

Constructing English Quebec Ethnicity: Colleen Curran's *Something Drastic* and Josée Legault's *L'invention d'une minorité : Les Anglo-Québécois*

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¹Quebec's second largest French-language daily

²The second referendum on Quebec sovereignty was held on October 30, 1995. The vote was 50.56% (2,360,717) against and 49.44% (2,308,072) in favour of the resolution to grant the present government of Quebec the right to declare independence from Canada within one year. There had been a significant and continuous exodus of English-speaking residents from the province of Quebec since prior to the first referendum in May of 1980 in which the sovereigntist declaration was rejected 58.2% (2,258,002 "no votes") to 41.8% (1,619,662 "yes votes"). The English-speaking communities have become more and more the focus of attention because of their declining numbers and status within Quebec, and because of the pivotal role these communities continue to play in holding the Canadian federation together and,

IN A 1997 *LA PRESSE*¹ editorial on the much discussed situation of the "les Anglais" in Quebec,² Agnès Gruda describes Josée Legault's title for her 1991 study of the dominant discourse of the English Quebec community, *L'invention d'une minorité : Les Anglo-Québécois*, as "un nom évocateur" (B2).³ Gruda summarizes Legault's thesis as follows: "Selon l'auteure, il n'existe pas vraiment au Québec de communauté anglo-québécois fondée sur une identité propre et différente du reste du Canada. Cette 'minorité' a été inventée de toutes pièces à des fins stratégiques" (B2).⁴

Certainly, the connotative baggage of skepticism and suspicion of the French word 'invention' seems intended, since Legault's central theme is that the dominant Anglo-Québécois liberal humanist discourse of individual rights is a mask intended to cover collective interests, reactionary, irresponsible, wait-and-see attitudes of superiority and nostalgic, elitist desires for domination.⁵ However, Werner Sollors's reflections on the popularity of the word "invention" in his introduction to *The Invention of Ethnicity* seem to undercut Legault's rhetorical outrage at the rift between the "true" nature and objectives of the English-speaking communities of Quebec and the "false" discourse emanating from the leaders, politicians, journalists, and writers of those communities:

...that "invention" has become a rather popular category in intellectual discourse seems, if anything, an understatement.

The term "invention" is, however, not just part of a fad; and we would not be better off without this buzzword, which, after all, offers an adequate description of a profound change in modes of perception. The interpretation of previously "essen-

tialist” categories (childhood, generations, romantic love, mental health, gender, region, history, biography and so on) as “inventions” has resulted in the recognition of the general cultural constructedness of the modern world. (x)

Sollors’s thesis that ethnicity “is not a thing but a process” and that it “is not so much an ancient and deep-seated force surviving from the historical past, but rather the modern and modernizing feature of a contrastive strategy...” (xiv) not only ‘puts into question’ but seemingly erases essentialist distinctions between a real or “vrai” community and the communality constructed or “inventée...à des fins stratégiques.”

Throughout the body of *L’invention d’une minorité* Legault juggles constructionist and essentialist visions of English Quebec pointing to the constructed, invented, created nature of the community in opposition to its essential, historic, “true” character and roots in order to display the apparent disingenuousness and hypocrisy of the public discourse of Quebec Anglophones and to explain what she sees as English intransigence. Legault argues clearly and in extensive detail that the newfound solidarity and cohesion of the English communities of Quebec came about largely in reaction to twenty years of government legislation designed to limit the use of English in Quebec⁶: “Une nouvelle identité collective a commencé à se construire, beaucoup en réaction et en opposition certes à l’affirmation nationale des francophones et aux gestes faits en son nomme par le gouvernement québécois”(57).⁷

The shrinking of the English population in the face of growing Québécois nationalism brought to the fore a number of organizations and prominent individuals as spokespersons for the dwindling English minority. These organizations and individuals, the subjects of Legault’s study, themselves confirm that the English-speaking communities of Quebec have coalesced and, in many cases, drawn themselves into a defensive posture explicitly in reaction to the political, cultural and economic realities of post-1976 Quebec.⁸ For example Alliance Quebec, an English-rights lobby group, was formed in 1982, shortly after the first referendum.⁹

consequently, obstructing the sovereigntist aspirations of French-speaking Quebecers.

³A name/title intended to evoke a reaction” (my translation, as are all subsequent translations)

⁴“According to the author, there does not really exist in Quebec a community of English Quebecers. This ‘minority’ was created from scratch for strategic reasons.”

