The Joual Effect: A Reflection of Quebec's Urban Working-Class
In Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs* and *Hosanna*

by

Melita Prins

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Approved April 2012 by the Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Mark Cruse, Chair
Helene Ossipov
Frederic Canovas

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ABSTRACT

Michel Tremblay, one of the most renowned and beloved Quebecois writers, began his literary career in the 1960s. He is well known for writing many of his works exclusively in the Quebec dialect of joual. The history of Quebec, from its beginnings as a permanent settlement of New France, to its subsequent takeover by the British after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, all were events that set the stage for the Quiet Revolution. The Quiet Revolution was a cultural, social and linguistic uprising set in motion by the French-speakers of Quebec who were tired of being dominated. Up until the 1960s, the majority of literary works produced in Quebec followed the classical French tradition. The desire in the 1960s to break free from the domination of the English language and culture as well as to be differentiated from the French from France brought with it a newfound nationalistic pride. From this point forward there was a push to create a distinct Quebecois literature. One way to differentiate the works of Quebec from those from France was to include characters and settings from within the Quebec society as well as to have those characters speak in their native dialect. Joual, a dialect version of the pronunciation of the French word cheval, meaning horse, was originally a rural dialect that eventually found its way to the inner city. For this reason, joual was most closely identified with the urban working-class of Montreal. This dialect was also perceived as the language of an uneducated, socially and economically inferior segment of the French-speaking Quebec society. By
using *joual* in his literature, Tremblay was able to depict the social, cultural and economic effect that *joual* had on this element of Quebec’s population. This thesis focuses on the impact of *joual* on this society through the study of two of Tremblay's plays: *Les Belles-sœurs* (1965), to show a women's perspective about a socially and economically inferior group, and *Hosanna* (1973), to show the perspective of homosexuals and transvestites, a socially prejudiced group.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband Jim and thank him for all his love and support. Without his encouragement, kindness, and willingness to listen to my concerns, read and re-read my many iterations of this thesis I would not have been able to get through this process. Thank you for not letting me give up.
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INTRODUCTION

The period of change during the 1960s in the Canadian province of Quebec, known as the Quiet Revolution, started a nationalistic dialogue amongst the French-speaking population. This revolution began a political and cultural debate, influencing many public and private spheres, including the state of the literature taught, read, and written in Quebec. Up until this period, French literature in Quebec was almost exclusively works produced in France. Those produced locally followed the classical French style and rarely included Quebecois settings and characters. The desire to create an indigenous Quebecois literature resulted from the will of the French-speaking population to be separate from the non French-Quebecois culture, including France and the rest of Canada.

One change made to differentiate Quebec literature from France and other outside influences, was to incorporate the lives and natural language of ordinary French-speaking Quebecois people. This ordinary way of speaking included both the use of Quebec French, which includes regional words and idioms, and the dialect of joual. This dialect is known for its mixture of Anglicisms, Old French, neologisms, and standard French, but it is primarily a spoken language (Nardocchio 50).

Joual was originally a rural dialect that eventually found its way to the city due to urbanization. It came to represent the urban working-class in Montreal. The use of joual in literature provided this segment of the French-speaking population, previously excluded from the literary world, a
newfound distinct national identity. Its use in written form had a big impact on the theater and literature in general.

When studying the story of the French language in Quebec and its usage, there are three forms that are used within society. There is the *français international* (International French), the *français Quebecois* (Quebec French) and *joual*. Up until this period, the writers and playwrights were almost obligated to use International French because of the view of the Roman Catholic Church\(^1\) and the academicians that a divergence from this standard was «a serious moral fault» (Gauvin and Henderson 32).

The commencement of the use of *joual* in Quebec literature was a new chapter in the literary history of Quebec. Playwrights not only started to use the language of the people in their works, but also started to write about Quebec society, stepping away from the religious and classical themes that had dominated the literary scene. This new way of writing and presenting the French-speaking population of Quebec was a huge push away from the classical literary style preferred by the Church and the elites.

In the political arena, the use of this dialect as a written language was viewed as an attack on «the language and culture of the oppressors» (Moss, “Playing with History” 342). In the cultural arena, the use of this

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\(^1\) For the purposes of this study, the term the Church will be used to denote the Roman Catholic Church.
dialect in literature was viewed as a change from the French influence to a Quebecois influence that aided in the creation of «a national literature that no longer followed the fashions of France» (Dunnett 120).

Michel Tremblay who wrote many plays exclusively in joual achieved this new cultural identification through its use in his works. Focused on the urban working-class of Montreal he represented them authentically on paper by having them speak in their own dialect—joual.

This study will look at two plays by Michel Tremblay, Les Belles-sœurs (1965) and Hosanna (1973), and at how language, the use of joual in literature, projects the cultural identity of its people to an audience. The examination of these two plays in particular will show two different perspectives on the same theme. Les Belles-sœurs shows a women's perspective about life as a socially and economically inferior group and Hosanna gives the perspective through the eyes of a socially prejudiced group, homosexuals and transvestites.

These two perspectives represent two sides of the same coin, the way that a group sees itself through the use of its own dialect and how others view them. The understanding amongst this group, bound together by a common dialect, says more than the words themselves. This common bond reaches beyond the words on a page.

The use of joual as the language of the characters emphasizes their hopelessness and misery because of their predetermined destiny as a result of their history and language. The French-speaking Quebec
society felt lost and had a lack of respect for itself due to many factors. One is the simple historical fact of abandonment by France. Another is the lack of respect by the British towards the French language and culture in Quebec and the intrusion of English into the French of Quebec.

By looking at the importance of language in literature, this study will look at how language in literature provides a basis for cultural identity. Language is synonymous with a people. The way that a language is used is very important to a society in both culture and politics.

First, *joual* immediately denotes a certain social class within the French-speaking population of Quebec. This spoken language, when put into writing, is both a cultural and political marker within literary works. The theater is greatly impacted by the use of this dialect because this form of literature is written with the intention that it will be performed and interpreted by an actor. The use of *joual* provides a dramatic effect, not only in its performance by an actor, but also in its written presentation because the writer must create, interpret and manipulate the written language accurately to the reader. This interpretation is a written performance of the words.

*Joual* is theatrical in its own right, as the look and sound is completely different from International French. This type of indigenous theater requires the performance by both the reader and the actor. In order for the reader to get the full impact he must speak the literature, just as an actor. The use of this language also provides a true representation
of what the speaker actually wants to say. Any translation from this dialect dilutes its strength in meaning, the explicit as well as the implicit meaning.

Second, *joual* is part of the cultural and political identification of the urban working-class. Seeing *joual* used in literary works, this group can identify themselves within their group, but also how they are seen within the larger society.

Third, the socio-linguistic effect of *joual* through literature presents the perceived social inferiority of this group. This is in part due to the debates surrounding the correct French to be spoken and hinders their ability to be upwardly mobile.

The socio-linguistic hierarchy of the Quebec society is as follows: At the top are the English-speakers, regardless of their social, political appointment, work position or level of education; the next level are those within the French elite, including clergy, politicians, intellectuals; and at the bottom of the hierarchy are those who belong to the urban working-class--the speakers of *joual*.

In order to understand the effect that the Quiet Revolution and *joual* had on Quebecois literature, the reader needs to understand the difference between the terms French-Canadian and Quebecois. This study compares two writers from Quebec during the same time period; one considered to be French-Canadian and the other Quebecois. The comparison is made between the works of Paul Toupin, French-Canadian and of Gratien Gélinas, Quebecois.
Paul Toupin was a writer from Quebec who considered himself a French-Canadian writer rather than a Quebecois writer. He preferred to write in the classical French style and to use characters and settings that were non-Canadian and non-Quebecois in nature. Gélinas and Toupin are writing during the same period, however their preferred writing styles and themes are very different.

According to many historians of Quebecois literature, the play Tit-Coq by Gratien Gélinas, published in 1948 constitutes the birth of modern theater and dramatic arts in Quebec and is «la vraie pièce de théâtre populaire que le public attendait » (Gélinas 1). He wrote about the Quebecois people and their struggles with many of his characters speaking in a colloquial French heavily interspersed with Anglicisms. Although Gélinas’ plays were not written fully in joual, as were those by Michel Tremblay, they were far removed from the elegance of classical French.
CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF QUEBEC AND ITS THEATER

Theatrical works produced in Quebec during the 1960s and 1970s were different from those written in preceding decades and the preceding two centuries. Before the onset of the Quiet Revolution the major themes in Quebec literature were Church sanctioned views on religion and the family.

The change in the look and feel of literary works produced in Quebec during the period beginning in the 1960s, also referred to as the Quiet Revolution, took place on several levels. One of the major changes was the use of the spoken language of Quebec, referred to as joual, used in a written form. Another major change to Quebec literature was the «desire to reject all remnants of the colonial past, including the elitist influence of French language and literature» (Moss, “Playing with History” 337). It became important to present the lives of everyday people in their natural setting. One important factor in the creation of this authenticity was to have the people speak on paper as they were in person.

The change in language used in the writing of these works was based on a desire to give a voice to the French-speaking population of Quebec by having them speak in their dialect. Up to this point in time, the literature read, written and taught came from France, the former motherland of the French-speaking population of Quebec. Due to the majority of literary works coming from outside of Quebec, there was a lack
of national identity within its literature. In an article by Lise Gauvin and
Emma Henderson, “From Octave Crémazie to Victor-Lévy Beaulieu:
Language Literature and Ideology” they discuss the idea of this lack of
national identity for French-speakers in Quebec and quote the poet
Octave Crémazie and his thoughts on this issue:

Ce qui manque au Canada, c’est d’avoir une langue à lui. Si nous
parlons iroquois ou huron, notre littérature vivrait.
Malheureusement, nous parlons et écrivons, d’une assez piteuse
façon il est vrai, la langue de Racine et de Bossuet… Je le répète, si
nous parlions huron ou iroquois, les travaux de nos écrivains
attireraient l’attention du vieux monde… On se pâmerait devant un
roman ou un poème traduit de l’iroquois, tandis que l’on ne prend
pas la peine de lire un livre écrit en français par un colon de
Québec ou de Montréal. Nous avons beau dire et beau faire, nous
ne serons toujours, du point de vue littéraire, qu’une simple colonie
(31).

This lack of national identity was deeply rooted in the history of Quebec. It
began with the abandonment of this group by France and then the desire
of the British to completely eradicate all vestiges of French heritage
through domination and repeated bids of forced assimilation. The goal of
the British was for the French to conform to the English ways by accepting
their laws, language and culture.

The history of Quebec set the stage for the Quiet Revolution. Since
the arrival of the first French settlers from France into New France in the
early 1600s, the geographic area of Canada which is now the province of
Quebec, French was first the dominant language and subsequently
became the language of the dominated. The change in authority from
French to English put the French-speakers in an inferior position, at first
simply because of their spoken language but ultimately due to the
distance and communication breakdown with their motherland. The
physical distance between France and its former North American colony
caused a change in the French dialects spoken over the next two
centuries. The French spoken by the people in Quebec by the 1960s
again placed them in an inferior position due to the views of the elites,
those of the Church and the men of letters and culture, within both France
and Quebec.

The British and their language become the dominating forces on
the Quebec French from the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, with the
signing of the Treaty of Paris, until the early 1960s. From this point in
history, the domination over the French-speakers in Quebec was not only
by the English, but also by the Church. This control took a toll on the
French-speaking Quebec society who, after two hundred years of
domination, would quietly break free by staging what is now referred to as
the Quiet Revolution. This revolution, which begins in 1960, is
categorized as both a political and a social revolution with the
secularization of the French-speaking population through the rejection of
past values in favor of liberal ideas intertwined with a renewed sense of
nationalistic fervor.

The Church, synonymous with the French-speaking population of
Quebec, always had a religious and de-facto political control over the
private sphere including the education of those who belonged to the
Roman Catholic faith. This control included but was not limited to the content of theatrical works, those from within Quebec and from foreign countries, including France. This religious control created a second colonizer of the French-speaking inhabitants of Quebec and it has been argued that this group of people were not only «colonisé but catho-colonisé» an expression coined in 1966 in an article by Quebecois writer, Pierre Maheu, “Le Dieu canadien français contre l'homme Quebequois” (Dunnett 119).

The clergy were always considered part of the elite and were dubbed the «élite clérico-bourgeoisé» due to their collaboration with the ruling class—whenever they may have been at a particular moment in time.
The Church has been blamed for the perpetuation of the inferiority of the French-speaking population because of their acceptance and complicity with «their British rulers in exchange for the right to exert sole control over French Canadians in the area of religion and education» (Dunnett 119). The Church’s power was far reaching and this power dominated the literary world as well—controlling what the writers could ultimately publish and what they could present to the public. Due to this control, the theater in Quebec did not have the chance to flourish on its own merits.

