

# Seeing French Theatre in Canada

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## Canadian Francophone playwrights

### Gratien Gélinas (1909-1999)

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Gratien Gélinas towards the end of his life, in 1991.

Considered the father of Quebec dramaturgy, Gratien Gélinas began his career as an actor, then as a radio monologist. As a monologist, in 1937 Gélinas brought to life his character Fridolin, an adolescent pretending to be naïve. Fridolin's humorous comments on the social mores of his day later came to life on stage in a series of [revues](#) called *Fridolinades*.

Gélina's development of *Ti-Coq in 1945* remains one of the key moments in Quebec theatre history. This dramatic text is one of the first to incorporate popular language and everyday people caught up in the era's major social and political issues. *Ti-Coq*, a illegitimate child, became the archetypal French-Canadian wrestling with a sense of identity shaped by inferiority and illegitimacy. In 1959, Gélinas wrote his comedy *Bousille et les justes*, an acerbic criticism of family and religious behaviour in traditional Quebec. The story foretold the Quiet Revolution.

As [playwright](#), [actor](#), [director](#), founder and director of the Théâtre la Comédie Canadienne, Gratien Gélinas was a consummate man of the theatre. He also worked for major cultural organizations, such as the CFDC – Canadian Film Development Corporation, now known as Telefilm Canada.

© National Archives of Canada, photo by Basil Zarov

Hélène Loïselle, Juliette Huot, Gratien Gélinas, and Paul Berval in the English version of *Bousille et les justes* (*Bousille and the Just*) by Gratien Gélinas at the Comédie Canadienne in 1961.

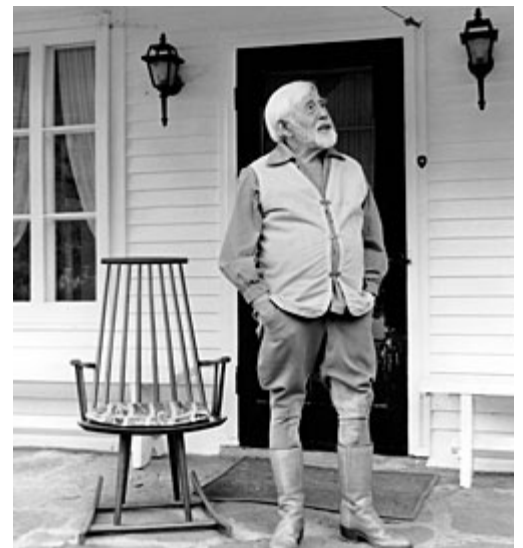
**By** Gratien Gélinas:

- *Les Fridolinades* [1938-1946], 4 vol., Éditions Quinze and Leméac.
- *Ti-Coq* [1948], Éditions Quinze.
- *Bousille et les justes* [1959], Éditions Quinze.
- *Hier les enfants dansaient* [1966], Éditions Quinze.

**About** Gratien Gélinas:

- *Gratien, Ti-Coq, Bousille et les autres*, Gratien Gélinas and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Stanké.
- *La ferveur et le doute*, 2 vol., Anne-Marie Sicotte, Québec/Amérique; short version available.
- Prenez place! Gratien Gélinas (National Archives of Canada website): [http://www.archives.ca/05/0519\\_e.html](http://www.archives.ca/05/0519_e.html)

**Featuring** Gratien Gélinas at the NFB:



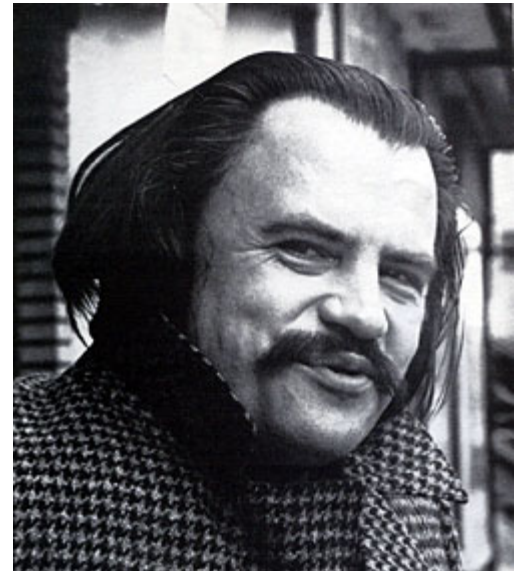
- *Fridolinons* (1945), Roger Blais, 34 min.