⁵Based largely on her reading of journalistic and political texts, Legault concludes that the dominant Anglo-Québécois discourse is one of “desolidarization” (199) and “déresponsabilisation” (210), displaying attitudes that are “nostagique” and “attentiste” (200) and encouraging “la résistance et la confrontation” (198).

⁶Bills 63, 22, 101 and 178 were passed into law by successive provincial governments, both Liberal and Parti Québécois. They were designed to guarantee the preservation and growth of French by limiting access to education in English and the use of English on signs, and by requiring the use

of French in larger businesses.

⁷“A new identity started to be built, largely in reaction and, indeed, in opposition to the nationalist affirmations of Francophones and to the programs undertaken in their name by the government of Quebec.”

⁸The Parti Québécois, whose central mandate is the independence of Quebec from the rest of Canada, first came to power in 1976. The Parti Québécois has won three of five elections since 1976. They surrendered power to the Quebec Liberals under Robert Bourassa in 1985, and Bourassa’s Liberals won again in 1989. The Parti Québécois returned to power in the election of 1994.

⁹Legault cites Alliance Quebec documentation that the organization had over 40,000 members in 1989. In 1995, in an article covering the meeting between Parti Québécois Deputy Premier, Bernard Landry, and Alliance Quebec, *The Gazette* claimed that “Current membership stands at 3,700, down from 10,000 a decade ago.” (see Hubert

The English of Quebec may have traditionally thought of themselves as simply English Canadians who happen to live in Quebec, or even more firmly as members of a particular region or municipality of Quebec, or as constituents of other ethnic communities where English has become the lingua franca. Whatever the feelings of the moment of individual English-speaking Quebecers, they are and have for many years now been going through a process, both internal and external, of being labeled and defined as a community. Legault’s thesis that “les Anglo-Québécois” have and are undergoing the process of constructing and being constructed as a community is corroborated by masses of daily and documentary evidence.¹⁰

However, Legault also adopts a traditional, essentialist line of argument identifying the Anglo-Québécois as “descendants de Britanniques” (descendants of the British) and therefore ethnically connected with “les conquérants” (the conquerors): “Pourquoi remonter au passé de ‘conquérants’ des Britanniques du Québec dans le cadre d’un ouvrage portant sur les années 1974 à 1991? Parce que ce retour en arrière est essentiel à l’analyse et à la compréhension du discours ‘dominant’ anglo-québécois des vingt dernières années” (18).¹¹

Legault completes her description of the Anglo-Québécois community with this encyclopedia of features: “La langue anglaise, la domination économique des anglophones, de même que leur culture politique propre, qu’ils considéraient supérieure à celle des francophone, étaient au coeur même de leur identité collective” (58).¹²

Against this kind of closure, Sollors’s notion of “invention,” once again, offers a means of re-opening and reconnecting a dialogue. He argues:

The forces of modern life embodied by such terms as “ethnicity,” “nationalism,” or “race” can indeed by [*sic*] meaningfully discussed as “inventions.” Of course, this usage is meant not to evoke a conspiratorial interpretation of a manipulative inventor who single-handedly makes ethnics out of unsuspecting subjects, but to suggest widely shared, though intensely debated, collective fictions that are continually reinvented. (xi)

From this perspective Legault's *L'invention d'une minorité* is itself an attempt to invent (or perhaps re-invent) Anglo-Québécois ethnicity and as such joins a number of such publications including Sheila McLeod Arnoploulos and Dominique Clift's *The English Fact in Quebec* (1980), Gary Caldwell and Eric Waddell's *The English of Quebec: From Majority to Minority Status* (1982), Ronald Rudin's *The Forgotten Quebecers: A History of English Speaking Quebec, 1759-1980* (1985), Reed Scowen's *A Different Vision: The English in Quebec in the 1990's* (1991), William Johnson's *Anglophobia: Made in Québec* (1991), Mordecai Richler's *O Canada/O Quebec* (1990) and so on. To this list of "inventions" we might add those fictions which are explicit fictions by and about English Quebecers, including such Canadian classics as Hugh McLennan's *Two Solitudes*, Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (to name but a few).¹³

Something Drastic (1995), a first novel by playwright Colleen Curran, offers a timely contribution to the discourse, and the discourse about the discourse, of the English Quebec community. Curran is part of a new generation of English Quebec writers—which would include novelists such as Linda Leith, Gail Scott, Robert Majzels and Kenneth Radu, as well as playwrights David Fennario, Vittorio Rossi, and Marianne Ackerman—who have responded with equanimity to the growth of Québécois nationalism and the minoritization of English in Quebec. For example, in her introduction to the anthology of short stories, *Telling Differences: New Fiction in English from Quebec*, Linda Leith comments:

The writers who stayed and who live here now have chosen to be here and they accept, with varying degrees of alacrity, the predominantly French face of Quebec. Some of the older writers may still be shaking their heads at what they see as decline, but those who have been emerging more recently are circumspect. Anxious as some anglos were on the night of November 15, 1976 when the Parti Québécois won the provincial election (but has enough been said about how pleased others were?),

Bauch, "Alliance Meeting Turns into Love In.") The Equality Party emerged largely in reaction to the perception that the Quebec Liberal government under Robert Bourassa had not lived up to its promises to protect English rights. The Equality Party elected four members to the Quebec National Assembly in the 89 election, but none in the 1994 election.

