

Dal's theatre season opens with *Albertine in 5 Times*

By **ELISSA BARNARD**
Arts Reporter

Nova Scotia tartan lies within the fleur de lis in the poster for Michel Tremblay's *Albertine in 5 Times*, the first Dalhousie theatre department production of this season.

The tartan is deliberately there to provoke, and to remind people that some of today's pur laine Quebecois were originally of Scotch and Irish descent.

"It's a humorous political statement. One of the things we wanted to stress was that it's a very Canadian play," says *Albertine in 5 Times*'s enthusiastic director Gillian Raby.

The play, written after the first separatist referendum in 1985, is about a woman, *Albertine*, in five different periods of her life, from the rigid Duplessis era of the 1940s, in which a Francophone working class woman had very few options, to the freewheeling '60s when *Albertine* is happily working in a fast food joint to the FLQ crisis and the 1985 referendum.

Tremblay never clearly states this, but Raby says *Albertine*'s story is a metaphor for Quebec's experience. "In my opinion, absolutely.

"*Albertine* considers her decisions and the choices that were available to her. Now that she's 70 she's looking back and considering for the first time without judging herself the source and validity of her rage.

"We experience the culture through the phases she lives through. I would call it a bitter acceptance, no, not bitter, a pained acceptance of herself. The play is about coming to know herself, and coming to accept herself."



Tremblay is best-known for writing in jòal, the working class language of Montreal, in his 1960s play *Les Belles Soeurs*. "Like Tennessee Williams and Oscar Wilde and other marvellous gay writers he's celebrated for writing incredible women's roles."

As a gay man and a French Canadian, Michel Tremblay "understands the difficulty of constructing identity in a world that doesn't automatically hand you one," says Raby.

Raby is a playwright and former artistic director of Alberta Northern Light Theatre. She is also directing *Beyond Zebra* by Torquil Colbo and with Ruth Madoc-Jones, part of Eastern Front Theatre's double bill at The North Street Church, playing to Sunday.

Raby has read the novels of Gabrielle Roy and Marie Claire

Blais, and worked with francophone companies in Quebec, "so I've experienced that whole situation quite first hand and I have strong feelings about it. I don't think you'll be able to tell from the play.

"I'm a federalist, first and foremost, at the same time I feel very strongly . . . I feel Quebec is a distinct society and hysteria has been created around separation when if Quebec had just been allowed its distinctiveness — for a while in the late '70s, early '80s it looked possible — we wouldn't be where we are, and I blame Mulroney for trying to drag Quebec into Confederation and decentralize Canada.

"The other thing I feel about pur laine is they have a lousy attitude towards immigrants. That's why the tartan is there. If you constantly focus on your own suffering and pain you can't see reality squarely or clearly anymore."

However, Raby has directed *Albertine in 5 Times* not with a political eye but to root it in particular character psychology and to bring out the musicality in the language.

"If people expect to see a pro-or anti-separatist diatribe that's not in the play. It is above all a lyrical mood piece that works on people's emotional intelligence."

Albertine in 5 Times, with Susan Leblanc, Jody Stevens, Karen Coughlin, Jessica Heafey, Sara Holmes and Konima Parkinson-Jones, runs in the David MacK. Murray Studio or Studio One in the basement of the Dalhousie Arts Centre tonight to Saturday, 8 p.m. with a matinee Saturday, 2 p.m. Tickets are \$10 and \$5 for students and seniors at the arts centre box office.