In 1927 a pastoral letter was published by «les Pères du premier concile du Québec» who decreed the following:

Si donc des amusements, honnêtes mais payants, ne sont pas permis les dimanches et les jours de fête, même si on les organise pour servir à la charité et à la religion, que ne faut-il pas penser et
dire de certains amusements, d'une moralité douteuse, qui offrent habituellement un aliment aux passions et qui n'ont d'autre but que de satisfaire la cupidité de quelques hommes qui veulent s'enrichir le dimanche encore plus sûrement que la semaine ? Il s'agit, en particulier, des représentations théâtrales et cinématographiques, que remplacent pour plusieurs l'édifiant spectacle de nos offices liturgiques et qui se donnent chez nous, le dimanche et les jours de fête, au mépris de nos lois ecclésiastiques et civiles. Vous savez tous, Nos très chers frères, que l'commerce est défendu le dimanche. Or, ces représentations, par leur multiplicité et leur allure d'opérations financières et industrielles constituent aujourd'hui une véritable profanation du jour du Seigneur que la conscience catholique ne peut pas tolérer (Laflamme and Tourangeau 279).

In the eyes of the Church it was necessary to use all methods available in order to have certain works disappear: «ces œuvres si peu conformes à notre esprit chrétien et à nos traditions nationales» (Laflamme and Tourangeau 280).

Theater taught and presented up until the 1960s was predominantly plays and literary works from France. Although the theater and its content was a concern to the Church, it had always been included in the school curriculum. However, their opposition to public theatrical presentations containing themes contrary to the Church’s moral teachings failed to allow the theater to expand throughout the French-speaking society due to their censorship over the previous 350 years.

Paradoxically, it is the clergy and their enthusiasm for the use of theater as a pedagogical tool that brought knowledge and appreciation of the arts to their students. This appreciation for the arts brought about the growth of the French language theater in Quebec. In 1937 Father Émile Legault was given permission by the Church hierarchy to found a theater
group, Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent, at the Collège de Saint Laurent in order to explore and perform a religious repertory of plays. Although Father Legault was bound by the Church to limit the plays to religious themes, it was the start of a change that would continue, slowly at first, and then would explode in the 1960s.

The year 1606 marks the beginnings of the theater «d’expression française au Canada» and between 1646 and 1694 there were many plays by Corneille presented (Godin and Mailhot 20). The Tartuffe Affair, as it is known, marked the end of the theater in 1695, for a century, because of the prohibition by the Church to allow such plays to be presented to the people. Censorship was the new norm in Quebec and it wasn’t until 1792 when plays by Molière, considered appropriate by the Church, were once again given permission to be presented. Theater is reestablished with the building of the Royal Theater in Montreal in 1825. The theater would see a golden age from 1895 to 1910, until the Church began to control the content of the theater once again (Godin and Mailhot 20).

Rebellion and revolution connected to the theater and the arts was not confined only to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. In 1948 a group of artists, painters and writers, wrote and published a manifesto entitled Refus Global. This manifesto was the condemnation of the «clerical obscurantism and narrow-mindedness of the social and political system» and was a call for artistic freedom (Nardocchio 22). Religious, education
and political groups harshly reprimanded many of those who were brave enough to sign this manifesto, simply for having the gall to question their authority.

However, by 1967 with the help of the Quiet Revolution, the theater was once again in full force in Montreal with twenty-seven permanent theater companies, hundreds of music halls, fifty art centers throughout the province of Quebec and 300,000 spectators (Godin and Mailhot 27). It is not the theater that is new to Quebec, but rather it is the form, function and language used within the plays that change with the Quiet Revolution. The majority of shows and plays in the late 1960s were presented in the French language.

Beginning in the 1920s and expanding in the 1940s, with the introduction of new forms of entertainment, namely movies, radio and television, the theater was no longer the Church’s sole target of immoral behavior, but only one of the many forms of unholy entertainment. The Church continued to monitor the theater community with the focus becoming the defense of and the upholding of the bon théâtre and the elimination of the mauvais théâtre-- a subversive form of theater contradicting Church doctrine.

The definition of the mauvais théâtre according to the Church was «les spectacles corrupteurs offerts par les théâtres et les cinémas» and those from other countries: « Un vent de sensualisme souffle des pays étrangers sur notre chère patrie» (Laflamme and Tourangeau 276). The
mauvais théâtre according to the Church was one which was «incompatibles avec les principes catholiques» manifesting itself in the abuses seen and most commonly denounced, vices such as drinking, smoking, fornication and failure to attend mass (Laflamme and Tourangeau 276). Also, any play performed on a Sunday was also seen as a sign of the mauvais théâtre.

The bon théâtre was easier to understand and to define because it was a form of theater which upheld the Church doctrine—Passion plays and other such religious works. Even these religious works ran into some trouble when they took too much creative license as deemed by the Church. In 1902 the Church denounced the play, La Passion, by Germain Beaulieu because an actor brought the character of Jesus Christ to life. It was only after the playwright threatened to cancel the showing that the Church allowed the play to be presented. Even though the Church allowed the play to be performed, the Archbishop of Montréal, not wanting to detract from this enterprise, deemed it necessary to issue a statement explaining the reluctance yet allowance of this presentation: «Des engagements onéreux les liaient [Daoust et Beaulieu] pour un temps déterminé, l’élan était donné. Par prudence et par charité, nous avons dû tolérer» (Legris et al. 57). La Passion attracted over 35,000 spectators over a period of three weeks to Montréal, an unprecedented record.

The 1960s was a period of immense change, not only in Quebec, but also around the world with the fight for the rights of African-Americans
in the United States and the decolonization of many African countries. At the same time the Church began the process of modernizing itself with the opening of the Vatican II conference called for by Pope John XXIII. The changes brought about by this conference would help bring about changes in the literary world because this change in thinking by the Church allowed for a greater tolerance and ‘religious freedom’ for its followers. The Council declared the following on its essential teaching and their definition of ‘religious freedom’:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits (Mirus).

There was a discrepancy in the interpretation of the definition of this new freedom between the Church’s followers and the Church hierarchy. The followers were more liberal in their understanding of what it meant to be a Catholic but the embrace of these new changes helped the speed with which secularization took place. The Church, little by little, lost its total domination over the daily lives of its parishioners, but managed to maintain some control over the educational sphere.

The Quebec government started a modernization process in the 1960s by taking over the responsibility for education, health and social services from the Church. With the creation of the Ministry of Education, the authority over the educational system was transferred to the State.
However, after negotiations between the Church and the provincial government, it was decided that the education system would remain denominational with the creation of Protestant and Catholic school boards. The Ministry of Education would run these school boards, but the respective religious institutions involved in each school board would be responsible for the denominational aspects of the education system. In the schools under the tutelage of the Catholic school boards, the students received Catholic religious instruction. Those under the control of the Protestant school boards, who accepted students of all faiths, provided moral instruction. The public education school boards remained divided on religious grounds in Quebec until the 2000s.

Education for the French-speaking population of Quebec was seemingly not as important as to the English-speaking population and this meant that the French-speakers as a whole were not as well educated in comparison with their English counterparts. This lower level of education had several adverse effects on the French-speaking population, their lower social standing being one of them. This lack of education placed many of the French-speaking population in the urban working-class rather than the business and managing class. The domination of the English-speaking population over the French-speaking population infiltrated every aspect of society. Language was also one of the factors in keeping the French-speakers in Quebec in an inferior social position within the English controlled economy, but also within the Church.
One of the changes put in place with Vatican II was the allowance of Mass to be said in the vernacular. This change allowed the people to become active participants in their religious life. The effect of this change trickled into all aspects of life, including literature. Writers and playwrights began to utilize the spoken language of Quebec, joual, into their works, which in turn meant the inclusion of everyday Quebecois in these new literary works. The Quiet Revolution infused a newfound vigor into the dramatic arts.

The Quiet Revolution started in the 1960s but the reason for this revolution was tied to the previous period—the years under the regime of the Premier of Quebec, Maurice Duplessis. This period of time in Quebec was referred to as ‘duplessisme’. The thirty-year reign of Duplessis was one of ultra conservatism and a rejection of contemporary values. The Church, and their agreement with Duplessis' policies, played a major role in his government. By actively participating and collaborating with Duplessis' government the Church was able to maintain their domination over the private sphere. The government kept control over the public sphere and in this way controlled all other aspects of daily life of the Quebecois, including the economic and political components. Consequently, this period in time is referred to as les années noires and la grande noirceur.

Jean Lesage, elected as Premier of Quebec in 1960, was the complete opposite of Duplessis because he believed in allowing the
population to have control over their own lives. His slogan for the French-speakers in Quebec was «maîtres chez nous» and he began his tenure by empowering the people to take their lives and destinies into their own hands. He did this by broadcasting the message to the French-speaking people of Quebec that they should not be content to be second-class citizens. Lesage wanted the people to be part of the development of a new socio-political-economic situation. The government of Lesage became the symbol of what is referred to as «l'affirmation de soi» (Belanger).

The French-speakers in Quebec were tired of belonging to a lower social class than their English-speaking counterparts and after more than two hundred years of domination they were ready for a change. The period of time marked by the Quiet Revolution brought with it a sovereignty movement--political parties and organizations whose ultimate goal was to separate from Canada and create a new French only country within Canada. The most important of these newly created groups were: Front de libération du Québec (F.L.Q.) and the Parti Québécois (P.Q.). The dream and ultimate goal of these two groups was to create a sovereign French-language nation in order for the French-speaking population to live in a society not dominated by another group. The language issue being an extremely emotional one spurred them to violence. The F.L.Q., an extremist organization that condoned terrorism, captured the attention of everyone in Quebec, Canada and the world on
October 17, 1970 when they kidnapped and subsequently murdered Pierre Laporte, Vice-Premier and Minister of Immigration and Labor of Quebec (pq.org). This act of terrorism caused the invocation of the war measures act in the city of Montreal by the Prime Minister of Canada at the time, Pierre Trudeau.

This emotional battle over the use of the French language is one that took place over many centuries. The first settlers arrived from France at the beginning of the 17th century and by 1754 the census estimated the French-speaking population to be approximately 55,000, in sharp contrast with the one million British settlers in North America during this same period. The population difference between the British and the French was of great importance with the end of the Seven Years War in 1763. This event was the major turning point for the French in Quebec. The victory of the British over the French and the signing of the Treaty of Paris would change the French path forever. The signing of this treaty was the abandonment of the French in Quebec by France; it handed over the French settlement of New France and all its inhabitants to Great Britain. In an article published in 1988 by Léon Dion, “The Mystery of Quebec”, he cites the description of the revolutionary novelist, Hubert Aquin, on this great loss for the French in Quebec who found themselves suddenly orphaned and completely cut off from their motherland:

French Canada, that tired and weary culture, has for a long time been going through an interminable winter; whenever the sun breaks through the ceiling of clouds which take the place of the sky,
the feeble and dispirited sick man fancies that spring is on the way again. French-Canadian culture, which lies moribund for long periods, frequently revives, only to sink back again into its former moribund state, and its existence is thus a continual alternation between revival and relapse (287).

At the time of the hand-over of New France to the British, the population disparity between the British and the French gave the British the false sense of the ease with which they would be able to assimilate their new subjects. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 declared that all French Civil law be abolished in favor of British law in order to weaken the rights of the French. The British tolerated Catholicism but its existence was not legal. In order to maintain economic and authoritative domination over the French, the British established the Sermon Test. This test stated that if you were a member of the religion of Rome that you were not allowed to hold any government office or be employed by the State. Unfortunately for the British, because of the stubbornness of the French and their attachment to their language and culture, this proclamation did not work in the way they had hoped. In 1774 the British were forced to establish the Quebec Act that incorporated both English and French laws. This incorporation helped the French-speakers by allowing them to maintain their culture and language.

In the 1960s, two hundred years after the first attempts by the English to assimilate the French, over six million people in Quebec considered themselves native French-speakers. They managed to win the
struggle to maintain their language and culture but they remained economically and socially inferior because of their refusal to abandon their language.

Canada, at the federal level of government, is an officially bilingual country, English and French. At the provincial level the official language of most provinces and territories is English with only one province, New Brunswick, having both English and French, and Quebec having only French as the official language. According to the Canadian government’s 2011 official census published by Statistics Canada, the population of Canada is 34,728,400 with approximately ten million French-speakers across Canada and seven million of those living in Quebec (2011 Census). These statistics show that the French-speaking population of Canada is almost one-third of the Canadian population with the majority living in Quebec.

The bulk of these French-speakers (in Quebec) do not speak English fluently, do not read English nor watch English television programs which is why French language literature, theater and broadcast arts (radio and television) are of such importance. The French-speakers want and need to have a literature they can relate to.