## Claude Gauvreau (1925-1971)

© Kèro

Claude Gauvreau

Claude Gauvreau often referred to himself as a revolutionary poet, a distinction confirmed by the unique place he holds on the Quebec literary landscape. Inspired by the automatist writing of the surrealists, he invented a poetic language which he termed *exploréen*. This language is characterized by the flamboyant use of invented words and verbal collages. His works, such as *Les oranges sont vertes* and *La Charge de l'original épormyable* exalt artistic sentiment confronted by the forces of social order and the obscure. Gauvreau has been labelled a “damned poet” – an image often found in his theatre – because of the strong resistance to his innovative work expressed by a certain segment of the public combined with a life plagued by bouts of depression interspersed with periods of psychiatric confinement.



Three people influenced Gauvreau and his writing: his brother, painter Pierre Gauvreau, who introduced him to modern art; his muse, actress Muriel Guilbault, whose suicide left him forever inconsolable; and Paul-Émile Borduas, the automatist artist whom Gauvreau supported by signing his Refus Global manifesto in 1948. Gauvreau took his own life in 1971, leaving behind a considerable body of work encompassing poetry, radio, and drama, which is still being discovered today.

© André Le Coz

Robert Lalonde, Robert Gravel, and Michelle Rossignol during the creation of *Les oranges sont vertes* by Claude Gauvreau, TNM, 1971.

**By** Gauvreau:

- *Les Entrailles* [1944-1946] in *Oeuvres créatrices complètes*, Parti Pris.
- *Le Vampire et la Nymphomane* [1949] in *Oeuvres créatrices complètes*, Parti Pris.
- *La Charge de l'original épormyable* [1956] in *Oeuvres créatrices complètes*, Parti Pris.
- *La Reprise* [1958-1967] in *Oeuvres créatrices complètes*, Parti Pris.
- *Les oranges sont vertes* [1958-1970], l'Hexagone.



Video excerpts (Real Audio):

- [http://video.telequebec.tv/catalogue/affiche\\_info\\_serie.asp?codeSerie=222](http://video.telequebec.tv/catalogue/affiche_info_serie.asp?codeSerie=222)

**Featuring** Claude Gauvreau at the NFB:

- *Nuit de la poésie, 27 mars 1970* (1971), Jean-Claude Labrecque and J.-P. Masse, 112 min.
- *Claude Gauvreau* (1977), Jean-Claude Labrecque, 10 min.
- *Claude Gauvreau – Poète* (1974), Jean-Claude Labrecque, 56 min.

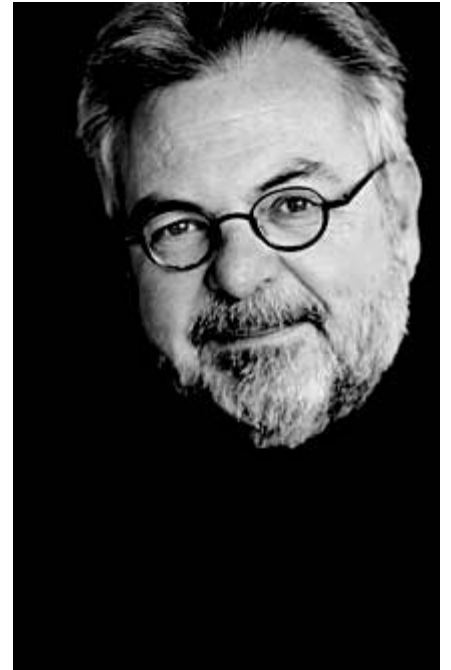
## Michel Tremblay (1942)