¹⁰This nascent Anglo-Québécois ethnicity might best be described as what Linda (Bortolotti) Hutcheon calls a "crypto-ethnicity" (see her essay "Crypto-Ethnicity" in *PMLA*). Not only is there reluctance to acknowledge Anglo-Québécois ethnicity in both English and French communities, but English Quebecers are a non-visible and, frequently, an aurally unrecognizable (when they speak French) minority. Hutcheon describes the pleasures and tensions of her own crypto-ethnicity as liberating, as "transethnic" and as "a reminder of the constructedness of all forms of ethnic identity"(32).

¹¹"Why go back to the past of the 'conquering' British of Quebec in the

context of a study covering the years 1974 to 1991? Because this return to the past is essential to the analysis and comprehension of the 'dominant' discourse of English Quebecers of the last twenty years." In order to accept Legault's image of a pure British line (and a pure French line) one has to ignore the history and patterns of immigration and migration which have constructed the present day communities. (See, for example, Cole R. Harris's "Regionalism and the Canadian Archipelago.")

¹²"The English language, economic domination by Anglophones, as well as their own political culture, which they consider superior to that of Francophones, are at the very heart of their collective identity."

¹³In "Canada in Fiction" Arnold E. Davidson, who is also the author of *Mordecai Richler*, judiciously distinguishes English Canadian, Québécois, French Canadian, Native and Ethnic writing but makes no explicit mention of English Quebec. There is no established critical tradition of identifying English Quebec literature. We might note the

and displeased as some of them remain with aspects of the French language law, the new writers view this as a society that has by and large been changing for the better. (4)

Leith's allusion to a generational split was reaffirmed in a more recent feature article in the Montreal *Gazette* by Joel Yanofsky entitled "The Silence of the Lamb Lobby."¹⁴ The article was provoked by "veteran Montreal writer William Weintraub"¹⁵ who "...wondered aloud in *The Gazette* last month why young anglo writers here—and by young the 71-year-old Weintraub later told me he meant anyone under 60—are'n't writing about 'the social and political upheaval...the cataclysm' affecting their own community" (i4).

In the article Curran was identified, in fact featured, as one of these "young" (Curran is 43) writers. However, it was in a 1993 interview with *The Gazette* that Curran most clearly displayed her 'degree of alacrity.' The interview, which bore the title "Successful Montreal Playwright Colleen Curran Finds Home Town Tough Nut to Crack," focused on the relative lack of production that her plays had received in Montreal, and in particular the fact that Centaur Theatre, Quebec's main English-language theater, had never produced one of her plays, though she had been the theater's playwright in residence for a year. Curran's response was that "It could be that as an English Quebecer, as a minority, I'm expected to write something political or angry." But as Curran explained, "that's not my outlook. When I write really seriously, the plays are so turgid and they're so depressing. I just can't stand it. I just want to have a good time and tell a good story" (B4).

Curran's novel is written in the same tone and with the same acceptance of the minority status of Quebec English that she expressed in the interview. *Something Drastic* is a series of letters written by the heroine/narrator, Lenore, to her estranged boyfriend, in which she tries to account for his sudden, unannounced departure for Florida, tries, unrequited, to woo him home, and in the process tells him the story of her daily life in Montreal from January 6 (presumably 1990), the day he left, to December 30 of the same year, the day she is able to say "you're out of

my life, I'm over you"(210). Through the process of a year's experiences as a woman alone, which included making a best friend of her tenant, Concordia University professor of Canadian and women's literature, Heidi Mavourneen (Irish for darling) Flynn; being drawn into a militant feminist group under police investigation for terrorist activities; attending a therapy session for "Women Who Love too Much," and winning a role in a musical at Centaur Theatre, Lenore comes to realize what a low-life, reprehensible cad her boyfriend is and to discover herself.

