Franck does not agree to the terms of this exchange, but he cannot reason with Mme Lemarchand.

Although Hilda's emotional distance distresses Mme Lemarchand, her beauty is everything that Mme Lemarchand had hoped it would be. Hilda's physical appearance seems to be the only aspect of Mme Lemarchand's fantasy to which Hilda spontaneously

conforms. A little later in Scene II, when Franck first attempts to free Hilda from her employment, he offers to substitute Hilda's sister Corinne. Mme Lemarchand refuses:

> La soeur, j'en suis sûre, n'est pas aussi belle qu'Hilda. La parfaite minceur d'Hilda, sa charmante petite taille, ses dents magnifiques, presque opalescentes à force d'être saines, je suis comblée par la beauté d'Hilda. Je craignais qu'elle n'ait le visage un peu étroit, les traits trop délicats, un tout petit nez mignard, mais non, Franck, le visage d'Hilda est large et puissant, et ses yeux sont grands, ses joues pleines, sa bouche immense. Je vais simplement couper ses cheveux, Franck, les cheveux longs d'Hilda. (38-39)

> [I'm sure the sister is not as beautiful as Hilda. The perfect slimness of Hilda, her charming little waist, her magnificent teeth, almost opalescent with health, I am utterly fulfilled by Hilda's beauty. I was afraid she might have a narrow face, features that were too delicate, a tiny little cutesy nose, but no, Franck, Hilda's face is broad and powerful, and her eyes are large, her cheeks full, her mouth immense. I'm just going to cut her hair, Franck, Hilda's long hair.]

This description of Hilda sensually paints her as a beautiful object that Mme Lemarchand both admires and controls. When she says that she is *comblée* by Hilda's beauty, this word can be read in several different ways. She is fulfilled, fully satisfied with this beauty, but also implicitly filled up by it. The adjectives that she uses to describe Hilda's features, "grands," "pleines," and "immense" evoke a fullness that Mme Lemarchand attempts to use to fill the emptiness of her own life.[52]

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[52] Mme Lemarchand has already spoken of this emptiness in terms of solitude in the first scene: "Ma solitude est si pesante quand je n'ai que les enfants pour me tenir compagnie. Je me suis réveillée ce matin, Franck, sachant que je n'aurais pas encore Hilda ou quelqu'autre (mais c'est Hilda, Hilda, que je voulais déjà), que je n'aurais certainement personne avant demain, et la journée à venir m'a semblé si longue, si grise, si pénible, que j'ai souhaité mourir pour ne pas devoir la vivre" (23). Christophe Meurée theorizes the stated emptiness of certain of NDiaye's characters in terms of their "shapes": "Dans chacune de ses pièces, l'on trouve deux types de personnages, en apparence distincts, que je m'autorise à figurer sous els

The promised cutting of Hilda's hair is Mme Lemarchand's first mention of remodeling Hilda, but it is not the last. In the third tableau, when Franck comes to Mme Lemarchand's home after his injury, he is surprised by Hilda's appearance. Just beyond the reach of the audience's eyes and Franck's arms, Hilda serves the Lemarchand children in the garden. The audience learns that this absent Hilda is different from the previous one because Franck does not even recognize her: "Là-bas, c'est Hilda?" (49). ["That's Hilda over there?"] In explaining to Franck why he no longer recognizes his wife, Mme Lemarchand describes Hilda as an aesthetic object without will:

> Bien sûr que c'est Hilda. Si vous avez du mal à reconnaître Hilda, Franck, c'est que je viens de lui enfiler cette jolie petite robe. Elle lui va parfaitement. Savez-vous ce que me rappelle Hilda, bien sanglée dans ce tissu à carreau un peu épais, un peu raide, et ses fines jambes charmantes et droites qui s'agitent là-dessous aussi rapidement qu'elles le peuvent? Surtout lorsqu'Hilda lève les bras, Franck, comme elle le fait à cet instant, regardez, pour attraper le ballon, elle me rappelle irrésistiblement la petite danseuse au fond de la bouteille de cognac. Tournez la clé, Franck, et la danseuse tourne et tourne en battant élégamment de ses jambes graciles, toute menue et empesée, au rythme d'une musique de pacotille. Oh, comme j'aimais ces petites danseuses autrefois. Je les ai collectionnées avant mon mariage. Si gracieuses, Franck, si frêles et pourtant

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espèces du concave et du convexe […] : d'une part, des personnages clamant le manque qui les déchire et d'autre part, des personnages comblé par l'existence—matériellement, familialement, mais aussi corporellement—ou qui paraissent avoir retrouvé un semblant de stabilité, confrontés cependant à un manque de type indicible souvent même imprononçable" (121-122). In *Hilda*, Mme Lemarchand functions both as "concave" and "convex," to borrow Meurée's terms, alternately claiming her emptiness or her plenitude—depending on the status that she attributes to Hilda's presence in her life at any given moment.

> inaccessibles à moins de casser la bouteille. Hilda est ma petite danseuse de chair, Franck, tout au fond, tout au fond de son flacon. La voyez-vous bien maintenant? Approchez-vous donc, collez votre front aux barreaux. (50)
>
> [Of course it's Hilda. If you have a hard time recognizing Hilda, Franck, it's that I just put her into that pretty little dress. It suits her perfectly. Do you know what she makes me think of, wrapped in that thick plaid fabric, a little rigid, with her charming little legs moving from underneath it as fast as they can? Especially when she lifts her arms, Franck, like she's doing now, look, to catch the ball, she makes me think of the little dancer at the bottom of cognac bottles. Turn the key, Franck, and the dancer turns and turns while elegantly moving her graceful legs, all slim and starched, to the rhythm of cheap music-box music. Oh, how I used to love those little dancers. So graceful, Franck, so fragile and yet inaccessible unless you break the bottle. Hilda is my little dancer in the flesh, Franck, way down, way down in the bottom of her bottle. Can you see her alright, now? Come closer, put your head up against the bars.]

This passage reveals several important aspects of Mme Lemarchand's relationship to Hilda (and also to Franck). First of all, like a child playing with a doll, she has changed Hilda's clothes. There is no ambiguity to her evocation—it is not Hilda who has changed clothes, but Mme Lemarchand who has changed her: "Je viens de lui enfiler." The verb "sangler" has several different meanings. Its primary definition refers to the cinch that holds a saddle onto a beast of burden, and has been metaphorically extended to refer to the tightness of clothing, as in being squeezed or corseted in a fabric, which in itself suggests constrictions on movement. Hilda is certainly restricted in her movement, and NDiaye's choice of the verb "sangler" emphasizes the dehumanizing process that she has undergone. Finally, behind the verb "sangler" lurks the phantom of its oldest meaning, which has mostly fallen into disuse: "to whip." When Mme Lemarchand goes on to compare Hilda to the dancer moving her legs as fast as she can, it inspires a vision of her attempting to flee either the constricted imprisonment of her clothing or the emotional

whipping that she has received by being dressed, as a doll, by her employer. Another image also comes to mind in relation to the verb “sangler” and the legs that “s'agitent”--that of slave blocks where slaves' legs were whipped before prospective buyers so that they would jump and move, proving their agility. Mme Lemarchand has already evoked slavery several times in the play, first referring to herself, who becomes the “esclave” of her domestic servants, and then to Hilda, who prefers to eat “comme une esclave” behind her children's chairs rather than sit with Mme Lemarchand. Mme Lemarchand even states, in Scene II: “Je ne suis pas son négrier, je ne fouette pas Hilda, je ne l’injurie pas, et je tâche de l’aimer et de lui parler” (34). [“I’m not her slave driver, I don’t whip Hilda, I don’t insult her, and I try to love her and talk to her.”] Despite her insistence to the contrary, Mme Lemarchand’s behavior and vocabulary underline Hilda’s lack of freedom.

The ugly image of Hilda's vain attempts to flee is soon replaced in Mme Lemarchand's discourse by that of the graceful dancer in the bottom of cognac bottles. Mme Lemarchand admits collecting these tiny inaccessible beauties before her marriage to M. Lemarchand: inaccessible, unless you broke the bottle. Mme Lemarchand's main complaint of Hilda is that she too remains inaccessible. Yet she works hard to “break the bottle” of Hilda's resistance to her. Finally, she imposes herself as both caretaker and jailor of Hilda in inviting Franck to press his forehead against the bars that separate him from his wife. Both Mme Lemarchand and her iron barrier stand between Franck and Hilda. Since Hilda remains emotionally inaccessible to Mme Lemarchand, Mme Lemarchand works to render her physically inaccessible to Franck.

A few moments later in the same scene, we learn that Mme Lemarchand's taming of Hilda's body goes beyond changing her clothes. She tells Franck that she also strips Hilda down : "Et, tout à l'heure, j'ai mis Hilda entièrement nue pour lui donner une douche avant de lui passer ma petite robe. Je connais parfaitement Hilda. [...] C'est moi qui douche Hilda, Franck. Hilda ne m'a rien demandé. J'ai donné l'ordre d'Hilda de passer à la douche, car je veux que la femme qui s'occupe de mes enfants soit aussi propre que je le suis" (53, 54). ["And, a little while ago, I stripped Hilda naked to give her a shower before putting her into my little dress. I know Hilda perfectly. […] I'm the one who showers Hilda, Franck. Hilda didn't ask me anything. I ordered Hilda to go to the shower, because I want the woman who takes care of my children to be as clean as I am."] The audience is left to presume that Hilda is powerless to defend herself against Mme Lemarchand's ever-increasing encroachments on both her body and her life. Mme Lemarchand increasingly breaks down the physical boundaries between herself and Hilda as she continues to be unable to access Hilda's mental space.[53]

As the scene comes to a close, Mme Lemarchand reveals that Hilda has begun to conform to the fantasy that she first imagined and then demanded that Franck facilitate. Mme Lemarchand tells Franck that while Hilda is not yet all that she hoped, she soon will be: "Hilda s'entête à refuser de s'asseoir en ma compagnie, mais je sens que sa

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[53] It is interesting to note that while first names of Germanic origin that begin with the letter "h" can be and are often imported into French with the "h aspiré," which precludes the liaison, Ndiaye chooses to have both Mme Lemarchand and Franck make the liaison whenever it can be made. While the "h aspiré" is certainly gradually disappearing from oral French, in this case its disappearance reinforces the erasure of the boundaries between Hilda and others that the play enacts. For the audience, Hilda exists in voice and body only through the mouths of others. Her body and clothing are said to be acted upon by others without her spoken consent or dissent, the threshold of her own home is crossed by her employer without her supervision; her sister takes her place in the lives of her husband and children. Just as Mme Lemarchand will eventually subjugate Hilda's will and even her body to her own, attempting to erase all distinctions between Hilda and herself, the eliding of the "H" in Hilda's name erases the boundary between it and surrounding letters.

résistance fléchit. Elle y viendra, cette petite danseuse rétive, aux confidences enjouées autour d'une tasse de thé" (51-52). ["Hilda stubbornly refuses to sit down in my company, but I feel her resistance crumbling. She'll come around, that little rebellious dancer, to cheerful confidences over a cup of tea."] When Franck protests Mme Lemarchand's overbearing "generosity" towards Hilda on Hilda's behalf, Mme Lemarchand insists that everything that has changed in Hilda has been for the best: "Hilda est très gaie, exactement comme je le voulais. Ne vous en faites pas. Elle est froide également, et taciturne, mais joyeusement froide à présent" (55). ["Hilda is very gay, exactly as I wanted. Don't worry. She is cold too, and taciturn, but joyfully cold now."]

The play juxtaposes Mme Lemarchand's confident affirmations of Hilda's changes with Franck's darker statements of what he claims are Hilda's true sentiments: "Hilda a peur de vous et de cette maison et de ces enfants. Elle a peur parce qu'elle est la bonne. Elle ne sait pas comment arrêter" (55). ["Hilda is afraid of you and of this house and of these children. She's afraid because she's the maid. She doesn't know how to stop."] Mme Lemarchand refutes him, "Ce que vous dites ne signifie rien. Hilda me trouve gentille: comment aurait-elle peur de moi?" (55). ["What you are saying means nothing [makes no sense]. Hilda finds me kind: how could she be afraid of me?"] While Mme Lemarchand attempts to contradict Franck's assessment of Hilda's state of mind, she unconsciously reinforces its basis. By telling him that his words "signify nothing," she negates his capacity to signify, essentially removing all power from his speech. Her negation of Franck here reinforces her constant negation of all aspects of Hilda that do not conform to her fantasy. Hilda still does not sit down with her, but she will; Hilda is

cold, but joyfully cold; Hilda is not sad, she is gay. By the time Mme Lemarchand sends Franck away from her home in the third scene, Mme Lemarchand has resolved on her own the conflicts between her imagined Hilda and the real Hilda. The oxymorons that she uses to describe Hilda's behavior reveal that she has departed from the world of objective reality. One of the most powerful strategies that the play employs is that it gives its audience and reader no choice but to enter into Mme Lemarchand's world view. It simultaneously establishes her as an unreliable narrator of events and as the only person who is allowed to report on Hilda's behavior at her home. What little Franck says about Hilda's attitude towards her work does not offer any images of how or if Hilda interacts with Mme Lemarchand, and Hilda herself has no voice.

Spaces of Desire

The analysis of Mme Lemarchand's fantasy vision of Hilda has revealed how Hilda exists for her both as an ideal and an object, but not as a human in her own right. How are we to understand and explain Mme Lemarchand's investment in her fantasy of Hilda? Why does NDiaye choose to paint Mme Lemarchand, but keep Hilda hidden and distant from the audience's eyes and ears? Examining Mme Lemarchand's use of mirror and reflection metaphors allows a deeper reading of Hilda's absence. Mme Lemarchand's expressed desire for equality with Hilda that she elaborates in the second scene is stated in the first scene in slightly different terms:

> Autant qu'il est possible, Franck, j'élève leur visage jusqu'au mien, le visage de mes domestiques, Franck, jusqu'au visage de la patronne que je suis bien forcée d'être. Leur visage est à la hauteur de mon visage et mes

> paroles sont bienveillantes. C'est pourquoi je veux que leur visage soit beau, comme un reflet du mien. (22)
>
> [As much as possible, Franck, I lift their face up to mine, the face of my servants, Franck, up to the face of the boss that I am forced to be. Their face is raised to the height of my face and my words are well-meaning. That's why I want their face to be beautiful, as a reflection of my own.] [54]

"Reflet" can be read both as a reflection and as a pale imitation, which suggests that Mme Lemarchand sees her servants as a slightly inferior version of herself. The expression "être un reflet de quelque chose," however, also can be read to mean "to reproduce." The text supports the idea that Mme Lemarchand sees her future servant (Hilda) as a reproduction and replacement of herself because she clearly states to Franck that she is incapable of fulfilling her duties as a mother:

> Vous savez maintenant ce que M. Lemarchand ignore, Franck, que je ne supporte pas de m'occuper de mes enfants la journée entière, et de leur parler, de jouer et de rire comme il faut le faire. Hilda fera tout cela. […] Il le faut, car j'aime mes enfants et je ne veux autour d'eux que de la joie. Mais je ne peux pas avoir cette joie. Hilda aura cette joie pour moi. […] Je fais déjà confiance à Hilda. Elle me remplacera très bien de ce côté-là. Quant à moi, j'aurai la conscience tranquille. (24-5)
>
> [Now you know what Mr. Lemarchand ignores, Franck, that I can't stand taking care of my children all day long, talking to them, playing and laughing like one must do. Hilda will do all that. […] She must, because I love my children and I want them to be surrounded by joy. But I cannot have that joy. Hilda will have that joy for me. […] I already place all my confidence in Hilda. She will replace me very well in that area. As for me, I'll have a clear conscience.]

