

## Oedipus and Menaud: The Self-Affirmative Complex in André Brochu's *Le Maître rêveur*

It is difficult to talk about André Brochu without mentioning *Parti-pris*, which Brochu helped found in 1963 when he was barely twenty-one. Essentially of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the self-proclaimed political and cultural magazine appeared monthly for five years, during which time its editors continuously sought to reconcile the publication's literary content with its political objectives. While Brochu considered literary criticism as a form of action similar to the political activity of *Parti-pris* ("La Nouvelle relation écrivain-critique" 54), he quickly found himself at odds with both his fellow editors and mainstream literary currents in Quebec: he did not fully espouse the new generation's avowed break with the past and had difficulty embracing structuralism which, in his mind, seemed to negate the very essence of literary creation. Brochu left the magazine only to state in 1967 that *Parti-pris'* shortcoming was partly due to the fact that its contributors had appropriated the revolutionary rhetoric of countries like Cuba and Algeria without linking it to Quebec and its traditions (Major 135). Consequently, Brochu was ostracized on two fronts. Not only was his vision of literary and cultural continuity not shared by the magazine's editors (Dumont 521), but his very concept of literature ran counter to critical movements of the day (Michon and Goulet 533).

Brochu's critical theories and essays inform his own creative writings. Indeed, he perceived his role as literary critic as that of striving to discover "une identité québécoise à travers les oeuvres qui composent notre tradition" ("La Nouvelle relation écrivain-critique" 53), and considered such a stance not as a type of regression or sterile attachment to the past, but rather

a quest for those forces that still vitalize the present and which might be used to anchor new forms of literary expression in firm ground (Dumont 521). Brochu's idea of the critic as a kind of *chercheur de trésors* in search of a definable notion of what it means to be Québécois likewise seems to underpin his poetic and novelistic endeavors. The past in fact has a crucial function in Brochu's writings, especially in his most recent novel, *Le Maître rêveur* unquestionably offers a rich layering of themes and narrative techniques focusing on identity, self-affirmation, survival, and expression through the written word. Intertextual references to the literary corpus of France as well as that of Quebec abound; yet it is without a shadow of a doubt Felix-Antoine Savard's *Menaud, maître-draveur*—a novel openly eulogizing the past—that serves as the culminating metatext in the construction of Brochu's narrative. The originality of the technique in this case stems from the fact that Brochu ingeniously meshes the reference to Savard with the Oedipus complex as formulated by Sigmund Freud. In tandem, these intertexts impart semantic depth to the main character's personal drama, giving it a national, if not universal dimension. They will therefore be used as analytical prisms in this reading of *Le Maître rêveur*.

Although Brochu experimented with a variety of critical methods of analysis, he never abandoned more traditional logocentric approaches, and showed a patent predilection for thematic studies. His 1984 examination of Gabrielle Roy's *La Montagne secrète* attempts to localize the work's underlying patterns and identifies three dominant time-frames (*Visée critique* 195). His 1966 analysis of *Menaud, maître-draveur* builds on then existent criticism of Savard's novel, stressing the work's three distinct chronological moments in the plot's development: the death of Menaud's son, the confrontation where le Délié in a cowardly fashion strikes le Lucon leaving him unconscious and, finally, Menaud's ultimate insanity ("Menaud ou l'impossible fête" 271). Interestingly, *Le Maître rêveur* concentrates on three important periods in the narrator's life. Doubly linked to *Menaud, maître-draveur* by an explicit reference to Savard's protagonist (186) and, more subtly, by its title (just one syllable shy of being identical to the epithet used to characterize Menaud), *Le Maître rêveur* is inseparable from *La Vie aux trousses* where a similar chronological network is discernible. The two novels in fact form a dyad which, like Savard's narrative, traces a largely linear diegetic development. Each recounts the story of Sylvain Mercier who is at once narrator and main character. Brochu has chosen to accentuate the interrelation of his two narrative's by titling *Le Maître rêveur* "La Vie aux trousses II." Yet

the second does not take up where the first left off. Instead, the two accounts form an intricate chronological overlapping.

The three chapters comprising *La Vie aux trousseaux* all revolve around a specific moment in the narrator's existence and are staggered over ten-year intervals. They represent the narrator at ages 9, 19, and 29 and cover the years 1951, 1961, and 1971. *Le Maître rêveur* follows an almost equally linear paradigm centring on events involving the narrator at ages 10 (1952), 30 (1972), and 45 (1987). However, episodes transpiring when the narrator was 10 are split in two. "Dix ans (I)" constitutes the novel's opening section and "Dix ans (II)" its third. The novel closes with a fifth section bearing the eponymous title "Le Maître rêveur," whose time period is not identified but which contains a reference to the 1995 referendum. Clearly, by virtue of its poetic, dream-like quality, this final segment is intended to transcend the preceding narrative portions, possibly marking a narrative victory in the self-reflexive process both at the diegetic and compositional levels.