The establishment of a national literature was important, but the goal of establishing this new form of literature would bring with it many problems and quarrels. The main quarrel would be the use of the spoken dialect of joual in its written form.
CHAPTER 2

FRENCH-CANADIAN OR QUEBECOIS

Part 1

DEFINITION OF THE TERMS FRENCH-CANADIAN AND QUEBECOIS

What the Quiet Revolution helped to achieve culturally for the intellectuals, artists and writers of French Canada, was the possibility to look within the society and air its ills. The *Parti Pris*, a radical review founded in 1963, had as their goal to denounce the Quebec literary past and to liberate, as well as, create a new sense of identity. Although some attempts had been made to create a national Quebecois literature, these were failed attempts of little significance:

Because of its supposed colonial tendency to lean heavily on French influences, all this earlier literature retained the designation French-Canadian; the new literature from the mid-sixties on was termed ‘québécois’ (Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay* 13).

In order to understand the difference between the terms French-Canadian and Quebecois, it is important to have an understanding of the evolution of these terms and the emotional ramifications involved. During the 1960s the term French-Canadian is replaced by the term Quebecois to denote someone of French heritage from Quebec. The change in the meaning between the terms French-Canadian versus Quebecois is due to a societal uprising by the French-speakers.

With the creation of new political parties in the early 1960s calling for the independence of Quebec from Canada, the term Quebecois would
become tantamount with this movement. The term Quebecois would become a politically charged term in all aspects of Quebec society including within the literary world. The demarcation between those calling themselves French-Canadian writers versus Quebecois writers would also denote a difference in political views and their feelings towards what should be the French standard in Quebec.

The change in this term is both political and cultural. On the political side, it denotes a desire to separate from the rest of Canada and have control over all issues including declaring French as the official and only language of Quebec. The cultural change is more complicated because the French-speaking elites are at odds with each other on the subject of the state of the language itself. The argument that ensues amongst the literary elite is a renewed call for a unified view on the use of the French language. For the elites and the men of letters they are pushing to make International French the standard.

The debate regarding which variation of the language to use in education is not a new fight, but in the 1950s a growing number of campaigns spring up calling once again for the usage of a «good French». «Le bon langage» is a push for the use of International French over the French of Canada or Quebecois French. According to an article published in the 1990s by Claude Verreault, “Français international, français québécois ou joual: quelle langue parlent donc les Québécois” there are three varieties of French used in Quebec by three different social classes:
1) français international used by the elites and those in the upper echelons of society, 2) français québécois (Canadian French) used in the urban settings and 3) joual used mostly in rural areas but also includes the urban working-class of Montreal (120).

Many linguists, and those within the literary elite, felt that Canadian French included too many words and sayings, no longer used in International French, and Anglicisms. For those reasons these groups felt that it was inappropriate to maintain this deformed language in the schools or to allow it in literary works. Their mandate was to promote the use of «bon langage» and to adopt International French as the normative standard for Quebec and its people.

In 1958, l’Association canadienne des éducateurs de langue française, ended its conference on the state of the spoken language and made the following declaration: «C’est dans la mesure où la langue française se conformera aux critères de la France qu’elle permettra au groupe canadien-français de prendre sa place parmi les nations civilisées» (Gauvin, *Parti Pris* 59). This statement angered many, including writer Gratien Gélinas, who felt that a language should not be forced upon someone.

The argument relative to which language to adopt as the normative standard was not resolved and the groups splintered into those who preferred to write using «bon langage», also known as International French, versus those who sided with the majority of the speakers of
French who wanted a compromise between these two extremes. Neither extreme of the language, International French or *joual*, should be considered as the normative standard and nobody should insist on the use of «la langue du grand siècle» (Gauvin, *Parti Pris* 61).

The moderates on this issue took the position that «sans prétendre parler le français aussi bien qu’on le parle en France, [sic] sont contents de ce qu’ils appellent la langue canadienne» (Gauvin, *Parti Pris* 62). Those who are in agreement with this more moderate stance accept the fact that it is possible to enrich a language with the inclusion of regional idioms. The language issue also spills over into the political forum with the creation of political parties such as the Parti Québécois whose goal is to separate from Canada based solely on language issues.

The use of the term Quebecois or Quebecoise in opposition to using French Canadian becomes a politically charged issue for all French-speaking people living within the geographic boundaries of the province of Quebec as well as those living in other Canadian provinces. The language debate becomes one that completely pits not only the French-speakers against the Quebec Anglophones, but also divides the French-speaking community. Even for some French-speakers from Quebec, separating from Canada and splitting up families with hundreds of years of history over linguistic differences does not make sense. For those Quebec French-speakers who are not in favor of the separation of Quebec from Canada, they prefer to be called French-Canadian. The term French-
Canadian is also used for all other French-speaking Canadians distributed throughout Canada. It is due to the debate regarding which variety of French to use as well as the politicization of the language that differentiates the two terms. For the segment of the French-speaking population who are against separation, the term Quebecois is seen as pejorative while at the same time French-Canadian is too generic because it lacks a true description of that person’s origins.

In literary terms, those who would prefer to maintain a tie with France and use the rules of language denoted by the official language body of France, L’Académie de la langue française, favor the term French-Canadian. For those on the opposite side of this language debate, they agree that there is more than one dialect that falls under the French language banner and would prefer to be referred to as Quebecois. Two authors who fit the French-Canadian versus Quebecois description are Paul Toupin, who considered himself French-Canadian and whose works are considered «littéraire» in opposition to Gratien Gélinas who has been given the label Quebecois and whose works are considered «populaire» (Cellard 51). These two writers are part of the Quebec literary scene just prior to the Quiet Revolution.
Paul Toupin was a dramatist and scholar born in Montreal in 1918 to a privileged family. During his formative years Toupin studied at Jean-de-Brébeuf College and went on to study at La Sorbonne in Paris, Columbia University, and finally received his Ph.D. from the University Aix-Marseille (“Paul Toupin”). Upon returning to his native Montreal he begins his writing career. He is best known for his plays and literary criticism produced in the classical French tradition, a pre-established and accepted way of writing.

In the years right after the Second World War most French-speaking writers from Quebec chose to write about people and places from within their socio-linguistic community. However, this was not the case with Toupin who preferred to set his dramas outside of Quebec and even outside of the present day. Toupin’s work focused primarily on relationships and their complexities. The focus of his topic is not unusual, but what sets him apart is that he chose to put his characters and their stories in less contemporary settings.

This choice can be observed in his trilogy, Théâtre, which includes his plays Brutus, Le Mensonge and Chacun son amour. His play Brutus (1952), as the title implies, tells the story of Caesar and Brutus, which revolves around their relationship of friendship and betrayal and set during the time that they were living. Another play in the trilogy, Le Mensonge
(1960), portrays what happens to a relationship when there is a lie between a husband and wife set during the Middle Ages. The third play of this trilogy *Chacun son Amour* (1955) is again a play about a relationship set in a nondescript location and time.

None of Toupin’s plays deal with any Quebecois themes in terms of characters and settings. When discussing Quebecois versus non-Quebecois themes, it is important to note that love, fidelity and deceit are universal themes and belong in all literature, but it is the settings, characters and language style used, which differentiates French-Canadian from Quebecois. A Quebecois theme is a story that takes place in a town in Quebec and revolves around contemporary, possibly political issues of the day; a story that a present-day audience can identify with clearly.

The comparison made between Toupin’s writings and those of his contemporaries is not only based on the classical writing and themes that he prefers, but the language and tone with which he writes «et son langage aristocratique» (Cellard 52). This is what Toupin had to say about Canadian Theater:

> Voilà une question à laquelle seuls peuvent répondre les directeurs de théâtre. Trois de mes pièces ont été «créées» ; deux, inédites, ont été refusées, surtout par ceux qui réclament à grands cris du théâtre canadien, la condition *sine qua non* tant que la pièce doive être d’abord «canadienne», car le nationalisme en art a, au Canada, préséance sur l’art même, en vertu de ce faux principe que l’art doit être, ce qu’était votre première question, le reflet d’un milieu, d’une époque (*Théâtre Canadien-français* 736)
Several of Toupin's works are produced and presented in Quebec through various media: in the theater (Brutus), on the radio (Le Mensonge), and on television (Chacun son amour and Son dernier rôle). Toupin receives many prizes and accolades from the literary community for his works. He receives two prizes from Canada, one for his play, Brutus, for which he is awarded the Prix de littérature de la Province du Québec and the Governor General’s Award for his essay Souvenirs pour demain. Toupin receives a second award for the aforementioned essay from l'Académie française, for the best work in French by someone outside of France.

Although many of his works are produced in Quebec and presented to an audience through the medium of television or radio, Toupin’s plays are rarely performed on a stage in front of a live audience, because Canadian and Quebecois theatergoers would prefer to see plays dealing specifically with Canadian and Quebecois themes (“Biography- Toupin, Paul). The failure of his plays to attract and keep the attention of theater going audiences is attributed by critics due to the fact that he doesn’t seem to be able to make any kind of connection with this audience: «Dans le théâtre de Paul Toupin, on ne trouve pas de ces signes de l’échange entre l’auteur et son public. Ses pièces sont comme un musée où le spectateur n’est pas admis» (Laroche 178).

According to some literary critics, Quebecois audiences seem to prefer to watch or read works in which they can see themselves, their
reality, and their society through characters that reflect their lives rather than leaving them feeling cold and unconnected. They would like to see characters that are multi-dimensional and really alive unlike those of Paul Toupin that audiences tend to think of as one-dimensional (Laroche 179).

Part 3

QUEBECOIS: GRATIEN GÉLINAS

Gélinas was born in 1909 in Saint-Tite-de-Champlain, a town located in the Laurentian Mountains, three hours north of Montreal. Gélinas was considered one of the founders of modern Canadian theater and film who paved the way for the writers who came of age during the Quiet Revolution. His main theme is the common man and his life within Quebecois society. This personification of the common man gave a voice, at home and abroad, to French-Canadian culture, which will be renamed Quebecois during the Quiet Revolution. His classical studies provided him a foundation in all the dramatic and literary arts, but his number one love was the theater. He founded a theater troupe in 1931 called the Troupe des anciens du Collège de Montréal (“Gratien Gélinas”).

In 1937, while working for a Montréal radio station, Gélinas created a character named Fridolin, «a naive, resourceful, softhearted but cynical young Montréalais» who becomes the main character in his most well known play Tit-Coq, written in 1948 (Mailhot). The creation of this character pays tribute not only to the Quebecois sensibility of culture and
family, but also incorporates many aspects of the culture such as the monologue. Yves Bolduc, a professor at the University of Moncton, wrote this in regards to the life and theater of Gélinas: «Il est celui qui a donné l’élan du renouveau, qui a ouvert la voie à un théâtre véritablement québécois, un théâtre dont les situations, les personnages et la sensibilité ne soient pas empruntés ailleurs» (Théâtre Canadien-français 475).

The use of a French-Canadian theme and character used in the play Tit-Coq, which Gélinas bases on his popular radio character, places his main character within Quebec and his role in the Second World War. The show of recognition of the place and effort of the Quebeccois during this war gave people the sense of pride that had not been seen within this cultural group. This newfound nationalistic pride stemmed from the portrayal of a strong Quebeccois character that survived the odds within his society.

The narrative of the principal character of the play, Tit-Coq, touched the hearts of many French-Canadians and was seen as the foundation of a new Quebeccois theater, one free from the «pious lies and false archetypes of traditional French-Canadian literature» (Usmiani, Michel Tremblay 5). The critic Laurent Mailhot said of this play when presenting a critique in 1980:

Vingt ans avant Tremblay ou Germain, Gratien Gélinas a préconisé pour le Québec un théâtre «national et populaire», suivant la double épithète mise à la mode par Jean Vilar en France. Prudent, habile, Gélinas prend soin de citer à l’appui de sa thèse une pléiade d’authorités : Claudel, Copeau, Ghéon, Giraudoux, Jouvet,
Barrault... Il se défend de vouloir bannir les œuvres étrangères. Il se réfère à plusieurs reprises au fameux passage de l’Échange sur le spectateur de théâtre qui «n’a point envie de s’en aller», avant d’établir un parallèle entre le «miroir» du théâtre autochtone (à créer) et les «portraits de la parenté», dorés et bien encadrés, qu’offre la dramaturgie étrangère ou universelle. Il faut les deux, conclut Gélinas, miroir et galerie de portraits, au théâtre comme à la maison (Gélinas 195).

In 1975, the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec officially changed its theater entry for Tit-Coq from French-Canadian to Quebecois, acknowledging its place in Quebec theater history. This change officially gave credence to Quebec theater as an «independent, national, cultural phenomenon» (Usmiani, Les Fridolinades). Although Tit-Coq is said to be the first Quebecois play because of its use of Quebecois themes and characters, it does not have the same socio-linguistic impact as the plays of Michel Tremblay, which are written completely in joual.

