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### THE EXILIC TEENS: ON THE INTRACULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN WAJDI MOUAWAD'S THEATRE

In his critique of intercultural ideology and practice in theatre, Rustom Bharucha proposes an alternative concept, *intraculturalism*, which describes the dynamics of the interaction between various cultural contexts within a single nation or a theatre production. When applied to the discussion of exilic identity, the dynamic of the intracultural takes on a different meaning: it identifies the exilic self as a territory of multiple, unmarked discourses, the discourses that are still waiting to be recognized, acknowledged, and brought into coherent dialogue with each other. Secondly, Bharucha extends his notion of the intracultural to describe the art of the theatrical *mise en scène* as the process of creating a multivocal performance discourse that still must be acknowledged as a homogeneous utterance. In theatre, this homogeneity of multiple discourses originates within three spheres: the stage, between stage and audience, and within the audience itself. In the theatre of exilic artists, this intricate *mise en scène* is also defined by the dynamic of the intracultural encounters that simultaneously appear at the levels of the creator's exilic identity and that of his/her exilic art. The dramatic texts and productions of Lebanese-Québécois artist Wajdi Mouawad are examples of personal, dramatic, and theatrical intraculturalism that form the basis for this phenomenon, and thus are the focus points chosen for this study.

*Dans sa critique de l'idéologie interculturelle et de sa pratique théâtrale, Rustom Bharucha propose le concept d'intraculturalisme pour décrire la dynamique de l'interaction entre divers contextes culturels au sein d'une nation ou d'une production théâtrale. Lorsqu'on l'applique aux échanges sur l'identité de l'exilé, la dynamique du concept d'intraculturel prend un tout autre sens : elle montre que le soi exilé est le lieu de discours multiples et non marqués qui attendent encore d'être reconnus et d'entrer en dialogue cohérent l'un avec l'autre. Bharucha donne un sens plus large à la notion d'intraculturel pour décrire l'art de la mise en scène théâtrale en tant que processus qui permet de créer sur scène un discours à plusieurs voix, un discours qu'il faut tout de même reconnaître en tant qu'énonciation homogène. Au théâtre, cette homogénéité des discours a trois sources : le discours sur scène, l'échange entre la scène et le public et les échanges*

parmi les membres du public. Dans le théâtre des artistes de l'exil, cette mise en scène complexe est également marquée par la dynamique des rencontres intraculturelles qui apparaissent simultanément dans l'identité du créateur de l'exil et dans son art. Les textes et les productions dramatiques de l'artiste libano-québécois Wajdi Mouawad illustrent bien l'intraculturel de l'expérience personnelle, dramatique et théâtrale qui forment la base de ce phénomène; c'est pourquoi Meerzon a choisi d'en faire le point focal de son étude.



Les enfants ont tous peur de la même chose—on a tous peur de la sorcière quand on est petit ; et moi j'avais peur de la sorcière, et lui, [...] la nuit, si jamais il se réveille pour aller boire un verre d'eau, puisqu'il est obligé de le traverser, ce foutu corridor, avant d'atteindre la lumière. J'ai l'impression, parfois, que tout ce que j'écris part de ce fameux corridor. (Mouawad, qtd. in Côté 80)

In his critique of intercultural ideology and practice in theatre, Rustom Bharucha proposes an alternative concept, *intraculturalism*, which describes the dynamics of the interaction between various cultural contexts within a single nation or theatre production. As Bharucha suggests, the challenges of intracultural encounters within a single geopolitical entity are “almost invisible, concealed behind ‘common’ codes of behaviour and language” (“Under” 128). Although Bharucha conceives the idea of intraculturalism as strictly territorial and geopolitical, I believe it can be applied to the discussion of *the exilic self* as a temporal and psychophysical venue where cultural contexts intersect. When applied to the discussion of exilic identity, the dynamic of the intracultural takes on a different meaning: it identifies the exilic self as a territory of multiple, unmarked discourses, the discourses that are still waiting to be recognized, acknowledged, and brought into coherent dialogue with each other. As Bharucha writes, intraculturalism is “more than a two-way street between ‘target’ and ‘source’ cultures—it is a meeting point and exposure of differences within seemingly homogenized identities and groups” (“Under” 128). Consequently, the expansion of the scope and application of the concept *intracultural* to the processes experienced and enacted by exilic artists (the children of exile), and its relevance to their identity formation helps to better understand the themes, images, and linguistic and dramatic structures employed in their works.

Secondly, Bharucha extends his notion of the intracultural to

describe the art of the theatrical *mise en scène*. As he argues, “in a utopic dimension, it is possible to envision the world of theatre as a multitude of *sangams*, multiple meeting points” (“Negotiating” 31). Thus, if in the geo-political context, *the dynamic of the intracultural* identifies a creative dialogue between various cultural traditions simultaneously co-existing within a single geographical locale, in the context of theatre the dynamic of the intracultural can be recognized as the process of creating a multivocal *mise en scène*. As Bharucha writes, “we need to keep in mind that before differences can be dissolved, they need to be acknowledged” (“Negotiating” 31); before we consider a *mise en scène* as a phenomenon of multiple discourses, it should be acknowledged as a homogeneous utterance that resonates with the complexities of a single artistic voice.

In theatre, this homogeneity of multiple discourses originates within three communicative and performative spheres: first, the stage; secondly, between stage and audience; and thirdly, within the audience itself. In the theatre of exilic artists, this intricate *mise en scène* is also defined by the dynamic of the intracultural encounters that simultaneously appear at the levels of the creator’s exilic identity and those of his/her exilic art. The dramatic texts and productions of Lebanese-Québécois artist Wajdi Mouawad are examples of personal, dramatic, and theatrical intraculturalism that form the basis for this phenomenon, and thus are the examples chosen for this study.

Wajdi Mouawad, as one of the adult exilic children, is not only a product of intracultural exchange himself but also the author of adolescent characters who constantly face the outcomes of the intracultural dilemmas that they live within. This article addresses issues of the dynamic of the intracultural as they are presented within the fictional territory of Mouawad’s plays and performances, as well as his personal experience, as documented in the artist’s works and public statements. It questions how Mouawad’s protagonists, typical children of exile, “perform the hyphen,” and how this performance works across different ethnocultural communities in Canada when it appears in Francophone or Anglophone contexts. Finally, the article looks at the dynamics of the intracultural as indeed similar to the processes of *creolization* and adaptation as theorized by Rinaldo Walcott.<sup>1</sup> This study asks how the hybrid subjectivities of exilic children are formed and performed, and what kind of cultural, collective, and individual memories inform the journeys of Mouawad’s characters.

Although there are a number of studies dedicated to similar

issues in Mouawad's works (Denance; Lépine; Godin), I believe their complexity is yet to be recognized, since the experience of exilic children consists not only of war and refugee trauma (Moss, "Drama"), or the collective past they have acquired (Grutman and Ghadie), but more significantly the struggles they face in their present. Exilic children are bound simultaneously to acknowledge and escape their origins, and perhaps even more seriously to refuse deliberately to accept them. Hence, my argument unfolds in three parts: first it looks at the condition of the intracultural as the life-frame for exilic children within the boundaries of Mouawad's personal experience, then at his dramaturgy, and finally at his *mise en scène*.

