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**Converging Theories and Emerging Practices:
The Voices, Visions and Women of Marie Laberge's Theatre**

by

CARA GARGANO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract**CONVERGING THEORIES AND EMERGING PRACTICES:****The Voices, Visions and Women of Marie Laberge's Theatre**

by

Cara Gargano

Advisor: Professor Renée Waldinger

The struggle for cultural and linguistic survival that has marked Québécois theatre for over 250 years, and the vital but ambiguous position of language in that society are forces that remain at the heart of today's theatre in Québec, and continue to be both the subject and the object of its dramatic inquiry. Marie Laberge's dramatization of language draws not only on the French Canadian split identity specified by Jean Bouthillette, but specifically on the inherent tension between word, motivation, objective, obstacle and subtext that is the essence of the theatre. Laberge is part of a new generation of playwrights who came of age after the valorisation of French as the official language of the Province in 1976, and whose work focusses more on the rights of the individual than on the needs of the collective. Laberge uses the word "provocative" to describe her relation to language, implying not only a revolutionary stance but a relationship of desire and passion as well. An overview of Laberge's oeuvre shows a remarkable evolution on several fronts. I will argue that while many of her contemporaries are pointing to the poverty of our language, Laberge is moving toward a re-poeticization of theatrical language; while much of today's theatre focusses on human isolation, she seems to be moving toward a theatre of choral harmony and healing, and a theatre where women are extremely *corps-présente*. I will show that the mythic properties of her work attempt to redraw the balance between the Credo of social order and the Libido that characterizes the artist's need to "remake the world."

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Introduction

As André Smith has noted, on the occasion of the international colloquium held on her work in July of 1988, at McGill University, "Marie Laberge n'est plus à présenter." She is one of the most important young playwrights of the current generation precisely because she is able to speak for her contemporaries while participating in a universal, almost mythic, literature. Her theatre attempts to heal an age-old confrontation that exceeds national and gender boundaries: that of dramatic theory and theatrical practice. She has written in *joual*, Montréal's 'dialect', (so called because of the Montréalais pronunciation of *cheval*) international French, and her own fictional construction of 12th century poetry; her passion for language is revealed by the range and diversity of her work which has been translated into English, Japanese, Finnish, German and Spanish. She is the recipient of numerous prizes, awards and grants, including the prestigious Prix du Gouverneur général for *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse-à-Gilles. Oublier* received the award for the best play of 1987 in Brussels, and in 1988, she was named Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture for her contribution to francophone culture. Her recent novel, *Quelques Adieux*, received the Prix Elle-Québec in 1993. Her work has been extremely well-received in Europe; *L'Homme gris* has had over two hundred performances in Belgium and France alone, and *Oublier* had simultaneous premières in Brussels and Montréal in 1987.

Actress, director, translator, teacher, as well as playwright and novelist, she deals with eternal themes, all of which turn on her interest in the human condition: the problems of human communication, the sins of the fathers (and mothers) that continue to be passed

along to future generations, human passion, the social conditioning that often prevents positive male/female relations, and death. She writes about the ultimate impossibility of meaningful communication, yet she writes to communicate with her audience. Like many of her contemporaries, she questions the possibility of absolute reality and the value of traditional theatrical structure; unlike them, however, she plays within the scintillation between theory and practice, what Richard Schechner calls the "difference between 'literariness' and 'theatricality'." (62) It is the combination of her theatrical abandon and her literary self-awareness that has made her such a controversial figure in both literary and theatrical circles; her conscious mirroring of those two worlds deconstructs and destabilizes them both, and the intense theatrical quality of her work has often blinded her public to the literary value of her dramatic *oeuvre*. It is customary to deal with theatrical literature either as dramatic text or as performance. Indeed, Anne Ubersfeld insists that the dramatic text is not, properly speaking, literature at all, ¹ as Aston and Savona caution against reading the play as "a novel *manqué*". (35) Laberge uses the tension between text and performance as one of her chief theatrical devices, drawing much of her power from the *différance* (in the Derridian sense) between the text as literature, its on-page *mise en scène*, the reader's imagined *mise en scène*, and its concrete, onstage realization. ²

At the crossroads of theory and practice, Laberge uses the tension between them, noted by Anne Ubersfeld, "to avoid both the passivity of fiction and the formalism of practice." (1981, 325) It is no longer possible, however, to speak of theory in the singular. Laberge also finds herself at the relatively recent intersection of theatre and feminist theory, as well as at the conjunction of theatre and semiotics. It is only in the past 20 years that these initially diverse paths have begun to converge, and, in Québec, to coincide with a continuing, vigorous, nationalist movement, whose banner has always been Québec's right

to its own language. At the center of all these converging forces, the theatre remains a site of provocation and sometimes convulsive transformation. Augusto Boal, keynote speaker for the 1992 Association for Theatre in Higher Education, spoke of theatre as having a directly incendiary effect, with the potential to foment revolution. Anne Ubersfeld asks, "L'Art, est-il révolutionnaire?" and answers: "il peut l'être s'il permet une relecture du monde, prélude à sa transformation." (1981, 328) I believe that Laberge's *oeuvre* can be seen as a revolutionary rereading of the world, leading to change on several fronts. My project, here, is to explore the way that Laberge seeks positive avenues for change: in how we see ourselves and others, as women and men, as sexual beings, and in relation to one another, as well as how our society reads and interprets its myths.

The playwrights of Laberge's generation are all dealing, in their own ways, with the converging issues of national language and autonomy, individual identity, and, in the case of women playwrights, feminist responsibility. What sets Laberge's work apart from them, however, is that she maintains a striking balance between the literary and the truly theatrical. Indeed, in this climate where breaking artistic rules and upsetting theatrical boundaries is the norm, and where the playwright has been, if not supplanted, at least equalled, by the director, Laberge has been criticized for her realism and her concern for the primacy of the text. I believe that a close reading of the body of her dramatic work, as vital literature, as well as performance text, demonstrates that her 'realism' is carefully crafted to subvert the very structures of traditionalism that she appears to support, and that her notion of textual accuracy not only relates to a sense of ownership: "j'ai le sens très fort de la propriété intellectuelle"(E 844), but also to a sense of loyalty to the truth of her characters: "si je ne suis capable de lui accorder *son* langage, en tout dignité, comment pourrais-je prétendre lui rendre justice..."(B 144) Laberge's characters live through their language:

authentic *québécois* language, but also the individual voice. In a time when language is disappearing from the theatre, it is Laberge's "terrain de jeu"; her project has oriented itself toward an axis other than that of her contemporaries, and it is the delicate and subtle nuances between individual voices that make human communication, or the lack of it, so potentially tragic. In this context, the written text takes on a primordial importance, but as an actress Laberge knows that "contrairement à ce que l'on pourrait croire, la précision d'une langue n'est jamais un frein ou une contrainte pour un acteur: il prendra cette langue et la fera sienne." (B 150) Laberge is committed to liberating the performer as well as empowering the feminine playwright. Her characters are satisfying to actresses precisely because the wealth of textual detail offers opportunity for rich interpretation, as actors Claude Piéplu and Denise Gagnon have testified.

Laberge's themes are few but far-reaching, and there has been a marked development in the way she deals with them: the arbitrariness of the word, silence as a communicative device, death and sexuality in our society, the various ways that women deal with power and their own representation, and their exclusion (absence) from the stage (of life) and from language. Celita Lamar's study on women writing for the French theatre suggests that many of the problems women face in the theatre cross national boundaries.³ Laberge makes an important contribution to francophone literature by suggesting new and positive ways of theatrical representation for women as she deals with these themes. She explores and transcends the linguistic barriers that separate written from spoken language and spoken languages from each other, and gives voice to the multiple languages of silence, gesture, memory and violence. While her characters often fail to escape what Gary Grant calls the "uncertainly paradigm" (120), the audience experiences a *catharsis* through what Cixous, in her recent writing, perceives as a complicity factor unique to theatrical

experience (Lamar 159-60). Laberge "perturbs" the system in a way that may appear more gentle than Artaud's notion of a transformational theatre of chaos, but is as subversive. The frequent intrusion of multiple authorial voices, her disturbing tendency to implicate the audience/reader in the literary "crime", and her interrogation of social and literary constructs, all destabilize traditional theatre and shape a project for upheaval and positive change.

Through her "creative mythologies" 4 Laberge builds a new, feminine mythology that profoundly alters the female voice in the theatre. I will deal with her most prevalent themes, the practical way in which they are translated to the stage, analyzing them in light of the theoretical writings that have shaped my view of her work: 1) the insufficiency and untrustworthiness of human communicative language, as it relates to Barthes' notion of *écriture*, Derrida's idea of *différence*, and Kristeva's premise of poetical language; 2) the role of silence in a world where human communication has been colonized by patriarchal society and where women's paradoxical relationship to language and representation can not be overemphasized, as such writers as pointed out by Claudine Herrmann, Hélène Cixous, Toril Moi, and Luce Irigaray; 3) the destabilization of the traditional theatrical experience to explore new ways of looking at the the theatre, as related to the theories of Antonin Artaud, Bertoldt Brecht, and the more recent semioticians, Anne Ubersfeld, and Patrice Pavis; 4) the manipulation of patriarchal mythology to find new and positive way of presenting women onstage and to create a new feminine mythology on stage, using the theatre theories of Jill Dolan, and Elin Diamond. I will show that Laberge's work is an effort toward reconciliation, liberation, and reparation in a world where it is difficult but essential to have "le courage de vivre, en toute lucidité, des choses qui n'ont pas de sens." (*Pierre* 133)

The dialectic that Campbell discerns between Libido as a desiring, creative force, and Credo, as the repressive law of the existing order is at the heart of her work, as is the ongoing confrontation between the status quo and human desire as an agent for change. We will see that for Laberge, passion is the Promethean element that separates humanity from lower species. In her theatre, her essays, and her novels, she explores physical desire not only as a liberating force but as a healing one as well, even if that healing is achieved through an immersion in the purifying flames of chaos. In this, she comes closer than one might think to Artaud's notion of the theatre as a place where our repressions may be allowed to exist in the open, demonstrating that "life's intensity is still intact and asks only to be better directed."(9)

Born on November 29,1950, Laberge is very much a writer of her time and of her country; her theatrical career has spanned nearly 20 years; at her reckoning she has recently completed her 21st play. While she is passionately *québécoise*, and very much a feminist, she seems, like many writers of her generation, to value the individual voice over the collective voice. An overview of her theatrical *oeuvre* shows a tendency to perturb the status quo and to provoke change as a way of keeping life "alive". As an author, Laberge came of age during the exciting years of the Parti Québécois' rise to power and the ratification of Law 101, making French the official language of commerce in the province. She belongs to a relatively new group of theatre professionals who received their training in the context of a University educational system, where theory, history, and practice co-exist in a required, if somewhat uneasy, relationship. In addition, her preparation as an artist was affected by the Parti Pris movement, whose writers were at the forefront of the *joual* controversy that would shape the province's literature, particularly the dramatic literature, and which had far-reaching consequences in terms of the role québécois theatre would play

in the formation of a national identity. Godin and Mailhot have pointed to the essentially self-reflective nature of contemporary theatre in Quebec, suggesting that its project to write about writing about itself is an attempt to construct its own identity. ⁶ Laberge is clearly writing about identity within the theatre: language (spoken and written), and silence, as semiotic markers, the way a performer creates a role, and the audience's relationship to the performance. Rather than positing the theatre as a mirror of society, her work plays with the reflective and symbiotic relationship between the two. Her work seems to deconstruct the theatre, as she bears witness to the controlling properties of theatrical discourse, and demonstrates the way we use these controlling properties in the construction of our own masks. Ultimately she uses the theatre's own tools to construct a theatre whose identity is one of diversity and change.

Joseph Campbell has referred to humanity's constant search for artistic renewal and the investment of the artistic space with a new sacrality. Artaud, too, sees the theatre as a place where renaissance can occur precisely because it is both dangerous (in its semiotic, semantic, and mythical properties) and extremely safe (in its nature as illusion). ⁷ Richard Schechner's work on performance consciousness posits a time/space eclipse in which the performer is both "not me...[and] not not me" (113), offering a safe place for potential transformations to occur. Cixous has commented on the dangers of the theatre, as a site of representation, but has recently discovered that those very dangers make theatre a powerful tool for change. Barbara Freedman has suggested that while the tools of the theatre have been used against women, they can be equally used to aid their socio-political cause. Anne Ubersfeld has shown that a spectator's pleasure derives precisely from a consciousness of theatrical illusion combined with the willing suspension of disbelief. Laberge plays within the scintillation between danger and safety, illusion and demystification, magic and reality,

that characterize a mythic theatre. She wants to "bring the spectator, there, where, ordinarily, he would not go, himself," (*Le banc*, 141) and to use the "strangeness" of theatre, that she makes manifest in several dimensions of her work, to heighten our lucidity in the face of our condition.

Contemporary French Canadian theatre has set itself apart from its anglophone Canadian and French counterparts in several ways, not the least of which is its insistence on its unique language, and on the difference between its oral and its written incarnation. These days it is pretty much a given that *québécois* characters speak in their "own" language, but when Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs* premiered in 1968, it created, in its own way, as much of a furor, as did the premiere of Hugo's *Hernani*, 138 years earlier. Renate Usmiani called it a "cultural/linguistic explosion" "not unlike that of Jarry's now historic "Merdre" at the opening of *Ubu roi*." (373) With its emphasis on the impoverished language spoken in the eastern section of Montréal, some critics felt that the play exposed a side of *québécois* life and language that was better left unseen; when the play was invited to Paris, the Canadian Arts Council considered withdrawing the funding for the project. Tremblay's realism, on the level of language, shocked a critical population used to considering theatre as a literary construct, and forced Québécois playwrights to reconsider their own artistic and socio-political roles.

Like most French Canadian playwrights of the last quarter of a century, Laberge turns away from international French as an inauthentic language for her characters. This is the legacy of the *Parti Pris* movement, the group of Montréalais writers who published work in *joual*, and whose need to reject linguistic colonization led to a rejection of both Canadian English and European French. The writers of *Parti Pris* looked upon their work principally as service to the political cause, while the literary establishment felt threatened

by a movement that advocated what they perceived as the poverty of this new, raw language, as opposed to the richness of the French classical and linguistic heritage. Gilles Lefebvre, in his article "Faut-il miser sur le joual?" (*Le Devoir*, 1965, quoted in *Le Théâtre québécois*, 198), describes this popular speech as a "sous-idiome marginal...langue du sous-groupe social le plus touché par l'aliénation culturelle et l'infériorisation économique". Roger Major attests to the *Parti Pris* group's uneasy relationship with literature and it is perhaps for this reason that their most successful and lasting impact on writing was in the theatre. The *Parti Pris* writers rejected *écriture* as part of an outdated, alienating Literature, as opposed to a vital and virile *parole*. **8** Writing belonged to the classical tradition and to colonial repression, be it by the English-speaking British or the culturally dominant French. As Jean Barbeau would say: "le théâtre que je fais n'est pas de la littérature...ça vient de la tradition orale donc c'est du langage parlé...Je prends le langage dont j'ai besoin et je m'en sers pour faire du théâtre. C'est tout." Barbeau's *Manon Lastcall* or his *Joualez-moi d'amour* makes the point that authentic speech is empowered speech; in fact, this is the first principle of theatre. That the *joual* controversy would center around the theatre is not surprising. More than in any other form, theatrical literature depends on authentic human speech, its rhythms, patterns and peculiarities to create a living character on stage. In 1968, when critics suggested that *joual* would prevent Michel Tremblay's work from becoming widely popular in the theatre, playwright André Major retorted: "Le joual permet au drame d'en être un" (quoted in *Le Théâtre québécois*, 197). To "correct" or purify the language of Tremblay's characters would be, as Major puts it, "la négation de la vie et du théâtre" (197). Indeed theatrical literature is written to be performed and heard, not necessarily to be read; in this it bridges the gap between the actor's *parole* and the writer's *écriture*. Theatre, closely linked to the social milieu from which it springs, in its immediate visual

and auditory experience of that milieu and in its apparently spontaneous (re)creation of a given moment on stage, depends on language and movement that "rings true" and renders a "felt experience." As Claude Piéplu, the French actor who created the role of Roland Fréchette in the Paris production of *L'Homme gris*, writes, "Bien respirer le texte est essentiel pour un interprète; la respiration c'est la vie. Un comédien ne respire bien que dans sa propre langue. Le rapport avec la syntaxe relève du mode héréditaire, de la biologie de l'acteur." (Smith 71)

Even before Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*, the question of language had already inextricably linked the theatrical with the political, and for the ten years after Tremblay's work opened the *joual* controversy, the uncertain state of Québécois identity was reflected in its theatre's inability to crystallize within a single language. De Gaulle's visit to Québec in July 1967, had not only brought to the fore the polarization of the English and French languages, but planted the seeds of a new polarization between French "from France" and what would come to be called "québécois", and the decade between 1968 and 1978 reflects the Passion of a language in the process of renewing itself.

In retrospect, the meeting between the *Parti Pris* movement and the theatre seems inevitable. Where better to dramatize and give form to an emerging nation and its language, than the theatre, site of important rites of passage throughout human history, and scene of ritual renewal in its own right, as the work of such artist/theorists as Hugo, Jarry, Artaud, and Brecht, attests. Further, the question of language, icon of the nationalist movement, has long been a crucial one for francophone theatre, where the quarrel between those who required poetry and *bienséance* on one hand, and those who sought realism and authentic language on the other, has never been resolved.

Renate Usmiani writes about this *québécois* version of the *querelle des anciens et*

modernes, which according to her took place on three main levels: 1) the battle over a dramatic idiom (the *joual* controversy); 2) the battle over the proper role of theatre in society and an attempt to create socially and politically engaged theatre; 3) the battle over theatrical form, with the radicals rejecting previous conventions, especially realism, and culminating in a rejection of the text reminiscent of Artaud's notion of a pure, resacralized theatre. This quarrel parallels another problem, which goes to the very heart of *québécois* theatre: the overwhelming influence of the powerful heritage of classical French theatre & culture on one hand, and the insidious encroachment of an equally powerful American and Canadian anglophone presence on the other. The struggle for an identity that is uniquely *québécois* has been, and continues to be, at the heart of most of the theatrical work developed in that province, but the approaches have changed significantly. Usmiani cites the paradoxical situation of French Canadian playwrights whose only tools to deny their classical literary heritage seem to belong to that heritage itself. They are caught in some sense between three colonialisms, an anglophone government, a classical French tradition, and a pervasive American culture.

The question of theatrical language raises several points in regard to Marie Laberge's work. Mary Jean Green and Barbara McEwan have pointed to a new expansion in recent *québécois* literature. While Laberge is clearly concerned with the social and political ramifications of language, as part of the "second generation" of *québécois* playwrights who use *québécois* language as their birthright, she brings to her work the necessary paradox of admiration of her predecessors combined with a need to break out of the "accepted" mold. As we will see, while she addresses the need for authentic language, she moves from validating *joual* as a politically necessary, collective language, to validating the individual voice, dependent on an inner truth. She is part of a move from what Usmiani

calls "the stage of adolescent/Promethean/Romantic rebellion" to a position in "the mainstream of Western theatre." (379) Like Tremblay, she combines raw personal language with a poetic lyricism; this juxtaposition creates sophisticated levels of meaning, profound emotional changes in rhythm and colour, and asks stimulating, provocative questions about the nature of interpersonal relationships as well as about our relationship to the theatre. Laberge has frequently been compared to Tremblay, whose work she admires. Tremblay's interest in *travestissement* parallels, in her work, the many faces of every human being, as she investigates the numerous levels of performativity in every 'character'. Laberge is also part of a second generation move away from the social and political proselytizing that was a necessary part of *québécois* theatre's coming of age. Unlike some of the plays of the early women's movement in Quebec, or the political dramas that surrounded the nationalist movement, she does not "tell" us what the problem is, but allows the problem itself to appear onstage and to suggest its own resolution. Her faith in theatre as a mode of communication that is somatic and therefore, doubly powerful in its ability to affect the spectator, is, in many ways, a result of the socio-political and artistic impact of her predecessors, who were instrumental in bringing Québec's theatre to the international scene. Her own work shows a marked evolution toward a theatre of synthesis and reparation; taken as a whole her theatre can be read as a process of healing wounds created by society, the church, and the family.

Unlike her predecessors of the political 1970's, such as Robert Gurik or Jean-Claude Germain who sought to establish a collective authentic language, Marie Laberge, like other authors who wrote, and continue to create the body of their work after Law 101 had gone into effect, and after the defeat of the May 1980 Referendum on the province's separation, has been able to emphasize the individual voice because of a certain linguistic

stability, that is, paradoxically, the result of the previous generation's linguistic crisis. As part of this *québécois* theatre's second generation, Laberge brings the study of theatrical language into the realms of theory, playing with the difference between words intended to be transmitted orally, and those intended to be read. She finds the tension between the various degrees of separation from the 'mother-tongue' an intensely dramatic and theatrical device, but considers the relationship with the 'father-tongue', as Bouthillette refers to English, equally as essential to her work. The space between phonetically transcribed speech and the more literary language of the *didascalies*, is heightened by the presence of written materials in her works, materials that function not only as a "sign" for writing, but as props (letters, contracts, novels) that advance the narrative. ⁹ No longer only a political statement of difference, linguistic shadings become a complex reflection on the richness of the individual voice and its relationship to culturally mastered *writing*. The need to affirm a national language becomes charged with a new awareness of the duplicity of language, and a consciousness not only of the polysemious in language but of the polyvocal as well. Michel Tremblay's technique of interfacing time and space and overlapping monologues suggests that when the individual voice is prime there necessarily will be many of them, and Marie Laberge's emphasis on the unique nature of the individual voice leads to a *va-et-vient* in her work between affirmation of the individual and the ultimate isolation that this affirmation can entail. Marie Laberge is one of the most sophisticated explorers into this fertile territory, in part, because she explores the theoretical aspect of theatrical language without compromising its dramatic impact or its appeal to the public; her very effectiveness lies in her ability to communicate by "charming", as Plato said, the thoughts of others. Never didactic, her sensitive and profound treatment of complex social issues and interpersonal relationships allows the practical problems of human intercourse to interface

with contemporary theory, and the importance of individual identity to interact with Steven Pinker's "unity of our species."(430)

Like Tremblay, Laberge uses local speech patterns, rhythms and popular middle-class regionalisms; she spells the words on the page as they are meant to be pronounced by the actors. By writing in French, the country's "second language", and by using the rich levels of language available to her, by juxtaposing song and poetry, she makes us listen to language differently and questions those elements that would confine or restrict language or would censor expression. She wants to speak "dans une langue devenue étrangère mais communiquer tout de même", a sentiment reminiscent of Brecht's notion of 'making strange': "A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, and at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar." (Willett 64) Jeanette Laillou Savona has remarked that language as a component of dramatic discourse has been relatively ignored as a subject for serious study; there has been a tendency to dismiss linguistic complexity within theatrical literature, where message is privileged over form and where textual function is second to narrative function, to borrow Ross Chamber's useful distinction. Using Chamber's technique of "oppositional reading", it is possible to discover Laberge's use of "oppositional language" which includes languages that are not usually defined as such, for example, gesture and silence, but which are innately part of theatrical communication. She also identifies a socially mastered network of language levels, to show us how our society implicitly privileges certain kinds of communication over others. Her work resonates with our own paradoxical need both for individuality and for linguistic hegemony, for specialness and inclusion. We will discover that because of the virtually unique and intensely personal nature of the individual voice as representative of human speech and experience, communication itself is her theatrical subject; the principal players

are the personal language of each character, and their obstacle becomes the difficulty of mutual understanding and the basic untranslatability of individual experience. On a somatic level, as Douglas Robinson has pointed out, any discourse is ultimately untranslatable, yet the theatre practitioner is committed to the problem of translating the humanity and feelings of her characters. The paradox of her experience as a playwright who communicates the difficulty, possibly the failure, of human communication with her medium is not lost on Laberge, who is particularly sensitive to the *différance*, in the Derridean sense, between the written and spoken language of drama, between language *intended* to be received as written and that *intended* to be received as spoken, between covert and overt message, as well as between message sent and message received. As we will see in Chapter 1, her early dramatization of language is often based on the notion of translation: as with many Québécois writers, it is not English or French that is *mis en jeu*, but the difference between them, marking their basic inseparability in the *Québécois* context.

Laberge uses local language to free and empower the character who uses it: "je crois que la langue qu'on parle sert avant tout à nous définir, à nous situer, nous communiquer."(107). Language is power and the character who uses his or her own language is the most authentic and most powerful, while the character who is limited or weak is the one who either hides behind or is coerced by another's voice. It is of course not an accident that this theatre grew up around Québec's struggle for linguistic autonomy and that many of the playwrights of this period focus on the issue of local language as an important human right. What makes Laberge important here is that, having passed through the stage of demanding French-language autonomy, she posits any collective voice as a potential threat to the individual, and sees censorship of that voice as one of the great dangers in the social hierarchy of language. Her work theorizes that censorship is a

potentially inevitable part of the human evolutionary cycle, and suggests that only through a courageous lucidity can we hope to move toward reparation and not toward destruction:

Toute école devrait chercher à abolir la censure, l'auto-censure,
Toutes les défenses qui nous empêchent d'être davantage. Que sait-on
de soi-même si on n'a pas essayé de voler? (*Ecrire* 847)

Local language and speech patterns have traditionally been used in theatre not only to define a character but to limit or marginalize him or her as well. The ethical considerations of writing in dialect raise a serious issue; too often, to render a character in dialect is to imply inferiority, to caricature rather than to characterize, to offer "comic relief" from the "serious" questions treated by the "real" characters. This often reduces language to an "us-and-them" situation, in which precedence is predetermined by linguistic status, and frequently is related to the denigration of class, race, nation or gender. In a recent restaging of Molière's *Dom Juan*, Benno Besson cast all the peasant and clown roles with Québécois actors, based on the fiction that their accent and speech patterns are closely related to 17th century French, but really revealing the classism that perceives *joual* as a 'peasant tongue'. Anne Hébert satirizes the way the French exoticize the *québécois* language in *La Mercière assassinée*. Laberge, too, is extremely sensitive to this sort of insidious double racism, what she refers to as "le biais du charme 'exotique' et malheureusement toujours folklorique de la langue québécoise," (*TQ* 109) which dramatizes Québécois playwrights' on-going struggle for acceptance outside and within their own community. If Laberge's characters often perceive language in this limited, stereotypical way, she does not. As we have seen, *joual* is not a reflection of social or economic class structure but of the daily spoken language patterns of an entire people. Indeed, Tremblay has said that properly speaking, there is no such thing as *joual*. These plays are not minstrel shows with exaggerated speech patterns or pronunciations put on like black-face, but a reflection of

daily life, the way people are 'en famille'. In fact, for Laberge it is precisely the opposite, and culturally 'acceptable' language functions as a destructive mask in most of her plays. She brings to this discussion a sensitivity to the way people 'stage' themselves linguistically, at home,(with friends and lovers) in society, and how we use this 'staging' to control, judge, or wound others.

Laberge uses dramatic language not to proselytize but to liberate, to free the individual voice and to explore the many kinds and levels of language inherent in each human being:

Je dois donc vous faire l'aveu suivant: écrire du théâtre signifie pour moi utiliser la langue parlée, vécue, la langue vivante des Québécois, celle qui fait qu'un personnage est immédiatement perçu pour ce qu'il est, et dans sa totalité. (*TQ*109)

Her choice to transcribe authentic speech phonetically, as she says, "la graphie est primordiale" (*Le Banc* 149), is juxtaposed with her use of International French for her *didascalies*. These form an authorial narrative throughout her work, and, as Savona has pointed out, can be considered "speech acts" in their own right. The difference between the narrative speech act of the *didascalie* and the actor's act of speech creates a textual drama all its own that is certainly part of Laberge's theoretical premise. The gradual insertion of the reader/audience into the piece requires the passage through the labyrinth of the text: we pass through the historical *écriture* of the prefacing quotation, through the naming of the characters, spatio-temporal identification of the stage directions, and finally into the material action of the "live" local speech. Of course, the tension between the "speech acts" of the playwright and the actor is significantly altered during performance: as the lights come up we "view the didascalies", and explore the geographical space of the play with the performer, usually before words are ever spoken. Yet it is interesting to note that very few of Laberge's plays begin *in medias res*; the visual impact of the set works on the audience

much in the same way we pass through it in the text; the actress or actor enters to "discover" the space, even as the stage directions lead us into the script.

If the project of political polemic is to erect barriers, artistic language barriers seeks to remove them. Speaking of the role of the artist as political activist, Gustavo Meza of the *Téatro Imagen* in Chile said that the danger of political thought lies in its tendency to be black and white, while artistic thought is concerned with the grey shades in-between. Too often, he says, the politically conscious artist loses the delicate balance between politics and art. **10** Laberge maintains this delicate balance, in fact draws much of her dramatic tension from it, by using language both as her mediator and her *agent provocateur*; universal, human issues are communicated through the political means of a culturally specific language, which in turn becomes a larger language, the language of the heart. If this technique makes us acutely aware of the political, it cuts across political, as well as sexual and cultural barriers, to draw us into the lives of her characters as a metaphor for our own.

Derrida's study of the phenomenology of the voice, as a material manifestation of *auto-affection*, has important resonances in Laberge's theatre, where speech can be a sign either of linguistic colonization or of auto-determination and liberation, and where the voice can act as a weapon, and the violence of the voice can only be countered by a silent 'restaging' of that violence. Theories of aesthetic distance in the theatre, specifically as they relate to the writings of Bertolt Brecht, demonstrate the possibility of change in the theatrical framework. Brecht has had unexpected influence on feminist theories of theatre, among them Elin Diamond's work on "gestic criticism", which proposes a feminist usage of Brechtian theory, by connecting Irigaray's "specular gaze" and Laura Mulvey's "to-be-looked-at-ness" to Brecht's notion of "identification", to demonstrate that *gestus* allows specular distance, commentary and critique. Cixous' recent writing embraces the theatre as

a mythic site for transformation not unlike Artaud's. Laberge specifically turns silence, as the traditional sign for (feminine) disempowerment into a sign of resistance and auto-determination. Throughout the course of her *oeuvre*, silence develops first into a mark of dignified and righteous resistance in the face of contaminated language, a kind of "Refus global", and finally into a form of violent chthonic chaos that overturns an empty credo and leads to a brave new world of representational and linguistic rebirth.

Silence must always be a foil for spoken language, especially onstage. Laberge dramatizes the problem of silence on stage, not only in the historical ways that women have always been silenced in the theatre, but for any character disempowered by society. Claudine Herrmann, in *Les voleuses de langue*, suggests the Promethean gesture of a female writer venturing into a world of masculine mastered literature. H  l  ne Cixous, in her now-famous, "Le Rire de la M  duse", writes that women have been refused access to the 'writerly' aspect of language. Laberge's work both inscribes itself in the geography of the feminine oral tradition, in its use of passionately authentic language, and inserts itself into the canon of literature with its timeless, tragic themes, that equally recall, and deconstruct, the myths of her male predecessors. We will see that she moves from a position that posits silence as a discourse of the disempowered, to silence as an act of resistance and finally of redemption.

Laberge's theatre of silence suggests silence as a transformative technique, both within the play and in the larger context of society precisely because of the economics of specular exchange in the theatre. In traditional theatre, the audience enters the theatrical space with certain expectations, one of which is that there will be acting, both physical and verbal. In some sense, the audience's willing entrance into the *salle* of the theatre constitutes the opening gambit of what might be called the dialogue between *sc  ne* and *salle*. A performer

who comes on to the stage but does not respond in the expected way has ruptured that dialogue by resisting the traditional performative role. Dramatic tension is heightened when an audience, as desiring subject, is confronted with a character who "resists" audience determination; silence is the first level of dramatic resistance on the part of character, performer, and playwright. Its power lies both in the *wait* we experience, (a length of time controlled by the performer, not the audience) and in the *resistance* to specular determination, that displaces the audience from its traditional seat of power. The silent performer turns the tables on the audience, stages *them* as they wait for speech, puts them on the metaphorical "spot" that is the stage. Laberge uses this potential reversal of roles to great effect. Not only do her characters stage this resistance for the audience, more importantly they stage it for each other within the play itself. The ruptured relationship between actor and spectator is translated to stage within the play, and we as audience see what Elin Diamond, extrapolating on Laura Mulvey, has so brilliantly termed "looking at to-be-looked-at-ness". Laberge's characters are always conscious of the many roles they play, within their relationships, their families, and society. As we will see, these roles shift within the play, commentary on the economics of theatrical exchange is heightened, and the audience both empathizes with the characters (the spectators themselves experience the anxiety of no response), and critically distances itself from the *scène/salle* relationship.

As Ryngaert has pointed out, loquacity on stage is an unrealistic convention that contemporary theatre has sought to question in a variety of ways.(126) With the literary tradition of French theatre and the classical education that has formed the base of most contemporary francophone writers' experience, it is not surprising, as both Renate Usmiani and Patrice Pavis have remarked, that contemporary playwrights both incorporate and struggle against that heritage. As Ryngaert has written, "la véritable innovation d'un théâtre

du constat...réside dans le silence qui découle de l'échec de la parole.."(125) This silence does not arise from actor subtext, but constitutes the metaphysical emptiness that is at the heart of modern (wo)man's relationship to the world, as evidenced by the impossibility to communicate either with Gods or among ourselves. The lack of faith in the word, is articulated by Artaud when he calls for a new language that "springs from the NECESSITY of speech more from speech already formed...finding an impasse in speech, it returns spontaneously to gesture." (110) Artaud sees "speech already formed" as an "ossified" language; "all words are frozen and cramped in their meanings"(117); he seeks "the active, plastic, respiratory sources of language, let words be joined again to the physical motions that gave them birth,"(119) what he calls a "naked language." (93) Artaud's search for a more authentic language of the theatre seems very like Cixous' notion of a "new language" built on *ventre* and *sang* (*Méduse* 52); these are both languages that well up from silence as the authentic source of expression.

Contemporary theatre has explored the special quality of on-stage silence in a variety of ways, from the pregnant pause that punctuates sound, to entire plays where no sound is uttered. In Post-World War II theatre, in the context of the holocaust and the European occupation, silence has developed both as a death wish and as a form of resistance. Laberge owes much of her problematization of silence to the Surrealists, for whom the word was often an automatic, somatic gesture, as well as to playwrights such as Beckett or Ionesco, for whom the sparseness of language of seems to signal its visceral, explosive nature. To some extent, the word can be seen to function as "noise" in the sense made popular by modern linguists. **11** By extension, Brecht's theory of *gestus*, committed to techniques of alienation, demystification, and rupture of the mimetic model structure, also posits the importance of silence as a performative tool, and suggests how personal, somatic

movement paradoxically reveals action as repetition and at the same time creates a sense of truth through the uniquely personal. As we have said, by staging silence in these plays, Laberge creates a distance that allows her to comment in a special way on the economics of audience response. By "staging silence" I mean a technique that is very specifically her own. Her theatre of silence is in no sense a theatre of mime. Laberge gives us perspective on silence in text and onstage by writing characters who use silence as a performative act for other characters. These characters use silence as resistance on several levels, to resist the status quo, as defined by the status quo of the word; to resist patriarchal language that does not allow them to "speak"; and finally, to resist the physical violation that is "forced speech", whether by another character or the audience. In these plays, silence is made material as the entire body becomes gesture, paradoxically, a speech-act in its own right. Ryngaert has pointed out that the less loquacious a character is on stage, the more authorial intrusion can be apparent.(1993,127) Because silence is a performative act in Laberge's work, it is the intrusion of the character as author that is apparent; the performative act of silence within the performance itself emphasizes the artificial process of theatre.

For Laberge, the separation between written and spoken language can be as blurred as the relationship between *scène* and *salle*. She tells of her early realization, that the printed signs on a page were words, and that words "created meaning." "C'était comme si la parole passait dans quelque chose d'écrit." (*Ecrire* 846) In this sense, the relationship between the *didascalies* and the characters' lines comment on, and blur, the relationship between literary tradition and *oralité* in the theatre. While she is specific in her writing of stage directions, she considers them, not as textual laws but as "porteurs de sens" (*Le faucon*, 143), intended to add atmosphere and significance. They lend an empathetic spirit to the

work, but they also provide critical lucidity. Jeanette Savona has suggested that the *didascalies* in a theatrical work function as "speech acts" in their own right. Countering Ubersfeld's notion the dramatic text as a series of directives to practioners who will turn them into a performance text, she demonstrates that the *didascalie* remains, in its essence, "a representational, fictive act." Savona describes the paradoxical roles that the *didascalies* may simultaneously fulfill in a text: as a representational device they contribute to creating the fictive illusion, while at the same time they function as an "instrument of mediation between the textual fiction and the stage fiction." (1985, 242) She also suggests two reading publics: the reader/spectator, who creates his or her own (imagined) version of a *mise en scène*, and the reader/practioner, who uses the text to construct a concrete version of the text. She points out that this latter reader must necessarily pass through the first reading state, leading to a "subtle phenomenon of imaginary exchange between the different receivers of the text." (1985, 243) While Laberge has said that "Le théâtre écrit n'est qu'une trace" and cannot achieve "le choc espéré entre la représentation et le spectateur" (*Ecrire* 840), her work shows a keen awareness of the performative statement made by the on-page manuscript, where the visual intersection between *didascalies* and script has a drama of its own.

A close reading of Laberge's plays demonstrates that her work functions on several levels simultaneously, and that these levels can be related to the ambiguous role played by the *didascalies*. Even as her characters stage themselves on different levels, as "social actors", as characters "in disguise", and as actors in a play within a play, (to use Elaine Aston's and George Savona's useful categories) the *didascalies*, calling attention to authorial voice, participate in the text as reminders of its status as a literary device. On another level, however, they may function as an internal monologue, equally as theatrical as

a spoken monologue, in Laberge's theatre of silence. In some sense, these internal monologues, juxtaposed with external dialogue or monologue, create the fullness of the performance, since one could not properly be said to exist without the other. As we will see, Laberge takes the role of the *didascalies*, and their relationship to reader/spectator, author, and performer, to its logical conclusion in *Le Night Cap Bar*, where each scene is presented as the deposition of a character, and where the *didascalies* belong to the characters and not to the author. When a character "stages" herself (or himself) in Laberge's work, the very number of "authorial" personae both expose the role of the author and lead to its *mise en abyme*. If we see that the script has controlled the action, we are never sure whose script it has been. If the *didascalies* finally give us "la clef de l'énigme" (Ryngaert b 115), they do so as the thread which deconstructs the theatrical process, and returns us to the silent source. This multiplication of authorial/production/performance roles within the performance text also multiplies the number of 'readers', and not only is theatrical illusion exposed but also the many reader-levels that occur in text, production process, and performance, are revealed.

Keir Elam has differentiated between performance, which he refers to as theatre, and which Ubersfeld calls the representational text, and the drama, or dramatic fiction.⁽²⁻³⁾ He notes that literary critics, when they consider plays as literature at all, have traditionally privileged dramatic text over performance text. In contrast, production trends indicate that theatre practitioners are moving away from the primacy of the dramatic text toward a privileged directorial vision and the performance text.¹² In addition, the traditionally separate fields of dramatic criticism and performance/production have been greatly problematized by the new fields of performance theory and theatre semiotics, which seem to play within the unstable *différance* between theatre and drama, to such an extent that

Elam refers to a "complex of reciprocal constraints constituting a powerful *intertextuality*." (209) The playwrights of Québec seem to participate directly in this problematization of their art, as they write about writing. The visual difference between the *didascalies* and the "oral" spelling of dialogue/monologue in Laberge's work, and that of her contemporaries, demonstrates more clearly than any other aspect of their work, an awareness of a concrete relationship between theatre and drama. In Laberge's work, the slippage between the two 'languages' allows the characters' spoken words to function as stage directives to other characters, while the *didascalies* may act as interior monologues. Similarly, the reoccurrence of dramatic texts within the performance text makes a separation between them, in the context of Laberge's work, an artificial one. As author, actress, teacher, and *metteure en scène*, she participates in both worlds, and a discussion of her work must blur those boundaries further. The new editions of her plays, published by Boréal, include pictures and a *dossier*, which she says deal primarily with production values, but where a discussion of authorial processes, directorial research, and the work of the performers, link theory to practice. In an art where, as she says, "tout meurt", Laberge seems to see that it is only through the interaction of theory and practice that theatre can continue to exist in several dimensions at once. The dramatic text becomes as performative as the performance text is consciously dramatic.