Gélinas touches upon some subtle changes within Quebecois society, but because he wrote this play a decade before the first rumblings of the Quiet Revolution, the Quebecois framework of his play maintained proper Church-sanctioned themes and depictions of the family. One of the leads in the play Tit-Coq is the priest in whom the title character confides and from whom he solicits advice regarding how to live a true and Christian life.

The main character of the play, Arthur Saint-Jean, alias Tit-Coq, is a child born out of wedlock and abandoned by his parents at an orphanage. Even though he makes references to himself as « un enfant
de l'amour» due to the mores and social constraints of that time, he is not allowed to be acknowledged or raised by his parents because he was not conceived under the right circumstances. The accident of his birth dictates that he cannot be loved by his parents, but rather that he must be given up to be brought up by others. The Church ultimately brings up Tit-Coq since all orphanages were under their control at this time. This is ironic since it is due to the teachings of the Church that his parents felt obligated to give up their child. The nuns care for Tit-Coq until he is old enough to live on his own. In Act 1 the play deals with Tit-Coq’s deep desire to have a family to call his own:

- Tit-Coq: Un bâtard, oui ! C’est bête, mais c’est comme ça. Cent pour cent. Né à la crèche, de mère inconnue et de père du même poil ! Élevé à l’hospice jusqu’à ce que je m’en sauve à l’âge de quinze ans. Je m’appelle Arthur Saint-Jean. Le prénom, je me demande où les sœurs l’ont pêché, mais «Saint-Jean» vient du fait que j’ai été baptisé le jour de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Oui, je suis un enfant de l’amour, comme on dit. Un petit maudit bâtard, si monsieur préfère. Seulement, vu que c’est bien peu de ma faute, y a pas un enfant de chienne qui va me jeter ça à la face sans recevoir mon point à la même place (17) !

The play is about love and family, but one could look at the theme of abandonment by both mother and father as an allegory of Quebec itself. A people abandoned by its Mother (France) and Father (England) and left to fend for itself within the confines of assimilation. The people of Quebec are the bastard children that no one really wanted or knew how to care for. Instead of taking responsibility for the children (the people) they had created, they preferred to leave them in the care of someone else. They
were left with someone who would care enough for them to survive, but not cared for or loved enough to allow them to flourish. Never left completely alone, but alone enough to lose respect for itself and never have a true sense of belonging. Gélinas was able to bring to life genuineness in his theater through the archetype of Quebec characters and by breathing life into them by allowing them to «express themselves in their own language rather than relying on an artificial stage idiom modeled after the classical French theater» (Usmiani, *Les Fridolinades*).

The use of *joual*, the spoken language of many rural and urban working-class families, is minimal in this play, but its use is something new to the literature being written at this time. The language used in this play falls more within the confines of what is described as Canadian French, a dialect that uses archaic sayings and words, sayings and words no longer used in International French, interspersed with phonetic spellings to relay the true Quebecois voice. The French used in this play was described by Quebec literary history, Samuel Baillargeon as «farci d’expressions non académiques [qui] a fait bondir les intellectuels» (qtd. In Cellard 50). It is mainly the characters of *le père* and *la mère*, the older generation, who use this language not considered to be part of International French.

One of the words repeatedly seen and heard in *Tit-Coq* is the Quebecois for *ici*, which is pronounced as *icitte*: «Le père (à Tit-Coq) Vous seriez pas parent avec des nommés Saint-Jean de par icitte, vous?» (29). There are also uses of some French words which have a supplemental
meaning in Quebec such as «plat», used to mean boring: «Tit-Coq: Si tu as envie de me faire rire avec tes farces plates, tu perds ton temps» (118).

The fact that Montreal is a bilingual city, is evident in Act II, Tableau VI when Tit-Coq is in a bar drinking with an English-speaking prostitute. The majority of this scene is written in both English and French without translation of either language. Rosie, the prostitute, speaks solely in English and Tit-Coq speaks in French with a few English phrases thrown in here and there. No translation is provided for either language because there is the implicit knowledge and expectation within the city of Montreal that the majority of French speakers have enough knowledge of English to understand some basic phrases. Although there is the expectation of the French-speaker to have some knowledge of English, there is no expectation on the part of the French-speaker that the English-speaker will have any knowledge of French. The English-speaker understanding some French is not a concern to anyone, because English is the language of money and power. This linguistic situation is made apparent in the conversation between Rosie and Tit-Coq:

- Rosie: Why don’t you speak English?
- Tit-Coq: Ça c’est de mes affaires. D’abord, penser à elle en anglais, ça me mèlerait les cartes. Mais t’en fais pas pour ça: entre nous, ce sera à chacun sa langue et à chacun sa religion. Ah! Et puis, tu aurais beau savoir le français d’un bout à l’autre et sens devant derrière, à quoi ça t’avancerait?...
- Rosie : Do you like me dearie ?
- Tit-Coq : Ah oui ! Very much ! Je te connais depuis une demi-heure et déjà je t’adore comme un vrai petit fou…(140).
This may seem like an odd scene to a reader who is not familiar with the linguistic culture and the daily interaction between the Anglophones and the French-speakers, but what this shows is a lack of respect by the Anglophones towards the French-speakers of Quebec.

There was an expectation by the Quebec Anglophones that the French-speakers should understand them, but the reverse courtesy was not necessary. The feeling in Quebec before the change in the language laws in 1977 was that if an Anglophone spoke a bit of French, they were considered bilingual. This bilingualism translated into higher salaries in the workplace. However, a French-speaker who spoke a little bit of English was not given the same consideration. In order for a French-speaker to be considered bilingual they had to be fluent in English.

Gélinas, because of the success of his plays and his inclusion of ordinary French-speaking Quebecois and their problems in his works, helped to define and shape this new Quebecois literature and theater. His many contributions and awards to this theater are why he is considered to be the father of modern Quebec theater.
INTRODUCTION

Born in 1942 into a working-class family in the east end of Montreal, the youngest of five children, Tremblay grew up in a financially poor yet culturally rich family. Surrounded by his mother and maternal grandmother throughout his childhood his literary career was aided by the great influence that both of these strong women on him. Although both lacked a formal education, they were voracious readers who passed along their passion for literature. The influence of these two women in his life is seen in the strong feminine characters that Tremblay writes about in his plays and in particular for the purposes of this study, Les Belles-sœurs.

The strong work ethic of his father, a linotypist, also influenced his early life and career choice. A talented student, Tremblay earned a prep school scholarship but decided that this was not the path for him and, at the age of 19, enrolled in the Institut des arts graphiques to become a linotypist like his father. His reason for dropping out of school was due to the fear of losing his authentic self if he became too educated. In an interview with a journalist from the London Times, Tremblay explained the reasons behind his decision to drop out of school: «I saw that if I stayed on at that school and then went to university, I would have to reject my roots, my background—to forget where I came from» (qtd. in “Michel Tremblay”).
Tremblay supported himself for several years as a linotypist while writing on the side. In 1964 he won a Radio-Canada competition for young authors with his play *Le Train*. Four years later, the Théâtre du Rideau Vert presented his play, *Les Belles-sœurs*. This play was an instant hit and catapulted Tremblay into the spotlight in Quebec and around the world. In 1973, *Les Belles-sœurs* was touted as the best foreign play of the season in France. With the success of this play, Tremblay realized that the audiences yearned for stories in which they were able to connect with the situations, the characters or the themes. He continued to write about the people and situations with which he was intimately familiar. He felt it was necessary to shine a spotlight on groups within society who until this time were rarely written about, such as women, homosexuals and the working-class.

Tremblay chose to highlight the transvestite and homosexual community of Montreal for a variety of reasons; one being that he was himself a homosexual. The realization at an early age that he was gay is what Tremblay says drove him to write about this group. It was a catharsis for him to put his feelings about himself and his surroundings on paper. In an interview he gave to the *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* he said this in regards to his reasons for writing:

> When you’re 12 and you sit and write something, it’s often about something you have to hide from the rest of society. I don’t know if you have this expression in English, but in French we say that we have to confide to the “white sheet”.

38
In 1975 he publicly came out about his sexual orientation when a television reporter asked him if he was homosexual and for the first time he honestly answered and publicly said yes (Burnett).

Another reason for writing about homosexuality and transvestism were the socio-political overtones and parallels that Tremblay saw between these groups. The symbol of homosexuality within literature was seen as fight for the liberation of a community as well as the recognition of a distinct people. The transvestite was the symbol of a lost identity and a parallel with the plight of the Quebec French-speakers within an English dominated society fighting to maintain their true identity, culture and language: «On est un people qui s’est déguisé pendant des années pour ressembler à un autre people. C’est pas des farces! On a été travestis pendant 300 ans» (Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay* 22).

Tremblay’s feelings of alienation were not only due to his upbringing and his sexuality, but also the exclusion he felt because of his linguistic heritage. As he became a prolific writer and began gaining recognition, he came to the realization that few French-speaking writers emerged from Quebec. The language issue was such a concern to Tremblay that he refused to allow English language productions of his plays in Quebec until 1976 when the Parti Québécois was voted into power. The Parti Québécois made many changes to the language laws to change the linguistic power from English to French. In 1977 they passed Bill 101, also known as the Charter of the French Language, declaring that
French was to be the only language allowed on commercial signs in the province, and with few exceptions the use of English was banned. On the education front, English was mostly restricted to children already in the educational system, their siblings, and people temporarily living in Quebec whose parents had received an English elementary education in Quebec (CBC). Only after the Parti Québécois came into power, a party whose goal was to maintain and elevate the French-language and culture, did Tremblay feel that the French-speakers in Quebec were given the recognition that they deserved.

Up until this period in the literary history of Quebec, the majority of French-language dramas read and taught in Quebec were primarily imported from France. Tremblay’s focus on language and his use of jōual in his writing brought about a dramatic change in how he presented his stories about these marginalized segments of the population to his readers. He was not as concerned as some other writers were, within the literary community, that jōual was unsuitable for literary expression and gave his characters an authentic voice by its use.

Part 1

WHY JÓUAL?

Giving an authentic voice to the people being represented in literature is important in order to reflect their true identity to the reader. The language in which the people are made to speak cannot be
overlooked. Jean-Marc Leger, a Montreal writer, journalist and ardent defender of the French language, writing during the Quiet Revolution, said this about the use of language:

Dans le premier cas, la langue est envisagée essentiellement comme un instrument de communication ; dans le second, elle est considérée d’abord comme un moyen d’expression, qui vient illustrer un mode de penser, de réagir, bref un mode d’être (qtd. in Larose 59)

Leger believed that language was not only a mode of communication, but was also a way of being, including a way of thinking and reacting to the situations with which individuals and societies are faced with. A language is a people and a people are their language.

Tremblay began using joual when writing about the Montreal working-class exactly for the reasons which Leger states. Language is not only a way of communicating externally, but it is also an internal unspoken connection between people within the same linguistic community. The appeal of the use of joual for Tremblay was the immediacy of recognition for and by this distinct society within Quebec and the Francophone world.

The criticism that Tremblay would receive from the literary world was somewhat of a shock to him, as his first intention was not necessarily political, rather just a way of telling the story of a particular group in a theatrical manner. In an interview on Radio-Canada in 1981 Michel Tremblay explained his reasons for starting to use joual in his works:

Je n’avais pas de rapport spécial [avec le langage], c’est-à-dire que j’étais presque à moitié dans l’inconscience jusqu’à ce que les Belles-sœurs soit jouée, c’est-à-dire que j’ai choisi [à] un moment
donné, un après-midi très précis de ma vie, j’ai choisi d’écrire en québécois, mais sans mettre le mot joual sur la langue que j’allais employer, ni le mot québécois et sans me poser de problème autre que celui : « essayons de restituer la parole d’une façon théâtrale ». […] Donc je me suis inventé un langage sur lequel que je me suis posé peu de questions jusqu’à ce qu’il me revienne dans la face (Larose 177).

The use of joual as Tremblay’s preferred language was in contrast to many other French language writers of his time. A number of writers were opposed to the use of this dialect in any form and felt very strongly against its use in literary works because of its status as a marginally accepted spoken language. Tremblay agreed that this dialect was not a standard form of French, but felt that it truly represented a large portion of Quebec society. By using joual to bring these voices to life for theatrical and reading audiences he gave his pieces a genuineness that had not been felt or read until that time.

Historians often describe the period of French history in Canada from 1840 until the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s as “the era of silence”. During this era of silence, in French-speaking villages across the province of Quebec, the written word was not shared with the common man. Only the priest, the doctor, and the lawyer had easy access to the written word. Because this group belonged to the French-speaking elite, they did not see the necessity for anyone outside of the group to have an understanding of either their spoken or written word. When they did
speak, they spoke «en termes», lofty elitist terms that excluded the general population (Sarkonak 9).