### **On the dynamic of the intracultural and exilic children**

Before I proceed to examine Wajdi Mouawad's works as instances of intracultural encounter, I would like briefly to outline Bharucha's views on the dynamic of the intracultural as a theoretical framework useful for the discussion of the complex intertextuality pertinent to the works of exilic theatre makers. In his study of India's multiculturalism, Bharucha uses the concept of *intracultural* and the idea of a seemingly homogeneous identity to describe the interdependency of different tribes living side-by-side in a single territory within a nation. In his 1997 article, "Negotiating the 'River': Intercultural Interactions and Interventions," Bharucha proposes a new vision of the intercultural dynamic—the *dynamic of the intracultural*—as a site for heterogeneity, a positioning of relationships among several cultural traditions that can co-exist in a single geographical locale, within the seemingly homogenized milieu. As he states,

in our search for 'other cultures' we often forget the cultures within our own boundaries, the differences which are marginalized and occasionally silenced in our imagined homogeneities. We also tend to valorize our own metaphors of 'culture,' ignoring its multiple resonances to different communities. (31)

Studying the intracultural encounters within the territory of one nation, India, Bharucha highlights the processes of translation, interpretation, and communication at "subtextual levels" and negotiates meaning as an indicator of the "intricate cultural imbalances" (33) that characterize relationships between cultures that coexist in one politically and economically bound and bordered

geographical locale. Thus, according to Bharucha, within the geopolitical discourse of a single state, the phenomenon of the intracultural indicates “those exchanges within, between, and across the regions in the larger framework of a nation” (31).

However, Bharucha possesses a critical view of the dynamic of the intracultural in the context of India’s geography and economy today, which he sees as imbalanced. As he writes, today’s India is increasingly subjected to intercultural encounters—thanks to the dispersion of the devices of mass communication and home entertainment, such as radio or television (“Negotiating” 33). Furthermore, due to insufficient economic infrastructures, which limit the number and intensity of historically enriching encounters between tribes, and because of unlimited access to the products of American entertainment, India in Bharucha’s opinion has begun to lose its originality. Historically situated as a territory of multi-cultural and multilingual encounters, today’s India is losing its inner connections, specifically the connections between tribes within a single state:

From a Himalayan perspective, it could be said that we’re living in India with prodigious cultural resources in diverse contexts—tribal, rural, “folk,” ritual—with oral narrative epic traditions in almost every part of the country. There is not one Mahabharata in India, but several Mahabharatas, sharply differentiated through context and idiom. (“Negotiating” 33-34)

Consequently, Indian intraculturalism as the country’s differentiating phenomenon is diminished today. It less and less informs the complexity of creative exchanges within the country, and thus the artifacts produced in India lose in their originality:

The reality is that we are living in ignorance of our cultural resources, in the absence of channels of communication within, between, and across regions. [...] In the process, not only are we becoming strangers to our neighbors, we are also becoming strangers to ourselves, as the global dominates the local. (33-34)

This seeming disappearance of inner borders and cutting edges within the country’s cultural exchange, as well as the increased self-ignorance of the country’s diversity and creative potential has been Bharucha’s primary concern. Maintaining continuity in this state of difference is in Bharucha’s view India’s

way to preserve its traditions and bolster its uniqueness.

Similarly, preserving home traditions by simultaneously fostering individual creativity is the exilic artist's way to survive physically and endure artistically in a new land. Artists brought to this country by their parents—first generation Canadians and exilic children—can be seen as representatives of Bharucha's *intra-cultural dynamic*. The products of the Canadian *habitus*, these artists exemplify the intracultural condition in their quotidian and artistic languages, behavioural codes, and artistic expression. They encounter complex identity problems pertaining to the experience of their parents and their own, as citizens of their adopted/native country and as members of the diaspora. While well integrated into the culture of their childhood, exilic children remain a "foreign element" (Bharucha, "Under" 128). As the subjects of *creolization*, they tend to "interact through [their] difference, constituted as it is through [their] own social and cultural specificities, angularities, quirks, imperfections, and limitations" (128). In their art, exilic children express the state of creolization as the tendency for flexibility and easy movement between separate cultural, ethnic, and communal entities, as well as the need for continuity and preservation of the inherited-from-home traditions.

### **Exilic children—the territory of self**

Exile is predominantly an experience of translation and adaptation shaped by cultural and linguistic challenges an emigrant meets in a new land. An exile in her artistic expressions mixes languages, historical traditions, and cultural referents, and thus through the device of ironic distancing builds a new identity. An exile, both in her everyday and artistic lives, strives to acquire the "homogenized identity" identified by Bharucha, while realizing, however, that total amalgamation is impossible. Instead, immigrants hope for their children to integrate completely into a new world, regardless of their ethnicity, native language, or cultural traditions (even ones still eagerly maintained in their homes). Consequently, exilic children are forced to live through the ambiguity of "in-betweenness." They find themselves on the fringe between the culture of the dominant and the diaspora, between the temporal linearity of the nation and the circular continuum of the inherited "home" culture.<sup>2</sup>

As Habermas writes, the cultures of children-expatriates exemplify the non-linearity of their displacement and delocalization (131). Living through the processes of negotiation of meaning

or the phenomenon of *difference*, exilic children become double refugees, “the other” not only to the culture of the dominant but also to that of the newcomers. By mingling with the population of the *polis*, these children break the linguistic and cultural barriers they are made to face by their dual home cultures. They enter the space of heteroglossia<sup>3</sup> and carry out a multivocal dialogue sitting on the fence between the two worlds. They rebel against the conventions of both discourses: they want to be identified neither as diasporic subjects nor as marginalized, colonized, or displaced people.

The *third space of enunciation* (Bhabha 37)<sup>4</sup> becomes the space of exilic children’s habitat—unstable, brutal, and estranged. Una Chaudhuri calls this phenomenon the *difference within* (199): it characterizes the everyday experience of immigrant children looking for their cultural and social niche, desperately seeking to be, if not “popular,” then at least accepted by their friends and classmates. This desperation to be a part of the community presents itself in the adolescents’ behaviour, immigrant or not, and is much more vigorous for children-exiles or those born into the families of expatriates. These children are marked as being *other*; they suffer for the cause of their parents, very often having nothing to do with the political or ideological standpoint of the family. Finally, they are made to “fully share both [their parents’] marginalization and their innocence” (Chaudhuri 199).<sup>5</sup> Hence, to overcome the challenge of the disjointed *Weltanschauung*<sup>6</sup> they possess, exilic children turn to creative self-expression. The constant need for adjustment—cultural, political, and generational—makes them embrace the practice of storytelling.

