theatre

cultural diversity and the stage

Volume 15, No. 1 $8

IN THIS ISSUE

Jill Carter examines the role of land acknowledgements

Heather Ladd muses on the gender-bending inspiration of Charlotte Charke

Rachel Offer and **Mona Zaidi** talk about adding a new twist to Shakespeare

REVIEWS

Lib Spry reviews *Radical Doubt: The Joker System, after Boal*

Upcoming in *alt.theatre* 15.2

ARTICLE

Daniel McNeil looks at media reception and hip-hop culture in an extended take on *Sal Capone: The Lamentable Tragedy of* at the NAC.

ARTICLE

Rebecca Burton weaves together the many threads of the Playwright's Guild of Canada Women's Caucus in action—the Pledge Project, The SureFire List, and the CASA Awards.

Contents 15.1

alt.theatre
cultural diversity and the stage
Vol. 15 No. 1

alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage is Canada's only professional journal examining intersections between politics, cultural plurality, social activism, and the stage.

alt.theatre welcomes suggestions or proposals for interviews, news, pieces of self-reflection, analytical articles, and reviews of books, plays, and performances. Submissions to *alt.theatre* are vetted by at least two members of the editorial board, as well as external reviewers where appropriate. Contributors retain copyright of their articles with the understanding that any subsequent publication will cite *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* as the original source. *alt.theatre* retains the right to distribute copies of published articles for educational and promotional purposes. Please query the editors before submitting any work for consideration: info@alttheatre.ca

Founded in 1998, *alt.theatre* is published three times per year by Teesri Duniya Theatre—an intercultural theatre company with a mandate to produce socially engaged theatre that reflects Canada's social and cultural diversity. *alt.theatre* is indexed in the MLA International Bibliography.

Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales Du Québéc/Library and Archives Canada ISSN 1481-0506

For more information,
contact *alt.theatre* magazine at
Teesri Duniya Theatre
460 St-Catherine W., Suite 916
Montreal QC H3B 1A7
Tel. 514-848-0238
email: info@alttheatre.ca
www.alttheatre.ca

facebook.com/alt.theatre
facebook.com/teesriduniyatheatre

twitter.com/alt_theatre
twitter.com/Teesri_Duniya

alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage
is published triannually by

Teesri Duniya THEATRE

"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

Cover photo
Filmmaker Mona Zaidi.
Photo by Mark Mainguy.

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested $157 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country.

Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 157 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.

Conseil des arts et des lettres Québec
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE MONTRÉAL | Montréal
Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des Arts du Canada
TATA

Contributors 15.1

JILL CARTER

Jill Carter is an Anishinaabe-Ashkenazi woman based in Tkaronto/Gichi Kiiwenging. She is a theatre practitioner and Assistant Professor with the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies; the Transitional Year Programme; and Indigenous Studies at the University of Toronto. Her research and praxis base themselves in the mechanics of story creation (devising and dramaturgy), the processes of delivery (performance on the stage and on the page), and the mechanics of affect.

Photo courtesy of the University of Toronto.

Article:
Calling Out at the "Edge of the Woods": Page 11

AARON FRANKS

Aaron Franks is an arts-based researcher and co-founder of the RAFT applied performance company with Rebecca Benson. He worked as an actor from 1996 to 2006, and now focuses on institutions, power, and transdisciplinary methods (not always in that order). He has worked with the Centre for Indigenous Research Creation at Queen's University and was a Mitacs Visiting Fellow in Indigenous Research and Reconciliation at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. He is currently Senior Manager for OCAP® (*Ownership, Control, Access and Possession*) and Information Governance with the First Nations Information Governance Centre in Ottawa, where he lives with Rebecca and their children Gil and Magda (and dog Archie).

Photo by Rebecca Benson.

Editorial:
Travesty, Treachery, and Bree(a)ching: Page 8

HEATHER LADD

Heather Ladd is an Assistant Professor of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature in the Department of English at the University of Lethbridge. Her recent publications include an article in *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830*, a theatre review of *Casanova* (Sadler's Wells), and an original one-act play called *The Changeful Muse*, a re-imagining of Shakespeare's Sonnet 79. She has performed twice in Lethbridge's annual queer cabaret, *Pretty, Witty, & GAY*, and currently sits on the board of the Lethbridge Shakespeare Performance Society.

Photo © Jaime Vedres.