In her letters Lenore makes several references to Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, and to Steven Spielberg's adaptation and film. In fact *Something Drastic* offers a pastiche of the form and structure of Walker's novel. Just as Walker's *Color Purple* is an epistolary diary/novel of a woman's growth and individuation through adversity told in what becomes a bible of Afro-American culture written largely in ebonics, Curran gives us, in a similar form though a minor key, the testament of one year in the life of an Anglo-Québécoise as she rises from the bottom of one of life's barrels into a blossoming awareness of herself and her environment, written largely in Quebec English.¹⁶

The theme of abandonment seems distinctly Québécois in *Something Drastic* since the villain of the plot is an Anglo version of a "vendu"¹⁷: the term frequently used to refer to Québécois who sold their property and left the province prior to the first referendum. Moreover, the average Anglo-Québécois is very likely to have experienced the departure of friends and loved ones in recent decades. In her first letter Lenore compiles a list of possible reasons her boyfriend, John Ferguson, (like the former "number 22 of *les Canadiens*") (30) has suddenly left Montreal for Florida. Possible reason number two was "You won't speak French."

But you will not be able to escape Possible Reason 2: Speaking French, because where do you think everybody from Quebec goes in the winter? There will be people speaking French all over the place and if you're in the Tourist Industry you will have to be nice to them, which you never were here. I hope you wind up working in Miami or Hollywood Beach after what you did to me. I hope you

difference of nuance in Davidson's description of the first North American novel, Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague*, as "both record and product of the coming into being of what will be Canada" (558) and Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkland's description of the same novel, in their introduction to *Stories of Quebec*, as the beginning of "the tradition of anglophone fiction set in Quebec" (5).

¹⁴The expression "lamb lobby" has come into currency in English Quebec to identify those English Quebecers who have adopted soft or passive or acquiescing attitudes toward Québécois nationalism and the minoritization of the English community. Conversely, the French equivalent of 'wolf lobby' (as in 'those who cry wolf') has gained some currency in the French Quebec media to identify English Quebecers in the public sphere who are viewed as strident, reactionary or simply hysterical.

¹⁵Weintraub is the author of the novel *Underdogs* (1979) which presents a dystopian vision of a repressive and financially bankrupt independent

Quebec. The precursor to this novel was likely Richard Rohmer's political thriller *Separation* (1976) which ends with a failed referendum vote "48.3%" in favour of Quebec's independence.

¹⁶"With increasing contact between the two languages, more and more French words—particularly those connected to provincial institutions, linguistic politics, and local life—have been assimilated into English, resulting in a new Canadian regional dialect: Quebec English." quoted in the *Oxford Guide to Canadian English Usage*. Ed. Margery Fee and Janice McAlpine. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1997.

¹⁷"Vendu" meaning sold appeared on many "for sale" signs on Quebec property following the election of the Parti Québécois government and prior to the first referendum. The double entendre is that "vendu" can also carry the sense of 'a sell out.'

¹⁸"a brioche," a French pastry

have to work in a store with customers who'll only speak French. And I hope they all find out you're nothing but a big Anglo separatist from Quebec. (13)

In contrast to Legault's image of the megalomaniac Anglo, Lenore is in a distinctly subaltern position in relation to Franco-Québécois culture and society. She tries to date Francophone police constable Benoit Archambault, makes friends with "separatist" neighbor, Reine Ducharme, by baby-sitting her dogs (Brioche¹⁸ and Montcalm¹⁹), and works at a cabaret style restaurant called *Festin du Bois*,²⁰ which features meat service by *les coureurs du bois*²¹ and entertainment by *les filles du roi*.²² Her big break comes when one of the singing waitresses defects to the *Maison Haunted*²³ and she is invited to audition to become one of *les filles du roi*. When she auditions Gaetan the restaurant manager tells her her voice is good but "my song was *trop donner les bleus*."²⁴ She prepares a bilingual version of her girl guide songs in order to be more Festin-ish which "meant something that celebrates nature or how much fun it is to be French Canadian"—and she gets the job (51).

The style of the novel is unabashedly kitsch. Lenore is a ceaseless collector of the tawdry and arcane, which of course overtakes the structure of novel as she sends her boyfriend macabre headlines clipped from the *Montreal Gazette* with each letter, describes the tacky Christmas napkins and cards she has purchased, and reveals her love for Doris Day movies, souvenir plates, and Expo 67 memorabilia. While Heidi tries to educate Lenore to a taste for Canadian and Feminist Literature, their friendship causes more of an educational exchange. Heidi eventually hires Lenore to give a lecture on Doris Day at Concordia and arranges for Lenore's home to be declared a museum. As one *Tour Book* describes it:

Musée d'art folklorique à Lenore/Lenore's Folk Art World:

...A kitschy , cluttered collection of taxidermied animals...gnomes and assorted creations *à la lawn* ornaments,...what may be the most extensive private collection of Expo 67 memorabilia in the world; Grottoes of the Stars;...