Born in Lebanon in 1968, Wajdi Mouawad belongs to the generation of Lebanese artists/exiles/nomads who had to flee their country during the civil war of the 1970s and seek refuge in the West. Mouawad’s exile is, however, more complex: he was first to experience the pangs of nostalgia and displacement at the age of eleven when the family relocated to Paris, and again at the age of fourteen when they moved to Montreal.<sup>7</sup> This early exposure to the adult world of double standards made its discernible imprints on the language, devices, and themes of this exilic author. As he testifies, his second *émigration* made his adolescence more vulnerable and lonely:

Une fois arrivé à Montréal, je me suis refusé à toute métamorphose. J’étais cancrelat. [...] Je n’ai donc pas perdu l’accent, je n’ai pas cherché à effacer l’étrangeté, au contraire, je

l'ai exacerbée, parfois par mépris, parfois par fierté, parfois par orgueil, parfois par défense; bref, à travers toute la gamme des sentiments que vit un adolescent de 14 ans rencontrant d'autres adolescents, qui se moquent de lui à cause de son accent, et lui d'eux à cause de leur accent. (qtd. in Côté 84)

Thus, perpetual homelessness, the necessity to recognize and embrace the scenario of the wandering Jew as the only life path, and the seductiveness of suicide are typical topics of the exilic adolescence that mark Mouawad's philosophy and dramatic conflicts. His protagonists are eternal teenagers (whether they belong to this age group or not), trying to reconcile their past with their present, their experience as young Québécois equated with that of refugees from a faraway country.

Despite the curious absence of postcolonial discourse in French language academic inquiry into recent Québécois drama, it is important to mention that the presence and ever-growing visibility of francophone immigrants in the "nation" of Quebec has contributed to important changes in regards to how North America's most important French-speaking society views itself, not to mention how it is perceived from the outside. Until recently, French-English binary oppositions, a concept typically linked to Franz Fanon's study of the "colonizer-colonized" dichotomy, have informed Québécois drama and theatre. It is in the political and cultural context of the now well-known Bill 101, adopted in 1977 by Quebec's National Assembly—a law that required all immigrants to learn French and immigrant children to attend French language schools—that the place of the artist-immigrant was reconsidered by Quebec's artistic community. As a consequence, during the 1980s Québécois literature and drama redefined themselves, in part through the recognition and exploration of a "multi[-]ethnic Quebec," and in particular, in "the reality of a Montreal that, in fact, had long been characterized by immigration and hybridity" (Green 13). Simultaneously and not surprisingly, during this same period Québécois history was being "transformed from a single narrative thread, the heroic survival of a handful of French settlers, into a fabric woven from multiple migrations" (Green 17). The works of certain Québécois artists of foreign origin are representative of this context, in as much as their plays are, discursively speaking, heteroglossic, a phenomenon that characterizes their narratives both in terms of storytelling and linguistic expression. These works add significantly to the chorus

of political and literary voices that have since contributed to redefining Québécois identity as a whole:

This expanded vision of Québécois identity is evident in the writings of many immigrants and second-generation descendants of immigrants who now actively claim their place in Quebec and its literature. This [...] is characteristic of the period since 1985, when writing by immigrants, la littérature migrante, has actively transformed the system of Québécois literature itself, and, within it the concept of Québécois identity. (Green 17)

Accordingly, the ambiguity of exilic homelessness, the expatriate's non-belonging to any place, whether in the past or present, becomes the central issue to comprehend, accept, and communicate in Mouawad's artistic projects. His personal recognition of this eternal uncertainty is manifested in the artist's willingness to explore his own multilingual and intracultural capacity. His ability to function in Arabic, French, and English and the elusiveness of his territorial belonging (he lives and works between two countries now, Canada and France) constitute the phenomenon of the *intra-cultural self*:

Les Québécois me demandent si je suis Libanais, les Libanais me demandent si je suis Français et les Français me demandent si je suis Libanais ou Québécois. Et moi, je ne vois pas l'utilité de tout cela. Comme s'il ne s'agissait pas de moi, mais de quelqu'un d'autre que moi, un autre qui me ressemble beaucoup, qui a mon nom et mon âge et qui, par le plus grand des hasards, vit dans ma peau. Simplement, parfois, il me prend l'envie de pleurer. Parce que le hasard est trop violent. (Mouawad, qtd. in Côté 145)

Thus, Mouawad's theatre is predominantly dedicated to the investigation of identity formation in flux. As a playwright of exilic background, Mouawad is concerned with the particularities of these mechanisms: the act of birth and the material and physiological ties that connect one to one's origins are in the spotlight in his dramatic texts. Shaken by the tragic circumstances of their birth, many of his characters appear on stage undefined socially, culturally, linguistically, and even in relation to gender.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, Mouawad is politically alert. His writings bear overtones of Brecht's political protest and serve as a voice of freedom for the community. His plays are infused by the political

and social context of Lebanon, his native country. The themes of war, death, the quest for home, and the search for identity provide the fundamental bases of his writings. For Mouawad, Lebanon remains the country of childhood, lost in pieces that theatre is called upon to restore by bringing peace to one's memory. Hence, in his plays, the Lebanese Civil War<sup>9</sup> becomes a pretext to talk about the experiences of collective tragedy and trauma, and its consequences for children, whether exilic or not. As he admits, the Lebanese Civil War, "a condition of horror for any type of human experience" (Mouawad, "Wadj") serves in his plays as a lens through which one can better see today's history. Moreover, the impressions and traumas of his own childhood become the major themes for Mouawad to investigate in his plays and through the journey of his protagonists: "les choses ont bien changé depuis l'enfance, et l'enfance, oui, est devenue un couteau planté dans la gorge" (qtd. in Côté 145).

A product of the French education system and the National Theatre School of Canada, Mouawad remains sensitive to how his persona and his plays are perceived in Canada and beyond, in the times of a new Lebanese crisis (summer 2006). When asked by the correspondent of the Lebanese cultural organization in Paris what in his opinion the exilic author can do in order to help his country when he lives in the West, Mouawad responds that it is freedom of speech that is his political weapon. A political dissident living in the West is indebted to the country of his origin. He can help his culture to struggle with its taboos by speaking openly about its problems, something that the people of Lebanon cannot really accomplish on their own (Mouawad, "Wajdi"). As Mouawad admits in the Playwright's Notes to the 2007 staging of *Incendies* [*Scorched - in English - YM*],

No doubt *Incendies* will make you think of what happened in Lebanon this past summer [the Israeli bombings of Lebanon, July 2006], you might be tempted [...] to consider the show you are about to see through the prism of the events which have torn my native country apart. You might be tempted to justify the reasons for the writing of this play by these events. [...] All of this is possible. None of this is untrue, but it is, if you allow me, incomplete. This is a reasoning which takes into consideration the personal (the author is Lebanese), the private (he and his family have survived a war), the social (he had to flee the country and become an exile), and the psychological (it must have traumatized him). But this reasoning is incomplete because it

does not take into consideration the most important thing (because it is the most mysterious): the transparency of ceilings. (Mouawad, "Playwright's")

"The transparency of ceilings" is the playwright's metaphor for describing the spiritual journey he is undertaking every time he is about to create a new fictional world. The transparent ceiling is his door into the philosophical and spiritual beyond where the metaphysical, the joyful, the tragic, and the transcendental meet.