Article:
Monologue for a Drag King Performance: Page 18

RACHEL OFFER

Rachel Offer is a fourth-year BFA acting student at the University of Windsor in Ontario. She has previously worked as an editorial assistant at *alt.theatre* through the Outstanding Scholars Program and the university. When she graduates, Rachel hopes to continue to immerse herself in the Canadian theatre community as both an actor and writer.

Photo © Alice X Photography.

Article:
Shakespeare Adaptation across Borders: A Conversation with Mona Zaidi: Page 24

LIB SPRY

Lib Spry has worked in theatre for over fifty years as a director, writer, educator, performer, popular theatre practitioner and translator. She is a recognized teacher of Theatre of the Oppressed. She has founded and run three theatre companies: Theatre Agile (2011–present), Passionate Balance (1989–1996), and, with Shirley Barrie, the award-winning Straight Stitching Productions (1986–1996). She is presently doing a PhD in Cultural Studies at Queen's University.

Photo © Wendy Philpott.

Book Review:
Radical Doubt: The Joker System, after Boal: Page 29

Editorial 15.1

Travesty, Treachery, and Bree(a)ching

BY AARON FRANKS

Diversity + narrative = already in trouble…

Charlotte Charke of the early to mid-eighteenth century; William Shakespeare of the late sixteenth to early seventeenth—it would have been a trick for this issue to include a performer, impresario, or other "pervert" from that middle span of 1615 to 1715 (maybe of British provenance for symmetry, but, if not, we'd say it's "comparative"). The dearth of options outside the Anglo-European sphere from the written record of that period would certainly be a factor. The Two Row and Dish with One Spoon wampum belts, beaded and woven in the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe lands Jill Carter writes from in this issue, came later: a lost opportunity for temporal Aristotelian dramatic unity at *alt.theatre*. Unwieldy cultural diversity.

Once more into the breach: Choosing

> *The choice of meaning in the world today is here between the two sides of the wall. The wall is inside each one of us. Whatever our circumstances, we can choose within ourselves which side of the wall we are attuned to. It is not a wall between good and evil. Both exist on both sides. The choice is between self-respect and self-chaos.*
>
> – Berger *Hold Everything Dear* 94

If you are picking up *alt.theatre* for the first time, you might be quite aware of the subtitle: "cultural diversity and the stage." Perhaps that descriptor is what pricked your interest. If you are a returning, maybe even a long-time, reader or one of our wide community of writers, contributors, colleagues, and critics, you probably just think of us as "*alt.*" As the latest editor-in-chief (hello and welcome to Volume 15), I'm conscious of how best to … represent? While I'm a geek for a good clause after the colon (thank you, critical social sciences training), I also appreciate the satisfying mental "snick" of straight-up *alt*.

And it's not just differing tastes, meaty vs. snappy. I wonder more than ever about the work behind the word "cultural": about what we're saying as a publication when we specify our interest in *cultural diversity*; what readers or creative "passers-by" may be hearing in that phrase; and how alt is then slotted into the peculiar Canadian artscape. We clearly don't mean cultural in the sense of cultural activities – i.e., music, literature, dance, things that "cultural" agencies fund. And while it might come a bit closer, I don't think, at least, that we can mean culture in the prescribed ethno-heritage sense either. At its most reductive, such a census-friendly and state-approved construct of culture takes us and drops us off at Heritage Days (grilled meat stands and traditional dance on the main stage at noon).

"Nothing is more important to me than the Nation-to-Nation relationship…"

> *We Are the Halluci Nation*
>
> – John Trudell, Northern Voice, and A Tribe Called Red, 2016

> *Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain and a bastard, and a knave, and a rascal*
> *What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?*
>
> – Captain MacMorris, *Henry V*

Alt's subtitle wants to be—needs to be—more. There are many ways we can serve our readers and communities; so, as but one person on this team, I don't want to overreach, and I certainly don't want to overdetermine, through an editorial, the experience of sifting through an issue of *alt*. But before I bury my own lead in a slurry of apolo-qualifiers, I want to suggest a viewpoint on positionality and boundaries —and choosing with consequence— through the lens of N/nation.

