

DAMNEE MANON SACREE SANDRA, *Bailiwick Repertory*. Michel Tremblay's 1977 drama is the kind

of play Bailiwick's Pride series should present more often. Unlike the formulaic relationship dramas and nudie domestic comedies that give the festival a breezy irrelevance, Tremblay's demanding meditation on the inseparability of purity and corruption plunges an audience headfirst into one of the 20th century's defining moral dilemmas. Tremblay pits the tortuously devout Manon, who struggles to transform herself into pure spirit with the help of a watermelon-sized rosary, against the wearily hedonistic Sandra, a chain-smoking transvestite who finds religious fervor in a life of pure carnality. Borrowing liberally from Beckett and Genet, Tremblay splits humanity

into eloquent opposing forces, waxing poetic on the brink of existential doom.

Director Joel G. Fink stages Tremblay's hallucinogenic text with noble restraint, planting Manon and Sandra in chairs downstage, reining in their gestures so far that a simple pointed toe becomes riveting. Jay Aubrey as Sandra and Carolyne Haycraft as Manon proceed with great deliberation, weighing out gem after gem from Tremblay's sparkling text. But this methodical approach compromises the play's feverish urgency; after all, these are characters desperate to prove they exist. The production is more a chamber reading than the ecstatic liturgy Tremblay intended.

—Justin Hayford