

# TARRAGON THEATRE

35<sup>th</sup> SEASON 2005-2006

“The real creative energy emanates from those theatres that develop their own plays. Of these, the most successful, on a popular and critical level, is Tarragon Theatre.”

*Time Magazine, 1974*

“Tarragon is a powerhouse of new Canadian writing. It is also an actors’ powerhouse.”

*The Times of London, 1986*

“What a miracle the Tarragon is, really.”

*The Globe and Mail, 2000*

## About Tarragon Theatre

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Tarragon is primarily a playwright’s theatre. Its mandate is to develop, encourage and produce new work; to attract or train new artists and technicians to interpret new work; and to inform and develop an audience for new work. The goal of the OutReach programs is to develop quality theatre education initiatives for students, educators, community members, and theatre patrons. The mandate of OutReach is “to use all its resources, programs, and facilities to promote, wherever possible, inclusion. Particularly through our OutReach initiatives we aim to support and foster relationships with community members, educators and students as together we develop the theatre practitioners and audiences of today and tomorrow”.

## Tarragon Achievements

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- Over 175 Canadian premieres by such celebrated and award-winning playwrights as David French, James Reaney, George F. Walker, Judith Thompson, John Murrell, Joan MacLeod, Maja Ardal, Morris Panych, Jason Sherman, Guillermo Verdecchia, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Daniel Brooks, Diane Flacks, Richard Greenblatt, Ted Dykstra, Ken Garnhum, Michael Healey, Morwyn Brebner, Mavis Gallant, Kristen Thomson and a host of others.
- Tarragon is the foremost producer, in English Canada, of translated plays from Québec, most notably the work of Carole Fréchette and Michel Tremblay.
- Plays developed and produced at Tarragon have, on many occasions, toured nationally and internationally; they have also been widely published, broadcast and filmed.
- Tarragon has received more than 200 Dora Award nominations, many nominations (and winners) for the Chalmers Canadian Play Award and many nominations for the Governor General’s Award for Drama (winners include John Mighton, Judith Thompson, Joan MacLeod, Guillermo Verdecchia, John Krizanc, Jason Sherman and Morris Panych, all for Tarragon plays). Tarragon has received the Lieutenant Governor’s Award 5 times in the past 7 years.

- Tarragon has 3,800 subscribers in the 2005-2006 season. Tarragon is deficit-free.
- The Urjo Kareda Playwrights Endowment Fund, named to honour Urjo's commitment to Canadian theatre, stands at just under \$1.2 million. Income from the fund is used to assist playwrights while they are writing their plays.

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### **Tarragon Programs**

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- 7 or 8 major productions in two theatres each season. In the 2004-2005 season, there were eight productions (over 300 performances).
- Playwrights Unit (since 1982). As many as 7 playwrights, with works-in-progress, work individually and collectively with the artistic director and the associate artistic director over the course of a year. These plays are given a public reading during Play Reading Week.
- 5 playwrights-in-residence.
- Tarragon Theatre/George Brown College New Play Development Project – Each year, the Tarragon works with George Brown College's Theatre Department to select an appropriate playwright to work with George Brown's second year class. The playwright's script is workshopped by the class, under the direction of Tarragon's dramaturg Andy McKim. In the students' third year, a second workshop culminates in a staged reading. George Brown Theatre School then has the option of performing the play in full production later that year.
- Spring Arts Fair (since 1985): an extraordinary free celebration of the performing arts, presented in spaces throughout the interior and exterior of Tarragon Theatre.
- OutReach programs aimed at youth including Spring Training Project, Young Playwrights Unit, Under 20 for Under 20's playwriting competition, high school and post-secondary co-op placements; OutReach programs aimed at educators including Teacher Nights.
- Apprentice programs in arts administration and stage management.

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### **Tarragon Special Services**

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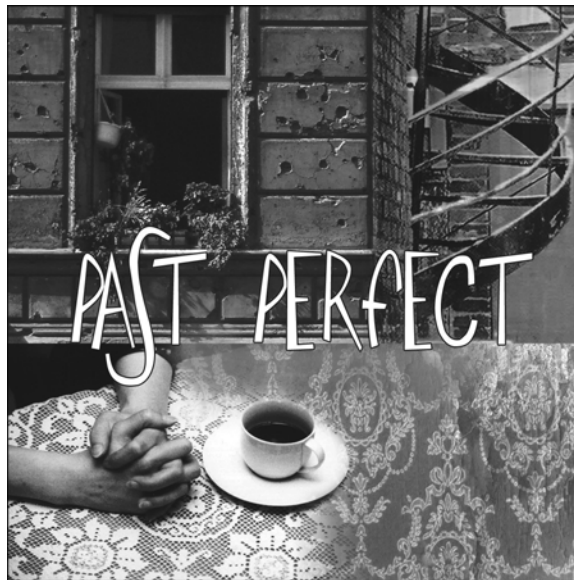
- Over 500 scripts professionally read and assessed annually without charge.
- Student and senior matinees; wheelchair accessibility throughout the facility.
- Teachers provided with a complimentary study guide.
- Costume and prop rentals for professional and community companies.
- Pay-What-You-Can performances every Sunday afternoon.
- Tickets donated to community and social service groups for fundraising events.

# TARRAGON THEATRE

## Study Guide

### *Past Perfect*

by Michel Tremblay



**Translated by Linda Gaboriau**

**Directed by Leah Cherniak**

**Starring: Nancy Beatty, Claire Calnan,  
Caroline Cave, Brendan Gall, Jeffrey R. Smith**

**Set and Costume Design by Yannik Larivée**

**Lighting Design by Paul Mathiesen**

**Composer / Sound Design by John Millard**

**Dramaturg: Dave Deveau**

**Stage Manager: Robert Harding**

**February 22 – April 2, 2006**

### About the *Past Perfect* study guide:

This study guide has been created so that your theatre experience at Tarragon is a fulfilling and engaging one. We hope that it will help create discussions, generate ideas and prompt many questions.

The *Past Perfect* study guide was coordinated and compiled by:

**Joanna Falck** Literary Manager

**Dave Deveau** Dramaturg

**Fiona Jones** Studio and OutReach Co-ordinator

**Mary B. Wood** OutReach Consultant developing lesson plans grounded in Ministry Curriculum

**Avery Swartz** Publicity and OutReach Associate

The *Past Perfect* study guide is divided into several sections.

1. **About Tarragon Theatre**
2. **About the Playwright**
3. **About the Play**
4. **Elements of the Play**
5. **Elements of Design**
6. **Additional Resources**
7. **Lesson Plans**

#### **Point of Interest**

We encourage you to make use of this study guide as effectively as possible and as such we want to highlight the fact that some elements of the guide are most useful prior to viewing the production and some are most useful post viewing. For example, while the structure, character breakdown and themes set up a context for viewing, the design elements are best understood after viewing. There are also lesson plans included for pre and post show activities.

**Feel free to contact us should you have any questions or comments at  
416.536.5018 x243.**

## Past Perfect

“One heartbreak isn’t the end of the world, for heaven’s sake!”

It’s Thursday night and Albertine has put on her sister’s best dress and she’s ready for a fight. She has lost her beau and she wants him back. Michel Tremblay returns to this passionate character from *Albertine, in Five Times* in this moving and intense portrait of a woman who loves to suffer for love.

### About the Playwright – Michel Tremblay

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“People always ask me why I write about unhappy people. I say I’ll give you one week to find a single play about a single happy person in 2,500 years of theatre. Even the funniest plays are usually about misery. What can you say about happiness? You can live in it, become boring to your friends, but nobody cares about seeing happiness on stage.” -Michel Tremblay

A dominant figure of Québec’s theatre scene since the late 1960s, Michel Tremblay has created works of an impressive quantity and quality as a dramatist, novelist, translator, adapter, and screenwriter. He is internationally renowned, having had productions in a multitude of languages on most continents.