National narratives appear, in diverse combinations, obliquely or directly, in all the feature articles in this issue. Certainly we see them in Jill Carter's exploration of the conditions that shape (largely settler) land acknowledgements of First People's territories as potential embodied diplomacies or rationalized discursive aggressions. In a more diffuse way, Heather Ladd contextualizes the work and world of Charlotte Charke in England, a territory with outsized national imaginaries and even more outsized impacts in the world of theatre. Rachel Offer's interview with filmmaker Mona Zaidi on her award-winning film *Richard III: Unto the Kingdom of Perpetual Night* addresses: the explicitly transnational remit of the award (named "Crossing Borders"); various "national postures" in relation to Shakespeare's work over the centuries; and the film's imagery of borders and migration. The awards competition was even adjudicated by an English "national icon": Sir Kenneth Branagh (I'm sure seeing that in Offer's article nudged my subconscious, which was already preoccupied with the N/national, toward *Henry V*). Rounding off the issue, Lib Spry's review of Mady Schutzman's encounters with Augusto Boal's work (*The Radical Doubt*) hints at the ways Boal's seminal notions of applied theatre crossed national borders and took on various national contextual "flavours" as per the contours of his own exile and travels and the global circuits of academic-performance practice.

How can N/nationhood (and membership) be engaged as another intersectional axis? Is there something like peoplehood, or Nation, outwith race and culture? My knowledge of myself as Métis informs this lens.

The origin of the Métis:[1] Take one—ish a bastard

> When the Europeans first came in contact with the Indians of Canada, it was always as a group of European sailors meeting a mixed male and female population. Sailors, separated from women during a long ocean voyage, formed alliances with native women as rapidly as possible. Sometimes marriages were quickly arranged; sometimes women were bought; sometimes they were kidnapped; but whatever the method, women were obtained. A standard answer of the Métis people to those curious as to when the Métis originated has been: "Nine months after the first White man set foot in Canada." It is an historically correct answer. (Sealey and Lussier 1)

This is the first paragraph of a 45-year-old book called *The Métis: Canada's Forgotten People*. That it's so euphemistic makes it feel, to me, even cruder. The point might have been better made upfront—"we have been a fucked people; we were fucked into existence." The references to both marriages and kidnapping bring Sarah Waiswisz's 2016 play (and 2017 *alt* article) *Monstrous* to mind. Like/unlike me, Waiswisz is mixed, and we are both—albeit in very different ways—in complex relation to different N/national projects:

> [T]he title [*Monstrous*] evokes how I always felt about myself, especially when I was younger: that I was a mixed-race monster . . . in contrast to the "beautiful multicultural exoticism" that our society supposedly believes in. Mixed-race identity is, I think, a final frontier of discomfort in race relations, because it is the result of either unequal sexual relations, often rape, or harmonious mixed-race love—and both of these concepts can be scary and uncomfortable to contend with. (21)

The Métis Nation: Take two—ish a rascal

Sex, class, skin, land, and labour: "the choice is between self-respect and self-chaos" (Berger 94). Métis scholar Chris Andersen challenges a hyper-racialized construct of Métis and the fetishization of race categories as axes of peoplehood. In *"Métis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*, Andersen pushes back at the way the word Métis has been conflated with "mixed" or, more dryly, "hybrid." His most compelling point is that people can articulate differences and solidarities based on a desire to live and self-govern differently. In the case of the Métis Nation, Indigenous (what are now constitutionally referred to as "Indians") and European (generally French and Irish, Scottish or English) peoples certainly mixed (miscegenated). But their peoplehood and coalescence into the Métis Nation emerged from organizing, governing, and supporting themselves differently from either the influx of white settlers being hustled in by the Canadian state or the tribal societies of the Cree, Salteaux, Sioux, and other Nations in the territories of what is now Western Ontario through East/Central Alberta, with the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers at their heart.

What does this have to do with culture? And why am I still fussing over our subtitle "cultural diversity and the stage"? Andersen's appeal that we think of culture, peoplehood, and Nations differently highlights the trap that concerns me:

> While all political claims are cultural in the sense that they are embedded in specific meanings and social contexts, in settler nation-states not all cultural claims are political . . . Indeed, modern nation-states and their institutions . . . often frame issues in terms of culture precisely to avoid discussions about their political basis.
>
> Hence…presenting the case for Indigenous nationhood in terms of cultural difference…never simply distinguishes it from that of settler-nationhood; it also subordinates it. (100–101)

After knitting together a number of thinkers' ideas around Indigenous "culture"—Daniel Heath Justice's and Kristina Fagan's criticisms of "voyeuristic "and "quaint" approaches, respectively,

and Craig Womack's and Claude Denis' appeal to actual "separateness" over mere "difference" —Andersen punctuates the concept: "Whether or not we operate in ways that appear similar to settler self-understandings is—or at least should be—beside the point" (101).