Not what you'd expect in this English bas-tion in the midst of New France. It's what the Québécois would deem "*trés kétéine*,"²⁵ *you'll deem it très fun*. (134)

Lenore's museum serves as a *mise-en-abyme* for the novel as a whole. In fact, its "thrown together" style, with its lists, and headlines, asyndetic references to fragments and details of news and folk/popular culture, notes, agendas and schedules, together with Lenore's open, magpie innocence make the novel an effective vehicle for documenting the multitude of influences which form this Anglo-Québécois world. The novel creates a veritable vortex gathering in Steven King, the Oprah Winfrey Show, soap operas and sitcoms, country and western music, can lit classics, fads and fashions, *People* magazine and *Macleans*, the McGarrigle Sisters, the Gulf War, Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, Brian Mulroney, Gille Vigneault and Robert Charlebois, and the fictional trial (echoing the O.J. Simpson case) of mass murderer Jean-Luc Clossé in which, to the incredulity and outrage of the public, he is acquitted by a jury which includes Lenore's neighbor, Reine Ducharme. In this process the novel demonstrates how Anglo-Québécois culture is formed, not through isolation and insulation but by being the site where a multitude of cultures—pop, American, Canadian, Québécois, feminist, academic and Irish—overlap.

Literary discourse in general and the form and style of *Something Drastic* in particular have important roles to play in the display of ethnic culture as the site of *metissage* and boundary crossings. Though Legault's analysis in *L'invention d'une minorité* is largely of political discourse, in a 1995 commentary in *Le Devoir*²⁶ Legault acknowledges the possibility for what she qualifies as an "anglo-montréalaise" culture:

...de nombreux anglophones demeurent prisonniers de leur refus d'une recherche imaginative et créatrice de leur identité et de leur appartenance à cette terre québécoise. Ils se replient sur leur solitude et leur crainte face à "l'autre" francophone. D'autant plus lorsque cet "autre" est nationaliste or souverainiste...

¹⁹name of the General who led the French forces and was killed on the Plains of Abraham, the decisive battle leading to the British conquest of New France

²⁰"A Woodland Feast" or "Banquet in the Woods" but also implies something like "Party Hard"

²¹French and Metis explorers in North America who generally travelled by canoe expanding the fur trade

²²women sent to New France to become pioneer brides

²³a Montreal restaurant with "haunted house" decor

²⁴word for word: "too much giving the blues"

²⁵very tacky and/or kitsch, but leaves open the possibility of being cute

²⁶a French-language Quebec daily with modest distribution, but generally considered culturally and politically significant: the paper of the intelligentsia

²⁷“many Anglophones remain prisoners of their refusal to imaginatively and creatively explore their identity and their connection to this Quebec land. They withdraw into their solitude and fear of the Francophone ‘other.’ All the more so when that ‘other’ is nationalist and sovereignist... Happily, there exists in Montreal a growing number of Anglophones who do not fear the adventure of this exploration. Whether one considers the theatre companies—Centaur, Bulldog Productions, Black Theatre Workshop and Theatre 1774—or the numerous authors, poets and composers, the desire to communicate and to create a distinct Anglo-Montreal culture is undeniable.”

²⁸*Québécois de souche* literally translates as being ‘from the stump’. The expression is usually translated as simply “old stock” but it implies that anyone so described can connect their family origins to the original pioneer inhabitants of New France. In daily usage anyone who might appear to be a native of Quebec and who is a native speaker of Quebec French will be loosely identified as *Québécois de souche*. *Pure laine* (pure

Heureusement, il existe à Montréal un nombre croissant d’anglophones qui ne craignent pas l’aventure que représente cette recherche. Que l’on songe aux companies de théâtre—Centaur, Bulldog Productions, Black Theatre Workshop et Theatre 1774—ou aux nombreux auteurs, poètes et compositeurs, la volonté de communiquer et de créer une culture anglo-montréalaise distincte est indéniable. (A6)²⁷

Legault’s choice of the regionalizing expression “anglo-montréalaise” over the broader notion of “anglo-québécoise” signals the grudging quality of her ostensibly generous vision. The expression Anglo-Québécois would doubtlessly be repudiated by many English-speaking Quebecers (not to mention Canadians) on the grounds that it inscribes acquiescence to Québécois nationalism. Québécois attachments to notions of cultural purity, signaled by such common expressions as *Québécois de souche* and *Québécois pure laine*²⁸ are also obstructions to an Anglo culture being recognized as Québécois.