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[54] The grammatical conflict that exists in English between the plural possessive and the singular noun is not problematic in French. The grammar does, however, underline the infinite substitutability of the faces of Mme Lemarchand's servants—as if all of them shared a single indistinguishable face that Mme Lemarchand would also like to render indistinguishable from her own.

It becomes clear that when Mme Lemarchand speaks of a reflection of herself, she is actually fantasizing about someone to replace her in her own life. Her words uncover the meaning of the changes that she undertakes in Hilda's dress and appearance; she seeks to transform Hilda into an adequate (according to her own imagination) replacement of herself. Yet her desire to vacate her own life does not end with finding someone to replace her; she is also seeking another role for herself.

The second scene depicts another implication of her desire for equality with Hilda. Whereas in the first scene, she speaks of her servants as reflections/replacements of herself, in the second, she proposes herself as a reflection/replacement of Hilda:

> Je vous en prie, Franck, embrassez-moi. Je vous en prie. Ne m'offensez pas. [...] Je suis le reflet d'Hilda comme elle est le mien, Franck. Vous me regardez mais c'est aussi Hilda que vous voyez, puisqu'elle dépend de moi. [...] Vous pouvez m'embrasser, je vous le demande. Figurez-vous que je suis Hilda. Hilda. (45)
>
> [I beg you, Franck, kiss me. I beg you. Don't offend me. […] I'm the reflection of Hilda just as she is mine, Franck. You look at me but it's also Hilda that you see, since she is dependant on me. […] You can kiss me Franck, I'm asking you to. Imagine that I'm Hilda. Hilda.]

Mme Lemarchand represents herself here as a substitute for Hilda, revealing that the fantasies that govern her words and actions pertain to herself as well as to her employees. This is the first of many instances in the play of Mme Lemarchand's attempted replacement of Hilda. She states that Franck sees Hilda in her because she desires it to be true. Equating herself with Hilda, Mme Lemarchand demands a portion of the affection that Franck has for his wife. When Franck refuses her advances, effectively refusing her

exchangeability with Hilda, she angrily turns to threats in an almost schizoid speaking pattern:

> Mais pourquoi notre chair vous dégoûte-t-elle? Nous sommes propres et beaux et bien vêtus, bien soignés, parfumés, agréables à embrasser. Alors? J'aurai votre peau, Franck. Au revoir. Je vais vers Hilda. N'égarez pas l'argent, rangez-le bien. Hilda. Je vous materai, Franck, petit malin. Au revoir. (47)
>
> [But why does our flesh disgust you? We are clean and beautiful and well dressed, neat, perfumed, pleasant to kiss. So? I'll have your skin, Franck. Goodbye. I'm going to Hilda. Don't lose the money, put it away safely. Hilda. I'll bring you to heel, Franck, clever little devil. Goodbye.]

Not only does Mme Lemarchand refer to herself as plural, with "notre chair," "nous sommes" and the series of plural adjectives, she also projects two entirely opposite versions of herself throughout the second scene of the play. First there is the Mme Lemarchand who desires Hilda's friendship and Franck's desire, and there is also the Mme Lemarchand who employs Hilda and who holds economic power over the Meyer couple. When her plaintive attempts to inspire Franck's affection and desire fail, she promises to bring him to heel, to subdue him, thus implying that she will come between him and Hilda. She projects simultaneously her power and her vulnerability. If she cannot claim for herself the affection that she believes Hilda to receive from Franck, she will at least keep Hilda from receiving it.

As in the first scene, where the uniqueness of Hilda's name allows Mme Lemarchand to create her fantasy version of Hilda, the rest of the play reveals the name as the principal symbol of what Hilda is and what she has that Mme Lemarchand is not and has not. On the simplest level, Hilda has a first name; Mme Lemarchand does not.

This difference not only establishes a distance between them in what it suggests about the structure of power, but it also defines Mme Lemarchand in terms that do not belong to her. She is not a woman with a name, but the wife of a man with a name, defined only in her relation to him. Through Mme Lemarchand's obsession with Hilda's name, NDiaye turns a familiar situation (a woman hiring a maid) into a strange one. The woman who holds the position of *bonne* or maid is, in that role, infinitely substitutable: the *bonne* is a woman whose name is *not* important.[55] In fact, Hilda's position in the socio-economic hierarchy is reinforced by the opposition between her first name, Hilda, and Mme Lemarchand's title of Madame. Yet NDiaye's text places the "insignificant" servant in the position of power within the libidinal economy. Mme Lemarchand expands on the power of the name "Hilda" over her imagination in her conversation with Franck in Scene 4, the scene in which she refuses to allow Hilda to return home. The name reinforces our understanding of the libidinal economy and the structures of desire that govern the play's action:

> Il y a longtemps que M. Lemarchand ne s'intéresse plus à moi. Et parfois je me demande, Franck, quelle aurait été mon existence si je m'étais appelée Hilda. Je crois que M. Lemarchand m'aimerait encore si je m'appelais Hilda, si ce prénom d'Hilda enveloppait sa conscience et ses souvenirs de moi, Franck. Je voudrais tant être Hilda. (67-68)

[It's been a long time since Mr. Lemarchand was interested in me. And sometimes I ask myself, Franck, what my existence would have been like if I had been called Hilda. I think Mr. Lemarchand would still love me if I were called Hilda, if the name Hilda enveloped his consciousness and his memories of me, Franck. I would like so much to be Hilda.]

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[55] Genet plays with this in *Les bonnes*, when Claire and Solange open the play with a role play in which they take on roles other than their own, Claire playing Madame and Solange playing Claire.

Throughout NDiaye's play, Hilda is expressed as a lack. She is missing; she is needed and wished for. In the first scene, Mme Lemarchand laments her immediate unavailability. In every subsequent scene, the audience sees and hears that her absence causes difficulties for her family. And the play itself, named for her, constantly lacks Hilda's presence. From this lack, this unavailability, springs desire—a psychic truth that is echoed by the proverb: "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." The idea that desire springs from a lack is first elaborated by Alexandre Kojève and then adapted for psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan. Kojève explains, and Lacan later elaborates on the fact that we desire what we do not have. It is our capacity to desire "that which is not a thing," that is, to desire the desire or recognition of the other, that distinguishes humans from other animals (Socor 184). Thus Mme Lemarchand's voiced desire for Hilda's affection coincides with Jacques Lacan's reformulation of Kojève: "The first object of desire is to be recognized by the other" (Socor 196). On one level, Hilda's absence from the stage is a visual metaphor for the presence of desire, which springs from an absence. The audience hears from Mme Lemarchand that Hilda's affection is absent, but it is not only her affection that is absent, but indeed her body and voice. Through Hilda's absence, NDiaye toys with her audience's desire to know her title character.

In the above passage, Mme Lemarchand's previously stated desire for Hilda's affection has never been satisfied, and so it transforms into a desire to *be* Hilda, whom Mme Lemarchand recognizes as an object of desire. This becomes eminently clear a few moments later in her conversation with Franck:

> Comprenez-moi, Franck, essayez de vous représenter quelle vie lamentable je mène, quel ennui j'éprouve, quelle médiocre mère je suis.

> Personne ne m'embrasse jamais, Franck, ni ne me caresse, jamais, ni ne m'appelle : Hilda chérie, Hilda mon amour. Hilda, elle, est aimée de vous, de moi, et ses enfants souffrent de son absence. Je n'ai rien de tout cela. Alors ? Qui doit être plaint, Franck ? (70)
>
> [Understand me, Franck, try to imagine what a lamentable life I'm living, the boredom I feel, what a mediocre mother I am. No one ever kisses me, Franck, or caresses me, ever, or calls me: Hilda dear, Hilda my love. Hilda, she's loved by you, by me, and her children suffer from her absence. I don't have any of that. So? Who is to be pitied, Franck?]

Mme Lemarchand's words to Franck reveal that she experiences the lack of affection in her life as a lack of *address*. She links her sadness, boredom, and mediocrity as a mother to the fact that no one ever calls her (Hilda). She is neither needed nor wanted by those around her.

There is no doubt that Mme Lemarchand is written as a tyrannically egotistical character—her desires preclude those of anyone else—yet the play stages a constant tension between the way that she confidently exercises her economic power to subjugate the Meyer family and her plaintive demands for recognition as a human being. Even while she recognizes on some level the association between absence and desire (stating about Hilda that "ses enfants souffrent de son absence"), Mme Lemarchand's character is written to inspire the opposite. She is omnipresent to the audience, and her character's words monopolize the sonoric space.

Through the play's structure, the audience is drawn in to Mme Lemarchand's psychic space—a space where her desires are omnipresent and insatiable. Mme Lemarchand's need to be recognized by Hilda and Franck destroys their relationship to each other. While her words and actions consume the Meyer family, effectively

permanently removing Hilda from her own life, her desire expresses itself in broadening terms until the final scene of the play. When Mme Lemarchand returns to the home that was once Franck and Hilda's but now houses Franck and Corinne, she visits ostensibly to tell Franck that he no longer owes her any money and that she would be happy to "loan" Hilda back to him. She informs Franck that the beautiful "danseuse de cognac" has been replaced by a "poupée de chiffon" whose "tête tient à peine sur ses épaules, [...] tant [elle] est devenue indifférente à tout" (88). ["a rag doll whose head barely clings to its shoulders […] as indifferent as she's become to everything."] Once again, Mme Lemarchand goes to what was once Hilda's home and leaves Hilda behind. This time, however, there is no sense that Mme Lemarchand is attempting to take Hilda's place there; Hilda's place no longer exists. Corinne has moved in with Franck, permanently, and Franck says to Mme Lemarchand: "C'est trop tard pour Hilda ... On ne peut pas recommencer. C'est trop tard" (86, 89). ["It's too late for Hilda. We can't start over. It's too late."] Hilda's space in her own life has been filled by another, and yet Mme Lemarchand's need has not been fulfilled by her. She is no longer "comblée" by Hilda. Her visit has a secondary purpose. She seeks, desperately, even as she reports Hilda's psychic death, recognition of her own resemblance to the once desirable Hilda:

> Je viens aussi me montrer à vous afin que vous constatiez que, s'il y avait encore quelque chose en moi qui vous causait du dégoût, ce motif d'aversion n'existe plus, Franck, puisque je ressemble tant à l'Hilda que vous avez aimée. Mes cheveux, ma nouvelle tête. Oui, Franck, considérez-moi ainsi. Observez-moi avec honnêteté et détachement. (86)
>
> [I've also come to show myself to you so that you can recognize that, if there were still something in me that could disgust you, this reason for your aversion no

> longer exists, Franck, since I so resemble the Hilda that you loved. My hair, my new look. Yes, Franck, consider me thus. Observe me with honesty and detachment.]

Mme Lemarchand, no longer *comblée* by Hilda, has done all in her power to become, like Hilda, an object of desire. The final lines of the play confirm that Mme Lemarchand's desire has not been satisfied by her devouring of Hilda.

> Je vous invite, Corinne et vous, Franck. Venez donc manger à la maison. Hilda cuisine encore, vous n'avez pas oublié qu'Hilda cuisine à merveille? Franck, attendez. Venez demain midi, tous les deux. Fréquentons-nous, Franck, soyez curieux de moi. Et remarquez encore ceci, que lorsque je penche la tête d'un côté ou de l'autre, comme le fait Hilda, la masse entière de mes cheveux bascule d'un seul coup, très précisément comme le faisaient les cheveux d'Hilda. Regardez. Vous en souvenez-vous, Franck? (91)

> [I'm inviting you and Corinne, Franck. Come eat at the house. Hilda still cooks, you haven't forgotten that Hilda is an excellent cook? Franck, wait. Come for lunch tomorrow, both of you. Spend time with us, Franck, take an interest in me. And notice this, when I lean my head to one side or the other, like Hilda does, the whole mass of my hair falls to the side, just like Hilda's did. Look. Do you remember, Franck?]

Her repeated use of the imperative mode in this final scene (*venez*, *attendez*, *fréquentons*, *soyez*, etc.) mirrors her manner of speaking to Franck in the first scene. She continues to plead while ordering, and her unchanged rhetoric demonstrates that her character has not evolved since the beginning of the play, despite her destruction of the invisible Hilda.

Her final question to Franck, "Do you remember?" changes the status of Hilda's absence from the play. Hilda has moved from the realm of fantasy to the realm of memory—both realms of psychic, rather than objective, reality. Hilda's absence from

NDiaye's play metaphorically represents her existence as a function of Mme Lemarchand's psychic reality rather than as a living subject in the world of objective reality. If the audience were to see Hilda, the spell would be broken. NDiaye gives a successful representation of Mme Lemarchand's psychic reality precisely because she does not allow any objective reality of Hilda to intervene.

Conclusion:

Many passages from NDiaye's play are striking in their inversion of the dramatic situation presented in Jean Genet's *Les bonnes*. Where Claire and Solange try on Madame's clothing without her knowledge or consent, ritualistically playing out their own psychic scenes, Mme Lemarchand dresses Hilda in her clothes for different psychic reasons. Yet in both plays, "Madame's" kindness is a poison:

> Ainsi Madame nous tue avec sa douceur ! Avec sa bonté, Madame nous empoisonne. Car Madame est bonne ! Madame est belle! Madame est douce! Elle nous permet un bain chaque dimanche dans sa baignoire. Elle nous tend quelquefois une dragée. Elle nous comble de fleurs fanées. Madame prepare nos tisanes. Madame nous parle de Monsieur à nous en faire chavirer. Car Madame est bonne ! Madame est belle ! Madame est douce! (Genet 90-91)
>
> [Thus Madame kills us with her sweetness! With her goodness, Madame poisons us. Because Madame is good! Madame is beautiful! Madame is sweet! She allows us a bath every Sunday in her bathtub. She sometimes offers us a candy. She showers us with wilted flowers. Madame prepares our herbal teas. Madame overwhelms us by telling us all about Monsieur. Because Madame is good! Madame is beautiful! Madame is sweet!]

Genet's text focuses on the maids themselves, depicting their murderous and suicidal reactions to the condescending kindness of their mistress, which the audience barely

witnesses. NDiaye, however, chooses to demonstrate the destructive nature of Mme Lemarchand "kindness" by allowing Hilda no voice.

Hilda does not offer a resolution or a judgment of Mme Lemarchand's behavior, but a metaphorical representation of the psychic murder of the title character. As a translator of the play, Erika Rundle describes NDiaye's theatrical mode: "In *Hilda*, NDiaye uses words on stage the way another playwright might use mirrors, weapons, or masks; she shapes her characters through the relentless power of a linguistic economy that works according to its own fierce logic" (79). NDiaye's words replace the props and visual play of traditional theater, which seems appropriate given her partiality to the radio play. Yet even when her texts are staged (as Rundle's translation of Hilda was), the imaginary takes precedence over the visual. Hilda exists only in discourse, and as such can be constructed and destroyed on others' terms.