Mircea Eliade has pointed to the two paradoxical definitions of myth in our society: the contemporary notion of myth as an outmoded fiction or outright lie, and the primitive one of myth as a sacred, 'true story'. These apparently opposing definitions have a great deal to do with the way we address reality and illusion in current theatre practices. Artaud's call for a return to the sacred origins of the theatre, and Brecht's desire to use alienation to affect social change, both suggest the theatre as a geographical and metaphorical space, where,

through its ability to participate simultaneously in the real and the ideal, transformation can occur on some level. Paradoxically, exposing the illusory nature of the theatre does not make its illusion any less powerful or far-reaching. As Toril Moi has pointed out, many feminist writers, in an attempt to escape masculine power structures, have rejected all power as patriarchal; as Jill Dolan notes, many have also rejected the theatre and the practice of representation as contaminated by its inscription in a dominant masculine tradition. While Herbert Blau has pointed out that the essence of theatre practice is ideological, Barbara Freedman suggests, that while the tools of the theatre have been used to perpetuate dominant ideologies, they are not necessarily related to any ideology. Similarly, as Campbell has shown, the mythic import of artistic practice is as much about overthrowing old ideologies as about offering new ones. In its framing of a specific moment, the theatre heightens that moment, elevating it not only to a position as icon, but simultaneously as index and symbol, (to use Peirce's vocabulary) as well.

It is this slipperiness, this ability to spill over between neat categories and systems that characterizes the unruly nature of the theatrical experience, and inscribes it in the chaos of eternal *différance*. In a recent interview, Laberge referred to her work as "a matter of life and death," and of the theatre as a "sacred space." She spoke, if not specifically of myth, in mythic terms, of her theatre as an attempt to "seize the moment" within the life and death cycle that is the human condition, and to confront "with all lucidity" the pain of being alive. Her work participates in a combination of magic and reality that, as Marie Vauthier points out, characterizes much of the theatre of Quebec. Myth is inscribed within her work on several dimensions, as she uses the theatrical space as one of transformation, for both characters and audience, as well as for the theatre itself. Many of Laberge's characters have symbolic wounds, in the sense that Bettelheim describes, as marks of passage and rites of

transformation. In the same interview, Laberge referred to her need to write as a wound, which must be healed through the practice of writing. Writing becomes a mythic act of reparation, as she uses it to heal women's traditional absence from stage, to bring women to writing, to change the way representation is used, and to transform society's current myths through a cosmogonic gesture of creation and reconciliation.

Notes

1. "Contraire à un préjugé fort répandu et dont la source est l'école, le théâtre n'est pas un genre littéraire" writes Anne Ubersfeld, in her first line of *Lire le théâtre II: l'école du spectateur*.
2. In his article "La Différance", Jacques Derrida writes: "Or, le mot différence (avec un *e*) n'a jamais pu renvoyer ni au différer comme temporisation ni au différend comme *polemos*. C'est cette déperdition de temps que devrait compenser -économiquement- le mot différence avec un *a*...il est immédiatement et irréductiblement polysémique...Il y renvoie non seulement...à être soutenu par un discours ou un contexte interprétatif mais déjà en quelque sorte par lui-même, ou de moins plus facilement par lui-même que tout autre mot, le *a* provenant immédiatement du participe présent (différant) et nous rapprochant de l'action en cours du différer, avant même qu'elle ait produit un effet constitué en différent ou en différence (avec un *e*). Dans une conceptualité et avec les exigences classiques, on dirait que "différance" désigne la causalité constituante, productrice et originaire, le processus de scission et de division dont les différents ou les différences seraient les produits ou les effets constitués. Mais.."différance" (avec un *a*) neutralise ce que l'infinitif dénote comme simplement actif...dans 'usage de notre langue, ...la terminaison en *ance* reste indécise *entre* l'actif et le passif...(48-49) It seems to me that for Derrida, the word becomes a metaphysical noun, where the temporal and the spatial intersect, and where potential is maintained as an open set because determination is always deferred.
3. While Lamar notes in her preface that "Unlike the situation in the United States, Great Britain and more recently French Canada, where net works of feminist playwrights and theatre groups have steadily developed, women playwrights in France have predominantly worked alone", she also remarks that "we do find a unity of thought in their presentations of problems and conflicts....from mother-daughter relationships to issues of personal identity, power and aging." She also mentions an "implied rejection of the patriarchal theatrical structure" which seems to me to be at the heart of much of current feminist theatre. It is interesting to note that Laberge and many of her contemporaries are dealing

with these same issues.

4. Joseph Campbell's *Creative Mythology* is devoted to a discussion of how the artist both subverts and supports the myths of a given society. He distinguishes between mythology which is designed to maintain a status quo, and creative mythology, whose purpose is to "foster the centering and unfolding of the individual in integrity." See Chapter 1 of *Creative Mythology* for a more detailed discussion.

5. Campbell uses the distinction between Libido and Credo to compare what he believes to be a natural human need for growth, expansion and change, with an equally natural need for stability and control. "Creative Mythology is an effect and expression of experience," he writes in Chapter 2: "The World Transformed" of *Creative Mythology*. Experience derives both from the new and the old, and is a delicate, dialectic balance. Laberge shows human passion as a catalyst for human evolution, and that passion, be it physical, emotional or intellectual, is always located in the body.

6. See especially, Chapter 1 in Godin and Mailhot, *Théâtre Québécois II*.

7. As Daphna Ben Chaim has pointed out, one of the aspects of Artaud's work in the Theatre of Cruelty that seems to have been neglected is his emphasis on the "psychological protection" that is available to the spectator in the theatrical context. She quotes Artaud's essay "The Alfred Jarry Theatre": "With [each] performance we are putting on we are playing a serious game, that the whole point of our effort resides in this quality of seriousness....Henceforth he [the spectator] will go to the theatre the way he goes to the surgeon or the dentist. In the same state of mind -knowing of course that he will not die..." Ben Chaim's conclusion is that for Artaud, the "theatre is a protected environment in which one can permit oneself to be most vulnerable because he is most safe."(44-45)

8. The *Parti Pris* manifestos made a clear distinction between *parole* as the virile language of the living, and *Littérature* as the dead language and ideas of an *ancien régime*. In this, they join Artaud, in his notion of the Masterpiece (*le chef-d'oeuvre*) which is a static icon of of corrupt society, as well as Barthes, who distinguishes between *écriture classique*, and a new kind of writing that would "reconcile the writer's words with the words of the people." (*Le degré zéro de l'écriture* 60) Literature with a capital L becomes a manifestation of the repressive order of a static society, while the spoken language of the theatre is a revolutionary new voice.

9. During an actual performance, the *didascalies* are, of course, not available to be "read" by the spectator. Laberge inserts written material, such as letters, contracts, etc., into her work to "hold the place" of the *didascalies* which are lost to us in performance, and to remind us that the written word is still privileged in our society, even in the context of theatrical performance.

10. This is taken from an unpublished talk during a series of workshops given by Gustavo Meza and the *Teatro Imagen* for the Theatre "Festival of the Americas" at the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University during the Spring of 1990.

11. "Noise" in the linguistic sense describes sound apart from meaning. In this context, sound becomes a visceral experience, an emotional explosion that is not always connected

to a semantic context.

12. See, among others, Godin and Mailhot, *Théâtre Québécois, II*.

Chapter I: "Le mot provocant": Interrogating Language

The struggle for cultural and linguistic survival that has marked Québécois theatre for over 250 years, and the vital but ambiguous position of the *québécois* language are two forces at the heart of Québec's theatre that continue to be both the subject and the object of its dramatic inquiry. Laberge's dramatization of language draws not only on the split within the French Canadian identity/ language identified by Jean Bouthillette, but, more specifically, on the inherent tension between word, motivation, objective, obstacle, and subtext that is at the heart of the theatre. Indeed, the opposition of word and subtext is a basic premise of theatricality; the theatre is a world where such a split is made manifest by the work of the playwright, director, designers, and performer, whose jobs are to find the many possible interpretations inherent in a text. That so much of Québec's theatre is about the theatrical process rests, to a large extent, on the parallel between this "split" and the québécois condition. The gap between the oral, québécois language and International French is dramatized very effectively by the dialogue between the *didascalies* and the spoken text. Laberge discerns gaps in what had previously been considered a collective Québécois language. Every character has her or his own language, and Laberge's project is to make us aware of the provocative power of the word as it erupts on stage.

Laberge frequently uses the word provocative to describe her relationship to language, implying not only a revolutionary stance but a relationship of desire and passion as well. Laberge writes of her "passion féroce pour le langage." (P 124) She wants to dramatize language, "stage" it for the audience, and is in many ways a "metteure en scène" for her language as well as her plays. "Mes pièces témoignent toutes de la même obsession du

mot qui, lorsqu'il éclate aux oreilles, porte un sens de plus". (P 126) Her dramatic quality arises from her ability to maintain the balance between "strange language" and communication, and from her clear understanding that in the theatrical arena the boundaries between public and private language become as fluid as do those between *parole* and *écriture*. The key to much of Laberge's work is her conscious use of the tension created between the text, the performance, and Barthian *théâtralité*, what he calls the "submerged text". This tension is paralleled by the tacitly accepted hierarchies she perceives in our use of language as a communicative tool, allowing the character to identify him or herself, permitting or preventing communication between characters, provoking controversy, creating dialogue between author and audience, and acting as a subject in and of itself. She centralizes (spoken) language between the larger, infinite language of human experience and the smaller, finite language controlled by and contained within the printed word. The moments of intersection, harmony and tension between the three realms of written word, felt experience and spoken language maintain a dramatic balance and allow the language to be both *parole* and *écriture*, to "be itself", comment on itself, and transcend itself. The performer's spoken word acts as mediator between two realms that have difficulty interacting directly and the level of mediation can either disempower or excessively privilege either of these realms.

Laberge's obsession with the word makes her acutely aware of the way we use its power to control and manipulate, and exposes the theatre as the site that exemplifies this system. Not only does she stage language, she stages the way we stage and perform language in order to create what Pardinis calls "les masques de la communication", a hallmark of her work. Her *oeuvre* participates in a development toward a new level of linguistic self-awareness that characterizes recent québécois theatre. If her early work puts

into play the difficulty of equivalent translation between cultures (collective or individual), her later work evolves toward a complex problematicization of the way we use language to stage ourselves and control others, and the unique position of the theatre as a stage for this discussion, while her most recent plays demonstrate the magical, transformative capacity of the word.

The translated word: *Ils étaient venus pour...*

In her early plays, Laberge demonstrates her keen awareness of the difficulties inherent in "translation" that are part of every communicative effort, a primary theme in her work. *Ils étaient venus pour*, begun in the summer of 1978, a scant two years after the valorization of the French language in Québec, deals with the tragedy of Val-Jabert, a worker community founded in 1902, whose hopes and energies are aroused, exploited and destroyed by an anonymous (English speaking) management during its 25 years of existence, what Rodrigue Villeneuve calls "one of the most spectacular failures in the development of capitalist industry in Québec."¹

The play is framed by two picnics, the first, an inaugural festival for the factory opening, the second, a tourist group meal during a visit to a long dead Historical curiosity. Laberge juxtaposes the vital language of the pioneer settlers come to "make history" with the impoverished and passive speech of the tourists who have come to stare at it as a retrospective curiosity. Even at this early stage in her work, Laberge's interest in the relation between performer and spectator is evident. On one hand, her historical distancing, in the Brechtian sense, stages the audience as well as the players. On the other, it turns the disembodied voices of the present into anonymous characters in comparison to the vitality and the reality of Val-Jabert's settlers. As a Québécoise she is revisiting and rewriting a history not told in text books. As Jane Moss points out, "Laberge never forgets that the

history of a collectivity is made up of individual histories." (1994, 980) The play maintains, as Villeneuve points out, " a tension between telling and experiencing, collective destiny and individual destiny, choral group scenes and monologue." Not only is Laberge making a parallel between Val-Jabert and the current political climate, she is also re-inserting women, their language and their stories, into Québécois history. She demonstrates the instability of the word, by staging all of Jakobson's three forms of translation: intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic. She takes Quine's idea of conceptual distance between languages to its farthest extent, positing every character as a repository of an hermeneutic culture that requires translation, and suggesting that individuality and isolation are invariably and inextricably linked.

Although we see all three forms of translation on stage in this play, it is not surprising, given the play's context, that the central scene stages a literal, interlingual translation between English and French. A representative from management has come to talk to the increasingly ill-used and dissatisfied group of workers and their families. He speaks to them in English, in platitudes which literally "do not translate" either into Québécois or into the languages of poverty, survival and hope which unite this valiant little community. In spite of the presence of a translator, or perhaps because of it, the true meaning of the representative's words is lost, and he is ironically met with cheers and renewed hope even though we as audience clearly hear his message of anonymous, uncaring rhetoric. A *didascalie* adds that the monologue, spoken in English and translated into Canadian French by another character, is "un discours qui devra évidemment être interprété avec les hésitations et les erreurs que la tâche de traduire suppose." English, in this context at least, is the language of the "haves" which can never be understood by the Québécois "have-nots" who are the artisans in the play, people struggling to be heard and, more importantly,

understood, in their "own" language. While to the audience the company's position is only too clear, the characters "hear" an optimistic reassuring speech. They hear what they need to hear even as the representative says what he must say. That these two discourses never interface is one of the hallmark's of Laberge's early theatre, and is reminiscent of the work of many of her predecessors, where, as Mailhot writes, "the irreducible opposition between two languages which simultaneous translation...only manages to make worse" (1988, 94), and, as a character in Loranger's *Le Chemin du Roy*, exclaims: "Y en a qui se tanneront jamais de traduire!"

The problem of translation in this play far exceeds a confrontation between English and French. The invocation spoken by Monseigneur Labreque, in a mixture of international French and Church Latin, at the beginning of the play, parallels the English representative's language, in its inability to communicate with its audience. Juxtaposed with the songs in popular language, sung by the arriving settlers to consecrate their arrival, Labreque's is an empty discourse, in a "dead language". Language and class are conflated, and translation between "cultures", as Pavis points out, becomes impossible on many levels. One of the reasons that the Val-Jabert settlers do not "hear" the messages that underlie the above discourses is that they assume a common language, a common mission, and a common culture. While the words may be the same, however, their subtext alters meaning, and the settler's hopes for prosperity, the boss' capitalist prosperity, and the Church's prosperity become mutually exclusive. The Church and the factory bosses are allied forces because their "meanings" are more powerful, and their level of language becomes dominant discourse.

The most poignant example of missed translation occurs late in the play, where a husband and wife, who ostensibly speak the same language, are unable to "speak" to each

other, because the dominant language of Church and State have taught them not to communicate. In her parting letter, Julia writes of her inability "to speak in person of what she has to say." Julia's letter takes the place of human intercourse, represents the failure of human communication on a meaningful level, and is a sign of the space between husband and wife. Laberge sets up Elzéard's reading of the letter so that we hear very little of the letter itself but rather Julia's thoughts on what it contains. "Même si t'es pas ben bon encôr en lecture du texte, j't'écris parce que j'saurais pas comment t'dire en parsonne c'que j'ai à dire...J'ai essayé ben des fois de t'parler de t'ça, mais c'est pas aisé de t'parler, Elzéard." (V 110) While we never actually hear what she has written in the body of the letter, we know that it is written language not spoken language by the way Elzéard reads the closing line, written in "corrected" French, and much at odds with the painful truth of her spoken monologue. Laberge's dramatic treatment of Julia's letter, staged as her monologue, rather than read aloud by her husband, allows us to experience the letter not as written material but as a cry from her heart. Elzéard treats the letter as a talisman; he reads and rereads it, trying to find answers, "mais j'ai pas encore toute compris, j'pense...fa que j'la relis.." (V 110). He studies the words as if *they* are the communicative medium and not the human voice.

Julia cannot translate the "night" language of their passion into the daily language that has been sterilized by the Church: "des fois tu m'parlais avec des mots qui avaient pas de bon sens, des mots pour la nuitte, des mots nouveaux pis doux comme tes mains sus mon ventre..." (V 113). This language of passion is condemned by the Church; when Julia goes to confession the priest tells her that sex without procreation is a sin which must be expiated through "work and abstinence." Julia's decision to leave her husband is based on her love for him, but twisted by the Church's dogma:

Ça m'fait d'la peine, Elzéard, mais des femmes comme
moé, ça sert a rien à une place comme ecitte à part que t'entraîner
dans l'mal pis t'enlever tes forces pour réaliser le bien comme
a dit monsieur l'curé.(V 113)

Elzéard, her husband, disempowered by society, and uncertain in his "own" language, is also unable to speak of his own love. He reads and rereads the letter, seeking to understand; the letter is at once the sign of the space between them and the only unifying agent left to him. The words on the page must be laboriously translated: he has only recently learned to read through Julia's tutelage, and is not proficient. As in much of Laberge's early work, these characters are impoverished by their lack of access to their own language, which is both simple and immeasurably rich in its truthful quality. The text of the letter is a dramatic script for Elzéard; like an actor, he studies it, seeking his role, and finds through it, though tragically too late, the words that might have been spoken: "j'aurais aimé ça avoir eu l'courage, rien qu'une fois de t'dire en plein jour, que j't'aime, Julia...Pis j'te l'ai jamais dit...j'te l'ai jamais dit..."(V 114) The language of a script, rich or impoverished, depending on the reader's ability to animate it, is separated from absolute meaning by its potential. The provocative quality of the word in these works is in the chaos it creates for the audience, for whom the *va-et-vient* between dramatic empathy and Brechtian distance is paralleled by a new awareness of the referent's inherent instability.

The word as power

With a realization of the inherent instability of the word, comes an equal realization that controlling the animation of the word lends power to the animator. In *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse à Gilles*, Laberge deals with the way language functions as a socio-economic phenomenon, in a small town, where, as in Val-Jabert, the Church is a repressive force, and the bosses are not English-speaking, but French. The play takes place during 1936; the title juxtaposes an event of monumental change, the war, with l'Anse à

Gilles, an insular community, where, it seems, nothing will ever change. Social positions are fixed and behavior regulated by controlling language, and through censoring individual voices that do not belong to the dominant social discourse. Secure in her status as a widowed woman of family and property, Marianna does not take seriously the gossip in town that she and her friend Honoré might marry. Both the orphaned servant Rosalie, whom Marianna has befriended, and Tante Mina mention the "things people might say", and Honoré himself suggests that there might be talk about his visits, but which Marianna blithely replies: "they're only words." (AG 94) When there is talk of war, her response is, "those are just stories." (AG 110) It is only at the end of the play that she sees the danger of stories and the hurtful capacity of words, when, after violating Rosalie, her boss sets forth a tale of flirtation and theft that compromises the young servant's reputation. When Marianna and Honoré consider telling the true story to the community it becomes clear that words and power are inextricably linked; social standing or Church doctrine are the only discourses that will be believed.

As we will see throughout the course of Laberge's work, the censored voice and a lack of access to language are linked to disempowerment. Early in the play, when her boss accuses her of being "une intrigante", who flirts with his young relative, Rosalie tells Marianna: "J'avais pas d'réponse à y fére, pis j'me sus sentie tellement pauvr' t'à coup, même pas d'mot pour répondre..." (AG 46). Rosalie, like Elzéard in *Ils étaient venus pour*, has been denied access to language; for her, lack of family, of instruction, and her station in life, have stolen her voice. For Rosalie, whose "truth" can never be "told", because it would not be believed, the script is one of silence, ruptured only by her friendship with Marianna, and by a letter, sent to her by her employer's young relative, Florent Dubé. This letter opens new vistas for Rosalie, represented by a world of writing and language hitherto denied her;

it also represents her (unwitting) violation of the unwritten social rules, giving her employer "the right" to violate her in return. It "proves" a social dereliction, and her punishment is that her employer will take physical advantage of her. Monsieur's patronizing question about whether or not she can read her letter, carries a weight of meaning in this context. As Mair Verthuy points out, the letter literally "erupts" into Rosalie's daily life, and its unsolicited presence, as well as "the importance her employer seems to attach to it" (AG 81) ruptures life as the characters know it, creating metaphorical and geographical space between characters, and reconfiguring alliances. The apparently innocent word, leads to extraordinarily far-reaching social upheaval, and the letter becomes a sign for the war which will change social, moral, gender, and economic traditions.

Laberge rejects any society or body that would censor the individual voice, and the atmosphere of censure that pervades the play comes from several discrete discourses of power. Tante Mina is equally as scandalized by Marianna's desire to vote, when the priest has specifically preached against women's political voice, as she is by Honoré's decision to vote against the Church's political party line, set forth from the pulpit on Sunday. At the end of the play, Marianna decides to leave the close knit community that conspires to censure the words that express opposition or change. She reads a paragraph of Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine* to Honoré, who finds its sentiments beautiful and inspiring: "au pays de Québec rien ne doit mourir et rien ne doit changer." (AG 116) Marianna, however rejects this "regne de l'ennuyance" and leaves in search of a new society bound neither by the controlling voice of the Church, nor by the prejudices and manipulative language of small-town society. That Hémon's text is "written" in form as well as in content, and in European French is juxtaposed with Marianna's linguistic spontaneity; her purchase of a radio not only provides new ideas and the promise of progress, but also challenges the class

structure in a village where progress is the privilege of the bosses. The reference to Hémon, as a European writer who colonized the myth of the *canadien*, is not infrequent in Québécois theatre, as, for example, in Léandre Bergeron's *Histoire du Québec en trois régimes*, where members of the cast respond to Maria's "rien ne doit changer" by kneeling and reciting in chorus: "Maria, osti, je t'en supplie. Pollue plus notre lumière." (Mailhot II, 49) For them, Maria's passivity represents traditional Québec, bound by its conservative attitudes and defeatist stance. Lise Armstrong has pointed to Laberge's ability to move the past toward a reparative future. As we will see in Chapter Four, this project is about giving voice to the women who have been silenced by history and by a colonial system that is not only political, but gendered as well. The social arbiters in Marianna's village, in their conservatism, are colonizers equal to Val-Jabert's factory owners or the Catholic Church. This play suggests that linguistic rigidity of any sort is a censorship of free expression, and that colonial oppression can be present even in the hard-won local language of the oppressed. All language is suspect if it is imposed, and the individual voice must always seek liberation from the collective voice.

If *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse à Gilles* leads us to the discovery that words are dangerous, it also suggests that, in the right hands, they have the power to effect sweeping changes. While the negative power of the word is evident in the Church's and Monsieur's use of it to control and limit growth, Marianna, one of Laberge's most memorable characters, has her own grounded, almost poetic language that suggests the Aurélie to come of *Aurélie, ma soeur*. She is a teacher, in the broadest, most positive sense: a mentor for Rosalie, and a catalyst for new ideas for her friend, Honoré. Like the playwright, Marianna is able to introduce new ways of seeing things, to disturb the status quo:

Marianna:
 Tout s'apprend, Honoré, toute! Y a pas grand'chose

qu'on sait faire de même sus l'allant d'la naissance: chanter, p'tête, pis rire...

Honoré:

Ouais, vous avez ben qu'trop raison, Marianna.

M'en vas jongler à çà, t'à l'heure en r'virant les mottes de terre sus ma plate-bande. J'en ai ben jusqu'à fin du jour à toute organiser çà correque dans ma tête. Vous êtes d'adon pour déranger un homme vous, Marianna.

Marianna:

Ben voyons, Honoré, çà vous était pas v'nu à l'esprit, pis c'est toute.

Honoré:

Chus pas sûr que çà s'rait v'nu tu-seul, Marianna.

Vous avez l'don de dire des affères importantes, vous. (AG 22-23)

Marianna both learns and teaches the value of education, in the broadest sense, of having a mentor who can help to achieve a higher level of awareness. Lucidity is one of Laberge's principal concerns, and throughout her work, there are characters who point out that neither lucidity nor avoidance of the truth are givens, but must be taught; as Marianna says: "tout s'apprend."

At the end of the play, Marianna accepts her responsibility in language, and her power to effect change with it. Honoré is changed by listening to her, has begun to think in a different way. She herself practices "oppositional reading", and "teaches" Honoré to do the same. The letters to be sent to Honoré promise more intellectual openness for both of them, more exchange of new ideas and more growth. Rosalie's lack of words and Tante Mina's clichés prefigure both Cri-Cri's mutism in *L'homme gris*, and Suzanne's frustration at her husband's "safe" language in *Deux tangos pour toute une vie*. André Belleau, in *Surprendre les voix*, points out that to censor language is to censor thought, even as Benjamin Whorf and Noam Chomsky suggest that language shapes concept. For Tante Mina, to censor language is to prevent "dangerous" thoughts and ideas that might challenge the comfortable social order. As we will see, Laberge suggests that censored

thought and repression of language leads to violence and destruction, and that language is only truly communicative if it is constantly in the process of renewing itself.

In *Deux tangos pour toute une vie*, rather than being censured by a more powerful class, it is her own family and her own milieu that would silence Suzanne. Both her mother, Martine, and her husband, Pierre, hope that if "they don't speak of it" her depression will go away. In an attempt to prophylacticize language they sterilize Suzanne's life; rather than dealing with the issues that make her life difficult, they deny her speech and turn hers into a "still life". Martine refuses to talk about anything that would cause confrontation or challenge: "dans la vie d'couple, là, t'es t'aussi bien de t'taire pis d'endurer que d'commencer la chicane."(DT 69) When Suzanne comes too close to challenging the existing order she either changes the subject or responds: "tu vas comprendre que ça a pas d'bon sens d'poser une question d'même."(DT 76) Pierre, too, will not accept confrontation, and suggests that it is better not to dwell on problems; only when he has been drinking is he able to overcome his fear of expressing himself. The character of Elzéard has grown into a Pierre; he has managed to accede to the language necessary to survive in society, yet he is still controlled by a discourse that censures the individual voice as dangerous to the status quo. Unlike Gilles, Suzanne's lover, with whom she feels alive because she is able to express herself, both physically and verbally, without fear of censure, Pierre is still afraid of truly communicative language.

Language as code

In *Deux Tangos pour toute une vie* Laberge deals with language as a code which, when translated, reveals yet another subtextual language: the dangerous language of euphemism, cliché, and denial. If written language is still powerful, this time as a means of

secret communication between Suzanne and her lover, adding danger to their affaire, spoken language has also become a specialized, encoded language that needs another sort of translation. Spoken language has been contaminated by the tradition and constraints that inform written language. A scene between husband and wife early in the play shows the emptiness of husband/wife discourse:

Suzanne:
C'est-tu de t'ça qu't'as peur? C'est-tu ça? Qu'on
arrete de baiser pendant cinq mois c'coup-là?

Pierre:
Appelle pas ça d'même, j'aime pas ça.

Suzanne:
Pis toi? Sais-tu comment t'appelle ça, Pierre?
T'appelle ça "le faire" te rend-tu compte? "Le
faire!" T'es pas plusse capable de l'dire que moi!
T'as même pas d'mot pour ça!

Pierre:
Ben, j'aime autant l'mien que l'tien! J'trouve ça
vulgaire, pis ça m'écoeure.(DT 47-48)

This scene shows the problem of language on its most human and practical level. Two different words for something make it almost impossible for two people to have harmonious intercourse in every sense of the term; it becomes impossible to transcend either personal or social language which either isolates the individual or makes them anonymous.

Suzanne's efforts to break out of the "dead" cliché language that permits her mother and husband to go through life without challenge, but also without passion, are met with rebuff. Only once does her mother break out of an annoying pattern of stock phrases, to speak, ironically enough, of her own mother's coldness, and her own desire for the maternal

physical closeness that she has denied her own daughters. Pierre, too, is paralyzed by clichés and euphemisms; the tragedy of their marriage is that when Suzanne wishes to discuss their life together, Pierre takes refuge behind meaningless language. When Pierre is finally able to express his own fears, he is drunk; his fear that she might abandon him keeps him from being able to speak honestly about his feelings of inadequacy. His alcoholic self-involvement allows him to wallow in self-pity rather than to address their problems as a couple, and only succeeds in increasing Suzanne's frustration at their inability to communicate on a meaningful level:

Pierre:

T'en voulais pas une conversation? C'pas toi qui dis qu'on pouvait jamais parler? Ben là, on parle, on l'a, not' conversation.

Suzanne:

Non, non, Pierre. Là, toute c'qu'on fait, c'est régler tes p'tites inquiétudes. on parle pas là, t'es trop chaud, on fait jusse décider si t'as raison d'penser que j'veux partir. Là j'pense qu'on va encore passer une heure à t'consoler parce que t'es chaud pis qu't'as peur que j'parte, comme à chaque fois qu't'es chaud. C'pas parler ça, c'est s'occuper d'toi. (DT 137)

We see that this scene has continued to replayed itself, and we will learn that Suzanne's sense of guilt at somehow having failed him is compounded by the 'fear of flying' that her mother has taught her. As we will see, Martine has "buried Suzanne alive" by teaching her a fear of passion, a fear of challenge and complication which she cannot overcome. Several times during the play, Martine tells Suzanne not to "complicate" things: "Ah, commence pas à toute compliquer, là, on pourras pus se parler" (DT 148); "je comprends pas c'que tu veux dire, t'es trop compliquée pour moi." (DT 160) If, for Martine, linguistic complexity is the greatest evil, for Suzanne, it offers the opportunity for escape from the "life-in-death" that she can look forward to if she stays with Pierre. Laberge has said that avoidance is as much a matter of choice as lucidity. Paraphrasing one of the maxims of the theatre, she

points out that even a choice to do nothing is a strong choice.

At one point during the play Suzanne talks about "translating" Pierre's physical and verbal language as if they are simple equivalencies:

Pierre:
Non, j'comprends pas! Si t'en veux plusse, t'as rien qu'à dire oui quand j'te l'demande. C'est toi qui veut jamais! C'est toujours toi qui dis non.

Suzanne:
Oui. Mais t'as-tu vu comment tu fais ça?...Un: tu m'défais les cheveux, deux: tu m'donnes un bec sur la joue en trouvant qu'chus d'bonne humeur aujourd'hui ou ben qu'j'ai des belles joues roses pis trois, t'annonces que tu vas t'choucher d'bonne heure a soir. Ça, ça veut dire: ma p'tite fille, pré-pare-toi, c't'à soir ça s'passe.! Pis là, dans l'code, j'ai rien qu'à dire que moi ausssi chus fatiguée pour que la vaisselle se fasse tu-seule pis qu'on s'couche après.(DT 52)

She goes on to say that their lives are so organized as not to use words at all: "C'est tellement organisée not'affaire qu'on n'a pas besoin de trouver d'mot pour ça, on l'prononce jamais, on n'en parle jamais. On parle d'aller s'coucher d'bonne heure." A code has taken the place of language, a code which is excessively limiting since there is no possibility for dialogue within a code. A code reduces language to a binary relationship, a series of logical entries in a ledger; it permits translation, but not discussion. It is not possible to investigate new behavior patterns within it. The equation of word=object assumes that everyone "translates" in the same way, and the nuances inherent in what we think of as rich language are lost. Suzanne's abortive affaire is an attempt to circumnavigate the limitations of both the linguistic and social codes. Sadly, she is unable to realize her role as challenger to the language, and dejectedly sinks into society's stereotype of her.

Suzanne's linguistic individuality becomes solitary confinement while her mother's and

concepts of modern socialization, mutual understanding, love and communication are debunked: Laberge shows us that if we do not look at the word as a challenge, complicated and ambiguous, and requiring dialogic response, we are doomed to isolation. Yet if language creates a gulf between Suzanne, Martine, and Pierre, it bridges the gap between performance and audience as well as between author and reader. The characters' failure to communicate communicates itself to us precisely through Laberge's juxtaposition of their different languages. The two tangos in the play suggest a language of the soul for Suzanne. The first tango belongs to her affaire with Gilles, where passion and language are provocative and exciting. The second is played by a musical toy, which Pierre brings home at the end of the play for the child they are expecting. While Suzanne, herself, has not escaped the controlling code of language and behavior that has turned her into a mother/wife, she promises a different life for her child, who will be allowed to make his or her own choices: "Je l'sais pas, Pierre. On va attendre de voir, o.k.? On va y laisser choisir si y aime ça, le tango." (DT 166) Her moment of lucidity and passion will lead to a wider opportunity for her child.

Laberge is clearly concerned with the loss of language, and with what we might call options for language retrieval. When language turns into a code, it dies, and it is the writer's job to revive and renew it, or at least to warn us of its impending demise. Language and passion are conflated here, as language and power, as language and free thought were in the plays mentioned above. In both cases, the implications of language as an operative and persuasive force in our lives, and the way our perceptions of reality are swayed by our often unconscious response to it, form an important part of Laberge's project. At one point, Suzanne, who was played by Laberge herself in the original production, asks: "Tu me trouves provocante?" She hastens to add: "Provocante dans mes

mots. J'parle pas d'sexe là, j'parle de provocante dans l'sens de provoquer." Laberge, like Suzanne, is an *agent provocateur* and wants to instigate upheaval and complication, in order to get at a new linguistic freedom and richness, a new expressivity. Unlike Suzanne, however, she has no fear of the passion she expresses so clearly to her audience.

Levels of language

Laberge is firm in her assertion that she does not judge her characters:

Je ne scrute pas la langue comme une puriste qui passerait son temps à guetter les écarts à la norme, à les quantifier et à les qualifier. Je considère la langue et le langage pour ce qu'ils sont: l'expression d'un être ou sa non-expression; quand un personnage s'embourbe dans un niveau de langue délabré ou primaire, je ne juge pas ce personnage fautif - je l'entends. (B 143)

When she refers, as she so often does, to the "levels" of language in her work, she does not use the word in the sense of hierarchy, but rather to express her fascination with "la multiplicité des 'façons de dire'." (B 143)

Les différents niveaux de la langue québécoise m'ont toujours fascinée. Impossible d'écrire du théâtre dans ce pays sans être conscient de la richesse et des raffinements de la langue. (B 142)

She is proud of Québécois multiplicity, "notre diversité n'a rien de chaos pour moi." (B 142) It is in *Le banc*, that Laberge most explores this diversity, a play which she refers to as "une sorte d'adieu à la ville de Québec." This play, perhaps more than any of her other work, celebrates the diversity in language rather than pointing to the isolation and miscommunication that individuality engenders:

Les niveaux de langue ont joué un rôle important dans l'établissement de cette micro-société. Chaque personnage, même si le spectateur n'a quelquefois qu'un aperçu sommaire de sa vie, chacun doit posséder son langage, sa façon de dire ou cacher, d'avouer ou mentir, d'argumenter ou attaquer. (B 142)

The play takes place on and around a park bench, a sign for the crossroads of all walks

of human society. There are 21 characters, ranging in age from 14 to 76, and were played by six performers in the 1983 production première. Laberge refers to the play as a "portrait gallery." Like *Ils étaient venus pour*, the play is framed by two scenes that anchor and inform it, in this case a silent one: The first and last tableaux consist of a worker going to work in the morning and returning at night. Carrying his "boîte à lunch", he passes through the park, in his daily ritual, feeding the birds, rolling himself a cigarette, and exiting. This routine both sets the scene for the play and closes it without closure, promising an infinite number of repetitions. As in all of her work, Laberge's portraits of the individual within the collective are masterful. The characters speak an individual language, expressing consciously, or more often, unconsciously, their social status within the collective, their hopes and fears, their prejudices and priorities, and, most importantly, what they cannot admit to others or to themselves. Laberge offers, as an example of the way people express what they are trying not to express, the character of Albert Parent, who "always repeats at least two times the slightest affirmation" and who is trying to put a 'good face' on his disappointment at having to move into a small and cramped apartment:

Mais c'est plus p'tit, ça, y a pas à dire, c'est plus p'tit.
 Mais on s'habitue à p'tit, on s'fait à ça...Au début, c't'endutu
 qu'c'est plus dur, là, on s'sent mal, toujours l'impression
 d'cogner un mur, mais on s'fait à ça...on s'fait à ça. Mais c'est
 plus p'tit. Définitivement.(B 30)

In a similar vein, the figure of the mother, who is only referred to in the context of her maternity, can only express her exhaustion, frustration and anger through baby language: "un peu comme si le langage avait été atteint plutôt que le corps," writes Laberge. Using baby-talk to "admit the inadmissible", ie., that she feels inadequate to the socially idealized task of motherhood, she turns herself into a child who wants to "be spoiled" by a loving, all-powerful parent. Like the mother, Jean-Maurice, a self-styled Lothario of 69, cannot

admit his sexual inadequacy, and so uses a verbal violence, not unlike Georges Trudelle's, to stage himself as a sexually experienced, dominant male. He uses clichés, both gestural and linguistic, to present himself as part of a social in-crowd, pronouncing: "Myami" with as clear an American accent as possible, and referring to his "motel full équip." (B 60) With his lewd references, and his boasts of young sexy conquests, he both stages himself as a playboy for Albert Parent, and reveals his inadequacy to the audience.

That these characters' language exposes them is due to the way they use it to stage themselves for an on stage audience. Albert Parent's need to appear contented, the mother's need to seem the ideal mother, and Jean-Maurice's need to resemble a romantic movie hero, expose the duplicity of language in a theatrical context. If the on-stage spectator receives only the overt message, the audience receives the covert subtext as well. As we will see in Chapter Three, this staging of self, within the confines of the stage, creates two other kinds of language level, which are not about social interaction, but specifically about theatrical and dramatic interaction.

Hierarchies in language

Laberge juxtaposes the struggle to find and accede to one's "own" language, with society's need to organize and codify language. *Oublier*, a two-act play about four women who come together at the family home on the eve of their mother's death, demonstrates Laberge's consciousness of the social importance given to different hierarchical levels of language. It is important to distinguish between the levels of language that Laberge refers to in *Le banc* and the hierarchical levels that society uses to judge, wound, or control others.

Hierarchies in language are important in *Oublier* : what one says and how one says it, becomes a crucial point of dissention and individuation for the four sisters. These women communicate on several levels: 1) they use international French for official business; 2)

they use local speech patterns and pronunciations within their community; 3) they use a private family language, that includes nicknames, identifies them as members of a unit, and brings them closer together; 4) they use individual language which identifies them as unique beings, "real" people, but which isolates them from each other. Within the varying degrees of community and isolation, Laberge identifies her characters for us, locates them as a group or individually in their social context, and from a theatrical point of view, gives them life. She exposes the hierarchies connected with language as a limiting social construct, and shows us how written language is privileged over oral communication, and conveys greater power in its permanence.

The play brings together, on a stormy night, four sisters who haven't met for over 10 years. They are assembled to deal with their mother's Alzheimer's disease. When Jacqueline brings out a document for her sisters to sign, one which will commit Micheline, the youngest, who has a mysterious amnesia, to an institution, it is written in stylistically pretentious, "correct" French. The artificial, official, officious nature of this language cues us in: this is "written" language, which serves a purpose in a socio-legal context but is clearly foreign and limiting, and inimical to daily life.

Jacqueline:

Bon, écoutez: on s'entend là-d'sus, Miche peut pas rester ici dans même maison qu'maman. D'abord, c'est un supplément d'travail inhumain, ensuite, c'est dangereux pour la santé d'maman. Ensuite, son état mental à elle est pas assez bon pour prendre le risque d'la laisser sans surveillance. (*Elle lit*). "En conséquence, nous trois, seuls autres membres sains d'esprit de sa famille, la plaçons dans une clinique où elle recevra tous les soins et traitements nécessaires à sa guérison. Nous autorisons tous les traitements que les médecins traitants jugeront pertinents." C'est l'doctor Tanguay, c'est quelqu'un d'très bien. Tu pourras l'rencontrer Judith si ça peut t'rassurer pour Miche. C'est ça, on a jussé à signer ici en bas toutes les trois. (O 83)

Laberge plays with the power of formal, written language to intimidate and the power of intimate language to manipulate. She dramatizes Jacqueline's attempt to manipulate her sisters through a combination of intimidating formal construction and a confiding, intimate family style. The punctuation, the spelling, the juxtaposition of public and private style work on both the sisters' and the audience's somatic response. The use of Micheline's pet name, Miche, lets us know that we are in intimate family mode, while the legal terms and formal tense usage represent what Jacqueline hopes will be the family's unified stance to the public world. Later, when Judith brings a strange man home, unified family language, individual language, international French and local idiomatic language appear in rapid succession as Jacqueline tries to keep up a polite social front, communicate her displeasure to her sister, and get rid of an interloper who has wandered into the family tragedy. Levels of language become levels of acting, on stage as in life.

In all her plays there is consistent reference to the powerful position written language holds in our society and to its perceived supremacy over spontaneous oral communication. Many of her characters privilege written material over speech. Letters, doctor's reports, and journals take on authority precisely because they are written. Almost always perceived as evidence, these documents play an ambiguous role for Laberge, because they are representations of life and no longer life itself: they are still life paintings, "killed into art." Frequently they represent *écriture* in the Barthesian sense: they are empty husks that maintain a social *status quo*. Later, in her work, as we will see, she will question even the theatrical script, a literary genre which is, like Barthes' notion of the *scriptible* text, ² is always open to an infinite number of performative interpretations. In this, she plays with the difference between the theatrical and the dramatic text, suggesting that neither can be seen as still lives, but should be considered as manipulations in their own right, on several levels.

