



## The Writer From Quebec

BY GRODBUZZ APRIL 2, 2013 CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF DENYS ARCAND ETIENNE LEPAGE LES MISERABLES PHILIPPE KEB BLANCHARD TENNESSEE WILLIAMS VICTOR HUGO WOODY ALLEN

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Writers grace the world with their visions. Some create entirely new worlds with their works. Others have a talent for identifying existing works as begging to be heard again in a new voice, a new language or in a new media. We saw **LES MISERABLES** adapted first for the stage from **Victor Hugo's** epic novel. Then we saw it adapted for the screen – a revelation for most of us who never thought it was even a possibility. In the theater, one who adapts and develops pre-existing material is known as a “dramaturg”. Dramaturges are responsible for much of what we see in the today’s theater (such as the current theatrical run of **CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF**). Dramaturges are not just writers but visionaries capable of re-imagining works in new ways that make it possible for new generations of audiences to feel the feelings the original works were intended to invoke.



Philippe “Keb” Blanchard

**Philippe “Keb” Blanchard** is a New York writer who is originally from French Canadian (I have written about him [before](#)). Born and raised in Quebec, Philippe added “Keb” to his name as an homage to his Quebecois roots – he will always be “Keb”-ecois, notwithstanding his New York address.

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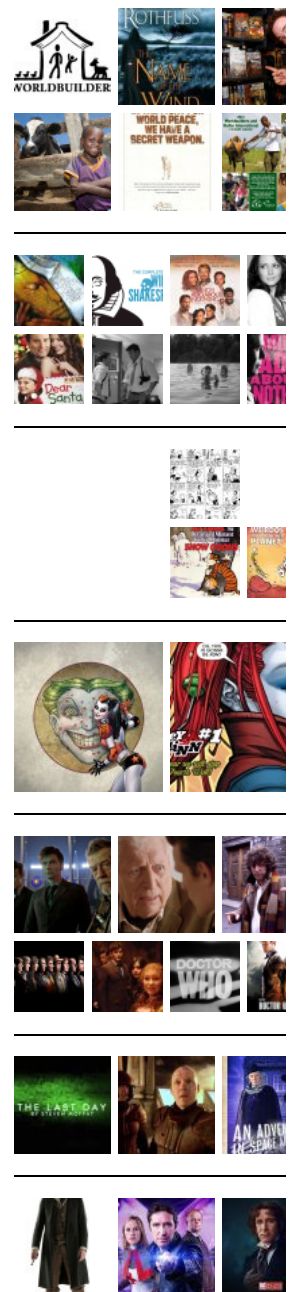
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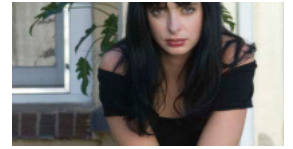
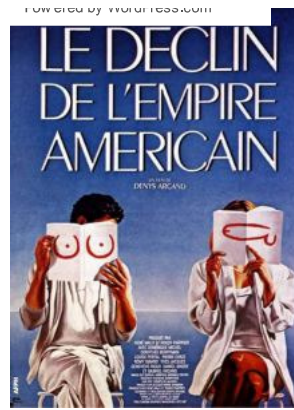
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### PHOTOS





Philippe arrived in New York in 1996. Having spent years involved in stagecraft, as well as appearing onstage internationally, Philippe began attending the [Lee Strasberg Institute](#) in 2002. Bitten by the acting bug, and searching for suitable audition material, Philippe eventually hit his stride when he translated several monologues from an [award-winning](#) Quebecois film, [THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE](#), and adapted them into one piece. Inspired by the reaction he received, he began toiling away at adapting the entire film into an English-language play. When he realized that he had created what looked like it could be a hit on the American stage, Philippe contacted the film's director [Denys Arcand](#) and negotiated at length for permission to produce the play in New York. In 2004, Philippe's production of [THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE](#) premiered in New York for a limited run at the Gene Frankel Theater.