### **Exilic children—a fictional territory**

After his studies at the National Theatre School of Canada, Mouawad co-founded *Théâtre Ô Parleur*, where he produced *Littoral* (1997), the first part of his dramatic tetralogy in-progress, *Ciels*. From 2000 to 2004, he was an artistic director of the *Théâtre de Quat'Sous* in Montreal, where *Incendies*, the second part of the tetralogy, was staged in the spring of 2004.<sup>10</sup> Written in Paris in 2003, this play presents a modern tragedy unfolding against the background of contemporary civil war. It tells the story of torture and silence, and presents the journey of a brother and a sister in a quest to carry out the wishes of their late mother. The third part of the project, *Forêts*, features a teenage protagonist, the young Québécois Loup, in search for truth of her family's past. This play was rehearsed and presented in 2006 in France, and in winter 2007 toured Montreal, Quebec City, and Ottawa.<sup>11</sup>

The plays of this tetralogy are marked by the playwright's ambitious desire to tell anew the fundamental texts of Western theatrical mythology, from the *House of Atreus* to the Oedipus myths. The three plays feature as protagonists Mouawad's versions of Orestes and Electra, Antigone and Oedipus, all of whom make the major decision of embarking on the journey home, to the real or imaginary homeland of their ancestors. In every play, therefore, the protagonists are exilic adolescents (whether they are aware of this fact or not) who are to discover some hidden secrets of their origins on their way back to the concealed past. Wilfrid, the leading character of *Littoral*, is subjected to his family's hate since his birth, the cause of his mother's death. Growing up as an orphan, with his father cut off from his own son, Wilfrid becomes the unwilling attorney and executor of the latter's last wishes: to be buried in the land of his ancestors. Janine and Simon, the twin brother and sister protagonists of *Incendies*, are on a similar journey. After their mother's death, the twins are to find their father and brother, and to discover the cause of their mother's detachment toward them as

well as the reason for her last years of silence. They are to uncover the horrible truth of their birth: their father is their brother, the rapist torturer whom fate has chosen as their parent. In *Incendies* Janine and Simon must complete the visibility graph of their family's *polygone*, a mathematical metaphor through which Janine searches for her origins and attempts to solve the riddle of her mother's silence (*Incendies* 20). The third part of the tetralogy, *Forêts*, like the previous two, features a Québécois teenager: Loup must discover the cause of her mother's brain anomaly and so uncover the genealogy of her own origins. Loup embarks on the journey, which takes both the character and the audience through the milestones of twentieth-century European history including the terrors of its wars, ethnic genocide, and Holocaust trauma. In these plays the voyages of exilic children reveal people familiar with a dual-home phenomenon: those of childhood and adulthood. The characters are subjected to living through the potency of the unknown, the moment of unpredictability, but they wilfully seek continuity with their past, even though it involves marginality.

In her study *Mixed Race, Post-Race: Gender, New Ethnicities and Cultural Practices*, Suki Ali describes storytelling as one of the habitual forms of communication both within the diasporic community and between the culture of the host and that of the minority. Narrative functions as one of the devices of self-expression and identity maintenance available for exiles. It is a form of overgrowing and overcoming the experience of a dual, triple, or multiple split. Thus, a writer in exile acquires not only the function of a storyteller, one called to entertain a community, but also an ethical function as the representative of a collective conscience, someone responsible for the diasporic past and future, the way it must be preserved and transmitted to new generations. The storyteller is responsible for the ethical rather than the political or aesthetic lessons she is to teach her flock through a variety of appropriate stories. Furthermore, to reestablish her lost ties with the homeland, an exile composes a new narrative: the narrative of self as well as the narrative of her new space and time. Ali notes that it is the history of a family, its myths and legends that construct for the exilic children their identity and their sense of national belonging. For the majority of émigré children,

The domestic space of the home, at the level of the household, is the site for the contestation of global versus local understandings of histories. In order to understand the way that the children frame 'home' within their identifications

we must consider the crucial impact family narratives, as well as family structures, have on these ideas. [...] It is often these narratives that mediate the disjuncture of time and space in national and 'racial' histories for the children. (125)

Typically, Wajdi Mouawad chooses dramatic storytelling as a major form of his artistic communication. Family stories become for his characters territory in which to discover their true identity and at the same time provide them with a sense of national belonging. These territories enable Wilfrid (*Littoral*), Janine and Simon (*Incendies*), and Loup (*Forêts*) to choose between the ideals of their mothers and those of their friends, compelling them to stay alive in the in-between spaces, times, and stories.<sup>12</sup> It is rather through the act of mourning<sup>13</sup> that the exilic children experience reconciliation with their own selves: a settlement of different universes and the final arrival to a deserved closure, the sense of belonging and complete self. Consequently, issues of memory, history, and survival, together with the problems of living through past traumas and finding a way for creatively defining present and future, perpetually reappear in Mouawad's dramatic and performative texts. This indeterminacy and suspected but previously under-defined grief causes Mouawad's teenagers a lack of self-irony and self-distance. They take their troubles too seriously; they are always poised for an explosion of emotion. Their reactions to the challenges of the world are immature: forever in self-doubt, these adolescents are afraid both of their past and their present.

As Mouawad himself admits, he has always suffered from being "Other" (qtd. in Côté 44). He has recognized and accepted those sad privileges and downfalls that exile provided him with. He eventually embraced the sense of guilt without being guilty and the doom of taking punishment without committing any crime that, as Una Chaudhuri suggests (199), overwhelms the life of the exilic child. In the end, Mouawad made this condition his personal artistic quality, which today enriches his voice and teaches his audience various forms of humanity.<sup>14</sup> As he says in his interviews,

Je crois être devenu un peu méfiant avec l'idée de vouloir « changer les choses ». Mes parents ont changé deux fois de pays, nous entraînant avec eux, mon frère, ma sœur et moi. Sur certains points, ce fut une bonne décision et sur d'autres, non. Pour moi, ce qui importe, c'est que la réalité de la situation soit posée clairement. Tenter de ne pas me raconter d'histoires, de ne pas me faire d'illusions. (qtd. in Côté 43-44)

This seems to be the most visible in *Forêts*. Loup is a typical “child of exile” character: she is confused, suicidal, deprived of home and family ties. Loup’s educational and metaphysical voyage is constructed on the principles of the *Bildungsroman*. As the lyrical *I* of her creator (as are the majority of Mouawad’s protagonists), Loup is to live through both the collective fears and memories of the society she grew up in—today’s Quebec—and the individual concerns and hopes pertaining to her position—a child with an exilic lineage, a descendant of a Jewish family that participated in the Second World War’s French resistance.