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Michel Tremblay

With over 26 plays translated into 26 languages, Michel Tremblay is the best known and most translated playwright in Quebec. He was born in the Plateau Mont-Royal, which was once a poor, working-class Montreal neighborhood. There, many of his [dramas](#) unfold. *Les Belles-Soeurs* created a scandal when it opened in 1968. The language spoken by the play's fifteen housewives, a form of Quebec slang, held a mirror up to the audience, reflecting their own speech. It had the effect of illustrating a more relaxed, liberated style of language in theatre drama.

Tremblay's works are filled with recurring characters on a desperate search for happiness. Their quest is compromised by a stifling and alienating social universe. Tremblay puts these "ordinary people" in unusual dramatic forms, using the antique chorus – *Les Belles-Soeurs* –, parallel montage– *À toi, pour toujours ta Marie-Lou* – or the multiplication of one same character at different ages – *Albertine, en cinq temps*. His artistic journey is linked to that of [André Brassard](#), Tremblay's favoured director.



A prolific writer, Tremblay continues to delight readers and audiences with his novels, plays, film and television screenplays.

### About Michel Tremblay:

© Robert Etcheverry

Nicole Leblanc, Denise Filiatrault, Sylvie Drapeau, Louise Laprade, Henri Chassé, and Guy Provost in *Bonjour, là, bonjour* by Michel Tremblay, TNM, 1987.

- *Le Monde de Tremblay*, Cahiers Jeu - Éditions Lansman.
- *Pièces à conviction* by Luc Boulanger, Leméac.
- [Canadian Writers: Michel Tremblay](#). Library and Archives Canada website.



### By Michel Tremblay:

- *Les Belles-Soeurs* [1968], Leméac.
- *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* [1970], Leméac.
- *Sainte Carmen de la main* [1975], Leméac.
- *Albertine en cinq temps* [1983], Leméac.
- *Encore une fois, si vous permettez* [1983], Leméac.

At the NFB:

- *Les trois Montréal de Michel Tremblay* ou *Promenade dans l'imaginaire d'un écrivain* (1989), Michel Moreau, 58 min.
- *Françoise Durocher, waitress* (1972), André Brassard and Michel Tremblay, 29 min.

- *Un miroir sur la scène* (1999), Jean-Clade Coulbois, two-part documentary.

## Réjean Ducharme (1943)

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Réjean Ducharme

Everyone knows Réjean Ducharme, but no one has ever seen him. This prodigious author's first novel was published by Gallimard when Ducharme was 26 years old. He lives anonymously and refuses all requests for interviews. Even still, his plays and novels plunge us into a world so intimate and so singular that one can almost hear his unknown voice. Ducharme's dramatic language inspires the imagination through his use of plays-on-words and a brilliant blend of both slang and poetic French. Characterized by the themes of childhood and solitude, Ducharme's works express the difficulties of communal living. His characters are often challenged adolescents or older children who isolate themselves from the consumer society, rejecting the adult world, using uncontrollable laughter to keep anguish at bay. By writing *Le Cid maghné*, Ducharme mocked the classic repertoire, by tampering with the language of Corneille's original *LeCid*. Ducharme's two most important plays, *Ha ha!...* and *Ines Pérée et Inat Tendu*, reiterate the major themes of his works and stage characters who are a mixture of destructive violence and tyrannical innocence.



**By** Ducharme:

© Yves Renaud

Martin Drainville and Pascale Montpetit in *Ines Pérée et Inat Tendu* by Réjean Ducharme, TNM, 1991.

- *Le Cid maghané* [1968], not published, available at the [CEAD](#).
- *Ines Pérée et Inat Tendu* [1968, 1975], Leméac.
- *Ha ha!...*, [1978], Gallimard, aussi aux éditions Lacombe.