More importantly, by fragmenting the section dealing with the narrator's life at age 10, Brochu draws attention to the influence that the past exerts on the present. The break takes place just after Sylvain's rude awakening to certain sexual realities: in the sombre depths of the cavernous cellar of the Jesuit school he is attending—symbolic of the inner recesses of the psyche where the libido lurks—Sylvain witnesses a priest, Father Locas, molesting a half-willing classmate. The perverse tryst is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of the school's disciplinarian, Father Lamontagne, and at that point the section abruptly comes to an end. The incipit of the next section, entitled "Trente ans," reads as follows: "Je déteste écrire. Je déteste. Maudit soit mon thérapeute, maudit, je le déteste" (75). Now 30 years old and recovering from a nervous breakdown, Sylvain is incapable of realizing his most cherished dream of affirming himself as a writer. The juxtaposition of the bizarre sexual act that Sylvain glimpses in the eerie darkness with his situation twenty years later tacitly establishes a cause-effect relation. The pattern is repeated—and the causal nature of the childhood event reemphasized—owing to the collocation of "Dix ans (II)" with the segment entitled "Quarante-cinq ans." Once again, a sexually imbued vision from the past (a sublimated homoerotic experience Sylvain now imagines at the close of "Dix ans [II]") is immediately followed by a portrayal of the narrator, still disturbed so many years later, as he contemplates the writing process and comments on his therapy sessions. In all, Brochu dedicates roughly half his novel to the narrator's childhood (over one hundred pages when parts I and

II of "Dix ans" are put together) and sporadically recounts those events in the present tense, thus putting them on a plane equal to subsequent episodes. What can be inferred is the futility of trying to completely sever the past from the here and now.

The discovery Sylvain makes in the school's subterranean is pivotal to his psychological evolution since it is essentially that scene which leads him to an awareness of his own mortality. Before the incident, Sylvain oscillated between the Manichean worlds of angelic-demonic absolutes. He would pray to God that he might become a great poet, though he was convinced great poets were all doomed to eternal damnation because they unavoidably strayed from the holy truth: "les grands poètes vont en enfer, ils s'écartent de la voie" (13). Yet their glory was, in his mind, immortal and he wanted to partake of their immortality. Inasmuch as he was still unknowing about the ways of the flesh, his dilemma at that point was how to write real poetry without offending the Lord, how to be a poet and still be saved: "faites que je sois quand même sauvé" (13).

Troubled by what he saw take place between Father Locas and his classmate, Sylvain seeks counsel from his Latin teacher, Father Philippon, who explains sex and its reproductive function as best he can. Suddenly, Sylvain's secure world of innocence and saintliness falls apart: "Fini l'ange. [. . .] Mes ailes étaient un effet de l'enfance. J'étais papillon, me voici chenille" (142); "je connais maintenant la science du bien et du mal, je sais la finalité terriblement pratique des corps, je suis un ange déchu [. . .]" (150). In the final chapter of the section entitled "Dix ans (II)," a confused and traumatized Sylvain ponders his sexual orientation and tries to stifle any homosexual leanings he might have: "[. . .] jamais je n'accepterai. Je corrigerai en moi le désir, le rendrai conforme à ce qui doit être [. . .]" (148). This last statement might serve as a paradigmatic image of the entire narrative construct. Time and again, Sylvain and ostensibly his narrative doubles (Olivier and, to a lesser degree, Camille) repress their real desires for a number of reasons: in response to social conformity, out of fear, or in the name of a higher ideal they deem absolute. Each becomes the victim of his or her own emotional suppression. Consequently, *Le Maître rêveur* unfolds as a novel of disillusionment, initiation, and quest, as they all seek a path to follow.

As critics have pointed out, the events comprising *Menaud, maître-draveur* are set in the wake of the great depression of 1929 and each of the work's three sections ends on a dramatic note (Boivin 39-40 and 50). This being so, further comparisons can be made between Savard's novel and the two narratives by

Brochu in question. While their sections may not necessarily each culminate on a dramatic note, they all unquestionably encapsulate a critical or dramatic phase for the main character. In addition, Brochu situates his narrator's experiences in distinctly significant periods of Quebec's sociopolitical history. He pushes the correlation between novelistic content and social reality further than does Savard by opting for three very different social climates. The triadic configuration of Savard's narrative is essentially derived from the events it delineates, all situated in the same historical timeframe. What strikes the reader in looking at Brochu's two novels is the extent to which Quebec's destiny and that of the main character run parallel.

1951-52: Quebec is in the grip of *la grande noirceur* or traditional conservatism under the rule of Maurice Duplessis who favors political stability through resistance to change, an ideology that, according to Denis Monière, incited French-Canadians not to contest their submissive and impoverished status (300). The psychological overtones of this depreciatory outlook are evident. In the 1951 segment of *La Vie aux troussees*, Sylvain attempts to forge a sexual and social identity through a series of apparently innocuous episodes, yet a feeling of malaise dominates: "C'est effrayant, d'être moi" (66). The concluding portion of the segment contains the highly charged question: "Pour l'instant, qui étais-je?" (83). In the sections of *Le Maître rêveur* taking place in 1952, an awareness of the rigid hierarchy of the province's social structures as well as deep-rooted sentiments of inferiority prevail among Quebec's French-speaking population: "Je suis un Canadien français, un miracle de la survivance à moi tout seul dans cette mer de grandes personnes qui parlent la langue du réel. Des francophones, il y en a et on les reconnaît soit à leur silence, soit à leurs échanges rapides à voix basse, soit surtout à leur accent quand ils répondent, reconnaissants, aux questions condescendantes de la race supérieure" (27). Sylvain's school is presented as a haven of French in a predominantly English-speaking city (45). Terrified of violating preestablished rules of conduct (69), Sylvain becomes introverted and seeks refuge in his personal "paradis intérieur peuplé de mots" (65). He ponders whether French in Quebec will be able to survive the degradations to which the historical situation subjects it on a daily basis (120). Furrowing his way through the crowded passenger train he takes daily to get to school, Sylvain reads disapproval on certain faces: "[. . .] d'autres passagers ne ressentent qu'exaspération devant les cabotinages de l'enfance ou les maigres pétulances francophones que j'incarnais *a priori* à leurs yeux" (120).