However, in his book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, Neil Bissoondath who lives in Quebec and writes in English and who is described by Linda Hutcheon as “a self-proclaimed assimilated Canadian” (29), suggests a clear preference for Québécois ‘centeredness’. Bissoondath describes “English Canada...” as “adrift with no sense of its centre” whereas “Quebec [has] redefined its own centre, strengthened it, sought to make it unassailable” (196). The downside of an ‘unassailable centre’ became apparent on the night of the 95 referendum when then Premier Jacques Parizeau blamed the failure of the independence resolution on “l’argent et le vote ethnique.”²⁹ And Bissoondath’s attempts to attach himself to that center have proven problematic. In June of 1992, some eight months after the referendum, the theme of *Bouillon de culture*, the French television programme which presents round-table discussions of books and culture, was Quebec. When, near the end of the broadcast, host Bernard Pivot asked the panel, “Mais enfin, pouvez-vous me dire ce qu’est un Québécois?” Bissoondath took the initiative of responding: “Un Québécois, c’est

quelqu'un comme moi."³⁰ At a conference, in the spring of 97, on English literature and culture in Quebec, distinguished Québécois literary scholar Gilles Marcotte delivered a paper entitled "Neil Bissoondath disait..." (alluding to this segment of *Bouillon de culture*). In his presentation, Professor Marcotte was categorical that "Citoyen québécois, Neil Bissoondath n'est pas un écrivain québécois" on the basis that "Il n'existe évidemment pas telle chose qu'une littérature anglo-québécois..." (2).³¹

In *L'invention d'une minorité* Legault clearly attaches her argument to these categorical sentiments when, for example, she argues that "s'il est indéniable qu'un certain nombre d'anglophones résidaient bel et bien au Québec, on ne pouvait toutefois parler de l'existence d'une 'communauté' anglo-québécois"(58)³² laying emphasis (through her italics) on the word 'québécois.' As Legault makes plain the collective identity that *les anglais* are beginning to construct is, in her understanding, "'québécois,' dans le sens territorial et non cultural du terme" (58).³³ Ironically, Legault's claims sound like an apologia for the largely Anglo, Quebec "partitionist" movement.³⁴ They also require that we overlook what Eric Waddell describes as the significant contribution of the Irish, Scottish and Anglo-Saxon traditions "to defining the personality of the province" (167).

The impasse which these binary oppositions set up seem all the more insoluble in the face of the recent tendency to identify a "true Québécois" as a nationalist and sovereigntist, and an Anglo-Québécois as, almost by definition, an opponent of independence. Certainly, Curran's naive heroine in *Something Drastic* unquestioningly buys into this new version of the two-solitudes myth, as she presumes separation to be anathema. However, when she meets her neighbor Reine Ducharme, Lenore observes:

Madame Ducharme likes me because I'm bilingual and we always speak French.

...She's really one for justice. And for Separation! (But we always knew that.) Luckily the subject of Quebec never came up. Still, I had such a nice time with her it didn't matter she was a Separatist. (107, 108)

wool or 100% pure wool) is simply a more contemporary, colloquial version of the same idea. The obvious problem with these expressions is that, although they are typically used innocently and unconsciously, they inscribe a distinction between "real" Quebecers and "les autres" (another common Québécois expression). Though these expressions seem acceptable as the signifiers of a minority's pride, they take on a different tenor as the common discourse of a nation on the threshold of independence.

²⁹"money and the ethnic vote." Though the Premier resigned the next day, this remark continued to elicit concern, bewilderment and outrage. Mr. Parizeau is a graduate of the London School of Economics. In "Canada in Fiction," Arnold Davidson classifies the Premier's late wife, Alice (Poznanska) Parizeau, as an "ethnic novelist" (574).

³⁰"But finally, can you tell me what is a Québécois?" "A Québécois is someone like me." This is hardly the first time the question has been asked. See, for example, Robert Vachon and Jacques Langlais' *Qui est Québécois* in which the authors conclude: "Nul

d'entre nous n'est vraiment Québécois. Nous somme tous et chacun des Québécois en voie de le devenir" (151). ["No-one among us is really Québécois. We are each and every one of us Québécois in the process of becoming."]

³¹"A Quebec citizen, Neil Bissoondath is not a Québécois writer..."
 "There is clearly no such thing as an Anglo-Québécois literature..."