Screenplays by Réjean Ducharme at the NFB:

- *Les Beaux Souvenirs* (1981), Francis Mankiewicz, 113 min.

Screenplays by Réjean Ducharme in repertory cinema:

- *Les Bons Débarras* (1980), Francis Mankiewicz, 120 min.

**About** Ducharme, an excellent documentary:

- *La vie a du charme* (1992), Jean-Philippe Duval, 53 min.

## Carole Fréchette (1949)

© Rolline Laporte

Carole Fréchette

Carole Fréchette is the Quebec playwright whose work is the most frequently performed in France. After graduating from the National Theatre School's French acting program Carole Fréchette cut her teeth as an actress and writer with a feminist collective company called the Théâtre des Cuisines. In 1988, Fréchette wrote *Baby blues* on her own, then in



1991 she wrote *Les quatre morts de Marie*. This play describes four main stages, from childhood to adulthood, of the central character's life. Each of Marie's "deaths" reveals her struggles with solitude. In a direct, intimate style of writing, Fréchette tackles subjects such as the fear of dying, the difficulty of finding one's place in the world, and the fleeting passage of time. Each theme is treated with a certain sense of derision tinged with poetry. Fréchette's plays are often set against a backdrop of social or political problems like unemployment (*Les sept jours de Simon Labrosse*), the female condition, and the West's political indifference toward the rest of the planet. The latter theme is addressed in *Le Collier d'Hélène*, a play whose many productions around the world confirm the relevance of this Fréchette's writing. In 2001, French actress Romane Bohringer directed the play *Les Sept jours de Simon Labrosse* which ran for 200 performances.



**By** Carole Fréchette:

© Josée Lambert

Suzanne Lemoyne in *Les Quatre Morts de Marie (The Four Lives of Marie)* by Carole Fréchette, Branle-Bas Productions, 1998.

- *Les quatre morts de Marie* [1991], Actes Sud - Papiers.
- *Les sept jours de Simon Labrosse* [1995], Actes Sud - Papiers.
- *Le collier d'Hélène* [2000], in *Écrits nomades, #2*, Lansman.
- *Violette sur la terre* [2001], Actes Sud - Papiers.
- *Jean et Béatrice* [2002], Actes Sud - Papiers.



## Normand Chaurette (1954)

© Josée Lambert

Jean-Louis Millette, Andrée Lachapelle, Julie McClemens, and Marc Béland in *Le Passage de l'Indiana* by Normand Chaurette, Théâtre Ubu and National Arts Centre French Theatre, 1996.

Normand Chaurette enjoys considerable international renown as a playwright and two of his works have been directed by Denis Marleau and presented at the [Festival d'Avignon](#) by the Théâtre UBU. A major Quebec playwright, novelist, and translator, Chaurette distinguished himself in the early eighties with the production of *Rêve d'une nuit d'hôpital* and the publication of *Provincetown playhouse, juillet 1919, j'avais 19 ans*.



The language of Chaurette's plays is poetic, precise, and musical. *Le Petit Köchel* is written like a four-voice cantata, much like the quartet of characters found in *Le Passage de l'Indiana*. His works tackle themes of monstrosity, childhood, death, and time. Chaurette favours disjointed dramatic forms with a literary and fragmented style that can sometimes make his texts difficult to perform.

Chaurette has translated [Shakespeare](#) and he fearlessly dives into the Bard's language to reach its wild essence. Since translation and creation can sometimes blend together, an unfinished translation of *Richard III* inspired one of the Chaurette's most beautiful texts, *Les Reines*, in which six characters aspiring to the throne haunt the halls of a London castle in search of power and legitimacy.

**By** Chaurette:

- *Provincetown Playhouse, juillet 1919, j'avais 19 ans* [1978], Leméac.
- *Fragments d'une lettre d'adieu lus par des géologues* [1986], Actes Sud - Papiers.
- *Les Reines* [1991], Actes Sud - Papier.
- *Le Passage de l'Indiana* [1996], Actes Sud - Papiers.
- *Le Petit Köchel* [2000], Actes Sud - Papiers.