Loup, perhaps more than any other of Mouawad’s characters, presents an example of the *intracultural self*: she belongs to the generation of neo-Québécois, the trans-cultural populace of the province that does not necessarily share French origins but speaks French as its native tongue. Facing the truth of her blood relations and roots (European Jews) as well as cultural and territorial belonging (Montreal, Quebec), Loup recognizes in herself an example of these intracultural encounters. She becomes the silent observer as the history of her family unfolds for her as a journey of reconciliation and closure. This voyage is called to inscribe Loup into the continuity of global history and through the reestablishment of her identity to open up the definition of today’s Québécois. Using the character of Loup as his dramatic statement, Mouawad, therefore, constructs a figure of the new inclusive Québécois (Green 11-23) whose identity and sense of belonging are based not on their blood relations but on the language and cultural referents they share with the rest of the province’s population.<sup>15</sup>

As Mouawad admits, theatre provides for him a venue to exercise the power of speech. The ability to articulate thoughts and emotions leads Mouawad’s protagonists to build a dialogue with the existential and cultural *other*. As Mouawad argues, language and speaking are the major tools for an exilic child to experience and express his or her difference. He cites his own relationships with Arabic, the language of his childhood: that of bed-time stories, childhood games, imaginative fairy tales and family narratives, as a point of departure for his dramatic and prose works written or staged in French:

L’influence arabe, chez moi, est liée au rythme, car la langue arabe, je l’ai surtout entendue. Entendu parler, entendu chanter. Les histoires que l’on m’a racontées, en arabe,

lorsque j'étais enfant, pour m'endormir. [...] La langue, son rythme, devient le décor, le décor où évolue le personnage. Je crois que c'est très perceptible dans mes mises en scène, comment la langue n'est pas liée uniquement au sens des mots, elle est liée au rythme et aux images qui surgissent de ce rythme. L'arabe est une langue très riche sur le plan sonore, les sonorités peuvent nuancer le récit. On me racontait ces histoires pour m'endormir, et donc cette langue est aussi liée à la nuit : elle est devenue pour moi la langue du rêve, de l'imagination. (qtd. in Côté 72)

By bringing rhythms, intonations, and imagery of Arabic oral tradition into his French writings, Mouawad renders his exilic narratives intracultural. The speech of his characters and thus their thinking comes out as poetic, accented, intracultural and, therefore, exilic. An ability to manipulate the everyday *langue* of an exilic child into the artistic *parole* of a dramatic universe is Mouawad's major strength. It leads both the playwright and his characters out of existential anxiety. Speaking helps Mouawad's exilic teenagers to escape their terrifying memories, confusions, and indeterminacy and to face the inevitability of their reconciliation first with their families and then with their present. Speaking and writing offer these characters a chance to be articulate about their inconsistency, if not with the world then with themselves. The skill of literacy and the proficiency in storytelling reinforce, in other words, the *intracultural complexity* of the exilic youth and establish them as equals at the negotiation table between the host culture and their community. Thus, through the language and speech of his characters, Mouawad offers a new model of *intracultural mise en scène*: it unfolds within the territory of self and primarily has to do with the characters' ability to employ a variety of everyday vernaculars, a mix of their native and second languages, and the constructed speech of the play.

### **Exilic children—the territory of performance**

Since the late 1970s, immigration has changed the political, ethnic, and linguistic milieu of Québec theatre, making it more heterogeneous and diverse (Moss, "Multiculturalism"; "Immigrant"). The plays and performances of the assimilated Québécois made Quebec's mainstream theatre face the question of what "Québécois" means in the context of global migration and the province's changing immigration policies. Thus, exilic artists participated in "the creation of a postmodern, postnationalist

[Québécois] theatre. Constituting a 'drama of marginality,' these plays provide a critique of hegemonic power by speakers who define themselves as Others in Québec context" (Moss, "Multiculturalism" 77). In these texts, the

plot structure and linear chronology are often exploded by a traumatized memory of the country of origin that refuses to be forgotten and returns to disrupt the present. The dramatization of memory often displaces and disorients—transporting the spectator/reader toward the playwright's native country, toward the psychic space of memory, or toward the site of myth. (Moss, "Multiculturalism" 77)

In addition, the texts of exilic authors are often written to shake the linguistic and dramatic homogeneity of Quebec drama. As Dominique Lafon suggests, *joual*, which had become the dramatic *langue* of Québécois dramaturgy at the time it was introduced by Michel Tremblay, changed not only the characters of Quebec's plays but also the dramatic structure and the performative forms the theatre of the province had been developing (192-194). The plays of immigrants, however, challenge the position of *joual* as the leading linguistic tool to depict a "typical Québécois" character. The exoticism of exilic speech becomes the definitive feature of the lexical, syntactical, and rhythmical milieu created by the playwright-immigrants. Their accented speech, the linguistic nuance of the émigré drama, finds its reflection and support in the expressivity of the foreign, exilic body and its presentation on stage. As Lafon suggests, in the writings of exilic authors, "un langage où le sens se joue dans l'anaphore, le phonème, le rythme, la création de vocables inouïs au sens propre du terme, où se lit le langage du corps plus que le langage du sens" (194).

Wajdi Mouawad allows his characters to travel between linguistic oppositions: the highbrow French of France, normative Québécois, *joual*, English, and Arabic. By utilizing the intonations, the imagery and the vocabulary of each culture that had developed within one territory, *the language of argot* (Denance 199), and the language of the intracultural encounters that an exilic child lives through, Mouawad renders his texts dialectical, heteroglossic, and multivocal. As he admits, the poeticity of his plays written in French camouflages the oral traditions of Arabic storytelling, with its specific rhythms and syntactic designs:

J'ai souvent dit aux acteurs avec qui je travaillais que le texte est écrit en français, mais qu'il faut le dire en arabe. On en

revient au rythme. L'oralité est arabe. Je crois qu'on écrit toujours avec sa langue maternelle, même si on écrit dans une langue qui nous est étrangère. Si on analyse un des moments lyriques de *Les mains d'Edwige au moment de la naissance*, le monologue d'Edwige pourrait facilement être réduit du tiers, et il dirait exactement la même chose, parce que j'ai tendance à répéter trois fois la même chose, de façon différente. C'est une question de rythme, de battement cardiaque du texte. (qtd. in Côté 134)

Thus, the intonations and the rhythmic patterns of the exiles' mother-tongues colour their dialect, especially in the moments of emotional and dramatic tension. For instance, to Richard Rose, director of *Scorched*,<sup>16</sup> it is remarkable how Mouawad's characters employ their speech, their ability or inability to put their thoughts in words, so as to make themselves face the horror of truth that they discover about their origins and self. Mouawad's characters need to say myriad words in order to find the courage to face the truth about their past and present. Thus, as Rose suggests, in Mouawad's plays speech functions as a protective shield from reality on the one hand and as the means of searching for identity on the other. In this process of speaking, the characters lose their ability to listen, and consequently their ability to hear each other. As such they display their intracultural substance, the traces of the culture they are coming from: the culture of story-telling, of the word's sacred power.