The play leaves its audience and its main character in a state of vague dissatisfaction, although the dissatisfaction springs from two different sources. The audience cannot help but wish that Franck would spring to his senses, slap Mme Lemarchand, and reclaim his wife, but the play never makes this jump to the realm of realism. In fact, one could argue that the action of the play produces in the spectator the desire to act where Franck does not. If Franck's defeated acceptance of Mme Lemarchand's tyranny is *invraisemblable*, Mme Lemarchand's madness comes across as real—or at least as realistically metaphorical. The play clearly proves the cliché that "money can't buy happiness," but its structure also points to a more profound psychic truth. Hilda exists in Mme Lemarchand's imagination before her actual body and flesh enter Mme Lemarchand's life. When the actual Hilda resists conforming to the fantasy-

Hilda, Mme Lemarchand's character first expresses her dissatisfaction, but then reimagines the "real" Hilda in terms of her fantasy. Mme Lemarchand's fantasy of Hilda symbolically annihilates her long before her character pronounces Hilda dead, but it is in fact Hilda's continued resistance to Mme Lemarchand that leads to her destruction. Mme Lemarchand's reimagining of Hilda proves ultimately unsatisfactory because the desire for the other's desire can *only* be fulfilled if the other is recognized as a desiring subject. Christophe Meurée comments on this tendency of NDiaye's characters to destroy the objects of their own desire—much to their final chagrin:

> Dans ses pièces, le principe de réalité ne fait plus barrage à la jouissance des personnages. Ainsi, d'un point de vue purement symbolique, les personnages ndiaïyens qui tentent de détruire l'objet du désir se retrouvent irrémédiablement confrontés à la béance que laisse la disparition de l'objet, qui ne met pas fin au désir, bien au contraire. […] Toutefois, malgré l'épuisement du personnage d'Hilda, Mme Lemarchand n'est pas parvenue à ses fins : elle n'a pas percé le secret du prénom Hilda. Le personnage toujours absent d'Hilda est renvoyé à une vacuité pure, ne suscitant plus le désir ni de Mme Lemarchand ni de son époux. (127-128)

> [In these plays, the reality principle no longer barricades the jouissance of her characters. Thus, from a purely symbolic point of view, NDiaye's characters who attempt to destroy the object of desire find themselves irremediably confronted with the gaping hole that the disappearance of the object leaves behind, which does not put an end to the desire, but does the opposite. […] Nonetheless, in spite of the utter depletion of Hilda, Mme Lemarchand is unsuccessful; she has not pierced the mystery of the name Hilda. The always absent character of Hilda becomes a pure vacuity, no longer inspiring the desire either of Mme Lemarchand or her own spouse.]

Mme Lemarchand cannot be satisfied by Hilda, because she cannot allow Hilda to be Hilda. Each of her attempts to force Hilda to conform to her image of her negates the possibility of Hilda being a subject who could actually satisfy her desire to be desired. NDiaye once wrote about the power of literature: "Dans le réel, il y a quelque chose d'incompréhensible et d'absurde que la littérature clarifie. La littérature peut transformer des histoires navrantes et tristes en récits tristes encore mais sublimés." ["In the real, there is something incomprehensible and absurd that literature clarifies. Literature can transform distressing and sad stories into narratives that are still sad but rendered sublime."][56] The theatrical space of *Hilda* figures desire through the absent presence of the title character. The political and social issues raised by NDiaye's play enter *via* the representation of Mme Lemarchand's psychic space of insatiable desire, and her text clarifies the power struggles that can govern both monetary and affective exchanges. The dehumanizing capitalism that governs the "sale" of Hilda to Mme Lemarchand does indeed wreck Hilda's life; yet Mme Lemarchand's life is also destabilized by the conflict between her power in the monetary economy and her powerlessness in the libidinal one. At the end of the play, Hilda has become a slave in one economy (she is no longer being paid) while Mme Lemarchand is the slave in the other (she has destroyed any chance of receiving the recognition that she desperately craves). Hilda's absence stands for Mme Lemarchand's denial of her individual subjectivity, and her psychic erasure of Hilda as Hilda is mirrored by the play's structure, where Hilda has no voice and constantly eludes both Mme Lemarchand's and the audience's attempts to know her.

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[56] http://www.theatre-contemporain.net/spectacles/Les-Serpents/

Chapter Four:

Dream(e)scapes and "l'irruption de l'autre" in Wajdi Mouawad's *Littoral*

Introduction:

In the two plays by Michel Tremblay examined in Chapter Two, the representations of psychic space belonged to the realm of individual history: the trauma of Manon and Carmen and Claude's feelings of jealousy and neglect were individual narratives. While they certainly contain links to societal constructs, the focus of the plays is on individual stories from which universal truths about psychic functioning can be drawn. Through its representation of Mme Lemarchand's psychic space, *Hilda* presented the realm of social history via the economies of desire bound up in the social reality of a capitalist socio-economic hierarchy. In Wajdi Mouawad's *Littoral*, individual history meets History. As Mouawad stages the psychic space of a young man seeking to bury his dead father, he also stages the results of a civil war on the individual psyches of the inhabitants of a war-torn country.

In his preface to the published version of *Littoral*, entitled "De l'Origine de l'écriture," Mouawad recounts the collaborative process that went into the writing of the work, which apparently began as he and his friend Isabelle Leblanc shared a bottle of champagne. In the course of a discussion with other artist and actor friends, Mouawad tells how the group asked itself: "Nous voici arrivés à notre trentaine. De quoi avons-nous peur?" (Mouawad 5). ["Here we are in our thirties. What are we afraid of?"] The response was revelatory, and led to the development of the principal plot of *Littoral*:

> Aussi, nous avons réalisé que si nous avions peur d'aimer, nous n'avions pas peur de mourir, car la peur, en ce qui concerne la mort, tournait autour de nos parents, en ce sens que nous n'avions pas tant peur de notre propre mort que de la mort de ceux qui nous ont conduits à la vie, et dans la vie ; cela ne concernait pas uniquement nos parents naturels, mais aussi nos parents dans la création (Mouawad 5).[57]

> [We also realized that while we were afraid of loving, we weren't afraid of dying, because our fear around death had to do with our parents, in the sense that we were not so much afraid of our own deaths as we were of the deaths of those who had given us life, and guided us through life; not only our birth parents, but also those who had parented us in our art. (Tepperman i)][58]

The play *Littoral* tells the story of a young man named Wilfrid, who ostensibly lives in Canada (although the country is never named), and who learns of the death of his father (Thomas) one night thanks to a telephone call that interrupts his amorous exploits with a woman he barely knows.[59] Now an orphan, having lost his mother Jeanne at his own birth and lost his unknown father while enjoying his own "petite mort," Wilfrid begins to ask himself many questions about his own identity and origins. Abandoned at a young age to the care of his mother's sisters by a father whose grief kept him from being able to take care of his son, Wilfrid learns almost all that he knows of his father from a

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[57] All quotations from *Littoral* are taken from the 1999 Léméac/Actes Sud edition. Henceforth in the text, they will be noted by the page number in parentheses.

[58] All translations of quotations from *Littoral* are taken from the Shelley Tepperman translation : *Tideline*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2002. Henceforth in the text, they will be noted by the page number in parentheses.

[59] In his article "De Wajdi…à Wahab," Pierre L'Hérault points to the autobiographical dimensions of many of Mouawad's characters, noting the prevalence of first names beginning with "W": "[…] on constate que ce personnage [Walter, in *Journée de noces chez les Cromagnons*] est le premier d'une série dont l'initiale du prénom, « W », est la meme que celle du prénom de l'auteur—Willy (*Willy Protagoras enfermé dans les toilettes*), Walter (*Journée de noces chez les Cromagnons*), Wilfrid (*Littoral*), Willem (*Rêves*), Wahab (*Incendies*)—tous personnages du reste qui ne sont pas sans rapport avec la réalité du dramaturge […]" (98-99). Wilfrid is also a typically French Canadian name, since it was the first name of Canada's first Francophone Prime Minister, Wilfrid Laurier. It thus inscribes the main character of *Littoral* firmly in his country of residence, not his country of origin.

red suitcase full of unsent letters to him that was in his father's possession at the time of his death.

Reading the letters, Wilfrid discovers things about his parents' relationship with each other that his aunts had never shared with him. Wilfrid's parents were not from the country where he has always lived; they fled a country across the ocean, bordering the sea, because of the war that was ravaging their homeland. Although it is easy to imagine that the country in question is Mouawad's own native Lebanon, the play never offers this precision. After his aunts and uncles refuse to bury his father beside his mother in the family crypt, Wilfrid decides to take his father's body to his homeland to be buried.

When Wilfrid arrives, however, he learns that there is no room in the cemetery of his father's native village for any more bodies—especially not those of a man who abandoned his homeland. War has filled all of the consecrated land with bodies and all of the open country with minefields. Thus begins Wilfrid's quest to find a place to lay his father to rest. His prospects improve as he meets several other young people (Simone, Amé, Sabbé, Massi, and Joséphine), orphans like himself, who abandon their villages and agree to help him find a proper resting place for his father. As they journey together, they decide that once they have helped Wilfrid bury his father, who comes to represent a father for each of them, they will travel from village to village in order to share their story. Surviving the physical and emotional weight of the decaying cadaver, the group eventually arrives at the sea, where they decide to "emmerrer" rather than "enterrer" the body (118), anchoring it with the weight of telephone books that Joséphine carried in order not to forget the names of those lost in the wars.

This perfunctory plot summary covers the narrative of Mouawad's play, but not its very rich theatrical texture. Mouawad describes *Littoral* as a play about meetings: "*Littoral* est donc né d'abord et avant tout d'une rencontre et a pris son sens par les rencontres. C'est-à-dire ce besoin effrayant de nous extraire de nous-mêmes en permettant à l'autre de faire irruption dans nos vies, et de nous arracher à l'ennui de l'existence" (6). ["*Littoral* (*Tideline*) was first and foremost born of an encounter and its meaning was born through encounters. That is, the terrible need to get outside of ourselves by letting the other burst into our lives, and the need to tear ourselves away from the ennui of existence" (iii).] Encounters with the other, or with others, are both what allowed the text of the play to come into existence and what catalyze its theatrical action.

Mouawad specifically states in his Preface that *Littoral* was inspired by his own encounters with other great works of literature, namely *Oedipus Rex*, *Hamlet*, and *The Idiot* (5). He was struck by the fact that the main characters of these works all evolved in relation to their fathers:

> […] l'un a tué le sien, l'autre doit venger l'assassinat du sien et le troisième n'a jamais connu le sien. Enfin, il m'a semblé clair que ces trois personnages racontaient, d'une certaine manière, une histoire à relais. Si Œdipe est dans l'aveuglement, Mychkine, son opposé, est dans la pure clairvoyance ; quant à Hamlet, qui se trouve au centre, il est dans le profond questionnement entre la conscience et l'inconscience. Ainsi est née l'idée de créer un spectacle qui mettrait en scène un personnage qui, perdant son père, chercherait un lieu pour l'ensevelir [Wilfrid] ; lors de sa

> quête, il ferait la rencontre de trois garçons [Amé, Sabbé, Massi] qui étaient, pour moi, chacun un reflet des trois géants. (6)

> [[…] One has killed his father, the other must avenge the murder of his father, and the third never knew his father. Finally it seemed clear that these three characters were, in a way, telling different parts of the same story, one picking up where the other had left off.
>
> If Oedipus suffers from blindness, Mychkine, his opposite, is the epitome of clear-sightedness; Hamlet, struggling between consciousness and the unconscious, is somewhere in between. And so the idea was born of a play depicting a character who, having lost his father, seeks a place to lay him to rest; during his quest he would meet three boys who were each, for me, a reflection of the three giants. (ii-iii)]

Mouawad places *Littoral*, and its main character Wilfrid, in the cycle of this "histoire à relais." Wilfrid's character's relationship to his father contains elements of each of the literary figures that inspired Mouawad: like Oedipus, Wilfrid feels that he "killed his father" because he was ejaculating when the phone rang to tell him of his father's death; at the same time; like Hamlet, his father's ghost haunts him on the stage until he is able to find him a suitable resting place (and his imaginary companions render him "mad north-northwest"); finally, like Mychkine, he knows almost nothing of his father who abandoned him at a very young age. The characters that Wilfrid meets on his journey are individual reflections of the three literary "giants": Amé did not recognize his father when he met him at the crossroads as he returned from a day of fighting and killed him with a machine gun; Sabbé witnessed his father's murder and decapitation by soldiers; Massi never knew his own father.

Mouawad's debt to canonical literary works goes well beyond their influence on his character development. *In LÀ-BAS*, Ulrich the blind man quotes the *Iliad*. In the scene where Amé recounts the murder of his father, François Ouellet compares the setting of his act to the one that surrounded Meursault's in Camus' *L'étranger* (171). Yet

although it specifically points to canonical works of literature, *Littoral*'s structure is an explosion of traditional dramatic theater, divided into six named but un-numbered sections (acts?) which are themselves divided into fifty-two named and numbered scenes. It gleefully disobeys the unities of time and place, crossing an ocean between *ICI* and *HIER* and the rest of the play, and one might argue that the actual dramatic action does not begin until *LÀ-BAS*. Each of the six sections, *ICI*, *HIER*, *LÀ-BAS*, *L'AUTRE*, *CHEMIN*, and *LITTORAL*, contains between five and ten scenes of varying lengths. The "Cast of Characters" lists only Wilfrid (the protagonist), *le père*, Chevalier Guiromelan, Simone, Amé, Sabbé, Massi, and Joséphine, from the second scene of the play forward, there are dozens of other characters who appear on the stage and with whom Wilfrid holds conversations. These other unlisted characters are materialized figments of Wilfrid's imagination (thus simultaneously theatrical and psychic figures), and his interactions with them often replace interactions with "real" characters. By creating a protagonist whose imagination seemingly determines which characters appear both on the "other scene" of his psychic space and on the theatrical stage, Mouawad creates a metaphorical figure for the author whose imagination leads him to produce artistic works. The dramatic action of the play chronicles Wilfrid's passage from living within himself to living in the world—while its theatrical space figures alternately his psychic space and the space of the world.

As regards the spectator, the structure of Mouawad's play might be categorized as psychotic. While the protagonist, Wilfrid, holds onto the distinction between reality and his dream figures, the play's spectators experience numerous moments of confusion. The distinction between the "real" characters and the characters who are projections of

Wilfrid's psychic space is not always clear. Although Wilfrid's character eventually clarifies each moment of confusion for the benefit of the audience, the immediate context of the scenes as they unfold on the stage is not always evident.

Each section of the play includes scenes in which Wilfrid interacts with his imaginary companions including his dead father and the Chevalier Guiromelan. There is, however, a clear moment during which Wilfrid begins to interact with characters who are not pure figments of his imagination (clear to the audience because Wilfrid no longer narrates these exchanges metatheatrically). *ICI* and *HIER* take place in a realm of dream and memory; with *LÀ-BAS*, Wilfrid's journey leads him to encounter other "real" people whose lives, like his own, have been disrupted by death. Wilfrid's voyage outside of his own psychic space into the space of the world is paralleled by the play's evolution from the drama of an individual coping with his own loss to that of a society's and a generation's coping with the psychic repercussions of war; the theatrical journey from *ICI* to *LITTORAL* both represents and enables the psychic journey from paralyzing and isolating grief to effective mourning. When the protagonists finally decide that history will best be served by the public sharing of their stories, Mouawad's play becomes a circle: the journey that the play enacts is in fact a journey towards the act of creating a play.