**On** Chaurette:

- *La Société de Normand Chaurette*, publication of Théâtre Ubu directed by Jean-Michel Sivry.

## Jean-Marc Dalpé (1957)

© Suzanne Langevin

Jean-Marc Dalpé

The “in your face” theatre of Jean-Marc Dalpé has dramatically coloured the franco-Ontario literary landscape. Originally from Ottawa, this actor, poet, novelist, and playwright has received three Governor General’s Awards for literature. In 1979, after studying acting at the University of Ottawa and the Conservatoire de Québec, Dalpé co-founded the [Théâtre de la Vieille 17](#) in Ottawa. Touring various cities and regions, he and the company presented his own pieces as well as collective new works. At the time, Dalpé also regularly collaborated with the Théâtre du [Nouvel Ontario](#). An eloquent speaker, he participates in storytelling and poetry evenings and often performs in his own plays. Dalpé’s theatre, with its relentlessly dramatic mechanisms and dazzlingly rhythmic and precise language, combines everyday suspense and tragedy in a raw and direct style, to describe the reality of working-class citizens. Whether it is the small-time neighbourhoods in *Trick or treat* or in *Le Chien*, where Jay tries in vain to reconcile with a violent, alcoholic father, Dalpé’s plays reveal social suffering caused by the rigidity of social structures.



© Yves Renaud

Maxime Denommée, Pierre Curzi, and David Boutin in *Trick or treat* by Jean-Marc Dalpé, Théâtre de la Manufacture, 1999.

**By** Jean-Marc Dalpé:

- *Le Chien* [1988], Éditions Prise de Parole.
- *Il n'y a que l'amour*, Éditions Prise de Parole, which includes *Blazing Bee to win*, *Give the lady a break*, *La Cinq*, *Un épisode de télé*, *L'âme est une fiction nécessaire*, *Je lui dis*, *Mercy*.
- *Eddy* [1993], Boréal.
- *Lucky Lady* [1994], Boréal.
- *Trick or Treat* [1997], Éditions Prise de Parole.



## Michel Marc Bouchard (1957)

© Yves Médam

Michel Marc Bouchard - (portrait)

Michel Marc Bouchard has written over 20 plays that have been translated in at least a dozen languages. Many of these works occupy a position of high rank in Quebec dramaturgy and the longevity of his children's play *L'Histoire de l'oie*, and the international success of *Feluettes* are a testament to his success.

Born in Lac Saint-Jean and influenced by his rural origins, Michel Marc Bouchard's plays depict "Deep Quebec" torn between traditional and modern values. The characters of Roberval in *Les Feluettes* and Saint-Ludger de Milot in *Les Muses orphelines* bear silent witness to ordinary dramas made universal by their mythological resonance. Recurrent in Bouchard's works is the marginal character whose will to emancipate is thwarted by familial and religious structures. His characters face such challenges as the search for identity, struggles with homosexuality, conformity and otherness. Bouchard writes summer theatre comedies which he considers to be stylistic exercises through which he questions romantic behaviour. Bouchard obtained a B.A. in theatre from the University of Ottawa in 1980.



**By** Michel Marc Bouchard:

© Robert Laliberté

Jean-François Blanchard and Denis Roy dans *Lilies (The Revival of a Romantic Drama)* by Michel Marc Bouchard, NAC and Théâtre PàP, 1987.

- *Les Feluettes ou la répétition d'un drame romantique* [1985-1985], Leméac.
- *Les Muses orphelines* [1988], Leméac.
- *L'Histoire de l'oie* [1989], « Théâtre jeunesse » collection, Leméac.
- *Le Voyage du couronnement* [1994], Leméac.
  - *Le Chemin des Passes-dangereuses* [1997], Leméac.

