

– *A Playgoer's Companion* –

The Author

"I'm not humble. I'm everything but humble. But I draw a line at being good and being a genius. You can be wonderful and write beautiful music but you're not Stravinsky. That's all. And when you accept you're not Stravinsky, you can go on in life, and write, and enjoy your writing." -- Michel Tremblay



Born in 1942, Tremblay grew up in the Plateau Mont-Royal, a French-speaking neighbourhood of Montréal, at the time of his birth a neighbourhood with a working-class character and *joual* dialect, something that would heavily influence his work. He is the most important playwright in the history of Québec theatre and the most produced. Internationally he is considered one of the leading French-language dramatists writing today. His plays have been translated into over 20 languages and staged worldwide. He has written nearly 30 plays, 20 translations and adaptations, 7 screenplays, the books of 3 musicals, an opera libretto, 12 novels, and 4 volumes of autobiography. [adapted from wikipedia and doollee.com]

Tremblay's first professionally produced 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 *joual* to the mainstream. It stirred up controversy by portraying the lives of working class women and attacking the straight-laced, deeply religious society of mid-20th century Québec. [adapted from wikipedia]

"Tremblay is patently angered by the despicable failings of the bourgeoisie in their approach to the wells of creativity that matter to him more than anything else. In expressing his indignation and scorn, he has created . . . characters whose retrospective vision on the one hand and corruption on the other appear to kill the imaginative techniques Tremblay has deployed to such striking effect in the bulk of his repertoire as a dramatist. The realistic presentation of the characters may well represent an attempt on his part to make the plays accessible to the very

people he seeks to satirize. Viewed from another angle, it is as though he considers such people, who in almost all cases, epitomize a lack of creativity, as undeserving of the resources available to his imagination." [Michael Cardy, "Michel Tremblay's Experiments in Naturalist Theatre"]

About the play

"In *Bonjour, la, Bonjour*, I apprehended most of what I wanted to do in the theatre -- to take out everything that is not strictly necessary." -- Michel Tremblay

"A young man returns to his loving family after a three-month sojourn in Europe. Sound heartwarming, doesn't it? You have no idea of the drama that awaits you. . . . This non-linear play by Michel Tremblay is constructed like a symphony, introducing themes and variations, changing harmonies, and weaving a rich tapestry that provides a portrait of a dysfunctional family. Dysfunctional only begins to describe this group." [Mark Andrew Lawrence, Broadway.com]

"Serge has returned from overseas and his trip allows everyone to get lost in the fantasy of vacation, ignoring the trouble brewing inside of Serge. Serge has really returned to consummate a love affair with one of his sisters, while his other two sisters, also infatuated with him, want his attention. This family-sexual relationship is heightened when we find that Armand, Serge's father, has in the past, practiced incest himself. Though the question of hereditary traits is not answered, Serge finds an understanding soul in his father. Father and son find themselves compatriots in this family of desperate women and wicked men." [Doollee.com]

[The play] received sharp criticism for its dialect, and also because it dealt with an incestuous relationship between a brother and sister. The eight-character drama takes up the return of a young man, Serge, to his Montreal family. While treating the brother's and sister's relationship sensitively, the play also explores the situation of their widowed father, who comes to live with them. . . . the play deftly avoids any pathological focus on the lovers. Instead, it uses their love as a touchstone for exploring the structure of the modern family and the religious-cultural influences upon it. [Roger Ellis, *Theatre Journal*]

"This is one of Tremblay's strongest works and not simply because the repellent subject matter is rendered oddly seductive, but also because of a continuing exploration of the use of language and theatrical structure." [*Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia*]

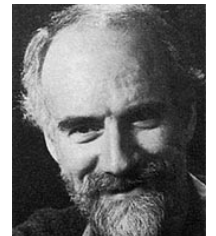
On the translation



John Van Burek

Co-translator John Van Burek has commented, "Tremblay's language is tremendously vibrant. The real problem is in trying to find an equally vibrant equivalent in English."

"Tremblay's language is a literary concoction based on *joual*, a dialect that has a very definite identity as the language of the working class in East Montréal. Van Burek and Glassco have translated the plays into a rather nondescript, neutral, spoken English." But although they "do not give the reader the flavor of Tremblay's language, they do capture the essence of the characters and their relationships, which is perhaps more important in these two plays." [Elaine Hopkins Garrett, "Sweet Jesus! What's that, ma?": Two new translations of Tremblay.]



Bill Glassco

" . . . theatre does not often touch the heart the way this modest masterpiece by Michel Tremblay succeeds in doing." -- *The Globe and Mail*

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