Born June 25, 1942, Tremblay started writing at 16 with the play *The Train*, while working as a linotypist. In 1964 he won first prize in a young writers competition for the same show, and met director André Brassard, with whom he has collaborated on virtually all of his projects since.

His first big break onto the theatre scene, 1968’s *Les Belles Soeurs*, changed the face of Québécois culture with the use of joul, the hybrid English-French spoken in various communities in his native Montreal, which provided audiences access to representation of themselves onstage. In 1987, *Les Belles Soeurs* was named by Paris’ LIRE Magazine as one of 50 plays that should be included in the home library of anyone who is interested in the history of theatre.

Tremblay’s body of work includes 24 plays, three musical comedies, 12 novels, a collection of tales, four collections of short stories, seven film scripts, and 20 adaptations/translations of playwright such as Aristophanes, Tennessee Williams, Anton Chekhov and Edward Albee.

Michel Tremblay’s plays have been performed throughout Canada and the United States, as well as in Europe, Asia, South America and Australia. Linda Gaboriau won the Governor General’s Award for her translation of Tremblay’s *For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again* and was a finalist for the award with her translation of *Impromptu on Nuns’ Island*. Among Tremblay’s most renowned works are *Bonjour, là, bonjour*, *Forever Yours*, *Marie Lou*, *Hosanna*, and *For The Pleasure of Seeing Her Again*, his ode to his mother who passed away before he had come to the fore as one of Canada’s greatest playwrights. Having received multiple honours both in Canada and abroad, including the Order of Canada in 1999, Michel Tremblay has affirmed himself as Canada’s most acclaimed and widely produced playwright.

*"It sounds silly to hear it when you're young, but getting older is understanding. When I was young, I used to describe old people and be very vicious about what society did to them. I was sure I was right. Now that I'm older I've begun to ask myself questions, go deeper into one character."* Michel Tremblay

Tarragon has produced 12 of his plays, 10 of which were English-language premieres. *Past Perfect* is the 13th and marks the return of Albertine, 20 years after her first appearance in Tarragon's production of *Albertine, in Five Times*. Tarragon has toured four Tremblay productions to New York, across Canada, to Expo '86 in Vancouver, to London, England, Glasgow's Mayfest and the Edinburgh Festival. This production also marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the character Albertine in Tremblay's play *Cinq* in 1966.

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### **International Message for World Theatre Day 2000 by Michel Tremblay**

WORLD THEATRE DAY was created in 1961 by the International Theatre Institute (ITI). World Theatre Day is celebrated annually on the 27th March by ITI Centres and the international theatre community, various national and international theatre events being organized to mark this occasion. One of the most important of these is the circulation of the International Message traditionally written by a theatre personality of world stature at the invitation of the International Theatre Institute.

More than two thousand years ago Euripides' Electra asked " How should I begin my accusation? How should I end it? What should go in the middle? " In this era of euphemism and empty rhetoric, an era in which it is considered better form to spare everyone's feelings than to call things by their names, the cry of Agamemnon's daughter has lost none of its relevance. To accuse. Denounce. Provoke. Disturb. Isn't this the role of theatre?

The trend towards universality at all costs and the incessantly harped-upon globalization now so much in vogue that is threatening to reduce our world to the size of a village where uniformity prevails, will certainly not facilitate the role of theatre in our increasingly asepticised society, subjected and ruled from on high by two or three powerful cultural monsters. The insatiable desire to make everything on earth alike will result in everything becoming like nothing on earth.

No, salvation at the beginning of this third millennium will come rather from those small voices being raised in all corners of the world, censuring injustice and, in keeping with the very foundations of theatre, extracting the essence of the human being, distilling and transposing it in order to share it with the whole world.

These small voices are coming from Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, Quebec, Norway and New Zealand. They are making their cry of indignation heard everywhere. Sometimes they have a local colour and a distinctive flavour which, it is true, have nothing global about them but at least these voices are genuine. What is more, they speak to everyone because they are addressed in the first place to someone, to a particular audience capable of being moved as it recognizes its own turmoils and troubles, and able to weep for and laugh at itself. And if in the first place the portrait drawn is a true likeness, the whole world will recognize itself.

For the universality of a dramatic text is not to be found in the place in which it was written but in its humanity, in the relevance of its statements and in the beauty of its structure. Writers are not more universal because they are writing in Paris or New York rather than in Chicoutimi or Port-au-Prince. They are universal when, in speaking about something they know well to an audience that is prepared to be self-critical and see itself for what it is, they manage, through the miracle of theatre, yes, by the faith they put in it and by their sincerity, to describe and sing the human soul, delve into its mysteries and restore all its wealth. The universality of Chekhov does not lie in his being Russian but in the genius that enabled him to describe the Russian soul with which all human beings can identify. The same applies to all geniuses and even to simply “good” playwrights. Each line of dialogue written by an author somewhere in the world is universal by definition if it expresses the fundamental cry of Electra: “How should I begin my accusation? How should I end it? What should go in the middle?”  
- Michel Tremblay, *St Adolphe d'Howard*, 24th July 1999

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### **Michel Tremblay Interviews Himself!**

*A magazine asked playwright Michel Tremblay to interview himself, without using the questions and words of a journalist. He agreed to play along...*

MT: Michel Tremblay, I'm sorry, but I'm all nerves. It's the first time in my life that I'm interviewing someone, you understand?

MT: Don't worry, I'm nervous too. It's the first time I've been interviewed by someone intelligent.

MT: You know, you don't have to be intelligent to do good interviews.

MT: And vice versa.

MT: Good. Let's go. What's the most stupid question that anyone has ever asked you?

MT: The one you just asked me.

MT: Michel Tremblay, what do you hate the most?

MT: I hate being told what to think and write, what not to think and write, what to say when I write, even what to say when I'm not writing, what direction I should head in with my theatre, what type of language to use, what subject matter I can grapple with without compromising my reputation, or how to grapple with them without compromising myself, I resent that people try to give me story ideas....

MT: You hate a lot of things.

MT: Yes... and I'm not finished. I have this strange pretension which leads me to believe that I'm still capable of thinking on my own, and to build pieces that can stand up on their own without the help of two thousand other people.

- MT: You're not scared of limiting yourself by choosing to continue along the same vein?
- MT: The danger of repeating myself or limiting myself stems from the fact that one day, like all writers, I could have nothing left to say...
- MT: You say that you don't repeat yourself and you don't hesitate to carry on with the same characters from one play to the next, sometimes in the same situations...
- MT: A character hasn't necessarily said all that they had to say in a single play... Take Rose Ouimet from *Les Belles Soeurs*: it's not because that woman tells us that her husband violates her twice a day that she has nothing left to say! And it's for that reason that I will someday use Rose Ouimet again. Why be scared of building one's own gallery of characters and situations in which you can pick and choose from time to time? Characters and dramatic action are vehicles, like language. You can discover, after ten years that that vehicle used in one play could still serve you, and you have to do it. Most of all, you can't think of "what the world will say" when you write. You have to, I think, describe what you think as exactly as possible, without worrying about the public, even if it's for them that you're writing. If I had to think of the public every time I wrote, not only would my plays be bad, but it would also take me years to write them! It already takes me enough time as it is, thanks!

-from "Michel Tremblay par Michel Tremblay", *Nous*, September 1973, translated by Dave Deveau

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### One on One with director LEAH CHERNIAK

Dramaturg Dave Deveau sat down to ask director Leah Cherniak about this production...

