

Michel Tremblay's

For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again



A Playgoer's Guide

"If you tried to make Nana an English Canadian or make her nearer you, then the audience would stop at what was not right. Whereas if she is French Canadian, they will be surprised at how much she is like them. They will identify much more with what's the same than what's different. When I saw Les Belles Soeurs in Yiddish at the Saidye Bronfman, it was incredible to see six Jewish women kneeling on the floor and reciting the rosary. It was absolutely absurd – and we loved it. Whereas, if they had done an adaptation . . . it's in the differences, sometimes, that we can see that we're not that far apart." – Michel Tremblay

The Author



Michel Tremblay was born, the youngest of five children, in 1942, to an elderly couple on Fabre road in the heart of Plateau Mont Royal. As a young child, Tremblay spent his holidays inventing new endings for familiar fairy tales. As an adolescent, he attended the theatre regularly even though his parents forbade this. He did it in secrecy. He realized while still very young that he had a passion for writing. At high school he wrote poems, plays and novels. At 17 he was writing fantasy stories that were later published. At 19 he enrolled in the Institut des arts graphiques to train as a linotypist, which was the trade he supported himself at from 1963 to 1966. When he won a scholarship to a classical college, disaffected by its snobbery, he only lasted a few months. In 1964 he submitted a play, *Le train*, to Radio-Canada's competition for young authors and it won the jury's first prize and earned him a Canada Council grant. This marked an important turning point in his career.

Tremblay has written twenty-one plays and an extended cycle of novels, the *Cabiers*, reflecting the changes happening in 1960's Montreal during the Quiet Revolution, frequently using the same semi-autobiographical characters in both his drama and fiction. As openly homosexual from adolescence as one could be in the 1950s, Tremblay has resisted the label of gay writer. Tremblay is much better known in his native Canada – more specifically, Québec – than in the U.S. Tremblay is the first Canadian playwright to achieve international renown. Critics have compared him to Molière and to Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

[drawn from the *Literary Montréal* and *Edimage* Web sites]

The Play

For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again is often called Michel Tremblay's low-key valentine to his mother. This play explores one of the most complex relationships we have -- with our mothers -- with humor, love, joy, regret, nostalgia and longing. There are two characters in this play, Nana and her son, the narrator. The narrator sits in a chair most of the play and can do nothing but squirm patiently but uncomfortably, occasionally rolling his eyes at his endlessly talking mother.

The show begins when the narrator is 10 years old, and Nana is chewing him out for throwing chunks of ice under passing cars. Then he's 13; she argues with him about the rubbishy romance novels she encourages him to read, squelching all his questions and complaining about family dinners. He enjoys the fantasies of the French author she calls "Julius Verne," while she prefers overheated melodramas packed with tragic orphans and dungeons, and tells exaggerated tales about her sister-in-law's cooking and her niece's ballet recital. When Nana is stuck for an explanation, she puts off her son's questions with, "It comes from the good Lord." Ultimately, the narrator becomes an adult who is beginning to write plays while his mother is facing her final illness. The last interchange provides the son with a chance to ease his mother's pain and to help her to understand what she has meant to him -- and to introduce her to the theatre he loves.

The world premiere of the English version of the play, translated by Linda Gaboriau, was first produced and presented by Centaur Theatre Company, September 29, 1998, in Montréal.

"Linda Gaboriau's English translation does great justice to Tremblay's love and mastery of language." --The Ottawa *Citizen*

Bits and Pieces

Tremblay's first play, *Les Belles-Sœurs*, was written in 1965 and premiered at the Théâtre du Rideau Vert on August 28, 1968. Its impact was huge, bringing down the old guard of Canadian theatre and introducing the Québécois dialect of *jonal* to the mainstream.

Beyond the language, Tremblay's plays and novels deal with issues of class and gender, and they often toy with the fantastical, as does *For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again*. A good portion of his work was part of a vanguard of liberal nationalist thought that helped create an essentially modern society by stirring up controversy about issues of class and culture through the portrayal of the lives of working class women and by attacking the strait-laced, deeply religious society of mid-20th century Québec.

"In a genre obsessed with the image, Tremblay writes real substance." – Ottawa *X Press*

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