1961: The momentum of the Quiet Revolution grows as new hope for change is assured by the victory of the Liberal Party under the leadership of Jean Lesage. The narrator of *La Vie aux troussees* openly speaks of these events and states that when Duplessis died, so did French Canada; the time was right for Quebec to emerge (98). The sexual orgy during which Sylvain loses his virginity is denotive of the fundamental changes at work eroding the strong moral and religious taboos that had ultimately paralyzed the culture for so long. At once despairing and indifferent (137), Sylvain describes himself as torn between the beckoning of his instincts and unrealistic intellectual aspirations (129). Both he and Olivier turn to literature in their efforts to solve life's riddle and give focus to their intense existential questioning—a reaction that is in no way surprising given the unprecedented flourishing of the creative arts in Quebec during the 1960s.

1971-1972: The aftermath of the October crisis and the dissolution of the FLQ give way to more orthodox fora for channeling political hopes of a sovereign Quebec, namely through legitimate political action. It is a time of both frustrated ideals and new optimism. In the 1971 segment of *La Vie aux troussees*, this antithetical mingling surfaces when Olivier and Sylvain, both married, raise their glasses to René Lévesque as Olivier says with a half smile: “on peut toujours croire au miracle” (204). Future political setbacks at asserting a collective identity are symbolically presaged by Sylvain's individual failing: unable to cope with the stress of completing his doctoral dissertation, which would mean taking a critical stand by defining his literary persona, he suffers a mental breakdown. The 1972 portion of *Le Maître rêveur* depicts Sylvain in slow recovery, tormented by his complete state of social and emotional dysfunction. His *angst* is a metaphorization of Quebec's dilemma as perceived by anti-federalists: “Je voudrais simplement être moi, avec des droits, avoir un peu de joie à exister. C'est cela qui est impossible. Il faudrait n'être pas qui je suis. Il faudrait n'être pas” (107).

1987: Quebec is still licking its wounds following the 1980 referendum, the 1981 constitutional repatriation agreement (from which Quebec was excluded), and finally the Lake Meech Agreement that was in the making and which, in the eyes of hard-line separatists, undermined future chances of achieving autonomy for the province. In the 1987 segment of *Le Maître rêveur*, Sylvain equates his inability to take hold of his life with Quebec's indecisiveness: “semblable à mon peuple lui-même qui refuse de se donner les moyens de vivre” (154). Decidedly, Quebec's struggle for self-affirmation mirrors the narrator's (or vice versa) and now he finds himself confronting

a void. After the Church ceased to represent the vehicle of salvation for Quebec, intellectuals turned to literature and politics in the hope their messiah would materialize in the person of someone like Réjean Ducharme or René Lévesque (169). However, the savior did not come. Sylvain now realizes there is no solution from without.

Through various dialogues, politics and the fate of Quebec come to the fore in this segment of *Le Maître rêveur* transpiring in 1987. The date is significant when one considers that it is also the year Brochu's article, "Menaud Today," appeared. In it, the author states that upon rereading Savard's novel so many years after the 1980 referendum, he could not help being struck by the work's pertinence to the present political situation ("Menaud Today," 76). He also alludes to the racial glorification found in Savard's narrative—typical of discourse in Europe in the 1930s (76)—yet adds that rallying the population around concerns over race (as Menaud tried to do) does not constitute a concrete program of action but rather a dream doomed to failure (78).

These remarks on dream and race shed light on their function in *Le Maître rêveur*. If Sylvain proves to be a master at dreaming—hence the title of the novel—it is because it is a way of avoiding the essential issue over which he feels powerless: "il n'y a que le rêve pour surmonter l'écoeurant besoin d'exister" (191). Similarly, if he declares that he is racist (187), it is because federal immigration policies, coupled with new multicultural perspectives, have rendered nationalist thinking politically incorrect: "Rétablir l'enseignement de l'histoire du Québec dans les écoles, ce serait chercher à imposer aux nouveaux citoyens une identité qu'ils rejettent. Ce serait raciste. Nous sommes des racistes, du moment que nous ne consentons pas à tout oublier" (211). Using Savardian imagery, the narrator likens Quebec to Marie and immigrants to le Délié: the province welcomes with open arms foreigners who have no vested interest in the culture of Quebec while those who wish to see its French-speaking population survive into the next millennium, the narrator included, go mad with rage over the insidious assimilation process taking place before their very eyes (187).