- DD: What was the spark that brought forth this production of *Past Perfect*? It's clear that one focal point is Albertine's escape via cinema...**
- LC: Noticing that in the text, that she liked to go to the movies and that they refer to the movies a lot, you get a feeling that that's where she spends most of her free time. She gets a lot of emotional information from what she sees. And in examining the movies of the time period there's a kind of emotional indulgence that I equated with where she lived. So that was one part of it. The other part was a sense of time passing. That the play isn't taking place in real time. And that was interesting to me too. There is also the image of a boxing ring where Albertine's in the ring, the challengers keep coming in to see if they can knock her out and she stays up. She doesn't get [knocked out] totally. She gets knocked down sometimes. That was a really early original feeling, that sense of the boxing ring. And there's the mythic feeling, the Greek feeling I had of it too. Even though it takes place in a little basement apartment, it felt somewhat like a modern-day tragedy. There's something tragic about her situation, her life. So those elements all sparked a kind of attitude toward the production.
- DD: Who is Albertine? She defines herself in the play, but stripped of all the artifice and construction, who do you think she really is?**

LC: I think she's a very vulnerable, lonely, insecure girl who, at the core, is not sure of her father, who her father is, and feels the potential lack of identity because of it. She doesn't feel secure really in who she is because she doesn't really truly believe that her father is her father and that there's some man out there who is. So I feel like for people like that, it often gives them a core of instability internally, a huge part of their identity is unstable, and so what they do is they build upon that. They build up something to cover that up. There's an interesting line in the play when Albertine says:

*"If I understand you correctly...nothing ever happens to me that is of any importance to the rest of you. Everything I feel is insignificant, you could cross out my existence and forget me within a couple days! If I'd never been born, it would make no difference..."*

And I think that's actually how she feels, deeply inside. So who is she? I think she's a young girl who needs someone to hold her and hug her and not talk so much, but just give her a kind of reassurance about who she is and that it's okay. And nobody in the play does that for her really.

**DD: The dynamic that exists between Victoire (the mother) and Albertine is very particular and peculiar. There is an odd form of parenting. As a mother, how does that dynamic speak to you?**

LC: There are a few things: one is that two people, two women living in the same house that are very similar will respond to things in similar ways. And in my case it's the same with my own daughter. It terrifies me that she's actually going to be like me. And she's already exhibiting a lot of tendencies that reflect me. It's scary, that. You try to stop them from being that. And in this case, I think, too, that deep down Victoire has the same problem, in a way, as Albertine. She knows there is a big fat secret about her parentage. And because of that lie, Victoire's lie, she can't face her daughter as easily. She knows there is a big gulf right there. And so I think that's affected their relationship. Now that's not obvious in the play, but it's suggested. But mostly I think that there's a similar combative nature and they love that about each other, but of course it gets them in incredible trouble. That they feel a certain energy in being able to fight with each other. They get empowered by it. They're vying for control of the household.

**DD: What are the challenges of directing a translation?**

LC: I would say this is a good translation. Understanding the culture from which the play has been written, and therefore the language that reflects that culture. There's a music to it, there's a kind of thrust of that language that you have to see if you can get inside of in order to make some kind of translation. You have to try to find out how does this translate into an English culture? Where can I find what that French language does? Where does that exist in our English culture? Sometimes I think it's in the multiculturalness of our own culture. English Canadian culture is now becoming so multicultural; I see [similarly Québécois traits] in any Mediterranean background that we have here in Toronto. That's an interesting part, to find the music of the language and see how to get it into the

English part of it. There is also a certain colloquialism in the French language version that doesn't totally translate into English. It's very different. So that was a bit of a challenge: to find out how important that is, or what the relationship to that level of the language is in the original version. I've done other works in translation, Chekhov, Ibsen, and they're even more challenging because with something that's been written in a Norwegian language there's a whole other music to that and words actually mean totally different things. It's also exciting. There's a bit of freedom, there's a bit of a liberation in it because you don't have to stick so close to it, you can make it your own. Because you can't possibly get so close to what the original is, so you might as well give yourself the freedom to depart from it and let it be built on the characters themselves and let that be the motivating force of the music of it all.

### About the Play

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In *Past Perfect*, Tremblay introduces us to Albertine at age 20. She's dressed to the nines, her makeup and hair are perfect, and she's ready... For what? To reclaim what is rightfully hers. She remains in the living room, like a boxer awaiting her opponent, and new fighters keep coming in: first her mother, Victoire, then her sister, Madeleine, her brother Édouard, and finally, Alex, the prize. Albertine is fighting everyone around her for the belief that the relationship with the love of her life, Alex, isn't over. That he hasn't really gone on to be with her younger sister Madeleine. That she didn't really scare him off like everyone keeps telling her. And that she isn't crazy.

**Victoire:** *I don't know what to do with you.*

**Albertine:** *You've been telling me that ten times a day, since the day I was born.*

Albertine is a worthy opponent. She knows her family well, and she knows what buttons to press to get a response. Is Albertine simply a troubled girl who has no other way to release her temper than toward her family, or does it go deeper than that? Is there more going on than meets the eye? Does something exist inside Albertine that she's not able to cope with, that she basks in without knowing how to get out of?

**Albertine** (played by Caroline Cave): *Do you think I don't wish I was different? Do you think I chose to be this way? That I wouldn't prefer to have something other than bad luck in my life?*

**Victoire**, her mother (played by Nancy Beatty): *I can't say I don't understand you. But that's a road you have to travel alone. I can't help you, because I travelled down that road once myself, and once is enough... You're going to be alone with your pain, Bertine. All your life.*

**Madeleine**, her sister (played by Claire Calnan): *You always relate everything to you. The centre of the universe! The universe revolves around little old you. Everything, absolutely everything, is related to you! I suppose they brought on the Depression just so you'd earn less at the American Spaghetti House? It's impossible that Alex could simply love me. No! It must have something to do with the centre of the universe, my sister, Albertine!*

**Édouard**, her brother (played by Jeffrey R. Smith): *Is that it? End of conversation...Do you realize that your conversations with us always finish the same way? You tell us to piss off when you run out of arguments, and we're left alone, riled up and frustrated, because we're facing a bundle of nerves, who's deaf and dumb and pigheaded!*

**Alex**, the ex-boyfriend (played by Brendan Gall): *It was too intense all the time! We can't always be intense like that, it's impossible. When we went to the movies, you expected me to look at you, not the screen, like you were jealous of the movie we were watching!*

### The Life of Albertine

*"All I wanted was... I don't know... a bit of... something that felt like happiness... No big deal like in the movies... just something small... made to measure for me...Not too big for me to understand, for me to handle..."*

-Albertine, *Past Perfect*

In 1984 Michel Tremblay introduced audiences to one of his greatest loves: Albertine. One of his most iconic characters, and a focal point in his series of novels entitled *The Chronicles of the Plateau Mount Royal*, Tremblay's play *Albertine, In Five Times* showed how one woman's life unfolded over five decades, how age changed her, how something in her past made her deeply troubled. Albertine quickly became a Québécois phenomenon, the quintessential tragic heroine who was never quite able to rise above her lot in life. The English translation of the play premiered on the Tarragon stage in 1986, bringing what would become the Albertine saga to Anglophone audiences in what Robert Crew of the Toronto Star called "in a word, awesome."