In *Oublier*, the letters that Judith has written to Micheline, while intended to act as a bridge, actually become symbols of failed communication. While we never see the letters, (just as the audience never sees the script during performance), we learn that they all close with the words "take care", and this phrase becomes one of the amnesiac Micheline's few "memories" precisely because it is in writing. While Judith intends these letters to be an intimate, binding communication between the two sisters, she is unaware how much she uses them to claim her sister as property; ironically the letters turn Judith into the controlling maternal figure she seeks to escape. Out of context the phrase "take care" is ambiguous, either a warning or a caress; like an actress with a script, Micheline studies the phrase, looking for the subtext that would reveal her identity in the family play. When Jacqueline secretly reads them they become, on one hand, a visible physical barrier to further communication, and on the other, as open to multiple interpretations as a script in the public domain. The difference between the spoken intention and the written sign of these letters becomes a symbol of the empty space inside the family; the words themselves have been rendered mute in their writing. Laberge herself said in a recent conversation, during a visit to New York, that when she first heard the words "take care" she was struck by the beauty of the sentiment, and only later realized that the phrase is used only as a social formula. The difference between what she first perceived and what she later understood is at the heart of her struggle with what happens to language when it becomes formulaic, the result of casual abuse. Jacqueline uses the letters as "evidence" of Judith's partisan attitude toward Micheline, as well as a "pièce de conviction" to indict her for not caring for their mother.

In *Oublier*, linguistic control over others takes place in the very process of naming, assigning them a word. Juliette Tessier has named her first three daughters in her own

image: all three names begin with a "J", and as Joanne says, "Not'mère, a l'aimait ca son nom. A s'voyait partout." (O 55) Yet Juliette has no inclination to give a name to her fourth daughter, the result of an illicit affaire, a daughter she thought of aborting. Her refusal to name the baby is a figurative abortion, and Judith thinks of this child as her own: "J'en ai un enfant, rien qu'un, pis c'est Micheline...J'l'ai adoptée l'jour où c'est moi qui y a choisi un nom, parce que not'mère avait pus d'inspiration."(O 103) For Judith, naming is appropriation, and she refuses to allow her sister to be called by any other name: Jacqueline refers to her as Miche, Joanne, as Michou, but Judith's ownership of her sister depends on the use of the full, given name, Micheline.

Juliette's refusal to name Micheline is paralleled by her forgetting of Jacqueline's name, which Jacqueline takes as a refusal of herself as daughter. Jacqueline's one wish is to be recognized by her mother, and recognition is tied up with the name: "J'aimerais ça qu'a me r'connaisse avant de mourir. J'aimerais ça qu'a dise mon nom. Même par erreur à quelqu'un d'autre. Ça fait longtemps qu'a l'a oublié mon nom..."(O 95)

When Micheline, in her amnesia, becomes 'reacquainted' with her sisters, she fortuitously drops the first syllable of their names: Joanne becomes Anne and Jacqueline becomes Line. Mostly she refers to them as "la femme" or "l'autre", she has divested them of their relationship to the woman who has negated her very being. When she tries to name herself Miche, because she has heard Jacqueline call her that, Judith is brutal in her refusal of that name, but will not tell her the real one. Symbolically, she repeats Juliette's act of refusing to name, in the egotistical hope that Micheline will recognize her and remember her own name. Micheline's response to Judith patriarchal voyeurism is to refuse, in turn, to 'recognize' her:

Micheline:
 Vous m'connaissez? Vous savez qui j'suis pis vous

l'gardez pour vous? On joue pas aux mots mystères, là.
 On fait pas une partie d'cachette. Pour qui vous vous prenez?
 Vous v'nez ici, vous dites même pas vot' nom, vous
 dites que j'm'appelle pas Miche, pis vous ramassez vos
 indices sans rien dire, comme si c'tait une partie d'fun.
 Chus tannée! Chus tannée d'vous voir me r'garder comme
 si j'tais un magasin à surprises. Vous m'guettez comme si
 j'allais sortir le numéro gagnant. Allez-vous-en cherchez
 vos réponses. On gagne rien ici. Pis j'vous ferai pas
 l'honneur de vous r'connaître. (O 51)

Micheline's response is not unlike Derrida's, indictment of Lévi-Strauss's ethnological voyeurism, 3 and she "calls" Judith for "playing with people's lives and names". The inescapability of a name, once given, and the mythic quality of its inherited stain, is emphasized at Micheline's departure, when she says in response to Joanne's "J'aimais mieux quand tu m'appelais Anne", "Ben sûr...mais on est toutes les filles à Juliette." The other sisters cannot escape the inheritance of what Gabrielle Pascal calls "la trahison maternelle, cette incapacité d'aimer" (Smith 136), a "maternal inheritance" as implacable as the inheritance of the Atrides. Micheline's escape may be related to her having avoided the fatal "J", since, as Pierre Lavoie points out, "l'appartenance à la famille officelle, légale, est marquée par le J, lettre initiale au sens propre du terme, légitimation de la ligne maternelle." (124) To escape maternal naming and recognition, is to be able to escape the maternal legacy, and the destructive power of the maternal discourse.

In Laberge's early work, the written word, such as doctors' reports and posted "informational" edicts, are linked to colonialism and patriarchal repression. Like Barthes' *écriture*, they are intimately linked to the religious and social *status quo* from which they spring. When, in *L'Homme gris*, Roland wants to reassure himself that Cri-Cri is not mentally deficient, he says that he has "des rapports écrits qui le prouvent à la maison." He adds, "Ça coûté assez cher qu'y l'ont écrit sus du papier." (24) Written material "costs", and is equated with social and financial power. One of the most striking uses of a letter as

evidence is in *Le Night Cap Bar*, where Suzy blatantly falsifies written material to convict an innocent person, and where, as we will see in Chapter 3, she has Merlin-like qualities associated with her power over the word. If naming is equated with power, then the power of the playwright to name her characters, and the multiple layers of naming that exist in a play, involve creation in the strongest sense of the term. In *Le Night Cap Bar*, she consciously exposes the author's power of naming, through Suzy/Solange's re-naming of herself, naming of the false Raymond, and naming of Agatha as the false murderer. As we have seen, she does this primarily with the falsified letter, which becomes the *pièce à conviction*, written evidence, and therefore unimpeachable.

The word as gift

The gift of the word is one of the most precious gifts that can be bestowed in Laberge's work, precisely because of its capacity to provoke change. It is in *Aurélie, ma soeur*, the play that directly follows *Oublier*, that the word as gift has its first major manifestation in Laberge's work. Aurélie talks about the "good" father she has loved and lost, she evokes memories of reading the dictionary with her father:

...y m'prenait sur ses genoux, pis on r'garder les mots, les mots neufs, les plus beaux mots du monde dans un livre qui avait même pas d'images....Comment on peut montrer à une p'tite fille les mots pis y enlever après?...Pis en écrivant mes lettres, pendant tous les nuits d'insomnie où j'y'ai écrit, j'ai compris que j'essayais à ma manière d'y donner c'que mon père m'avait donné d'beau: les mots. (A 100-105)

It is the experience of her father in happier times, the gift from a father who taught her to revere language but not to fear it, that enables Aurélie to break the genealogy of destruction that haunts so many of Laberge's characters.

The gift of language is associated in Laberge's work with spoken language, as a physical expression of passion and life force. In a sense, it is the gift of life. In *Pierre, ou la*

consolation, her last play to date, Héloïse cannot substitute the letters that Abélard has sent her for the passion of the spoken word. While the letters are rarely mentioned, they form a strong intertextual underpinning for the play, since the story of the star-crossed lovers is primarily known to us through their famous epistolary exchange. Pierre Abélard's lifeless body, onstage in a sack throughout the play, is like a sack of letters left at the "dead letter" office. The cloister is the physical embodiment of Héloïse's incarceration within the rhetoric of these letters, while her spoken conversation with Pierre le Vénérable not only violates the rules of that cloister (feminine silence and sequestration) but marks their mutual gift of passionate speech. Abélard's literal death is juxtaposed with his linguistic death in life, and his double, Pierre le Vénérable, implies that, in his rhetoric, he tried to control language as he controlled Héloïse. By refusing the physical passion that was their communicative act Abélard is seen to have set himself up as a God:

Héloïse:
 Vous disputez contre l'inhibition de l'apèlement
 charnel tant enseignée de Pierre Abélard?

Pierre:
 Où est grandeur superlative?
 Se croire Dieu ou saint et banir l'humain de ses actes,
 ou se savoir humain et pescheur et banir vaniéité
 et orgueil de son coeur?
 Tendre vers Dieu, que si; mais prétendre à Dieu
 en étant homme n'est qu'illusion et péril. (P 104)

Pierre Abélard, in his use of language for power and control, in lieu of offering it as a gift, allies himself with the factory bosses and Monsieur Labreque in *Ils étaient venus pour*, while his double, Pierre le Vénérable, uses language not to coerce Héloïse but to liberate her. The musical language that Laberge "creates" is poetic and sensual in its rhythms, and its "strangeness" stages the gap between language as gift and socially mastered speech. Oral passion replaces defunct liturgy; the encounter between Héloïse and Pierre le

Vénéérable is sexually charged, a figurative rebirth for and through spoken language.

Speech is the ultimate physical act, liberating and empowering:

Pierre:

La mienne amour emplie du désir de ploier en
vostre corps sait, dans sa povreté mesme et sans
jamais le voir qu'aux confins de vostre
profondence est l'entaille de Dieu.
Et jamais n'en rendrai suficient omage.
Et vous en ai, à l'Un comme à l'autre, merci. (P 109)

As they leave to bury Pierre Abélard, bells ring in the distance and dawn breaks.

The idea of the word as gift finds its full expression in Steve's final monologue in *Le faucon*. In many of Laberge's plays there is regret for words of love left unspoken, and the geographical space between emotion and verbal expression is enormous. As we will see in Chapter 2, the premise of *Le faucon* is Steve's protective silence; it is all the more moving, then, when he makes a gift of words to his father:

Ecoute, j'vas t'faire un cadeau: quand tu sauras pus qui t'es,
quand ça va faire longtemps que t'auras pas faite de découverte,
quand le soir va être noir pis l'ciel vide, pas d'lune, pas rien. Quand
y aura personne dans ta maison, pas de femmes dans tes draps,
quand tu vas te demander si t'as toute raté ou ben si y a une lueur
d'espoir queque part, si l'échec total c'est ta vie ou celle des autres,
quand tu sauras pus si queque chose vaut la peine, même un soupir,
même un sourire, quand tu sauras pus rien...pense à moi. Pense à
moi quand j'avais quatre ans sur tes épaules, qu'y avait un vent chaud
d'été, pense que tu m'as protégé c'jour-là et que, rien qu'pour c'te jour-là,
rien qu'pour ces heures-là où tes mains tenaient mes pieds où ta tête
était douce et chaude, rien qu'pour ça t'es t'une merveille pour quelqu'un
pour toujours.....Tu tenais ses pieds dans tes mains, y étais sur tes
épaules comme un roi pis y respirait tes cheveux en ayant l'impression
de tenir le monde entier dans ses mains. C'est ça qu'tu y as donné.
Ça fait qu'y t'dit merci, pis oui, c't'enfant-là a eu un père.... (F 124-125)

Steve's poetic gift to his father is one of the rare, straightforward communication-gifts of one character to another in Laberge's work; similar to Aurélie's letters to her sister, Charlotte, in their generosity, this monologue does not posit the geographical gap

presumed by the letters. Relying on connotative poetic language, similar to the musical poetry in *Jocelyne Trudelle*, or the poetry of *Pierre*, Steve's monologue, in its synthesis of poetic image and human *joual*, is a masterpiece in the simplicity and honesty of the "felt experience". The gift of the word, then, is the gift of the playwright and the performer, who, as Claude Piéplu writes, must "ingurgiter le texte mot à mot... l'enfourner... l'entasser... l'enmagasiner..." (Smith 73) and is able to give it back, word for word, both connotatively and denotatively, breaking it open to audience scripting, and allowing the characters' many voices and many names to emerge. Laberge's languages are many, and she continues to seek new ways and new conditions of communication, and to use language to provoke us to see the theatre as a communicative tool in a new way.

Like Suzanne, in *Deux tangos*, Laberge herself is *provocante* in her need to test language barriers, and to shake up an audience that has become linguistically complacent and stagnant, takes language for granted, and therefore no longer really communicates. Conscious of the visceral power of modern spoken language, she wants not only to exploit and explore the phenomenon but to expose the manipulative power of the theatre. Her problematization of language depends on her medium: her written language is never "seen" by an audience but only heard and "felt." When actors get into the "skin" of a character, they are fitting themselves into the character's language, provided by the author as a physical, material construct for the actor to explore and fill. Anne Ubersfeld speaks of the play as *trouée*, a work with gaps to be filled by actor and audience. Laberge's gaps are frequently within the words themselves; she destabilizes the text through her use of what Ubersfeld calls the "phatic function", the "I am speaking to you, do you hear me?" that is the theatricality of performance. Her work makes the spectator conscious of "les conditions de la communication" (1978, 43), not only between the three levels of author, actor, and

spectator, but within each level, between actor/actor, between spectator/audience, and within the intertextual connection between authors. The conditions of communication are nothing more than the subtext that informs the text; the actor's attitude toward the character, the character's attitude toward him or herself, and finally the spectator's attitude toward the theatricality of the experience. Letters and documents, in the plays as in life, are either dramatic scripts, to be treated as texts that are *scriptibles* in the Barthesian sense, or they become "dead letters", whose subtexts, hidden from us, are a source of pain and misunderstanding through their impenetrability. Documents mentioned in the plays are props; they cannot be read by us but are artifacts of a dissolute society where *parole* and *écriture* may become signs for each other. Laberge's use of theatrical illusion as a metaphor for the very real instability in our life is not new. As Martin Esslin says, "is not ultimately all human interaction in the real world based on "role-playing, conventionalized behavior, hence 'acting'?"(76) Her contribution is an exploration of "meaning" within the theatrical construct, where subtext can be more important than the word itself, yet she continues to seek *le mot juste*, in her current work as in her translations. Her awareness of the theatrical nature of *all* language is due, in part, to the climate of the times, but also to the unique position that Québécois playwrights hold in the world of theatre. Revolutionary and provocative, she remains heir to those who fought an anglophone government for the right to *speaking* her own language, faced European patronization for the right to *write* in her own way, and countered the Québécois socio-religious *status quo*, which suppressed feminine language. Her mistrust of written material arises out of the experience of colonization, and she continues to translate that experience in a variety of ways. If Laberge's work can be read in terms of a post-colonial expression it is certainly in terms of her problematization of language. Her work is an effort against repression of the human voice, whatever its form.

In all her dramatic literature to date she struggles against that repression, be it be by English-speaking governments, patriarchal society, conservative French linguists or narrow-minded family members. Her experience of the colonial is as an on-going domination of others through suppression of the voice. She thinks of language as a living, mutable thing and provokes us to *hear* language in a different way: she would "parler dans une langue devenue étrangère mais communiquer tout de même." (P 123) The dangers of "dead" or "murderous" language are never far from her work, whether it involves degeneration of spoken language into a static code, the patriarchal repression of a feminine voice, or the privileging of written over spoken language, or of European French over *joual*. Concerned with language as a lively art, Laberge continually battles linguistic tyranny and hierarchies and the rigid formalization and codification of language by any colonizing and stultifying Academy.

Notes

1. Rodrigue Villeneuve wrote the preface to the VLB edition of *Ils étaient venus pour...*
2. In *S/Z*, Barthes distinguishes between a text that is *scriptible* and one that is merely *lisible*. The *scriptible* text allows, even demands, reader (or in the case of the theatre, spectator) participation in the creation of its meaning, while the *lisible* text is one that belongs to what Barthes calls *écriture classique*, becoming only a compendium or reference, and permitting no interaction with it.
3. See *La Grammatologie*, Part II, Chapter 1, "La violence de la lettre: de Lévi-Strauss à Rousseau", pp. 149-202. "La simple présence de l'étranger, la seule ouverture de son oeil ne peut pas ne pas provoquer un viol" he writes. (166)

Chapter II: A Theatre of Silence 1

If Laberge's passion for "the word" in all its complexities demonstrates her interest in the dramatic text as a sophisticated, readable work, belonging to a literary tradition, her strong sense of the theatrical indicates that silence can be a most powerful visual and dramatic tool. As we have seen, the word in a theatre text is an open set, until animated by the actors and actresses who will play these roles and the many *mises en scènes* that will inform them. Much of the magic of a performance lies in the physical language that reveals what the words do not; the words, until they are rooted in the character-body that inhabits them, represent potential not communication. The audience's dialogic response in any theatre experience plays a large part in determining "meaning"; as Douglas Robinson has shown, language is learned not cognitively, but somatically, through our physical and emotional experience of the word. As an audience we may receive meaning as a physical reaction to a character's physical reaction, and bypass words entirely.

Many of Laberge's characters, both male and female, battered by society and betrayed by the "stacked deck" of politically and socially mastered speech, take refuge in a mutism that protects them from participating in their own destruction. In *Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient*, Maurice stages a theatre of verbal and sexual silence of retaliation for his wife and family. In *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse à Gilles* Laberge reveals a code of silence that is both gender and class mastered; in *Ils étaient venus pour...* and *Deux Tangos*, failed communication and empty language is laid at the door of the Church's silencing of sexual pleasure. In *L'Homme gris*, Christine's gestic silence is an active expression of the "felt experience": her mutism becomes an authentic voice and her anorexia, physical silence. Ubersfeld has shown that "theatre within theatre" exposes the theatricality of the

Ubersfeld has shown that "theatre within theatre" exposes the theatricality of the performance mask. ² Christine's "dumb show" exposes the mask of her father's own false theatre. In *Jocelyne Trudelle trouvée morte dans ses larmes* Laberge uses multiple levels of silence, both physical and verbal, to demonstrate failed communication on the simplest level. Jocelyne's suicide, a bullet through her mouth, creates a deafening silence; as we will see in Chapter 5, her comatose poetry and song, "unheard" by the other characters, is an alternative to the "dead" conversation around her.

Laberge's theatre of silence has changed as her work has evolved. While silence is related to death in all her work, it is no longer necessarily equated with death, and can become, as earlier plays such as *La réparation*, *L'Homme gris*, and *Jocelyne* suggest, a place of growth, however convulsive, of authenticity, however cruel, and of generosity, however painful. For Laberge, a theatre of silence is always revolutionary: challenging the status quo, by allowing the audience to witness the mutism that arises from repression, or by staging a resistance that, because it is dramatized, is more active than passive. In the final moments of *L'Homme gris*, when Cri-Cri accesses the chthonic chaos arising out of the babelian order and attacks her father, the language of silence overthrows the linguistic order. Since Cri-Cri never speaks, she never lies, and Laberge parlays this mutism into a complex discourse on the new role silence is to play in her theatre.

Laberge's interest in a theatre of silence has much in common with the work being done by other feminist writers, who question the very possibility of human communication in a language that so much privileges patriarchal society. ³ Silence is a common feminist response to patriarchal colonization of language, where, as H  l  ne Cixous writes, "la femme n'a jamais eu *sa* parole." (1975, 42) As the feminine body has been censured "on censure du m  me coup le souffle, la parole;" (1975, 43) in her role as symbol or metaphor,

woman has been maintained in silence and *épinglée* by the gaze. Laberge both shows us and speaks to the silent position women have held in society. In *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse à Gilles*, Rosalie is bereft of speech before her employer's censure; Marianna speaks to women's traditional role when she says to Honoré: "j'pense que nous aut' les femmes, on meurt dans l'silence." (AG 116) The very geography of rural québécois society is inscribed in the silence of the disempowered, as well as conflated with the performance stage itself when Marianna says: "icitte, c'est l'silence qui mène." (AG 114) Marianna's attempts to turn the passive silence imposed by the gaze into an active silence that is an eloquent, gestic criticism and which reveals patriarchal language to be as empty as the Emperor's clothes. She takes Rosalie and leaves, in her own, 1936 version of a *refus global*.

In Laberge's work, what is not said takes on heightened importance by its very omission. In *Le banc*, for example, what one says does not correspond to what the words 'mean' but to how the characters 'feel'. In *Oublier*, Jacqueline's refusal to admit her mother's imminent death suggests, as Laberge points out, her own unwillingness to "be born," and all four sisters impose a form of *oubli* on themselves that will help them to evade a lucidity that would lead them off-stage into 'real life'. The shameful family secret, Madame Tessier's affaire and subsequent illegitimate child, Micheline, has stunted the family's growth and suspended its animation. Silence has become death. Equally as destructive is the code of silence that is promulgated in *Deux tangos*, where Mother and Husband, the two traditional figures of authority, tell Suzanne that if she doesn't talk about the fears she has they will not materialize. Both subscribe to a view, debunked, as we will see in Chapter 4 by Aurélie, that silence is safer.

If society has conspired to maintain women in a silent 'safe' position, the role of the

father is frequently related to noise. In Laberge's work, silence can be both positive and negative, and the province of both female and male characters. Blanca Navarro Pardiñas has remarked of *L'Homme gris*:

si les signes du père sont de l'ordre du bruit, ceux de sa fille s'inscrivent dans celui du silence. A l'ouïe se substitue la vue. (Smith 117)

This is equally true in *Jocelyne Trudelle*, where the Father's noise is starkly contrasted with his daughter's coma and silent journey toward death. The "order of noise" as a foil for the "theatre of silence" is a constant in Laberge's *oeuvre*, and "la vue" is no longer an intrusive gaze but is a positive performative act which turns a mirror back on audience desire, "demands" its attention and requires its participation. The doubled regard is a hallmark of this theatre. Not only is the spectator called to "witness", but there are witnesses within the plays themselves, constant reminders of the many levels of specular economics in the theatre.

Laberge appears to suggest that the stasis of Barthesian *écriture* has crept into spoken language as well and that when society 'writes the script' people are reduced to characters, making the spectator as vulnerable as the performer. This is particularly clear in *Le faucon*, where Steve's silence puts his observers on the defensive: his father cannot stop talking to fill the gaps left by Steve's refusal to speak, while his counselor, Aline, must learn to "speak" his non-language. The spectator is both distanced and admitted to this double staging, able to observe the performative process, while participating in the tension of the theatrical moment. We will see that silence in Laberge's work is both an affirmation and a destruction of the self. It may appear, to both characters and audience, to be a passive withdrawal into stasis, but it is, in every case, a catalyst for convulsive change. That this change is able to take place is due to the safety of the theatrical space, as evidenced by

Brecht's theory of distance in the theatre, the "psychological protection" that is afforded by what Sartre called the "negation of reality" in the theatre, and Artaud's point that one is able to be completely vulnerable and experience even "death" in the theatre *because* it is so safe, and the spectator knows "he will not die." (quoted in Ben Chaim 44) Through the "psychical distance" provided by the multiple levels of staging in her work, Laberge allows us to experience the unsettling potential of silence as chaos: its violence, and its catharsis. She allows us to experience and criticize the power of the author as "role-maker", and to participate in the death, resistance, and transformation of her characters.

Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient

In *Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient*, (1980), Maurice Gingras' refusal to speak to family and friends is a phenomenological event: an affirmation of the spiritual self, in his refusal to participate in what he perceives to be a non-life; a refusal of the material self, in the sense of Derrida's view of the voice as a manifestation of *auto-affection*. Maurice chooses to be both deaf and dumb to any verbal, or physical stimulation. Having fulfilled his social 'role' for 65 years he has 'retired' from life as an actor withdraws from the stage, and seeks the privacy of an interior life. For Maurice, the "real world" and stage are reversed; society is a stage where role and speech are one, and his imagination is a 'real world' where he can stage his memories of a lost childhood paradise, in a silent, poetic language.

To refuse society's role is to reject its language. As in *Deux tangos*, language is a scripted code which has a cliché for every responsibility but which has no relation to the felt experience of Maurice's interior monologue. Laberge renders the split between Maurice's on-stage and off-stage worlds material by providing what she calls in her *didascalies*: "l'endroit qui parle du passé". (H 85) Maurice's silence is emphasized by the fact that it is the space that speaks, not the character.

Maurice's inability to deal with his adult self, apart from the mask/role he has assumed at work, is the result of a traumatic childhood loss. On a visit to his beloved aunt, Félicie, he had pretended to be lost in order to test her love. Félicie searches for him all night, and finds him, but succumbs some months later to a lung congestion, and the child Maurice feels both abandoned and guilty. For Maurice, the loss of Félicie seems all the more unjust because it robbed him of a happiness he had only just begun to discover:

Vous auriez jamais dû mourir, vous l'savez ben,
j'avais besoin d'vous, moé, j'avais encore besoin d'vous,
j'tais trop p'tit, j'commençais ben jusse à être ben...(H 41)

His anger at her death and at himself for causing it, occasions a split between his exterior and interior worlds that comes to suggest the split between *salle et scène*, between actor and character, between backstage and on-stage. Indeed, Maurice stages a passive resistance to Being; his silence acts as a barrier between himself and his surroundings, objectifies others (Cécile, his wife, the radio, and the television become interchangeable signs for the "noise" in his life), but in the process, his silence acts also as a barrier to communication between interior and exterior selves. As Derrida points out, the monologue is not an act of communication, but a staging of the communicative self (1967, 54); if Cécile's constant speech is an effort to represent herself as a valid, speaking subject, Maurice's interior monologues are not, properly speaking, monologues at all. Rather they are monologues of the past, spoken not by Maurice, but by the "space of the past." It is this space, which stages its communicative self, paradoxically making itself the visible representation of silence and absence and giving Maurice's silent absence "presence" on stage.

The *mise en abyme* of the theatrical "regard", of visibility in the context of absence, is manifested by the television that Maurice stares at blindly, while the radio functions as theatrical "noise". As Maurice says:

...les gens sont tellement stupides, y veulent toujours parler de n'importe quoi, mais surtout, de rien d'intéressant...parsonne ne s'est jamais intéressé à moé(H 56)

If Maurice perceives the emptiness of daily social discourse, this emptiness is related to that fact that it does not seem to be about him. Ironically, the play within the play *is* about Maurice as subject: Cécile lives her life around their failed relationship, his office colleagues concern themselves with his welfare, and his daughter, Hélène, spends her life looking for him, but Maurice's silent self-loathing makes it impossible to "hear" himself as subject, to represent himself as "real". His tragedy, and that of all those connected to him, is that if he cannot break through his barrier of silence, no one will be able to "be interested" in him in a way that will seem meaningful; his silence is not only imposed on others, it has doubled back on him, and he is silent even to himself.

Maurice withholds himself sexually as well. His rejection of adult passion is related to his rejection of the power of speech, which, as we have seen, is intimately connected to desire for life in Laberge's work. Maurice's physical stillness, referred to by other characters and frequently reinforced by the *didascalies*, is part of his total lack of voluntary presence, his withdrawal from the scene of life. Maurice's silent stillness is dramatically opposed to Cécile's constant noise and ceaseless activity, but, by juxtaposing their respective interior monologues in a technique not unlike Michel Tremblay's choral drama, Laberge shows these characters to be mirrors of each other. Silence and noise are shadows of the same isolating barrier that reinforces the split within the couple, traditionally the sign for perfect unity; both are masks that cover a poverty of the inner spirit.

As in all of Laberge's work, the present of the play does not exist in a theatrical vacuum, but is linked to a past and future genealogy that is clearly marked. Maurice's desire for absence is connected to his loss of a parent figure at a critical point in his

childhood. That he becomes trapped in the moment of loss and being lost affects the way the family history evolves. Hélène's search for her father is a replay of Maurice's life search for his Aunt Félicie; Cécile's search for a present, physically passionate husband, is a replay of Maurice's unrequited desire to be "found" by Félicie, as well as of her own need to be "found" by someone who loves her.

Cécile's struggle to reach a physically "present" Maurice is tied to food, a point of contention between them. Food is traditionally both a metaphor for nurturing and a symbol of sharing and community. In Laberge's theatre of silence, neither nurture nor community are possible, and food as a sign becomes perverted. Cécile's battle with sexual frustration is metaphorically replayed by the "diet" she claims to be on, while she smokes cigarette after cigarette, and rationalizes her constant bingeing. Her unhappy relationship with food, as a metaphor for her relationship with her body, is played out in her effort to control Maurice's food habits. She chides him for snacking before meals, (as she does, herself), complains that he won't eat, and tries to control him physically by spoon-feeding him. What should be a sign of nurture becomes a place of hostility and power-struggle. Maurice's refusal to eat (he rejects Cécile's food as well as her body), is related to his silent death-wish; he resists food as the symbol of community and human intercourse, destroying his body and seeking absence.

Maurice's silence acts as a punishment, of others and of self. His only mode of self-empowerment is through self-destruction: "J'vas crever au plus sacrant sans dire un mot à parsonne!" (*H* 42) he says in a moment of (interior) defiance. His silence is connected to his desire for death. In the phenomenological sense, to refuse to represent himself in speech is to seek perfect absence, which is death. In this context, the parallels between *Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient* and *Jocelyne Trudelle trouvée morte dans ses larmes* are

inescapable: Jocelyne's choice of a bullet in her mouth is perhaps a more active version of Maurice's choice; her juxtaposition of poetry and music with the "world's" ordinary speech parallels the separation between Maurice's and Cécile's interior and exterior monologues (there is almost no dialogue, in the traditional sense, in either of these plays), represented in both plays through the theatrical split between "real" and oneiric spaces, within the designated stage space.

Jocelyne Trudelle trouvée morte dans ses larmes

Jocelyne Trudelle trouvée morte dans ses larmes, had its first staged reading in 1981, and demonstrates Laberge's continued preoccupation with silence as a form of resistance. Like *L'Homme gris*, this play deals with feminine silence, the result of an overbearing father, a speechless, passive mother, and a hostile society, whose language belongs to the Father's "order of noise", and cannot express the silent appeal of young women. During the play Jocelyne never speaks; she is visited in her coma by the participants in her failed life. She sings to them, accompanied by a pianist, a seductive death-figure in a blue, oneiric space. Jocelyne's method of suicide is unambiguous: by shooting herself in the mouth, she makes it impossible to respond to her family/audience's desire to break her silence. Like Maurice, however, she is still marginally present, in a "space of silence". She has "hidden in the woods" of her suicide and can be "found" if someone will speak in response to her. Her nurse is clear about the possibility for survival:

Moi, j'pense qu'on peut aider une malade à lutter pour vivre,
même si est dans l'coma. J'pense qu'y faut qu'les gens qu'a l'aime
lui *parle*, l'aide. (*JT* 31, my emphasis)

None of Jocelyne's visitors *do* respond by speaking to her. Her mother has never spoken

and is an icon for the censured feminine voice: "J'sais pas parler, moi....j'parle jamais." (*JT* 34) Carole, her friend, feels rejected and abandoned by Jocelyne's solitary act: "...a l'avait rien qu'à m'appeler, j'tais là, j'tais là...pis a l'a pas asseyé de m'parler." (*JT* 41) Georges, her father, will talk to her (give her a good talking to) "quand a va pouvoir parler" (*JT* 72) and Ric, the erstwhile boyfriend, says "quand a va s'reveiller, j'aimerais ça y parler" (*JT* 115) and, "J'vas r'venir quand tu vas pouvoir parler." (*JT* 118) They have all missed the essential point: with her suicide attempt, Jocelyne has already "spoken". She awaits their response, but as Lucie, her nurse says: "Sais-tu qu'y en a pas encore un qui t'a parlé?" (*JT* 76) When Carole finally speaks, Jocelyne is gone.

Listening, as separate from speaking or silence, takes on special importance. Many of Jocelyne's visitors refuse to speak to her on the pretext that she could neither hear nor understand; unlike Jocelyne, they will not initiate a conversation that may not be "heard". Ironically, as her song shows, Jocelyne is listening for their response:

J'entends marcher la peur
Toujours pas de reponse.

Ma voix ne porte plus
Personne ne peut m'entendre
Vos oreilles sont en cire
Et vos coeurs en plastique.

Peu importe, je pars
Je n'voulais pas rester... (*JT* 37)

Georges will not "listen" to the suggestion of suicide, nor will his wife "hear" the truth from the people around her, even as she is deaf to Jocelyne's song of appeal. By emphasizing the problem of dialogic response, Laberge mirrors the role of the silent spectator, identifying him/her with Jocelyne's silent self-destructive gesture, "silent" song, and with her visitors' inability or refusal to respond. This suggests a rupture within the

communicative process that is the basis of traditional theatre.

Jocelyne incarnates the young woman silenced by society as a specular object. Her mother is a role model for silent passivity. Her father treats women as objects to be seen and not heard:

Carole:
J'ai pas envie d'parler à parsonne.

Georges:
Ouain? Ça adonne ben, j'ai d'quoi à t'dire: fa que assis-toi pis écoute. C'pas forçant ça.

Carole:
J'ai pas envie d'écouter parsonne non plus.

Georges:
Crisse, j't'ai dit assis-toé là, pis écoute: c'tu frança? (JT 52)

Georges is a particularly brutal character, whose domination resides in his linguistic "presence" and noise, and in his assumption that women exist for his pleasure. He refuses to support Jocelyne, who has lost her job: "Si j'ai envie d'payer pour quequ'un, j'vas payer pour une vraie femme, pas pour une hostie d'faticante qui parle jamais..." (JT 54) Unlike Roland, in *L'Homme gris*, he has not sanitized his incestuous attitude toward his daughter, and is irritated at her refusal to accept her female body/role:

A jamais été capable de s'organiser pour avoir l'air d'une femme. A m'aimait'tu, elle, tu penses? Pas capable de s'mette un morceau d'linge de femme sus l'dos, toujours l'air de pas avoir de cul, comme sa mère. Quand on a l'body qu'a l'avait, faut s'arranger en crisse si on veut que l'monde nous voye! (JT 55)

He believes that Jocelyne's problem is sexual hysteria, inherited from her mother, and that all she needs is "a good lay":

J'y ai dit qu'a l'aurait l'air d'une soeur pis qu'a r'semblait à sa mère:

un gars qui va a peau, c'pas une fille de même qu'y charche! J'y ai même acheté un top une fois, pis a l'a jamais mis, crisse, jamais! (JT 56)

The paradox in George's attitude reflects a problem for feminine language. He complains that Jocelyne and her mother never speak, but tells Carole and Lucie to "shut up and listen." Carole's appeal about Jocelyne's lifelong solitude, "si seulement quequ'un l'avait vue, l'avait regardée"(JT 60), is countered by George, who complains that Jocelyne never made herself nice to look at, and fled his gaze. In this context, patriarchal language cannot express the feminine experience; Jocelyne, Carole, and Lucie are all misunderstood when they try to speak to Georges, and Madame Trudelle (she has no other name), has given up trying. The only woman in the play who belongs to a patriarchal order of noise is the night nurse, who talks to keep herself awake, and whose monologue is an empty, isolating babble.

As we have seen, physical passion is important in Laberge's work. The figure of Death, a pianist on an elevated platform, is sexual and seductive. Jocelyne is drawn to him not only by his music but by his physical charisma. When Georges insists that there was no suicide, Carole speaks of Jocelyne's relation to the shotgun in graphic terms: "...a l'a voulu l'nettoyer avec sa langue, c'pour ça qu'a l'a mis l'canon dans sa bouche!" (JT 62) Physical passion does not require consummation, however, and Jocelyne's "plus belle nuit d'amour qu'une fille peut rêver" (JT 106) is a night spent in bed with Ric, eating crackers, listening to music, laughing touching and talking. As in *Deux tangos*, music is the purest example of transcendent language and represents the rich interior language that is the other side of exterior silence.

L'homme gris

L'Homme gris, (translated as *Night* by Rina Fraticelli), is perhaps Laberge's most profound exploration of a theatre of silence. Opening to a lukewarm reception in Canada, it

went on to extraordinary international acclaim. This play also deals with possible expressions of female rage, and the sad reality that this rage usually finds its outlet not in violence toward the persecutor but, as for Jocelyne, toward the female victim/self. It addresses the need for women to break the cycle of self-destruction that rage perpetuates; as Carole says to Georges Trudelle, "...si j'avais eu un père comme vous, c'est vous qu'j'aurais tiré, pas moi."(JT 57)

The premise of the play is simple. Roland is bringing home his daughter, a former anorexic, who has been battered by her husband. They have stopped at a motel. The daughter is no longer able to speak and the spoken words of the play are the father's alone: she will sit mutely, throughout the play, while the father searches for the cause of her problem. What he will never realize, and what we come to see through their performance, is a chilling truth: he himself, as a representative, participant, and victim of repression within a destructive parent/child system, with his concern for social appearance and his need for personal justification, has robbed his daughter of her identity, her selfhood, and most importantly for Laberge, her power of speech. Like Georges Trudelle, he has never seen his daughter as a person in her own right, but merely as an object of his own. Christine stages her silence as a defence against Roland's censure. "For me the theatrical challenge was to make the the whole drama clear without having Christine reproach her father, since she lacks the self-confidence required for reproach" writes Laberge, (Remnant 112) who points out in her stage directions, "Sa seule présence doit nous aider a décoder les paroles du père, sans pour autant avoir à appuyer le jeu." We note that the author uses the word *décoder*, indicating our necessary relationship to Roland's words and very presence in Christine's life. The notion of decoding appears frequently in Laberge's work, implying the impossibility of dialogue, the binary equivalence of cliché, and the emotional

or social distance between characters or groups. Roland Barthes sees *écriture* as an encoded system that reaffirms a social and literary *status quo* and turns writing into a fixed, (mirror) image of itself, just as Roland attempts to do to Christine. Decoding in *L'Homme gris* is all the more important since Roland is a typical father, hearty, embarrassed, unable to show his love, but concerned, caring, as Laberge writes "le type même de l'homme de bonne volonté." Unlike Georges Trudelle, he is not brutal, but emerges perhaps as even more dangerous in his apparent innocence. With every stroke Laberge draws a portrait of the typical catholic, middle-class father, bound by social appearance and convention, who betrays his insensitivity and self-preoccupation to us with every word he utters, and who chillingly emerges as every father who has ever existed.

Nowhere does Laberge use the apparently innocent *parole* to create a complex and damning *écriture* more effectively than in *L'Homme gris*, where she uses *écriture* to interrogate and expose itself as code and takes this to a radical conclusion by mixing up notions of *écriture* and *parole* to the point where, within her script, Roland's speech may function as both, while Cri-Cri's silence and pathetic efforts at speech become both eloquent *parole* and mythic writing. Barthes suggests a "degré zéro" of writing which would not be an encoding of the existing system but would look toward freeing the work from this dominant structure. It is through this juxtaposition that Laberge's theatre of silence reaches a kind of *degré zéro*, where *parole* and *écriture* comment and act directly upon each other; this commentary is fully realized through the specular presence of the audience which triangulates and further distances the process. Laberge writes a script that allows interplay between both the *scriptible*, which calls for reader participation, and the *lisible*, which silences the reader/audience, forcing us to experience Cri-Cri's mute frustration as a non-participant in her life and yet makes it possible for us to take an active

role in her liberation.

Much of the critical acclaim for the play focussed on its "psychological" aspects; congratulating the author for being psychologically accurate and yet not allowing the psychological to "get in the way." Thus they seem to free themselves of the uncomfortable stigma suggested by Roland as Everyfather. Placing him in the context of a case study, an anomaly, they remove him from their sphere. Laberge's intent, it seems to me, is quite different. The character of Roland is frightening because of his very normalcy. He does the best he can for his family, he subscribes to all social and religious "correct behavior", he typifies the respectable *pater familias*, Ellen Donkin's Big Daddy. Every woman will see aspects of her own father in this man, and that is what makes our reaction as an audience so complex: the audience, like Christine, becomes a silent woman reduced to a listening, reactive posture by its very role as audience.

Much of the tragic power of this play lies in the genealogical context in which Laberge situates her characters. Roland himself is a product of an abusive family environment; he does not and never will realize his own culpability in Christine's plight and its relation to his own failed childhood. Like Maurice and Georges, he is a victim of parental loss or abandonment. As a father he is a signifier for the Father; he is a sign for the whole cultural system that is abhorrent and destructive to young women growing up, and which they are tragically led to perpetuate, as in the case of Roland's own mother and Madame Trudelle. Studies have shown that young children of both sexes have a similar self-esteem quotient until the age of eight when, as boys begin to increase self-esteem, girls correspondingly decrease. This is a process so built into our cultural structure that it is almost invisible.