³²"though it is undeniable that a certain number of Anglophones do indeed reside in Quebec, one cannot, however, speak of the existence of an Anglo-Québécois 'community.'"

³³"'québécois' in the territorial and not the cultural sense of the term"

³⁴The "partitionist movement" typically traces its roots to Pierre Trudeau's declaration that "If Canada is divisible, then Quebec is divisible." One of the effects of the last referendum was to clearly identify those (ethnic/anglo) regions which were strongly against independence. Certain municipalities have

Something Drastic signals the writer discovering or attempting to discover herself as an Anglo-Québécoise for the first time. In fact, nothing in Curran's 12 published plays between 1981 and 1995 gives any suggestion that she is and has all her life been an English Quebecer. The typical setting of a Curran play is small town Ontario, though she has set one-act plays in Acapulco and cottage country in New England. Curran has been described as a "tradition" at the Blyth festival in Blyth, Ontario, where most of her plays have been produced.

Lenore's self-proclaimed orphan-hood (she is a fully independent adult but her parents have died before the novel opens), together with her recent abandonment, make her a distinctly disconnected, *tabula rasa* character, and therefore all the more prepared as an empty vessel to be filled with the distinctly Anglo-Québécois mix of cultures she experiences. Lenore's friend, Heidi Mavornneen Flynn, for example, is passionate about her Irish ethnic roots. Heidi practices Ceili dancing, listens to Chieftain's music, talks of her fighting Irish father and brothers, and celebrates St. Patrick's Day with devotion. Lenore absorbs this Irish essence like an Anglo-Québécois cultural sponge.

Curran's upholding of Irish ethnicity, which has also been undertaken by playwrights David Fennario and Marianne Ackerman, becomes all the more striking when juxtaposed to Legault's attempt to reinforce the ethnic line from the conquerors to the modern day English population of Quebec. Using a 1976 survey carried out by the now defunct *Montreal Star*, Legault persists in attempting to carry forward a mythical connection between "les conquérants," "les britannique de souche," the modern Anglo-Québécois minority and resistance to the French language:

Selon un sondage effectué par le *Montreal Star* en 1976, seulement 20% des Québécois anglophones travaillait uniquement en français, et la majorité de ces 20% était d'ailleurs d'origines autres que britannique. En fait, la quasi-totalité des travailleurs de souche britannique travaillait encore dans leur langue. (45)³⁵

Although one may detect incredulity in Legault's dis-

course here, a brief perusal of the relevant statistics will confirm that her tone is, at best, feigned. In the first place it is universally acknowledged that bilingualism among Anglophones has increased dramatically since 1976 and has outstripped bilingualism among Francophones. There are generally considered to be 800 or 900 thousand Anglophones in Quebec. The numbers are “soft” because they are made up of native speakers of English and native speakers of other languages who live and work in English. According to the 1991 census 599,145 residents of Quebec identified themselves as native speakers of English. However, in the same census year only 159,260 Quebecers identified themselves as English in terms of ethnic origin. Welsh is not given its own category as a language or an ethnic origin in the Canadian census statistics for Quebec. Including the Scottish (a questionable move according to my Scottish friends) in Legault’s category of “britannique de souche” we arrive with a population figure of just over 200,000. In other words Legault’s “britannique de souche” make up, at most, about a quarter of the Anglo-Québécois community.

Are we to be amazed that in 1976 the majority of Anglophones in Quebec used some English in their work? Our incredulity (and hers) should be erased when we take into account Legault’s own statistic that 75% of Quebec Anglos are in the Montreal region together with her claim that “Il faut vivre sur une autre planète pour croire que Montréal, par exemple, sera un jour unilingue française”³⁶ (48).

Statistically, Quebecers who claim English as an ethnic origin are significantly outnumbered by Italians (by almost 10%). 82,790 Quebecers identified themselves as being of Irish origin in the 91 census. It is these Irish cultural roots which Curran’s novel tends to emphasize. To underline the point, Lenore’s arch enemy in the novel is her Anglo neighbor Jemima Farnham whom she describes as “formerly of England, a Monarchist and an Anglo Supremacist” (157).

What the novel outlines to us is that being an Anglo-Québécoise means, for example, the polyphonous experience of travelling by “*Métro*” (subway) going to the “*Com-*

attempted to pass resolutions indicating their determination to remain a part of Canada should Quebec secede.

³⁵“According to a survey undertaken by the *Montreal Star* in 1976, only 20% of Quebec Anglophones worked exclusively in French, and the majority of this 20% was from origins other than British. In effect, nearly all the workers of British origin still worked in their own language.”

³⁶“You would have to live on another planet to believe that Montreal will one day be unilingually French.”