Tremblay fans are no strangers to Albertine's character. Based on Tremblay's own Aunt Robertine, the Albertine character has appeared in more of his works than any other of his creations. In *En Pièces Détachées*, we witness her as a grandmother; in the film *Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est* we are enraptured by the tension that exists between her and her brother Édouard; in *La Maison Suspendue*, as well as the first three of Tremblay's novels: *The Fat Woman Next Door is Pregnant*, *Thérèse*, *Pierrette*, and *the Little Hanging Angel*, and *The Duchess and the Commoner*. Her children Thérèse and Marcel discuss her further in the play *Marcel, Pursued by the Hounds* as well as the later novels *News from Édouard*, *The First Quarter of the Moon*, and *A Thing of Beauty*. Tremblay's own memoirs (*Bambi and Me*, *Twelve Opening Acts*, *Birth of a Bookworm*) often refer to his dear Aunt who informed so much of who he became as he grew up in a tight-knit household.

Yet through all these interactions with Albertine, we never really understand where her immense sadness and rage and sense of betrayal came from. Thus Tremblay has provided us with *Past Perfect* which brings us back ten years earlier than any of the Albertines witnessed in *Albertine, in Five Times* in order to shine some light on that all-too-tragic moment.

*"If you're a girl, I'll call you Albertine, like my mother's mother, in the hopes you'll be as kind and gentle as her... Non, if you're a girl you won't be kind, I know it. You are going to... you're going to inherit the very worst in me, you'll inherit all my rage..."*

-Victoire, *La Maison Suspendue*

## The World of *Past Perfect*: Montreal, Québec, 1920-1930

- Following World War I, the Prohibition movement (referring to a period during which the manufacture, transportation, import, export, and sale of alcoholic beverages is restricted or illegal) in the United States turned Montreal into a haven for Americans looking for alcohol. Americans would go to Montreal for drinking, gambling, and prostitution, which earned the city the nickname "Sin City."
- Despite the increase in tourism, unemployment remained high in the city.
- 1928: Women legally become "persons" in Canada for the first time.
- 1929: October stock market crash on Wall Street heralds the start of the Great Depression.
- As the Depression hits, bread lines and soup kitchens open to feed jobless.
- 1934: At the height of the depression, one quarter of the city's inhabitants depend on some sort of government financial assistance.
- As Canada started to exit the Great Depression in the mid 1930s, and real estate developers began to build skyscrapers, changing Montreal's skyline.
- The Sun Life Building, built in 1931, was for a time the tallest building in the Commonwealth. During World War II its vaults were the secret hiding place of the gold bullion of the Bank of England and the British Crown Jewels.
- 1931 - The Statute of Westminster provided that all existing dominions of the British Empire, and all new dominions created thereafter, were fully independent of the United Kingdom so that the British Parliament no longer had legislative authority over them. The exceptions were Newfoundland, which was already showing signs of collapse (the Newfoundland dominion government was suspended in 1935 and direct rule from London was instituted until Newfoundlanders voted to join Canada in 1949); and the Dominion of Canada, which had specifically requested exclusion from the independence provisions of the Statute of Westminster because the federal and provincial governments could not agree on an amending formula for the Canadian constitution.

## Old Montreal & The Main

"Whether you're looking for a gal or a gun, a haircut or a hustler, a hock shop or a hamburger, you'll find it on Saint Laurent Boulevard."

-1930s columnist

- Old Montreal is the oldest example of a turn of the century urban metropolis.
- Old Montreal had been relatively uninhabited since the 1860s. In 1891 it accounted for only 3% of the city's population, a figure that had dropped below 1% by 1930.
- Montreal had the highest percentage of rental occupancy of any city in the country.
- Contrasting Old Montreal, Saint Laurent Boulevard, commonly referred to as "The Main" represents Montreal's nightlife.

## Entertainment in Montreal

“If you didn’t go to the movies so often, Bertine...”

-Édouard, *Past Perfect*

- The 1920’s and 1930’s mark a huge boom in cinemas in Montreal with theatres opening every year from 1929 through 1931, ushering in a new visual world.
- Entertainers and nightclubs made the city swing prior to television—it was a time when Montrealers of all stripes headed out to the clubs for music, cocktails, and dancing.
- The clubs were anywhere from restaurants with a stage to a real nightclub where people sat around and drank and danced. Some were old vaudeville theatres, some were basically bars. The city’s night scene owed much of its vibrancy to the US. When Prohibition began in America and the rumrunners headed south, a steady stream of musicians and entertainers migrated north to turn Montreal into Canada’s entertainment capital.
- The city’s night club scene flourished in the 1930s and 40s. However, many of the clubs were ruled by Montreal’s powerful underworld, and when mayor Jean Drapeau came to power in 1954 he moved quickly to shut these down. Suddenly, musicians found it exceptionally difficult to make a living in the city, and a period in Montreal’s history came to an end.

## Translation and Tremblay

All of Tremblay’s work is originally written in French and are unique because of his use of **joual**. Tremblay was the first playwright in Quebec to use joual in his plays – a dialect which many considered ‘low class’.

## What is JOUAL?

Joual is the name given by some to a working-class dialect of Quebec French spoken in Montreal, after its pronunciation of the word cheval (horse). Its most important trait is said to be the quantity of words borrowed from English. The term is said to have been coined by journalist André Laurendeau but the usage of this term can in fact be traced back to the 1930’s all around Francophone Canada.

## Why is Tremblay’s use of joual both important and controversial?

When Tremblay’s first major successful play *Les Belles Soeurs* was produced in 1968, audiences heard joual for the first time on stage. While audiences embraced the play, the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs was not as thrilled by its success and refused a \$20,000 grant needed to take the play to Paris. Although the Minister said it was due to “budgetary restraints”, most speculated that the ministry was embarrassed by the low-class society portrayed in the play. Tremblay admits that while joual may not be the most beautiful sounding French, it’s the language of his people and possesses “beautiful raw elements”. He says its “stupid to be ashamed of joual and Quebec must grow out of its inferiority complex”.

## Joual/French/English dictionary

For the production of *Les Belles Soeurs* which did finally premier in Paris, a two-page glossary of terms was included, explaining the meaning of “Canadian/ French” words such as bingo, tuque (winter hat) and quetaine (kitsch).

Here are some words in joual, French and English:

toé -- toi (you)	a -- elle (she)
moé -- moi (me)	ouais / ouin -- oui (yes)
chuis -- je suis (I'm)	y'a -- il y a (there is, there are)
té -- tu es (you're)	icitte -- ici (here)
ché -- je sais (I know)	ben -- bien (well)
pis -- puis (then)	su'l -- sur le (on the)
y -- il (he)	tsé -- tu sais (y'know)
	nuitte -- nuit (night)

## Language and Translation: An interview with John Van Burek

John Van Burek is a translator and did the translations of many of Tremblay's earlier works which were produced at Tarragon. In an interview, Van Burek explains Tremblay's use of language and how Van Burek wrestles with translating his unique style:

**Q. Michel Tremblay's plays are linguistically unique. Do you find that they cause greater problems for you as a translator than the works of other French-language authors?**

Van Burek: I doubt if the problems are greater with Tremblay than they are with any other good writer. All translations have to be unique and all authors have to be treated differently. I will agree that Tremblay's work is very special in that you have to be thinking on several levels at once – the sexual and the political are perhaps the two most obvious. Then there's the whole musicality of the work and the very special Quebec milieu. That always causes problems because if you're too literal, too exact, something larger might be lost.

**Q. How would you describe Tremblay's language?**

His language is tremendously vibrant. The real problem is in trying to find an equally vibrant equivalent in English.

**Q. Vibrant how?**

Well, its not real language. People don't speak that way. It's cruel language, grotesque language in a way. It's based on a reality, but it's Tremblay's reality. No one speaks like his characters. The language is too fine, too honed to be 'real'. Too orchestrated. He also has an extraordinary capacity to pun, to create his own structures, his own words in some cases. I thought for a time that it was Québécois, pure and simple, and I spoke with that language that I'd learned. When people started telling me how extraordinary my language was, I realized it was not a real language, but Tremblay's I was speaking.