Luce Irigaray makes an excellent case for what might be termed an acquired invisibility syndrome, when she points to Freud's theory that daughters must turn away from the

mother in order to enter the domain of the father. For Irigaray, this is unacceptable because it removes an identifiable role model without replacing it: Freud "se conduit ici en prince des ténèbres par rapport à toutes les femmes." (5) Julia Kristeva has suggested that if the father represents the authority of both parents during early childhood, this primary allegiance to him must be understood symbolically as an allegiance to the Father, sustained by the order of language, since we know that empirically it is the mother who evokes first imitation and affection, as well as first attempts at speech. If *L'Homme gris* is a psychological drama it is such on an unexpectedly complex level, not so much in terms of the characters' inter-action but in terms of a larger picture: the relationship between women and society, between children and their parents, and above all between Freud and Laberge. Like Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, Laberge brings the struggle for female identity to the battleground of language. Laberge's Christine is nicknamed Cri-Cri; the name is of course juxtaposed with the fact that she cannot speak. Her voice has been systematically torn from her by the emotional and physical battering she has received at the hands of family and society. Her name and her character are a silent scream, and, like Munch's painting, function as a mute expression of fear and rage, bypassing the mediation of 'civilized' language and touching the audience directly and somatically. Since Laberge uses patriarchal society's own words, her indictment is even more telling. Cixous sees *écriture féminine* as a positive "retaking" of writing and of the staging of the female body: for her the traditional written word is an extension of masculine law and political power. Laberge neatly avoids the problem of playing into the hands of masculine discourse by making Cri-Cri mute and stuttering, unable or unwilling to speak in masculine language; by using masculine language against itself she allows it to subvert itself. If, as Cixous says, "la femme n'a jamais sa parole" (1975, 6), Laberge confronts "ossified speech" with what Artaud called

"the respiratory sources of language." She creates Cixous' "espace d'où peut s'élancer une pensée subversive" (1975, 8) by staging stage silence as a mirror of feminine mutism. It is through the various aspects of his language and through his own (re)writing of the family history that Laberge exposes Roland, or rather, allows Roland to expose both himself and the emptiness of the wider patriarchal structure. It would be simplistic to view this play only as a battle between *feminine écriture* and the patriarchy, however, since in this play, as in most of Laberge's work, the characters are victims not only of society but of a human condition which imposes silence in the face of mortality.

It is one of Laberge's theses that an excess of love is not love at all but represents a need to master the Other, an absorption or redefinition of the Other as a reflection of the Self. In a commentary on *Night*, the English translation of *L'Homme gris*, she writes of "the ravages made possible by love, not only the love that goes unheeded, not the refusal, the rejection of the other's love, of its very nature" (Remnant 112). Christine, needing her father's love, allows him to unconsciously obliterate her, and Roland, rendered emotionally dysfunctional by his mother's inability to give love, is unable to give love himself. Indeed, Roland stages his communicative self in his monologue, valorizing himself in his own and in society's eyes through what he presents as his self-sacrifice on another's behalf. Cri-Cri is a tool for building his self-esteem based on empty social conventions, and his alleged concern for Cri-Cri's well-being invariably results in a re-inforcement of traditional patriarchal parent/child relationship, even though Cri-Cri has reached adulthood. We as an audience see that she is the audience for his staging of self, even as he is for hers.

From the outset of the play Roland treats his daughter as a backward child, fussing because she will not take off her wet raincoat, using her pet name, teasing her to eat. "Cri-Cri! mange-donc ton poulet au lieu d'te manger les doigts d'même", he admonishes and

when she finally eats, "Bon-on, fais a bonne fille là"(HG 10). When he makes himself a drink he offers her one, but "avec de l'eau en masse", watered down. He takes away her cigarette, symbol of her adulthood, in order to encourage her to eat, announcing that he has given her the better serving, but finally greedily eats her own food as well as his own. His language is consistently both diminutive and diminishing and he is unable to communicate with her, or even address her, as an adult. Food becomes a battleground in this play, as well, a place of struggle for power and a metaphor for Roland's consuming of Christine's identity. His noisy, voracious appetite and excessive drinking signify his need to consume and appropriate everything around him, while Christine's silent anorexia is a sign of her inability to absorb further anything imposed by outside authority, and is her only line of self-defense. Roland sends conflicting messages, bullying Christine into eating while clearly coveting her food, pressing her to eat and speculating on how fat she might get in the same breath. Cri-Cri's refuge in anorexia is one of the only forms of self-determination she has left, but even this is ultimately manipulated and directed by her father. As they sit down to eat the unappetizing take-out chicken he comments on her mother's appearance as a potential mirror of Christine's own: "Ça l'a ben gros inquiété maman, ça, savoir si tu mangeais à ta faim. Faut dire que pour elle, manger à sa faim, ça veut dire pas mal. Pas mal plusse que toi et pis moi ensemble." He goes on to add, "dire que j'ai marié ça, c'était slim comme toi". (HG 19) Roland does not overtly bemoan his lot, he jokes about it, looking for complicity from his daughter. At the same time he subtly makes her mother's weight Cri-Cri's fault:

C'est quand t'es t'arrivée qu'a l'a faite el plus gros saut. On dirait qu'après toi, a l'a jamais r'perdu la bedaine...est comme restée enceinte, même si tu étais née. Ouain, c't'à partir de toi qu'a s'est mise à engraisser. Ça l'air que c'est ben dur avoir un enfant.(*Il la regarde, pensif.*) J'me demande si ça va t'faire le même effet toi?(HG 20)

At this, Christine silently drops the chicken she has just barely begun to eat.

This eloquent scene replays itself over and over in the course of this intense little play. Roland, expressing himself through the clichés of his patriarchal bias, cuts the ground out from under every opportunity for positive action that Christine might have, and allows her nothing that can legitimately be hers. One of the things he takes from her repeatedly throughout the play is identification with her mother, as he silences maternal influence to isolate Christine. Roland constantly dismisses and diminishes his wife in a clear attempt to escape the sense of maternal domination and lack of love he has experienced in his own childhood. In so doing, he effects the alienation between mother and daughter of which Irigaray speaks, and replays his own childhood loss of the father/son relationship destroyed by what he perceives as a destructive maternal force. Shutting the door on Christine's potential as a woman, Roland sends her back into a mutual childhood in which his experience dominates, leaving his daughter in a state of suspended animation, manifested through an inability to eat or speak.

Yet even Christine's silence cannot belong solely to her. Ironically Roland tries to appropriate that as well:

Tu parle pas gros ma Cri-Cri...t'as jamais faite trop de bruit,
mais là, c'est pire que pire. C'tu l'mariage qui t'a faite ça?
P'tête jusse que t'es comme moi, t'as de la misère à parler. (HG 22)

He goes on to say that of course *maman* has no trouble talking, paradoxically widening the emotional distance between mother and daughter through negative identification, as well as re-inforcing the supposed resemblance between Cri-Cri and himself. He continues devastatingly:

Mais toi, ma Cri-Cri t'as jamais dit grand-chose.
A part de quand t'étais p'tite t'as pas faite grand bruit
dans c'te maison-là. Faut croire que t'étais heureuse...on a

tout faite pour en tout cas.(HG 22)

He interprets her silence, both past and present, as a sign of complicity, as further proof that she is a passive off-shoot of himself, a mirror of his own complacent writing of events. As in *Avec l'hiver qui vient*, silence and noise are foils for each other, shadows of the same geneologically inherited loss of other that leads to loss of self that leads to loss of other, and so on.

Roland shares it all with us, and incidently, with Christine, his frequent desire, instantly suppressed, to shake her just to get any reaction, his fears that she might not be sufficiently intelligent:

Chus persuadé qu't'es ben intelligente...toutes les spécialistes
qu'on a consultés l'ont dit d'ailleurs, t'as pas besoin d't'inquieter
là-dessus. J'ai même des rapports écrits qui le prouvent à la maison.
Ça couté assez cher qu'y l'ont écrit sus du papier, t'auras au moins
ça comme diplôme à défaut de n'avoir des vrais. (HG 24)

As we have seen, the fact that this is written on paper makes it solidly respectable to the patriarchal mind: it is *écriture*. His fears, of course, are not for her intelligence or her peace of mind but for his own, as she is merely part of himself.

In a similar vein, Roland blames his own unwillingness to confront her battering husband and his own cowardly subterfuge to remove her from their home squarely on Christine, expecting her to absorb his feelings of inadequacy and to feel gratitude for a sacrifice of integrity on his part:

J'ai jamais menti, Cri-Cri, j'ai jamais conté de menterie dans ma vie.
Tu sais comme moi comme j'haïs la menterie[...]Ça m'est arrivé de
déguiser la verité par charité humaine, ça oui, ça m'est arrivé de pas
répondre, de rien dire plutôt qu'd'être obligé d'mentir tellement qu'ça
me répugne, mais aujourd'hui, à matin, j't'ai menti. Pis, l'pire, c'est
qu'c'est toi qui m'a forcé à mentir. C't'à cause de toi que j'ai menti.
Pour toi. J't'ai menti pour ton bien.(HG 25)

He has told Christine that her mother is ill and that she is needed at home, knowing that she will not leave her battering husband otherwise. Furthermore, he does this because

Christine's godmother, uneasy about Christine on the occasion of her a recent visit, spied on the couple, asking neighbors questions and staying in town longer than she admitted, in a hotel, "à ses frais", (further guilt for Christine). Rather than addressing the problem directly, and unwilling to confront the Husband, who is a sign of male authority, she takes refuge in deceit. Roland, too, is afraid of confronting Christine's husband, perceiving him as an equal in the patriarchal system, and upon whom he has conferred a "husband's rights". In a troubling twist we see that Roland is depriving Christine of the only physical contact she has ever had by removing her from the presence of a husband who beats her, and further, that he is doing this not really because he wants to protect her but because something of his must not be touched or harmed: "Si quequ'un t'bat, c't'à moi qui touche".(HG 27) The single thing that is Christine's own, the physical contact that she has had with her husband, abuse notwithstanding, is also appropriated by her father. Of course, Roland's view of physical contact with women is questionable anyway:

J'aimerais ben mieux rien qu'la regarder.." (he says of a woman)
 J'ai beaucoup de respect pour les femmes: c'pas moi qui les
 toucherais, les maltraiterais, les violerais. Non, j's'rais plutôt
 l'genre protecteur. J'aime pas qu'on touche une femme, n'importe
 comment, j'aime pas ça. Faut dire qu'j'aime pas qu'on m'touche non plus.(HG 48)

Like Georges Trudelle, he wants women to want to be looked at, to silently stage themselves for his consumer gaze.

Roland prides himself on his self-avowed control where women are concerned. Proud of never having struck either Christine or her mother he is angry that Christine might confuse her husband's physical cruelty with her father's mental cruelty. Roland's fear of the physical becomes more and more clear throughout the play, and we see that his "socially acceptable" attitude toward physical abuse has its root in a phobia that is far from "normal." Roland has replaced vital, physical sexuality with the gaze, a non-threatening, safe (to

him), sterile way to enjoy women that turns them into objects to look at, to possess visually, without permitting them to participate in a way that he could find disturbing. Women are to be seen and not heard, viewed but not touched. He tells of a young woman who mistook his stare for interest. Her advances offended and frightened him: "A l'avait brisé l'image" (HG 48). It is as if by expecting physical consummation woman shows herself to be threateningly alive, not only a participant, but separate from himself. Like Georges Trudelle, he sees women as silent, theatrical images, and himself as desiring spectator and we see him "seeing" Cri-Cri, as we see her "seeing" herself being "seen".

Roland's image of himself, only slightly less tenuous than his daughter's, is based on his ability to put women "in their place." For the same reason that he cannot confront the husband who is his masculine equal he cannot be with a woman who endows herself with equality and identity. Roland prefers his women to be lifeless *objets d'art*, images for his enjoyment. This is made very clear in his comparison of Cri-Cri with the film *Bilitis*: "Toute c'que j'aimais r'garder était dans c'film-là" (HG 48), and later, as Laberge notes in her stage directions "d'un ton très sensuel, très troublant, pas "paternel" pour deux cennes" he adds:

J'ai toujours un image de toi dans ma tête, quand t'avais
dix-onze ans. Tu peux pas savoir comme t'étais belle à c't'age-là.
C'pas mélant, j'me fatiguais pas de te r'garder... ben t'as
été ma première Bilitis.(HG 49)

This curious reference further demonstrates Roland's need to place female sexuality in a non-threatening imagistic context where it is preferably satisfied by something other than the vulnerable male, all the while satisfying his own clearly sexual incestuous interest in his daughter in a "socially acceptable" manner. Roland, terrified of women, still a child himself, has both a child's morality, literal and limited, as well as a deeply rooted fear of female matriarchal power. He is proud of his moral rectitude, he doesn't have affaires, he is

not sexually active: "rien pour scandaliser une fille de 20 ans" (HG 48). This scene is about feminine silence on stage, and the masculine voyeurism that has told women to be "seen and not heard."

One of the most devastating moments in the play is Roland's remark that Christine "replaced" a miscarried "son". While the doctors are unable to specify the child's sex, Roland has the remains baptised Christophe and blames his wife's tight clothes during pregnancy (her need to stage herself as desirable for the male gaze) for the miscarriage. He adds: "Un an après c'est toi qui est née. On t'a appelé Christine en souvenir de lui, pis, malgré toute, on t'a aimée." Later he continues, "J'ai revé à deux choses dans ma vie: à mon fils pis à ma p'tite fille de onze ans".(HG 51) He has fixed her on the stage of his mind as a stand-by for his son, and as an 11-year old one at that.

Laberge sends Roland through the gamut of loathsome revelations with horrifying persistence. As he continues to strip off the layers of his self-delusion, not for himself, but for his audience and for Christine, he also shows us how he systematically stripped his daughter's identity from her, leaving nothing but a pitiful creature whose entire being is reduced to her name, Cri-Cri. Even the name has several levels of meaning. On one hand it is a clear cry for help, on another it is a mutilation. The name is not even her own, and if the nickname is a diminutive of Christine, with all the irony that the word diminutive implies, the fact that she is named in memory of the first child, the alleged 'son' is even more problematic. Further, she is unable to fulfill either of her father's dreams: male heir or eternal 11-year old adolescent almost-woman, leading to anorexia in an attempt to silence her body and to keep herself from growing past her father's ideal. His emphasis on her 11-year old self removes her potential realization of healthy, adult female sexuality, instilling in her a fear and a contempt for womanhood and reducing her to the eternal helpless child,

who, in a retelling of Roland's own childhood, tries to flee into the very arms that destroyed her.

By the end of the play Christine is nearly invisible to herself. Laberge's stage directions are clear:

La porte de la salle de bains est entrouverte. Sur l'extérieur de la porte il y a un grand miroir. Christine se regarde. Attentivement. Sans bouger. Elle est devant son image et se regarde comme si elle se voyait pour la première fois. Elle ne se touche pas, elle est totalement immobile. Puis, elle se met à frapper son corps violemment. Elle frappe, frappe sur elle, puis sur le miroir, sur son image (HG 53-54)

This painful description, which continues with stark brutality, is strikingly long and narrative for Laberge, who is playing with several things here: Christine's fear of imagification, death by stereotype, her loss of identity, but also her need for the physical touch that Roland's gaze has denied her. We remember that the only physical contact she has ever had has been with her battering husband. When she can no longer feel that physical pain, she needs to reassure herself of her own existence. Both forms of reassurance relate to the men in her life: the mirror to Roland's gaze and the physical abuse to her husband. This scene, in which she confuses self and mirror image prefigures the later confusion of self and father which leads to the dénouement of the play. She takes the gin bottle, breaks it, and stands, irresolute. In a moment of exquisite dramatic tension we do not know if she will attack herself or her father. She has been so manipulated that she is able to find only negative ways of self-realization: self-abusive ways that buy into Roland's desperate patriarchal view of her as appendage or image. Her final attack on her father becomes an attack on the Father as well as on herself, and she is finally unable to tell the difference. Ultimately, and perhaps unwittingly, she personifies Cixous' advice: "Amie, garde toi du signifiant qui veut te reconduire à l'autorité d'un signifié...Romps les

cercles"(1975, 11), destroys her creator, and refuses to perpetuate the system.

The theme of the mirror is a strong icon in this work, the catalyst that leads to the play's dénouement. Laberge plays with the duality of language and the imagistic double, demonstrating the impossibility of discerning difference. Cri-Cri's silent staging of self mirrors Roland's monologue. This is a system of terrifying symmetry, Roland's psychological battering mirrors the husband's physical battering, Roland's power-based relationship with Christine mirrors his vulnerable relationship with his mother and his uncomfortable relationship with his wife. Roland's unwillingness to confront Christine's husband suggests his inability to face the idea of his own father. When Christine finally kills her father, it is after looking in the mirror, in a desperate attempt to separate her image from his. Relationships find themselves fractured and refracted in the mirror that is Laberge's play, which upon reflection, turns the mirror back upon the specular gaze of the audience.

The play as mirror exposes the various facets of Roland's language as both *parole* and *écriture* and reflects them back upon themselves. Lacan's mirror stage is pre-verbal, even as the mirror never "talks back". The grey man of *L'Homme gris* is not only Irigaray's "prince des ténèbres" or Roland's shadowy alter-ego, the Father who takes identity from his daughter. He is also the sign, the *signifiant* for all parents who have not recognized their children as separate identities from themselves, and he represents the danger of accepting the sign at face value, both socially and linguistically. *Gris* is slang for inebriated; Roland is not only an alcoholic but drunk on his own words. The grey man is also the neutral projection, embodying both Roland's good intentions and his destructive acts, and through whose actions and language as action they become universalized. The climax of the play can certainly be seen on one level as a metaphor for French speakers repressed by an

English speaking government as well as for the dilemma of the "colonized woman" in a patriarchal society. On a more universal level, it reminds us that any censorship of the voice will certainly lead to violence.

Local vernacular speech renders Roland sympathetic, yet his words are as empty as Barthes *écriture classique*, because they reaffirm platitudes that Roland himself unwittingly tells us are patently false. His reliance on the system's written language is clear as he emphasizes the importance of the doctor's written report. At the same time, Laberge is interrogating her own role as author. Her writing of Roland's speech is what shows us the emptiness of his own writing of self, and sets up a dizzying tension between the spoken and written word in all its permutations. Written language masquerading as spoken language is exposed by the litmus test of being written down, and yet, because it is performed and spoken, leads the audience to a false sense that conventional language codes remain intact. Laberge's *écriture* transcends Roland's words, exposing the patriarchy for what it is, the empty shell of an impotent alcoholic, ironically dependant on a lost matriarchal figure, and unable to feel secure without subjugating little girls. The (trans)scription of local *parole* exposes the contamination of that speech by the *idées reçues* of the patriarchal system's *écriture*, and the authentic "naked language" is Cri-Cri's silence.

Laberge's Christine is the female sacrifice who will ultimately break the vicious circle of patriarchal repression. We notice that Christ(ine) as the sufferer is crucified, stripped of human identity, and purified throughout the play, in preparation for her final symbolic act. Laberge, in the very creation of Christine raises the situation of the play to a mythic level, expands the space of the script to allow *parole* and *écriture* to occupy a mutual space, and thus heals the broken link between mother and daughter of which Irigaray speaks. Irigaray

points out that in one version of the Demeter-Korè myth the daughter is stolen by the god of shadow and fog, with the father's (Zeus) connivance, and that the rape of the daughter is "un interdit de parler imposé à la fille et à la femme" (123). Laberge carries out Irigaray's advice to "renouer les liens des généalogies féminines." (121) Christine attacks her presence in Roland. Laberge's sacrifice of Cri-Cri follows Cixous' advice:

Il faut tuer la fausse femme qui empêche la vivante de respirer.
Une femme sans corps, une muette, une aveugle, ne peut pas
être une bonne combattante. Elle est réduite à être la servante
du militant, son ombre. (1975, 13)

Christine is a theatrical character, a sacrifice created to "allow the living to breathe." Through her writing Laberge affirms her own right as a woman to speak, create and to judge, and offers us as audience the opportunity to share that right. She realizes both Irigaray's and Cixous' charge to allow her writing to become a place of change. If the message of the play is sombre, its result is darkly joyful. Laberge transforms silence in these plays from the passive silence that many feminists have seen as symptomatic of self-destruction in a patriarchal system, into a "naked language", which returns the theatre to language's source.

Le faucon

In *Le faucon*, (1991), the consequences of the transformation operated by Cri -Cri in *L'Homme gris* become apparent, as Laberge uses double-staged silence within a play to achieve distanciation and empathy and to create a double level of specular attention that paradoxically heals its own rupture. Like Maurice, Cri-Cri, and Jocelyne, Steve stages a language strike. Suspected of shooting and killing his step-father, he has been detained for 'observation'. He is considered guilty by his mother as well as by the authorities; his social worker, Aline, a former nun, is the only one who believes he is innocent. Even André,

Steve's real father, returned after a twelve-year absence, is afraid that some "psychological reason" may explain Steve's behavior, and seeks a "legal" solution for his son rather than proof of his innocence. Steve's silent resistance is juxtaposed with his solitude in the opening scenes of the play; alone, with no one to talk to, he moves about the empty space that imprisons him. We do not know until the third silent scene, when Aline enters and finally speaks to him, that Steve's silence is a choice rather than a result of his solitude: his refusal of social dialogue is a refusal to buy into the social system, and his staged silence is both his own metaphorical death and an affirmation of his younger brother's life.

Steve's silent refusal to recount the off-stage violence delays the act's material reality in a theatrical sense. In *Laberge's theatre of silence*, the site of the play is a showdown between noise and silence, where the tension is finally resolved in violence, physical, emotional, or psychological. In *Avec l'hiver*, Maurice and Cécile finally end up hiding in the bunkers of their own isolation, sending out pleas for help against the other's aggression. In *Jocelyne Trudelle*, Carole and Georges confront each other over the announcement to the audience that Jocelyne has died, in the only moment when the audience is directly addressed in the play; the violent rupture of the "fourth wall" is an assault on the spectator, who also becomes the site of their conflict, as each tries to "persuade" the audience to their point of view. While the tension between Maurice and Cécile is only relieved by the audience's realization of them as mirrors of each other, it is Jocelyne's nurse, Lucie Fecteau, who releases the tension between Georges and Carole, symbolically releasing Jocelyne as well as materially releasing the audience. In *L'Homme gris* the tension between silence and noise is clearly marked; it is further exacerbated when we realize that, like Cécile and Maurice, Roland and Christine are, in some sense, mirrors of each other. When Cri-Cri erupts into violence, she is committing both murder and suicide.

In *Le faucon*, the stand-off between noise and silence has become more complex. When Aline first speaks, Steve responds with silence; when she "speaks" silence, Steve responds with noise; when André incarnates the "order of noise", Steve again responds with silence, but when André, recalling their silent trips into the woods to watch the birds, "speaks" in a hesitating attempt at silence, Steve retaliates with violent noise. No longer is one character associated with one kind of language, and the constant shifting between noise and silence parallels a more complex staging of self and other within and without the play. There have been suggestions of this exchange in the earlier plays: if Georges belongs to the "order of noise" and Jocelyne personifies the poetry of silence, at the moment of rupture it is Georges who would silence the "truth" of her suicide, and Carole, as Jocelyne's mouthpiece who cries to the audience that this *was* a suicide. While all the characters in Laberge's plays "stage" themselves to some extent, silent staging is most apparent in her early theatre, and reaches both its apogee and *mise en abyme* with *L'Homme gris*. Cri-Cri's staged silence is balanced by Roland's mask of noise and the physical noise of her violence parallels the silent stillness of Roland's death. In *Le faucon*, while Steve's staged silence is the premise of the play, silence itself evolves as a poetic synthesis of the original binary opposition. The moment of violence which usually resolves the opposition is infinitely post-poned and curiously gentle, much like the healing that is Steve's gift to his father.

Silence in *Le faucon* is different from the silence in the previous plays because, for the first time, its subtext and its motivation are different. If Maurice's silence is one of resistance and retribution at the metaphysical emptiness of his world, Jocelyne's is no less an attempt to escape that void. Cri-Cri's silence diagrams her abuse at the hands of the patriarchal society that is based on her metaphysical absence: in all three cases silence is a device to protect the vulnerable self. Steve's silence, however, protects another, and his

resistance makes him more, not less, vulnerable. Unlike the earlier plays, silence is not a rejection of life but an affirmation of others, an effort to protect what Steve calls his younger brother, Frédéric's, "paradis terrestre". Unlike Maurice, whose lost moment of safety and security drove him into himself, Steve credits his own moment of childhood paradise for his salvation. Having experienced a moment of "paradis terrestre" he is able to pass it on to others.

This is an important moment in evolution of Laberge's study of genealogy. Like Maurice and Roland, and so many parents in her work, whose roles as parents send them back into their own failed child/parent relationship, André at first equates Steve's childhood with his own:

J'ai souvent pensé à toi pendant ces années-là. Ta mère m'envoyait des photos, mais c'est pas ça qu'avais gardé en tête. J'pense que j't'ai toujours imaginé comme moi quand j'tais petit. (F 50)

Perhaps because of the "theatrical" distance occasioned by their twelve-year separation, André is able to experience the "psychical protection" that allows him to see the difference between them with critical judgement:

C'est fou, han? C'est en t'voyant à matin qu'j'ai réalisé ça: tu me r'semble pas vraiment. C'est fou c'qu'on s' imagine pendant des années, han? (F 50)

While André resists the total self-involvement to which other Labergian parents succumb, he does not accede to parenthood. His contribution to breaking the pattern of ruptured relationship and parental abuse, so frequent in Laberge's work, is based, in many ways, on the "theatrical" nature of his relationship with Steve. Steve, as the next step toward healing, is, as Aline points out, a true adult: "T'es la première vraie grande personne que j'rencontre", he says to Aline, who responds,

"À part toi." (F 98) He, like Aurélie, as we will see in *Aurélie, ma soeur*, has profited from a moment of "paradis terrestre" with a parent, and can participate in the healthy nurture of another human being.

The opposition between passion and sexual anorexia that has characterized Laberge's theatre of silence is, if not absent, considerably less painful in this play. Steve's silence, in its generosity, is linked to a passion for life that expresses itself in physical love, and, like Héloïse, he is relatively graphic in his description. His physical presence and availability rekindle a sexuality in Aline that she had thought long dead, and their conversation in bird language suggests a renewal of her physical vision of self that is not unlike that which Héloïse will awaken in Pierre le Vénérable.

Silence in this play suggests a metaphorical rather than actual death, perhaps the more renewing "little death" of the sexual act. Silence, like the word, can be a gift, and Steve's incarceration is a willing immolation of self; he accepts the death in life intended for Frédéric. His descent into death is one of self-sacrifice and rebirth, a mythic death that is both ritual and intensely theatrical.

It would be a mistake to see the development of Laberge's theatre of silence as a decisive move toward a positivist point of view. As she herself has said, much of her work is presented to the public out of sequence with its writing. Her exploration of eternal themes turns around silence as a basic and natural human response that has infinite permutations, and therefore, infinite opportunities for dramatization.

It is Laberge's great strength as an artist that we do not see in her work examples of victimization in black and white (the all too frequent good guy/bad guy syndrome), but rather a complex tapestry of interconnected and pathetic human failures, the result of a wider, systemic failure. It is through Roland's personal account that we understand

Christine's destruction That Roland is unaware that he has censored Cri-Cri makes the play even more heartbreaking; his local language renders him human and sympathetic even as we deplore his unwitting usurpation of his daughter's voice, and we experience both mimetic empathy and Brechtian distance through Laberge's handling of Roland's language. Even Georges, perhaps the most unsympathetic character of Laberge's *oeuvre*, has, as Pierre Lavoie points out, his own childhood tragedy. In both cases, these men articulate their own destruction, as they silence others, and so operate their own destruction. In using silence, the traditional sign of feminine absence, as a theatrical technique of resistance and presence, she exposes the limited value of "cramped" language and uses feminist theories toward universal liberation of theatrical expression.

Bruno Bettelheim (14) suggests that mutilation, of either the Self or the Other, has great mythic significance in human history. He points out the sacred value of mutilation as a moment of transition within a personal and universal evolution: it is the physical language of passage. Through mutilation one enters a new stage of life: one dies and is born again. Through this mythic rebirth one enacts the rebirth of one's audience. Jocelyne's self-mutilation is a step toward healing, and her act paves the way through the labyrinth for others to follow. Only Maurice's silence is without redeeming value for himself and his family, but is for the audience alone. Through Cri-Cri we relive the passage from adolescence to womanhood, from despair to rebirth, in a symbolic shedding of ritual blood: the blood is appropriately that of the Father and not that of the father. On a mythic level, then, we participate in the passing of a Father who has become sterile and corrupt and we make way for a new order, where the physical and the sexual in the female identity are not only permissible but desirable. The idealization of the girl child has been the destruction of both the idealized and the idealizer, since idealization implies and indeed

requires the cessation of becoming. Laberge liberates us from the sterility of *idées reçues* , both socially and linguistically, and offers an opportunity for renewal and growth with a powerful blood ritual. Cri-Cri's sacrifice consists in becoming and absorbing her own tormentor, and then in destroying the monster she has become. Through this sacrifice of the literary child, Laberge achieves cultural evolution through a language of silence and arrives at a powerful feminine *écriture* .

Through Steve, we experience the self-mutilation of self-imposed silence. His is a more conscious sacrifice than Cri-Cri's and heals his fellow characters as well as the audience. If the blood of the Father has been shed, it is in the context of transforming the Father as well. The parental relationship between André, Steve, Bernard, and Frédéric problematizes and diversifies the paternal role as a parallel to the rearticulation of the maternal role that we will see in Chapter 4. Bernard is sacrificed as the representative of the old order of noise, while André, Steve and Frédéric pass through a veil of silence, to heal and be reborn. Laberge juxtaposes conscious and unconscious experience to create a space for the conscious and the unconscious to exist in a mutually receptive space. Her ability to juxtapose the outwardly "socially acceptable" (conscious experience) with what is really going on (unconscious experience), allows us to participate in both. This juxtaposition of apparent motivation and hidden motivation demonstrates the complex levels of theatricality and distance as she both demystifies and repoeticizes theatrical language.

Notes

1. Portions of this chapter appeared in *Modern Drama*, 36(1993) in an article entitled: "Silent Rage in Marie Laberge's *L'Homme gris*: The Mutism of Cri-Cri".

2. Ubersfeld writes in *Lire le théâtre*: "De même, le "théâtre dans le théâtre" dit non le réel, mais le *vrai*, changeant le signe de l'illusion et dénonçant celle-ci dans tout le context scénique qui l'entoure." (52) Cristine's silence becomes a play within play, even as her body is the subject of Roland's voyeurism within the larger performance.

3. Silence as a response to privileged discourse is not unique to feminist writers, particularly in the theatre. A striking example of this is the number of writers who refused to create during the German occupation of France. Jean-Pierre Ryngaert writes that language in all contemporary theatre can only be measured by its relationship to silence. (1993 159) He cites Ionesco's comments from *Journal en miettes*: "Le logos était aussi l'action. Il est devenu la paralysie," and "Le mot empêche le silence de parler." (159-60) Ryngaert also mentions Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, who uses silence "in a singular way to reach the tragic." Sarrazac believes that silence is the only recourse if one is to truly communicate, and calls it "un supplément de sens conféré au langage." (162) Certainly Beckett's work derives much of its power from his masterful use of silence. If characters often speak what is unimportant, essential communication is achieved through silence. In *Catastrophe*, as Robert Baker-White has pointed out, the protagonist in that play constitutes the "actor" whose only recourse to his violent treatment at the hands of the stage director and his assistant, is to "fix the audience" with his gaze. This silence gesture abruptly ends the play. Although there is much to be said on the subject of the role silence plays throughout the history of drama, for the purposes of this project, for the purposes of this chapter, I will limit my discussion to Laberge's use of silence as a feminist response in *L'Homme gris*.

Chapter III: The Murder Scene: a Site for Feminine Revenge

Many critics have passed off *Le Night Cap Bar* as a simple "murder mystery" with an "unlikely intrigue," while rarely exploring the work as an "investigation" of the theatrical experience, which Laberge proposes as the ritual "murder scene" of traditional drama. Most of the critics who reviewed both the original production in 1987, and the published version of the play, which appeared in the same year, referred to a *thriller policier* in the manner of Agatha Christie. Daniel Hart seems to deplore the fact that, after writing texts of social and psychological import, she chooses to try her hand at a thriller,¹ Robert Lévesque refers to the purely "technical" aspect of the thriller,² and Marianne Ackerman refers to the play as "a splendid example of a minor genre straining to be something else."³ Several reviewers, notably Levesque, made disparaging comparisons between *Le Night Cap Bar* and *L'Homme gris*, principally on the strength of the latter's psychological import. Bruno Dostie seems to come closer to what I believe is the important contribution that Laberge makes with this play when he calls it her "sweet revenge", referring to the Paris triumph of *L'Homme gris* after its lukewarm reception in Montreal. Her "revenge", however, seems to be more far-reaching than a vindication of her work by Parisian critical acclaim, or her "pleasure in violating certain taboos: that of writing a 'vulgar' thriller, and that of staging women who are 'bad' in this era when they are all supposed to be 'good!'"⁴ I would suggest that the revenge that takes place in *Le Night Cap Bar* can be seen as a comprehensive revenge on the traditional ways that the stage has been used to stage the absence of the female character. In this light, *Le Night Cap Bar* is a continuation of the female figure's liberation that is dramatized in *L'Homme gris*.

In "Aller à la mer", Cixous uses her now-famous metaphor of the murder scene to

express what she perceives as the inevitable victimization of women in the theatre. She identifies the victim as "the Father's daughter, his sacrificial object: With even more violence than fiction, theatre, which is built according to the dictates of male fantasy, repeats and intensifies the horror of the murder scene." (1984, 546) While Cixous later discovered the theatre as a powerful agent for change, her metaphor is still one of the most popular for describing women's situation on stage for most of theatrical history. Laberge has discovered the value of this "minor genre" in its relation to Cixous' vision of "the murder scene", and replays the murder scene from various points of view throughout her work as a way of turning the act back upon itself to reflect itself, staging it as an artificial theatrical construct, and using the traditional murder scene to murder itself.

While some writers have seen the theatre as the site of female representation/rape, others increasingly see that the theatrical strategies used to victimize women can also be used to question and reverse that victimization. Barbara Freedman offers a persuasive argument for the dramatic idiom as the "language" most suited to change. "A methodology necessarily tied to no master"..."theatre provides the tools - the stages, the mirrors, or reflected gazes - through which perspectives are fragmented, shattered, and set into play against one another." (152) Elin Diamond has argued that "theatre is a privileged site for feminine analysis because of, not in spite of, its long association with mimetic practice and theory." (1988, 62) As we will see, Laberge uses theatrical strategies to "murder" the "murder scene". Theatre, by its nature, is a suspenseful medium: narrative is withheld and revealed within a specific time frame. In some sense, every play follows the format of the mystery investigation: we are in the grip of the action as it unfolds on stage, and can neither put down the narrative to reflect or page ahead to discover the ending. The audience sifts through the evidence of the play, as it occurs, to arrive at a *dénouement* simultaneously

with each other and the performers. Using techniques of multiple stages where performers perform performance, Laberge parodies the stage as murder scene, engaging in an intertextual dialogue with it.

Violence is a key element in Laberge's work; her characters use physical violence, emotional blackmail, and the violence of rhetoric to maintain an increasingly fragile hold on the traditional daughter/victim. For her, linguistic violence, such as Roland's in *L'Homme gris* or George's in *Jocelyne Trudelle*, is "one of the worst forms of violence we have to endure in this life."⁵ As we have seen, that violence is always challenged by the daughter, and Cri-Cri's murder of her father parallels Jocelyne's more comprehensive murder: if Jocelyne's literal violence is to herself, it is a figurative murder of her world. Laberge notes that in *Le Night Cap Bar*, the characters are "extremely violent on the level of language,"⁶ and we will see that, in this play, for the first time, women accede to violent, masculine language; as Laberge points out about Suzy, who uses this language to commit violence on both men and women, "if such a character could exist in real life, I am certain that her perversity and her vanity would finally be her downfall."⁷

As we have seen, Laberge takes advantage of the paradox between the reality of representation and the representation of the real by a technique of double staging that represents representation, drawing much of her problematization of power from her use of mimesis. By the same token, she frequently restages the murder scene, rewriting the act in a radical mytho-poetical paradigm shift: in her work it is the fathers who are sacrificed, not the daughters. Indeed, Pierre Lavoie has pointed out the number of father figures who die in Laberge's plays. (Smith 129) Maurice Gingras is psychically murdered, Roland Fréchette, of *L'Homme gris*, and Bernard in *Le faucon*, are murdered as representatives of an old order of repression that must be replaced. Both fathers in *Oublier* die, Lucien, in "a

symbolic death" (Smith 129) and M. Tessier, who, like M. Langeais in *Deux Tangos*, dies from a malaise that renders him absent long before his wasting death. In *Pierre, ou la consolation*, Abélard's death makes Héloïse's rebirth possible. It is no accident that most of Laberge's work turns on the moment when woman is freed by the death of a father figure. I would suggest that the father's death has less to do with a search for the lost father figure than with an attempt to invert the murder scene of traditional theatre. Laberge's theatrical narrative scintillates between the Father of countless classical dramas who sacrifices his daughter for his own survival, and the proposed victim who rises up and retaliates by murdering the Father, as in *L'Homme gris*, where the traditional murder victim, "the Father's daughter", is replaced by a new on-stage victim, the Father himself: Cri-Cri, the paradigmatic victim of patriarchal repression kills her father in what Pardinás has called "un acte de légitime défense".(Smith 118)

Le Night Cap Bar, more than any other of Laberge's plays to date, writes and rewrites the death of the father figure who would determine women's lives. The intrigue turns on an investigation into the apparent murder of Raymond Thivierge, the proprietor of the Night Cap Bar. The play is divided into four scenes, each bearing a character's name: the first three are testimonies from the three women who, at one time, have been intimately connected to Raymond, the fourth explains the mystery. These women represent, as their ages suggest, the three decades of Raymond's adult male life. Laberge is precise about the ages of these characters: Raymond is 55, Agathe Martel is 42, Suzy/Solange Boivin-Rinfrette is 36, and Linda Côté is 22. The testimonies are arranged in order of the women's chronological age and in order of Raymond's presence in their lives, we come to know these women only through their own testimony and that of their rivals, and we will find that, because of the personal agenda connected to the investigation of a "murder scene", it is

impossible to "know" them at all. The first three scenes replay, from different points of view, the moment when these women's paths intersect and the moment that Raymond's (apparent) death is discovered. The fourth scene, which bears Raymond's name, reveals that Raymond is still alive: the murder was a set-up to cover the theft of a substantial amount of drug money, and Suzy/Solange has arranged for Agathe to be convicted for the "murder". In fact there has been an actual murder: they have sacrificed Raymond's cousin Louis, who resembles him, and Suzy has manufactured and manipulated the evidence, hiding Raymond in a safe-house under the bar floor to mislead drug dealers and police alike. In an extra twist, however, she betrays Raymond as well, killing him "again". She arranges to burn down the bar, and flies off to Geneva with the money.

Suzy functions as the playwright of the piece, and was played by the author in the original production. *Le Night Cap Bar* is about the playwright's power to materially alter reality, and warns the audience that their passive presence in the theatre is an act of complicity, whether in maintaining the status quo or in operating change, and that theatre itself is necessarily the site of illusion and betrayal. From the outset, *trahison*, betrayal, is at the heart of this play. Laberge uses the word in three of her four character descriptions: Linda is "une fille trahie à l'os qui donne l'impression de l'avoir mérité, mais une fille trahie..." and Agathe is "une autre trahie, mais plus consentante, presque..." The open-endedness of these descriptions, the suspended punctuation, and the passive verb form all render the characters fully vulnerable, open to outside determination and direction. This in direct contrast to the description of Solange/Suzy: "Elle apprécie l'autorité qu'elle a et ne s' imagine même pas le mot trahison." Between these three women there is a complicated relationship of multiple betrayal: Agathe and Linda allow themselves to be betrayed both by Raymond and Solange, who in turn betrays Raymond. The dictionary defines

"trahison" as a crime in which the perpetrator "goes over" to the enemy, and the verb "trahir" as "to give over", to abandon someone to whom one owes allegiance. Laberge plays with multiple meanings of this word. In one sense *trahison* refers to betrayal of self to others; Agathe and Linda allow themselves to be betrayed because they betray themselves through auto-biographical confession, while Suzy's double name is indicative of her double face and hidden (unbetrayed) essential self. She cannot conceive of the word betrayal because the only person to whom she owes allegiance is herself. Betrayal is at the center of the play in a larger context, as Suzy denounces her "sisters", because they allow themselves to be powerless victims in a hostile society. She "sells out" Raymond because, like Agathe and Linda, he does not know how to wield the power he believes he was born to, and unlike Georges, Suzy's husband, he is not wise enough to hide behind Suzy's mask, as she hides behind his.