Cognizant of the growing territorial hold by outsiders and the collective disaster he sees looming on the horizon, Menaud expends all his energy trying to counter the situation. His efforts are ineffectual and ultimately stymied by madness, which Brochu describes as a kind of death or fetalization, that is, a return to the womb of nature ("Menaud Today" 81). A similar fetal image is used in *Le Maître rêveur* and would seem an intentional,

albeit implicit, reference to the narrative's principal metatext. The image appears when Sylvain tries to convey to his analyst how writing gives him the impression of expanding the sphere or womb he feels he is in to the point where he might actually come forth and be born: "[. . .] c'est comme le Québec. Le Québec existe très fort depuis une trentaine d'années, mais il existe *en dedans*, il n'ose pas quitter le sein maternel, et il va en mourir, docteur" (186). Thus, writing constitutes for Sylvain an antidote for his psychoneurosis. It is a means of self-generation, the opposite of suicide ("je me mets au monde, tous les matins" 157), a remedy not accessible to Menaud, who was torn between death and madness when faced with the inevitable tribal extinction he foresaw.

Confirming his analyst's diagnosis that he has a tendency to identify too closely with Quebec, Sylvain calls this behavioral tic his "Menaud complex." Since it operates as a focal point in the articulation of the narrative, his description of the disorder needs to be cited in its entirety:

—Oui docteur, c'est un complexe. Le complexe de Menaud. Il vaut bien celui d'Oedipe. Oedipe voulait tuer son père et épouser sa mère. Menaud a plutôt le culte du père et des ancêtres, et il veut tuer—c'est une façon de parler—son futur gendre qui sert les Anglais et qui trahit son peuple. C'est par la femme que le malheur arrive, que la modernité vient bousculer les valeurs de la tradition. La femme, c'est la fille de Menaud, elle s'appelle Marie et elle est la mère symbolique, celle qu'Oedipe veut épouser et que Menaud, pour sa part, se retient de chasser. Bref, l'oedipe québécois est à peu près l'envers de l'oedipe universel. —L'envers. . . ou l'inversion: à la limite, on tue la mère et on épouse le père. —Docteur, vous m'avez compris. (186)

Freud explains that, when confronted with the Oedipus complex, a child may react in one of two ways: he may put himself in his father's place to have intercourse with the mother as did the father, thereby rendering the father an obstacle, or, conversely, he may "supplant the mother and be loved by the father, whereupon the mother [becomes] superfluous" ("The passing of the Oedipus Complex" 169). The neurosis described by Sylvain would seem a spin-off of the latter. Nevertheless, once the intertextual reference to Savard's novel has been made in conjunction with the Oedipal fixation, a number of narrative elements already touched upon fall more squarely into place, such as the themes of lucidity and madness, the interplay between dream and reality, and the narrator's valorization of the past. Additionally, other narrative components come into focus, including the arboreal images that punctuate the narration and, paradoxically, the motifs of incest and homosexuality.



Pascal Riendeau has convincingly argued that traditional paradigms of sexual identity are challenged in *La Vie aux troussees*, whose narrative impetus fluctuates between an idealization of exaggerated virility and an ironic presentation of sexual roles in society as being predeterminedly restrictive (575). The narrative in fact seeks at times to bolster orthodox visions of masculinity and at others to call them into question. This effect explains the narrator's emphasis on writing since it is an ingenious tool for inventing one's own identity (576). If the narrator's attempts at establishing a sexual identity on a personal level are a metaphor for the author's quest to define a collective Québécois reality, Sylvain's swing between heterosexual and homosexual relations can be viewed metonymically as a struggle to find a balance between traditional values and new ways of thinking. Furthermore, many of the narrative ingredients associated with this dichotomous tension in *La Vie aux troussees* and *Le Maître rêveur* become enriched when placed in the context of the Menaud complex.<sup>1</sup>

Savard's novel is based on a patriarchal ethic, but underlying that ethic is, as Brochu's himself states, the notion of freedom ("Menaud ou l'impossible fête" 269). In both *La Vie aux troussees* and *Le Maître rêveur*, the narrator attempts, at one point or another, to repress desires he identifies as ordinarily repudiated by society: "Je me suis corrigé, comme on corrige un gaucher. J'ai refait mon existence contre moi. J'ai construit, parfait, poli, mon mensonge [. . .]" (MR 80). The psychological dangers of repression that betrays the self are well known and, in the case of Brochu's narrator, it leads to bouts of dementia. Thus, social restrictions regarding sexual orientation, voiced most strongly in *La Vie aux troussees* by the narrator's mother, might be interpreted as symbolic of all forms of interdiction that diminish legitimate self-expression. At the same time, the narrator's homosexuality serves as a thematic device in the weaving of the Menaud reference. Through this conceit, the author prepares the reader for both the Menaud complex and the Freudian twist he gives to Savard's novel.

Brochu sees the narrative structure of *Menaud* as binary, presenting two distinct spheres of activity, namely the feminine—suggested by the house—and the masculine—represented by the mountain ("Menaud ou l'impossible fête" 289). By extension, nature and horizontal expanse are also part of the female identity by opposition to the vertical space of the mountain where Menaud is able to communicate with his male ancestors: "la hauteur dans l'espace est liée à la profondeur dans le temps, et tous deux impliquent un même refus de l'étendue, c'est-à-dire de l'étranger et, plus secrètement,

de la femme” (282). Savard’s narrative is intransigent in that it leaves no room for reconciliation between the two (284). Feminine relations are open to “l’étranger” (as evinced by Marie’s courting of le Délié who collaborates with outsiders) whereas masculine relations are exclusive and self-contained within the tribal unit. In light of this information, Sylvain’s homoerotic experiences with Olivier and Luc take on new meaning. Both are described in detail in *La Vie aux troussees* (158-60 and 231-43) and each is evoked in *Le Maître rêveur* (87 and 174-75).