For example, the poeticity of Mouawad's dramatic *parole* is partly based on a number and variety of linguistic, rhythmic, and structural repetitions. The recurring words, phrases, images, and even scenes constitute the basis of Mouawad's dramatic writing, adding to the subtle Oriental hues of his European *mise en scène*. In the Western canon, repetition is known as a device of dramatic irony and humour. In Christian masses as well as in Jewish prayers, however, the rhythm of monotonous repetition is used in lamentations, celebratory and mourning songs, and prayers. In his handling of dramatic and theatrical repetition, Mouawad oscillates between the ironic self-distance pertinent to immigrants' art and the performative principles of religious ritual: the repeating rhythms of grieving and lamenting are heard in the structure of his plays and productions. As Mouawad points out, the repetition present in the poetics of his French texts is the sign of the intracultural tensions existing in his artistic language and thus in his dramatic texts. Specifically, these tensions become audible in the ways his characters express themselves verbally:

Ce n'est pas la langue qui fait battre mon coeur et qui accélère mon sang. La tension, chez moi, est dans la répétition. C'est cela, précisément, l'arabesque, la langue qui revient, qui tourne, qui encercle. Le son, pour moi, est support et appui. Les sons dans la bouche de l'acteur deviennent l'appui de son émotion et de sa pensée. Je demande aux acteurs d'aller très vite dans leur texte. C'est la cinétique du texte. (qtd. in Côté 134-135)

In addition, the multivocality of Mouawad's productions emerges not only through the complex relationships between the oral Arabic and the written French of his plays, but also through the actors' close involvement in the writing process. When working with his company, Mouawad asks the actors to listen to the rhythms and melodies of their characters' mother tongue. He in turn draws on the linguistic peculiarities of the actors: their personal vocabulary, intonations, and even syntax they utilize during the process of "collective writing." When determining the verbal shapes of his characters, Mouawad enriches them with the multi-audial experience he receives during the rehearsals. In fact, using rehearsal as a form of collective improvisation and emotional breakthrough based on the ritual of a communal experience (grief or joy), Mouawad follows the cultural traditions of his motherland and creates an example of *theatrical intraculturalism*. His productions bear the signs of the author's creative upbringing, the oral and performative traditions of his native and adoptive cultures. Mouawad uses Western theatrical techniques (Canadian specifically)—the actors' collective improvisations and storytelling—to shape his characters, situations, and plot structure. In his author's preface to the English version of *Littoral (Tideline)* ("On How the Writing Began"), he describes the types of creative collectivity that inform his writing:

If Wilfrid is the reflection of my "lostness", Simone is the reflection of Isabelle's [Isabelle Leblanc, the actress in the role of Simone in the original staging] disillusionment. And in my eyes, it is significant that the first flesh and blood character Wilfrid meets is Simone. [...] it is also significant that the character is Josephine, whose vocation is to bear the memory of the vanquished, is the last person Wilfrid meets. Because if Wilfrid belongs more to my world and Simone to Isabelle's, Josephine is the perfect marriage between the two: Isabelle came up with the fabulous idea of the telephone books she carries, and I found its dramaturgical raison d'être, through the war and making the weight that will

anchor the father beneath the waves. [...] *Littoral* (*Tideline*) was first and foremost born of encounter and its meaning was born through encounters. That is, the terrible need to get outside of ourselves by letting the other burst into our lives, and the need to tear ourselves away from the ennui of existence. (viii)

In other words, Mouawad transcribes the oral and cultural specificity that each of his actors/co-creators possesses into the space of his written texts.<sup>17</sup> Poetically, he searches for the distance between the everyday languages that he and his actors acquire (both French native speakers and speakers of French as a second language) and that of his plays: the elevated and the poetic speech of his characters (see Côté 134). In this way, as Moss suggests, Mouawad participates in “the theatre of heterogeneity [that] subverts identity discourse in a fundamental way by [his characters’] bilingualism and frequently trilingualism” (“Multiculturalism” 77). Mouawad, like other exilic writers

“refus[es] melting pot assimilation, [and] deliberately choose[s] to insert languages other than the two official Canadian languages into the dramatic discourse of Québec. By representing their own memories and languages, these ethnic dramatists spotlight the multiculturalism of contemporary Québec society” (Moss, “Multiculturalism” 77.)

Accordingly, the dialogic, multilayered, complex language of the authors who had been exilic children expresses their intracultural quotidian.

As a theatre director, Mouawad emphasizes the tension between the audio- and video-scapes he creates on stage. It is through the particular use of highly dramatic language and in his characters’ speech that he aims to evoke for his audience the horrors and the joys of his fictional worlds. As in the theatres of Racine, Corneille, or Shakespeare, the spectators are invited to follow the tempo-rhythmical design of Mouawad’s texts and thus to visualize the fictional off-stage and off-time:

Le spectateur a alors la possibilité de voir l’image. Tout comme ces images que l’on fait défiler soi-même. Trop lentement, la figure ne bouge pas, trop vite, on ne la voit plus. Il faut trouver les 24 images par seconde dans le rythme de la parole qui devient ici à la fois notre pellicule et notre projecteur. Du point de vue de la langue, on peut faire tout ce qu’on veut, mais on reste toujours dans sa langue mater-

nelle. L'écriture se rattache à des fils tellement invisibles qui nous renvoient souvent à l'enfance, des fils qui se rattachent à la mémoire, dans ce qu'elle a de plus fragile. Donc, à la langue. (qtd. in Côté 135)

In Mouawad's works this transfer of a dramatic text into a theatrical one involves not only the merging of purely theatrical semantic systems but also the systems and the traditions of multiple cultural milieus, those of the dominant and the minority. The sound, for instance, becomes almost a separate character in Mouawad's plays. In order to convey the tragic overtones in his productions, Mouawad mixes Lebanese folk music with Western pop-culture: in *Incendies* Nihad the torturer and the rapist, Nawal's son-husband, is given *The Logical Song* by Supertramp as his leit-motif, or as it would be in a musical, his principal number. In this way, Mouawad makes his audio-scape accessible for both audiences: that of the diaspora and that of the dominant culture.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Mouawad relies on the processes of semantic transfer as it exists on stage, when the very transfer of a dramatic text into a performative one involves merging multiple semantic systems, since in addition to speech a theatre performance generates meaning through subtext, movements, gestures, and audio-visual images. His *mise en scène* tends to be symbolic when neither stage objects nor sounds appear in their direct, iconic, or even indexical functions. The theatrical space and time of Mouawad's plays have no predetermined coordinates: the action unfolds simultaneously in different spatial and temporal locales, with the past constantly bumping into the future, as one theatrical place extends beyond the other. In *Littoral*, this free-running of a theatrical space and time is already inscribed into the text of the play: Scene 9 "The Family" contains some Pirandello-esque moments when the characters suddenly realize that the action has moved to another fictional space, a funeral home, whereas they themselves remain in the previous location, the sitting-room of Wilfrid's aunt's house (42-43). Thus, Mouawad's directorial choices in defining fictional time and space are based on subverting both iconic and indexical laws of theatrical representation; everything seen or heard within his productions acquires a metaphorical meaning. In his own staging of *Incendies*, for instance, Mouawad employed a bare stage with a metallic screen as the background for the action and two ladders as major set pieces,<sup>19</sup> thus making sure that his *mise en scène* did not acquire any particular geographical reference. In *Fôrets*, the stage space was turned into a metaphor of a

damaged brain undergoing surgery—the brain of Loup’s mother, with a tumour that consisted of the embryo of her unborn twin brother. “Vous étiez deux dans la ventre de votre mère. Mais vous l’avez intègre, le forçant à conserver un état embryonnaire. Un genre de cannibalisme foetal qui se produit parfois au tout premier stade de la vie” (*Fôrets* 22).