That Suzy, whom Saletti calls "le pont" between Agathe and Linda, is the only one who is able to liberate herself by staging her own complex drama of the events is significant. That her play within a play results both in Raymond's apparent death and his real one, refracted in the mirror of the murder investigation so that it is told over and over, is, upon reflection, inevitable. Raymond "dies" five times during the play: once in each of the women's depositions, once as Louis, as described by Suzy, and once off-stage at the end of the play. Laberge "murders" the Father, repeatedly, in several ways, as she displaces the patriarchal character from the center to an absent (traditionally female) role, delivers a death-blow to traditional Aristotelian structure, and, gives us Suzy, who refuses to be bound by rules of right and wrong, who as "sinful" woman, revels in her sin, who appropriates the pen, a masculine power tool, to rewrite history. She also "murders" the Father's rules for social role-playing: Suzy accedes to masculine power by using her

feminine mask. Her womanhood stages her as non-threatening, and because Raymond sees her as a sexual object, he does not see her potentially dangerous position as subject.

Denise Gagnon has said that this play is about the "arcana of power" and Laberge conflates Suzy's power with her violence. Randall McGowan remarks that as a society we read violence as a measure of "the conditions of our civilization." (140) He points out that violence not only creates fear but "produces disorientation" because it has "become the domain of the other." Otherness has been parlayed into monstrousness, suggesting that the criminal is either sub- or super-human. McGowan's concise history of violence reminds us that the reformation of the British penal code was a conscious effort to stage the state as benevolent and the criminal as the eternal outsider, a threat to the social *status quo*. The political advantage of having a collective enemy cannot be overemphasized, and Lucia Folena has shown that the collective enemy is often identified through a rhetoric that is violent in its own right, even as Michelet suggests how the "enemy" is identified by social role and/or gender. Most studies of violence, however, seem to ignore its essentially theatrical quality. McGowan touches on this when he reminds us that the executions of the 18th century "had everything to do with a dramatic portrayal of state power." (153) If public sympathy frequently went to the dying criminal, it was perhaps less that the spectator empathized with his visible pain than that the playing out of punishment rituals had become a theatrical convention, where the suffering of the condemned was supplanted by the staged suffering of the character. The "last words" of a highwayman on the gallows became famous, as John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* demonstrates; even Brecht's historicization cannot make Mack the Knife any less heroic. Paradoxically, staging the suffering of an "alien group", heroicized, and perhaps increased, specular fascination with the violent "Other" rather than contributing to its marginalization. The intense notoriety of today's

"most wanted" (read, most desirable?) criminals seems to confirm that as society appropriates the marginal to maintain its center of power, it also offers the "Other" a stage on which to perform. Teresa de Lauretis has pointed out that if writing implies a position of power, it also necessarily implies violence, and shows that there is no way to renounce the power that goes with discourse. Of the three women who give their testimony, only Suzy acknowledges her power, and seizes the moment to "snatch the tongue" of masculine language. If many of the characters we discussed in Chapter II either seek to avoid the role that dominant language would assign them or attempt to "stage" themselves in a new language, Suzy chooses to beat the system at its own game. In doing so, she exposes both the system and the game, the violence of its rhetoric, and the instability of its semiotic economy.

Lucia Folena suggests that judicial violence turns the body into "an object of the violence of interpretation, a mere text to be read by the hermeneutics of inquisition." (228) Judicial violence is, of course, violence sanctioned by society, and it is that violence, both physical and linguistic, that Suzy visits on Agathe and Linda. Folena referring to the judicial torture of a certain type writes: "far from being a mere expression of uncivilized brutality, of violence as disorder and unpremeditation it manifests the civilized, code-structured cruelty that characterizes the violence of the culture." (228) The effect of premeditation is to remove violence from the chaotic chaos of a program of survival of the fittest, and bring it into a society where violence is permitted if it participates in maintaining a current power structure, or, as Lauretis would suggest, in assimilating what it cannot destroy. Suzy, by sacrificing the members of a marginal group, proves herself worthy of entrance into the group of power. Suzy defines herself by her position of masculine power, and, as Folena would say, "the Other has been reduced to the pure function of providing

[that] definition." (229) Several times she refers to herself in a masculine context, as when she disfigures Louis "comme un homme." Suzy's "reading of the others" becomes a negation of their materiality, not only as people, but even as characters. She redirects them through her theatricalization of language, redirecting our gaze as well, and their "meaning" becomes a projection of her participation in the judicial system as a metaphor for her entrance into society.

Folena tells us that "Naming or renaming...amounts to waging the first offensive in the war of cultural representation. Blood is thus shed in the name of a name, battles are lost and won over the establishment of a universal designation."(221-222) In fact, Suzy's whole project in this play is murder "Suzy" and emerge as "Solange", and the instability of her name is a sign of the instability of the play. In the script it is "Suzy" who has the lines. Although she announces to Agathe that she has changed her name (27), one of the few pieces of information that she offers about herself, both Agathe and Linda refer to her as Suzy. The difficulty of escaping the past is clear in the following exchange:

Agathe:
Suzy Boivin...j'en reviens pas comme t'as changé.

Suzy:
D'abord, j'm'appelle pas d'même: j'ai repris *mon vrai nom*
pis celui d'mon mari évidemment. J'm'appelle Solange Rinfrette...
ben, Boivin-Rinfrette si t'aimes mieux. (my italics.)

Agathe:
Chus pas sûre d'aimer mieux...j'aimais ça, moi, Suzy Boivin. (NC 27)

This exchange begins and ends with the name that Suzy/Solange is trying to escape; even though she has chosen her "true name", Agathe's memories re-anchor her in the past of the old one. Agathe uses the name Solange only once, in Linda's monologue: when Linda asks, "Oùsqu'est Suzy?" Agathe responds, "Solange? Solange la femme de l'avocat?", but

then continues, "Suzy est en haut."(NC 136-137) Solange, the character, is "la femme de l'avocat" while Suzy, the former stripper at the Night Club Bar, is the person Agathe and Linda know. Suzy's name scintillates between Suzy (s'use y?) Boivin (boit vin?) and Solange (sol ange?) Rinfrette (rien fait?), even as the anglicized name wars with the French one. The two names propose two characters in opposition, and Solange must kill her double if she is to separate successfully from her past. This murdering of past self as well as all others who "knew" that past self is very clear in her final monologue, heard, on tape, after she has left the stage: "j'ai liquidé l'passé...Ça s'enterre un passé, ça devient presque rien, un tas de cendres...Toutes mes vieilles lettres d'amour sont à dompe, pis y vont rester là...fais-toi un bon feu en pensant à moi..."(NC 176)

The slippery language of the play is apparent in the ways that Linda refers to Suzy in the three depositions, as well. In Agathe's testimony, Linda addresses Suzy with titles pertaining to masculine success roles, "madame docteur" (NC 39, 50, 64) "madame la juge", (NC 63) "madame notaire" (NC 72) and "madame avocat"(NC 38). In Suzy's deposition, Linda uses clearly female appellations, indicating feminine nobility (into which one is born) rather than masculine role status (which depends on aggressive achievement): "la reine-mère" (NC 95) "la duchesse" (NC 96, 99, 130) "madame la comtesse" (NC 100, 110, 113) and "l'archi-duchesse"(NC 129); "mère supérieure" (NC 96, 102) indicates high moral status as well. In Linda's testimony, she is simply referred to as "la boss" (NC 142, 144). Suzy's relationship to Agathe and Linda, as well as the way she presents herself, are "staged" in each scene by the titles Linda uses, suggesting that there are unstable signs but no referent, no one behind the mask. The women use the implicit social hierarchy in language that Laberge identifies throughout her work, to sway the jury/audience, make judgments about each other, and assign each other roles, but the very multiplicity of the

roles discredits them all. In Agathe's version, Suzy's *joual* is more apparent, while in Suzy's version, Agathe's language is coarser and Linda's speech is more slurred. If we suspect that the "real" Suzy to show up in Scene Four, we are again misled: Suzy plays one role for Raymond, throughout the scene, and in her final, telephone call, plays another for her husband Georges. The recorded call can be read as the absence of her essential self from the "stages" of the play; hers is the disembodied voice of the hidden playwright.

While Raymond is at the center of much of their discussion, the struggle between the three women goes much deeper than rivalry over a man. Raymond is valued only for what he *represents*; in his absence, the women put him on trial for their failed lives or argue about who will inherit his material goods. In Agathe's version of the scene, Suzy's interest in all men is in what they can provide for her, and how she can manipulate them, while Linda uses them as easy access to drugs and alcohol; Agathe presents herself as a woman who needs to be needed by a man. In Suzy's version, Raymond is a sign of her charity, "ma bonne oeuvre, ça," (NC 81) while Linda is using him as a cover for delinquent activities and wants him to live and suffer as long as possible. Suzy's deposition sets up a complicated psychological agenda for Agathe, who has suffered from an emotionally destructive childhood, sees Raymond as a second father, and so is angry at his double betrayal. Agathe and Linda are shown fighting to inherit the bar as a sign of financial security and "possession" of Raymond; they even discuss potential complicity in hastening his death. Linda's testimony is incoherent. During her scene, the three women are referred to as actresses, and not by their character names; the action stops, rewinds, continues, and changes, as we understand that, according to Linda, she was too confused to have been capable of committing the crime.

The question of authorial and directorial point of view is never far from this play. In the

first scene, we are led to believe that this is a traditional play, and so as an audience we buy into the illusion and "believe" the action as a coherent fiction. When we realize that this is a murder investigation, however, we begin to interrogate these scenes, to test them for conflicting information. We move from the traditional audience position of distance/empathy with the characters to a relationship of empathy with the unknown inspector; because there is no on-stage inspector character, we assume, in some sense, that role. Laberge does not allow us to fall into this second convention either. What seems like a straightforward murder mystery à la Agatha Christie, soon becomes a discussion about the essential betrayal of representation, as related to point of view, complicated by conscious or unconscious altering of facts to aid personal agendas of self-delusion or self-protection. The separate powers of the director and the playwright to manipulate others, direct players, elicit planned responses from spectators, and indeed, write the script, are elucidated, as the journey of the play takes us from traditional mimetic representation to exposing a convention of repetition in the second scene; in the third scene, the characters become actresses, discouraged by director/Linda's lack of direction. In the last scene, mimetic convention is restored, and we learn what "really" happened. The relief of this return to "normalcy" is short-lived, however, as we realize that the three testimonies have been not only manipulated by the director/actress/witness, (a conflation of the director/performer/spectator triangle) but that a double manipulation has occurred. Suzy, as secret author of the play, has manipulated the witnesses, who, in turn, have directed each other in this *mise en abyme/ scène* of the theatrical process: all information is contaminated by her authorial focus. Marianne Ackerman, in her review of the play, complained that "the audience never gets a firm hold on how truthful each revelation may be." ⁸ Indeed, that would seem to be the author's point, as she refuses to allow the audience to "trust"

theatrical narrative.

In the sense that every scene is a doubled "staging", the *didascalies* take on a special performative role of their own. In Agathe's deposition, she and Suzy are happy to see each other: "Elles se jettent dans les bras l'une de l'autre, ravies," (NC 26) while in Suzy's, she alone makes the welcoming overture: "Elle s'approche, serre Agathe dans ses bras." (NC 80) Weighing the evidence as two recollections of a spontaneous, unplanned event, we read these *didascalies* as two, equally valid versions of the event. When we learn that Suzy has engineered, indeed falsified, the entire event, Agathe's testimony raises new questions, since we know now that she saw what Suzy *planned for her to see*. On a superficial factual level, Agathe's deposition may become more believable; ie., perhaps this is what she saw. On a deeper level, it becomes more treacherous, since we cannot separate what Agathe saw, what she alleged that she saw, and what "fictional" truth she has been led to see. Further, we must assume that Agathe, like the other women, would "stage" herself autobiographically in the most positive light possible. For example, in Agathe's version, Roger does not betray her, while in Suzy's he does; in Agathe's there is no mention of her menial job, while in Suzy's the words "Concierge" and "Rue Ontario" are repeated with almost excessive frequency. When considered in terms of Scene Four, however, Agathe's testimony becomes problematic, Linda's empty, and Suzy's completely treacherous. As Denise Gagnon, who played the role of Agathe in the original production points out, it is impossible to know who is the "real" Agathe, (Smith 40) adding a new dimension for the actress, for whom "creating the role" takes on new challenges. We expect Linda's to put them both in perspective, but because she has been manipulated by Suzy as well, even the few shreds of evidence that we are able to glean from her incoherent words must also be questioned.

Robert Saletti has very justly pointed to the importance of the monologues in this play. In fact, as testimony, each of the first three scenes can actually be considered as monologues, even though they are performed by all three characters. As he remarks, if the content of Linda's two monologues (one in Agathe's version, one in her own testimony) is approximately the same, the context varies significantly. (Smith 95) Agathe's version suggests that Suzy was a present, and Agathe, a hidden, witness to the monologue, but Suzy makes no mention of it. The monologue appears in Linda's testimony, but with no mention of a witness, suggesting that Agathe might have been a hidden witness, while Suzy's silent presence on the stairs at the end of the monologue leads Linda to ask "tu m'espionne encore?" (NC 138) Both versions of the monologue come just after an argument between Suzy and Agathe regarding ownership of the bar, which in Linda's version occurs during a stage black-out, a sign for her alleged loss of consciousness.

Monologues in this play serve as both unmaskings and as masks. Linda's monologue serves the two witnesses who recount them in different ways. It is in Agathe's interest to unmask Linda's vulnerability; Saletti remarks that she appears to be a child seeking to return to the womb. (NC 95) Linda, however, uses the same monologue as a mask, to demonstrate physical and mental separation from the murder as she hides behind her incoherence: "mettons que j'tais pas assez en forme pour tuer quequ'un c'te matin-là." (NC 146) At first glance, the juxtaposition of Suzy's monologue in Agathe's deposition, and Agathe's in Suzy's, appears to be a stand-off in their attempts to clear themselves by suppressing auto-biographical revelations, while recounting the other's vulnerable moment of self-betrayal. On closer examination, however, the balance of power is clearly unequal, as we see that Suzy's monologue in Agathe's deposition is a masterful example of a successful mask, while Agathe's are pathetic, unmasked moments of self-betrayal. Suzy's

monologue, like Roland's in *L'Homme gris*, is an attempt at self-justification; Suzy's succeeds, however, where Roland's fails, because she arranges for the monologue to be "told" by her rival, who would have no reason to justify Suzy. Unlike Roland, who betrays himself through his own words, Suzy hides behind Agathe's restaging of her already staged monologue. Further, anything harsh that Suzy says about Linda is actually ascribed to Georges, Suzy's husband, further masking her presence in the intrigue. In Suzy's deposition, however, the exact opposite pertains. During this deposition, in the first of Agatha's monologues, Suzy details Agathe's bitterness, toward men in general, and Raymond in particular. In the second, presented (by Suzy) as a confession to the sleeping Linda (hence Linda can neither confirm nor deny its veracity), Agathe's troubled relationship with her father is unmasked, and a curious story, in which her father might or might not have called, and Raymond might or might not have lied about it to torture her, is recounted. (NC 118-119) This is the monologue that convicts Agathe, but we learn in Scene Four that it never took place at all, and that Raymond had told Suzy Agathe's story some time previously:

Suzy:

J'ai même conté l'histoire de son père pour rendre ça plus attendrissant, pour y donner des circonstances atténuantes.

Raymond:

T'es chienne! J'aurais jamais dû t'conter ça.

Suzy:

C'tait bon...ça faisait vrai. Pis c'était émouvant pour le coroner. Même Agathe pleurait...un vrai mélo. Fallait ben y donner quelques raisons de te tuer. Un crime passionnel, ça se nourrit. (NC 158-159)

The veils of hearsay become impenetrable; the most moving moment in the play, "didn't happen", and we see the way a playwright takes a casually told story and animates it into "real" theatre. History becomes drama, more moving because it is theatricalized, and we

remember Artaud's remark that "the image of a crime presented in the requisite theatrical conditions is something infinitely more terrible for the spirit than that same crime when actually committed." (85) "Faire vrai" is more moving than the actual event, and melodrama has the effect of making even Agathe, who knows it is "not true", shed tears in the courtroom. Laberge not only gives us "the image of a crime" three times, but also the tawdry "reality" of the event, which is also, of course, "an image". By replaying the murder scene over and over in different contexts, she magnifies the crime. Murders increase exponentially in this play, as the entire play becomes the scene of its own death.

This play becomes, like Suzy herself, a strip tease dance, dealing with the slippery nature of performance on several levels. The fascination for visual violence, that seems to be one of the most basic characteristics of specular pleasure, tantalizes the spectator, but its violence always belongs to the semiotic and the rhetoric. The two actual murders do not occur on stage; Louis' is graphically described by Suzy, for Raymond as bloodthirsty spectator, and Raymond's is promised, but not actually confirmed, by Suzy's significant gesture for the audience's intention. The closest thing to violence on stage is the fight between Agathe and Suzy in the first scene, and the fight between Agathe and Linda in the second. By the third scene, that fight takes place during a black out and is not seen. As Barbara Freedman has pointed out, theatricality depends on the fact that "a person is aware that she is seen, reflects that awareness, and so defeats our look." (1) All three of these women have performed for the patrons of the Night Cap Bar stage, much as they do for us and for each other, during the play. Agathe sang Raymond's songs, while Linda dances nude. What Suzy did on the stage is never made explicit; Agathe talks about Suzy "upstaging" her during her songs, drawing Raymond's attention, and that of the audience, to herself. Suzy's insistence on costumes for the show further implies that it was the

costume not the music or dancing, that she performed. While both Agathe and Linda perform a "naked" art that makes them vulnerable, Suzy performs a strip tease, the art of making it appear that you are taking off what you are not. Linda cites Suzy as having inaugurated "les p'tits spectacles"(NC 96), and suggests that she misses performing. Suzy's performances, of course, are not limited to the stage and have never ceased. Freedman has said that "strategies of power are directly related to the control of the spectator's gaze." (186) Suzy creates spectacle in order to control it; she does not let it "happen" but scripts it for the audience. Her voice in the black-out at the end of the play not only suggests her success in eluding representation, but also presumes a continued play between representation and elusiveness. Her last line, "on va faire une grande fête....*on va leur montrer...*"(my italics) promises the possibility of future representation, not of self, but of staged self.

Freedman asks "if we cannot figure without disfiguring, can we not put these disfiguring processes on stage by acknowledging their role in representation?" (176) Nowhere is the dramatization of the disfiguring process more brutally achieved, both literally and metaphorically, than in Suzy's chilling description of the (dis)figuring of Raymond's cousin Louis, who, as stand-by for Raymond, must go on stage in a parody of a snuff show. Louis "dies" several times: "massacré...la première fois" to provide a convenient, speechless, paralysed, wheelchair victim, tortured by the gangsters in search of their money, and, finally, from an overdose administered by Suzy. The (dis)figuration by which Suzy turns Louis into the actor Louis who will play Raymond, is graphic and goes on for several pages:

Y a rien senti: j'l'avais loadé en masse...le pire, c'était pas l'escalier, c'tait avant. Le battre, pis sa face...(NC 160)

Ecraser la face de quequ'un au poing americain, j'sais pas si tu l'sais,

mais c'pas facile. J'ai faite comme si Willi t'avait donné la volée qu'y avait envie de t'donner. J'ai fessé, fessé jusqu'a temps de tombé sus lui. J'tais morte. J'voulais tellement que ça aye l'air d'une job à Willi... une job dégueulasse.(NC 160)

Faut dire que j'y'avais démoli l'portrait: 20 points de sutures sus l'front, les yeux comme les trous de sucés, les dents d'en avant pétées, une joue presque pendante, pis l'nez cassé. mettons qu'y avait moins d'allure qu'avant. Pis là, j'parle pas d'ses jambes...(NC 164)

Louis' drugged state suggests the unawareness of the many characters who have been "willingly murdered" on stage; he is set up by author/director Suzy, and the narrative of his murder, graphically theatricalized, parallels Raymond's own, anonymous death. Representation is always framed in Laberge's work. As the women's performative levels seem endless, so Raymond boasts of not always having counterfeited his drug habit. The dangerously fragile threshold between "faisant semblant d'être sus l'smac" and "J'ai pas toujours faite semblante" (NC 163) is the dangerous dilemma of the artist who cannot separate her/him self from the role. Instead of pointing out this danger to Raymond, Suzy's reassures him by flattering him, and by suggesting differences between himself and Louis. She skirts the self/role issue by pretending to separate actor from stand-in, while in actuality, muddying the distinction still further. Suzy is very careful, however, to separate the actress Suzy from the character Solange that she is trying to create. In scene 4, Suzy's performance of a passionate, sexually attracted woman is for Raymond's specular benefit, but the spectator is offered a more privileged (we think) understanding, when she "shows us" the gun, pointing to the performative aspect of her self-dramaticization for Raymond. She plays on both Raymond's and the audience's fascination with sex and violence, while exposing this fascination for what it is: we sense discomfort when confronted with a titillation on Raymond's part that parallels our fascination.

When Raymond questions Suzy too closely, she adroitly turns the scene toward sexual

staging, as a consummatory supplement to Raymond's fantasy, yet whenever he attempts to fulfill that fantasy she again turns the scene, this time to play on his fear of discovery. She maintains her control of his specular attention by refusing closure. Like a soap opera or a cliffhanger, she teases him, making him increasingly vulnerable, and herself, increasingly opaque. Her persona as a sexually insatiable siren is attested to by all three other characters, but, in fact, is as dubious as the role of Solange Rinfrette. She uses the traditional stagings that have been the female lot to mystify and seduce her "audiences". As Freedman points out, the very concept of voyeurism is a function of gender -if Suzy is not perceived as opaque that is because women are not "seen" that way. We suspect that her role with her husband, Georges, is equally as opaque, a conglomeration of roles. In Agathe's deposition Suzy presents her husband as a "flan mou", a soft custard of a man, while in her own, he is represented as a pillar of society. In the fourth scene, she represents him to Raymond as a gullible cuckold: "Georges, y croit n'importe quoi." (NC 166) She has supposedly staged a depression to explain her departure: "j'vas en Suisse me reposer de l'enquête. Moi, j'fais une depression, j'm'en remts pas pis mon mari comprend ça." (NC 170) On her last telephone call she suggests Georges' possible (if unwitting) complicity in her act. She stages herself to the audience as staging herself to Raymond as staging herself to Georges; multiple framings serve only, in the final analysis, to frame an empty frame.

Autobiography and confession play major roles in this play. There is a long tradition of confessional literature and autobiographical writing in French, and Jacques Derrida has shown the way that the genre often has an agenda to rewrite the self. ⁹ In a sense, autobiography and dramatic monologue are similar, as Evelyn Hinz points out, "the *agon* of self-dramatization" is inherent in both. (198) If each of the three scenes can be considered to be autobiographical, in the sense of a staging of self, from another point of

view, the entire play can be considered as a biography of the bar itself, as written by Suzy. Brian Pocknell has pointed out that the bar becomes a character in the play. I would suggest that the bar is the intended victim all along, as it represents Suzy's past, a sign of repression she will seek to liquidate. It is also the past of the theatre, a sign of the representation that has 'murdered the daughter' for so many centuries. When Suzy burns the bar she is not only destroying a literal space she is figuratively destroying years of representation, as represented by the myriad representations in each scene. We must remember that the audience, seated at tables, are not only implicated in the crimes (Suzy's murder of the murder scene) but exist as part of the literal space of the theatre that she has betrayed and that will be destroyed as well.

Evelyn Hinz has pointed out that the "premise that something real is being imitated" (199) is the basis of both auto/biography and traditional theatre. In fact, one of the tacit agreements in the theatre, especially in a mystery such as Christie's *Mousetrap*, or Anthony Shaeffer's *Sleuth*, is that the audience will not be lied to, only mislead. The "facts" will be there if only we can "see" them. In auto/biography we accept the notion of fallibility but not of deliberate falsification. (200) If, in themselves, the different versions of the event do not break that theatrical convention. Suzy's admission that she has exchanged letters, substituted bodies, and manipulated us, not by accident but by design, exposes theatre not as an illusion but as an outright lie. Suzy betrays theatrical convention by revealing the semiotics of its language, even as Roland betrays the emptiness of the patriarchal discourse in *L'Homme gris*. In both plays, Laberge's emasculation of the common practices of theatre demonstrate that the theatre is not bound by its traditional practices. She exposes all her tricks, gives away all her illusions, and still offers us riveting theatre.

Hinz has pointed to the mythic aspect of auto/biography as well, in the sense of Mircea

Eliade's eternal return. The magic act of "naming" takes on new dimensions when it is about defining or redefining self. Eliade has shown how the ritual (which is at the origin of our theatre) is a mythic repetition of the cosmogonic experience, intended both to replay and rewrite history. As Hinz puts it, "ritual is not statically but dynamically representational." (207) The restaging of the origin is an act of cleansing and purification that enables a "fresh start", and violence is an integral part of that death and rebirth. The mythic time of ritual, like theatre, permits both a retrospective viewpoint (providing safety and distance) as well as an eternal present that restages the past and projects us into the future. Hinz notes that great biographers remain unobtrusive "because of their adherence to dramatic principles of composition" (201), ie., the illusory "staging" of "fact". Suzy's biography of the bar is not an attempt to relive the bar's life but is actually a rewriting of her own. She hides her own autobiographical confession within an ostensible biography, and confesses to murder only to "flaunt her success." (208) Pocknell has noted that Night Cap Bar as a site can be linked to both a mythic and a social underworld: Laberge, herself, identifies it as "un trou". That the proprietor emerges at the beginning of Scene Four from "a hole within a hole" visually and materially parallels Suzy's play within a play, as well as the images of death and rebirth that are consistent themes in Laberge's work. If, like Cri-Cri in *L'Homme gris*, and Jocelyne in *Jocelyne Trudelle*, Suzy is reborn through violence, Suzy's violence is comprehensive, death of her former name/self, incarceration (living death) for Agathe (mother) and Linda (daughter), death of Raymond/Louis (father), death of the theatrical event, and, finally, death of the theatrical site and its audience, who, as witnesses, will also perish in the burning of the bar. Out of this dramaturgical holocaust Solange will be reborn as a phoenix from the flames.

Taking the "murder" back to the theatre and reversing feminine victimization is a large

part of Laberge's project. Reversing the mirror, she turns our gaze back to the audience's role in the theatre, and explicitly implicates us in her "crime". As she shows us the way we identify with characters, both as performers and as abusers of the voyeuristic, she forces us to mistrust the playwright. We are suspended between theatrical, mythological time where there can be an infinite number of repetitions and rectifications of reality, and chronological time where our experience tells us that time is not circular but linear. Within the interplay of these two temporal structures, Laberge encourages us to recognize the slippery quality of theatrical time, which allows for contamination between the two worlds. Ann Wilson has pointed out that if theatre can be used to transform it can also be used to confirm the *status quo* of a prevailing ideology, and Irigaray has noted the "seduction function of the law itself." (*Speculum* 38) While Cixous later came to see the theatre as a site for transformation, this later work does not invalidate the very important warning of "Aller à la mer". Freedman's assertion that the tools of theatre far exceed any ideology they can be used to support does not negate the unruly capacity of the "murder scene" to slip off-stage and into our lives. *Le Night Cap Bar* is Laberge's testimony to the uncertain threshold between *scène* and *salle*, and to the unstable relationship between theory and practice.

Notes

1. Daniel Hart's review of *Le Night Cap Bar* appeared in the section "Arts et Spectacle" of *Liaison*, for April 22, 1987.

2. Robert Lévesque's review of *Le Night Cap Bar* appeared in *Le Devoir*, for April 9, 1987.
3. Marianne Ackerman's review of *Le Night Cap Bar* appeared in the English-language paper, *The Gazette*, Montréal, for Thursday, April 9, 1987.
4. Bruno Dostie's review of *Le Night Cap Bar* appeared in the Theatre section of *La Presse*, Montréal, for Saturday, April 18, 1987.
5. Quoted in an interview with Paul Eliani in *Nuit Blanche*, no. 28, May/June 1987.
6. Ibid.
7. Quoted in an article by Raymond Bernatchez in the Theatre section of *La Presse*, Montréal, Saturday, April 11, 1987.
8. Marianne Ackerman's review of *Le Night Cap Bar*, see above, note 3.
9. See Derrida's *De la grammatologie*, Part Two.

Chapter IV: Articulating the Feminine and Restoring *corps-présence*

As we have seen, Laberge's work, like much of the theatre currently being produced in Canada, deals with the issue of representation, particularly feminine representation in provocative and innovative ways. Laberge is one of a growing number of post-colonial women playwrights of whom Hélène Cixous might have been speaking when she wrote in 1975:

Je parlerai de l'écriture féminine, *de ce qu'elle fera*. Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive de la femme et fasse venir les femmes à l'écriture, dont elles ont été éloignées aussi violemment qu'elles l'ont été de leurs corps; pour les mêmes raisons, par la même loi, dans le même but mortel. Il faut que la femme se mette au texte - comme au monde, et à l'histoire - de son propre mouvement. (1975, 39)

Laberge's characters increasingly seek their own self-definition and empowerment within the text. Jocelyne, like *Cri-Cri*, defines herself in a way that excludes the world from which she has been excluded; Marianna and Rosalie adventure to the city to find a society that values progress and not a status quo that silences women. In *Deux Tangos*, Suzanne's attempt to break out of a moribund socio-linguistic system is not successful, but in *Le Night Cap Bar*, Suzy redefines language to suit her needs and to escape a codified existence. In *Oublier*, Jacqueline, the eldest, replays her mother's life, Judith and Joanne try to forget their identity as "Juliette's daughters", but Micheline is able to pass through a figurative death and rebirth similar to Suzy's in chthonic violence if not in actual blood. As

we will see in *Pierre*, Héloïse's figurative death in the cloister is not unlike that of *Le Faucon's* Aline in the absence of physical passion. Héloïse's liberation and rebirth arise out of Pierre's death, while Aline's will come from Steve's release.

Laberge addresses the issue of feminine writing as a challenge to the social, theatrical, and literary status quo in many contexts. Her work demonstrates an awareness of gender representation in a culture where both social and theatrical roles are defined by traditional values and religious heritage, and whose language, long a source of cultural identity and political controversy, already foregrounds the question of gender. As Québec has struggled to "write itself" in the face of a colonial heritage and changing national identity, women's position in the theatre has been no less marginal; women, too, have struggled to "write themselves" in a genre where patriarchal codes of structure, language and criticism have dominated and where, as Jill Dolan suggests, the very "apparatus of representation" conspires to maintain an ideology of masculine domination. As we have seen, one of Laberge's principal projects is, in fact, to expose that "apparatus" as a theatrical convention, too easily assimilated by an audience whose acceptance of the illusion as illusion often blinds them to the subliminal messages inherent in representation.

Rewriting self in parallel personal and national contexts has generated important changes in québécois theatre. Since the 1950's playwrights such as Gratien Gélinas, Marcel Dubé, Robert Gurik, Françoise Loranger, Anne Hébert, and Michel Tremblay have reflected, in diverse ways, Québec's need to affirm a national identity; during the strong women's theatre movement of the 1970's and 1980's, Denise Boucher, Pol Pelletier, Marie-Claire Blais, Jovette Marchessault and Michelle Causse focussed specifically on feminine identity. In recent years, however, Jill MacDougall has seen "Québécois artists [shift] away from an inward search for cultural identity to an affirmation of their

uniqueness in a multifarious world" (11); there has been a strong move from the collective to the individual voice. Marie Laberge positions the individual as principal artist in her work, and seems to re-iterate Cixous' questioning of the very possibility of feminine identity within traditional theatrical representation; she challenges role, language, and structure as dramatic tools as well as socially mastered constructions.

Traditional theatrical literature often depends on the feminine figure as metaphor; male heroism is primary, defined through male dominance over or quest for a female figure. Frequently based on three traditional figures, virgin, mother, and crone, Woman is posited in relation to the male hero: as the dangerous witch, the nurturing mother, or childlike virgin/wife. Her relationship to her sexuality is defined by, and finally defines, masculine attitudes of fear, need, or domination. She is the complement, as Luce Irigaray points out, always a sign for absence. We have only recently addressed the ethical considerations of metaphorization, what Laura Mulvey calls "to-be-looked-at-ness". Cixous, in "Aller à la mer", questions the very possibility of representing women on stage. Mary Ann Caws has pointed out the close relation between textual and visual representation and the impact of that representation on society. Barbara Johnson has commented on Barthes' "sexual symmetry" where presence and absence are necessarily complimentary figures in a system privileging the narcissistic (male) subject. In Marcel Dubé's *Un simple soldat*, for example, feminine metaphor is a sign for male desire or lack: woman is represented as the idealized mother (deceased and absent), the virginal half-sister (unattainable to the hero but seduced by another man), and the destructive step-mother (whose own son usurps the protagonist's rightful place). Through his interaction with these stock female characters the protagonist's dilemma is established and elucidated. Roland Lepage's *Une vie*, appears to deal with one woman's birth, life, and death in

Québec. Like *Un simple soldat*, however, it seeks to portray a patriarchal society's malaise, the deterioration of the family unit, and the difficulties experienced by an alienated class of francophone Canadians. In all stages of her life, this woman represents québécoise society: as new-born, she occasions the death of her mother, as child, she is incestuous temptation for her brother, as a young woman, she is limiting marriage for a wary suitor, as a married woman, she is violated by her husband and takes refuge in motherhood, as an old woman, she is absent for and forgotten by her children. The play begins and ends with a scene between her father and the doctor at her mother's death-bed, and we understand that the absence of the mother, as metaphor for the loss of masculine, childhood innocence and the ravages of time is really the subject of this play. That the little girl is always either trying or forced to take the place of the absent mother does not render her any more real. She is, indeed, the metaphor for a metaphor, the symbol of a symbol.

I mean in no way to simplify these authors' extraordinary work, nor to deny the excellent acting that has brought their characters alive on stage. Rather, I wish to point out that many fine playwrights, however much they have broken ground in some areas have, perhaps unwittingly, continued to depend on the traditional, one-dimensional female figure which posits the absent, symbolic feminine as a foil for the present, real masculine subject. As we know, Cixous, in recent work, has discovered the transformative powers of theatre, and the possibility of using what Freedman calls "the tools of theatre" for positive change. Marie Laberge is one of several playwrights who accept Cixous' charge that new feminine representation must come from women, using theatrical tools to (re)construct what Cixous calls the "Whole Woman" for the québécoise stage, a woman who will restore *corp-présence* and who will "work at exploding everything that makes for "staginess", going beyond the confines of the stage".(1984, 547) By dramatizing staginess to the extent that

she does, Laberge exposes it as a convention that can be 'believed' as fact. Her de-idealization of the 'present' mother, juxtaposed with the father figure's death or absence, suggests the urgency of self-determination for the daughter.

For Cixous, the capacity of the theatre to effect social change is through the complicitous role of the audience as a collective unit, while Ross Chambers maintains that to be truly subversive the writer must work within the entertainment factor. Daphna Ben Chaim points out how aesthetic distance in the theatre, as in no other genre, requires a paradoxical stance of simultaneous empathy and criticism from the witnessing audience. Laberge's mimesis conceals a subversive attempt to liberate the feminine voice and body through dramatic techniques that almost always explode traditional realism and structure, *representing* representation. For her the feminine voice is connected to the body and one cannot be wholly present without the other. Voice and body meet on a site where passion is obligatory: the stage.

For Laberge, articulating the feminine operates on several levels: giving voice to the character, for years silenced in her role as metaphor; giving voice to the actress, often diminished by the roles she was allotted, (ingenue or mother, the rare, but gratifying witch); giving voice to a female audience, for years alienated and undermined by stereotypical "role" models; and last, but not least, giving voice to the female author, who not only discovers and rejoices in the terrible power of the playwright but exposes it to the audience for what it is (Laberge uses the word "terrible" to describe Suzy's intelligence in *Le Night Cap Bar*). Denise Gagnon says that the mother's role is usually "boring and conventional", yet she loves to play mothers written by Laberge. (Smith 41) Further, articulating the feminine is not only a question of restoring feminine voice and body-presence, but of setting forth an aesthetic that challenges modern aristotelianism, traditional

modes of representation and indeed, the whole, comfortable audience notion of truth.

Laberge "writes" women who appear at first to fulfill traditional roles but then break that expectation. She creates dramatic tension through representational confusion, juxtaposing outer mask and inner reality: characters who stage themselves for an audience of other characters are a hallmark of her work. Of course, it is not possible to write of "articulating" the feminine without mentioning Cri-Cri's lack of voice in *L'Homme gris*. Laberge does not see Christine as a silent character, as she says: "Dans toutes mes pièces...sans exception, les femmes ont la parole, même dans *L'Homme gris*, où elle ne parle pas mais s'exprime tout de même." ¹ Although the feminine voice is technically silent in this play, Cri-Cri is one of the most physically present of Laberge's protagonists, her gestic voice is overwhelmingly clear. For Suzy/Solange, articulating the feminine becomes a question of "taking back" female representation, through a doubled device of appropriating and exposing "to-be-looked-at-ness". Traditional representation is destabilized; we are never allowed to "look at" characters, but forced to "experience their reality" and their perception of each other; our body-presence insures theirs. The motherly figure, the raw young woman, and the elegant mondaine "appear" in all three masks, until it is impossible to "assign" a role, and representational stereotypes become meaningless.

In *Aurélie, ma soeur* (1988), the feminine voice reaches a new level of articulation, tenderness, and liberation. The play opens with a scene between an older and a younger woman, a comfortable, ordinary relationship. La Chatte is dressing for a date, while Aurélie, who has brought her up, offers sisterly advice. La Chatte's mother, Charlotte, Aurélie's sister, is in Italy, and never appears on stage. We learn that La Chatte is the result of an incestuous relation between a barely teen-age Charlotte and her father; Charlotte herself has been rendered almost mute, sterile and unable to nurture; Aurélie is a maternal

figure, but unable to have children, is both sister and aunt to La Chatte, and surrogate mother to Charlotte; to atone for her perceived failure to protect her sister, she has denied her own memories of a loving father. Mother/daughter roles become socially arbitrary conventions, potentially destructive if we rely on them as titles or force them into stereotypes. For Aurélie, Chatte is sister, daughter, and niece. (A 102) Aurélie herself has experienced a parallel mother/sister relationship with her ex-mother-in-law Cynthia O'Sullivan-Boucher, and Aurélie's own life has prepared her for a multiplicity of roles:

Si on r'garde ça dans famille, on est une belle race d'orphelines: maman est morte, j'avais 9 ans pis Charlotte trois. J'ai élevé Charlotte avec tante Lilas qui est morte quand j'avais 15 ans. J'me sus mariée à 20 ans, ta mère t'as eue presque l'jour de ses 17 ans...des tantes pis des soeurs qui jouent à mère. C'tait presque inévitable que ça soye moi qui t'élève. (A 107-108)

True maternity emerges as *sisterhood* in the profoundest sense of the word.

Unlike Juliette Tessier, in *Oublier*, who names her daughters to perpetuate her own image, and Judith Tessier, who wants the sister she named to be called only by that name and no other, Aurélie gives Chatte multiple names for a more open identity. These names offer different relationships and allow for many paths of self-determination. As in *Oublier*, the "true" mother, a phrase that appears a good deal in *Aurélie*, is the one who names. Chatte calls Aurélie "...ma mère choisie. Ma soeur pis ma mère." (A 107) Names have the power to create or change reality; Aurélie talks about the time it took to "find a name" for Chatte/Charlotte/Carla:

Chatte:
Pourquoi tu m'as appelée Charlotte moi aussi?

Aurélie:
Je l'sais pas. Au début, j'ai pensé que c'tait pour me convaincre que t'étais sa fille, pas sa soeur: on appelle jamais deux soeurs avec le même nom. Pis c'est peut-être pas ça. Ça m'a pris du temps à te trouver un nom. J'tais sûr que ta mère reviendrait, qu'a voudrait t'nommer elle-même. Pis après j'ai compris qu'a r'viendrait jamais t'chercher,

J't'ai appelée comme elle. T'étais sa fille, t'étais celle que j'aimais le plus au monde comme elle. Mais j't'ai donné un nom italien aussi, que j'ai cherché dans le dictionnaire des noms propres: Carla.

Chatte:

Oui, mais tu m'appelles jamais d'même. Y a jussé Pierre-Louis qui m'appelait Carla.

Aurélie:

J'ai jamais voulu que t'aïlles en Italie non plus. J't'ai donné c'nom-là au cas où ta mère voudrait t'élever elle-même en Italie. J'avais très peur de ça, alors j'ai jamais prononcé c'nom-là. (A 103)

If Aurélie cannot bring herself to call Chatte Carla, because it make her fears of losing her come true, she also cannot call her Charlotte, for fear of seeming to replace her sister, or of recreating *ad infinitum* the violent act that nearly destroyed her.