Dream(e)scapes

"Je suis resté longtemps, longtemps, longtemps dans ma tête […]" (20)

The term "dreamscape" evokes both the dream and the sense of place that *Littoral*'s passage through imagined realities creates in its reader and spectator. Wilfrid's dreams do indicate both space and place, creating an "ailleurs" for him outside the realm

of his character's objective reality. The (e) that allows us to read Wilfrid's dreamed perambulations as escapes is promoted by Wilfrid's use of his imaginary characters, most particularly in *ICI* and *HIER*, where the scenes that take place on the stage are narrated by Wilfrid as if in the past while being simultaneously lived by him in the theatrical present. The main characters springing from Wilfrid's imagination onto the stage are the cinema crew (including, at various points, the *réalisateur*, the *scripte*, the *perchiste*, the *preneur de son*, the *cameraman*, the *éclairagiste*) and the Chevalier Guiromelan, follower of King Arthur and trapped in Wilfrid's world by Morgane, seeking the Holy Grail to return to his ailing king.

The play opens with Wilfrid recounting to an imaginary judge (or perhaps to us, the spectators, using the theatrical device of the audience surrogate), the story of the night of his father's death (three days earlier, according to the play). He tells the judge (the readers and spectators) of the call that interrupted him at the most inopportune moment of a casual sexual encounter to report his father's death and left him shocked and frustrated. In addition to the news itself, Wilfrid was also told that he could not immediately go to the morgue to identify his father's body because of a gas leak, but he does decide to leave the house:

> Je suis pas resté à la maison parce que je voulais plus être quelque part. Je suis sorti pour trouver un ailleurs, mais c'est pas une chose évidente quand vous avez le cœur dans les talons, qui est une expression stupide. J'ai cherché partout un ailleurs mais j'ai rien trouvé. Partout, c'était toujours ici, et c'était crevant. (15)

> [I didn't stay home because I didn't want to be anywhere anymore. I went out to find a somewhere else [elsewhere], but it isn't easy when your heart is in your gut

> [heels], which is a stupid expression. I looked everywhere for a somewhere else but I didn't find anything. Everywhere was still here, and it was exhausting. (5)]

Quelque part (somewhere), *ailleurs* (elsewhere), *partout* (everywhere), *ici* (here)—the desire to be both nowhere and elsewhere underlines Wilfrid's desire to escape. His incapacity to find a satisfactory "elsewhere," despite looking everywhere (in the literal world space), shows that he is not speaking of escape from a literal place or space, but from a psychic one. No matter where his feet take him, his character is always ici (*ICI*), here, in the present of his distress at learning of his father's death. Wilfrid's loss of his father, despite (or perhaps because of) their nearly nonexistent relationship, not only pushes him to seek a psychic elsewhere, but also plunges him into a constant questioning of his own identity.

In the opening scene, Wilfrid introduces himself to the "judge" by saying that he was sent to him in order to present his story and to make a request. (*18. Requête* is the last scene of *HIER*, where Wilfrid finally asks permission to take his father's body to his homeland): "Je suis devant vous. On m'a dit aussi que tout ce que j'aurais à faire, ce serait de vous raconter mon histoire. V*ous dire un peu qui je suis*. Alors je suis venu le plus vite que j'ai pu pour vous dire qui je suis, mais ça va être un peu difficile, parce que je suis jeune et qu'à mon âge, des choses pareilles ne se disent pas" (13).[60] ["[…] I'm here now in front of you. They also told me all I'd have to do is tell you my story. Tell you a bit about who I am. So I came as fast as I could to tell you who I am, but that's going to be kind of hard, because I'm young and these aren't the kinds of things people talk about at my age" (3).] From the play's opening, Wilfrid's character's lack of confidence in and knowledge of himself is readily apparent. In this passage, Wilfrid

[60] Italics mine

suggests that his youth is both a barrier to his understanding of himself and to his comfort with speaking about himself. The passive construction of the phrase "des choses pareilles ne se disent pas" is a very ambiguous way of stating Wilfrid's incapacity to define himself as a subject. His acknowledgment of the difficulty of self-definition is a motif that will recur throughout the play.

The only possible escape from Wilfrid's psychic "here" is a journey into the dreamscape where he is accompanied by the avatars of himself as embodied by the often comical cinema crew or the noble Chevalier Guiromelan. Yet even in the dreamscape, questions about his identity continue to plague him. Wilfrid's imaginary companions seem to function for him in the way that psychoanalytic literature describes their functioning for children: "[...] the imaginary playmate is a visual or auditory idea that becomes as vivid and real as a visual or auditory percept, but [...] the child nevertheless always recognizes its unreality" (Nagera 169). Wilfrid's case is noticeably different in that he is no longer a child. While his character does show awareness of the fictional quality of his comrades, the theater itself makes no distinction between their existence and his own. Mouawad takes advantage of the fact that theatrical space is different from both psychic space and world space and yet holds a privileged relationship to both (in that, as we have argued, it can represent those other spaces either directly or metaphorically even while acting upon them). As the play unfolds, the theatrical space gradually transforms from a representation of Wilfrid's psychic space to a representation of his interactions with the world around him. This progression is in itself a metaphor for the psychic evolution that the play stages.

Immediately after Wilfrid expresses his dismay at being trapped in the here and now, the audience first meets the cinema crew in scene *2. Tournage.* He tells the judge: "Je ne sais pas d'où me vient cette manie d'avoir toujours l'impression que je suis en train de jouer dans un film" (16). ["I don't know where I get this obsessive feeling that I'm always acting in a film" (6).] Wilfrid's self-conscious reflection on his status as an artistic object is of course in part a wink at his theatrical existence, but the members of the cinema crew also reinforce his self-doubt. The director asks him: "Wilfrid, je n'existe pas, je le sais bien, mais est-ce que tu sais de façon certaine si tu existes toi-même ? As-tu plus de vie réelle que moi ?" (16). ["Wilfrid, I don't exist, I know that very well, but do you know with absolute certainty that you yourself exist? Is your life more real than mine?" (6).] Once again, the spectator recognizes Mouawad's "play" with metatheatrical reflections. The *réalisateur* of course has no more or less theatrical existence than does the play's protagonist (even though he is not included in the "Cast of Characters"), but his questioning of Wilfrid's existence is one that the play has already built into the character of Wilfrid himself, clear even from the opening lines of the play. Before being chased from Wilfrid's mental space ("vos gueules, bordel, vos gueules, et sortez de ma tête," ["Shut up for fuck's sake, shut up, and get out of my head"] even though their theatrical existence on the stage locates them already outside of his head while confirming that the theatrical space represents Wilfrid's psychic space), the *réalisateur* raises the same questions that torment Wilfrid: "Je suis le réalisateur du film, et je suis obnubilé par une angoisse sans nom: Wilfrid, qui es-tu? dans quel monde étrange nous fais-tu vivre ? où nous entraînes-tu ? dans quel coupe-gorge ?" (17). ["I'm the director of this film, and I'm obsessed by a nameless anguish: Wilfrid, who are you? What strange

world are you making us live in? Where are you dragging us? Into what cutthroat alley?" (7).] The *réalisateur's* "qui es-tu" is mirrored in the text by Wilfrid's own repetition of similar formulations : "[…] je suis qui moi, je suis qui ?"; "Je ne sais même plus qui je suis"; "D'où je viens moi ? qu'est-ce que je suis ? je suis qui moi ? je suis qui ?" (27; 32; 56). The *réalisateur's* words are an extension of Wilfrid's own self-interrogations, and the anxiety that he speaks is the same anxiety that springs from Wilfrid's newfound status of orphan. Once again the concept of space and place is evoked by the *réalisateur's* question: "Where are you taking us?" This question must be heard both literally and metaphorically as Wilfrid's wondering—"What am I doing wandering around in the cold in the middle of the night?" and "What do I do with the knowledge of my father's death? How do I process it and where do I go from here?" Wilfrid's imagining that he is playing in a film is complicated by its theatrical representation. He is not playing in a finished film, but instead in one that is in the process of being made—a film in "tournage." His imagined conversations with the *réalisateur* emphasize that if he is indeed playing in a film, like his life, the film is a work in progress.

If the cinema crew represents an often ironically toned exteriorization of Wilfrid's inner turmoil (and sometimes his conscience), the play's dreamscape offers the Chevalier Guiromelan the more noble quality of rescuer. Despite the play's serious subject matter, it is important to note that Wilfrid's conversations with his imaginary companions are often hilarious. The spectators and reader first meet the chevalier when he comes to "save" Wilfrid from the bawdy place he had gone to warm himself in search of his *ailleurs*: *3. Peep Show*. Seeking refuge from the cold night and fearing to return home,

Wilfrid goes to a peep show where all the booths are occupied, but enters one anyway and shares with another client. Although his interior Cameraman warns him, "Wilfrid, je te le dis en passant, ça ne me dérange pas de filmer ça, mais je trouve ça plutôt malsain, et si j'étais toi, je m'en irais," ["Wilfrid, I just thought I'd mention, I don't mind shooting this but I don't think it's very healthy, and if I were you, I'd leave" (13),] Wilfrid stays in the booth (22). As the client who shares Wilfrid's booth ejaculates, the *chevalier* appears and, as the stage directions indicate: "Le chevalier tue le client de son épée" (22).[61] ["The knight slays the customer with his sword" (14).] Upon introducing himself to Wilfrid, the chevalier expresses his dismay at the current situation:

> Sors-moi d'ici! Honte! Honte au monde et à ce qui l'entoure. Honte, honte au mal, honte à la souillure, honte à la perte ! Wilfrid au cœur lumineux, délivre-moi de ce cauchemar, ce cauchemar où mes mains, mes pieds, mon cœur et mon esprit sont en proie aux tourments les plus obscures. Je ne sais plus qui je suis, ce que je fais et ce que j'ai à faire ! Aide-moi, au nom de Dieu qui t'a emporté ici pour que tu me secoures, aide-moi ! (23)
>
> [Get me out of here! For shame! Shame on those people and all that surrounds them. Shame, shame on evil, shame on filth, shame on waste! Wilfrid of the shining heart, deliver me from this nightmare where my hands, my feet, my heart and my mind are seized by the darkest torments. I no longer know who I am, what I'm doing or what I have to do! Help me, in the name of God who brought you here to rescue me, help me! (15)]

After the imaginary knight kills the client whose orgasm evokes the one that Wilfrid was enjoying when he learned of his father's death, his cries to Wilfrid to be rescued mirror Wilfrid's own conjuring of him. At his first appearance in the theatrical space, Wilfrid's

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[61] Once again, "la grande" and "la petite mort" are linked.

dream refers to his reality as a nightmare. In the complex layering of this passage, Mouawad stages the psychic spaces of both memory and dream. This scene is simultaneously Wilfrid's re-telling of the night of his father's death, combined with the visual reenactment of his memory of it, layered with the devices of his own imagination that he uses to modify that memory and render it less horrific and shameful. The Chevalier Guiromelan's repetition of "Shame!" underlines the feelings of his fictive creator, and his confusion about his identity and purpose mirror Wilfrid's ("je ne sais plus qui je suis"). His calls for aid can be read as a visual representation of Wilfrid's own desire to help himself.

The Chevalier appears onstage for a second time when Wilfrid goes to the morgue to identify his father's body. His first act is to "kill" the mortician who tells Wilfrid that he is not allowed to leave him alone with the cadaver. The exchange that follows the mortician's "murder" reveals Wilfrid's dissatisfaction with the efficacy of his dream(e)scapes:

> WILFRID: Mon cœur se vide, chevalier, comme un seau percé. Qui est mon père ? qui est donc ce cadavre qui a été mon père ? Est-ce que ton père est mort, toi, chevalier ?
>
> LE CHEVALIER : Mon roi est malade. Une sombre mélancolie l'a gagné, il ne répond plus, son cœur est sombre. Il est désespéré.
>
> WILFRID : Qu'est-ce qu'on va faire ?
>
> LE CHEVALIER : Rêver.
>
> WILFRID : Ça fait un peu mal de rêver toujours. Ça rend fou, mais ce qu'il y a de plus douloureux dans le rêve, c'est qu'il n'existe pas.

> LE CHEVALIER : Qu'est-ce que tu racontes? et moi, alors, je suis quoi? je suis quoi? rien? je n'existe pas, moi? Et alors! Je suis chevalier Guiromelan, [...]
>
> WILFRID : Tu n'existes pas, chevalier Guiromelan, tu n'existes pas. Tu ne sers à rien, puisque tu n'existes que dans ma tête.
>
> LE CHEVALIER : Qu'est-ce que tu racontes! Mais le rêve est au coeur de la vie. Nous rêvons notre vie, et nous vivons nos rêves. Regarde-moi. Je suis ton rêve, tu es ma vie. Je suis la flamme qui brille au fond de toi. Tu es les yeux à travers quoi je brûle. [...] (29)

> WILFRID: My heart is emptying, Guiromelan, like a punctured pail. Who is my father? Who is this corpse that was my father? Is your father dead, Guiromelan?
> KNIGHT: My king is ailing. A dark melancholy has overtaken him, he doesn't respond anymore, his heart is heavy. He is despairing.
> WILFRID: What are we going to do?
> KNIGHT: Dream.
> WILFRID: It hurts to dream all the time. It makes you crazy, but the most painful thing about the dream is that it doesn't exist.
> KNIGHT: What are you talking about? What about me, what am I? What am I? Nothing? I don't exist? Now what? I am the Knight Guiromelan, […]
> WILFRID: You don't exist, Guiromelan, you don't exist. You aren't good for anything, because you only exist in my head.
> KNIGHT: What are you talking about? Dreams are at the heart of life. We dream our lives, and we live our dreams. Look at me. I am your dream, you are my life. I am the flame that blazes deep inside you. You are the eyes through which I burn. […] (22-23)

This passage reveals a plausible source of Wilfrid's confusion about his own identity. Confronted with the death of his progenitor, about whom he knew next to nothing, Wilfrid is also confronted with the knowledge that all hope of learning anything more from his father—either about himself or about his parents—seems irrevocably lost. Wilfrid's question to the chevalier, "is your father dead?" provokes a response that once again points to the complex layers of meaning in Wilfrid's dreamscapes. When the

chevalier evades the question by answering: "my king is sick," his evasion is not shocking in that the king (and most particularly King Arthur) is a father-figure for his country. Could the chevalier's king also be read as Wilfrid, his creator? And could his invitation to dream be an invitation to explore the power of unconscious creativity? The chevalier's response to Wilfrid's question: "What are we going to do?" "Dream," and the ensuing debate about the status of dream(e)scapes shows both Wilfrid's penchant for dreaming and his comprehension that it is not ultimately a satisfactory way of dealing with his problems. This passage once again underlines Wilfrid's disquiet about his origins and his identity. As he asks the chevalier about his father's identity, we hear the echo of his questions about his own (which are then echoed again by the chevalier's repetition "je suis quoi?"). By redoubling Wilfrid's questions in the mouths of his imaginary companions, Mouawad reinforces the idea that his character is dependent on dreams for coping with his reality, while also intimating that he is on some level aware that this dependency on dreams does not always have the desired effect. Even if, as Freud would have it, the dream is the fulfillment of a wish, the dream companion is a poor substitute for a real one. Yet in this case, Wilfrid's denial of the chevalier's existence outside of his head is belied by his presence beside Wilfrid on the theatrical stage. The dream itself (himself), of course, defends the importance of its (his) existence. The chevalier's defense voices both a description of Wilfrid's mode of living and an affirmation of the importance of dreaming for living.[62]

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[62] The multiple manifestations of Wilfrid's psyche via the various imaginary characters is reminiscent of one of the first plays to represent the psyche as a space of multiple characters: August Strindberg's *A Dream Play*. In the Author's Note that precedes the text of the play, Strindberg writes: "The characters are split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallize, scatter and converge. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all—that of the dreamer" (192).