With the beginnings of urbanization in Quebec in the early 1900s, there was an awakening and the faint beginnings of desire by the French-speaking population to become included in all aspects of society. This inclusion took many years, but Tremblay recognized that in order for the French-speakers in Quebec and in particular those within the urban working-class to gain the recognition that they felt they deserved, they had to be depicted in a realistic way. This realism came by including them as subjects within Quebec literature and putting the spoken dialect of joual in writing.

In keeping with his socio-political leanings throughout his works, he also wanted to show how this inferior spoken dialect was hindering their path to economic and social freedom. Tremblay hoped that by using joual to depict the urban working-class in his plays, that this authenticity would provoke «une prise de conscience chez le spectateur» (Larose 239).

This «prise de conscience» was not limited only to literary works, but became part of the national psyche during the Quiet Revolution and the idea of «la québécité» was born. This term coined by the Quebecois writers, poets, linguists and politicians of the time, was used to describe the point of no return in the development of Quebec nationalism. It was «un esprit de libération» and the « conviction profonde que le Québec se
doit de tracer sa propre voie sur tous les plans» be it political, economic or linguistic (Haig 916).

The use of joual in writing was also a way of differentiating the Quebec French from other members of French-speaking populations included those pockets of French-speakers throughout Canada and throughout «la francophonie». The distinctiveness of both the language and the culture of the French-speakers of Quebec were obvious to them, but they wanted to show that those differences should be embraced rather than deemed inferior to that of France. The French-speakers of Quebec wanted to show that they could be and had the same rights as the French to be passionate about their language and culture. The Quebecois felt that their language was not only « un moyen de communication, mais une impulsion téléologique» (Haig 916).

This teleological impulse included safeguarding the language because of its cultural and social ramifications. Language is not only a means of communication but it is also a way of transmitting and actualizing the aspirations of a minority who have fought assimilation, or have felt the fear of assimilation (Haig 916). One way of transmitting these aspirations and in turn safeguarding a language is through writing, be it poems, songs, novels, or plays.

Tremblay was able to show internal and external differences of the French Quebecois by bringing language and culture together through the use of literature and theater. He achieved this difference by melding
«dispossessed characters using a bastardized French of Montréalais joual» to «…not just mirror each other» but so «they are one another» (Sarkonak 13). The characters become one another because they are the text, through their contradictions and tensions placed upon a written page, that can be clearly defined as Quebecois versus French-Canadian versus someone from «la francophonie».

Tremblay was disappointed when his works were rejected by some critics for being, in their words, an attempt to bring the problems of «une petite partie de la société» to a larger group who were not interested in listening to this group speak in joual. For that matter, his critics felt that nobody wanted to hear them speak at all. Tremblay’s response to this criticism was simply to say «"Il n’y a pas seulement l’élite qui a des problèmes profondément humains" et qu’au théâtre on doit pouvoir dire, “je suis malheureux” autrement qu’un verre de martini à la main» (Larose 240).

The use of joual did not immediately bring Tremblay accolades from his colleagues or the Quebec government. Those that were against the use of joual in literature were able to block his success by using their administrative and political power. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Quebec wielded this power by refusing to give Tremblay a grant that would allow him to accept an invitation to present his play, Les Belles-sœurs, in Paris at the Festival du Théâtre des Nations. The same summer Tremblay’s request for a subsidy to help him fund some new work
was refused. All of these refusals were due in large part to Tremblay’s use of joual in his literature.

The «querelle du joual» became a fierce one when a manifesto was published in a Montreal newspaper, *La Presse*, entitled “Manifeste contre le joual”. The authors of this article attacked Tremblay indirectly, but it was obvious that Tremblay was their target. They singled him out by copying the style and words from *Les Belles-sœurs* when writing the following: «J’espère qu’y a autre chose dans mes pièces que c’te maudit langage-là. Ch’t’assez tanné d’en entendre parler» (Larose 242).

Tremblay was irritated by two things at this time: 1) by those who continued to denounce him for his use of joual and 2) by the campaign «de bon parler français», campaigns being led by the elites of the French-speaking Quebec society whose goal was to make International French the standard. Tremblay had a strong opinion about these campaigns being waged on the French language in Quebec: «Les campagnes de Bon Parler sont les choses les plus stupides qui existent» (Larose 243).

In order to clarify the global nature of the literature that Tremblay was writing he reflected on the state of literature and/or what people were writing, had written and hopefully would be allowed to write one day.

On n’empêche pas Tennessee Williams d’écrire aux Etats-Unis ni Marcel Pagnol d’écrire en France. Partout dans le monde, il y a une littérature dans la langue du peuple. Je ne renie pas la langue française pour autant. Les gens savent très bien pourquoi j’écris en québécois. […] Ça sert à rien d’écrire une pièce en français qui se passe nulle part (Larose 242).
The importance of language within a social dialogue is necessary because «l'état d'une langue reflète tous les problèmes sociaux» (Gauvin, *Parti Pris* 67).

Language and its usage are constantly evolving. This linguistic evolutionary process takes place through its people: their history, experience, geographic location and the social adaptations that they must make in order to survive. These changes that take place within a language should make it impossible for anyone to believe that the language of the French-Canadians was or could be the same as that of the French-Parisians. By looking at language in this way, Tremblay believed in «un vrai usage » rather than «un bon usage» (Larose 221). This authentic presentation of the language being spoken by people, the real use of the language, became Tremblay’s number one reason for using *joual* in his literature and believing in its appropriateness in this literary medium. In choosing to write plays in *joual*, there was an emphasis placed on the importance of the language of the people.

The difference between writing for the theater and writing a novel is that the ultimate goal of a play is for it to be presented to a live audience. In order to experience a people authentically it is important that they speak in their language or dialect. It is not only the words that are important, but also the manner in which they are presented. In order to achieve this genuineness of the people, the text must be written in the way that the person would really speak. If one changes the way that people speak, in
order to make the language conform to the unnatural rules of writing, there is immediately a change in the effect of the spoken word on the audience and the readers.

Writing is the graphic representation of speech. Writing is a standardized representation of communication with its set of rules and proper usage, and speech is a localized representation thereof. You cannot separate a people from its language; therefore the people are their language. In order to present a society authentically, they must be made to speak their language.
CHAPTER 4

LES BELLES-SŒURS

INTRODUCTION

This play is included in the study because it is considered to be the first Quebecois play completely written in *joual*. It also provides a female perspective on the plight of Quebecois women. Tremblay is able to provide an insider look into the lives and daily interactions of the typical Quebecoise from the east end of Montreal due to the fact that he grew up surrounded by strong-willed women belonging to this group.

The play focuses on fourteen working-class women who get together in the kitchen of the main character, Germaine Lauzon, a woman who has just won a million trading stamps. She invites her closest friends to help her stick the stamps onto redemption cards. The action of the play takes place completely in Germaine’s kitchen, and includes no men. The story that unfolds «is a complex analysis of the social, sexual and political concerns of the time» (Skallerup). *Les Belles-sœurs* runs the gamut of women’s issues and refers to taboos, such as sex and abortion, which were never discussed in public due to the influence of the Church.

The burden placed on women by the Church, as well as the socio-economic constraints due to their spoken language, is seen through the hopelessness described in the state of their quotidian lives. The language spoken by these women, places them on the lowest rung of the economic and social ladder as they are perceived to be uneducated and not able to
marry above their social status. In the French-speaking communities of Quebec, the Church is blamed for keeping the Quebecois in fear and shameful ignorance, and the British are blamed for their political and economic oppression (Moss, “Women, History and Theater” 977). This sense of inferiority is felt to a greater extent by women, due to the domination of the Church in their lives. The only expectation placed on women is to be good wives, and to bear as many children as possible. Tremblay brings the women’s problems and their feelings of hopelessness to the forefront, by allowing them to discuss all these issues within the confines of a play.

The works produced in and about Quebec prior to this time were mainly historical dramas. These «concentrated on the heroes glorified by the nationalist ideology of the clerico-political élite», which did not include women (Moss, “Women, History and Theater” 974). The Quiet Revolution brought about a change in the mindset of many readers, both men and women, who became willing to accept the idea of the changing role of women in society. Most men, and those in power, were not ready to be confronted with details of the mundane of women’s everyday lives. Before the era of the Quiet Revolution, Quebec literature portrayed historical male authoritative figures. However, with the beginning of a change in the literary themes and subjects, women were ready to be portrayed in a realistic way, not only as glorified heroines in historical dramas. In an article by Jane Moss in 1994, “Women, History and Theater in Quebec”,
she had said this on how women wanted to be portrayed in this new nationalistic literature:

It is particularly interesting to note that there has been no rush to dramatize the lives of Jeanne Mance, Marquerite Bourgeoys, Marie de l’incarnation—perhaps because these women have become symbols of the patriarchal ideals of female self-sacrifice and sexlessness. (976)

What women wanted to see, both on paper and on stage, was a true representation of their everyday lives. Tremblay was aware of this segment of the population, and understood them as a result of his experiences with strong women during his formative years. By writing about the plight of the average Quebecoise, Tremblay was not only including these women in his literature, but he was also gaining a new audience.

The Quiet Revolution had brought about many changes for women within society. However, for the Montreal urban working-class women, these changes did not make a rapid appearance. These women were acutely aware that they were on the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder. The accepted teachings of the Church also had a big effect on the women who belonged to it. They were taught, and felt obligated to accept, that their only role in life was to be a wife and mother—nothing else was expected nor encouraged. Not only did gender play a role on the social status of these women, but they were also hindered socially and economically due to their linguistic heritage, both French and joual. English continued to be the language of authority in Quebec until 1977
with the passing of Bill 101. This law made French the official language of Quebec, and from this point forward, French was elevated to a higher level. However, joual, continued to be perceived as a lazy and uneducated person’s version of French.

Tremblay wrote Les Belles-sœurs in 1965, and it was presented to an audience for the first time in 1968. The story is set in 1965, during the Quiet Revolution but before the French-speaking sovereignty political party, the Parti Québécois, came into power. There were many changes on the language front being made and still more on the horizon, but the majority of the French-speakers continued to be under the control of the English. The French working-class still struggled to become more than they were.

The debate over which French language standard should be used in Quebec continued during that period. It included the campaigns of «bon parler», which wanted to follow the standards of International French, versus the idea of allowing a Quebec French, with terms and words that were not part of International French.

The effect of the language spoken and the heavy burden placed on women by the Church is spotlighted in Les Belles-sœurs. The continued use of joual hindered the socio-economic mobility of the women within the Montreal urban working-class, even those within the French-speaking population. Joual in this play, combined with the awareness by the characters of their inferiority, provides an interesting perspective on its
cultural and economic effect. The role of language in, and the impact on, their lives can be seen throughout the play.

The safety and security of being part of the same linguistic community allow the women to speak freely. This freedom allows them to have a conversation without the fear of being judged because of their use of joual: «Ces dames partagent non seulement les mêmes préjugés, la même insignifiance significative, le même joual… mais les mêmes jurons, les mêmes tics» (Godin and Mailhot 197). It also allows them to speak without having to explain the true meaning of what they are saying to each other. They all process the language and its semantics through the same linguistic and societal filter.

This filter and common societal bond, allows them the freedom of language. They do not have to be worried about the «bon parler» amongst them because of the pragmatic competence of this group of women: «On tient à rester entre soi, à l’aise, déboutonné, familier; parler le même langage, réagir aux même allusions, colporter les mêmes ragots» (Godin and Mailhot 195).

Misery and hopelessness, combined with joual, are the common bond tying these women and their life stories together. The restless longing for better circumstances in the lives of the women in Les Belles-sœurs is presented to the audience through the use of language rather than action. Through monologues and conversations between the characters the audience gains insight into «the emptiness and misery of
their lives – lives of quiet or less than quiet desperation» (Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay* 33).

Part 1

CARNIVALIZATION

The definition of carnivalization of theater, as found in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin is « the liberating and subversive influence of popular humour on the literary tradition, the overturning of hierarchies in popular carnival—its mingling of the sacred with the profane, the sublime with the ridiculous ». The dialogue in *Les Belles-sœurs* can be defined in the same way. There are many aspects of the language and the way that it is presented that correlate with the definition of carnivalization. The mental picture that is conjured when thinking of a carnival or a circus is that of a big party with music, dancing and joke-telling presented side-by-side with death defying stunts and acrobatics. Often clowns are present to distract the audience as to the true danger present and to the possibility of tragedy or even death of a performer.

The use of *joual* can be looked upon as a form of carnivalization because it is a form of a language that can distract an audience from the presence of hopelessness. This distraction works exceptionally well if a member of the audience does not possess the knowledge of the true situation of that people, such as the women in *Les Belles-sœurs*. Laughter
is one such distraction that the characters in the play use to avoid the truth of their lives.