Similarly, Chatte becomes what Aurélie calls "une championne de la synthèse" (A 133) when, as a young child, she coins the name Mamélie (maman, mamie, Aurélie) to refer to her sister/mother/aunt. Laberge, too, is a "championne de la synthèse", in her ability to balance her conscious demystification of the authorial process and the power of writing with an ability to offer rich and polyvalent, multi-named characters. She recognizes the "slippery" quality of naming, its position of control, as well as the liberating power both of self-naming and naming as a gift.

When La Chatte goes in search of her "true" mother she finds what appears to be a crone. Charlotte appears to replay many of the distant, unresponsive mothers in Laberge's work; she does not talk, smokes and drinks too much, seems masculine and unloving: a sculptor who works in stone, she is almost a statue herself. However, at the end of the play we learn that Charlotte has had her own maternal gifts for La Chatte and Aurélie: each other. Cixous writes: "il faut, il suffit qu'à la femme soit donné par une autre le meilleur d'elle-même pour que la femme puisse s'aimer et rendre en amour le corps qui lui est "né"(1975, 44). When Charlotte finally breaks her silence she tells La Chatte: "Ciao, ma

filles. Si jamais tu te choques encore contre moi, essaye de penser que j't'ai donné c'que j'avais d'mieux. J't'ai donné ma soeur. La piú cara del mondo" (A 147). The gift of self is reiterated by Aurélie when she says to Chatte: "tu me rendais tellement heureuse! Ç'aurait été y prendre son meilleur...ou l'meilleur de mon père qui serait passé par son père à elle." (A 105)

Jill Dolan has cautioned that "the birth metaphor is emblematic of the mother/daughter bond, but its glorification of motherhood also implies that a woman's self-fulfillment can best be attained by fulfilling her biological capabilities." (90) Laberge and many other Québécoise *auteures* combat that problem by viewing motherhood in many of these texts as broader than biology; birth and rebirth occur many times in many contexts. As Boucher's characters in *Les fées ont soif* operate their own, shared rebirth, and hopefully that of the audience, so do Aurélie, Charlotte, and La Chatte. Charlotte writes that "notre fille à toutes les deux est...une merveille." (A 149) She is "une jeune beauté sauvage", a new breed of woman who, because of a gift from older women, is able to share it as well as to pass it on. This legacy is represented by "la dinner-ring", given to Aurélie by her ex-mother-in-law: "A m'a dit que cette bague-là pouvait seulement être portée par des femmes qui ont d'la valeur mais qui risquent de l'oublier souvent et d'en douter tout l'temps" (A 29). Aurélie gives it to La Chatte, who will pass it on. Like Cixous' image of a women's round dance, maternity is passed circularly from hand to hand, and flows naturally from one woman to another, regardless of the accidents of biology or the peripatetics of masculine intervention.

In recent québécois theatre there are many examples of unorthodox motherhood which, in most cases, lead to rebirth, liberation, and a new understanding between mother and daughter, or simply between women. In Laberge's *Jocelyne Trudelle trouvée morte dans*

ses larmes, Jocelyne's suicide metaphorically strengthens the bond between mythical and symbolic sisters. In H el ene Pednault's *La D eposition*, matricide, a mercy-killing that, like suicide, is against patriarchal law, gives birth to new love between mother and daughter. Michelle Causse's Jane Bowles, in *A quelle heure est la lev ee dans le d esert?* is barren, but gives birth to many writers. Laberge's Suzy, in *Le Night Cap Bar*, creates and assassinates her "characters" with the ease of a modern Medea. Steve, too, gives birth, to his father, and to Aline, while H elo ise and Pierre le V en erable operate a mutual rebirth. Birth is not only a single event but an on-going process of renewal through communion with self and with others; motherhood is not a physical imperative but a matter of choice, and often literary than biological. In *C' etait avant la guerre   l'Anse   Gilles*, Marianna chooses her maternal relationship with her friend while rejecting biological motherhood and the society that imposes it on women. In *Deux tangos poue toute une vie*, Suzanne's pregnancy is a sign of her inability to escape the mastery of traditional social discourse, but suggests that her unborn child might succeed where she has failed. Aur elie's and Charlotte's giving honesty produces La Chatte; patriarchal repression produces a destructively powerful Suzy, who, like Madame de Merteuil, learns only to dominate society through theatrical manipulation and deceit; the *mensonge* of metaphorization leads to a domineering Suzy or the destructive Cri-Cri of Laberge's *L'Homme gris*: both murder the men in their lives. If traditional writers search for the mother as Mother, Laberge and her colleagues often find that lost figure to be the searching woman or the writer herself. In a profound discovery of feminine responsibility the women in these plays grapple with the maternal void only to conclude that they themselves must operate their own birth and re-establish a feminine genealogy: divine, social, emotional, literary, and sexual.

As we have said, part of Laberge's project is the re-instatement of feminine sexual

pleasure and the validation of feminine passion, so long repressed: "j'pense que la seule chose qu'on n'a jamais pu apprendre à faire, c'est pardonner pis vivre sa sexualité." (A 109) Charlotte is a virgin in both senses of the word; sacrificed to patriarchal sexuality, and unable to experience "jouissance". For Aurélie sex was "l'plaisir attrapé par hasard", but La Chatte has no fear or shame and is frank in her enjoyment of it. The difference between Chatte's capacity and Aurélie's incapacity for sexual pleasure is chronologically and metaphorically generational. Aurélie is part of a generation that "faisait l'amour comme des coupables" and where "l'ombre du chapelet...planait au-d'sus du lit." (A 61) She is firm in her resolve to give Chatte the lucidity to look honestly at any feeling and to discuss anything: "n'importe quoi, n'importe quand, vérité assurée. J'ai jamias regretté c'contrat-là," says Aurélie. That Pierre-Louis is unable to rise to her level of uncompromising honesty, makes her an even stronger character for us. That her enjoyment of the physical with Pierre-Louis does not blind her to his faults or bind her to his insecurities is all the more reassuring in terms of the feminine persona. Laberge's thesis of genealogical growth or deterioration, according to the measure of self-deceit or auto-determination of her characters, attempts to rectify Irigaray's theory that masculine writing has destroyed female sexual pleasure and feminine genealogy, impoverishing the female character and separating her from her humanity, her divinity, and her voice: Laberge re-establishes female pleasure as normal and feminine genealogy as thriving, through a painstaking reconstruction that may take several generations. While female fear of masculine censure is a consistent theme in Laberge's work, it never remains unchallenged, and can be outgrown, particularly in her later plays. Her characters may operate under the compulsion of that fear, but they liberate, and are liberated by, the audience's ability to see the emptiness of the vessel that occasions it. La Chatte's presence enables Charlotte to sculpt the father, "re-drawing" him to free not

only herself but the dead father as well: "comme si y était vaincu, pis qu'y sortait d'un tombeau."(A 148) His ghost released, the spectre dissipated, the Patriarch is rendered powerless. Aurélie, too, is freed to voice memories of a man who in better times was a good father.

Audience complicity is a constant theme for Laberge. Aurélie is uncompromising about the audience's responsibility when she speaks about the family's refusal to intervene when both her father and Charlotte were at risk. She calls the family and neighbors "des spectateurs qui aiment pas l'show qu'y'r'gardent pis qui sont même pas capables de se l'ever pour aller s'faire le leur. C'est du monde comme eux autr' qui font qu'des drames deviennent des tragédies.(A 109) This remark resonates with the importance of seeing the difference between life and theatre, in spite of their connection. It is the bored spectators who treat life as theatre that make life into the *object* of their gaze. Articulating the feminine also means allowing male characters to be human, by releasing them from the weight and expectations of the patriarchy. It is the audience that supports a patriarchal machine at the expense of human men and women. As we have seen, witnesses are a key factor in Laberge's work. Aurélie feels that without Charlotte's presence, her own childhood has been lost: "Après son départ, y a pus rien d'mon passé qui est revenu, parce qu'y avait pus aucun témoin." (A 74) Aurélie's lost childhood is, in some sense, her sacrifice to Charlotte, who needs to escape the specular rape of a desiring audience, equated with the family's watching and doing nothing, and her father's actual rape. Aurélie refers several times to the small town voyeurs who vicariously enjoyed her sister's pain: "Y s'sont contentés de r'garder l'spectacle pis de s'délecter dans peine de ma soeur."(A 98) Later, she calls them "les confortables au fauteuil d'orchestre, les confortables qui jugent pis qui applaudissent quand les méchants meurent," (A 110) recalling the social arbiters of l'Anse à

Gilles who have no life other than the one they 'create' by turning real pain into theatre for their own enjoyment.

One of the exciting aspects of feminine writing in Québec is the diversity of the emerging feminine personae, and its program to disturb, subvert and rewrite traditional theatrical structures, staging, and especially language, to reflect that diversity. As one of Boucher's characters says: "leur langue ne nous appartient pas. Elle ne nomme rien de ce que je cherche. Elle cache mon identité". Il faut "trouver la voix réelle de nos vraies entrailles"(70). Like Artaud's search for a "naked language", Laberge's feminine voice rises out of the body, and insures body-presence. Susan Rubin Suleiman has pointed out that transgression of conventional values is linked to transgression of conventional language(75). If Laberge subtly questions and redefines the way we hear language and see the stage body, as well as the connection between the two, she also insists on individuality as the ultimate emphasis of her feminist project: stereotypes never go unchallenged, and characters increasingly articulate themselves, muscularly, emotionally, and spiritually. The provocative word has become linked with the physical expression and presence that it implies.

Feminine writing is a tremendously important and responsible task for women and can result in healing the rift between mother and daughter as well as in empowering women in society. Aurélie's unanswered letters to Charlotte emerge as Charlotte's salvation. Writing, especially in letters, becomes increasingly positive, and Aurélie's letters to Charlotte are more comfortable than Julia's to Elzéard in *Ils étaient venus pour*, and have a more positive result than do Judith's to Micheline in *Oublier*. In writing to Charlotte, Aurélie not only recreates her sister's presence for herself and for the audience, she reaffirms her own existence.(A 105) Writing permits us to "see things" (A 106) and to transform one's life.

Laberge said in a recent radio interview that "without writing, I would most probably be dead." ² Throughout her work, feminine writing increasingly develops as a powerful tool for feminine affirmation, body-presence, and salvation.

Near the end of the play, Aurélie offers the 25 years of letters she has written to Charlotte to Chatte for her to read, in an effort to introduce mother to daughter. These letters are the only link between the three women, and, if they represent the geographical as well as emotional space between human beings, they also suggest the possibility of *rapprochement*: "Not' vie à nous deux raconté à ta mère, à ma soeur." (A 130) All written at night, a time of intimate confidences and love, they are an outpouring of sharing from the one woman who cares for the other two. When Charlotte finally writes back, 25 years later, she says: "Ecris-moi encore. Ecris-moi toujours. Tes lettres sont mes larmes et ce qui me reste de coeur." (A 149) The healing quality of the letters is in their continuity, and in their affirmation of life. Rather than control others, they respond to the needs of others. Like the letter written by Elle, the daughter in the one-act play *La réparation*, these letters represent the best of feminine writing. While they still mark a space between sisters, or between daughters and parents, like the letters Marianna will write to Honoré in *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse à Gilles*, they form a translational bridge rather than affirming a gap.

Aurélie, ma soeur, presents several kinds of feminine articulation. Charlotte, who describes herself as "un être humain démuné" (A 149) has, like many of Laberge's characters, lost the capacity for verbal communication and seeks new forms of expression that will not betray her. Charlotte, when she speaks at all, is most comfortable in Italian, a language that separates her geographically from the painful childhood memories of patriarchal violation and helplessness. If language, both written and spoken, can have

extraordinary healing powers or be extremely destructive, and Charlotte has experienced both polarities. Charlotte's principal language is her sculpture, which, because it is a somatic language, bypasses translation and addresses the experience of the receiver directly, without the mediation of spoken or written language. While even Charlotte's silence can be misread, her art reaches across the geographical and emotional distance that separates these women and allows for harmonious dialogue. Laberge said in a recent interview that Charlotte is the single character in her theatre who still "has something to say," a "secret as yet untold." It is part of Charlotte's mystery that she is an artist, who has abandoned society in order to create. Laberge sees art as "un grand appel sans que l'on attend une réponse." She refers in the same interview to the harmony that is created by distance and "déchirure". It is the non-reconciliation between the three women that creates the harmonic chord that unites them.

If the power of language is a given, responsibility belongs to the person who chooses to articulate it. Aurélie's insistence on the truth of La Chatte's birth aids them all to transcend the crime. Her honesty is juxtaposed with the relatives who refused to admit what they knew was going on, and chose not to help them both. Pierre-Louis uses language to avoid real feelings, and to maintain the status quo. As we have seen, Laberge is what she herself calls "une fanatique de la lucidité." Truth, as an expression of one's own authentic experience must be shared, and if truth is merely one's own perception, the artist's ability to create and alter life is a powerful and dangerous tool, to be dealt with both honestly and compassionately. Articulating the feminine is about women's new-found ability to articulate choice. Chatte chooses to separate from Pierre-Louis rather than to perpetuate a living stasis, even as she chooses Aurélie as her mother. (A 107)

Feminine theatre in Québec offers us feminine perspectives but no single feminine

perspective, and there is frequently a conscious effort to de-privilege the role of both the writer and the audience. In Michèle Causse's *A quelle heure est la levée dans le désert?* a constant on-stage writer figure reminds us that it is only the writer's point of view we receive. Pol Pelletier begins her *Lumière Blanche* by allowing her character Torregrossa to acknowledge, and thus to dis-empower the audience and its gaze: "Vous remarquerez par ailleurs qu'il y aura dans ce lieu un certain nombre de personnes, assises, qui vous observeront en silence. Ne vous en occupez pas. Ces personnes feront comme si elles n'étaient pas vraiment là et ne devrait donc aucunement nuire au déroulement des événements." (12) In this way, Pelletier not only comments on the audience's traditionally privileged position, but reverses that privilege by staging the audience as a referent. Paradoxically, calling attention to their presence no longer allows the audience to be the safe and silent spectators, greedy for scandal, that Aurélie condemns. Laberge is part of what Pol Pelletier calls "une étape historique de la convulsion". She and her colleagues are not only questioning roles assigned to women but writing new ones, in the many senses this implies, for the character, the performer, the reader/audience, and the writer. Strongly linked to an oral heritage, they rely on their audience to give life to their characters and to participate in redefining the female role, but as Boucher's characters say, parodying a children's game, "Paré, pas paré, je sors pareil." Laberge contrasts the implied passivity of the traditional audience stance with what she and Cixous both see as the necessary complicity engendered by the performance space. In many of these plays, the author is a player as well, one who opens up theatrical illusion and brings the audience "to life". Like Dorothy, exposing the Wizard of Oz as the "little man behind the curtain", these writers both expose the "role" of the patriarchal playwright and his theatrical sleight of hand and empower the new feminine playwright as one who reveals new truths and a vigorous

female body-presence. It is no surprise that Laberge herself created some of the roles that represent feminine *authorial* articulation. If Suzy is what Claudine Herrmann calls a *voleuse de la langue*, appropriating authorial power for the purpose of articulating the feminine, Aurélie has no need to appropriate it. She is the positive of Suzy's negative and is able to articulate herself and to allow her loved ones to do the same.

The importance of audience complicity in maintaining the theatrical illusion is extremely important in this play. Indeed, as Gaëtan Charlebois points out: "*Aurélie* is the bravest kind of theatre...the most fragile kind of theatre...Half the suspense of a work like this is...how much the audience can be trusted."³ As in all of Laberge's work, every character is an audience for the others, and one stages oneself not really for others, but for oneself. As Aurélie points out, Pierre-Louis tells Chatte that he will meet her "because he needs to believe he will." (A 71) When Chatte questions her required complicity in this self-staging Aurélie reminds her that the spectator must believe in order for the performer to believe. Chatte's refusal to buy into Pierre-Louis' false theatre makes it crumble, even as the audience's refusal to accept what Roland says at face value in *L'Homme gris* exposes his illusion. Pierre-Louis is used to what Aurélie refers to as "indulgent mirrors" who bolster his tenuous illusion of self. Because "he is a man who cannot love himself" (A 86) he commits the unpardonable error of trying to represent Chatte to herself as an hysteric, in the time-honored manner of traditional theatre, as Cixous shows us in her play, *Portrait de Dora*. It is not only Pierre-Louis who tries to impose a role on Chatte. His wife Sandra stages her as a homewrecker: "une vicieuse, une perverse, une folle, une putain, une voleuse" (A 54) forcing Chatte to question her identity in the context of Aurélie's divorce and her own unorthodox origins.

The act of staging the self is presented in many ways in this play. The first scene is about

Chatte's very natural preparation for her first date with Pierre-Louis: costume is important as Chatte considers the effect that each outfit might have on him. Their first meeting after the course on American film that he taught and she attended, is at the swimming pool, and Chatte describes it in terms of Pierre-Louis' performance as a swimmer, the aesthetics of his body, and his act as a diver. She describes the first date as if "comme din vues presque" (A 33) and, in fact, they go to see Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, a classic thriller in which the role of the audience/voyeur is consistently problematized; Pierre-Louis mentions Truffaut's theory that Hitchcock's crimes can be considered as sexual acts, re-invoking the situations of both *L'Homme gris* and *Le Night Cap Bar*, in which power and violence are conflated sexually. Representation is taken to its logical conclusion when Aurélie points out that we are all different depending on our audience. (A 68) Articulating the feminine has much to do with accepting one's relationship with representation. As Kristeva notes, there is no such thing as woman, only the shifting face of her representation.

The fleeting moment of *paradis terrestre*, that appears in many of Laberge's plays, also extends to *Aurélie, ma soeur*. Aurélie's experience with her father, who, ignorant himself, shared the precious gift of "learning words" with her, lead to her role as a teacher in the most profound sense of the word, as she recreates that moment for her students every day in class:

C'pas a misère...Chez eux, p'tête bien, Mas pas dans ma classe, Dans ma classe, y sont d'bonne humeur, fins, pis tellement contents quand ils réussissent leur coup. Si t'é voyais! Tu dirais pas qu'y sony dans misère. (A 52)

Aurélie's ability to provide a safe space for her students parallels the life she has made for La Chatte, who, according to all the studies, should have been the disturbed, insecure child that Pierre-Louis' son promises to be. Chatte speaks of her moment of intense sexual

pleasure with Pierre-Louis in words comparable to Maurice Gingras' in *Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient*, and she almost echoes his sentiments word for word: "Quand quequ'un nous ouvre ça, c'monde-là, y a presque pas l'droit d'vous l'enlever après." (A 69) She might have been as emotionally scarred as he, but instead, is "capable de vivre en pleine face avec c'qu' sont." (A 82) Aurélie is justifiably proud that not only does Chatte know how to protect herself, but it is she who has given her this gift. (A 88)

If *Aurélie, ma soeur* is about articulating the feminine voice and body, perhaps the reason that Laberge feels that Charlotte "has more to say" is because Charlotte remains almost silent in a play about feminine self-determination through language, and is absent in a play about feminine body-presence. As an artist, Charlotte incarnates the sacrificial character, following Cri-Cri and prefiguring Steve. Laberge suggests that it is Charlotte's recourse to art that isolates her. Like Suzy, Charlotte becomes the hidden artist who creates significance through chthonic violence: "plus c'était fort, violent et présent, et plus l'objet sculpté devenait vibrant, signifiant." (A 133) As a child, Aurélie would spit on the snow to make it wet enough for Charlotte to sculpt. When Aurélie and Charlotte combine their mutual artistry, La Chatte is their work of art, "une sculpture d'une grande beauté (A 133) who can effectively live and breathe on her own.

In her most recent play to date, *Pierre, ou la consolation*, Laberge revisits the paradigm of *la femme fidèle*, and suggests that History's view of Héloïse, as a woman who sacrifices everything for her husband, does not deal with her as a passionate, present woman, but as the sign of a masculine lack, in this case, of Abélard's very material castration. Her position as one of the few literate women of her time and the sophisticated level of argumentation in her letters to Abélard bely the traditional idea of her passivity. Laberge presents a very human woman, whose passion for life, language, and love

transcends Pierre Abélard's much lesser presence. Indeed, he is absent in his very presence; his body, in a sack onstage, is a sign of his influence on Héloïse's life. Abélard's effect as "dead weight" is paralleled by the almost adulterously passionate linguistic and intellectual orgy Héloïse engages in with his "double" Pierre le Vénérable. The encounter is figuratively a sexual one, with language as its site: each has a gift to offer and they are both reborn through the meeting. In *Pierre*, Laberge addresses the issue of feminine *corps-présence* on several levels. Juxtaposed with Abélard's dead body, Héloïse's own luminous presence becomes all the more clear. By juxtaposing the two Pierre's as foils for a centrally present Héloïse, Laberge reverses the traditional view of her as Abélard's shadow, the tragic image of the unattainable lost love. We witness the dark night of Héloïse's articulation of self. It is by giving voice to her body, through the very materiality of her speech, that she is able to abandon herself to herself, putting distance between herself and God, even herself and man. (*P* 108) Through the theatrical gesture of removing her veil, she claims a place for herself on stage; through the act of burying Abélard, she puts to rest a fiction that has haunted her, and reconciles the separation of body and spirit that has maintained her as less than a whole woman.

Articulating the feminine onstage is clearly an on-going project for Laberge. Theatre history is a list of women's exclusion from the material space of the theatre, (even women's roles were played by men) as well as from the figurative space of the drama, as absent foils for a masculine presence. Even when women began appearing on stage, the words they spoke were written by male playwrights, even as their image was both posited and consumed by a primarily masculine audience. As Ellen Donkin points out, even today's female stage director must be aware of the way a society, that considers masculine discourse as the norm, rewards directors who re-inscribe the feminine voice within a

patriarchal discourse. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Laberge frequently prefers to direct her own plays.

For Laberge, feminine writing becomes a conscious, subversive act, the ultimate act of feminine love for the female. The search for maternal love becomes an exploration of the possible ways of love between women, and results in new theatrical life. Dealing with the essentials of theatre (rules of time, action, and space), literary archetypes, and the question of language as an absolute, these authors are actually re-writing dramatic theory, rebirthing it. (As Marc Silverstein says perhaps the ultimate body-presence is birth on the stage).

While their approaches differ widely, Québécoise playwrights are writing feminine perspectives *into* theatre, new ways of looking at and staging it, new ways of seeing and hearing languages, and new arenas for theatrical collaboration between performer, character, author, and audience. Their work looks toward inclusion; there is no sense of genealogical displacement by a new generation, and the circular structure and problematicization of the time/space continuum, so dear to traditional theatre, in much of this work rejects traditional closure. The ensemble nature of many of these plays suggests multiple points of view, posits multiple protagonists and does not support a hierarchical "star system." When Irigaray and Cixous propose replacing the Orphic myth of separation with the Demeter/Korè myth of reparation (absence replaced by presence), it is to heal a patriarchally orchestrated rift between mother and daughter; this rift extends not only to female representation but to the audience, as well, where the hollow absence/presence dialectic must be healed. While some writers are writing the "Whole Women" specifically for female audiences, Laberge is writing her for the "whole audience." Her subtle subversion of apparently traditional structure, language, and above all representation, is a subversion that takes place from within the patriarchal theatrical milieu and thus is,

perhaps, the most damaging to it. By celebrating feminine individuality and paradox over stereotype, and humanity over representation, and by "writing" the dissolution of the patriarchy into theatrical literature, Marie Laberge and her contemporaries are clearly bringing the whole woman to the theatre, as Cixous says, "au texte, au monde, et à l'histoire, - de son propre mouvement."

Notes

1. Quoted in an interview with Paul Eliani, for *Nuit Blanche*, No. 28., May/June 1987.
2. *Rencontres en musique*, July 17, 1994.
3. Gaëtan Charlebois's review of *Aurélie, ma soeur* appeared in the *Montreal Mirror*, for April 22-29, 1993.

Chapter V: Creative Mythology and Rites of Passage 1

Myth has a special place in Québécoise and Acadian literature. Marie Vautier has suggested that the extensive use of mythology in post-colonial societies is linked to a need to re-view official History from a point of view different from that of the coloniser, to work "à l'intérieur de systèmes mythologiques donnés" and to subvert these systems "ils fabriquent de nouvelles mythologies qui portent les marques du postmoderne et du post-colonialisme." (50)

Myth arises out of a need to speak the inarticulable: as Michel Tremblay says, "j'écris du fantastique parce que j'pas capable de parler."² Marie Laberge, like so many of her contemporaries, participates in what Vautier calls "le réalisme magique" in which elements of insistant realism combine with mystic time/space continua, mythic structures and themes, and a vision to altering the status quo, suggestive of Campbell's creative mythology. In *Creative Mythology* Joseph Campbell has coined a phrase that unites the sacred and the artistic aspects of mythology. He suggests that creative mythology "springs not, like theology, from the dicta of authority, but from the insights, thought, and vision of an adequate individual, loyal to his own experience and value:"

Thus it corrects the authority holding to the shells of forms produced and left behind by lives once lived. Renewing the act of experience itself, it restores to existence the quality of adventure, at once shattering and reintegrating the fixed, already known, in the sacrificial creative fire of the becoming thing that is no thing at all but life, not as it *will* be or as it *should* be, as it *was*, or as it *never will be*, but as it *is*, in depth, in process, *here and now*, inside and out. (1991, 7-8)

According to Campbell, it is the combination of mythic consciousness and artistic

creativity that distinguishes primitive man from his animal ancestors. Myth was man's way of locating himself within an ordered environment, using his capacity for aesthetic and symbolic interpretation as a tool. Mircea Eliade makes a distinction between the contemporary definition of myth as a fiction or lie, and the primitive definition of "true story", "highly significant and sacred. (1963, 11) This parallels Campbell's separation between theological myth, which may have a sacred, "true" origin but, seeking to impose itself becomes dogma, and creative mythology which participates in the rebirth and transformation of myth. ³ For Campbell, a myth is no more or less stable than the society that engenders it: "To be effective, a mythology...must be up-to-date scientifically, based on a concept of the universe that is current, accepted, and convincing." (1970, 144) Both Eliade and Campbell are dealing with the paradox inherent in myth, which resonates with Barthes' notion of the relation between the classic work and the modern text. ⁴

The myths of one generation become the fictions of the next, and as Marie Vauthier has noted, in magic realism, "la version officielle de l'Histoire est subvertie par un discours marqué d'éléments magiques et mythiques." (50) Eliade writes that a myth "does not disappear from our psychic reality" but simply "changes its aspect and camouflages its functions." (1957, 26) Mythic behavior is inherent in the human condition, which, according to all the laws of evolution, simultaneously seeks both stability and revolution. Paul Veyne has remarked that the true power of myth lies in its variations, often lost with the crystallization of History into mere "facts". Campbell suggests a myth of multiple dimensions, capable of transforming itself, and distinguished from religious myth by its essentially subversive nature: rupture of daily reality leads to a Bahktinian catharsis, and Libido opposes Credo. (1991, 65)

There has been much written about the many faces of contemporary myth in

Québécoise literature. It is not surprising that much current literature uses myth to debunk itself; both Patrice Pavis and Renate Usmiani have discussed the way the French system of classical education has affected contemporary writers. Brunel has pointed out that "modern theatre often uses myth only to demystify it." (79) Vauthier notes that many Québécois writers have chosen to confront the graeco-roman myths, "avec leur bagages d'autorité, d'éternité et de tradition." (55) When post-colonial meets postmodern, mythic paradigms are necessarily transformed. Without exploring the origins of the theatre as the original site for mythological dramatization and ritual, I will consider it here as a mythic "lieu de changement", where it is possible to make what Pierre Ouellet calls a "changement de lieux." This is very close to Cixous' recent writing on the experience of the theatre, where:

...le théâtre c'est ce voyage même, cet arrachement, ce transport vertigineux, et alors le surgissement en scène d'un monde différent de notre quotidien. (1984 b 8)

Creative thought focuses not on the "culturally conditioned rendition" but on the "archetypal, natural, or elementary idea." (1991, 8) In other words, it uses the relationship of *différance*, in the Derridian sense, to comment and alter the way we view the archetype; this is, in fact, the work of the theatre. Pavis refers to a "phénomène de recyclage" that is the basis of theatre. Because any given script will be recreated an infinite number of times in as many contexts, it has, in a sense, "perpetual life". While certain authors, notably Beckett and O'Neill, have tried to control the way their plays are interpreted and produced, the dramatic script is usually considered as an open set with almost an infinite number of variables. There are obviously many points of view that go into a single production, and every performance is materially different. Québécois playwrights have sought to address their sense of linguistic, gender, and national alienation through an assault on the outmoded myths that have become repressive or destructive fictions for them. Pavis has referred to

the *mise en scène* of a play as a *règlage* between different cultures and contexts. Québécois playwrights have used what Brunel calls "résistance" to current myths to reinvest their theatre with a new sacredness and a more profound meaning. Jean-Claude Germain and Dominic Champagne seek social purification through theatrical sacrifice: in a way that suggests Peter Brook's recent work on the dramatic ritual. Denise Boucher and Pol Pelletier, struggling against the false mythification of women look not only to destroy the masculine myth of Woman, but to replace it with myths that might be pertinent to women. Marie Cardinal, in her introduction to her translation of Euripedes' *Medea*, writes that myths serve as a site where society can experience and dispose of "its greatest horrors". (122)

Laberge treats myth as continually transforming; for her it can only be multi-voiced and multi-faceted. Like Michel Tremblay, who uses the theatre as a mythic site where time and space conflate in an eternal present, Laberge deals with the ritual moment of repetition and change, after which nothing can ever be the same again. She tends to interrogate mythic paradigms from the point of view of the victim, rather than that of the traditional hero. On one hand, she demystifies outmoded social myths that serve only to maintain a repressive status quo, on the other she renews the sacredness of the theatrical space through a recreation of eternal passions and paradoxes. Her work seeks to redress certain social issues that can perhaps only be dealt with first on a mythic level, a kind of *règlage*, in Pavis' sense, between our reality, our social fictions, and what we would become.⁵ Laberge shows us that it is in its multivocal aspect that the mythic voice remains true to itself, and, as we saw in Chapter Two, she works to give voice to those players in myth hitherto silenced. In this way she sets up a dialogic relationship, much like Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, between the mythic paradigm, its current incarnation, and her newer, more

inclusive version. ⁶ Much of her work with creative mythology involves a re-vision of mythic archetypes to reverse the negative and positive poles that exist in traditional mythology.

Howard Bloch points to the traditionally magic properties of naming, and to the many names that Merlin owns as a sign of his mercurial nature and multiple personae. Indeed, naming can be equated with supreme power, and Adam's right to "name" the animals gives him dominion over them, even as God's creation is in a sense a calling into being through naming, through the word. This patriarchal power to control through naming has not gone unnoticed by feminist writers such as Cheri Kramarae who points out that "those who have the power to name the world are in a position to influence reality." (165) Bloch refers to Lévi-Strauss' anthropological patriarchalism in acquiring tribal names while remaining "firmly outside the problematics of nomination that he thematizes." (97) In *De la grammatologie*, Derrida points to the violence inherent in the act of naming (1967, 164), and to the fact "la guerre des noms propres" described by Lévi-Strauss is unleashed simply by his presence as an observing stranger: "la simple présence du voyeur est un viol." (1967, 166) He emphasizes the complexity of naming, and the importance of regarding naming contextually; giving a name and giving away a name are both in a sense colonizing acts.

Laberge is clearly aware that, as Toril Moi writes, "naming is a more slippery business than it seems." (160) What people name themselves and each other, in various times and contexts, marks their position in society. As we will see, Madame Trudelle's symbolic lack of identity is seen in her lack of a first name, and Roland refers to Christine's mother only as "maman"; neither of these characters will accede to an identity other than their biologically designated one. In *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse-à-Gilles*, Rosalie's employer addresses her as "la bonne", or "la sarvante", and is alone in using the

diminutive, Rosa. The diminutive is more insidiously controlling, as we see in several of Laberge's plays, and relates to the subtle if unpleasant form of ethnological voyeurism and name stealing exposed by Derrida. In some cases, a character's use of a nickname becomes a violation of the Other. In *L'homme gris*, Christine's father calls her Cri-Cri, a nickname which not only reduces her to the childhood state which Roland preferred, but, as Pierre Lavoie has pointed out, presents her as a "reincarnation of Christophe, the 'son' he would have cherished had he not died unborn," (Smith 25) denying her personhood in her own right.

Naming not only affects the way characters interact on stage, but the way we as audience perceive them, identify them, or identify with them. Laberge's project is to demonstrate that we can never separate ourselves from our own cultural experience of language. By representing the way characters represent language, she places our comfortable assumptions of language and communication on stage to be addressed. For example, Roland's view of his daughter as Cri-Cri is juxtaposed with the author's presentation of her as Christine in the *didascalies*; this technique deconstructs her doubled identity, and demystifies the authorial power and process of naming. Only twice does Laberge refer to Christine as Cri-Cri in the *didascalies*.⁷ Although presented as Christine in the character description, as an audience, we meet her for the first time through Roland's perception of her, and she is referred to as Cri-Cri or *elle* in the *didascalies* until her first "reaction", from which time on she is exclusively called Christine. In other words, as she "creates" herself as a character, she establishes herself, not as Cri-Cri, but as Christine. In this way, Laberge's written script parallels our visual experience of the play as performance; this subtle but effective change in naming allows us to experience Roland's control of his daughter, experience her experience of that control, and experience our own

experience of it as spectator/readers. The *didascalies* expose to us the way we may receive naming as part of a hierarchical system, both on the page and on the stage. Howard Bloch points out that writing has always had a place among the hermetic arts, associated with the magician and enchanter Merlin, whose multiple guises are linked to the power of writing: he represents the "shifter" who can change age, station and even gender, has an access to past and future knowledge, and, like Prospero, organizes the "drama" of other's lives through knowledge gained from arcane study of written material, whence one learns the "names" of creatures and thus gains power over them. Laberge's investigation of our complex relationship to writing, its accepted authority in our society, and its paradoxical nature as a Merlin-like shifter in its own right, spans the whole of her *oeuvre*.

Among the archetypes she uses, the labyrinth is one of the most prevalent. Frequently associated with memory loss, *oubli*, it is also related to the descent into the Underworld (ie., Death). In *Oublier*, for example, the house itself is a labyrinth: the maze is vertical rather than horizontal, suggesting spatial confusion, and, as in *Jocelyne Trudelle*, the lower level is a hellish "real" world of failed communication, while the upper levels are the realm of death. In *Oublier*, the people upstairs suffer from a self-induced forgetfulness: the mother from Alzheimer's disease, and Micheline from amnesia. In both cases these characters are seeking escape from destructive familial relationships, the result of a mother's incapacity to nurture or to love. When Micheline finally comes downstairs and plunges into the snowy night, she undergoes a purification that will allow her to separate herself from the family and the house that has been her prison.

The labyrinth not only requires a physical journey through the obstacles of the set, but a narrative and/or spiritual one as well. In *Le Night Cap Bar*, Suzy leads us deeper and deeper into a maze of false information, while if the cloister that has surrounded Héloïse

during her life suggests a physical maze, her spiritual journey requires her to come to terms with her imprisoned passion. In *Jocelyne Trudelle, trouvée morte dans ses larmes*, Jocelyne's physical journey takes her through the maze of the set, while her emotional and spiritual journey requires her to follow the thread of her life back to its center. The play is, in many ways, based on the figure of the labyrinth. Traditionally, the conquest of the labyrinth has been associated with a male assault on female virginity, an analogy to man's relationship to Gaia, or Mother Earth. *Jocelyne Trudelle* demonstrates the supremely masculine point of view that informs the Greek versions of the myths. Jocelyne's journey through the labyrinth is a movement toward the passionate and sensual figure of Death, a piano player. He is an orphic figure, but rather than attempting to lead Jocelyne out of an underworld, he allows her to find it; unlike Eurydice or Persephone, Jocelyne is not carried to the Underworld, but actively seeks it. Her choice is an affirmation of freedom rather than a negation of life. Unlike Theseus, who needs Ariadne's thread to escape after killing the Minotaur, Jocelyne begs for it as a talisman to lead her into death. The relationship between Jocelyne and Ariadne is one of sisterhood, and is paralleled by Jocelyne's prearrangement of the way for Carole Prévost, her friend. When the labyrinth becomes a woman's journey, like Cixous' Medusa, it is no longer dangerous, but desirable. If the hero's object is to enter, rape, steal or kill, and leave as quickly as possible, for the heroine, the journey becomes a search for her own central core of being, to return to her own place. In fact, as Cixous has pointed out, she *is* the labyrinth, entered and violated, as Jocelyne's song tells us:

Et puis les hommes de fer sont venus
 Ils ont mis leurs mains impardonnables
 Sur mon ventre
 Ils ont déchiré le dedans de mes cuisses
 Et leurs yeux tournés par en dedans
 M'ont fait peur.

Les sexes étrangers conduisent
 Les hommes de fer à travers moi
 Jusqu'à leur vision intérieure
 Vision qui ne me regarde pas. (JT 117)

Jocelyne calls on Ariadne to help her enter the labyrinth of mythic time/space:

Si l'matin d'été est beau
 Et respire de bleu de ciel
 Alors l'espoir me reprend
 De trouver le fil d'Ariane. (JT 98)

If Theseus' travels in the labyrinth oblige Ariadne to participate in her own violation (both of her body and her family), and in the death of her half-brother the Minotaur, Jocelyne's is a pilgrimage of redemption and reparation, and prepares the way for other women. In certain versions of the myth, Ariadne, left alone, chooses suicide herself; in others she becomes the bride of Dionysus. In both cases, these choices confirm the traditional view of woman as unstable, and link her with madness and hysteria. For Laberge, however, there is no negative judgement associated with Jocelyne's choice: "pour elle, l'ailleurs de la mort contient les promesses non tenues par la vie." (JT 141) Neither is she her father's victim, for, as Laberge writes, "that would be too simple." (JT 135)

The pianist evokes as well, the close relationship between Dionysus and Orpheus; his evident sensuality suggests the bacchanalian mysteries. In this sense, the figure of the labyrinth is also associated with a descent into Hell. Laberge, however, places her Death figure on an elevated platform:

*Le lieu du pianiste aurait avantage à surplomber
 le reste du décor, l'accès y gagnerait en difficulté pour
 Jocelyne et l'effet de supériorité temporelle serait plus clair.*

Jocelyne, then has to climb to reach her destination. This inversion of metaphorical space is consistent with Laberge's project to subvert traditional myth. Hell is represented by Jocelyne's family, whose inauthentic discourse, "mauvaise foi", and evident hostility make them seem almost Sartrean. Jocelyne's voyage is into her past, to revisit her failed life with

these "dead" people, and her emergence into death is actually a rebirth into a more real "life". She never demonstrates the passivity of a Eurydice or a Persephone: her suicidal gesture is a clear affirmation of her power, and not the result of a paternal bargain or a rapine pursuit, and her journey is occasioned neither by a mother's demand nor a husband's song. Her own song is in harmony with the pianist's music: his does not control hers, perhaps the reason that they are successfully united.

The relationship between mother and daughter has been the subject of many re-visions of mythic stories, and a central area of discussion among feminist critics. Some writers ally themselves with Luce Irigaray's stated desire to re-animate the link between mother and daughter, and repair the broken genealogy that separates them. Irigaray would replace the myth of Orpheus, based on the absence and passivity of woman, with the Demeter-Korè myth, based on reparation and feminine power and presence. She writes, "Les mythes ne sont pas univoques ni intemporels comme il se dit," (106) and compares Freud's need to separate daughter from mother to Zeus' selling of Persephone to Hades. Her need to "renouer le lien des généalogies féminines" (121) sometimes leads her to emphasize the importance of the maternal aspect of the feminine at the expense of the very multi-faceted woman she is insisting must be allowed to exist. Toril Moi cautions against this essentialist viewpoint when she suggests that this may lead to a perpetuation of the equation woman=mother. She cites both Cixous and Irigaray as linking feminine power to the mother figure, and remarks on Cixous' "constant return to biblical and mythological imagery" as a search for the Imaginary ideal. (116-117) For Moi, both Irigaray and Cixous, in their emphasis on an essential feminine, as different from masculine/patriarchal, are reinvesting society with the very bipolarity that they are trying to avoid.