(From *Canadian Theatre Review*, “Michel Tremblay Casebook”, Fall 1979)

## Elements of the Play

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All of the components that make up a play are called the dramaturgical elements. These include the **structure** (how the story is 'built') the **genre** (comedy or tragedy), the **dialogue** (what kind of language the characters use), the **characters** and **themes** (the larger issues the play is examining).

### Structure

The structure refers to how the playwright has arranged the events in his/her story. A story can be told in many different ways, for example the playwright can begin at the beginning of the story and move forward until the story reaches a logical ending. Or a play can begin long after the events have happened and unfold in random order, for example, in one character's memory.

In general, most plays consist of **exposition**, where the background of the story is told and the characters are introduced; the **crisis point** – the point in the story where the events around which the play will be centred begin; from here there is **rising action** which lead to the **climax** – the point at which the conflict introduced by the crisis point are resolved and the **denouement**, where the elements of the story are summarized and the play is concluded.

Examples of kinds of structures or plots:

- Shakespeare's plays always have five acts with the rising action in the first two acts, the climax in the third act and the falling action or denouement in the final two acts.
- The Well-Made Play – a term created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for plays which are characterized by the perfectly logical arrangement of its action. Suspense is a major element of these plays and each act reveals more of the plot which is then neatly resolved in the climax. Soap operas often follow this structure.
- Many modern playwrights reject logical, linear (meaning forward moving in a straight, logical line) and they arrange the events in the play in a less logical way. Memory plays, for example, don't often unfold in a chronological structure ie. Tennessee Williams' play *The Glass Menagerie*

### Tremblay's Musical Structures

The structure of Tremblay's work has often been compared to musical structures- string quartets, arias, solos etc. In considering the structure of *Past Perfect*, there is a definite 'operatic' feel - not only to the heightened emotions expressed in the play, but to the structure as well. Albertine is at the centre of the piece and each scene becomes a duet - first with her mother, then her sister, her brother and finally her ex-boyfriend. In between, Albertine sometimes has monologues or, in operatic terms "arias". Critic Don Rubin, writing in *Canadian Theatre Review*, also comments on the musical structure of some of Tremblay's other works:

"Tremblay...conceives his plays in an auditory, rather than visual, manner... based upon the method of musical composition. Thus, Tremblay refers to *Forever Yours, Marie Lou*, as a 'string quartet'; *Bonjour, là, Bonjour* is divided into individual scenes with the headings of solo, duo, trio, up to octet, based on the number of characters (conceived as voices/instruments); *Sainte Carmen de la Main* is designed as an 'opera for the spoken word'. In other words, the characters of the plays are conceived as structural elements,

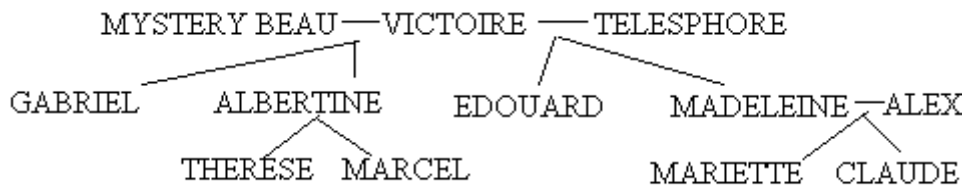
functioning and interacting as would voices or musical instruments in a piece of music.” (CTR, Fall 1979)

Director **Leah Cherniak**, in an interview in the *Globe and Mail*, describes the structure of *Past Perfect* this way:

“It’s an incredibly formal play. There’s Albertine in the boxing ring and every 20 minutes or so in comes someone else. It’s a series of duets, really. It’s not how people talk to each other; it’s a heightened form.”

### The Tremblay Family Tree

This family tree helps delineate the generations of Albertine’s family as they appear in the works of Michel Tremblay. The tree itself could continue for pages, as almost all of his characters in all his novels and plays can be included in it. For the purposes of this play, this is the family that is most significant.



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### Characters

Michel Tremblay has woven an intricate world of characters that unfolds throughout his plays and novels. The characters from *Past Perfect* continue on in many other works:

#### VICTOIRE

Albertine’s mother. She is what holds the family together, despite the poverty that the Depression has brought on. Victoire has a force within her that, when released is often overpowering, making her Albertine’s primary opponent as they are most alike. She also holds a tremendous sense of secrecy, another thing that Albertine taps into in order to fight hard.

Her four children have deeply influenced her life. The eldest, Gabriel has already moved out. His wife is the titular “fat woman” of Tremblay’s first novel *The Fat Woman Next Door is Pregnant*. Victoire is featured in many of Tremblay’s works, most notably the novels, as well as *La Maison Suspendue*, where the questionable relationship between her and her brother Josephat-le-Violon is first introduced.

#### MADELEINE

Albertine’s sister. Though Albertine refers to her as “the dull one”, she is the calm, rational member of the family. Madeleine is now dating Alex, Albertine’s former beau. As a result, she tries to navigate the complicated terrain of Albertine’s emotions, as well as her own battle with the morality of it all.

Albertine’s foil in *Albertine, In Five Times*, Madeleine is one of the only characters in this family that is a complete construct and not based on any actual member of Tremblay’s own family. Madeleine is later seen in *The Real World?* and referred to in Tremblay’s latest play *The Driving Force*, which examines the interactions of her husband Alex, and her son Claude.

## **ÉDOUARD:**

Albertine's brother. Albertine and Édouard have a love-hate relationship, in which they both fundamentally understand each other, as they both have a world of secrecy that they don't want to share. Édouard has within him an amazing contrast of tenderness and cruelty, but all of it informed by a deep love.

Édouard is another of Tremblay's most iconic characters, as his drag persona of *The Duchess of Langeais*. He is the central character in the play *La Duchesse de Langeais*, the film *Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est* and the novels *The Duchess and the Commoner* and *News From Édouard*. His explorations on The Main, mark the intersection of the two worlds of Tremblay: Fabre Street (where the family later relocates) and Saint Laurent Boulevard (commonly referred to as The Main). Almost all of Tremblay's works happen within these two locations.

## **ALEX:**

Madeleine's boyfriend, and Albertine's ex. Alex is an almost iconic image in the context of this play, until he is finally revealed in the last moments of the play. The contrast of the idealized version of Alex that Albertine paints throughout the show, and the reality, helps us begin to understand the world in which Albertine lives in her mind.

He is featured in only two of Tremblay's other works: *The Real World?* and *The Driving Force* which focus on Alex and Madeleine's family, including their two children Mariette and Claude.

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## **Themes**

### **Secrets**

Each of the characters in the play possesses some kind of secret that they are either too afraid or too ashamed to tell anyone else. Victoire makes reference to her "mystery beau" who was perhaps the father of Gabriel and Albertine. Albertine is full of secrecy with regard to her real intentions for wearing a beautiful, alluring dress on a Thursday night, when her sister's beau is on the way. Madeleine's secrets stem from her having more of a backbone than she lets on, as Albertine herself says:

*"Madeleine, the dull one, though not so dull we realize now, the damn hypocrite!"*

Édouard lives his life in a world of secrecy out on the town. Though Albertine has suspicions about what his life entails, no one is really sure. Alex's secrets resurface when he finally confronts Albertine, but so much of it has been eating away at him, that it has caused a fury inside.

Secrecy slowly erodes at all of the characters in the play. It controls their actions, their responses, and the way they interact with each other. And in many ways it prevents them from making real connections with one another.