The following passage, however, points to the dangers involved in living within dreamscapes. Wilfrid's next demand to the chevalier again suggests the desire to flee his own psychic space: "Emporte-moi sur les ailes de ton dragon, chevalier. J'en ai marre. Emporte-moi, je ne suis plus capable ! Je veux juste mourir et rester tranquille. Une morgue est un lieu merveilleux pour mourir" (29). ["Carry me away on the wings of your dragon, Guiromelan. I've had enough. Carry me away, I can't take it anymore! I just want to die and be at peace! A morgue is a wonderful place to die!" (23).] Faced with the literal reality of his father's death in the literal space of the morgue, Wilfrid asks once again to be carried away, out of the psychic space that he currently inhabits—even into the space of death, which would release him from all necessity of attempting to comprehend his current situation. Implicitly, Mouawad points out via Wilfrid that being "carried away" by dreams is a form of death—or at least a turning away from life. The idea of Wilfrid's turning away from life is supported by the play's dramatic action in *ICI* and *HIER*, where Wilfrid has no interactions with "real" characters.

If Wilfrid voices his desire to turn away from life, it is perhaps because he thinks that joining his father in death is the only way to communicate with him. In scene *5. Aube* Wilfrid laments his incapacity to conjure his father in the same manner as he brings forth cinema crew and the chevalier:

> A ce moment, j'aurais voulu lui parler, lui poser des questions, mais j'avais beau me concentrer, je n'arrivais pas à le faire venir, même dans ma tête il ne venait pas, je ne sais pas pourquoi il ne venait pas dans ma tête, pourtant, dans la tête on peut faire venir n'importe quoi, il suffit de vouloir, vous le savez bien, vous, monsieur le juge, qu'on peut faire

> n'importe quoi dans la tête [...] mais mon père, moi, ne venait pas, c'est pas que j'ai pas essayé de me cogner la tête contre un mur, j'ai essayé, mais ça n'a rien donné, mon père ne venait pas, j'avais beau me concentrer, il ne venait toujours pas. Je ne sais pas. Peut-être qu'il trouvait que ma tête était suffisamment encombrée, avec toutes ces ombres qui me suivent sans jamais me lâcher. [...] Je ne suis pas fou, monsieur le juge, je vous raconte simplement à voix haute ce qui arrive à tout le monde à voix basse. Dans des moments pareils, tout le monde parle tout seul au risque de passer pour un demeuré. (24)

> [Right at that moment I'd have liked to talk to him, ask him questions, but as hard as I concentrated, I couldn't make him come to me, even in my imagination he wouldn't come to me, I don't know why—in your mind you can make *anything* come to you, you just have to *want* to—*you* know very well, Your Honour, that you can do anything in your mind, […] but my father wouldn't come, it's not like I didn't try to bang my head against a wall, I tried but it didn't do any good, my father wouldn't come, I concentrated as hard as I could, he still wouldn't come. I don't know. Maybe he thought my heat was cluttered enough with all these shadows that follow me, that never give me any peace. […] I'm not crazy, Your Honour, I'm simply telling you out loud what happens to everyone in whispers. In moments like this everyone talks to themselves at the risk of passing for a mental case. (16-17)]

Wilfrid's interactions with the characters from his imagination are self-conscious—there is nothing to suggest a psychotic break with the reality principle. For all his invention, however, he is unable to conjure the figure of his father. Wilfrid's incessant repetition of different forms of the phrase "mon père ne venait pas" underlines his desperate need to use his imagination to erase his loss. Yet there is also in this enunciation's use of the imperfect tense an echo of the habitual and repetitive. Not only was his father not appearing to him at this particular moment, but perhaps his words also signify that

throughout his life, his father was never present to come to his aid at any time.[63] He hints that this device of calling forth figures from his imagination to rescue him when there was no "real" person to come is one that he has always used, since he has always been alone: "Jamais de toute ma vie je ne me suis senti seul, parce que j'ai toujours été seul" (27). ["Never in my life have I felt lonely, because I've always been alone" (20).] The causal relationship he establishes between feeling and being—between not feeling lonely *because of* the constancy of being alone—points to the omnipresence of his imaginary protectors as substitutes for "real" ones. (The play's journey will eventually bring him into contact with suitable substitutes in reality for the imaginary companions of his childhood.)

Mouawad also uses the play's flashback structure in *ICI* to demonstrate how certain types of emotional distress are lived. In *8. Procedures*, the stage directions indicate: "Wilfrid est dans deux bureaux et un magasin. Un préposé et un agent des pompes funèbres, un vendeur" (33). ["Wilfrid is in two offices and a store. A clerk and a funeral agent, a salesperson" (28).] The collapsing of these three spaces on the stage, as Wilfrid alternately interacts with the different service providers, metaphorically represents the indistinction between all of the banal formalities that are required of the bereaved. The Agent and the Vendeur mirror each other in their attitudes of understanding concern: "Ne vous en faites pas, monsieur";"Ne vous en faites pas, monsieur"; "Si vous voulez, on peut s'occuper de tout..."; "Je m'occupe de tout" (34).

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[63] Instead of his father, it was the chevalier Guiromelan who came to sweep away the monsters in the hallway, as he tells Wilfrid in the scene with the mortician: "Quand tu étais petit, nous combattions les monstres cachés dans le couloir qui menait à la cuisine quand, en pleine nuit, tu te levais pour aller boire un verre d'eau. […] Aujourd'hui je suis un chevalier fatigué qui ne sait plus contre quoi il doit cogner son épée. Tu as grandi, Wilfrid, et les monstres sont devenus beaucoup trop forts. Mon épée ne suffit pas à te réconforter" (32). The chevalier's last words point to Wilfrid's own recognition that his dreamscapes are no longer sufficient.

["Don't worry, sir"; "If you like, we can take care of everything"; "I'll take care of everything" (30).] Wilfrid's anguish about where and how to bury his father overwhelms him as he goes through the necessary motions. His desire to see his father laid to rest beside his mother is one that he knows will meet with resistance from his family: "[…] je sentais que ça allait être très compliqué à cause de la famille de ma mère qui est très riche et qui a un caveau au nom de la famille et qui est très avare quant à la place dans le caveau en question" (35). ["But I sensed that would be very complicated because of my mother's family who are very rich and who have a family crypt and who are very stingy about the space in said crypt" (31).] In the last two scenes of *ICI*, *9. La famille* and *10. Salon funéraire*, Wilfrid's fears are confirmed as his uncles and aunts reveal to him and to the audience the circumstances surrounding his birth: "Ta mère était trop fragile pour avoir un enfant, elle le savait, les médecins le lui avaient dit, elle était trop fragile, les médecins le lui ont répété mille fois! [...] et à l'accouchement de l'enfant, évidemment, elle n'a pas résisté et elle y est passée" (46). ["Your mother was much too fragile to have a child, she knew that, the doctors had told her, she was too fragile, the doctors repeated it a thousand times […] and when the child was born, obviously, she wasn't strong enough and she died!" (48).] According to Wilfrid's mother's family, Thomas insisted that Jeanne keep the child despite the doctors' warnings. Therefore they blame Wilfrid's father for the death of his mother.

Immediately upon hearing that his own birth caused his mother's death, Wilfrid is confronted with the dream he had wished for in *5. Aube*. As *ICI* comes to a close, *le père* makes his first appearance on the stage, encouraging Wilfrid to flee from his family's horrible recounting of his birth: "On va attendre qu'ils aient le dos tourné et on va s'en

aller en courant" (47). ["We'll wait till they have their backs turned, and we'll make a run for it!" (48).] His arrival promises Wilfrid another way of understanding the story of his own birth. For the first time, perhaps, Wilfrid is able to conjure his father to rescue him—but not without some assistance from his other dreams. The chevalier joins *le père* in his encouragement: "Cours, Wilfrid, va, vole, suis le chemin inusité qui conduit au gouffre, et saute! Saute dans le gouffre! Laisse les chemins, car tous les chemins mènent à la terre, le gouffre seul conduit au rêve" (47). ["Run, Wilfrid, go, fly, follow that unbeaten path that leads to the abyss, and jump! Jump into the abyss! Forget the roads, because all roads lead to the earth, the abyss only leads to the dream" (49).] *Le père*'s arrival in this scene prefigures his definitive arrival on the stage with his son in the first scene of *HIER*.

Whereas *ICI* is presented as a flashback that includes both recounting and reliving the events following Wilfrid's father's death, *HIER*, through the reading and enactment of the letters he received from his father, gives Wilfrid an idea of the life his parents lived together before his birth. The eight scenes of *HIER*: *Apparition*, *Plage*, *Bombardement*, *Amour*, *Solitude*, *Mère et fils*, *Douleur et Accouchement*, and *Requête*, guide Wilfrid's character and the play's audience to the decision to take his father back to his home country. In this section of the play, landscapes and dreamscapes intermingle, as each letter serves as an introduction to a scene representing Wilfrid's parents' past life.

When *HIER* begins with *11. Apparition*, Wilfrid is still in the mode of recounting the events of the past few days, expressing the difficulty he has sleeping and coming to terms with his current situation. He explains to the judge that his lack of sleep makes the dreams come: "Alors les rêves montent dans la nuit, dans ma tête, le chevalier

Guiromelan est prisonnier dans une époque en forme de donjon. Il se bat mais comment se battre contre un mur, je suis un acteur célèbre et je suis en train de jouer dans un film, c'est un film qui raconte l'histoire d'un jeune homme qui ne sait plus où enterrer son père..." (48). ["So the dreams surface in the night, in my mind, Guiromelan is a prisoner in an era the shape of a dungeon. He fights, but how can you fight a wall, I'm a famous actor and I'm acting in a film, it's a film about a young man with no idea where to bury his father…" (50).] Wilfrid's language about his dream characters is curious; the chevalier is not imprisoned in a dungeon, precisely, but in an *era* in the form of a dungeon. This image of being imprisoned in a specific time evokes Wilfrid's own imprisonment in the here and now. Once again Wilfrid also distances himself from his current situation by pretending that it is a fictional event. This layering of the *mise en abyme* structure—a character within a play who pretends that he is a character in a film—reiterates the importance of both art and imagination as particularly human means of dealing with emotional distress.

Waking from a dream in which he imagined that his father, not dead, had come to visit him ("Wilfrid se réveille, il est seul" (49) . ["Wilfrid wakes up, he's alone" (51).]), he tells the judge that he decided to open the suitcase: "Alors là, monsieur le juge, j'ai pris la valise et je l'ai ouverte" (49). ["So then, Your Honour, I picked up the suitcase and I opened it" (51).] As soon as Wilfrid opens the suitcase, his father calls out his name and reappears to him, as if the letters inside the suitcase, the only communication left between Thomas and Wilfrid, conjured his presence on the stage. The subsequent scenes of *HIER* stage Wilfrid's reading of the letters as well as his parents' past together—as if the past were brought to life in the present. Sometimes Wilfrid interacts with his father—who

also observes his younger self with his wife on the stage. There is a multiplication of the character of the father, as three versions of him contribute to the play's dialogue: *le père*, *le père jeune*, and *le père adulte*. The overwhelming presence of the father in this scene, magic or fantasy, reverses the critical absence of Wilfrid's father from all key moments of his life. Wilfrid is able to recreate conversations with his father on the stage, asking questions that he would have liked to have asked his living parent. The apparition-father reminds him (and the spectators), however, that "[il] ne peu[t] rien [lui] raconter de plus que ce que ces lettres [lui] racontent" (56). ["[He] can't tell [him] anymore than those letters do" (61).] Yet the letters are enough for Wilfrid to imagine his parents' love for each other and for him. Reassembling their history from the pieces of it revealed in the letters (which are also enacted on the stage), Wilfrid learns that his mother insisted that his father promise to save the child rather than save her if the choice had to be made while she was in labor. Obeying her, Wilfrid's father Thomas cast himself into a continual and profound questioning of his own existence, revealed to his son by the unsent letters: "Mon petit Wilfrid, Je ne sais pas pourquoi je t'écris, je ne sais pas pour qui j'écris. Je ne sais plus qui je suis" (51). ["My little Wilfrid, I don't know why I'm writing to you, I don't know why I'm writing.[64] I don't know who I am anymore" (54).] The father's uncertainty about his own identity is transmitted to and mirrored in his son. Wilfrid confronts the apparition of his father about why he never sent the letters, and his father's response—"si pleines d'une profonde mélancolie,Wilfrid, pourquoi te les envoyer?" ["So full of melancholy, Wilfrid, why would I have sent them?"]—is greeted with Wilfrid's affirmation of his quest: "Mais pour que je puisse savoir un peu ce que

[64] The literal translation of this sentence is: "I don't know for whom I'm writing." It implies not only that Thomas does not know his son, but also that he does not know whether he writes for his own benefit or for the benefit of his child.

j'étais pour toi. Qui j'étais, moi, pour toi? qui? un fils? un inconnu? un fils inconnu que tu as mis entre les mains de mes tantes qui ont passé toute mon enfance à me raconter toutes sortes d'insanités sur toi?"(55-56). ["So I'd have some idea what I meant to you. What I was to you. What was I? A son? A complete stranger? An unknown son who you left in the hands of my aunts who spent my whole childhood telling me all kinds of crazy things about you?" (61).]

Wilfrid's own confusion about himself stems from a lack of knowledge about his importance in the lives of others. Denied the primordial relationships to his own parents, he comes of age in a psychic world that lacks key figures, which he replaces with figures from his own imagination. If the camera crew inhabiting Wilfrid is a voice of warning that lives within him, the chevalier Guiromelan is his ultimate protector. But in *HIER*, the letters open a space for Wilfrid to revivify his lost parents. The theatrical space becomes a space of psychic reinvention, where Wilfrid uses his father's letters in order to reconstruct his own origins and to seek a path toward his future. As his mother Jeanne comes to him in a dream, telling him of his father's happiness with his decision to bury him in his homeland, Wilfrid clarifies the difficulty of his situation: "Mais je ne sais pas où l'enterrer, papa, je ne sais pas...Tu dis qu'il est enterré ici, là-bas, mais non, il est encore parmi les vivants, il n'a pas de repos, il n'a rien, papa n'est enterré nulle part et je ne sais pas comment l'enterrer, comment on fait pour enterrer son père" (60). ["But I don't know where to bury Dad, I don't know…You say he's buried here, over there, but he's not, he's still among the living, he isn't at rest, he isn't anything, Dad isn't buried anywhere and I don't know how to bury him, I don't know how one goes about burying one's father" (67).] It is clear here that Wilfrid is not speaking of a literal lack of know-

how—after all, the play has already staged the helpfulness of the various funeral service providers—but of an emotional incapacity to come to terms with the death of the father. Once Wilfrid arrives in his father's homeland, the principal causes of his difficulties change. It is no longer only his psychic reality that prevents him from burying his father, but the physical reality of attempting to find a suitable grave site in a country that has been ravaged by war.