For Laberge, the biological mother-daughter relationship is irreparably damaged, and

her Demeter figures are inevitably destructive to their daughters because they would not or could not define themselves apart from their biological capacity to reproduce which links them to the patriarchy. The mother figure is no longer the goddess of abundance and fruition, but sows sterility in every interaction with her progeny. If Homer's Demeter is powerful in her vengeful immobility, Laberge's mothers "tentent de perpétuer...tout l'immobilisme dans lequel elles ont été elles-mêmes maintenues par le poids des traditions, des valeurs sociales et de la peur." (Smith 129) The Demeter figure is stripped of her nurturing powers and is seen as our society has forced her to become: by imposing maternity as a social requirement, motherhood has evolved into a destructive, debilitating role. In *Avec l'hiver*, Cécile is hostile to her daughter's more liberated life and jealous of her potential relationship with her father, while Martine Langlais, in *Deux tangos*, encourages her daughter to be satisfied with the unhappy life she herself has had. *Le Banc* offers us several different views of the destructive and painful relationship between mother and child, while Tante Mina, in *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse-à-Gilles*, demonstrates all the dissatisfaction and alienation of a woman who has defined herself as mother and, when her children are grown, has no other self. Mothers are often absent in Laberge's work: Rosalie is an orphan, Cri-Cri's mother not only never appears on stage, but is clearly no advocate for her daughter, while Steve's mother in *Le faucon* believes the worst of her son and will not come to see him or seek his release. Charlotte leaves Chatte, and Juliette Tessier is both spiritually and physically absent. In *Ils étaient venus pour...*, Julia, unable to have children, constitutes herself as a failure and unworthy of marriage; she leaves her much loved husband and goes back to the city to teach other people's children; Rose-Aimée, having lost her family feels useless, and we recognize the destructive nature of a society that associates women's worth only with their biological ability to reproduce.

As Diane Pavlovic has pointed out, Madame Trudelle has no other name, and no other existence outside her failed maternity. Georges, her husband, addresses her as "la mère", representing her to Nurse Fecteau as the stereotypical hysteric, nervous and incapable. Madame Trudelle waits for her daughter: she does not go to bed until she gets home, and throughout the play, will sit, immobile, at the foot of her bed. Her passive presence, however, is directed *toward* her daughter and has nothing of Demeter's determination to heal and change. Her refusal to understand Jocelyne's coma is the negative shadow (in the Jungian sense) of Demeter's refusal to accept Persephone's kidnapping. Madame Trudelle not only does not save her daughter from the prince of death, she ends up being the determining factor in her choice. Madame Trudelle's immobility is a direct inversion of the traditional Demeter figure, a negation of the possibility of maternal fidelity.

If the purely biological mother/daughter relation is doomed to failure in Laberge's work, it is not so with the symbolic mother/daughter relationship that arises out of a sense of sisterhood. As we have seen in Chapter Four, in *Aurélie, ma soeur*, Charlotte, recognizing her inability to nurture her daughter, gives her to Aurélie. If Charlotte is as sterile a maternal figure as Martine, Cécile, Juliette Tessier, or Madame Trudelle, she and Aurélie make a conscious choice not to perpetuate what Gabrielle Pascal calls "la trahison maternelle" that occurs in most of Laberge's work. Maternal betrayal is mitigated by a reparative act on the part of an older woman, as in the case of Aurélie and Chatte, or Aurélie and her Aunt Lilas or her mother-in-law, Cynthia O'Sullivan-Boucher. Marianna's decision not to marry Honoré and have children but to take Rosalie under her wing and leave l'Anse-à-Gilles is also a reparative act, as is Aline's presence in Steve's life (*Le faucon*). Judith's "mothering" of Micheline, in *Oublier*, while it has some aspects of their biological mother's controlling presence, is also a liberating factor for her sister. Laberge

"breaks the circle" that Cixous talks about in "Le rire de la Méduse", through several theatrical devices. She juxtaposes the outmoded myth of the faithful, waiting mother with the reality that it can be destructive to women, and replaces it with a mythic story of healing and reparation. She separates the destructive mother from her daughter, in a mythic rewriting of the relationship, and separates the spectator from an unconscious acceptance of a fictive dogma, releasing women from the pressures of an impossible mythic role. In Laberge's work, to be a Mother is to participate, necessarily, in the patriarchal order, while to care for other women is to assist them in an act of auto-determination that gives birth to a mythic, feminine protagonist. In this cosmogony, it is the woman's task, as Gabrielle Pascal has suggested, to be "symboliquement sa propre mère", to "transcend parental privation" and to become "porteuse d'avenir." (Smith 144)

That the Korè becomes the subject/protagonist instead of the object of the struggle between matriarchy/patriarchy or masculine/feminine is crucial to Laberge's work, and is the positive supplement to the destructive mother figure. In traditional myths, the daughter is relegated to the background, while Mother and Father battle for control, in an on-going struggle between matriarchy and patriarchy. In Irigaray's recuperation of the Demeter/Korè myth, the daughter has no voice; it is her mother who must speak for her. In Laberge's work, the Korè must define herself, and it is *her* dilemma, and *her* decision to act with passion and commitment in the face of maternal passivity and social fixity that is at the heart of these plays. Object, she *becomes* Subject.

In *Oublier*, every character seeks out a symbolic forgetfulness, however, it is only the Korè whose *oubli* can heal; her amnesia functions as a Lethe of healing and renewal, while her other sisters and her mother remain trapped. Juliette Tessier, the mother, has Alzheimer's disease, her presence in the play attested to only by the ritual flushing of the

toilet. Juliette's fear of and fascination with her own excrement is juxtaposed with the traditional harmony demonstrated by Demeter's relation to the life and death cycle. **8** Jacqueline has chosen, like Madame Trudelle, to ignore the emptiness of the maternal. She re-enacts her mother's life in an effort to give meaning to it, while Judith runs away from both her maternal language (French) and the matriarchal home. Joanne's alcoholism helps her forget that she, as a doctor, deals more with death than with life, and Micheline is the only one, as Pascal writes, to "parcourir le cycle complet." (Smith 143) Purging herself of Juliette's murderous hatred of a daughter she wishes she had aborted, she plunges into a snowy night, she returns only to say "take care" to her sisters, purified by access to a mythic level that only she can reach. Micheline's passage through the figurative labyrinth of her memory and the literal maze of the stage set determine a destiny for her that is separate from her mother, and parallels that of many of Laberge's Korè figures who have taken themselves out of the destructive biological genealogy to create an identity and, in some cases, a family of their own. Marianna and Rosalie choose to leave l'Anse-à-Gilles, and Julia's departure, heart-breaking as it is, is an attempt to define herself in a positive context that is acceptable to her. Cri-Cri severs family ties in a violent and definitive way. As Pierre Lavoie has pointed out, these Korè figures always manage to find a way out: "Fausse sortie ou non, elles réagissent afin d'échapper à l'enfer familial." (Smith 129)

There is a close relation between the figure of Demeter and that of Medea. **9** In fact, as we have seen in *Le Night Cap Bar*, Suzy is the Medea in Laberge's work. She is a chthonian force, replacing an impotent Demeter, and remaking the world. Laberge's inversion of positive and negative gives us characters whose Medea-like qualities are admirable because of their posture as *active*, conscious characters. Because they must radically change the existing order, her characters are sometimes both "victorious and

vengeful" and "heroically criminal". **10** The life principle that animates Laberge's work is human passion, a passion that flies in the face of social "morality" and looks toward the reintegration of that mythic quality into human daily life. By making Suzy the only character with whom the spectator cares to identify, Laberge reverses traditional morality, and turns the Medea figure into a successful heroine rather than an unnatural monster. As we saw in the previous chapter, however, the Korè figure, even if she has characteristics that are principally those of the daughter, are never relegated to simply that role. Every Korè who transcends her state of emotional privation plays at one time or another, all roles, and is locked into none of them. In this sense, Suzy's rebirth of self can be compared to Micheline's.

Symbolic wounds in the sense that Bruno Bettelheim describes them play a large part in the transformative and transformed myths projected by Laberge: they are always linked to a rite of passage. As we saw earlier, loss of voice is a common theme in her work. Maurice's dumbness marks his retirement from life, as Jocelyne's bullet through her mouth marks hers. In both cases, these characters emphasize their passage from one stage of life to another: they leave behind their voices as a sign of the lives they have left. Cri-Cri's loss of voice is a sign of failed or stunted passage. The natural growth from child to adult has been denied her, and she has, in a sense, many symbolic wounds: her anorexia marks her inability to pass into a woman's body, her dumbness, an inability to accede to adult voice. Steve's silence functions in yet another way, as a self-wounding that marks not only his passage from young man to adult but is also a rite with far-reaching consequences for his community. Everyone who is in contact with him throughout the play is changed in a profound way by his self-imposed loss of speech. Steve's silence and incarceration suggest a ritual death and rebirth reminiscent of many mythic fertility rites, such as those of

Dionysus, Osiris, the Corn King or Rama, as well as Christ's death and resurrection. That violent death often accompanies these rites of passage is consistent with traditional mythologies, however, this death is often tangential to the primary site of transformation, as in *Le faucon*, where Bernard's murder serves as a realistic pretext for Steve's mythic gesture. In *Le Night Cap Bar*, real and figurative murders are interchangeable signs for each other in Suzy's cosmogonic act, while Cri-Cri's murder of her father is a desperate attempt to create a new world for herself. As Lavoie writes, "...comme dans les grandes tragédies, un ordre nouveau est proposé; par leurs paroles et leurs gestes les personnages veillent à son application, même si pour cela la fille doit s'opposer à la mère et tuer le père." (Smith 130) It is possible to see the different instances of *oubli* that occur in the play as instances of failed rites of passage for Juliette and three of her daughters. Juliette's Alzheimer's is an attempt to avoid the reality of her imminent passage to death, while her daughters' forgetfulness is a refusal to pass into life. What Pascal calls "le drame mythique de l'amour refusé" (Smith 145) is resolved by an equally mythic wound symbolizing a passage, failed or successful, out of that drama.

Hélène Cixous, in her recent writing on the theatre, has insisted on its potential healing power, and its capacity to unify and change. As Celita Lamar notes, "her initial mistrust had given way to an enthusiastic endorsement of the theatre as a place where we have the chance to meet the gods...I mean our own part of divinity." (148)

Et dans le noir bruissant du théâtre, même les ennemis se touchent, goûtant ou subissant le même aveuglement, les adversaires se reconnaissent comme également émus et menacés par l'inconnu, ils se pressent les uns contre les autres, et avant de se combattre, ou tout en se combattant, ils s'aiment aussi. (1984 b 11)

The healing quality of the theatre for Cixous arises out of its capacity to transport us into mythic time, there to relive our primitive mysteries, return us to our "true dimension." (

1984 b 9) Seen on a certain level, Laberge's dramatic work develops toward an *ethos* of healing; taken as a whole, her theatrical *oeuvre* moves from fear, captivity and despair toward liberation and flight. In *Le faucon*, Steve is falsely arrested for his step-father's murder. His incarceration becomes a redemptive descent into Hell, and saves his biological father, his step-brother who committed the murder and Aline, the social worker and former nun who is trying to help him. As Derrida has pointed out, the mythic repetition of a patricide is related to the seasonal mysteries in many mythologies. Artaud's notion of a return to the sacred in theatre is in some sense a return to chthonic chaos. While Laberge's early work focussed on the father, whose very absence or murder often made him the primary subject of the play, her later work dismisses his presence and allows the protagonist to hold center stage. In *Pierre, ou la consolation*, the onstage presence of Pierre's dead body in a sack, is more liberating than the absence of the previous fathers, since his lifelessness is such a contrast to Héloïse's and Pierre le Vénérable's passion and vivacity.

Laberge addresses not only classical myth, but Christian myth as well. One of the most important uses of the symbolic wound in this work is in *Pierre*, where Abélard's castration not only literally translates him from literal to figurative husband, but forces Héloïse's untimely passage from carnal to spiritual wife. She also becomes an object of exchange, between man and his god in a masculine, religious economy. Her wound is the loss of her passion, both physical and spiritual, the result of Abélard's own loss, and her loss of her identity and faith in her own religion of passion.

The play begins with a silent ritual, which, like the beginning of *Le faucon*, sets up silence as the normal world of the play; in this case, feminine silence, which is the rule of the cloister. The exchanges between Héloïse and the novice Guillemette are for the most

part, in silent gesture: the *didascalies* indicate that speaking is an unusual act in this world, where, as Guillemette says to Pierre le Vénérable, "Parler n'est pas coutume" (P 46).

Silence is posited as a feminine thing, woman listens, for God or for man:

Guillemette:
Voilà le pourquoi de ma venue au silence: pour mieux entendre Dieu.

Pierre:
Et à parler je t'enjoins...

Guillemette:
Vous aimez, comme notre abbé, les joutes oratoires. N'ai pas de force pour vous, suis trop simplete. (P 53)

In this play speaking is masculine; Pierre le Vénérable says "Parler m'était nécessité". (P 54) Language, spoken or written is the province of learned men, and is conceived in terms of jousting and jockeying for power or position. That Héloïse is able to express herself in several languages, can hold a position of power, and writes and speaks, allows her accede to a masculine status in the medieval world. Her knowledge and learning were legend in her time. In Abélard's *Historia calamitatum*, it is this that draws him to her; she was worthy of his attention and, being lettered, could correspond with him as well. Much later, in a letter to Héloïse, Pierre le Vénérable insists on her celebrity as an educated woman, and writes "dans l'esprit même des hommes, vous, par le transport de votre zèle, vous vous êtes élevée au-dessus de toutes les femmes, et il est peu d'hommes que vous n'avez pas surpassés." (Pernoud 46) Like Suzy, her linguistic and writerly proficiency make her an anomaly in her society.

Because Héloïse is able to "think, read, and write like a man" but "feels" like a woman, she incarnates what the Middle Ages considered to be the paradox of womanhood, in which Eve, the temptress is juxtaposed with the Virgin as redeemer. The dichotomy for

Héloïse is not unlike the one that Cixous notes in *La jeune née*, where oppositions lead to false identification and role distribution. If Abélard is "homme de Dieu" then, because she is clearly opposed to him, she must be "fille de Diable". (P 65) Laberge's Héloïse, however, is a creature of synthesis: "cette face de mon amour contenait et Dieu et Diable pour moi" (P 68), and the journey of the play is not only to tell the story from her point of view, but to renew the myth of eternal love, through a reawakening of the pagan and human aspects of that love.

From the opening of the play, Pierre Abélard is associated with an austere and jealous God, while Héloïse is linked to the pagan. Abélard's presence in Héloïse's life has been that of a god in several senses: he has awakened her dionysian carnality, he has taught her reason and *logos*, and has chastized her passion and physical desire when it no longer suited him. As a god figure, Abélard is the "namer" of the play. Like Adam he is a stand-in for God, albeit, as Pierre le Vénérable points out, a self-appointed one:

Où est grandeur superlative?
 Se croire Dieu ou saint et banir l'humain de ses actes,
 ou se savoir humain et pescheur et banir vanité
 et orgueil de son coeur?
 Tendre vers Dieu, que si; mais prétendre à Dieu
 en étant homme n'est que illusion et péril. (P 104)

With Abélard's death, God has died for Héloïse. Far from being created by God, Abélard has created God for Héloïse, and this God becomes associated with her uncle the "vengeful and vindictive" Canon Fulbert who was responsible for Abélard's mutilation.

If Abélard has staged himself as Adam, he has, in turn, staged Héloïse as Eve, the temptress; "elle est parée de toutes les séductions" he writes. (Pernoud 53) Laberge's Héloïse echoes this sentiment when she says:

moi qui désirais tant élever âme et esprit
 n'ai su incarner que désir et corruption de chair

sensualité licentieuse et pitoyable. (P 32)

Campbell cites Tertullian, who writes that "actual woman"... "awakened to her nature, was *janua diaboli*, 'the devil's door'." (1991 53) This "actual woman" is juxtaposed with the "ideal woman" of the New Testament, the Virgin who redeems the world by giving birth to Christ, and Abélard next stages Héloïse as the Virgin redeemer to expiate their sin. Like Suzy, in *Le Night Cap Bar*, Abélard is the playwright behind the scenes; as he tells us in his *Historia calamitatum*, he orchestrates Héloïse's seduction, her marriage, her subsequent entrance into the convent. We are reminded of levels of staging in this play as well; Abélard stages, as Héloïse tells us, a silence for her that is reminiscent of Maurice Gingras's physical and emotional theatre of silence for his wife Cécile in *Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient*. Héloïse "receives" her role from Abélard, and plays it so well that when Pierre le Vénérable asks Guillemette if she has ever seen Héloïse in despair she replies: "A mes yeux, non mon père/ En son coeur, ne puis parler." (P 48) Héloïse has offered a vision of competence and serenity to all who deal with her, but as an audience we are allowed to see "backstage", behind the mask. Like Roland, in *L'homme gris*, Héloïse's monologue betrays more truth than she knows, in this case, Pierre Abélard's abuse of her innocence. His seduction and betrayal of her trust is much like Roland's patriarchal "use" of his daughter to create his own, very shaky, identity, and we as audience see the irony of the the following lines:

Le chanoine, mon oncle, portant atteinte à
ton masle membre
tranchait aussi ton noble sentir? (P 38)

She then stops herself: "Voilà que de Dieu, j'en suis à douter de toi." (P 39) This is a telling role reversal and inversion of the traditional route to doubt, since God is usually not the first, but the last to be doubted. Throughout the journey of the play, however, Héloïse

comes to a new awareness, as Roland does not, and recognizes Pierre Abélard as more human than god-like, with all the weaknesses of man. It is in acknowledging his humanity that she is able to reconcile her love for him with his cruelty, and the new myth of eternal love is based, not on fixed, god-like perfection, but on human vitality and frailty:

Pour la première fois m'enclinerai sans blasme
devant ceste amour comme si elle fût bienfait et
non délaissement. (*P* 107)

The famous letters, while infrequently mentioned in the play, form the basis of the Abélard and Héloïse myth, and Laberge uses our certain knowledge of them to raise questions regarding that myth, and, as she so often does, to problematize the role of these letters within the complex relationship between these three characters as well as between them and the audience. To have received letters from someone means to have received confidences. Pierre le Vénérable keeps coming back to the letters that Héloïse has written to him, which represent, for him, a certain level of intercourse between them, allowing him to see into her heart (*P* 47): "croyant par vos lettres reçues mériter un peu de votre fiance passée." (*P* 58) Héloïse sees his letters to her as a solace to the silence to which Abélard has subjected her: "c'est par les lettres que nous avons eschangées qui, toujours, mettaient balme sur mon coeur meurtré." (*P* 58) Her letters to Pierre le Vénérable achieve with him what her letters to Abélard could not, to awaken passion and desire and to renew human vitality and life force.

While we know the myth of Héloïse and Abélard primarily through their letters, their story is known to their own time as represented by Guillemette, the novice, through the love songs Abélard wrote for Héloïse, and which she heard the troubadours sing. What Pierre le Vénérable calls "le fable" of their relationship (the early definition of the word scintillates with the modern definition), is based, for Guillemette, on love songs that most

speech and the subject of their conversation, represent an equally present refusal to be bound by those laws. As Héloïse says, near the end of the play:

puisque hors la règle nous sommes,
parler Pierre le Vénérable. (P 95)

Abélard's body, which together they bury in a secret service, suggests the death of Credo in favor of a new Libido.

From the beginning of the play, Laberge sets up Abélard and Héloïse as ascribing to two sets of very distinct and opposite value systems. Abélard suggests that their transgression is in indulging in carnal desire, forbidden by the Church, but as Pierre le Vénérable points out, the Church does not forbid the physical within marriage. It becomes clear that Abélard's vanity is at stake: he uses their physical relations as a red herring in his need to dramatize himself as a mythic character, 'to save his glory and his faith.' (P 66) Both Henry Adams and Joseph Campbell suggest that Abélard's true transgression, his "danger" to the Church, resided in his notion that religious mysticism could be penetrated by (male) human reason, and in his preaching of a possible direct relation between man and God without the Church's mediation. In his own way, Abélard was trying to transform religious myth. His failure to do so resides in his need to assault, and in his inability to synthesize; his is a traditional patriarchal approach that would replace repression with repression: he tries to renew dogma with the tools of dogma rather than with the transformative tools of creative mythology.

For Héloïse, marriage was the "only offense." Pierre, to her mind, wanted to "buy salvation" : "toujours il combattit pour réparation par mariage." (P 61) His adherence to reason is juxtaposed with her physical desire. As she tries to subsume her desire to please Abélard's rules, desire appears as a physical illness. The medieval split between order/spirit and chaos/body separates her from herself. Her attempt at *oubli* is as physical a mutilation

as Abélard's castration, should she be able to inflict this wound on herself, but her courage and adherence to the life principle that she is always associated with, prevents the sort of death through forgetting that is the lot of Juliette and Jacqueline Tessier in *Oublier*.

Héloïse's own rebirth and salvation, like Pierre le Vénérable's, comes not through denial but through acceptance and synthesis, not through self-love but through love for another. Abélard's efforts toward his own glory are juxtaposed with Héloïse's selflessness on his behalf. For her marriage and the Church's idea of purity through chastity are acts of *mauvaise foi*, which she accomplishes only for Abélard:

Et ne peut me désirer pure en d'autres vouloirs
que celui, unique, de l'atteindre et d'être
consolations à ses malheurs. (P 66)

Her generosity, in practicing a religion that she ultimately does not believe, is to insure his salvation with his God: "à sauver et sa gloire et sa foi." (P 66) Like Héloïse, Pierre le Vénérable cares more for another than for himself, and Héloïse remarks on his very human mercy on her behalf, as opposed to Abélard's silence and that of his austere and absent God. He is willing to expose to her his own weakness and his vulnerability to her passion, in order to afford her some consolation of her own.

From the first page of the play, Laberge emphasizes that this is not an historical reconstruction but a fiction, in its narrative, its characterizations and its language. This allows her to work within the *différence* between fixed, historical fact and the fluidity of fiction, that is, in fact, the very subject of her work. She plays with Campbell's juxtaposition of Libido and Credo as an inter-play between creative and dogmatic mythology, and much of the importance of this play lies in her treatment of religious dogma as outmoded myth, a myth of the Father whose passing is symbolized by Abélard's dead body and subsequent burial. We are invited to participate in the ritual of the

transformation and rebirth of a myth that is in a sacred and meaningful process of becoming. Héloïse's ritual litany (*P* 36-37), "Pourquoi m'avoir abandonné(e)" moves from the masculine form, as she quotes Christ on the cross, to the feminine, as she personalizes her own abandonment. The blasphemy of her identification with the sacrificed son of Christian doctrine reminds us of early Christianity's own marginal position as a threat to the religious dogma of its day, and emphasizes Laberge's point that myth must always be in the process of becoming, and that in paradox resides the richness of life.

Mircea Eliade has juxtaposed on the one hand, contemporary fear of ambiguity, in language and in life, with, on the other, "primitive" man's ability to accept this same ambiguity in the name of myth. Quantum theory and Bell's theorem demonstrate a relationship of synchronicity between elements and belongs more to mythology, in the true sense of the word, than to what we consider today as science.¹¹ For Campbell, there is no conflict between science and mysticism: if there is a conflict, it is between the science of 2000 BC and the science of 2000 AD. Indeed, much of today's science surpasses the possibility of visual verification, and the universality of the genetic code points more and more to the holistic inseparability of the world; early myths of creation are being reborn as "scientific fact".

If modern man's existential crisis comes, to a large extent, from his inability to accept the multiple aspect of human existence, ironically this multiplicity extends to our mode of communication as well. The increased insistence on social homogeneity, and the breakdown in human language and communication that are part of the postmodern condition, are symptomatic of a desire to simplify a non-simplifiable existence. If Campbell has shown that the profession of inauthentic ideologies leads to a fundamental loss of self, Howard Gardiner's recent studies indicate that children, who are exposed to the

arts at a young age are more readily able to accept human diversity; indeed the arts depend on a capacity for something to "be two things at the same time" as in Magritte's famous painting entitled "Ceci n'est pas une pipe". Laberge's project is based on the paradox of representation, and its role as the site for potential transformation. As Laberge writes: "*Pierre* est une pièce sur le courage de vivre, en toute lucidité, des choses qui n'ont pas de sens." (P 133) Her characters develop the courage to live for and through themselves, by reliving the death and resurrection ritual that leads to their own rebirth, not Abélard's.

Patrice Pavis has shown that it is at the moment when exact reproduction becomes possible that we understand the true irreproducible, ephemeral nature of the theatre. (1986,16) Indeed, the work of the theatre is to "reawaken" the "figures endormies" within myth, to reveal its hidden voices, and to demythify in order to remythify. The value of myth is that it situates itself squarely within the Derridean concept of *différance*, outside the necessity of choosing between reality and fiction; like the theatre, it permits an infinite number of *mises en scènes*. Laberge's mythic references affirm difference and provoke ambiguity. The mythic resonances in her work invest the darkest of Laberge's plays with a level of hope and continuity that abolishes time and engages in a dialogue between primitive and contemporary mythology.

Notes

1. Portions of this chapter originally appeared in *Mythes dans la littérature contemporaine d'expression française*, Metka Zupancic, ed. Ottawa: Le Nordir, 1994.
2. Quoted by Richard Chadbourne in "Michel Tremblay's Adult Fairy Tales", *Québec Studies*, No. 10, 1990.
3. In *Creative Mythology*, Campbell cites Ortega y Gasset's distinction between "collective faith" and "individual faith" in this regard, and goes on to write:
 "Traditional mythologies, that is to say, whether of the primitive or of the higher cultures, antecede and control experience; whereas what I am here calling Creative Mythology is an effect and expression of human experience. its producers do not claim divine authority for their human, all too human, works. They are not saints or priests but men and women of *this* world; and their first requirement is that both their works and their lives should unfold from convictions derived from their own experience."(65)
4. There seems to me to be a connection between the way Eliade and Campbell deal with the distinction between myth as an instrument for controlling society and myth as an instrument for individual expression, and Barthes' distinction between the classic work and the modern text. The classic work, also classified as *lisible*, sets forth a single way of reading and a single meaning to be gleaned, while the modern text, which he refers to as *scriptible*, offers the reader the opportunity for continually creating new meaning within the original meaning of the text. See *S/Z* in connection with this.
5. Patrice Pavis has written in *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* that any *mise en scène* is a "kind of *réglage* ('fine-tuning') between different contexts and cultures; it is no longer a question of intercultural exchange or of a dialectics between text and context; it is a mediation between different cultural backgrounds, traditions and methods of acting. Thus its appearance towards the end of the nineteenth century is also the consequence of the disappearance of a strong western tradition, of a certain acting style, which makes the presence of the 'author' of the performance, in the figure of the director, indispensable."(6)
6. Toril Moi has described Kristeva's notion of *intertextuality* as "how one or more systems of signs are transposed into others. Moi stresses Kristeva's interest in the ethics of linguistics, (quoting from the essay of that name) and sees her use of intertextuality as more far-reaching than the way it is usually described. "Inscribing a specific context for a text does not *close* it or *fix* the meaning of that text once and for all: there is always the possibility of reinscribing it within other contexts..." (155) Indeed, this is the essence of theatre as a site where texts are continually recontextualized, and Laberge's insistence on the potential of language suggests the necessary blurring of boundaries that are part of Kristeva's premise.

7. The experience of a play is necessarily different depending on whether it is being read or being viewed on stage. One of Laberge's projects seems to blur this distinction and she takes great pains to retain the 'readability' of her on-stage text, even as she seeks to retain a performance quality in her published versions of her plays. While she recognizes that one must necessarily be a supplement to the other, the essential inseparability of the page/stage relationship is crucial for an understanding of her work. As I have mentioned, Laberge's plays all open with a long visual moment, in which we are required, as spectators, to "read" the *didascalies* that set the stage. Her use of letters and other written material as integral parts of the dramatic structure force the spectator to be conscious of the privileged status of the written word in our society, and her problematization of the name, particularly in *L'Homme gris* and in *Le Night Cap Bar*, is made clear in the published version of the plays in the way she changes the references to the characters in the *didascalies*. This problematization is no less clear in the performance of the play, where, while achieved in a different manner, the characters names are also 'rearranged', as the characters consciously or unconsciously 'confuse' them.

8. In *Oublier Juliette Tessier*, the Mother figure, is represented by the ritual flushing of the toilet. While we never see Juliette, we know she is 'present' in an upstairs room, because we are told that she is fascinated with the bathroom and can rarely be persuaded to leave. It is not only her fear of inconstancy that prompts her to haunt the bathroom, but her fascination with the excrement she produces; her daughter Jacqueline has to beg her not to eat it. In this context, the bathroom suggests a site of passage, the threshold between life and death, as well as the paradoxically life-giving properties of decay.

9. Both C. Kerényi and Jung demonstrate the relationship between Medea and Demeter, through the mediation of Hecate, who was Medea's patron. Kerényi points to Demeter as Hecate's double: a mirroring of the dark and light mothers.

10. Artaud writes: "In the theater as in the plague there is something both victorious and vengeful" (27) This seems very like Suzy's role as a comprehensive scourge and a phoenix reborn. Artaud makes also a reference to the character who is "heroically criminal and audaciously, ostentatiously heroic." (28) We identify with Suzy because she is larger than life, and has heroic properties, in her ability to survive overwhelming odds by her strength of character and what Artaud refers to as "the force of...convulsive passion." (28) Laberge's character seems to very close to Artaud's notion of adherence to the life principle as the sign of supreme heroicism.

11. See Richard D. Moore, "From Science to Mythology: A New Vision of Reality" in *Mythology: From Ancient to Post-Modern*, Jürgen Kleist and Bruce A. Butterfield, eds. Plattsburgh: Peter Lang, 1992.

Conclusion

An overview of Laberge's dramatic *oeuvre* shows a remarkable evolution in a number of areas. On the linguistic front, while other playwrights of her generation are pointing to the poverty in language, Laberge has moved toward a re-poeticization of theatrical language. The early polarization between individual languages, paralleled by the split between written and spoken language and between *didascalies* and the 'oral' language of the characters, has ceased to be discordant and has become harmonic. In her recent radio interview with *Rencontres en musique*, Laberge spoke of how separation creates harmony. Indeed, the binary opposition that characterized her early work has evolved from the four voices of *Oublier's* sisters, to choral harmony where dramatic tension is less violent and the language more tender. Her theatre of silence has evolved as well, from silence as a sign of alienation and disempowerment to silence as a form of resistance, and finally redemption. Silence and speech are no longer signs of a struggle between irreconcilable forces, but appear, as in *Le faucon* and *Pierre*, to work together in concert, and to resolve themselves in a synthesis of daily conversation, silence, and poetic language that is, in essence, musical.

The role and configuration of the theatrical space has been a subject of much exploration in contemporary theatre, where the frame of the proscenium has been seen by some feminist theorists as a cage from which female performers must escape, even as the realism of the set locked women into a traditional representation as dangerous as it was limiting. While she has for the most part been considered a "realistic" playwright, Laberge's problematization of the theatrical space, both questions and re-instates it as a sacred site, by juxtapositioning realistic and symbolic elements, to simultaneously seek mimetic realism and remind us of the 'theatricality' of the event. In early work, such as

Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient, there is a clear destabilization of the traditional theatrical space, as the extreme realism of the Gingras' drab daily life and working kitchen is juxtaposed with the magic of the reflective space which "speaks of the past" and with their mutual retreat into the extremities of noise and silence. The stage space has always been one in which impossible theatrical 'meetings' occur. These meetings can take place between the interior and exterior worlds of the characters, but can also occur between chronologically disparate times and places.

In *Ils étaient venus pour*, the stage space allows movement between interior and exterior experience as well as interaction and transition within the 25 years of the play, and between these 25 years and the spectator's present. The structural frame of the play, two picnics, invests the action with a sense of infinite time, as the first picnic anchors the play within a Brechtian distance, while the second questions the notion of historicization, implying a potential eternity of touristic, specular consumption. *Ils étaient venus pour* questions the premise of Brechtian historicization, even as it employs the technique, and calls to our attention what will become for Laberge a more authentic form of distancing, that of the split between inner drama and outside performance. Her impossible meetings take place on three intersecting continua: theatrical chronological and mythical time; iconic, indexical, symbolic, and literal space; interior and exterior worlds of actor and character. It is perhaps in *Ils étaient venus pour* that Laberge discovers the insufficiency of earlier theories and begins to formulate her own.

Laberge's use of space scintillates between the strongly realistic and the intensely magical. Anne Ubersfeld has pointed out that, paradoxically, the more realistic a stage set is, the more we are struck by the mimetic magic of the theatre. ¹ In *Le Night Cap Bar*, for example, the realistic re-creation of a sordid Valleyfield bar is juxtaposed with the space's

ability to suspend real time and allow characters to replay a single moment three times in succession. As Pocknell has suggested, the bar is at the heart of the structure of the play; we have seen that Suzy seeks to "liquidate the past" by detroying the playing space, in all senses that this implies. (Smith 57)

In *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse à Gilles*, too, Laberge juxtaposes the realism of the period with a clear movement toward the future. Critical acclaim for the play, which received the Prix du Gouverneur général of Canada in 1981, focussed on its relation to the *roman de la terre* and on its psychological and realistic aspects. Lise Armstrong, however, points out that, as opposed to Lepage's *Le Temps d'une vie*, which was also produced during the same 1981 season, Laberge's play draws us away from the past and into the future. ² The realism of Laberge's play, unlike that of Lepage's, does not lead us to mourn our mothers' fate but rather to look past it to a positive future, as Armstrong notes. Pocknell has called Marianna's kitchen "une cuisine ayant une qualité métonymique, dont le référent serait le sort de la Québécoise d'avant-guerre." (Smith 50) However, the kitchen functions not only as a sign for Marianna's incarceration in her traditional feminine role, but also as a sign of her independence, since her work there enables her to rely only on herself. If the character, Honoré, emphasizes the importance of the kitchen, not only as an iconic space, but as a symbolic one as well, when he says that it is perhaps "la faute aux cuisines, rapport qu'on vous a toujours mis en dedans" that women have not been able to accede to more liberty and self-determination (AG 117), Marianna points out that it is through her kitchen that she remains independent. (AG 24) If the realism of the stage set anchors it in an historically distant time, the discourse of the characters, as Lise Armstrong has suggested, "displaces the center of gravity" toward the future, and gives women centrality of speech.

Pocknell has referred to "Laberge's talent for using the material resources of the stage to the full extent" and to the "network of signs" in her plays.(153) She uses the natural economy of the theatre sign, which necessarily functions on several levels, to create an unusual semiotic richness. The very use of realistic markers to anchor the action both in the theatrical stage space and in the dramatic time and place allow each sign to work simultaneously as icon, index, and symbol, as in *Le Night Cap Bar*, where the stage bar represents a real bar, is a measure of the society for which and in which it exists, and symbolizes the mythic underworld from which Suzy will be triumphantly reborn. In *Deux tangos pour toute une vie*, the realism of the set locks Suzanne into a homemaker tradition that silences her creativity and her desire, while it also inscribes her in the destructive realism of traditional theatre. Her plan to put up new wallpaper works not only as a sign for her need to act upon and change her life but as a need to tear down the old walls that confine her, both literally and metaphorically. As an icon, the wall paper acts as her daily reality, as an index, it suggests her frustration and imprisonment within the walls of her existence, as a symbol it functions as a sign for her provocative upheaval on a semiotic level, of her language, her desire, and her surroundings. Pierre's pants, too, are a multi-faceted sign for the economy of their relationship. While they remain a constant sign of wifely servitude they also suggest failed sexuality and the struggle for identity within the couple (who wears the pants); Suzanne's revolt is linked to her forgetting to have them cleaned, as her final capitulation is a sign of her acceptance of societal norms.

Similarly, in *Oublier*, the very realism of the set enhances the semiotic density and excess that characterizes Laberge's work. The upstairs/downstairs dichotomy, where the literal memory loss of the upstairs characters is juxtaposed with the figurative loss on the part of the downstairs characters, allows the house itself to function not only as an

oppressive "real" environment, but as a womb from which three of the four sisters will be reborn. The raging storm outside parallels the metaphorical storm both within the house and within each of the characters. The ritual toilet flushing that belongs to the mother, suggests her fascination with and fear of death and decay, as well as her need to flush away the acts and the people that represent her failure. The repetitive flushing recalls passing time and our own mortality as well as the contractions of the mother/house, while on another level, the flushing toilet can be recognized as the frustrating experience of caring for a physical and emotional invalid.

In *Aurélie*, too, we find "a sharp sense of dramatic economy: nothing is superfluous"; Benoît Melançon points to Aurélie's solarium, where the action takes place, "as a metaphor for her role" (174) one that is further enriched by her job as a teacher of disadvantaged children. The solarium shows us the passage of time with the passing seasons, and the changing of seasonal flowers and plants; it also suggests Aurélie as a new Demeter, surrounded by rich symbols of fruition and life. The solarium is the material space of the *paradis terrestre* that reoccurs in Laberge's work, an eternal garden that is both a place of refuge and a source of life. Dramatic and theatrical semiotics are conflated as Aurélie's exams and the biography of Camille Claudel function not only as props, theatrical business to inscribe the character in realistic behavior, but as dramatic signs that lift the work out of the quotidian and into the mythic with the very density of their meaning. Melançon points to Camille, as a sculptor, like Charlotte, whose relationship with her patriarchal brother/father resulted in her exile and incarceration, while Aurélie's work with troubled children who cannot express their emotions and who have difficulty "separating their words" both recall Charlotte's trauma and resultant silence, as well as their father who was illiterate and learned his words with Aurélie the child. Melançon points to film as a sign in

Aurélie, ma soeur, and to the reference to Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, which, as he writes, "is a brilliant reflexion on voyeurism, while the narrative argument does not rely on the representation of the crime but on its imaginary reconstruction, on its analysis rather than on the event itself." (174) In this light, the tenderness of *Aurélie*, so far from the violence of *Le Night Cap Bar* in its style and its narrative, does very much the same thing on the theoretical level. In both plays, violence, as in classical tragedy, is only recounted; in fact, physical violence is almost never staged in Laberge's dramatic work.

Pocknell has written that "the space in Marie Laberge's theatre is always integrated into the dramatic action and, thanks to the diversity of its forms, gives depth to and amplifies that action." (Smith 59) This becomes increasingly apparent in her later work, where the action is more restrained, and where the language both creates and reflects the stage space. Laberge's treatment of space is also increasingly related to her problematicization of the theatrical space not only as a potential "murder scene" but as a place of refuge and mythic change. Eliade has pointed to the theatrical nature of the eternal return's cosmogonic recreation, even as Richard Schechner's work on the intersection of theatre and anthropology has shed new light on the time and space of the theatre experience. With *Aurélie, ma soeur*, the stage set and the Stage both become the scene not of murder, but of healing, and the solarium is not only the sign of Aurélie's life-giving forces but of the regenerative forces of the theatre as well. The space as a metaphor and a metonym for passing time, "le temps cyclique de la vie quotidienne," as Maïr Verthuy writes, far from suggesting change, suggests a system of eternal return. Verthuy has perhaps gone to the heart of Laberge's project on stage and on Stage, dealing with it in terms of Bahktin's concept of the chronotope, literally, a moment of "time-space":

Il convient cependant, ...de faire remarquer une ambiguïté propre au genre théâtral. Pour sombre que soit le contenu,

spectateurs et spectatrices se trouvent néanmoins confrontés lors des représentations à un phénomène d'un très grand dynamisme, la lutte se déroulant tous les soirs sous nos yeux, jamais réellement terminée, toujours à recommencer. Ce chronotope-là est aussi à prendre en considération dans l'évaluation de la contribution de Marie Laberge au monde du théâtre. (Smith 90)

Throughout the course of Laberge's *oeuvre*, she has shown us the *mise en abyme* of the traditional theatre's specular economics. She herself said in 1981, that she mistrusts the kind of sexual violence often referred to in her work, when it is *represented* directly on the stage, without a certain mediation and/or deflection of the gaze:

Le viol, au théâtre, je m'en méfie beaucoup. Pour le public, cela devient trop souvent une histoire érotique. Dans le cas de Rosalie je voulais que ce soit sordide et que cela devienne un moyen par lequel le public saisisse comment la jeune fille se perçoit socialement. 3

As early as *l'Anse à Gilles*, the more sensational, visual, theatrical action that is the hallmark of many contemporary authors is not for Laberge. Like the Greek dramatists, for whom violence must always take place off-stage, Laberge uses the monologue as action, in which the violence is recounted from a spatio-temporal distance rather than immediately and materially enacted. In this way, the audience is implicated in the specular crime and required to accept an empathetic position toward the victim, rather than becoming involved in a desiring stance of the traditional 'innocent' spectator. Violence, especially traditional violence toward the daughter, is mediated through language, or take place in the blanks, pauses or black-outs, that are the tools of the theatre. Rosalie's rape is recounted rather than enacted, even as the most violent aspects of *Le Night Cap Bar* are also related and not made material. In *Jocelyne Trudelle*, the physical violence, while heard in a black-out, is visualized only in our imagination, and can not be sensationalized on the material body of the performer. In *L'Homme gris*, Roland's violence toward his daughter is mediated through language, and becomes, like Derrida's idea of *archi-violence*, all the more

damaging. As Cri-Cri has no spoken words to mediate, her violence toward her father is seen through the mirror of the shadowed action on the wall, even as her husband's physical violence and Roland's specular violence, are seen through the mirror of his monologue.