### **Family**

Though they spend the entirety of the play bickering, there is a definite under-current of love that exists between the four members of the family that the play presents. Victoire's husband, Télésphore, is never seen onstage, but is referred to numerous times through her discussions with Albertine as she idealizes him. Albertine wants nothing more than

to know for certain that Télésphore is her real father. This is one of the things that prevents her from coming into her own.

There is a definite sense of sibling rivalry that exists in the family. Gabriel, the eldest, and Édouard used to gang up on Albertine, prior to Gabriel moving out to start a family.

*“It was just for fun. I hope you realize that, I hope you don’t think I try to get your goat to make you feel bad and “add to your misery”, as they say in Ma’s novels. But you always took it seriously... To the bitter end... And it didn’t change after Gabriel left home. You act like every joke I make about you is high treason, Bertine...”*

Now that same pattern has continued between Édouard and Madeleine leaving Albertine to feel isolated and alone within the confinement of their basement apartment. Albertine, however, welcomes the challenge of all of her family members who attempt to knock some sense into her. She gives it her all and throws any punches she can. It is doubtful that Albertine would feel so comfortable fighting with someone who wasn’t family.

### **Anger**

Albertine holds an incredible rage within her that slowly festers. Every now and again a wave of it comes out and attacks whoever she is speaking to at the time, because it becomes too much for her to withstand. There is a history of anger in the family, likely stemming from loves lost and parentage that is never clarified. This is one of the similarities that unites Albertine with Victoire:

*“If you lock two stubborn mules up in the same box, they’ll drive each other so crazy, you’ll end up taking them both to the loony bin.”*

It is Albertine’s anger that prevents her from ever maintaining a real connection to anyone in her life.

### **Morality**

There are many immoral acts that occur within Victoire’s household. That Madeleine is now involved with Albertine’s ex creates a certain atmosphere of immorality. That everyone in the family is on Madeleine’s side only furthers it, while adding to Albertine’s anger. Questions of morality also surround Victoire when discussing the possibility that Gabriel may have a different father. And Édouard is no stranger to immorality, as his wanderings downtown are often put into question. The family members live in secrecy, each with their own slight immoralities, and try, in vain, to coexist.

## Elements of Design

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The following section combines general information about areas of design (including information from Tarragon production staff, design websites, and the textbook: *Theatrical Design and Production* by J. Michael Gillette) with specific examples of how design elements have been employed in the production you are attending. A brief glossary is also included to assist with technical terms used in this section of the guide.

### Design Overview

A script can be performed numerous times without ever being interpreted the same way. Although text stays the same from production to production, the way the piece is conceptualized changes.

The designers (set, costumes, lighting, sound, etc.) and director thoroughly discuss the play to ensure all parties share a similar vision of the play, and explore how this vision will be represented through design. Design elements should create an environment for the play that supports the production concept: the creative interpretation of the script.

There are some artistic and practical considerations that apply to all areas of design. These include:

- mood and spirit of the production
- historical period of the production
- season of the year and time of day for each scene
- time, labour and material budgets
- health and safety
- needs of other designers
- how do these elements affect the choices for each area of design?

In *Past Perfect*, playwright Michel Tremblay explores the contradiction between the way we see ourselves and the way we are perceived by others. Director Leah Cherniak wanted to explore this disparity further in a production that plays with the boundary between naturalism and heightened theatricality. In order to do this, video projections that represent the lead character's emotional state are incorporated into the production. This took the play out of standard "kitchen-sink drama" naturalism and allowed the designers to heighten the theatricality of their design.

The play is set in a family's apartment in Montreal in 1930. The feeling of the time period is strongly represented onstage through the set and costume designs. But there is a very obvious reference to 1930's cinema. The red curtains, revolving set and the strong lighting, let the audience know, before the lights go down, that they are about to see a larger than life performance. Cue the MGM lion!

## Set Design

The set designer's job is to create a physical world that helps the audience understand and enjoy a play by providing a visual representation of the production concept. Before rehearsals begin, the set designer meets multiple times with the director. From these meetings design drawings and a maquette (a scale model of what will be onstage) are developed. The model and drawings are used by the actors, stage managers and production staff to better understand the design goals; to imagine and replicate the space the production will be set in; and to build and decorate the set pieces.

Specific practical elements considered by the set designer are:

- number and position of entrances and exits needed
- number and position of entrances and exits already in the space
- the seating formation of the theatre – can it be changed?
- the type of stage that comes with the theatre (i.e. proscenium, thrust, arena, catwalk etc.)
- is this a flyhouse?
- the duration of the run
- will the set tour after the first production

In addition to the scenery, the set designer is frequently responsible for designing the stage properties.

It will be interesting to take notice of the following:

- How the mood and spirit of the production is relayed through the design
- What information the set gives about the characters

Set Designer Yannik Larivée had to incorporate a large projection screen into the set to show the video montages. A large sheet of flexible projection fabric, thicker than shower curtain plastic, is stretched across the void space in the upstage wall and then painted scrim fabric covers all the walls of the set to create a uniform texture to the walls so the video screen seems to disappear when not in use. The red bordering curtains add a feeling of "old cinema" but they have no practical use. The height of the set – right up to the lighting grid – allows for the projection screen to be really large. In order for the projection to appear as large as it does on the screen, the projector has to be a certain distance from the screen. Unfortunately our backstage area is not large enough. We'd have to put the projector in the driveway! The problem was solved with the use of a large mirror. The projector is right behind the screen, focused at the mirror and the images are reflected back onto the screen. The iris effect, so often used in old movies is operated manually. An iris was mounted in front of the projector lens and the ASM opens and closes it when cued by the SM in the booth.

The stage also incorporates a revolve. 1 revolution = 1 show. We end up where we started. The opening image of *Albertine* is reminiscent of the opening shot of an old movie. But we couldn't keep the sofa back to the audience for the entire show as too much of the action would be obscured. The rotation of the furniture means that all the audience has an opportunity to see the show from every angle. It is though a camera is being set and reset for us to get all views.

The stage has minimal set dressing. There isn't a lot to clutter the stage. On the revolve there is a sofa, a chair, coffee table, end table and an ashtray on a stand. A radiator and a wall sconce are the only dressing off the revolve. The colour of the set is neutral allowing the performers to stand out in contrast.

## Lighting Design

Effective stage lighting not only lets the spectators see the action of the play but also ties together all the visual elements of the production and helps create an appropriate mood and atmosphere to heighten the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the play.

Lighting includes the use of coloured gels to create different effects; intensity to determine how dark or bright a scene is; direction to establish the angle at which the light hits the stage; and movement to decide the duration and components of cues.

Lighting and sound often work together to create an effect (i.e. a fade to black that is timed to a piece of music).

Lighting also works closely with set pieces when 'practicals' are used. These are light sources that are manipulated by the actors (i.e. a desk lamp). In this case the set designer will determine the look of the lamp and the lighting designer will decide how it functions.

Some practical considerations for a lighting designer are:

- the number of locations in a set
- the number of lighting instruments available
- the type of performance (i.e. drama, comedy, dance, opera, etc.)

Some lighting elements to notice are:

- when and how lighting indicates a change in time or location
- lighting changing the focus from one character to another
- how lighting interacts with sound elements
- how lighting is employed to reinforce a mood
- how colour is used in the lighting instruments

There are several challenges to lighting *Past Perfect*. Lighting Designer Paul Mathiesen had to use minimal front light that would wash out the projections. There is a lot of top and side lighting as well as foot lights that add to the theatricality of the lighting. It is angular and cinematic and focuses our attention on Albertine's larger than life speeches.