The frenzied escapade with Luc begins when Sylvain meets the former separatist terrorist while wandering in a state of delirium on the mountain in Montreal. Serving as an archetypal space, the mountain inscribes Sylvain’s euphoric lunacy in the paradigm established by Menaud. In the symbolic network of Savard’s narrative, the mountain is reserved to male characters and is a privileged locale, connoting both freedom and Quebec itself: “tous les lieux de la montagne, profonds et sacrés [étaient] comme le sanctuaire de son pays” (Savard 113). It is a wild, uncivilized space, harboring memories of the past (Savard 38) and serves as a place of refuge for both Menaud and le Lucon. In going to the mountain, Sylvain is seeking to liberate himself from the social hypocrisy that is stifling him and connect with the forces of freedom from which he feels cut off.

Luc—or Lucky as he prefers to be called—shares a definite onomastic bond with Savard’s character, le Lucon. What is more, his former terrorist maneuvers vaguely echo le Lucon’s active support of Menaud’s subversive operations. Sylvain’s fascination with Luc’s terrorist past is perhaps compensatory for his own inaction regarding an issue that speaks to his very soul. Pushing the parallel with Savard’s novel still further, one may imagine Sylvain as symbolically replacing Marie in a union of lucidity and madness as ambivalent as Menaud’s final state: “Ce n’est pas une folie comme une autre! Ça me dit, à moi, que c’est un avertissement” (Savard 155). Luc’s name is in fact contained in the word “lucid” which, as Sylvain observes in *Le Maître rêveur*, comes from the Latin word *lux*, meaning light (102). Indeed, madness and lucidity are inextricable: “Au fond du fou, il y a toujours un désespéré lucide qui s’active” (85). Luc is likewise contained in Lucifer, an identity the writer must also assume: “un écrivain c’est peut-être cela, Lucifer” (23). When Luc tells Sylvain his name, Sylvain renames him Lucifer, at least in his mind (*VT* 232). Luc-Lucifer becomes a catalyst for Sylvain, allowing him to complete his dissertation at last. Interestingly, as if suggestive of a schism between the male and female strata, the whole inci-

dent takes place after Sylvain's wife, Yolande, has left on vacation so he can have the peace and quiet necessary to concentrate on his writing. Her absence is not absolute, however, and it becomes clear that unlike Menaud, Brochu's narrator seems to be striving for some sort of balance between the spheres of masculinity and femininity (or between tribal and foreign forces): "Mon délire fait que Yolande et Lucky se superposent au sein de ma raison aimante, forment un seul corps. Il n'y a plus de sexe ni de choix ni de limite [. . .]" (VT 239).

Sylvain's adventure with Luc is triply transgressive. By its homosexual nature, it violates traditional societal codes. Second, the place of the encounter is associated with a criminal offense. It was on the mountain that, in his terrorist days, Luc set off sticks of dynamite; his going back periodically to the mountain is, in essence, motivated by the pleasure derived from returning to the scene of the crime. Last, and in conjunction with the idea of transgression, the relationship is cast in an incestuous light: Sylvain views Luc as a brother or daughter (239).

In the sexual act between Sylvain and Olivier, multiple levels of semantic operation are discernible. It, too, serves to crystallize the themes of transgression and inversion, but additionally becomes a symbolic consummation of the Menaud complex if one takes into account that, earlier in the narrative *La Vie aux troussees*, Sylvain ascribes a paternal identity to Olivier on two occasions.<sup>2</sup> Interpreting their sexual intercourse from the perspective of a Québécois Oedipal fixation—as defined by Sylvain—would seem justified in view not only of the psychoanalytical overtones of the two narratives (psychoanalysis is part of their diegesis), but also because of the express references to Freud which they contain.<sup>3</sup> Sylvain's need, immediately following his moment of physical pleasure with Olivier, to have sex with a woman, replicates the oscillation between masculine and feminine spheres to be found in the encounter with Luc.

More significant here, however, is the effect his erotic experience with Olivier has on his relationship with his mother, who has little trouble deducing what transpired between her son and his classmate. The incident causes a rift between them that prompts Sylvain to move out. One might ask if Sylvain's conduct is not motivated by a latent desire to punish his mother for the restrictiveness she symbolizes?<sup>4</sup> Freud in fact speaks of the case of a young woman whose lesbianism stemmed from unexpressed anger with her father; it was a type of revenge directed at him as the result of an unresolved Oedipus complex.<sup>5</sup> On a related note, it is appropriate to recall

that a male child's early bonding with his father is in part an instinctive reaction in resistance to "the regressive pull [of] the reengulfing, symbiotic mother" (Blos 19). Generally speaking, in Brochu's two novels, Sylvain's sexual relationships with women seem to derive chiefly from the urgency to prove his "normalcy" ("Quelle joie, d'être normal!" [VT 124]) and ultimately conform to socially acceptable modes of behaviour. Conversely, the release he finds through sex with males is symptomatic of his response to an innate call for freedom which on both social and political levels is equated with proscribed behavior.