Ailleurs and "l'irruption de l'autre":

When Wilfrid flees *ICI* for the definitive *ailleurs* that is *LÀ-BAS*, the structure of the play's action changes dramatically. In her article "La thématique de la guerre dans *Littoral* de Wajdi Mouawad," Lucie Picard notes that whereas *ICI* and *HIER* are essentially comprised of a narrative interrupted by a series of scenes—Wilfrid recounts the events since his father's death to the judge, and his narration is interrupted by various scenes and reenactments—from *LÀ-BAS* onward the action of the play consists of a series of scenes that are interrupted by small excerpts of the individual narratives of Wilfrid's newfound companions. The narratives of *LÀ-BAS*, *L'AUTRE*, *CHEMIN*, and *LITTORAL*, are the war-stories of Wilfrid's friends that he meets while actively seeking a final resting place for his father. While Picard goes on to make several interesting claims about the play's relationship to the process of mourning, she does not examine the importance of the change in the play's emphasis as it coincides with Wilfrid's voyage. When Wilfrid is *ICI*, reliving *HIER*, the act of narration replaces his action and his living. The theatrical space represents a psychic one, and the dramatic action is essentially inaction. In recounting his difficulties to the judge, he is only *beginning* the process that will allow him to change his situation. The scenes that spring from Wilfrid's imagination onto the

stage are his own attempts to make sense of the recent events of his life. When he crosses the ocean and leaves the inside of his own head in order to encounter "real" people, narration becomes part of the active process of living in the world. Visually, the theatrical space does not undergo any changes when Wilfrid begins to interact with the world. The clearest indication that his interactions with the characters from *LÀ-BAS* take place in a realm of concrete reality is that he never refers to them metatheatrically. Whereas he constantly underlines the imaginary quality of his conversations with the chevalier, the *réalisateur*, and *le père*, the play directly stages all of the exchanges with Simone, Amé, Massi, Sabbé and Joséphine.

In his preface Mouawad tells the reader of the play that Simone is the first "real" character that Wilfrid meets. Her character immediately demonstrates a firmer grip on her identity and desires than Wilfrid. Ostracized from her village because her music awakens the pain of the war in the ears of the villagers, Simone the violinist desperately seeks someone outside of herself with whom to share her pain and joy. She complains to Ulrich, the only member of the village who does not seek to punish her for her music:

> Hier encore, j'étais certaine que dans tous les villages, il y avait des gens comme moi qui veulent se retrouver, qui s'ennuient, qui cherchent, qui en ont marre d'entendre toujours parler de la même chose, tout le temps, tout le temps. [...] J'ai l'impression que je suis toute seule au beau milieu de cette montagne. Je veux sortir de moi, Ulrich, je veux sortir de moi et rencontrer quelqu'un, quelqu'un qui aurait un visage différent du mien, le visage d'un autre, l'autre, Ulrich, l'autre. Toute l'intrigue de la vie prend

> naissance dans notre histoire avec l'autre, mais il n'y a personne ici, il n'y a personne. (72)
>
> [Even yesterday, I was sure that in all the villages there are people like me who want to find each other, who are bored, who are searching, who are sick of always hearing people talk about the same thing, all the time, all the time. […] I have the feeling I'm all alone in the middle of this mountain. I want to get outside of myself, Ulrich, I want to get away from myself and meet someone, someone with a different face than mine, the face of another, the other, Ulrich, the other. The whole storyline [plot] of life is born through our encounter with the other, but there's no one here, there's no one. (83)]

Unlike Wilfrid, Simone seeks some form of comfort primarily outside of herself. She feels that she must be part of a larger community, but that she has been unable to find it. The reflexive verb "se retrouver" with the subject "des gens comme moi" must be read simultaneously in two ways: there must be others who are seeking to find themselves; and there must be others who are hoping to meet each other—others—like herself. Simone's desire mirrors Wilfrid's need. Where Simone's character recognizes her need to interact with others outside of herself, Wilfrid's invents interior others in order to fulfill his need without taking the next step of creating a real connection. Her statement that life's plot begins in the encounter with the other is also the sign that the veritable plot of the play is also going to begin with that encounter. Until he meets Simone, Wilfrid interacts only with the characters either recalled or invented in his own mind. As such, the action of the play takes place within psychic space rather than in the world. With the first meetings of *LÀ-BAS*, both the play's action and Wilfrid step "outside his head."

Ulrich introduces the two young people to each other: "Simone, la réponse que tu attendais est arrivée,mais tu ne l'entends pas, tu ne la vois pas, car elle arrive du coté où tu l'attendais le moins. Simone, voici Wilfrid. [...] Wilfrid, voici Simone. Je crois que vous aviez besoin l'un de l'autre" (73). ["Simone, the answer you were waiting for has

come, but you can't hear it, you can't recognize it, because it's coming from the side you were least expecting. Simone, this is Wilfrid. […] Wilfrid, this is Simone. I think you two need each other" (84).] While Simone sent her messages down the river in bottles, the answer to her calls arrived from across an ocean. Simone immediately responds to Wilfrid's need for help with his father's corpse: "Je vais t'aider" (73). ["I'll help you" (84).]

Simone's help will not immediately be the solution to Wilfrid's problem. When he asks the villagers for a space in the cemetery for his father, they first respond by telling him that there is no room: "Le cimetière déborde. Il n'y a plus aucune place," ["The cemetery is bursting at the seams. There's no room left"] and when Simone asks for a simple spot in a field somewhere, they respond: "Tous les terrains sont minés. Plusieurs ont sauté en s'y aventurant, tu le sais. Quant aux autres places, elles sont réservées aux gens du village et non pas aux étrangers!" (75). ["The lots and fields are full of landmines. So many people have been blown to bits just wandering through, you know that. As far as other places, they're reserved for people of the village, not strangers!" (88).] When the villagers respond as negatively as his family to Wilfrid's request for a resting place for his father, he and Simone find themselves on a two-fold quest: for Wilfrid, to bury his father; for Simone, to help Wilfrid and to seek out those who, like her, are seeking "l'autre." Their decision to undertake the journey together stands in opposition to Wilfrid's stasis in *ICI* and *HIER*, where his stagnation was the result of living within his own head. Theatrically, the play continues to intertwine dreamscapes and landscapes, but time moves forward at a natural pace. The past and the

present no longer occupy the same space on the stage, and Wilfrid's recourse to dreamscapes is a supplement to his interactions with "real" characters.

Each of the companions that they meet, Amé, Sabbé, Massi, and Joséphine, will bring something new to their group. As *L'AUTRE* begins, Simone meets the first person from her own country to respond to her calls. Amé, whom they meet at the crossroads, is even more violently disgusted with his existence than Simone. In response to her question, "T'en avais pas marre, toi?" he responds, "Moi? Je ne sais pas par quel miracle je ne me suis pas tiré une balle dans la tête" (83). ["Aren't *you* sick of everything too?"; "Me? It's a miracle I haven't shot myself in the head" (98).] Amé's violence and impatience spring from his character's past. During the war, he was a "poseur de bombes." Now, Simone suggests that he leave with her so that they will plant bombs, no longer in buses or in restaurants, but "dans la tête des gens" by telling their own stories. Simone's metaphor of the sharing of personal narratives acting as a bomb expresses her conviction that the stories of individuals can impact society as a whole. That impact springs from the fact that telling stories creates a community: "Ils sauront alors qu'ils n'ont pas été seuls, qu'ils ne sont pas seuls" (85). ["[…] they'll know they weren't the only ones, that they're not alone" (100).] Although he is skeptical of her plan, ("Mais les gens s'en foutent des histoires! De la tienne en particulier ils s'en foutent" (84). ["But people don't give a shit about our stories! They especially don't care about yours!" (100)]) Amé decides to leave with them, suggesting that they bury the corpse by the side of the road. When Wilfrid and Simone refuse, he angrily points out that Wilfrid is an outsider: "Ce que tu peux être con toi alors avec le cadavre de ton père! On voit bien que tu arrives de loin, sinon tu ne ferais pas le riche. Ton père pue et il faut l'enterrer, c'est

tout!" (85). ["You're being such a jerk about your father's corpse! It's obvious that you've come from far away, otherwise, you wouldn't be so precious about it. Your father reeks and you have to bury him, period!" (101).] Amé's declaration of Wilfrid's difference insists on his lack of understanding of what it means to be from a country ravaged by war: "[...] il n'y a plus un seul lieu décent dans tout le pays" (85). ["But there isn't a decent place anywhere in the country" (101).] Wilfrid's psychological difficulty with burying his father is paralleled by the difficulty of finding a peaceful resting place. Wilfrid cannot be at peace with his loss until his father "rests in peace." Amé initially resists this insistence on finding a "decent place," but Simone agrees with Wilfrid, and they do not dump the cadaver in a ditch.

As the trio continues to seek a place for Wilfrid's father, they next meet Sabbé, who responded to Simone's violin with the beating of a drum. When he hears that they are seeking a place to bury Wilfrid's father, he recounts a dream that predicted their encounter:

> C'est drôle! Il y a deux nuits, j'ai réussi à m'endormir un peu et j'ai fait un rêve complètement grotesque. J'ai rêvé que j'étais avec quelques personnes, dans un lieu étrange, une de ces personnes traînait avec elle un cadavre, mais un cadavre qui parlait, qui donnait son opinion, qui discutait, un cadavre qui faisait le mort…mais le plus étrange c'est le lieu, nous étions dans un lieu clos, un lieu vaste…nous étions confinés au fond de ce lieu, le long d'un long mur et dans le noir, il y avait du monde, du monde assis, qui nous regardait. (90)
>
> [That's funny! Two nights ago I managed to fall asleep for awhile and had a totally grotesque dream. I dreamt that I was with a few people in a strange place,

> and one of them was carrying a corpse, but a corpse that talked, had opinions, that argued, a corpse who was only playing dead…but the strangest part was the place, we were in an enclosed space, a huge place…we were confined to one end of the space, along a long wall and in the dark, there were people, people sitting and watching us. (108)]

If the play *Littoral* tells the story of a young man's journey from living within his own dreamscapes to living within a community that eventually becomes something like a theater troupe, it is interesting that the first explicit reference to the theatrical situation comes from within a dream. When Sabbé tells the others that there is no room in his village for a corpse, they ask him to leave with them to continue their journey and "raconter des histoires." He immediately understands the purpose of the stories, "Des histoires. Notre histoire," ["Stories, our stories" (109)] and agrees to join them if the corpse accompanies them as in his dream (91). Wilfrid, however, does not yet feel like he belongs to this group of voluntary exiles: "Le cadavre ne viendra pas avec vous parce que le cadavre va venir avec moi. Je crois que nous n'avons plus rien à faire ensemble. C'est vrai ça ! Vous avez une vie qui ne me concerne pas et je me sens un peu comme une couille dans le potage, qui est bien l'expression la plus imbécile que je connaisse" (91).[65] ["The corpse won't be going with you because the corpse is coming with me. I don't think we have anything to do together. It's true! You have a life that I'm not part of and I feel a bit like a booger in the soup, which must be the stupidest expression I know" (110).] Confronted with the realities of war as they have been lived by his newfound companions, Wilfrid feels like an outsider to their struggles.

Wilfrid's feelings of exclusion are marked by his continued recourse to dream(e)scapes. After the group meets with Massi (the second-to-last companion to join

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[65] Wilfrid's recourse to expressions that even he qualifies as "stupide" ("le coeur dans les talons") and here "imbecile" points to his own incapacity to find his voice. He is dissatisfied with the popular expressions that he chooses, yet he seems unable to express himself otherwise.

them) on their journey to “raconter [leur] histoire de ville en ville,” Wilfrid recounts to his father and the chevalier his feelings of inadequacy: “Ben tu sais quoi, je commence à les envier sérieusement d'avoir vécu la guerre, ça leur donne une raison valable pour aller parler au monde. Mais moi, moi, on s'en fout...un gars va enterrer son père, c’est tellement quotidien!” (99). [“Well you know what, I’m starting to seriously envy them for having lived through a war, it gives them a legitimate reason to go talk to people. But nobody cares about me. A guy wants to bury his father, it’s so ordinary!” (121)] Wilfrid's envy springs from his perception that his companions' suffering gives them not only a valid reason to speak to the world, but the right to do so. The war created in them and for them a community of shared understanding via their individual horrific experiences. Wilfrid considers himself to be an outsider automatically excluded because he did not live through the same atrocities. Although he is linked to them by their mutual orphanhood, Wilfrid knows that his companions' losses have been more horribly violent than the deaths of Jeanne and Thomas. Simone’s parents were killed in the war; there is no precision given about their deaths. Amé killed his own father, whom he did not recognize, at the crossroads as he returned from a day of fighting; his mother then committed suicide. Sabbé’s father was chopped to pieces in front of him when he was a young boy; his murderers then played soccer with his decapitated head. Massi recounts that he never knew his father, and that his mother “est partie il y a longtemps” (99) [“left a long time ago” (121)]. Joséphine’s parents were killed by a bomb that destroyed their home. The members of the group abandon their villages to join each other because their villages contain only their solitude and horror. Diane Godin describes their community:

"Ces jeunes constituent, en fait, un véritable microcosme du monde, de ses errances et de ses douleurs. Leur espace intérieur, comme extérieur, est un espace de perte. Aussi la marche qu'ils entreprennent vers un lieu de repos encore inconnu est-elle une façon pour eux *d'agir la perte* pour lui donner un sens qui puise sa force dans la possibilité d'une re-naissance" (Godin 106). ["These young people constitute, in fact, a veritable microcosm of the word, of its wanderings and its pains. Their interior and exterior spaces are spaces of loss. Thus the journey they undertake towards a place of rest as yet unknown is a means by which they will *act the loss* in order to give it a meaning that takes its force from the possibility of a re-birth."] In a nation where an entire generation is made up of orphans, where the dead bodies of loved ones cannot be buried, where mothers are too weak to survive the births of their children, traditional familial ties have been destroyed. The orphans who join Wilfrid are seeking a future that holds more than mere survival. They do not flee their difficulties via dreamscapes, but immediately see in each other, and in Wilfrid, a possibility of renewal.