Because the upstage wall is blank, Mr. Mathiesen used this canvas to texture it with light. Bold stripes and crossed beams makes the upstage wall more lively.

The large scoop light hung directly over center stage creates another effect – bright and shadowless – that has the look of old film lighting. It too is used to highlight Albertine's emotional outbursts.

There is only one practical light source onstage - the wall sconce. A practical lamp is one that the actors operate, turn on and off, or is the perceived light source in the room.

## Costume Design

Costume design includes all clothing, underclothing, hairdressing, makeup, and accessories such as hats, scarves, fans, umbrellas, and jewellery, worn or carried by each character in a production. A costume design suggests specific personal information about each character.

The designer works from indications within the play's script and looks for hints into the characters' personality. They then make artistic choices for the colour of the costumes, their shape, and the fabrics to be used.

Finally, the designer works with the costume team and the actors in fittings to make certain that the costumes are comfortable and as easy as possible to manipulate.

Some practical considerations in costume design include:

- the background and personality of the characters
- the limitations created by the set or staging (i.e. a raked stage makes spiked shoes impractical)
- the actors can move about on the stage as required (i.e. run up a set of stairs or engage in stage combat)
- the costumes remain effective under stage lighting
- costumes that need to be changed quickly are built accordingly
- costumes can last for an entire run and be laundered

As there is little on the set to tell us what time period the play takes place in, the costumes, designed by Yannik Larivée, have to convey this to the audience. As contemporary clothing bought off the rack can't necessarily depict the style of the late 1920's - early 30's, period look pieces were built for the show. Stylebooks were poured over to find clothing shapes that were appropriate for the time period. Fabrics were chosen with an eye to what was in style and available in that era. Modern synthetic fabrics are used to mimic more authentic fabrics in some cases for durability, launderability and cost.

Colours of the costumes are muted and distinct to each character. Albertine stands apart from them in her dramatic black dress.

- Albertine: Black w/ beige accents
- Victoire: Beige w/ black accents
- Madeline: Green with beige and soft pink accents
- Edouard: Beige and grey
- Alex: Brown and grey

## Sound Design

Sound design consists of music, effects and reinforcement (such as microphones).

The sound designer obtains a lot of information directly from the script i.e. “a phone rings”, “it begins to rain”, or “a sad song is heard through the window”. He/she must think about the transitions between scenes and what sound elements will shift the audience from the mood of one scene to the next. Sound design also extends to the elements the audience hears when they first enter the theatre, during the intermission, and even the curtain call and post-show music.

Some practical elements the sound designer considers are:

- speaker and microphone placement
- live or recorded sound, or both
- volume of each piece
- length of scene changes
- equipment available
- existing ambient noise in the theatre

As well as establishing and reinforcing mood and atmosphere, sound elements also provide information to the audience:

- When you enter a theatre take a minute to listen to the pre-show music or soundscape – does it offer any clues about the nature of the show?
- What sound cues did you hear that helped establish time and place?
- Were any special effects used? Were they useful in moving the story forward? Why or why not?

John Millard is the sound designer for *Past Perfect*. He has created sounds that punctuate the emotional peaks that Albertine reaches and heighten the theatricality of the video montages.

## Pre Show Lesson Plan 1 Exploring Character through Text

### Critical Question:

How does gender inform character development?

### Expectations:

TH1.01: describe the process of creating a character (e.g., script analysis, character analysis, experimentation with movement and voice);

CRV.01: interpret a variety of roles/characters, using the techniques of character development;

### Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Warm up:

“Yes...but:”

- Two students start in the middle of a circle with an object (ruler, pencil case, shoe etc).
- The first student says, “I need this shoe to *insert objective here*”
- The second student responds with “Yes...but, *insert their objective with the object here*”
- The first student replies with “Yes...but....”
- The improvisation game continues as students build on reasons, agreeing with the “yes” but adding their needs with the “but”
- All students take turns. The object changes with each turn.

### Main Activity

1. Put students into pairs.  
Explain that this lesson is about exploring how gender informs decisions about how to play a character.  
Distribute scene from **Past Perfect** (on the next page)

When approaching the text students might consider:

*How old are the characters?*

*How well do they know each other?*

*What happened just before they spoke? What might happen next?*

*What physical gestures can be added to help convey the ideas?*

*What is the objective that they are **desperate** to obtain?*

Do it once with with “anger” or “sadness” throughout the scene. Do it with two pauses in the scene, pick two places where this will happen.

Students Rehearse the script and perform it once as character “A” female and “B” male.

**Question: What characteristics of the female character surfaced?**

Now reverse the roles, perform character “A” as male and “B” as female.

**Question: How does the scene change with a man acting out character “B”?**

### Possible questions:

How did the role reversal effect the scene? Why or why not?

*Past Perfect Scene Excerpt:*

A: So you may as well make yourself comfortable...Give me your coat, have a seat on the sofa.

B: You must understand that I don't feel comfortable –

A: Why not? C'mon, "B", we have to put all that behind us.

B: Oh, really? Well, I'm relieved...

A: Let bygones be bygones, we have to move ahead...

B: It's just that I heard... I mean...

A: You're still so attractive when you blush....

*B squirms with embarrassment.*

A: Strange, you're not usually the shy type...Good heavens, "B", if you go on blushing, you're going to explode! Fan yourself a bit, do something, you look like you're going to faint!

*Laughs....a peal of false laughter, too theatrical.*

A: Can I get you something to drink? I'd love to offer you a beer, but, as you know, my mother refuses to keep any alcohol in the house... and that's why my father spends his days at the tavern...

B: No, no thank you. I'm not thirsty.

A: Not even a little glass of water?

B: No, no, thanks. I'm not thirsty.

A: *(laughing)* Good heavens, a real parrot!

## Pre Show Lesson Plan 2 Using theme to inspire discussion

### Critical Question?

How do large dramatic themes connect to our own stories?

### Expectations:

CRV.02: create and present an original or adapted dramatic work; Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

CR1.02 – convey character through the effective use of voice and movement techniques;

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### Warm-up:

Physical warm up.

### Main Activity:

In his address for 2000 World Theatre Day, Michel Tremblay said, “ ***Writers are not more universal because they are writing in Paris or New York rather than in Chicoutimi or Port-au-Prince. They are universal when, in speaking about something they know well to an audience that is prepared to be self-critical and see itself for what it is, they manage, through the miracle of theatre....to describe and sing the human soul. The universality of Chekhov does not lie in his being Russian but in the genius that enabled him to describe the Russian soul with which all human beings can identify.***”

One of the main themes in *Past Perfect* is our understanding of romantic love; how it is supposed to be, how we are supposed to feel within it.

- 1) Divide students into groups of 5.
- 2) Students write on chart paper, or brainstorm what ideas they are given about romantic love from:
  - Family, television, movies, fairy tales, friends, magazines, internet, their school culture
  - Students discuss the “ideals” or ideas of romantic love. Are these true? Do these ideals work in our society? In our own understanding of ourselves? Do these ideals promote healthy relationships?
- 3) In groups of 5, students create a five-piece tableau, which tells the life cycle of familial or platonic love.
- 4) Then students create a five-piece tableau illustrating the life cycle of romantic love.
- 5) Students perform their tableaux in front of their peers.

### Questions:

What differences were illustrated between the different kinds of love? Do we have different expectations for each kind of love? Why or why not? How do large dramatic themes connect to our own stories?

## Post Show Lesson Plan Analysis of Pre Show Press

### Critical Question:

How does the press shape our understanding of artistic process?