Laberge's dramatic economy and the density of her theatrical signs are especially evident in her last two plays, *Le faucon*, and *Pierre*. In both cases, the stage space is significantly different than in her previous plays; less realistic than *Oublier* or *Aurélie*, they carry the same semiotic richness that characterizes those plays. The stage itself functions as a cage in *Le faucon*. Steve's silence replays the various stages of silence in Laberge's work, disempowerment, resistance, and reconciliation. As Laberge points out, every character in the play is, in some sense, a caged bird, and the gaze is associated with the piercingly lucid gaze of the falcon, wary and both literally and metaphorically far-seeing. The stage set conflates with the Stage, as a prison for the performers, and with the way that people create their own stages for themselves and for each other, becoming trapped by the basic theatricality of relationships. Both Aline and Steve quit the stage at the end of the play. The father remains, in an almost fetal position. André suggests the patriarchy of the traditional theatre, abandoned on stage to be born or die stillborn in a changing world.

In *Pierre*, the cloister can be seen as the sign of Héloïse's imprisonment, in her passionate body, in Abélard's life, in a Church unresponsive to women's needs, as well as within the stage of her own myth. As in *l'Anse à Gilles*, Laberge uses distancing, not to turn our gaze back to a closed past, but to draw the past forward into a future. We have already mentioned the importance of Abélard's body as a material sign on the stage. The fruit that Guillemette brings to Pierre le Vénérable also functions on multiple levels, as a material sign of her own love of life and her fasting, of the emotional and sexual nourishment that Héloïse has been refused, and, in the final moments of the play, as a

nature morte, the perfect stasis of the artistic endeavor. The image of a *nature morte*, a still life, is an image of an image, and places Laberge's concern about representation very much on center stage, both literally and figuratively, in this last play. It is unusual for her to use the poeticized descriptive language of the final *didascalies* in *Pierre*:

*Le soleil traverse le lieu et flatte les victuailles
pour en faire, avec ce chant qui monte vers le ciel,
une magnifique nature morte. (P 110)*

The apples, symbol of physical and moral temptation, sexuality and harvest, the evolutionary cycle of life and death, has been "killed into art" even as Héloïse has been mythologized by Abélard's choice and Héloïse and Abélard have both been mythologized by the double stagings of History and Art. The principle of the eternal return, suggested by the theatrical space, is juxtaposed with the characters' decision to leave the theatre, and the stage picture of immortalized fruit is the a perfect picture for a playwright leaving the stage of the theatre for an undetermined period of time.

Laberge has developed a theory of social evolution, which is strongly based in individual accountability and lucidity, and which is as related to modern sociology and psychology as it is to the family dynamics of Greek tragedy. If her early characters, such as Maurice in *Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient*, are paralyzed by their single moment of happiness, or unable to act on them, as in *Eva et Evelyne*, her later characters discover the profound responsibility of expanding that moment for the next generation. In *Le Faucon*, Steve's childhood moment of security with his father grounds him forever in a somatic sense of security, and allows him to share and expand that moment, for Frédéric, his younger brother, for Aline, and even to return the gift to his father, André. This theme is particularly developed in the drawing of the Koré figure, who, throughout the work, becomes increasingly present and empowered, and therefore, empowering. The moment of *paradis*

terrestre, a vision of what might have been, and whose tantalizing failure is a poignant reminder of the cruelty of daily life, expands exponentially as Laberge's *oeuvre* increases. Each play offers an opportunity for expansion, both within the world of the play, and in the body of the work itself, until, in *Oublier*, it becomes possible to escape family oppression by naming it. Laberge has said that *Oublier* was a definitive moment in her work, and that soon after its completion, she knew her work had been irrevocably changed. *Aurélie, ma soeur*, which immediately followed *Oublier*, is a clear manifestation of that change, as it suggests that there are germs of the paradisiacal moment in the most destructive situations: Aurélie's solarium becomes a material and literal manifestation of that moment of *paradis terrestre*, to which Chatte can literally and figuratively return for spiritual and emotional nourishment and renewal.

Laberge's project of articulating the feminine has reached new levels of maturity as her work has grown. If the young women of the early plays, such as Hélène in *Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient*, and Rose-Aimée and Julia in *Ils étaient venus pour*, quit the stage, both figuratively and literally, Jocelyne Trudelle's choice for suicide is paradoxically a more positive choice, as she refuses to leave the stage but forces her audience to watch what it has done to her. Her choice for Life in death rather than for a dead life, brings the Koré's struggle to the mythic as well as the literal stage, and Cri-Cri's ability to break through the physical and rhetorical violence that has for so long "directed" women's onstage speech and action, and kill rather than be killed, empowers the female characters that will follow in Laberge's theatre. If Suzy uses society's tools of repression to survive, in *Le Night Cap Bar*, the women of *Oublier* suggest that rebirth can occur without a comprehensive murder of society and its theatre, and with a figurative and mythic, rather than literal, death and resurrection.

Aurélie, ma soeur completes the fundamental change that these plays have prepared by demonstrating for the first time that women can have language as their right on stage, without the violence hitherto associated with articulation; their speech is momentous action in the very normalcy of its conversation onstage. *Aurélie*, which Gaëtan Charlebois calls "the bravest sort of theatre", refuses the sensational action that is required by traditional theatre, and makes feminine speech action in and of itself. ⁴ As a conversational play, it belongs to what Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska calls the "counter-rituality of *bavardage*". By counter-ritualistic we mean, in this sense, counter to the ritual of traditional declamatory theatrical procedures; in its own way, the play also reaffirms the sacrality of theatre, as a rite that passes feminine mysteries from generation to generation. It is in *Aurélie* that Cixous image of a round dance is fully realized in Laberge's work. For the first time in her plays, women have a "room of their own" in *Aurélie*'s solarium, one that is re-invoked at every production of the play. For the first time lucidity leads to self-affirmation, a new possibility for communication, and a feminine strength and groundedness that increases exponentially by generation. With *Aurélie, ma soeur*, Laberge's theatre has arrived at the end of a cycle; the plays that follow will be significantly different in their structure and in their focus, as well as in their intimate relationship with the novels that she begins to publish about that time. It is from the source and the security of this new center of gravity that a new cycle of Laberge's work will take shape; as André-Gilles Bourassa writes: "tout donne dans cette pièce une part active et primordiale à l'écriture libératrice."⁵

Pocknell has pointed out that the end of Laberge's plays and the conclusion of the action seem to coincide with a literal and metaphorical "abandon du lieu scénique." (Smith 59) The literal departure from the set becomes a metaphor for the actual departure from the theatre of "le regard", on the part of the on-stage witnesses as well as the audience. These

characters make a conscious choice, not only to escape the gaze of their fellow characters but to depart from the specular economics of the *scène/salle* exchange. Critical response to Laberge's plays has recently referred to the lack of action and "wordiness" in her work, particularly in those plays that she herself has directed. In a time when the theatre is moving away from the textual play, and where onstage violence toward women, as Jean-Marc Larrue has pointed out, is on the rise, Laberge is increasingly exploring a theatre of tenderness and introspection, where language itself is action. If she is moving toward reconciliation within the mythic space of her plays, however, she is finding it increasingly difficult to reconcile herself to the stage as an encounter between her characters/performers and the critical gaze that acts as a filter between her and her audience. In the light of Laberge's recent work, this consideration must be reiterated, as her last plays seem to move farther and farther from the traditional expectations associated with the theatre, and to equate the stage with the Stage: she is leaving both.

It is after *Aurélie* that Laberge's project of articulating the feminine takes second place to her exploration of the theatrical process itself. With her last two plays to date, she studies the way theatre can cross, not only the boundaries we have previously discussed, but also the traditionally inviolate barrier between the drama and the novel. Laberge has said that *Le faucon* is a play about "what we must kill or leave in order to live."⁷ In some ways, this play heralds, not so much Laberge's departure from the theatre, as her need to test the barrier between drama and narrative, to reduce the spectacular and the specular in her work, and to explore interior intention and motivation to such an extent that they become more important than action or the articulated objective. In a sense, she is exploring truth in acting, both on stage and in life.

For Laberge, theatre is as much an auditory as a visual experience. She admits to

"hearing" her plays as she writes them, while "visualizing" her novels. Speaking about the difference between the play and the novel brings her, once again, to the materiality of onstage activity:

J'estime que le roman permet d'écrire certaines émotions que le théâtre ne pourrait pas rendre. La sexualité heureuse, par exemple: au théâtre, il faut que ce soit un échec, ou un problème ou en tout cas, il ne faut pas que ça aboutisse! Car il y a le tabou, le malaise du corps. On doit évoquer seulement. 8

She refers to the very real problem of the material actor body onstage. In this she suggests, like other writers who concern themselves with feminine representation, that what Cixous refers to as "staginess" can become erotic at the expense of the Whole Woman, seeking the sensationalism of violence to the character, the performer, and the author.

In this light, it is important to consider the last two plays, *Le faucon* and *Pierre, ou la consolation*, as works that participate not only in theatrical literature but in dramatic narrative as well. Ouellette-Michalska has pointed out that feminine writing has sought, and to some extent recently achieved, a *mélange* of genres. 9 In *Le Faucon*, Laberge takes narrative structure to the play, writing 6 pages of opening *didascalies* juxtaposed with a mere 10 spoken words. These pages read like a *nouveau roman*, or a screenplay, as the recorded bird sounds are juxtaposed with the characters' extremely sparse dialogue. As the interior drama becomes primary, the *didascalies* supercede the spoken lines. Laberge's last two plays correspond to her first two published novels; if *Le faucon* seeks a silence and interiority that in novel form becomes *Juillet*, *Pierre* explores excesses of verbalized emotion, and the way we expand an essential interior moment while contracting unremarkable time, that is the subject of *Quelques Adieux*.

Since 1992, Marie Laberge has separated herself from the world of the theatre. While continuing to collaborate on translations of her work, she has withdrawn from the theatrical

milieu to concentrate on the novel, a genre she has worked in for many years, and where she feels that, paradoxically, she is able to address her public more directly. This departure has been occasioned by several converging forces, notably, the increasing inability on the part of the critics to understand her work and a need to address her audience, in a more permanent form, without the mediation of performer or director. The Boréal editions of her plays include a *Dossier*, with pictures of the productions and remarks on the part of the collaborative team and the author, in an effort to allow the reading audience to experience, in some way, the production of the plays, in their fully realized form, to combine dramatic and theatrical texts. As my discussion of her work has tried to demonstrate, Laberge is interested in the theatre as a space where important encounters between theory and practice may take place. Her disillusionment with the theatre as a practice is linked to her disenchantment with a critic/audience gaze, both on and off stage, that seems to ignore the fact that theory and theatre come from the same etymological root. Her work seems to be moving counter to many of today's theatre trends. As the scenic design becomes more extravagant, onstage violence more graphic, plays become more visual and less verbal, and the role of the author becomes increasingly distanced, Laberge has moved toward a spare, poetic theatre, that values language even as it recognizes the importance of the inner world that is part of every performer's creative process. Her movement away from the space and text of the theatre is, paradoxically, a more profound exploration of theatricality and performativity, as it slips off the page and onto our personal stages. By bringing the theatre into another genre she reaffirms its essentialness and prevalence in our lives.

In a recent interview, Laberge spoke of her separation from the world of the theatre as an opportunity to deal in a new way with how she visualizes her themes.¹⁰ While she has downplayed the relationship between her theatre and her novels, many critics have

remarked on the dramatic and theatrical quality of the latter. Indeed, certain theatrical conventions, transferred to the novel, strike a disquieting and provocative note. By using the conventions of the theatre in the novel, she problematizes them both, demonstrating the theatricality of the novel, and questioning its narrative stability. Conversely, she uses the novel to explore, in more depth than is possible in the theatre, the way theatricality slips off-stage and into our lives, and how we stage ourselves, not in the usual sense of the term, as an artificial construct, but in the way we observe ourselves, judge our performances, and seek audience approval. Indeed, the novel is the next step for an author whose focus is increasingly becoming the character's inner, backstage drama, and who seems to have arrived, with *Le Faucon* and *Pierre*, at a new level of peace and interpersonal détente which is at odds with the violence of theatrical experience. Critics of her recent plays have referred to an increasingly static quality, "more cerebral than emotional", ¹¹ whose "major obstacle" is that they "rely on reminiscences" instead of "action." ¹² As we have seen, Laberge's work moves from the visual violence of the traditional theatre to a violence of rhetoric and a drama of words and ideas. In the novels, she is able to explore in more depth the theories of theatricality that have increasingly informed her work. Her novels admit us to the intimacy of a character's continual self-creation, in the face of the witnessing regard of Self and Other. The reader/spectator role is doubled as well, as the reader witnesses the levels of communicative masks that mark Laberge's work. In the novels, in fact, the theatricality of Laberge's work is all the more apparent, since it is not a question of theatre, in the traditional sense, but of a slippage of theatrical and representational techniques, which has as a consequence, a *mise en scène* of theatricality on the stage of the novel. In the novel, Laberge can accede to a sort of virtual theatricality, where multiple stages interact and where the theories of social construction can mix with the practice of multiple stagings.

The elements that are an essential part of Laberge's dramatic *oeuvre* are central to the novels as well. In fact, it is in the novels that the slippage between the theatre and daily life, and between dramatic theory and practice, has its fullest exploration to date in her work. As in the plays, Laberge is economical in her use of signs; nothing is gratuitous and everything signifies on many levels. *Juillet* takes place during a classically dramatic period from dawn to dusk, on a scorching day in July. The temperature and the atmosphere are equally as steamy as passions heat up in a modern, bourgeois version of the garden of Eden. Simon, his son David, and his daughter-in-law Catherine are preparing a dinner party for Simon's wife, Charlotte, who is expected home from a medical conference for her 65th birthday. An apparently idyllic garden and 'normal' happy family become the site of explosive passions that threaten the veneer of civilized silence and cliché-ridden conversation. There is little dialogue, and the vibrant, interior perspective passes from character to character, as the inner observations of one character lead to those of another character, in a disturbing dialogue of the not-said.

Philip Wickham has written of *Juillet* as an "explosion des désirs marqués par le silence, les dialogues faux et trompeurs, les gestes à peine esquissés, la haine dissimulée..."

13 These underlying passions are indeed all the more explosive because they are not articulated or acted upon; the atmosphere is oppressive with the excessive heat, the heavy scent of Simon's prize roses, and the weight of the unspoken. Silence and noise are dramatic forces in the novels, as they become, in some sense, the two antagonists on stage. The moments of spoken language are provocative in their spareness, and rarely lead to meaningful dialogue. Significant communication between characters takes place on a somatic level, bypassing words almost entirely. The descriptive, interior monologues act not as conscious monologues in the traditional sense, but as *didascalies*, with the telling

difference that, since the performer's material voice is absent, the boundary between spoken word and *didascalies* becomes not only blurred, but allows the two to exchange places on the novel's stage.

One of the most interesting effects of moving the theatre of silence into the novel format is reminiscent of the interesting twist in *L'Homme gris*, where Laberge explored the relationship between hidden voice and explosive, physical anger. While Cri-Cri's voice has been repressed by her father, Charlotte suppresses her own voice. In *Juillet*, while Simon, David, and Catherine all express their interior reflections in *didascalie*-like perspectives, Charlotte remains completely private. Our only knowledge of her, beside that gained from the gaze of the other characters, is through her completely unrevealing, spoken lines. While we share the other characters' emotional and geographical screenplay, Charlotte's inner world is curiously closed to us. Even as Cri-Cri's suppressed speech leads to her desperate violent act, Charlotte's refusal to allow her interior vision to surface leads her to shoot Catherine when she discovers her with Simon. Even as Suzy, in *Le Night Cap Bar*, dissimulates her 'real' self behind an infinite series of masks, Charlotte never reveals herself, either to the other characters in her life, or to the reader/audience. As in *L'Homme gris* or *Le Night Cap Bar*, part of the novel's suspense lies in wondering who will be the one to explode in this clearly volatile situation. Upon reflection, it is inevitable that the murder would be committed by the character who is the most masked, and one, moreover, who has used language to manipulate matters of life and death. The rhythm of the novel accelerates as the *didascalies* that are each character's perspective become shorter and more staccato; a non-dialogue that gets out of control.

In *Juillet*, the murder scene functions on several semantic and semiotic levels unavailable to the theatre, taking on a new dimension on a stage where the material voice

and body of the performer are not present as signs in their own right. Laberge has said several times that she "hears" her plays as she writes them, but "sees" her novels. This filmic quality is evident, not only in the way that her characters' interior world unfolds, as if it is something they see rather than something generated from inside them; the characters' alienation is clear through the way they observe themselves as characters in a film. This is also the case in her treatment of the murder scene. While she scrupulously avoids the visually sensational in her plays (since the sign of the performer's body is often more powerful than the sign of the character's body on stage), in the novel, she is able to explore both physical passion and violence in more depth, paradoxically in a more visual way. Her characters in the novels clinically visualize and "stage" themselves as performers in a scene of passion, even as actors, as Schechner has pointed out, are simultaneously both "not" and "not...not" the characters. **14**

As in *Le Night Cap Bar*, murder is a comprehensive image in *Juillet*. From the outset, the vocabulary suggests an investigation, into the metaphorical demise of David and Catherine's marriage, into the philosophical and moral dilemmas of giving and taking life, into the murder that is surely to come. The fundamental opposition between Charlotte's and Simon's positions as doctors informs the basic struggle of the novel, between life and death, and between order and chaos. In a debate between life/death and Death/Life, not unlike that of *Jocelyne Trudelle*, Simon and Charlotte represent two ways of confronting the human condition. Charlotte sterilizes and thus destroys people's lives; in a professional confrontation with Simon, she has forced a dying woman to have an abortion that would prolong her life but drain the meaning from it. Paradoxically, as in much of Laberge's work, an effort to control life leads to death, and an acceptance of the reality of death leads to Life. Simon is concerned with human dignity in the face of the human condition: as a

specialist in medical ethics, he helps patients and families make decisions when confronted with certain terminal illness. He has accepted death and its chaos as part of the natural life cycle, and helps people make choices in light of their inevitable mortality. Charlotte, on the other hand, takes death as a personal affront, and wants to prolong life as long as possible in order to prove that she can control it. Simon is associated with chaos, with the provocative action and passion that is linked to generating life from death. Charlotte tries to maintain order in a non-orderly world; in her need to order life, she kills it into a work of art, succumbing to the same illusion of godhood that allows Suzy to become author and *metteure en scène* for *Le Night Cap Bar*.

Charlotte is frequently referred to as "perfect." Her perfection is related to her ability to maintain the role of perfect mother, excellent homemaker, and successful professional. Like Suzy, however, these roles are masks, and maintaining these illusions has made Charlotte mad. On one level, we can see Charlotte as the product of a society that has so idealized the perfection of motherhood that it has become perverted; on another, she is the victim of a patriarchal Church that would silence sexuality and its resultant chaos, teaching women to turn against themselves and their daughters. On a more comprehensive level, Charlotte identifies with the Church's "jealous God", who destroys his creatures when they do not follow the rules of the Garden. Charlotte's choice of weapon, a hunting rifle belonging to Simon's own father, is heavy with significance, as she, and not Simon, becomes the avenging angel of the patriarchy and its taboos.

Laberge resists references to the theatricality of her novels, saying that for the most part they are a facile attempt to explain or justify her movement to that genre. I would suggest that her work in both the theatre and the novel is a discussion of the essential performativity in our lives, and the way we use that performativity either to destroy or to create. Laberge's

constant investigation of language, and the dual themes of the provocative word and eloquent silence, as they relate to performativity, finds its *degré zéro* in *Quelques Adieux*. The 2 blank pages that represent the 10-year hiatus between Part I and Part II in *Quelques Adieux*, remind us that if the author does not choose to impart information we will not receive it. Ubersfeld writes of the intermission or the pause as not only a space for imposed audience reflection, but as a dramatic device to indicate passing of time and change of space; it is a semiotic gap that is in itself a sign. (1981 245-46) The emptiness of those 10 lost years echo the lack of concrete information shared between characters even those close to each other. If the silent years in the novel are an eloquent reminder of the silent theatre we discussed in Chapter II, their silence is even more deafening in the total absence of text. In Laberge's theatre, silence is attested to, and made textual by the *didascalies*, which refer to the characters' silence, describe or suggest the possibility of gesture to replace voice, and replace textual absence with authorial voice. The reader/audience is aware of the character's silence as a material, visual choice; silence never represents an omission in communication between character and audience, only between characters. In the novel, silence becomes a more complex and difficult issue, since the absence of a character's speech is not marked in any way; the character's place is not held, and her/his non-presence is not made material by the actor's body. As Ubersfeld refers to the dramatic text as a "texte troué", Laberge reveals that, in fact, human language itself, is by its nature "troué". Indeed, the gaps in Laberge's novels are even more apparent, paradoxically, than in the plays, where they are *represented* as empty spaces, through the material presence of the *didascalies* on the page or the gestures of the performer. In the novels, however, the gaps *are* empty spaces: this is *degré zéro* of writing taken to its logical conclusion, and we as readers are required to participate actively in giving shape to the lost years of those characters' lives; our pursuit of

this information parallels Elizabeth's quest for the truth her relationship with the husband she finds she did not know. As in all of Laberge's work, we, as scriptors, are part of the investigation. In *Quelques Adieux*, we must cast and direct for ourselves, even as Elizabeth does, the scenes that are never made material.

Quelques Adieux, like *Juillet*, is about the unruly nature of human passion. François, a professor of English literature, and happily married to Elizabeth, falls catastrophically in love with his student Anne. The first part of the novel details their meeting, their denial, and their eventual acceptance of the inevitability of their relationship. Part II begins after a 10-year hiatus, 2 years after François' sudden and untimely death from cancer, and chronicles Elizabeth's discovery of François' infidelity, her search for information about the François she never knew, and her ultimate resolution and rebirth. The novel reproblematises the word in a way that is reminiscent of *Deux tangos pour toute une vie*, although in a more theoretical manner. François' fascination with literature suggests his need to read about passion rather than experience it first hand, and it becomes clear that words have meaning on different levels, as François' nascent passion leads him to see language in a new way:

Il se voyait forcé de repenser ses certitudes de réévaluer chaque mot, chaque concept à la lumière de cette découverte foudroyante. (QA 14)

François' discovery parallels Elizabeth's own when she finds out that the language of her relationship with François did not "mean" what she thought it had meant. Language becomes only as understandable as our knowledge of its context, and the characters' inner monologue helps us see the split between meaning and comprehension.

In this novel, too, the inner monologues fuse with the descriptive passages, but are clearly separate from the sparse spoken language: inner monologue and description form a running series of *didascalies* that play against the actual dialogue. In Part I, the inner

monologues belong to Anne and François; we "see" Elizabeth through their eyes and their interaction with her is understood from their point of view. If François and Anne stage each other and themselves, this staging is always in reference to Elizabeth's silent presence in their lives. In Part II, the inner monologue and point of view belong to Elizabeth, as she attempts to stage their relationship "as it might have been", and to find her own presence in their lives. As an audience, we participate in all points of view, and our knowledge of the relationships of Part I makes us want to share Elizabeth's quest for the truth of the 10 years that the missing 2 pages represent.

Quelques Adieux returns to the murder scene with the literal and metaphorical investigation of François' death and the death of his relationships. As in *Juillet*, the image of death pervades the novel. François' death is almost a suicide, and his love is equated with his cancer, when Elizabeth comes across Anne's paper, in which François has underlined the following section:

L'amour est comme un cancer, un chancre,
une masse sournoise qui se nourrit d'elle-même,
grossit, grandit et finit par nous dévorer. (QA 264)

Elizabeth's fantasy of literally and figuratively murdering Anne is linked to her need to eradicate her from the relationship she herself shared with François, as well as from her memories of her husband, which have become equally contaminated, but these homicidal feelings die when Elizabeth "sees" Anne, and realizes that Anne, like François, has already 'died' for her. (QA 390) The metaphor of the murder extends to Anne's figurative murder of her mother after her father's murder/death, and to her burial of the red shoes her father had given her, and Anne's murder/abortion of François' child. Elizabeth's mythic rebirth, after a descent into Hell where she confronts her demons, is reminiscent of the evolution of many of Laberge's Koré figures. Elizabeth's demons, however, are clearly marked as

aspects of her misunderstanding of her own performativity, and of her own specular consumerism and stereotyping. She recognizes herself as murderous spectator and chooses instead to live in the moment, and returns to the stage of life as a lucid and committed performer. Elizabeth is a life-force, "une femme dangereusement vivante." (QA 397) Her child, conceived in the depths of winter, and to be born in the Fall harvest season, is juxtaposed with Anne's, which will be born in the dark months of winter; Anne's second pregnancy, like François cancer, becomes an act of self-destruction.

In all of Laberge's work there is a consistent exploration of the specular relationship that is inherently part of the theatrical experience, and nowhere is the awareness of the gaze of the Other as developed as in *Le Faucon* and *Juillet*, two works that deal in depth with self-staging specifically for the gaze of others. From the outset, in *Le Faucon*, Steve is aware of being observed as if under the dual microscope of audience and other character; the fourth wall acts as the transparent plate that holds him against the wall of the theatre/room, even as he is both literally and figuratively being "held for observation" in the play. Aline's posture in the beginning of the play describes her own awareness of her position as observer, even as she knows that Steve is aware of it as well: "Elle reste donc là, appuyée contre le mur, à regarder Steve ne pas la regarder." (F 21) The levels of self-staging that are only understood after the fact in *Le Night Cap Bar*, are made explicit from the outset in *Le Faucon*, where the characters are always conscious of being watched, staging themselves for each other, and by extension, for the audience as well. If Steve, like Suzy, is determined "not to reveal anything of himself" he is, unlike Suzy, "un être humain chaleureux, sensible," and Aline, his audience, is "une femme intègre qui l'approche avec une curiosité plus large que l'objet de sa recherche." (F 146) Aline acts as icon, index and symbol for the specular interaction that occurs between *scène* and *salle*, as the stage becomes a microcosm

of the theatrical experience, and the theatrical experience becomes a microcosm for human relationships, as the title of the play suggests the fiercely lucid gaze of the falcon.

Juillet is a novel about the gaze, and the final scene sees Charlotte in a symbolically masculine position as the omnipotent Eye. Lit from behind, silhouetted in a large, upstairs window, she stands motionless, waiting for mortal error, a deity revealed. Criticized for portraying women in general and mothers in particular, in a less than favorable light, and for creating an image of a ruthless woman in *Le Night Cap Bar*, Laberge responded, "...je n'ai pas fait cette pièce pour salir les femmes. Je n'ai jamais écrit quelque chose pour salir, mais il faut aller au fond de l'univers même s'il y a de la lie au fond." ¹⁵ Charlotte and Suzy have much in common in that they both use power in a way that links them to the patriarchy, but Laberge has taken her now-famous character of the *mère meurtrière* to a new level in *Juillet*, where the mother incarnates what Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska calls the "mère patriarcale." ¹⁶ Like Suzy, Charlotte feels absolutely sure that she has a right to play God; also like Suzy, her righteousness comes from having acceded to, or used the tools of, a privileged society, where she has embraced masculine order and life at the expense of feminine chaos and Life. While the other characters' sense of culpability keeps them from murder, it is Charlotte's righteous certainty that makes her dangerous.

The *regard* is associated with masculine power, and it is not until *Le faucon* that Laberge directly suggests positive ways for women to use that power without destroying self or other. If Suzy is a shape-shifting sorceress, assuming the position of the *voyeur* without permitting the gaze to fall upon herself, Aline, in *Le faucon*, refuses to use the privileged Eye without permitting herself to be "seen" in return. Where Suzy hides all pertinent facts about herself, Aline shares fairly intimate details, allows herself to be vulnerable, and interacts with Steve without destroying him. In the most recent works,

Laberge suggests that we can and must choose between refusing the power of the gaze and remaining perennial victim, or assuming the power, and using it either destructively or creatively. The choice becomes between Credo and Libido, to use Campbell's terminology, between patriarchal order, which is death and a lucid responsibility for our own diverse voices which permits harmonic chaos. This choice is particularly apparent in *Quelques Adieux*, where Laberge allows us to share Elizabeth's struggle between her desire for murderous control (to which Charlotte, in *Juillet* has succumbed), and her decision for the nurturing, creative, chaotic side of desire.

In *Pierre, ou la consolation*, the voyeurism, role-playing, and observation that exist in all of Laberge's work, finally result in a meeting of the gaze that is striking in its equality, and that suggest the perfect interpenetration that would be the ideal sexual union. This moment occurs at the end of the last play to date, where the intensity and mutuality of the experience is attested to by a multitude of dramatic and theatrical signs. (P 107-108) For the first time in her work, there occurs a harmony, fragile to be sure, between man, as a representative of God, and woman; this permits a reconciliation between Libido and Credo, however fleeting:

Taisez-vous de peur de briser le fragile accord de
Dieu et de femme. (P 107)
Cet abandon que qu'on femelle nature semble
mettre distance entre femme et Dieu...
et peut-être entre femme et homme à la fin. (P 108)

At this Pierre asks Héroïse to lift her veil, which she does. In light of the dissimulation and avoidance of the gaze, and the power struggle surrounding it that has been the subject of most of Laberge's work, this simple request, and Héroïse's response, suggest a reconciliation that goes to the heart of her entire *oeuvre*. The frank, lucid exchange of the *regard* that ensues heralds a new freedom for Laberge's women. The taboo of 'looking at'

the husband, or sleeping god, has always placed man as the privileged, dominant gazer. Indeed, the sorceress was one who transgressed that law, and her 'evil eye' traditionally sapped and emasculated male power.¹⁷ Pierre le Vénérable's willingness to exchange the gaze instead of imposing it parallels Aline's choice in *Le faucon*, and suggests the possibility of an equal 'theatrical meeting' between men and women.

Laberge's last published works deal, in different formats, with women's coming of age in terms of the gaze. If the women in her early work either shun or flee the gaze, her interim work suggests the unease or (dis)ease of a maturing feminine population whose own ambiguous position as gazers places them in a questionable relationship to masculine power. Her recent work addresses ways of dealing with that power: Aline acknowledges it but refuses to exploit it; Charlotte uses the gaze to control and ultimately destroy all life; Elizabeth acknowledges the power to destroy and refuses it, and Héloïse meets the gaze with her own, not in confrontation but in a symbolic sexual conjoining. This new understanding of the relationship of women to power and to the gaze has interesting implications for an author who is leaving the stage for an undetermined period of time, after having come to terms with the relationship between viewer and viewed, between performer and audience.

Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska has shown how male writers are coming to a new writing due to recent movements in feminine literary articulation, and how the strong presence of the feminine in current literature is undermining the traditional economics of the Eye: "Ce débordement de féminin affaiblit l'Oeil. La prolifération foetale et l'inversion brouillent les effets de miroir."(297) As a writer, Laberge has benefitted not only from a generation of nationalists who insisted on their right to a collective language, but also from a generation of feminists who identified the masculine power gaze as pernicious and the

written word as under the domination of masculine Church and State. Laberge and her male and female contemporaries are able to posit the possibility of meeting each others' gaze straightforwardly, on an equal footing, to honor the work that has gone before, and to theorize it in a new light. As Madeleine Gagnon writes:

Laissez-moi parler les langues de mes mères, de mes tantes,
de mes soeurs et les miennes. Elles n'excluent en rien de tous
mes frères poètes d'où je viens, aussi, elles ne font que
mieux les éclairer. 18

As women's writing has changed the social and literary center of gravity in past years, Québécois writers have opened an important dialogue on language, as far-reaching in its implications as Derrida's work in deconstruction. If Laberge's early writing owes a great deal to these two converging forces, her later work builds on it to seek a more global, almost mythic perspective, and deals more with our relationship to and reception of art than to specific socio-linguistic issues.

Joseph Campbell has shown that the struggle between *Libido* and *Credo* is part of an ongoing process that can result in a paradigm shift of some significance, as individual creative desire confronts collective law. Laberge's work demonstrates that when this creative desire unites with personal lucidity, to confront patriarchal rule, that paradigm shift may be radical and far-reaching. In other words, when patriarchal word is used in a conscious and provocative way, re-investing it with etymological complexity, it can provide a site for generating new feminine mythologies. Laberge has said that "la déchirure crée l'harmonie" and that art is "un grand appel sans que l'on attende une réponse." 19 Art, as a manifestation of *Libido* tears at the fabric of the established law, and in doing so, necessarily creates a harmonic that both problematizes and changes it. Throughout the course of her *oeuvre*, Laberge has moved not only the feminine voice but the theatrical and dramatic voice, so that in *Pierre*, Héloïse is articulated within the text of her life, rather

than within Pierre's *Historia Calamitatum* or within their letters, even as Elizabeth in *Quelques Adieux* writes the text of her life rather than accepting history's traditional role of the woman scorned.

Pavis suggests that a reconciliation between theory and practice "is only possible if we stop separating production and reception." (1992, 88) In Laberge's theatre, theory has interfaced with practice, and her *oeuvre* moves between the two, not only in her own presentation of the plays, as dramatic and as theatrical texts, but in the way she explores the theories and the practice of producing and receiving meaning in the theatre. Theory and practice flow into each other even as the emotional and physical spaces interact in her plays. In all of her work, Laberge studies what Mary Ann Caws refers to as "the in-training and the instruction of the eye" (3). The eye, for Laberge, belongs both to the material body and to the imagination; it is both the agent and the currency of the exchange between the performer and the spectator; it is the entrance to the soul. Laberge calls the audience's attention to the socially mastered ways we perceive, and to how this leads to stereotyping and repression, both on and off stage. She suggests as well that it is the eye that permits the flow between dramatic and theatrical texts as well as the interplay between genres that so characterizes her later work.

The slippery quality of art is that, like the provocative word, it does not seek a single reaction, but a series of new actions; it does not require return but demands an outward movement. The creative force of Libido carries an outward thrust, setting forth a potentially infinite number of responses, as opposed to the limiting force of Credo, which requires a single, predetermined response. Laberge has said that writing is "une façon de respirer la vie" ²⁰ suggesting that through the act of writing and the implied act of reading/scripting, we are not only nourished but created, even as Campbell notes that art not only reflects the

Credo of society, society as it is, but enters into a dialogue with it, inevitably and irrevocably changing it. Derrida has suggested that as a one work interacts with a previous work, that first work is necessarily altered, and can never again be conceived in its original context. Throughout the course of her writing, Laberge has evolved a theory of artistic responsibility that directly relates not only to the creation of art *per se*, but to the artistic texts of our daily lives. She posits a specific human life as a work of art, that is an on-going process of characterization and *mise en scène*: a dramatic *texte troué* in constant process of theatrical realization.

Notes

1. See Ubersfeld's section on "Le paradoxe du fictionnel" in *Lire le théâtre II: l'école du spectateur*.
2. Lise Armstrong's comparative review of *Le temps d'une vie*, by Roland Lepage and Laberge's *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse à Gilles* appeared in *Cahiers de Théâtre Jeu*, No. 19, 1981.
3. Quoted by Martial Dassylva in a review of *C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse à Gilles* in *La Presse*.
4. Gaëtan Charlebois' review of *Aurélie, ma soeur*, appeared in the *Montréal Mirror*, for April 22-29, 1993.
5. André-Gilles Bourassa's review of the published version of *Aurélie, ma soeur*, appeared in *Lettres Québécoises* No. 53, Spring 1989.
6. Jean-Marc Larrue's award-winning review of the 1991 theatre season in Montréal appeared in *Veilleurs de nuit 3: Bilan de la saison théâtrale 1990-1991*, Montréal: Les Herbes rouges 48-56.
7. In a radio interview for *Rencontres en musique* on July 17, 1994.
8. Lucie Joubert's interview with Marie Laberge appeared in *Le Sabord* No. 19, Summer 1988.

9. Madeleine Ouelette-Michalska writes: Restitution du corps, de la présence, de la mobilité et de l'instantanéité de la parole, mélange des genres, suppression de la démonstration linéaire, voilà peut-être les caractéristiques majeures du féminin de l'écriture à l'heure actuelle."(308)
10. In a private interview with Marie Laberge in Montréal during the summer 1995.
11. Marie Labrecque's review of *Pierre* appeared in *Voir*, April 9-15, 1992.
12. Pierre Leroux's review of *Pierre* appeared in *Le Journal de Montréal* for Thursday April 2, 1992.
13. Phillip Wickham's review of Laberge's first novel, *Juillet* .
14. Schechner suggests that the actor goes through stages of identifying with the character, passing through a position of "not" being the character to one of identifying so closely that while he/she is "not" the character he/she is "not...not" the character. His work on what he refers to as "performance consciousness" has demonstrated measurable physical changes in the body during performance. Schechner bases his notion of the "not me...not not me" process on British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott's study of the mother-baby relationship, especially the way in which the child learns the difference between "me" and "not me." See Chapter Two of *Between Theatre and Anthropology* , especially pages 108-116.
15. Raymond Bernatchez's review of *Le Night Cap Bar* appeared in *La Presse*, Montréal, for Saturday, April 11, 1987.
16. Madeleine Ouelette-Michalska writes: "Mais il ne suffit pas de caresser le corps d'une autre femme pour anéantir la mère patriarcale. Oeil pour oeil, dent pour dent. Il faut tuer la mère biologique pour que naisse la mère symbolique." (288)
17. It is through the role of the sorceress that such diverse characters as Suzy and Héloïse, indeed, all of Laberge's feminine protagonists are finally united. Hélène Cixous's *La Jeune née* offers us a site for this reunion, in her discussion of the sorceress as a parthenogenic phoenix, who like Suzy arises from the ashes of her own pyre. "The sorceress engenders without a father. She emerges, pressed out by the "soul press," a living product of psychological crushing."(56) This is an especially important aspect of Laberge's work, as all of characters seem to pass through a "psychological crushing" which allows them to emerge as purified, renewed beings, separated from patriarchal law of order and family. The sexuality and open desire of many of Laberge's characters belongs directly to the sorceress image described by Cixous and Clément. This is a subject who, like the Medusa, is outside (in all senses of the term) the rules that bind ordinary society, and whose excess can be seen as an essential part of the creative life force that animate the universe. Both the murderous Suzy and the desiring Héloïse can be understood in a different way when seen in the light of Cixous' sorceress: liberated from the rules of a repressive society they become not cursed but our salvation. There has been much written about the sorceress figure in Québec's feminist theatre. One thinks immediately of Denise Boucher's *Les fées ont soif* (1978), Jovette Marchessault's *La Saga des poules mouillées*,

(1981), and the now-classic *La nef des sorcières*, (1976) written by a women's theatre collective, including Nicole Brossard, Pol Pelletier, Marie-Claire Blais, and France Théoret. As Lori Saint-Martin writes: "La folie même de la sorcière devient gage de son désir de parler autrement, dans un nouveau langage-femme. Sa souffrance aux mains des hommes, sa vitalité et son pouvoir (sage-femme, guérisseuse), sa joyeuse insoumission..... tout cela fait d'elle un personnage exemplaire qui cristallise les doléances et les aspirations des femmes. C'est cette forte convergence du réel et de l'imaginaire qui fait de la sorcière une sorte d'étendard; figure de résistance et de subversion, elle annonce la volonté de briser des tabous, de faire advenir un ordre nouveau." (Introduction to the 1992 edition of *La nef des sorcières*, published by Hexagone.)

18. Quoted by Madeleine Ouelette-Michalska in *L'Echappée des discours de l'oeil*, p. 293.
19. From a radio interview on July 17, 1994 for *Rencontres en Musique*.
20. Ibid.

Works by Marie Laberge

Abbreviations used are in parenthesis

Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient. Montréal: VLB, 1981.(H)

Ils étaient venus pour. Montréal: VLB, 1981.(V)

La Réparation. in *20 Ans: Le centre d'essai des auteurs dramatiques.* Montréal VLB, 1985.(R)

L'Homme gris. Montréal: VLB, 1986. (HG)

Le Night Cap Bar. Montréal: VLB, 1987. (NC)

Oublier. Montréal: VLB, 1987. (O)

Aurélie, ma soeur. Montréal: VLB, 1988. (A)

C'était avant la guerre à l'Anse à Gilles. Montréal: VLB, 1991. (AG)

Le Faucon. Montréal: Boréal, 1991.(F)

Pierre, ou la consolation. Montréal: Boréal, 1992. (P)

Jocelyne Trudelle, trouvée morte dans ses larmes. Montréal: Boréal, 1992. (JD)

Deux tangos pour toute une vie. Montréal: Boréal, 1993.(DT)

Le banc. Montréal: Boréal, 1994. (B)

Juillet. Montréal: Boréal, 1989.(J)

Quelques Adieux. Montréal, Boréal, 1992. (QA)

Le Poids des ombres. Montréal: Boréal: 1994.(PO)

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