When the women in *Les Belles-sœurs* learn that Angeline Sauvé frequents the club where Pierrette Guerin works, they are incensed by this fact. They cannot believe that Angeline would step foot into the club: «Le Club! Un vrai endroit de perdition!» (77). Pierrette Guerin responds to the comment about the club by responding and laughing loudly, «Si l’enfer ressemble au club ousque j’t’travaille, ça m’fait rien pantoute d’aller passer mon éternité là, moé!» (78). Living one’s whole life without laughter and fun, definitely takes its toll on the way that one view’s the world.

Angeline Sauvé finally understands the need for laughter in her life and because of this new realization, she feels that she can be defiant in this new desire and tells the women: «J’ai appris à rire à cinquante-cinq ans! Comprenez-vous? J’ai appris à rire à cinquante-cinq ans! Pis par hasard!...j’ai compris c’que c’était que d’avoir passé toute une vie sans avoir de fun!» (81).

The gesture of laughter is described by Bakhtin as «the all-encompassing gesture and attitude which answers to the experience of ambivalence, while at the same time representing a basic ability of humankind that enables it to overcome ‘cosmic fear’» (Lachmann, Eshelman and Davis 130).

Both women, Pierrette and Angeline, understand that laughter in certain situations, especially those that are emotionally charged and
irrational, can only be dealt with through laughter. There is no amount of explaining or pleading that will make the cast of women believe that she is not causing any harm to her life or the life of others. By laughing about her particular situation, she is able to overcome the negative thoughts, which the other women have towards her.

Another aspect of carnivalization through the use of language, is the alternation between joy and sadness, and a desire to make the sad comedic. This aspect is seen in *Les Belles-sœurs* through the character of Rose Ouimet. She is described as someone who knows when to make the intolerable ridiculous. Two of the women at the stamp party talk about Rose, and how she can be insufferable, but always manages to make them laugh.

-Yvette Longpré: Est-tu folle, elle, hein? Est pas tenable dans les parties! A’donc le tour de nous faire rire!
- Gabrielle Jodoin: Ah! Pour ça, on a toujours eus du fun dans les parties, avec elle!
- Rose Ouimet: J’ai pour mon dire, que quand c’est le temps de rire, allons-y gaiement! Même quand j’conte des histoires tristes, j’m’arrange toujours pour les rendre un peu comiques…(39)

Although these women are living mundane lives, they understand the importance of having fun and laughing sometimes.

Part 2

LYRICISM AND MUSICALITY

Tremblay brings these women and the play to life through his use of language and its emotional ramifications. Language has both musical
and theatrical qualities, but neither music nor theater holds linguistic ones. That is to say, the theater in and of itself does not contain words or language; it only exists because of the existence of language. But through language, the theater can achieve a lyric quality, melodiousness through the art of expression.

The lyrical quality that joual brings to the conversations comes from the way that the language is pronounced in comparison to the «bon parler». One difference between joual and International French is its pronunciation. Joual has been criticized by many elites to be the lazy man’s French because of what is considered to be a lazy pronunciation. This laziness makes the dialect flow more than one that must follow a strict pronunciation guideline.

In order to understand the dialogue, the reader must pay special attention to the sound of the language by the way it has been written. This way of understanding a spoken dialect in writing is not only for the comprehension of joual, but is true of all dialects. When something has been written phonetically, the reader can no longer use the rules of reading in order to comprehend the words and must rely on the sound of the words for understanding. For example if one looks at the word «chus» it wouldn’t automatically be recognizable as the phonetic for «je suis», but if «je suis» was said as it would be in an informal conversation it would be understood as and recognized as «chus». Of course, some words spoken in the play and used in joual are not found in International French, but
regionalisms aside, most French speakers should be able to decipher a majority of the dialect.

The lyrical quality of *joual* is also found in the way that the characters are made to break out in song. This lyricism and rhythmic dialogue are introduced through the use of the characters of *Les Cinq Femmes* and *Les Quatre Autres*. The use of a chorus, is not only an element from a Greek tragedy, but is also used to represent the public to comment on and judge a dramatic situation (Jubinville 75).

In the Second Act, the women break out in song with an «Ode au bingo». As stated in the theater directions «Pendant que Rose, Germaine, Gabrielle, Thérèse et Marie-Ange récitent ‘l’ode au bingo’, les quatre autres femmes crient des numéros de bingo en contrepoint, d’une façon très rythmée» (86). The references to a chorus and the use of the word *ode*, both refer to techniques used in ancient Greek tragedies. The musical quality of this scene is also seen through the descriptions based on music terms: «ode», «récitent», «contrepoint», and «rythmée». These words are also part of the vocabulary used to describe classical religious music. The importance of this scene is a mix of the sacred with the profane, religion and religious fervor, combined with a game of chance.
Part 3

REPETITION OF WORDS AND IDEAS

Many of Tremblay’s plays are written in the tradition of the Theater of the Absurd, a genre of theater that exposes and explores the human condition. Absurd being man’s reaction to a world apparently without meaning because human existence seems to have lost its purpose for those involved. Many of the writing techniques employed in the Theater of the Absurd, such as the repetition of words and ideas, is a method employed by Tremblay in *Les Belles-sœurs*.

The repetition of words and ideas in *Les Belles-sœurs* are presented through monologues and choruses. The choruses are used to sing certain parts of the dialogue and to repeat phrases and ideas that have just been spoken by the preceding character. This repetition emphasizes the words and ideas that have been spoken. The repetition of the same words over and over is one way of showing that the words and what the words are trying to convey, have lost their meaning.

The repetition of sentences and words is seen throughout the play. This repetition puts an emphasis on certain aspects of the hopelessness of the women. For example, this hopelessness is brought to the forefront through the character of Marie-Ange Brouilette and her tirade about her dull existence: «Chus tannée de m’esquinter pour rien! Ma vie est plate! Plate! Pis par-dessus le marché, chus pauvre comme la gale! Chus tannée de vivre une maudite vie plate!» (22). The word «plat» or «plate»
in *joual* means dull. By having the characters repeat their tasks of drudgery emphasizes the tireless repetition, of everyday life and their lack of hope that something better is possible.

The continuation of the emphasis on this extremely dull life in *Les Belles-sœurs* is a continuation on the theme of Marie-Ange’s monologue, which gets repeated by the choruses of Les Quatre Autres and Les Cinq Femmes. The chorus begins by making statements about what they do all week and then to a character interjecting something boring or almost intolerable concerning their daily lives. This scene begins with Les Cinq Femmes declaring: «Une maudite vie plate! Lundi!», the following interjection by the character, Lisette de Courval is «Dès que le soleil…», then Les Quatre Autres start with «J’mê lève, pis j’prépare le déjeuner! Des toasts, du café, du bacon, des œufs». They discuss making lunch and then preparing dinner and then the chorus of Les Cinq Femmes chimes in: «Pis le soir, on regarde la télévision! Mardi!». And it all starts over again: «Dès que le soleil…» and then «J’mê lève, pis j’prépare le déjeuner. Toujours la même maudite affaire!» and then the evening is the same: «Pis le soir on regarde la télévision ! Mercredi!» (23-24). They continue in this fashion and make it through the full week ending with Sunday. Although Sunday is slightly different because they go out as a family, the evening still ends in its customary manner: «Pis on regarde la télévision! ». This chorus by Les Quatre Autres Femmes ends the same way as the monologue by Marie-Ange Brouillette «Chus tannée de mener
une maudite vie plate! Une maudite vie plate! Une maudite vie plate! Une maud…» (24). Whether the characters are talking about one day, or a whole week, everyday begins and ends the same way.

The lives of these women has a resemblance to other well-known characters from the Theater of the Absurd who can be described as automatons, Vladimir and Estragon in *En Attendant Godot* by Samuel Beckett. These two characters, DiDi and GoGo, are stuck in a routine and continually speak in clichés. (*Théâtre Canadien-Français* 602). Because they have become so set in their ways and have no expectation of change, they alternate from the beginning of the day to the end and back without questioning anything. It is as if the day never stops because it does not deviate and it always starts and ends the same way and one day becomes another without change as is seen in *En Attendant Godot*:

Vladimir: On s'est trompé d'endroit.
Estragon: Il devrait être là.
Vladimir: Il n'a pas dit ferme qu'il viendrait.
Estragon: Et s'il ne vient pas ?
Vladimir: Nous reviendrons demain.
Estragon: Et puis après demain.
Vladimir: Peut-être.
Estragon: Et ainsi de suite.
Vladimir: C'est à dire...
Estragon: Jusqu'à ce qu'il vienne ?
Vladimir: Tu es impitoyable.
Estragon: Nous sommes déjà venus hier.
Vladimir: Ah non, là tu te goures.
Estragon: Qu'est-ce que nous avons fait hier ?
Vladimir: Ce que nous avons fait hier ?
Estragon: Oui (21)
Everyday is a circle of dull existence, no beginning and no end. Just as for the women in *Les Belles-sœurs*, everyday is the same and those days become weeks, the weeks become years, without notice and devoid of real meaning.

Part 4

CURSING AND RELIGIOUS SWEARS

The use of swear words is a form of carnivalization of literature, making the sacred profane. In *Les Belles-sœurs* the women use profanity in the course of their daily lives without giving much thought to the words that they are actually using. The profanity used is mostly of a religious nature because the majority of swear words in Quebec are religious words used in a profane way. The disengagement between the characters use of these words and their strong feelings toward religion can be seen throughout the play.

There are three levels of French-Canadian/Quebecois/joual swear words: 1) the *juron*, considered to be an ordinary curse, includes the words maudit, bâtard and verrat ; 2) the *sacre* involves the use of a religious expression and is the most commonly used such as câlice, tabernacle, hostie, and; 3) the *blasphème* which is a combination of a *sacre* with the word maudit (Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay* 48).

The repetition and preponderance of a combination of all the swear words possible in *Les Belles-sœurs*, makes them lose the vulgarity and
inappropriateness, which should be felt by the use of these words. The loss of the offensiveness of these words amongst the women is due in part to their inclusion within the same language group.

Religion is an important part of these women's lives, but the religious swear of Quebec, which the women should not feel comfortable using, has become a natural and integral part of everyday speech. Even while Rose Ouimet is actively gossiping about everyone and describing her husband as a pig «Quand j’parle de cochon, là, j’parle de mon mari...Maudit cul!» the time on the clock suddenly reminds Rose that she needs to perform a religious ritual. The strength of the religious indoctrination is so strong, that acts of religion come naturally regardless of what was happening moments before.

-Gabrielle Jodoin: Aïe, y’est quasiment sept heures! Le chapelet!
-Germaine Lauzon: Mon doux, ma neuvaine à sainte Thérèse! J’vas aller chercher le radio à Linda.
-Rose Ouimet: Que c’est qu’a peut ben vouloir à sainte Thérèse, donc elle? Surtout après c’qu’a vient de gagner! (Germaine Lauzon branche l’appareil de radio. On entend des bribes de chapelet. Toutes les femmes s’agenouillent. ) (30-31)

The mixture of the sacred with the profane is also seen in a joke told by Des-Neiges Verrette. She feels comfortable amongst this group of women to tell an off color joke about the rape of a nun. If you were not part of this group you would not take a chance in telling a religious joke in the fear of offending everyone:

Des-Neiges Verrette: …C’tait une religieuse qui s’était faite violer dans la ruelle...Ça fait que le lendemain on la retrouve dans le fond d’une cour, toute éfouerrée, la robe r’montée par-dessus la tête...A
gémissait sans bon sens, vous comprenez...Ça fait qu’y’a un journaliste que s’approche pis qui y demande: «Pourriez-vous, ma sœur, nous donner quelques impressions sur la chose horrible qui vient de vous arriver?» Ça fait que la sœur ouvre les yeux pis murmure: «Encore! Encore!» (Toutes les femmes éclatent de rire, sauf Lisette de Courval qui semble scandalisée et Yvette Longpré que ne comprend pas l’histoire) (51).

A few moments later after telling this joke, Des-Neiges Verrette is planning on having people over to her home next Sunday but «Après le chapelet» (51). The fact that the women are able to laugh at an insensitive joke regarding the rape of a nun and then, in the next breath discuss how they can only do something after they have attended mass or completed a religious ritual, is completely opposite to what it means to be religious. This particular narrative illustrates the women’s disconnect between being truly religious versus being part of a socially religious group.

Part 5

FEELINGS OF INFERIORITY

The women are conscious of their low social status and they are not happy with this situation. This inferiority is sparked by many factors in their lives including their lack of opportunity, education and «bon parler». There are many times in the play when one of the women declares her unhappiness because of this life of hopelessness she leads. In one instance, which could come from any of the fourteen women, Marie-Ange Brouillette announces her lot in life: «Moé, j’mange d’la marde, pis j’vas en manger toute ma vie!» (21) She feels a strong sense of being stuck in her
situation with no way of escaping. This idea of being stuck in one’s situation even touches the realm of “pure luck”.