Returning to Brochu's commentary on Menaud, we read: "La femme ne représente jamais l'épouse mais la mère; l'épouse, au contraire, c'est bien la liberté [. . .]" ("Menaud ou l'impossible fête" 289). Savard stresses the maternal qualities of his female characters (who all extol the virtues of stasis) in order to free the males and allow them to pursue the elusive love object they so dearly covet, that is, freedom. Metatextual reverberations of this effect can be felt in *La Vie aux troussees* when Sylvain, in an acute state of delirium, asserts that his wife, Yolande, is his mother (246). Although, in spite of his momentary madness, he is speaking metaphorically, the notion suggests that, as with Menaud, any real conjugality Sylvain might experience will ultimately be with the object of his obsession. If Menaud's expeditions to the mountain are symbolic enactments of such a union, Sylvain's liberating homoerotic experiences serve a similar function.

Obviously, in terming Sylvain's isogender attraction—or negative Oedipal complex—a Menaud complex, Brochu is adapting a clinically defined disorder to the specific purposes of his narrative intent. He seems to use certain features of the symptomatology of the psychological condition which are consistent with Peter Blos' views on father-son relationships to reinforce his literary construct. For example, boys will typically seek "by active and persistent solicitation the father's approval, recognition, and confirmation, thus establishing a libidinal bond . . ." (11). Sylvain does just that *vis-à-vis* two characters who serve as father substitutes. The first and, by far, most influential paternal figure is Sylvain's teacher, Father Philippon, whom the boy considers a poet. The fact that the young Sylvain wants to show his own poems to his teacher and wishes that he himself might one day become a great poet (*MR* 12-13) signifies that Father Philippon is an object of emulation. Sylvain turns to him for positive feedback and recognition, as well as guidance during his pubescent stage. Furthermore, Father Philippon represents traditional values (the fact that he teaches Latin links him to a vast tradition of learning

and culture) and is treated with respect by the narrator. It is he rather than Sylvain's real father, about whom minimal information is provided, who incarnates ancestral ideals (*MR* 120). Interestingly, the dialogue between male and female zones of activity, inherent to Brochu's two novels, is apparent in the narrator's presentation when Sylvain alludes to Father Philippon's paternal OR maternal instincts (*MR* 120).<sup>6</sup>

Another important father figure is Sylvain's psychotherapist, Doctor Papin ("Papin, cela sonne comme papa" [*MR* 101]) for whom he expresses a definite attachment (183). Sylvain even admits, if only in his diary, that he likes/loves him: "Je l'aime" (183). This was not the case with Sylvain's first therapist whom he detested (75), most certainly because of the doctor's inexperience and extremely young age (77). Doctor Papin, on the contrary, is an older gentleman who somehow reminds Sylvain of Father Philippon (180). While the significance of this doctor-patient relationship based on a father-son emotional attitude (at least on the patient's part) is obvious here, the situation is not limited to novelistic invention. According to Blos, the common tendency of father-fixated men to overidealize their male analysts can be explained in part by a need for fatherly protection (11). Furthermore, claims Blos, resolving the Oedipal conflict involves renouncing residues of infantile ties "to both parental figures, i.e., to both their dyadic and triadic imagos. An adjunctive or corresponding resolution pertains in many cases to an incestuous tie of the adolescent boy to his sister . . ." (143). In both of Brochu's narratives, hints of a libidinal attraction between Sylvain and his sister, Camille, are omnipresent. She provides Sylvain his first glimpse of the female anatomy (*VT* 28) and he repeatedly expresses his love for her (*VT* 47, 63, 139). As a child, he imagined her as a damsel in distress and himself as the courageous dragon-slayer coming to her rescue (*MR* 15-16). The first concrete signs of an incestuous relationship appear in *La Vie aux troussees* when Sylvain confesses that the real reason he moved away from home was to flee Camille and his desire for her (178). The *Maître rêveur* narrative is even more explicit and employs the word "incest" in conjunction with Camille (97). The concluding oneiric segment of the novel provides a poeticized dialogue between the now dead Camille and her brother wherein she confides her passionate love for him. She states that she married Olivier only because it was quintessentially a way of marrying Sylvain (217-18).

Clearly, this manifestation of incest elicits the notion of transgression and, as an extension of the Oedipal taboo, is thematically polysemous. On a psychological level, it reiterates the impulse behind the male child's allogene-

der parent fixation: the subject's nostalgic yearning for a lost paradise, that is, existence as it was prior to the burdens of decision making and responsibility (Durand 67). In mythological terms, it suggests a need to reintegrate the golden era of perfection and harmony when Time did not exist, an era Mircea Eliade calls the primordial *illud tempus* (55). Both perspectives indirectly amplify the prestige allotted the past in Brochu's narratives, especially in light of a difficult present. As the object of forbidden desire, Camille emblemizes the inaccessible ideal plaguing the narrator. This process is evidenced by Sylvain's seemingly paradoxical refusal to allow his sister to become a maternal figure for him: "J'aimais trop Camille pour la laisser s'abaisser au rôle de mère par défaut" (VT 139). She is rather a sublimated wife figure: "Ma femme, ma soeur, ces mots sont synonymes et contraires [. . .]. Ma soeur est mon ciel; la terre est ma femme" (MR 218).