### Expectations:

THV.02: demonstrate an understanding of various aspects of the elements, principles, and techniques of dramatic arts;

AN2.02 – explain how their experiences in dramatic arts have helped develop or enhance their beliefs, philosophies, or world views;

AN2.01 – explain how participation in the theatre fosters self-awareness and awareness of others for performers, authors, and audiences;

AN1.05 – identify universal concepts and themes from a study of theatre works, and analyse their personal, social, and cultural significance;

ANV.03 · analyse the personal, social, and cultural impact of dramatic arts;

### Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Warm-up:

Physical warm up.

### Main Activity:

- 1) Distribute a copy of “Cherniak’s Taste of *Past Perfect*” to the class (next page).
- 2) Students read the article in groups and highlight points that surprises them
- 3) In groups, students answer the following questions:

*a) How did you see the boxing ring analogy manifest itself during the play (through the blocking, set design, lighting)? Was this effective? Why or Why not?*

*b) Leah Cherniak says, “When you’re finally in the room, you discover the absolute music in the text.” Did you have the same experience? Why or why not?*

*c) Leah Cherniak has promoted the idea of the performer [actor] as a writer through her “collaborative, hands-on, physical, very emotional” approach to theatrical creation.” National Theatre School and Ryerson are “stating very boldly that acting students be quite versed in many aspects of play creation.”*

*What is your response to this new role assigned to actors? Do you feel it will alter the kinds of plays that are created, or how they are created? Why or why not?*

- 4) Each group shares their answers with the class.
- 5) Was there a bias vocabulary in the article which inferred information, or lead to reader assumptions?
- 6) Did you find that important information was left out, having attended the play? Why or why not?

### Journal:

1. What did you learn about the creative process from reading this article? Please explain.

## Cherniak's take on *Past Perfect*

KAMAL AL-SOLAYLEE, The Globe and Mail

A consummate theatre artist who has seen and done it all, Leah Cherniak is a complete virgin when it comes to directing the plays of Michel Tremblay. She has a vague recollection of *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*, in which she had a small acting part, but can't quite recall if the production was performed in its original French or in English.

"It was thousands of years ago," the bilingual Cherniak says with a give-me-a-break lilt in her voice. Other than that obviously not-so-memorable production, her path and Tremblay's never crossed. Seeing her name attached to the Toronto premiere of his 2003 play *Le passé antérieur*, or *Past Perfect* in Linda Gaboriau's translation, at the Tarragon Theatre must have caused some double takes in the community.

Despite an eclectic résumé that ranges from directing European classics, Ibsen and Chekhov among them, to such "American chestnuts" as *The Miracle Worker*, to contemporary Canadian works including Michael Healey's beautiful *Rune Arlidge*, Cherniak is primarily known for the physical, clown-based work of Theatre Columbus. That's the company she set up with actor Martha Ross 21 years ago, shortly after both returned from their training in France's L'École Jacques Lecoq. It's famous for such productions as *The Anger in Ernest and Ernestine* and *The Betrayal*.

For Richard Rose, the Tarragon's artistic director, that was exactly the point of inviting her to direct this Tremblay, the 12th production of the Montreal master in his theatre's history. "Partly why Richard asked me to do it [was that] he wanted to see something done with it that was different from a complete naturalistic take," Cherniak explains. "He's seen some of the work I've done where I've taken some classical text and found a way of heightening it. I immediately agreed in terms of the texture of this play and how I see it. I saw it as quite operatic."

In *Past Perfect*, set in Depression-era Montreal, Tremblay revisits his favourite character, the indomitable Albertine. In *Albertine, in Five Times*, Tremblay traced five decades in her life from her 30s onward. In this prequel of sorts, he goes back a decade to the 20-year-old Albertine (played by Caroline Cave), shortly after her younger sister has stolen her lover away. The play unfolds as a series of intense encounters between Albertine and her family, including mother Victoire and brother Édouard.

"It's an incredibly formal play," says Cherniak. "There's Albertine in the boxing ring and every 20 minutes or so in comes someone else. It's a series of duets, really. It's not how people talk to each other; it's a heightened form."

In choosing words like opera and duets, Cherniak is showing her roots as a rhythmically attuned performer's director. Although she's a meticulous reader and researcher of texts, the real work is determined in the rehearsal room with the ebb and flow of the words as her cast interprets them.

"When you're finally in the room, you discover the absolute music in the text," she says. "It's in my ear. When it's right, I hear it, I hear it as music. And when it's wrong, I hear it

musically wrong. . . . That brings me back to the feeling of opera that I had from the beginning, the sense of arias."

It's not just how Cherniak hears it that influences the shape of her productions. What she sees, more accurately what she visualizes, is just as significant. You can always tell a Cherniak show from its slightly off-kilter look. "I have an instinct in me that sees what a text might look like: a visual picture. That's a different starting point, I think, from people with a much more literary background."

Eventually, the literary and visual starting points merge, and Cherniak cites Theatre Columbus's adaptation of Ibsen's epic *Peer Gynt* (produced in 2002 as *The Gynty Self*) as an example. Cherniak, Ross and other members of Theatre Columbus have promoted the idea of the performer as a writer through their "collaborative, hands-on, physical, very emotional" approach to theatrical creation.

As Cherniak, who teaches at both Montreal's National Theatre School and Toronto's Ryerson University, notes, theatre training is catching up to the model of creation she and other members of Theatre Columbus developed. At NTS, for example, "they're stating very boldly that acting students be quite versed in many aspects of play creation."

But just because theatre culture is coming round to embracing her philosophy is not enough of a sweet vindication. As with all theatre artists, every day is a struggle and there are times when keeping the faith requires, well, more faith than she has in her.

"What revitalizes me each time is walking into the rehearsal hall and working with the actors," she says. "I get pulled into it every bloody time and I fall in love. I fall in love with the people I'm working with and want them to look great and show off their love through the work, this piece of theatre, to make audiences sit up and, hopefully, gasp."

## Pre and Post Show Lesson Plan Production Analysis through Role Play

### Critical Question:

How does role-play act as a tool for greater understanding?

### Expectations:

THV.01: demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of role playing and structuring dramatic works etc.

TH1.01: demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief” both as performer and as audience;

ANV.02: evaluate dramatic performances presented in the school and the community;

ANV.03: explain how dramatic arts represent, influence, and contribute to culture and society;

AN1.06: identify the artistic choices made by the actors, director, designer, and technicians in a dramatic production, and assess the effectiveness of these choices;

### Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### Warm-up:

Review with students the important elements of creating a whole group role-play:

- Maintaining focus throughout the role-play.
- Maintaining the physicality of your character throughout the role-play.
- Sustaining the vocal quality of your character throughout the role-play.
- Ability to take on, and commit to, your characters’ attitudes and beliefs.

### Main Activity:

Interpreting the play through Role Play

- Divide the students, half as production members (actors, designers etc.) and the other half as Canadian media (Globe, CTV, CBC, Flare magazine etc)
- Each half will take turn on the production panel and as a member of the media
- The media asks a questions about the production to the production panel
- Remind the students that they should watch the play with their role in mind because they will need to answer questions pertaining to their specific role assignment.
- Every decision in the theatre is a conscious one (the colour of a pair of pants, an actor’s hairstyle, the texture of the set carpet). All of these choices help create the world of *Past Perfect*.
- Though certain theatrical elements may seem to address one area of production more specifically, students should be prepared to provide feedback for all questions when in role.

In this activity students develop role-playing, reflective thinking, focusing and application of knowledge skills. Students discover through their own creative work in role (layered with their experience in Drama class and viewing the production) that they may contribute their own knowledge to some of the questions about artistic choices that are asked.

### Journal:

What surprised you about answering production questions in role? Please give two examples. How did discussing the play in role affect your analysis of the Tarragon production? Be specific and give examples.