The feeling of inferiority permeates every aspect of the women’s life, even the belief that it is only others who receive good news or have luck: «On peut dire que la chance tombe toujours sur les ceuses qui le méritent pas!» (22). One such person that the women feel does not merit good fortune, is the character of Germaine Lauzon and her win of a million stamps. This jealousy starts a discussion amongst the women about what contests they have entered lately. The dialogue begins a question and answer exchange between Yvette Longpré and a cast of characters. Yvette asks the same question to each person and receives just about the same answer—Do I look like someone who has ever won anything? The question seems ridiculous to the women because they know the situation and the surroundings in which they live, and the woman asking the question belongs to the same group.

Yvette Longpre: Pis, avez-vous gagné quequ’-chose, toujours? Gabrielle Jodoin: J’ai-tu l’air de quequ’un qui a déjà gagné quequ’chose! (41)

Yvette Longpre: Pis, avez-vous gagné quequ’-chose, toujours? Lisette de Courval: …J’ai-tu l’air de quelqu’un qui a de besoin de ces affaires-là, moé…euh, moi? (44)

Yvette Longpre: Pis, avez-vous gagné quequ’-chose, toujours? Rose Ouimet: J’ai-tu l’air de quequ’un qui a déjà gagné quequ’chose? (44)

Yvette Longpre: Pis, avez-vous gagné quequ’-chose, toujours?
Des-Neiges Verrette en regardant Germaine: J’ai-tu l’air de quequ’un qui a déjà gagné quequ’chose? (46)

Yvette Longpre: Pis, avez-vous gagné quequ’-chose, toujours? Therese Dubuc en regardant Germaine: J’ai-tu l’air de quequ’un qui a déjà gagné quequ’chose? (47)

Those within their group should understand that everything they have is because of hard work, no luck involved. Luck is not a word that this group is familiar with or believes that it pertains to them.

Even within this inferior group, there is always someone who feels that they are superior to the rest. In this case it is the character of Lisette de Courval who feels that she is better than the rest because she has had the opportunity to go to Europe as well as a receive a gift of a fur coat from her husband. The women do not take kindly to this feeling of superiority within their social class and Rose Ouiment takes Lisette de Courval down to her social level. Lisette should have no reason to believe that she will ever be able to escape this life: «On le sait que ton mari se fend le cul en quatre pour pouvoir emprunter de l’argent pour te payer des fourrures pis des voyages! C’est pas plus riche que nous autres pis ça pète plus haut que son trou!» (48). By using a vulgar phrase «ça pète plus haut que son trou» to describe Lisette and her husband, Rose immediately places Lisette back into the social class in which she belongs. Even though Lisette receives some nice gifts and trips from her husband, these things are not due to his position or profession. He provides these
material objects through overworking himself and borrowing money. None of these things change their social status or the people they are.

Though the group believes that no one can change their lives, Lisette has dreams. Because she has done some travelling she pictures herself as being superior to those who have not. The one thing that she cannot escape is the way that she speaks and even with all the traveling she has done she gives herself away with her pronunciation. When discussing her travels in «Urope», she pretends to be the knower of all about the world. The truth is that she is uneducated and makes statements not based on fact: «D’ailleurs, en Urope, le monde se lavent pas!» and because her Italian neighbor doesn’t put underwear on her clothes line on Mondays she says: «J’ai rien qu’une chose à vous dire: c’monde-là, là, ça porte pas de sous-vêtements!» (27).

Although Lisette is an uneducated woman, she is aware of the affect of joual on her social standing and for this reason is the most careful about her speech and corrects herself when she can: «J’ai tu l’air de quelqu’un qui a besoin de ces affaires-là moé…euh moi» (44). The pronunciation is of utmost importance and is one of the distinctions between the different dialects of French spoken in Canada.

For the character of Lisette de Courval, her inferiority weighs heavily on her. Lisette is one who would like to be able to change her social standing and who cares about how others perceive her. At one point in the play she starts discussing what kinds of people you find in
Europe and in particular in Paris, because in her mind France and everything about it, is what that life should be:

-Lisette de Courval: ...Puis l’Urope! Le monde sont donc bien élevé par là! Sont bien plus polis qu’ici! ...Y’a juste du grand monde! A Paris, tout le monde perle bien, c’est du vrai français partout…C’est pas comme icitte…(59)

Lisette believes that the only real French is the French spoken in France, and she is disgusted by the state of the French-speakers lives in Quebec. If she spoke «du vrai français» she would not have to deal with the inferiority that has been placed upon her because of the language she speaks. Her belief is that she should be living a better life and the people that she associates with are not the people that she was meant to be associating with: «Léopold avait raison, c’monde-là, c’est du monde cheap, y faut pas le fréquenter, y faut même pas en parler, y faut les cacher!» (59). The choice in the word «cheap» to describe the people that Lisette associates with is interesting. Although she has a sense of superiority because she speaks a French closer to International French, she chooses to use an English word to describe the cheapness of these people. These «cheap» people should be ashamed of who and what they are and should be hidden away from the rest of society.

The belief that everyone else outside of this group speaks a better French and therefore makes them superior, is not only on the mind of Lisette. Germaine Lauzon describes what happens when her boxes of stamps are delivered: «Deux gars sont v’nus les porter dans’maison pis
l’autre gars m’a faite une espèce de discours… Y parlait bien en s’il-vous-plaît! (15). She feels that she does not have the right social and language skills to speak properly, but that her husband would have been able to:
« J’aurais aimé que ton père soye là… y’aurait pu y parler lui…. J’sais même pas si j’y ait dit marci! » (16). The inferiority of the language and the way that these women speak is part of their dialogue and conversation when discussing their lives. Lisette de Courval and Marie-Ange Brouillette have this conversation about the « bon parler »:

-Lisette de Courval: … Regardez, moi, j’perle bien, puis j’m’en sens pas plus mal!
-Marie-Ange Brouillette: J’parle comme que j’peux, pis j’dis c’que j’ai à dire, c’est toute! Chus pas t’allée en Urope, moé, chus pas t’obligée de me forcer pour bien perler! (25)

Marie-Ange Brouillette is realistic about her manner of speech and she is aware that she does not utilize International French. This awareness does not change her situation, and so she uses the language to the best of her ability to say what needs to be said. She does not understand why anything else would be expected of her. Although she realizes that her dialect of French places her in an inferior social class, there is no need to make any excuses for her dialect. It is only important for those in the same social group to understand what is being said.

The lack of opportunities afforded to these women combined with the perceived inferiority of joual is some of the facts that keep the women within this economic, social and cultural group. The many challenges and oppressions facing women during this period in Quebec affected the ability
to improve her life. The acceptance of this hopelessness was a result of many factors; including the teachings of the Church, the perceived inferiority of women by men, and the constraints placed upon her by society through historical precedent. For the working-class woman language had an even greater negative impact. It served only to support the stereotypes society had defined for the lower class.
CHAPTER 5

HOSANNA

INTRODUCTION

As part of this study, the play *Hosanna* has been selected to highlight how Tremblay correlates the French-speaking underclass to the lives of homosexuals and transvestites within the Montreal working-class setting. Tremblay, himself a gay man, is able to give this segment of society an authentic representation through his writing. He includes this group in many of his plays in order to draw attention to the extra struggles they face as a misunderstood element within the larger *joual* speaking working-class group.

The themes and naturalistic descriptions of the settings that Tremblay chooses to use in his works are almost as controversial as his use of *joual*. In *Les Belles-sœurs*, he describes the true yet unpleasant life of families in the east end of Montreal and, in *Hosanna* he describes the goings on in the cheap cabarets and drag bars of the city. The descriptions of the gay Montreal scene aroused the ire of many socially conservative citizens who were not prepared to accept the reality of the society in which they lived (Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay* 4).

The play was written and presented in 1973, only five years after homosexuality was decriminalized in Quebec. While drag queens and leather boys are relatively familiar to even the most casual of television viewers today, this play and its subject matter were not as familiar to the
audiences of the 1970s. While being homosexual was no longer considered to be a criminally punishable act at the level of the federal government, the Church considered, and still considers, homosexual acts to be sinful and contrary to natural law.

Because of these societal biases on sexual orientation, acquiring a sense of belonging and acceptance is even more difficult than for groups such as the women in *Les Belles-sœurs*. Tremblay provides his character Hosanna with a double identity as a gay transvestite. Bestowing these traits to this character, hiding his true identity behind a disguise, is an allegory for the two faces of the French-speakers in Quebec.

The double identity of the character is also portrayed through the use of *joual*, which has been described as a language «à deux visages, l’un esthétique, l’autre politique» (Larose 176). The philosophical esthetic is the common knowledge, both the explicit and the implicit, granted to this society through its language. The political face of the language shows itself through the debates sparked in the political and artistic arena. The general squabble is the belief that this language should not be used in literature in opposition with those who believe that, as the language of the people, it has a place in literary works.

_Hosanna_ is a play about two gay Montrealers in the early 1970s. The character Hosanna is really Claude Lemieux, a man from rural Quebec who moved to the big city to escape the oppression faced by openly gay men. He works as a hairdresser by day and a drag queen by
Hosanna is obsessed with the character of Cleopatra as portrayed by Elizabeth Taylor, and his/her dream is to emulate this character from the 1963 film. He lives with his over-the-hill biker boyfriend, Raymond Bolduc who goes by the name Cuirette. The play depicts the events of one night in the relationship between Claude and Raymond (Hosanna and Cuirette).

The lovers have just returned from a Halloween party where Hosanna has been humiliated because everyone has come dressed up as Cleopatra as a joke. Even her boyfriend laughs at this prank, bringing Hosanna to tears. She rushes home and Cuirette arrives not long after. The action is the ensuing next few hours of this disastrous and eye-opening evening.

The action of the play is confined to the small, rundown and cheaply furnished apartment located «quelque part, sur la Plaza Saint-Hubert» in the east end of Montreal (11). This section of Montreal was where there was a concentration of poverty, a concentration of the French-speaking working-class associated with their use of joual. Not only are their environs poor, but they also have a language to match. In the book La langue et le nombril, the author Chantal Bouchard gives this description of joual and what it represents:

Le joual sert de repoussoir, il représente symboliquement, à ses débuts, tout ce que les Canadiens français rejettent d’eux-mêmes : l’état de colonisés (langue anglicisée), le sentiment de retard culturel (l’archaïsme), le peu d’instruction (ignorance de la syntaxe, du vocabulaire français), le manque de raffinement (la vulgarité),
l’isolement culturel (langue incompréhensible pour les étrangers), la perte des racines, voire de l’identité (déstructuration, désagrégation, dégénérescence, décomposition, etc.) (237).

*Joual* is a collection of many different aspects of a society; language, history and identification, combined into one. By studying the different aspects of a language readers and audiences gain insight into a society and what is important to them.

Part 1

CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC POVERTY

A language is not only the words but also what they represent to others and to those within that society. In an article which appeared in a Montreal area newspaper, *Le Devoir*, in 1961, André Laurendeau asked the question: «Qu’est-ce que parler *joual*?» and one answer was «elle apporte un vocabulaire que nous subissons: la cohabitation de deux langues – l’une, de riches, l’autre, de pauvres – contamine surtout la seconde». The connotation is that English is the language of the rich, and *joual* is the language of the poor. English was an unwelcome intruder into the French language of Quebec and its infiltration had an effect on the French-speaking society culturally, politically and economically.

*Joual*, the socially disdained language of Quebec, is associated with both economic and cultural poverty. The use of this language by the characters puts emphasis on this poverty and suffering through many aspects of their lives. From the opening of the play, by means of the
description of the apartment, the reader is aware of the sad state of the
living conditions of the characters: «…qu’on a baptisés ‘batchelors’ parce
qu’on n’a pas eu l’honnêteté de les appeler franchement ‘one-room-
expensive dumps’» and its meager furnishings and cheap décor: «Seules
touches personnelles dans ce désespérant décor…un ‘David’ en plâtre,
déformé et grotesque…» (11).