If Camille embodies an unattainable ideal or realization of desire for Sylvain, the incest motif surrounding her takes on additional thematic significance in light of the functional purpose of taboos. Broadly speaking, interdictions assure the integrity of social institutions, essentially harmony and order, or cohesion based on an attitude of humility. But they also draw attention to obstacles, thereby generating the energy necessary to overcome them (Caillois 165). In Brochu's novels, braving taboos—of which incest is perhaps the most basic—has the symbolic significance of challenging the status quo.

On still another level of interpretation, the incestuous attraction between Sylvain and his sister has a grounding in the cosmogonic legends of creation that were frequently used to explain the existence of a people. Indeed, as Roger Caillois explains, incest was practiced by the gods and often, in mythological representations of the origins of the world, the first couple was comprised of a brother and sister. Thus, incest myths recount the story of creation and were used to explain the beginning of the human race (150). The implications of this process in relation to the Brochu narratives are two-fold. Firstly, the endogenous nature of the union marks an aversion towards all things alien. The consanguinity it suggests seems almost like a mythological transcription of Menaud's xenophobia, expressed in Savard's novel through the repeated use of Hémon's phrase, "Des étrangers sont venus!" Secondly, the sacred fertility of the couple corresponds to the theme of genesis which, narratively speaking, addresses the issue of textual production.

A 1964 article by Brochu on Louise Maheux-Forcier's novel, *Amadou*, provides information pertinent to this topic. In it, Brochu states: "l'inceste et l'inversion sont les modalités privilégiées de la passion au Canada

français” (Major 126). Indeed, the Brochu narratives weave an intricate network of implicit incestuous relations. At its core is the concept of desire which delineates the totality of Sylvain’s experiences: “Je n’avais rien compris à ce que je croyais être l’égarement de mon désir, qui tendait vers tous les corps [. . .]” (VT 166). In making incest and homosexuality the *modi operandi* of his two narratives, Brochu is drawing from the literary well of what he deems established components of French-Canadian literature to examine the “passion sauvage pour la liberté” (Savard 25-26) that Sylvain ostensibly shares with Menaud. Physical passion operates as the concrete vehicle allowing the author (and the reader) to partake in a dialogue whose substance both scrutinizes the existence of the cultural community from which the written work emerges and calls into question the very writing process itself.

The notion of textual genesis is encoded in Brochu’s novels through a variety of means that can only be partially explored here. One technique, however, which has direct impact on this discussion is the author’s use of arboreal imagery which culminates in the final segment of *Le Maître rêveur*. Through these images, elements of the Savard metatext are blended and transformed to take on renewed signification. It is important to begin by underscoring the homogeneity that exists between Menaud’s tree-covered mountain and the forest. Indeed, Savard assigns Quebec’s woods and rivers (“le libre domaine des eaux et des bois” [80]) the same liberating qualities he so often attributes to the mountain. And, as Réjean Robidoux and André Renaud point out, Savard aptly conveys the bewitching presence of memory and ancestry in the voices that fill the depths of the forest (41), making it, like the mountain, a storehouse of treasures from the past. In his article, “Menaud ou l’impossible fête,” Brochu affirms that the two are virtually synonymous (271). Consequently, the decor Brochu has chosen as the setting for the Sylvain-Olivier episode is just as significant as the mountain in the narrator’s adventure with Luc. The island is private property (theme of transgression) and, because of its remoteness, offers the two travelers refuge. When Sylvain and Olivier disembark, they immediately notice two tall elm trees whose branches form a sort of canopy (VT 157). Trees constitute the main distinguishing feature of the location: “Il [Olivier] m’avait possédé dans un espace neuf, où les arbres avaient leur pure et simple dimension d’arbre, de la base au faite, masses laïques désertées des pertinences symboliques” (160). The experience is important for what it brings Sylvain by way of psychological and emotional growth. Whereas the episode with Luc is recognized for the madness it was (“Cet infini n’était ni moins ni plus que le délire”

[MR 107]), the one with Olivier is viewed positively: “Il était resté pour moi comme un point lumineux, au milieu des choses refoulées” (MR 175).

Traditionally accepted as a symbol of the unconscious, the forest harbors both positive and negative discoveries, joys and dangers (“des loups y brillent” [MR 103]). This is why writing—essentially delving into the unconscious—is no easy matter. The narrator wants to overcome his trepidation and take the plunge. If he does, he will have to push forward into the woods, he says, to the very end, to the very last word (MR 103). He finally undertakes the inner journey: “J’entre dans un moi grand comme la forêt, tout encombré de broussailles et de troncs morts, mais planté de fûts vigoureux qui élèvent vers le ciel leurs nuages de feuilles” (MR 158). The final segment of *Le Maître rêveur* can be regarded as the concretization of that journey, a possible victory over the fears and taboos that had paralyzed the narrator to that point. Qualified as a dream, the segment describes in highly poetic language the narrator roaming through a forest where the trees, all people from his past, speak to him. But the victory proves equivocal. One wonders if it is a product of madness or lucidity. Has he attained the higher awareness he has been seeking? Is *Le Maître rêveur* a self-begetting novel like Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu* whose conclusion ultimately leads into its opening and where the hero forges his identity as novelist and through a novel (Kellman 8)? The final dream sequence ends with the words “l’aube inouïe” (220) while the opening scene begins with “Le rêve” (11) of the narrator in the early dawn light.