Speaking to his father and the chevalier in *36. Isolement*, Wilfrid feels the weight of his dreams as they remove him from reality: "[...] je commence à être fatigué de traîner un rêve avec moi pour me sentir moins seul! Je commence à trouver ça pas mal pathétique, je suis même pas foutu d'enterrer mon père décemment. Regarde-le! Et tout ça, c'est à cause de toi. Tu es toujours à rôder autour de ma vie, autour de mes nuits, autour de mon corps, de mon esprit" (100). ["But I'm getting tired of dragging a dream around with me so I'll feel less lonely!! I'm starting to find it pretty pathetic, I don't even have what it takes to give my father a proper burial. Look at him! And it's all your fault. You're always lurking around me, around my nights, around my body, around my

mind" (122).] The dream as a remedy for loneliness is a fatiguing exercise, yet even as Wilfrid blames the chevalier, he is also blaming the part of himself that is incarnate in his imaginary companion. Just as Wilfrid makes no distinction between life and nights (perhaps because his life, full of dreams, resembles other people's nights), he also makes no distinction between his body and mind. The stage represents this confusion by giving a physical presence to the chevalier and to all of Wilfrid's other imaginary companions. Yet even though the stage gives external life to Wilfrid's internal characters, the text underlines that his frustration with the chevalier is a frustration with himself. When the chevalier announces a refusal to leave and promises that Wilfrid will continue to dream in spite of himself, because, "si tu refuses, tu meurs," (120) ["if you refuse, you'll die" (122)] Wilfrid lashes out: "Je ne te crois pas! Tu n'existes pas! Tu es déguisé et tu articules des mots qu'un autre a mis dans ta bouche! Tu n'existes pas, tu n'existes pas! Tu n'existes pas et si tu n'avais pas existé, je serais plus heureux aujourd'hui" (100). ["I don't believe you! You don't exist! You're wearing a costume and you're speaking words someone else has put in your mouth! You don't exist, and if you'd never existed I'd be happier today!" (122).] The mutually exclusive utterance "You don't exist and if you hadn't existed" emphasizes Wilfrid's semi-conscious recognition of the difficulty of his situation. If it is true that the chevalier is indeed disguised and speaks words that another placed in his mouth, the same is also true for Wilfrid.

Mouawad uses the chevalier (Wilfrid) to represent the complicated ways in which humans hold internal debates about their own actions. Yet Wilfrid's internal debates have, since his childhood, replaced any interactions with those around him. It is only when Wilfrid's character recognizes his shared history with the others that he can come to

consider himself part of their community. With the arrival of Joséphine, who carries the names of all of the people in the country inscribed in old telephone books, Wilfrid discovers definitive proof of his connection to the other wandering orphans. When Wilfrid finds his parents' names in a telephone book dating from the beginning of the war, his friends insist upon his belonging to the community: "Tu vois, Wilfrid? Toi aussi tu es du pays, regarde, c'est écrit ici" (108). ["You see, Wilfrid? You're from this country too, look, it's written here" (133).] Not only does Wilfrid belong to their group, but his presence there is evoked within a landscape, not a dreamscape: "Regarde. Ces montagnes. Ces arbres, ce soleil et ce ciel, tu viens de là, tout comme nous, et tout comme toi, nous n'avons plus nos parents, alors ce père que tu nous offres, nous irons l'enterrer ensemble dans un lieu de paix" (108). ["Look. These mountains. These trees, the sun and this sky, you come from here, just like us, and just like you, Wilfrid, we've lost our parents, so this father you're offering us, we'll all bury him together in a peaceful place" (133).] For the first time, Wilfrid is able to step outside of himself and come to terms with the journey that he is undertaking: "Je commence à y croire" (108). ["I'm actually starting to believe that" (133).]

Pour enterrer un père

If Wilfrid's confusion about his identity is irrevocably linked to his lack of knowledge about his origins, then his quest to bury his father in his homeland is also a quest to encounter those origins and answer the question: "qui suis-je?" In life, Thomas's wanderings left Wilfrid no sense of being rooted to a place and history. Burying his father—placing him in the earth of his home country—would be a way of planting roots in his own past. In order for the future to be possible, the past must be symbolically laid

to rest. This is not only the case for Wilfrid, but for all of his companions. Brought together by the losses that disconnected them from their own worlds, the young wanderers become a group with a common purpose. Their journey is not without its torments, but as *L'AUTRE* comes to an end and *CHEMIN* begins, Sabbé encourages the angry and frustrated Amé:

> Amé, que tu le veuilles ou non, ce corps est le corps de ton père. Reste droit, mon vieux, reste droit. Ouvre les yeux et reconnais en lui le père disparu, le père assassiné, le père ensanglanté. Reconnais en lui le père de toutes nos douleurs. Allons lui retrouver un endroit et enterrons-le pour de bon. Nous repartirons libres, plus libres, libres! (102)
>
> [Amé, whether you like it or not, this corpse is the body of your father. Stand up, my friend, stand up straight. Open your eyes and recognize in him the father who disappeared, the father who was murdered, the father covered in blood. Recognize in him the father of all our pain. Let's go find him a place and let's bury him once and for all. We'll leave from there free, freer, free! (124)]

Burying the father "pour du bon" gives access to the future, and as Amé finally recognizes this, he recognizes from whence springs all of his own anger: "Je crève, moi, putain, à force de ne plus avoir d'avenir! Regardez l'horizon, je veux être comme l'horizon, je veux aller vers lui et en allant vers lui, aller vers moi! Je veux dire des phrases comme demain nous ferons ci, nour ferons ça!" (128). ["I'm dying, for fuck's sake, from not having any future! Look at the horizon, I want to be like the horizon, I want to go towards it and by going towards it, go towards myself! I want to say things like tomorrow we'll do this, we'll do that!" (157)] Wilfrid's journey from living within and interacting with only himself to living in the world and interacting with others facilitates the beginning of the group's journey towards successful mourning of the losses

their country incurred during the war. Even when discouragement threatens after the group nearly drowns when trying to cross a river with the cadaver, the chevalier reminds Wilfrid of the symbolic importance of his father's body: “Peux-tu seulement imaginer l'humiliation de ceux qui se voient dépouillés? Dépouillés! [...] Wilfrid, tu as ici la chance de rendre à des vaincus leur dignité. Un chevalier ne peut pas, sous prétexte de fatigue, passer à côté de cet honneur” (112).[66] [“Can you even imagine the humiliation of those whose dead have been taken from them? Taken! Wilfrid, you have the chance here to give the vanquished back their dignity. A knight cannot, claiming fatigue, step aside from that honor.”] The chevalier speaks Wilfrid’s character’s recognition of the importance that his father’s corpse has taken on for the group. He is no longer alone in his struggle, but instead has the opportunity both to alleviate his own suffering and that of others. The burial of Thomas will symbolically enable not only Wilfrid’s future, but the collective future of all of his companions. Thomas is merely the literal manifestation of the corpses that they have all been metaphorically dragging with them since the loss of their own parents. The importance of Wilfrid’s role in their community becomes apparent as Simone creates through him the link that ties them all together: “On a notre histoire. Un homme cherche un lieu où enterrer le corps de son père. Et à travers cette histoire chacun racontera la sienne. Nous raconterons notre histoire aux gens en redisant et en refaisant ce que nous avons dit et ce que nous avons fait. Sur les places publiques nous irons et nous raconterons notre histoire” (117). [“We have our story. A man seeks a place to bury his father’s body. And through this story each of us will tell their own story. We’ll tell our stories to people by saying and doing again what we’ve said and

[66] Strangely, this passage was not translated into English in the Tepperman translation. It was omitted from her text. The translation is mine.

what we've done. We'll go out in public and we'll tell our stories" (145).] *Raconter*, *redire* and *refaire* via the public repetition of their story. In its infinite repetition, the theatrical act reinscribes reality within a symbolic framework. Simone's words are, of course, a description of the play *Littoral*, which was both predicted and prefigured by Sabbé's dream earlier in the play.

When Massi comments that they still need to find their story's conclusion, Simone responds, "Nous trouverons la fin lorsque nous aurons trouvé le lieu où enterrer le père" ["We'll find the ending when we find a place to bury the father" (145)] and the group exclaims, as the fog lifts, "La mer !" (117). The sea. La mer. La mère. Le littoral. Le père rejoindra la mer (la mère) au littoral. Geographically, the littoral figures a place of meeting between sea and land. Its sonorities in French evoke a place of repose (le lit), a space of connections (lier) and a means of communication (oral). The sea that the companions encounter is the body of water that ultimately connects Wilfrid's parents' homeland to his own. The decision to "emmerrer" rather than "enterrer" Thomas commits him to the shared space figured by the sea. Le littoral becomes a geographical figuring of the in-between space in which the main character of *Littoral* has evolved throughout the play—touching dreams and reality, land and sea, theatrical space and psychic space.

In choosing the fluid in-between space as a resting place for their collective father, the group also changes the symbolism of their act. Rather than laying the cadaver to rest somewhere in their static, war-torn and mine-ridden land, they commit him to a space of movement and change.[67] *Le père* initially expresses his apprehension at the idea of

[67] This is also a gesture of radical deterritorialization. The sea belongs to everyone and no one. Just as Mouawad decides to conserve the anonymity of home country in the text of the play, thus evoking all of the

floating wherever the tides might take him ("[…] sans ancre pour m'empêcher de deriver,/Mon Coeur se remplit de terreur" (130) ["[…] with no anchor to keep me from drifting,/My heart fills with terror" (160)]). Were he allowed to float aimlessly, washing back ashore to haunt the land again, it might prefigure the group's failure to move forward. The solution to their problem, anchoring Thomas with the weight of the telephone books containing the names of the vanquished, symbolically establishes the group's link to History even as they dedicate themselves to a path of change.

Wilfrid's passage from the realm of his dreamscapes to a life in the world, however, is not without a return of some of his previous feelings of exclusion. When Joséphine asks Wilfrid whether or not he will join them after his father's funeral, he responds, "Pour quoi faire? Je n'ai rien à voir avec vous. Vous, vous avez une raison pour souffrir, tandis que moi, je peux bien aller me recoucher" (124). ["What for? I have nothing in common with you. You all have a reason to suffer, whereas I might as well go back to bed" (154).][68] In Wilfrid's own terms, his previous life was one lived in an unwakened state to which he can easily return—"aller me recoucher". His father's funeral will free him from his only responsibility; he can return home. His companions, however, will continue in hopes of telling their story and bearing witness to the losses that the older generations of their community would prefer to forget. When Joséphine points out her own similarity to Wilfrid—just as he was seeking a suitable resting place for his father, she was searching for a place to lay to rest the phone books containing the names of her country's people—he once again attempts to separate himself from the

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war-torn countries of the world, consecrating Thomas to the sea commits him to an ambiguous space that can belong to all.

[68] "Recoucher" also evokes the idea of returning "en couches" or to the moment of "accouchement," the last time at which Wilfrid was in contact with his living mother.

group: “Moi je ne compte pas ! Moi je ne suis qu’un personnage. Quelqu’un qui vit dans le monde du rêve. Mais dernièrement, il y a eu un étrange accident qui m’a précipité ici, dans la réalité. C’est une situation très pathétique pour le rêve d’être prisonnier dans un monde vulgaire” (124). [“I don’t count! I’m only a character. Someone who’s in a dream world. But recently, a strange accident has thrown me here, into reality. It’s pathetic for the dream to be held prisoner in a vulgar world” (154).] Wilfrid's character's logic strangely links theatrical space, psychic space, and the world space we call “reality.” While referring to himself as a *personnage*, his words evoke his literary and theatrical existence. When he turns immediately to associate his existence as a character to an existence within the world of dreams, his words equate the world of dreams to the world of literature. Finally, when he speaks of being pushed out of the world of dreams into reality, it is also clear that he remains an invented character in a play taking place on a stage that spectators, who live in “reality,” are watching. If reality is a more vulgar realm than the realm of dreams, it is perhaps only improved by the existence of literature, especially theater. Joséphine's answer to Wilfrid’s protests implies that humans are all acting characters in the dramas of their own lives: “Mais moi aussi je suis un personnage qui nage en pleine réalité, Wilfrid ! […] Moi aussi je ne suis qu’un personnage… […] dessiné par la vie…(*Elle l’embrasse*.) Embrasse-moi” (124-5). [“But I’m a character swimming in reality too, Wilfrid! […] I’m only a character too […] a character given shape by life…(*She kisses him.*) Kiss me” (154).] Mouawad points out through Joséphine and Wilfrid that while art may imitate life, life itself is a form of art, constantly drawing and redrawing us as we adapt to the world and the circumstances around us. Wilfrid’s hesitation about moving from the world of dreams into the world of reality

shows his ambivalence about becoming an actor in the "real" world. His character recognizes that the goal of Simone's troupe will be to influence the reality of the external world—not just their own personal histories, but History.

Because Joséphine reminds him that he is not alone in being plunged into the vulgar world of life, Wilfrid's is able to let go of his dream(e)scape. Just before sending his father into the sea, he says farewell to the chevalier Guiromelan: "Je n'ai plus besoin de te voir pour continuer à croire en toi. Tu vois, je ne te demande pas de partir, je ne cherche pas non plus à te quitter, au contraire, je veux que tu vives tellement en moi que nous ne soyons plus en mesure de nous voir" (131). ["I no longer need to see you to believe in you. You see, I'm not asking you to leave, and I'm not trying to leave you either—on the contrary, I want you to live so deep inside me that we won't be able to see each other anymore" (162).] As Wilfrid's character asks for the full integration within himself of his imaginary companion, he consciously takes the step that children take unconsciously when they find suitable substitutes for their dream(e)scapes in the world of reality. Wilfrid leaves being his childlike fleeing from reality into dreams in order to take up residence in the world. Dreams are finally allowed to be dreams, disappearing from Mouawad's theatrical stage as his characters respond to the call to create theater themselves.

If Wajdi Mouawad's *Littoral* is a theatrical celebration of the incredible power of the imagination, it also points out the dangers of exercising it to the exclusion of the world. It is a work of art about the importance of collaborative encounters with the "other." These encounters with "the other" are not figured merely on a human level by the meetings of the characters within the play, but also on a literary level as the theatrical

text and space are inhabited by other forms of verbal and visual expression from the ordinary (letters and telephone books) to the artistic (cinema, epic, lyric poetry). Wilfrid's father's letters to him are his first encounter with his parents' personal history. Their names printed in the telephone books inscribe them (and him) within the history of a community. Yet Wilfrid's dream(e)scapes are characterized by artistic productions that focus on individual, rather than collective, experience. His "film" is the story of one young man's struggle ("un jeune homme qui ne sait plus enterrer son père") and the epic the story of one knight's imprisonment "dans une époque en forme de donjon" (48). They are also forms of artistic production that separate the producer of the work from its audience. The spectator of a film has no interaction with its actors; the text of the courtly epic does not change according to the reader's response to it. Appropriately, as Wilfrid allows the "irruption de l'autre" within his own life via his kiss with Joséphine, the play incorporates a form of poetry that implies a listening audience. In the last scene *52. Le gardeur de troupeau*, *le père* chants the final lines of his *Récitatif*, encouraging his "children" to continue their journey:

> Wilfrid, Simone, Amé, Massi, Sabbé, Joséphine,
>
> Il est l'heure de vous mettre en route.
>
> Avancez sur les chemins,
>
> Epuisez-vous à la marche,
>
> Partez avant le jour,
>
> Et ragez, et enragez,
>
> Au bout des routes,
>
> Au bout des villes,

Au bout des pays,

Au bout des joies,

Au bout du temps.