Accordingly, the ambiguity of the theatrical referent allows the audience to assign a variety of connotations to the given stage signs, and the connotations will differ according to the spectators’ social, national, and ethnic background. These connotations will render Mouawad’s performative texts universally appealing and intracultural at the same time. For instance, when translated and performed in different countries, the geographical and political referents of Mouawad’s texts change. When staged in Russia, the play inevitably points at the most recent battles of Eastern Europe (the Kosovo tragedy, for instance) and at the ongoing Russian-Chechen war.<sup>20</sup> However, in Linda Gaboriau’s translation and Richard Rose’s staging of *Incendies* in Toronto the ambiguity of Mouawad’s accented French disappeared. The English translation did not keep the exoticism of Mouawad’s expression (it tried to work with the linguistic particularities of the text only at the level of wrongly used proverbs in the speech of the notary). Similarly, in his *mise en scène*, Rose aimed for the indexical rather than symbolic staging, making the locales recognizably Middle-Eastern and the time-frame identifiably present. By not engaging with the spatial and temporal ambiguity of the play, this staging clearly identified its target audience: the spectators at Tarragon Theatre in Toronto, and subsequently at Ottawa’s National Arts Centre. In this way, Rose’s production functions as “site-specific” and localized, fulfilling the expectations of its addressee. At the same time, both in its visual and audio choices, Rose’s *Scorched* employed the intracultural possibilities the Canadian theatre milieu provides: it engaged with the play’s themes of memory and war trauma, exile suffering and the search for identity, as well as rendering Mouawad’s text a contemporary classic by casting actors (Kelly Fox, for example) who regularly appear at major English Canadian theatres.

In conclusion, I would like to go back to the definition of an *intracultural performance* that allows an immigrant to travel across cultures and construct the theatre’s own universe: its network of dramatic and performative meanings. Theatre, and specifically its intercultural practice, is capable of examining the relationships between mimesis and exile, subjectivity and other, the art of repre-

sentation and the art of being. It manifests itself as “a land-less country, a country in transition, a country which consists of time not territory, and which is confluent with the theatrical profession” (Barba ix). In this respect, *intracultural performance* finds its best response within the multicultural context of its spectatorship, when every production is informed and enriched both by the creator’s intracultural roots and the audience’s ethnic and linguistic diversity (see Bharucha, *Theatre*; Brown). The Canadian French- and English-speaking audiences, living through the quotidian experience of multiculturalism, are well-equipped to receive any inter/intracultural theatrical messages given their bilingual/bicultural and in many cases trilingual/tricultural status. Moreover, the neo-Québécois that Mouawad portrays in his plays reflect the breadth, variety, and mixture of exiles and their children who are now filling theatre halls across major urban centres of Canada.

The theatre of intracultural encounters—the theatre of exilic children—challenges the binary oppositions proposed by various multi-cultural performance practices. It seeks the state of *synechism* defined by Peirce as a logical continuity that helps one to “understand the all-inclusive social logic which upholds mankind’s growth or reasonableness” (Andacht 103). The exilic state becomes a form of postmodern integration, which through opposition to dualism “splits everything in two” and through the experience of hybridity and creolization presents “the tendency to regard everything as continuous,” where “continuity governs the whole domain of experience in every element of it” (Bergman and Paavola). Thus, the practice of intracultural encounter expresses the processes of *cultural creolization* and becomes a new form of theatrical globalization: a manifestation of borderlessness, flexibility, and free movement between separate cultural, ethnic, and communal entities. ❁

## NOTES

- 1 Rinaldo Walcott identifies the culture of creolization as an expression of borderlessness, flexibility, and easy movement between two or more separate cultural, ethnic, and communal entities. *Creoleness* is the reality of global postcolonial tendencies, when the former colonial cultures and nations move to the West and to the North. It is a new form of globalization expressed through today’s global migration, forced and unforced relocation not of individuals but of large refugee groups and entire nations. This global exodus instigates the

re-establishing of colonial mechanisms of the narrative of power and the re-formulating of emigration policies and deportation apparatus. Very much like the eighteenth-century Foucaudian city, the urban formula of surveillance within a modern city-site provides the spatial and temporal environment for creating this new, Creole ethnicity based on fusion of languages and cultures, when they are forced to share a single space-time continuum.

- 2 *Diaspora* “indicates the dispersal or scattering of a body of people from their traditional home across foreign lands” (Israel 1). The portrayal of a member of a diaspora emphasizes “a positive resonance [. . .] bespeaking a sense of tenacity, resistance, and preservation of faith during the worst of circumstances” (Israel 2).
- 3 *Heteroglossia* (*raznorechie* in Russian) was coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in the essay “Discourse in the Novel,” published in English in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Dialogism grows into *heteroglossia*, which in its linguistic and literary meanings signifies the multiplicity of languages and discourses within the unity of one language or discourse. The “hetero” part refers to the competitive coexistence of many *paroles* in one *langue*—the accepted, linguistic standard or, in sociopolitical terms, the official language of the state. Therefore, heteroglossia involves the dialogic communication of many voices. In the practice of exilic narratives, this heteroglossic communication becomes multivocal.
- 4 Homi Bhabha identifies *a third space of enunciation* as “the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures [that] opens up a cultural space—a third space—where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (218). The identity of exilic children can be read as *hybrid hyphenization*, which emphasizes “the incommensurable elements as the basis of cultural identities” (218). As Bhabha states, the intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. (37)
- 5 It was Stalin’s brutal idea to use the slogan “the son is not responsible for the actions of his father” as the state’s method of negotiation with the children of political prisoners. By arresting their parents, the system was at the same time erasing those children from the ranks of the “builders of communism,” or the mainstream. Due to Stalin’s cunning politics these children, still ostracized by society, were given a chance, seemingly, to integrate fully into their own country, study in schools and universities. The cruelty of this politics was, however, in the fate that the state was preparing for these children: in many cases

(that of Vasilii Aksyonov, for instance), these children were subjected to become political prisoners, guilty or not, by the time they reached the age of majority. These children were forever stigmatized as different, as half-deserving, as the sons of the state's enemies. The lot of the exilic children of course is not as predetermined as one just described. However, a degree of a similar stigma is present in their lives and works too. See Serov; Aksyonov.

- 6 *Weltanschauung* translates from German as “world view” or personal philosophy of life. Our cognition as well as personal expression (in language and behavior, as well as conscious acts) manifests our personal philosophy, our relationships with the outside world, as well as our attitude to a certain situation. Sigmund Freud identified *Weltanschauung* as “an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis, which, accordingly, leaves no question unanswered and in which everything that interests us finds its fixed place. It will be easily understood that the possession of a *Weltanschauung* of this kind is among the ideal wishes of human beings. Believing in it one can feel secure in life, one can know what to strive for, and how one can deal most expediently with one's emotions and interests” (Freud 193).
- 7 The dates of Mouawad's biography are slightly confusing. For example, a number of biographies available in Mouawad's published texts (including the latest one, *Seuls, Chemin, texte et peintures*) state that Wajdi was born in 1968 in Lebanon and left his country together with his family at the age of eleven, in 1978, for France, and in 1983 relocated in Quebec: « Wajdi Mouawad est né en 1968 au Liban, que très jeune il a dû fuir pour cause de guerre. Réfugiée en 1978 en France, n'y trouvant pas la terre d'asile ni les papiers espérés, sa famille émigre en 1983 au Québec où Wajdi découvre une vie théâtrale très créative et reçoit une formation d'acteur à l'École Nationale du Théâtre du Canada » (Théâtre du Nord).