Denys Arcand

Since then, has been actively seeking out French Canadian dramatic works for adaptation for the American theater. In 2013, Philippe once again realized his dream of bringing a Quebecois play to the New York stage. [BITE YOUR TONGUE](#) is a very American adaptation of a play by Canadian playwright, [Etienne Lepage](#) called [ROUGE GUEULE](#), which Lepage based on 19 of 22 short stories he wrote while at university. [ROUGE GUEULE](#) premiered in Montreal in 2009 and was translated into English for a public reading entitled [RED HOWL](#) in 2011-2012. [Bite Your Tongue](#) makes the characters very American, and places them in quite American situations, while retaining the very Quebecois sensibilities of sexual frankness and honesty. Brought to life by a truly talented cast that included [David Zen Mansley](#), [Cameron Mason](#), [Tali Custer](#), and [Audrey Lorea](#) (whom Philippe singles out as "one of the best things to happen to him in several years"), the characters are beautifully shaded, and their emotions serve as their dark, indelible ink outlines.



That Blanchard chose to adapt this piece out of so many speaks volumes about him. He has [Woody Allen](#)'s ability to cut right to the bone with brutal flashes of dialog and insight that expose the veins. This style of storytelling reminds me of a number of European filmmakers; perhaps the fact that I jump right away to a European connection is a sad sign of how unfamiliar we Americans are with French-Canadian works. The artist I feel Blanchard most aims to emulate is [Pier Paolo Pasolini](#): mixing dark-humored bleak cynicism with life-affirming sexuality as part of the existential reality. In that sense, Blanchard has adapted BITE YOUR TONGUE the same way Pasolini dramaturged [THE CANTERBURY TALES](#) or [THE DECAMERON](#). He is not afraid to pervert or humiliate his character yet never degrades them. And because he is adapting pre-existing content, he is able to focus his attention primarily on form and tone, creating a more visceral experience.



Pasolini

Perhaps part of the reason I connect so much with Blanchard's approach is due to my own adventures in adaptation, a form of writing so often forgotten. Many years ago, I was in a screenwriting class, and while most of the students chose to write original stories, I adapted a [Stephen King](#) novel. This relieved me of a huge burden: I already knew the plot, characters, arcs, etc, so I was able to focus entirely on retelling the material in a visual style and learn how to use the screenplay medium to its fullest. While the other students would comment throughout the semester: "I've lost sight of my story. I don't know what my main character wants, or what my plot is exactly, or what I'm trying to say anymore," I found myself cruising right along. Not that the finished script was any sort of masterpiece, but for a class project as well as being my first screenplay ever, it turned fairly well. For the next few years I wrote exclusively original stories, never thinking twice about doing any further adaptations, until earlier this year when a chance to do a new screenplay adaptation of [THE LITTLE MERMAID](#) was brought to me. It was truly an opportunity out of nowhere, yet within minutes of thinking it over, it seemed so perfect. Here was a tale I connected with, yet had never really been filmed properly. And Hans Christian Andersen's original short story is only twenty-five pages long. I knew that any adaptation I'd write would, by necessity, require me to expand on the material and revitalize it, with the finished work would be a melding of Andersen's voice with my own. [THE LITTLE MERMAID](#) ended up being one of my favorite projects I've had the privilege to write, and while I have no doubt more revisions lay ahead, I am happy to have revived an old story and sparked its interest among new readers.



I can only imagine the joy Blanchard has experienced introducing new audiences to great French Canadian art, infusing his own voice with others before him, and adapting the old to create something new and newly noteworthy. His love for writing and nurturing the work of other writers is clearly evident when he speaks of the weekly writer's group that is held in his apartment in TriBeCa – an open forum for writers of dialogue-based dramatic works to present their works for discussion and constructive criticism – his roommate created the group more than four years ago, and it has continued to flourish and to nurture emerging writers ever since. Philippe's personal growth as a dramaturg has stemmed from this nurturing love of the craft. But at the end of it all, the most important part of Philippe Blanchard's name is that "Keb" and what it represents, and his work will never let us forget that.



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## 4 thoughts on "The Writer From Quebec"

 **ND**  
APRIL 3, 2013 AT 8:52 AM [REPLY](#)

A simple google search would have prevented this embarrassment:

Chantal Bilodeau translated the stories of Etienne Lepage into a dramatic adaptation. It was presented at the Lark in NYC just one year ago.

This person you call a writer did nothing more than photocopy the work of Miss Bilodeau and stick his name on it.

A good writer investigates. A good writer writes. You and this clown are not writers.



grodbuzz

APRIL 3, 2013 AT 10:05 AM [REPLY](#)

It seems to me you have a personal vendetta against M. Blanchard. If your accusations are true, then it seems to me your time would be better spent taking this matter to court for plagiarism or going after the Theatre For the New City who put on his play. I think they would deserve to be attacked a lot more than I would for simply doing a brief write-up.

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