Tout juste après les amours et les peines

Les joies et les pleurs,

Les pertes et les cris,

Il y a le littoral et la grande mer,

La grande mer

Qui emporte tout

Et qui m'emporte d'ailleurs,

Qui m'emporte, qui m'emporte, qui m'emporte, […repeated thirteen more times…] (134-135)

[Wilfrid, Simone, Amé, Massi, Sabbé, Joséphine,
It's time to set off.
Walk along the roads,
Exhaust yourselves walking,
Leave before day breaks
Rage, and rage
At the end of roads,
At the end of cities,
At the end of countries,
At the end of joys,
At the end of time.
Right after loves and sorrows
Joys and tears,
Losses and laments
There is the tideline and the great sea,
The great sea
That carries everything away
And that's now taking me,
That's taking me, taking me, taking me, [repeated thirteen times].]

His directives are clear, encouraging Simone's project of traveling from town to town to share their stories: *ragez* and *enragez*—cry out your anger and communicate it to others. Speak to the world.

Conclusion:

Just as the final lines of Tremblay's *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* enact the condition of possibility for the play's beginning, the imperatives of *le père* at the end of *Littoral* encourage the theatrical undertaking of Simone's troupe, which itself becomes the play *Littoral*. Mouawad's play is the first in a series of theatrical works in which he takes up Simone's call to "poser des bombes dans la tête des gens."

In 2004, Mouawad released a cinematic adaptation of *Littoral*. Where the play is filled with dreamscapes, leaving geography ill-defined and detailing the imaginary characters that Wilfrid invents to people his solitary existence, the film deals with the actual landscapes affected by the civil war in Lebanon. The play *Littoral* recounts the journey of a young man who goes from living within his head to living within the world, although the world in which he lives is never specifically named. It is almost as if Mouawad himself needed to undergo the same journey as Wilfrid: the writing of the play, with the universal truths about unnamed wars, gave him the capacity to address the actual war that disrupted his childhood. In the film, the protagonist's name is changed to Wahab (making him more representative of a specific culture of origin); the country of his parents' roots is named as Lebanon, their town Kfar Rayat; Wahab's own country is named as Canada. The choice that Mouawad makes to film within real landscapes (although in Albania, not Lebanon) limits the demands that are made on spectators' imaginations. Where the film deals with the realities of war (one of Wahab's

companions is killed by a mine as they try to catch up to the Syrian soldiers who have stolen the body), the play allows more room for exploring war's unconscious implications. While the actors from the first production of the play embodied their roles in the film as well, the film contained no chevalier Guiromelan, no *mise en abyme* of the cinematic experience, and a *père* who rarely speaks.

The Canadian press gave the film a positive review, calling it "a play crossed with a film that benefits from its hybrid form,"[69] but one glance at the user comments available on cinema blogs or www.imdb.com shows that the film disappointed its common audiences. Two representative comments demonstrate the film's limitations:

> 1) I found the idea behind the story was interesting and could have been further developed into a much bigger film. I watched this movie along with a few other Lebanese Canadians and we all found it to be disgraceful. A bunch of non-Lebanese actors acting as Lebanese, attempting to speak the language, they do not look it, it is not Lebanon but Albania, and none of the supposed local Lebanese in the movie behaved like authentic Lebanese.[70]
>
> 2) When I attend a play, there are certain conventions I am willing to accept. For example, that an actor can play someone from a different origin even if everything about this actor shouts: I was born here. In cinema, it doesn't work. Even if the actors offered great performances, I could never believe that Renaud or Boutin or Leblanc were actually from

[69] Melora Koepke: *Littorally*, http://www.hour.ca/film/film.aspx?iIDArticle=4639: written 11/4/2004, accessed 6/27/09.
[70] http://www.hour.ca/film/film.aspx?iIDArticle=4639 (Comment posted by Charlie Koury on 8/12/05), accessed 6/27/09.

> Lebanon (or Albania where it was shot). Everything from their accent, to their look, to how they move wasn't right. I still enjoyed the movie because there is a strong story underneath but I was not moved by it as I should have been.[71]

In the theatrical version of *Littoral*, the absence of geographical names and the presence of imaginary characters allow its spectators to be moved by its universal suggestiveness and accepting of its straying from realism. The above viewers of the film complained not only because the "reality" was not real enough to do justice to the horrors of the war, but also because it was *too real* to allow for the symbolic evocativeness that is omnipresent in the play. Nearly all of the lyricism of Mouawad's theatrical text is stripped from the cinematic adaptation, and the effect is that the play is much more powerful than its cinematic counterpart. As Geneviève Blais comments in her article "Wajdi Mouawad: Regard vers un ailleurs troublant," "[…] la guerre dans son théâtre a peut-être d'abord une valeur métaphorique, n'étant pas le premier sujet qui le préoccupe mais une voie qu'il emprunte pour évoquer la soif insatiable de l'infini" (156). ["[…] war in his theater has perhaps primarily a metaphorical importance, being not the first subject that occupies him but a means by which he evokes an insatiable thirst for the infinite."] The film leaves the realm of metaphor to join historical reality, but suffers from its departure, because it meets with the resistance of those who see its representation as inadequate.

If Mouawad's play speaks to us in a way that the cinematic version of *Littoral* cannot, it is because of the ambiguity permitted by the dreamscapes and the meeting with alterity that is the "irruption de l'autre" into the lives of the characters on the stage, the

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[71] http://www.hour.ca/film/film.aspx?iIDArticle=4639 (Comment posted by Marc Charette on 11/16/04), accessed 6/27/09.

spectators watching it, and the reader imagining its staging. Just as *le père* is carried away by the sea, the spectator is carried away by *Littoral*'s imaginative scope and not distracted by concrete references to historical reality. *Littoral*'s staged encounter with "others" of literature within the play and its protagonists' search for others that will allow them new understandings of themselves contribute to a theatrical work that renews and reaffirms the power and necessity of theater as a space of encounter. By staging the *process* of discovery that points his protagonists towards healing via their artistic endeavor, Mouawad almost offers a *mode d'emploi* for living in the world outside of the theater: ragez and enragez. Theater is an *inter*active art form, constantly touched by the world that it touches. Bombs set off in people's heads can be more powerful and productive than those set off in the street.

Conclusion(s)

This dissertation has examined ways in which three contemporary Francophone authors have integrated the psychoanalytic concept of psychic space into their theatrical works, creating innovative and evocative theatrical representations of the dramas that unfold in the mind. While plays from Antiquity forward can be interpreted psychoanalytically (Freud himself being the most prominent psychoanalytic reader of literature), it is not until Freud's own era that playwrights begin to explore extensively the metaphorical capacities of theatrical space to represent psychic space. Ghosts, dreams, monsters and *mises en abyme* take on the appearance of projections of the mind, and some playwrights seem preoccupied with showing their audiences the "strings and machinery of the human mind" that Strindberg mentions in his Preface to *Miss Julie*.

If the first chapter of this project dealt with the ways in which psychoanalysis took up concepts of theatricality, the chapters on Tremblay, NDiaye, and Mouawad analyzed how these authors invite their readers and spectators to imagine theater in terms of the psyche. Yet in examining *how* these playwrights evoke psychic spaces on their stages, we have only briefly addressed the question of *why* they might choose to do so. In order to conclude with a few thoughts on this subject, it will be useful to return to some of the concepts that were briefly evoked in Chapter One.

Aristotle's version of catharsis implied that theater provides a means of relieving individuals of their mental oppressions via a collective experience; psychoanalysis's evolution from Freud and Breuer's original "cathartic method" attempts to provide similar relief via the individual experience of the "talking cure." Another important

twentieth-century thinker and practitioner of theater offers some enlightenment about the importance of the cathartic theatrical experience both for the individual and for society.

When Antonin Artaud, French philosopher and dramatist, writes about the Theater of Cruelty in *Theater and its Double*, several provocative passages bring to mind a more violently imagined version of Aristotle's cathartic purgation. Artaud proposes a theater that would turn away from the psychological studies of individual characters and toward the deep preoccupations of all of society, in the hopes that this new theater will give shape and meaning to pain and to cruelty and thus evacuate the need for these emotions to be acted upon in the outside world. The violence of his theater would preclude actual violence in the streets, a concept he repeats in many different ways, but which is most powerfully evoked here in the following passage:

> Quels que soient les conflits qui hantent la tête d'une époque, je défie bien un spectateur à qui des scènes violentes auront passé leur sang, qui aura senti en lui le passage d'une action supérieure, qui aura vu en éclair dans des faits extraordinaires les mouvements extraordinaires et essentiels de sa pensée,--la violence et le sang ayant été mis au service de la violence de la pensée,--je le défie de se livrer au-dehors à des idées de guerre, d'émeute et d'assassinat hasardeux. (Artaud 127)
>
> [Whatever conflicts may haunt the mind of an era, I defy the spectator whose blood will have been traversed by violent scenes, who will have felt in himself the passage of a superior action, who will have seen in a flash of extraordinary events the extraordinary and essential movements of his thought—violence and blood having been placed at the service of the violence of thought—I defy this spectator to indulge outside the theater in ideas of war, rioting, or dangerous murders.]

How does Artaud propose to have this cathartic, purging effect on his spectators? The theater he imagines will be both physically and emotionally jolting. He tells us that it

must act on both the spectators' nerves and his heart. He compares the theatrical experience to that of the snake being charmed by the snake charmer: "…je propose d'agir avec les spectateurs comme avec les serpents qu'on charme et de les faire revenir par l'organisme jusqu'aux plus subtiles notions" (126). ["I propose that we treat the spectators like snakes that are being charmed, and that we bring them back to the subtlest notions by way of their bodies."] With the spectacle of theater taking place all around them, we can imagine that the images, sounds, and lights that Artaud proposes would cause rushes of adrenaline, racing hearts, and perhaps even momentary nausea.

In 1933, at the end of his essay "Theater and Cruelty" his words are all the more powerful because he seems to offer a premonition of the historic violence to come: "Il s'agit maintenant de savoir, si, à Paris, avant les cataclysmes qui s'annoncent, on pourra trouver assez de moyens de réalisation, financiers ou autres, pour permettre à un semblable théâtre de vivre, et celui-ci tiendra de toute façon, parc qu'il est l'avenir. Ou s'il faudra un peu de vrai sang, tout de suite, pour manifester cette cruauté" (136). ["It is now a question knowing whether, in Paris, before the approaching cataclysms, we will be able to find sufficient production means, financial or otherwise, to permit such a theater to live, as it will occur in any case, because it is the future. Or whether a little real blood is needed right now to manifest this cruelty."] Artaud seems to be offering a choice: the Theater of Cruelty is coming, no matter what. Either it will occur on the stage, purging society of its need for violence, or it will occur in the streets. History tells us that in his time it was acted out on the streets rather than on the stage, and contemporary playwrights, if they so choose, are faced with the task of finding new ways of making theater into an art form that can positively impact society in the ways that Aristotle and

Artaud suggest. While none of the playwrights examined in this project writes theater that can be considered Artaudian in terms of staging, they each engage the minds of their spectators in ways that attempt to force those spectators to reflect and feel.

The representations of psychic space that occur on Tremblay's stage clearly point spectators toward the conclusion that refusing to deal with psychic distress in a productive way leads to stagnation, psychic paralysis, and a future condemned in advance. Manon shuts herself up in the space of her past and refuses to explore any paths towards her future. Claude writes his father as a monster rather than confronting his own ambivalent emotions, and in doing so avoids the self-examination that might have allowed him to come to terms with his father's inadequacies in a more honest way. Tremblay's plays can be read (as they often have been) as allegories for the stagnant political situation of the province of Québec. Their enactments of individual trauma and emotional crises, however, reach far beyond the traditional political readings that have been applied to them, and resist reductive analyses of all kinds. Tremblay writes for the Québecois audience that he knows, but the dozens of translations of his works prove that they speak to audiences in every language. His plays demonstrate an inherent sensitivity to the unconscious aspects of human existence, and they point to the dangers of becoming isolated in an unexamined life. Whether one reads his characters as representatives of political positions or as individuals changes very little: Tremblay's plays are a plea for conscious living, both in the realm of politics and the realm of individual relationships.

Marie NDiaye communicates disturbing truths about human relations in contemporary society via her theatrical texts. In *Hilda*, Mme Lemarchand's ridiculous demands are almost funny; they would be laughable, at least, if Franck refused them.

NDiaye takes a banal situation—that of a woman hiring a maid—and pushes it to its paroxysm of horror. Mme Lemarchand buys Hilda's life when she pays for her services. Yet what is the point of representing the psychic space of one crazy woman's insatiable desires, communicated via the unrealistic demands she makes of her servant? NDiaye's text points out the inevitable dehumanization that occurs in a system where human beings can be exchanged for money. She does not seem to be condemning the system so much as she condemns the unconsciousness and hypocrisy that accompany it. Mme Lemarchand declares to Corinne: "Personne ne fait la bonne. On ne parle plus comme cela. Il n'y a plus de bonnes, Corinne" (77). ["Nobody works as a maid. We don't talk like that anymore. There are no more maids, Corinne."] "Bonne" has become "femme de ménage" just as "secretary" has been replaced by "administrative assistant" and "handicapped" by "disabled." Through Mme Lemarchand, NDiaye points out that the self-righteous adoption of a more politically correct vocabulary in no way implies that attitudes and behaviors have changed. Like Tremblay, she represents unconscious structures in order to facilitate a transition to consciousness.

Mouawad's theater distinguishes itself from Tremblay's and NDiaye's not only by its scope, but also by the fact that its protagonist arrives at a new level of consciousness during the course of the play's action. Mouawad's depiction of Wilfrid's reliance on dreamscapes represents the temptation that all humans face to flee from, rather than to confront, difficult situations (be they psychic or physical). By avoiding meaningful contact with the world around him, Wilfrid's character attempts to protect himself from further disappointment and loss. Yet his lack of contact with others saddles him with a profound confusion about his own subjectivity—evoked by his constant

question: “Qui suis-je?” Just as Wilfrid turns to the chevalier and the *réalisateur* rather than speak his pain, the older generation of villagers holds on to a rigid silence about the war and persecutes those who—like Simone with her violin—seek solace via the expression of their collective loss. Wilfrid’s takes the first step towards healing when he accepts that he belongs with Simone and the others; he advances much further when he agrees to allow his story frame the narrative of their anticipated theatrical production. His characters’ arrival at the decision to recount and reenact their stories so that others will know “that they’re not alone” (100) demonstrates Mouawad’s belief in healing power and its capacity to promote consciousness.

In a contemporary society where potential spectators are constantly bombarded with imagery from all types of artistic media, the only way for the ancient art of theater to remain relevant is for it to continue to speak to the world *differently*. Artaud compares the theater to a plague that purges the collective abcesses of society (45). Mouawad calls it a bomb placed inside people’s heads. It must sometimes function as a plague, draining the viler things that haunt our minds; other times its power might be as explosive as a bomb, causing powerfully violent and immediate alterations to an audience’s perceptions. I would argue, however, that effective theater most often functions like a magical seed on the verge of germination that creates its own fertile ground. If a play successfully plants the seed, an audience in the presence of live actors readily suspends its need for realism and opens itself to the (im)possibilities of the stage. Because Tremblay, NDiaye, and Mouawad brilliantly prepare the terrain for their audiences, their metaphorical representations of the invisible actions of the mind successfully demand that their spectators nuance their perceptions of the world around them.

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