The ambiguity shrouding the novel’s conclusion echoes the precariousness of both literary expression in present-day Quebec and the future of its French-speaking population. This notion is contained in Sylvain’s comment that the great elms are gone and all that remains are the old roots in testimony of their past existence (MR 172). Thus, when Sylvain (whose name is derived from the Latin word for forest) laments to Olivier (whose name, it should be recalled, signifies olive tree)<sup>7</sup> that nature is dying, he is metonymically talking about the slow extinction of a collective consciousness.

Although *Menaud, maître-draveur* belongs to the period of the *roman de la terre* novels advocating traditional values and territorial appropriation, the critics Robidoux and Renaud prefer the term *roman de la fidélité* (23). The designation is broad enough to include Brochu’s two novels, because they share a similar premise, namely the urgency of preserving Quebec’s distinct cultural identity. Overtones of the alarmist message found in *Menaud* are also present in *Le Maître rêveur*. Menaud’s plea for mobilization



is of no avail because it is met with apathy: “l’indifférence est générale” (“Menaud ou l’ impossible fête” 272). Similarly, the narrator of *Le Maître rêveur* perceives literary works in Quebec as ineffectual, like so many false prophets teeming in “l’indifférence générale” (MR 183).

*La Vie aux troussees* focuses on the narrator’s breakdown, while *Le Maître rêveur* places emphasis on his struggle for psychological and emotional rehabilitation. Together, at their most elementary level, they relate the case of a male child who fails to bring his Oedipal stage to a conclusion and is therefore unable to construct his superego successfully and integrate paternal authoritativeness into his own personality to establish an autonomous identity. However, the issues raised in this account have broad repercussions. Indeed, its individual and collective implications are glaring and focus on the imperative-ness of assuming one’s differences and affirming one’s individuality.

## NOTES

- 1 It bears noting that Brochu viewed his role as literary critic from a Freudian Oedipal perspective in that he felt his development as a creative writer in his own right was stunted by his being limited to commenting on works by others (“bloqué qu’il est [. . .] dans la phase oedipienne du développement de sa personnalité d’écrivain” [*La Visée critique* 116]). It is like a child who never resolves his complex and never asserts his own identity. Operative in this study is the importance Brochu gives the Oedipus dilemma: “Oedipe est sans doute la figure maîtresse du XXe siècle, Oedipe l’inliquidable, et l’écrivain aussi bien que le critique ou son lecteur, communique à son destin.” See “Le Critique et son lecteur” in *La Visée critique* 115-20. Although the scientific validity of certain of Freud’s theories has come under fire, their authoritativeness is less an issue in this reading than the textual meaning Brochu succeeds in generating by alluding to them.
- 2 The first is blatant, the second indirect. At one point, Sylvain says to Olivier: “Tu parles comme mon père” (VT 102). Later, he jokingly tells his sister, Camille, that Olivier is old enough to be her father (136). Carrying this logic a step further, it could be said that if Olivier were Camille’s father, he could be Sylvain’s as well.
- 3 Sylvain evokes the analyst’s name in all seriousness in a conversation with Olivier (VT 128) and again in a decidedly tongue-in-cheek manner while musing in the bath—a symbolic representation of the womb (“je suis dans ma maman d’ivoire,” [VT 88]). The latter rumination brings him to consider the Oedipus complex and finally ask: If I were Socrates, would I sleep with Oedipus? (VT 150).
- 4 In *Le Maître rêveur*, religious and maternal dictates of conduct merge into a single discourse of proscription: “la colère maternelle est cruelle et arbitraire” (20); “Dieu [. . .] faites que [. . .] j’obéisse à vos saints commandements” (21); “maman n’est pas toujours consciente de tout ce que je fais [. . .] pour respecter ses commandements” (22).
- 5 In the example provided by Freud, the young woman’s behavior was motivated by her frustrated attraction to the parent of the opposite sex or, in her case, toward the father

imago (See Freud's article entitled "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman"). In the symbolic network generated by Brochu's narratives, a similar frustrated attraction for the parent of the opposite sex (that is, by Sylvain for his mother) could be maintained, given the character's bisexuality. Yet it should be stressed that Brochu's intention is less psychoanalytical than literary and thematic.

- 6 In addition, the narrator places Father Philippon in the same category of mother figures as Lucie and Odette, the young women with whom he travels daily on the commuter train (MR 130). In comparing Father Philippon today with a photo taken of him years earlier when he was serving as a chaplain in the army, Sylvain finds that he has lost his harsh physical traits and now looks more like a mother hen (130).
- 7 Arboreal imagery in conjunction with Olivier recurs when Sylvain describes his friend as almost becoming a tree and enveloping him with his leaves: "en m'enveloppant de son beau regard plein de feuilles" (MR 177). In addition, the name of the river that takes them to the island where they make love is "la rivière de l'Orme" (VT 156).

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