³⁷On December 6, 1989 an anti-feminist gunman killed 14 women at *l'École Polytechnique* of the *Université de Montréal*

plex Sportif" (sports centre) at the *Université de Montréal* with a celtophile, Anglo professor of Canadian literature to attend a Bonnie Raitt concert and stopping to leave flowers at the memorial for the *Polytechnique* massacre.³⁷ It means arranging a date with a Francophone police officer to see either *Les Expos* or *Les Canadiens* and thinking "He'll probably take me to Ben's for Smoked Meat. (That's probably what he thinks all the Anglos go for)" (141).

Although bilingualism may not have much purchase in French Quebec these days, in the novel it remains the center of an Anglo utopic ideal. Lenore waxes sentimentally:

The other day that musical, *Les Misérables*, opened here in French and in English. The same cast is doing the show, one time it's all in French, another time it's in English. That is so amazing, it's so bilingual and so hopeful or something. For our city. It's the first time its been done like that, it's all Montreal people in it. And it's professional like the ones in Toronto and New York.

And as if to confirm that her bilingualism, whose icon is a French classic, Anglosized, Americanized and presented in Quebec in French and English, is not an anglocentric strategy, Lenore continues: "That makes me think of the Gulf Desert Storm War, because the bad guys speak English. I've seen them on the news. In the other wars, it was always people who didn't speak our language, but this time they do" (32).

Being Anglo-Québécois means celebrating St. Patrick's Day at a restaurant called *Festin du Bois* where you, the Anglo, have introduced the clientele to a new house wine from a Quebec vinyard, and being able to observe that "the fact that it's Québécois has the *pure-laines* pretty *heureux*" (69).

Being Anglo-Québécois means observing on New Year's Eve that "if we were politically correct anglophone Quebec Canadians we'd watch *ByeBye*, that French comedy show looking back at the year, and we'd pretend we understood all the in jokes" (25).

As the novel so copiously displays, being Anglo-Québécois also means speaking a version of English which

accommodates such signifiers as “*joual*,”³⁸ “*dépanneur*,”³⁹ “*réveillon*,”⁴⁰ “*pure laine*,” “*kétaine*,” “*flyé*”⁴¹ and “*boite a chanson*”⁴² as well as a host of standard French expressions and institutional and commercial names.

Is there a political allegory to detect in the conclusion of the novel? Perhaps even asking the question is heavy-handed given the author’s claims to being apolitical. But Reine Ducharme was captured trying to poison the other jurors with whom she had hastily acquitted Jean-Luc Clossé. There seems to be something here about the Franco-Québécois making rash and hasty decisions which they later regret. Heidi resists marrying into an American family. There seems to be some subtext here, despite Lenore’s appetite for American pop culture, about resisting American domination. These are, after all, also English Canadian narratives.

Feeble political correctness, tokenism and speaking *franglais* will not move the political agenda in Quebec. But, through the process of the novel, Lenore has become evermore clearly and fully what she was in the beginning: an Anglo-Québécoise. Her case invites us to begin seeing the hyphen between *anglo* and *québécois*, and all such hyphens, not as separations but as possibilities, as “*trait d’union*,” ‘a pulling together’. It is a sentimental notion, not a solution, but Legault also concludes her study by giving stern counsel on the need for compromise. Perhaps what the Anglo-Québécois case best demonstrates is what philosopher Charles Taylor, himself an English Quebecer who has upheld Quebec’s right to defend its collective cultural interests,⁴³ calls the need for “‘deep diversity,’ in which a plurality of ways of belonging would also be acknowledged and accepted” (183). In fact there are no immediate, viable options other than the ongoing need for invention.

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³⁸slang term for the popular language of Quebec. It derives from a claim that Quebecers pronounced the French word for ‘horse’ as ‘joual’ rather than ‘cheval.’ Joual has become an object of some pride in Quebec, particularly as its poetic qualities are displayed by Michel Tremblay, Quebec’s master playwright and novelist.

³⁹“small grocery store or corner store”

⁴⁰traditional all-night family party

⁴¹adjective for light-headed or spirited or wild behaviour or character

⁴²night club featuring French folk singers and, often, sing alongs

⁴³For example, in *Reconciling the Differences*, Taylor writes: “...there is something exaggerated, a dangerous overlooking of an essential boundary, in speaking of fundamental rights to such things as commercial signage in the language of one’s choice. One has to distinguish between, on the one hand, the fundamental

liberties...and, on the other hand, the privileges and immunities which are important but can be revoked for reasons of public policy..." (176-7).

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