In his latest performance-text *Seuls* (which opened 4 March 2007, at Scène Nationale de Chambéry et de la Savoie, and toured to Ottawa, at le Centre Nationale des Arts, 14-18 October 2008) Mouawad also refers to 1978, to his eleven-year-old self, as the date for his first encounter with the French language and culture (86 and 111). A photo of a young boy “Wajdi Mouawad” (page 126 of the same book) is accompanied by a note “Wajdi, Beyrouth, 7 avril 1977.” However, the inconsistency of dates continues on page 187 of the same publication: among the list of photo-credits the picture featured on page 126 is cited as “portrait [of Wajdi Mouawad] a huit ans, collection privée de l'auteur” (187). Taking into consideration the “fictional aspect” of the referential and “strictly biographical” material included into the performance-text of *Seuls* and its subsequent publication, as well as a possibility of mistakes in other sources, I have opted for verifying those dates with Guy Warin, a

personal assistant to Wajdi Mouawad at CNA, Ottawa. In his email to the author from 3 November 2008, Guy Warin states that the correct date for Wajdi Mouawad's leaving Lebanon, at the age of eleven, is 1979. In my research and in this paper I use the information provided to me by Mr. Warin.

- 8 Mouawad's protagonists appear as doubles (twins in *Incendies*), sexually frustrated (Wilfrid in *Littoral*), or potentially androgynous (Loup in *Forêts*).
- 9 The Lebanese Civil War lasted for about fifteen years, between 13 April 1975 and 13 October 1990. It involved and affected all different cultural and religious groups populating the country. It raised issues of religious, political, ethnic, and economic borders and led to numerous re-mappings of the territory.

The spark that ignited the civil war in Lebanon occurred in Beirut on April 13, 1975, when gunmen killed four Phalangists during an attempt on Pierre Jumayyil's life. Perhaps believing the assassins to have been Palestinian, the Phalangists retaliated later that day by attacking a bus carrying Palestinian passengers across a Christian neighborhood, killing about twenty-six of the occupants. The next day fighting erupted in earnest, with Phalangists pitted against Palestinian militiamen (thought by some observers to be from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine). The confessional layout of Beirut's various quarters facilitated random killing. Most Beirutis stayed inside their homes during these early days of battle, and few imagined that the street fighting they were witnessing was the beginning of a war that was to devastate their city and divide the country. (Pike)

Mouawad witnessed the horrors of the first days of the war. They traumatized the imagination of a young writer-to-be and, consequently, later invaded his plays and productions.

- 10 In 2005, after he left *Théâtre de Quat'Sous*, Mouawad founded two different companies dedicated to the practice of creative writing: *Abé Carré cé Carré* in Montreal (co-founded with Emmanuel Schwartz) and *Au carré de l'hypoténuse* in Paris. In September 2007, Mouawad began his five-year term as the Artistic Director of the Centre national des arts in Ottawa.
- 11 *Forêts* was a coproduction with l'Espace Malraux - Scène nationale de Chambéry et de la Savoie, Le Fanal - Scène nationale de Saint-Nazaire, Théâtre de la Manufacture - Centre dramatique national Nancy-Lorraine, Scène nationale d'Aubusson - Théâtre Jean Lurçat, L'Hexagone - Scène nationale de Meylan, Les Francophonies en Limousin, Le Beau Monde compagnie Yannick Jaulin, Scène nationale de Petit-Quevilly Mont-Saint-Aignan, Maison de la Culture de Loire-Atlantique, Théâtre du Trident (Quebec City) and ESPACE GO (Montreal). It was produced with the support of Théâtre 71 -

- Scène nationale de Malakoff and Région Rhône-Alpes, Centre national du livre, Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, the Canada Council for the Arts, Commission permanente de coopération franco-québécoise, Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec, Ville de Nantes et de la DRAC Pays de la Loire, AFAA (Association française d'action artistique), Service de Coopération et d'Action Culturelle du Consulat Général de France au Québec, and DRAC Île de France—Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication. *Forêts* premiered on 7 March 2006 at the *Espace Malraux* in Chambéry, in the French Alps. The production toured in France and then opened at ESPACE GO, Montreal (9 January to 10 February 2007), and Théâtre du Trident, Quebec City. It played at Le Centre National des Arts, Ottawa, 27-31 March 2007.
- 12 Lazarides notes that the names of Mouawad's protagonists often begin with "W" (Willy, Wilfrid, Willem and so on), thus suggesting their close relationships with the author. Mouawad's first name is "Wajdi," and the resonance can be even found in "Edwige," the female protagonist of his earlier work, indicating therefore the traces of the author's personal stories in the thoughts and actions of his characters (Lazarides 118). I believe, however, that even if the plays of Wajdi Mouawad portray the author in their protagonists, this correspondence is less visible in the author's choice of names or stories. It becomes more apparent in Mouawad's choice of narrative modes. Mouawad's plays are constructed according to the principles of lyrical poetry, the genre in which the thoughts and emotions of the author are identified with those of the protagonist.
  - 13 The act of mourning in Mouawad's plays embraces both the social ritual of the funeral and the metaphorical burial of one's memories and past emotions.
  - 14 The same problems are found in Mouawad's novel *Visage retrouvé*. It depicts the journey of a fourteen-year-old boy to the acceptance of his present through the journey into his past.
  - 15 For more on the subject see Green.
  - 16 Richard Rose directed *Scorched*, a translation of *Incendies* by Linda Gaboriau commissioned by the National Arts Centre English Theatre Play Development program with support from Marti Maraden, the artistic director of the centre at the time, and the Canadian Play Creation Fund. *Scorched* was presented to Ottawa audiences in June 2005, in the framework of *On the Verge Theatre New Play Reading Festival*. Rose then directed the premiere of *Scorched* as a co-production between Tarragon Theatre, Toronto, and the National Arts Centre, Ottawa. It opened in Toronto and ran from 27 February to 31 March 2007 before transferring to Ottawa where it ran from 6 to 21 April 2007.
  - 17 In every preface that Mouawad writes for his published texts, he explains various forms and stages of creative writing he uses when composing his plays and how his actors contribute to the multivocal-

ity effect he strives to achieve in his texts. For examples of these prefaces see *Littoral*, *Tideline*, *Incendies*, *Scorched*, and *Forêts*.

- 18 Mouawad staged *Incendies* for Théâtre de Quat'Sous from 12 April to 22 May 2004, in Montreal. The cast included Annick Bergeron, Eric Bernier, Gérald Gagnon, Reda Guerinek, Andrée Lachapelle, Marie-Claude Langlois, Isabelle Leblanc, Isabelle Roy, and Richard Thériault.
- 19 The ladders signify the walls of the prison where the twins' mother was tortured and raped and where she gave birth to her children, alone in the empty darkness of her cell.
- 20 Mouawad directed *Incendies* in Russia, in March 2007. This production was a part of *Les Journées de la Francophonie* in Moscow. It opened at the Et Cetera Theatre. John Freedman, the reviewer of *Incendies* in Moscow, testifies, "As director of his own work at the Et Cetera, Mouawad exhibits a bold willingness to let his play's obscurity and complexity speak for themselves. He trusts the audience to lock into the emotional pull of the story as it spins forward almost, but not quite, out of control."

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