The lack of richness and refinement also conjures in the minds of
the readers and the audience, a sense of the lack of education of the
characters. This lack of education is not only the lack of a formal
education, but also a lack of a cultural education as in this scene between

Cuirette and Hosanna:

-Hosanna: …Hé, que j’haïs donc ça quand j’me casse un ongle de
même! On dirait que mon doigt est tout nu, après, pis que j’peux
rien faire avec pour un grand bout de temps…Pis ça s’accroche
partout…
-Cuirette: Les chats sont de même…
-Hosanna: Quoi?
Cuirette: Les chats, si tu leu’coupes les ongles là…
-Hosanna: Ça sert à rien, j’vas me le limer, sans ça, j’vas me le
casser encore plus…
-Cuirette: Si tu leu’coupes les ongles, y savent pus quoi faire,
après…
-Hosanna: Cuirette, as-tu pris ma lime?
-Cuirette: Sont comme pardus…Y regardent partout…les yeux
grands-grands…Y sentent pus rien…
Hosanna: Cuirette, cibole, c’est pas les ongles, c’est les
moustaches qui font ça aux chats! C’est quand on leu’coupes les
moustaches! (22)

This scene is also a metaphor for the lives of these two characters
as well as those within their social group. If you cut them off from what
they know, they will go around all wide-eyed, looking to find their balance
and their place within society, but won’t be able to find their way. This sense of loss ends up making them emotionless and losing hope.

Another aspect of joual is the use of Anglicisms. Through the dialogue of these two characters, one can see the extent to which English has affected their dialect. As a result of the extensive use of English by the characters in this play, the dialect makes a quasi-political statement questioning which cultural group they belong to. Are they Canadian, French, English or Quebecois? The language, in its entirety, resolves this argument and the reader understands that they are Quebecois as a result of the pronunciation interspersed with English words. Cuirette says «Sandra, le party est fini, là…On a eu ben du fun, mais laisse Hosanna tranquille, un peu» (19). The use of full English sentences within a French sentence is also an aspect of joual: «C’est aussi bien pour toé qu’à te voyes pas, Cuirette parce que son ‘regard’ serait justement pus d’appréciation, if you know what I mean» (40). Even the pronunciation of the name Cuirette, which means Leatherette, has an English connotation. When pronounced in English sounds like queer’ette’, a less than complimentary gay reference.

The suffering that Hosanna has felt in her life, is also described through her wardrobe. After returning from the party she is trying to take off the dress that she made. The number of hooks to undo makes this difficult. When Cuirette suggests that she just rip off the dress and be
done with it, she refuses. He feels she is afraid to get rid of this memory, because she likes to suffer.

-Cuirette: De toute façon, tu devrais la déchirer. J’pense que la r’mettras pas de sitôt…
-Hosanna: Non, j’la remettrai pas de sitôt, j’la remettrai pas de sitôt, j’le sais, mais ça m’a pris trois semaines pour la faire, pis j’vas la garder!
-Cuirette: C’est ça, tu la mettras dans le garde-robés, pas à chaque fois que tu vas ouvrir la porte, à va te rappeler un beau gros mauvais souvenir! Que t’aimes donc ça souffrir, Hosanna, que t’aimes donc ça! (21)

The insistence on the poverty of the characters and the use of English phrases emphasizes the inferior social standing of the characters in the scene. Even the description of Hosanna conjures an image of someone lacking refinement: «Hosanna est un travesti habillé comme Elisabeth Taylor dans ‘Cléopatre’, en infiniment plus cheap, évidemment» (12). The stress placed on the fact that her costume would evidently be «infiniment plus cheap».

Part 2
TWO FACES OF QUEBEC: DISGUISES AND MIRRORS

Joual is not only a language, but also envelops the people who speak it; in the same way that clothing envelops a person. Like the use of joual, the use of disguises is explicit in Hosanna. The dialect affects the socio-economic status of the two characters while portraying the two faces of their lives and of Quebec society.

Les moyens d’expression, la forme, le langage d’une pièce sont inséparables de son engagement, de son message ; le joual n’est
pas ici un habit de carnaval dont l’auteur revêt arbitrairement et artificiellement ses héroïnes ; il est leur vêtement de tous les jours, il leur colle à la peau, il est devenu leur corps même, leur «maladie chronique», une «carence dans le sang» comme le note justement Tremblay (Godin and Mailhot 198).

As he did in Les Belles-sœurs, Tremblay uses aspects of carnivalization throughout this play. The principal character, Hosanna, is a man, who dresses up as a woman. He essentially hides who he really is behind his make-up and wigs. Hosanna wants to be different, but when everyone shows up as Cleopatra he is mortified. It shows that even if one yearns to be different, we are all the same. We all wear disguises in order to hide our real identities within a society. The two faces of Quebec and of joual are highlighted in a monologue by Hosanna:

Chus ridicule quand chus déguisée en homme, quand j’coiffe mes Juives jewish-renaissance. Des vrais gestes de femmes, qu’y me disent que j’ai... ‘You should work in drags, Claude I!’ Pis si j’irais travailler en femme j’gage qu’y me laisseraient tomber parce qu’y veulent pas se laisser toucher aux cheveux par des femmes... Pis chus ridicule quand chus déguisée en femme parce que j’t’oblige de faire la folle pour attirer l’attention parce que chus pas assez belle pour l’attirer autrement... Pis chus t’encore plus ridicule quand chus poignée comme ça, entre les deux, avec ma tête de femme, mes sous-vêtements de femme, pis mon corps...(Hosanna 29)

Hosanna also shows the two faces of herself through her names, her real self and her disguise:« -Cuirette : Claude...-Hosanna : J’m’appelle Hosanna» (27).

Is the use of this joual in literature «un outil de dénonciation ou miroir fidèle?» (Bouchard 248). The mirror is a repeating element in the play and can be thought of as a metaphor for this dialect. Depending on
how you look, you can see what you like in the person who is being
reflected at you. A mirror can either be a true representation of what is in
front of it, or an element of disguise. The disguise is in the reflection, a
mirror image that is the reverse of the real image. People looking at the
reflection through their own societal filter can also distort this image. Just
like joual is perceived as a distortion of the true French language.

The mirror is important; one of the first things Hosanna does upon
returning from her personal tragedy is to look at herself:

- J'voulais pus, J'voulais pus…J'voulais pus y aller.

    *Elle s'approche du miroir et se regarde. Franchement. Froidement. Elle se détaillle des pieds à la tête. Elle se regarde comme un travesti en regarde un autre. Elle se met à trembler un petit peu… Elle se calme, puis retourne au miroir.*

- C’est ça, pis le visage qui te coule pardessus le marché ! Trois heures d’ouvrage, pis une demi-livre de brillants sus le yable ! Si les paillettes te coulent dans les yeux, t’es correcte pour le braille dans pas longtemps, Hosanna ! Trois heures d’ouvrage ! Maudite kétaine ! ( Silence) Toute une vie, ouan, toute une vie de préparation pour en arriver là ! Félicitations ! Très beau succès ! (13-14)

The importance of the mirror can be seen by the descriptive word it
receives. In the opening paragraph of the play describing the apartment
and its furnishings, most of the furnishings are given a diminutive
descriptive word such as: «une seule», «un mini-réfrigérateur», «de
minuscule armoires», «une petite table». The only items which receive
any grandeur are the lamp and the mirror: «une énorme lampe», and «un
très grand miroir» (11). The lamp sheds light on the scene and the mirror
is necessary to project or reflect the image of the apartment and the characters.

The mirror is an important element to Hosanna but looking out the window is what Cuirette prefers:

*Cuirette retourne à la fenêtre*

-Hosanna: dans sa glace- j’arais dû commencer par la perruque,. J’arais dû commencer par ça, ç’a’rait eu plus d’allure…mais ça me tente pas…Ça me tente pas de l’ôter…
-Cuirette: dans la fenêtre- C’est vrai que j’engraisse…(27)

Hosanna is concerned about her disguise and how she looks now that she has started to remove it. Hosanna is more of a realist, although she seems more concerned with her disguise and hiding her true self. Cuirette is a dreamer, staring out the window, looking out at what could be, rather than what is.

-Hosanna: *dans son miroir-* Maudit que t’es bête!
-Cuirette: Quoi?
-Hosanna: J’me dit que chus bête…
-Cuirette: Tu viens juste de t’en apercevoir?
-Hosanna: Oh! Non…*Cuirette regarde dehors, Hosanna se regarde dans le miroir.*
-Cuirette: On peut même pas voir au boutte d’la rue…
-Hosanna: Jamais j’déménagerai, Cuirette…pis jamais j’changerai de parfum. (28)

Cuirette is someone who had dreams of greatness at one time. He had aspirations of becoming an artist, whereas, for Hosanna, everything of importance in her life has already happened. She is not searching for her destiny, but rather assuming that her past has determined her future.

-Hosanna: J’parle de l’image générale que ça donne…C’est pas nécessaire de scruter les détails! Pis c’est pas nécessaire non plus
de savoir c'qui est v'nu avant pis c'qui va v'nir après...J'parle de l'image générale que ça donne...'gard...(Hosanna 24)

The sense of a predestined life felt by Hosanna is the same as the emotion of the French-speaking Quebec population. Regardless of their dreams, it is the history and the language spoken, which determine the future because of the economic and political domination held by the Anglophones in Quebec.

The combination of English, elements of the disguise, and the mirror all come together in a dialogue by Hosanna:

_Elle se regarde dans la grande glace_

Y’a du monde, comme ça, qui méritent pas de vivre parce que leurs noms sont trop laids! C’est pour ça que les travestis pis les acteurs changent de noms: par-ce-qu’y-mé-ri-tent-pas-de-vi-vivre! Cha-cha-cha! Une cigarette, une cigarette, mon royaume pour une cigarette! C’est vrai qu’y’a pas grand monde qui donneraient une cigarette pour une boîte à parfum...(Silence) Ma boîte à parfum pour guidounes à cinquante cennes ...Ça pue, ici-dedans, ça pue, ça pue, ça pas de boutte comme ça pue! But...the show must go on...and on...and on...and on...Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all? Shut up! (56)

Hosanna is not made happy by what she sees in the mirror, but she is afraid of changing what she knows. It is hard to escape reality, especially if one is not equipped with the tools to escape. In the case of these characters, there are many factors hindering their social mobility, one of them being that they belong to the _joual_ linguistic community. Their dialect has placed them at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

The mirror and the window represent the two faces of Quebec, a reflection of what is, and a view to what could be. In literature as in life, the
environment surrounding the characters is of great significance. In each case this represents the social, political, and cultural reality, which the author is hoping to convey. The space that the characters inhabit reflects actual and supposed boundaries of the community. Language and its perceived role is one such boundary.
CONCLUSION

By looking at the works by Gélinas and Toupin and comparing them with the plays, *Les Belles-sœurs* and *Hosanna*, by Michel Tremblay, one can see the evolution in the written language, the themes and the desire to showcase Quebecois society. Representing this society authentically and presenting them to the rest of the world was of great importance to the Quebec artistic and literary community. The Quiet Revolution was a catalyst in the creation of this new form of literature in Quebec. Other influences on these changes were the Church’s relinquishment of power over what and how writers could portray society in their writings, both the themes and the language used to convey their vision.

The desire for the Quebecois people to have their authentic story told worldwide also had an influence on the literature produced in Quebec. Up until the Quiet Revolution, much of Quebec literature was based on historical and authoritative figures and the intellectuals wanted to change this «out-dated textbook image of the province» (Moss, “Playing with History” 337).

Through the use of Michel Tremblay’s plays, *Les Belles-sœurs* and *Hosanna*, the study showed that using a spoken language in written form affects the depiction and understanding of a culture, and that population’s cultural identity. The use of *joual* is important not only because it defines a culture within its borders but also defines the Quebecois outside its borders. It also gives a sense of belonging and makes them part of a
linguistically distinct society within the larger group of people who call French their maternal language.

The Quiet Revolution was both a cultural and a political revolution. Tremblay chose to use *joual* to show both sides of this revolution. There were two trains of thought within the literary community on the use of *joual:* 1) those who were for the use of *joual* and who insisted that it was the language of the Quebecois and should be used in written form and 2) those who were against its use because, although they agreed it was a spoken form of a Quebecois dialect for a segment of the population, insisted that it should not be used as a written form.

Tremblay’s works have been translated into many languages and continue to remain popular. Even today, in 2012, *Les Belles-sœurs* has been re-made into a musical theater piece and toured throughout the province of Quebec and finished its run in Paris, France at the Théâtre du Rond-point. *Hosanna,* also continues to be shown to modern audiences. It recently was presented at the Stratford Summer Theater during the summer of 2011.

Tremblay’s reasons for using *joual* in his writing leaned more towards the political rather than the cultural, although the combination of the two is what made his plays so popular. Tremblay had the same vision in mind for the Quebecois and used *joual* in his writing to wake up the Quebecois from their historical prison:
Je dénonce le joual qui non seulement est une langue pauvre ou de pauvres, mais aussi l’indice d’une paresse d’esprit et d’une carence dans le sang. Le théâtre que j’écris présentement en est de ‘claque sur la gueule’, qui vise à provoquer une prise de conscience chez le spectateur (qtd. in Gauvin and Henderson, 42).

It was a call to the Quebecois to stand up and take control of their destiny by no longer looking in the mirror at the past, but rather looking through the window to the future.
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