**On** Michel Marc Bouchard:

- Website: <http://www.michelmarcbouchard.com>

Screenplays by Michel Marc Bouchard in repertory cinema:

- *Les Muses orphelines* (2000), Robert Favreau, 107 min.
- *Les Feluettes* (1996), John Greyson, 95 min.

## Daniel Danis (1962)

© Paul Cimon

Daniel Danis

Originally from the Saguenay, Daniel Danis' plays are performed in Canada, in Europe, and especially in France. Termed *theatre of memory*, Danis makes the ordinary extraordinary through original language that is at once commonplace and poetic. Often, as in *Celle-là* and *Cendres de cailloux*, Danis' stories integrate actions that replace traditional dialogue. Haunted by chaos and the memory of a tragic event, his characters search to reconcile themselves with a contemporary world devoid of symbolic landmarks. Steeped in the odours of nature, of damp stones, mud, and flesh, (the playwright is also a sculptor), Danis' writing depicts vast spaces – *Le Langue-à-langue des chiens de roche* –



or closed quarters – *Celle-là*. Danis wrote his first play for young people, *Le Pont de pierre et la peau d'image*, in 1996. His play e will premiere in Paris in 2005, directed by Alain Françon.

**By Daniel Danis:**

© LaRoche Lab Solution

Marco Poulin and Nathalie Poiré in *Cendres de cailloux*(*Stone and Ashes*) by Daniel Danis, Théâtre Blanc, 1994.



- *Celle-là* [1991], Leméac.
- *Cendres de cailloux* [1992], Actes Sud - Papiers.
- *Le Chant du Dire-Dire* [1996], L'Arche.
  - *Le Pont de pierre et la peau d'images* [1996], Éditions L'École des Loisirs.
- *Le Langue-à-langue des chiens de roche* [1998], L'Arche.

## Wajdi Mouawad (1968)

© Maryse Warda

Wajdi Mouawad

For playwright, actor, and director Wajdi Mouawad, a Montrealer of Lebanese descent, speech leads to freedom! After studying at the National Theatre School of Canada, he co-founded the Théâtre Ô Parleur where he mounted several of his texts, such as *Littoral*, presented in Europe and in Lebanon. Written in full-bodied language peppered with poetic images, Mouawad's work is often inspired by the political and social situation of his native country, creating a dramaturgy imbued with profound humanism and often touched with humour. The themes of war, death, revolt, and filial relationships form the basis of his writing. For Mouawad, theatre's fundamental art offers the power of speech, which leads to a dialogue with the Other. He has experimented with theatre for young people with his plays *Alphonse* and *Pacamambo*; in 2002, he published his first novel, *Visage retrouvé*. From 2000 to 2004, he was the artistic director of the [Théâtre de Quat'Sous](#), in Montreal. In spring 2003, in Paris, he created his play *Incendies*, a contemporary tragedy which, set against a backdrop of civil war and torture, tells of the journey of a brother and sister seeking to carry out the wishes of their recently deceased mother.



**By Wajdi Mouawad:**

© Pascal Sanchez

Steve Laplante, Claude Despins, Isabelle Leblanc, Miro, and Manon Brunelle during the creation of *Littoral* by Wajdi Mouawad, Théâtre Ô Parleur and FTA, 1997.

- *Willy Protagoras enfermé dans les toilettes* [1993] (not published, available at the [CEAD](#))
- *Littoral* [1997], Acte Sud - Papiers.
- *Rêves* [1999], Actes Sud - Papiers.

- *Pacamambo* [2000], Actes Sud - Papiers.
- *Incendies* [2003], Actes Sud - Papiers.

**On a final note, here are some other playwrights who could be added to this list:**

Marcel Dubé, Françoise Loranger, Yves Sauvageau, Suzanne Lebeau, Louis-Dominique Lavigne, Herménégilde Chiasson, René-Daniel Dubois, Larry Tremblay, Lise Vaillancourt, Yvan Bienvenue, Serge Boucher, François Archambault, Évelyne de la Chenelière, Jean-Rock Gaudreault, Emma Haché.