In other words, our unique bearing in the world, our distinctive sense of integrity, is not contingent on being a colourful tile (or pixel) in the cultural mosaic. We can confound description invisibly, make different demands (and offers), and not explain.

Treason against A-Lie-Nation:[2] A final stretched allegory

When does a bree(a)ch yawn open into travesty? When does criticism become resistance, even become treacherous in the precipitous sense of treasonous, not just "difficult" (or, at the anodyne, academic end of spectrum, "problematic")? In "Monologue for a Drag King Performance Adapted from a Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke, written by Herself (1755)," Heather Ladd explains how Charke (1713–1760) began her career with "breeches" performances and graduated to "travesty roles." A bree(a)ches role features the naughty spectacle of a female playing a female character who, in the course of the action, puts on male clothes as a means of getting something or just getting by. To get geo-political, it is a tactical manoeuvre, even diplomatic.

It becomes "travesty" when a female plays a male character—"*as a male*," in male clothing and comportment (whether Charke's off-stage penchant for dressing as a man counts as bree(a)ch or travesty, I don't know). In geo-political terms, which might mirror a more subjective, personal politics of space and boundary, such a travesty is an incursion: A treacherous breaking of boundaries.

Notes

1. This is the title of the first chapter of the book by Sealey and Lussier
2. The title and lyric of a song from A Tribe Called Red's 2016 album *We Are The Halluci Nation*, featuring Santee Sioux/Indigenous Mexican poet and activist John Trudell.

Works Cited

Andersen, Chris. *"Métis": Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014.

Berger, John. *Hold Everything Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2007.

Sealey, D. Bruce, and Antoine. S. Lussier. *The Métis: Canada's Forgotten People*. Winnipeg: Métis Federation Press, 1975.

Waiswisz, Sarah. "Monstrous." *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* 13:3 (2017), 20–30

Calling Out at the "Edge of the Woods":

The Protocol as Perlocutionary Event[1]

BY JILL CARTER

"The fact that there were few direct exchanges at TRC events between Survivors and former school staff indicates that for many, the time for reconciliation had not yet arrived."
(TRC, *What We Have Learned* 120)

"They need to hear others hearing them."
(Saul 283)

This Page: Jesse Wabegijig as Sir William Johnson in *See It; Map It; Claim It—Asserting British Title in Tkaronto*—Talking Treaties, Fort York, October 6, 2018. (Photo by Jill Carter.)

Page 11: You Are Here: First Story, Routes & Roots Tour July 2017. (Photo by Jill Carter.)

"[Indigenous] artists actively seek to dislodge colonization from their bodies, to intervene upon the brokenness and excise psycho-spiritual scars that unbalance so many survivors of the relocations, residential schools, sixties scoop, and forced sterilizations—the sustained campaign to eradicate or assimilate Indigenous peoples."

The Doctrines of Discovery, Extinguishment, and *Terra Nullius* have comprised the bedrock of this nation for 150 years. And as archaeologists are now able to calculate, Canada, throughout its short life, has fed upon lands and waters that have sustained and been stewarded by Indigenous nations for over 13,500 years. Indeed, the City of Toronto, an economic engine for Canada, is not what it is by settler design. It is an apex of trade where monies and goods flow in and flow out to feed this young nation because this is what it has been since time immemorial. For the Erie, the Petun, the Wendat, the Seneca, and the Michi Saagig Anishishinaabeg who stewarded these territories, Tkaronto was always an economic and social hub—a bustling port of trade on the shores of a great body of fresh water connecting the far north to the Atlantic Ocean via the three Rivers[2] (and their myriad tributaries) that feed it, and via the terrestrial highways (i.e., portage trails) that Indigenous peoples forged and utilized for travel, trade, and cartage long before contact.

Tkaronto's complacent self-importance and Canada's de jure existence as an internationally recognized sovereign state rely upon this nation's forgetfulness—upon its refusal to acknowledge that there are stories that precede its recent genesis, stories that inhabit and reverberate throughout "deep time," and upon a rigorous and methodical campaign to sanitize the present moment of Indigenous presence and eventually to erase all traces of Indigeneity from living memory.

Resisting such erasure (in place, historical memory, or cognitive space), Indigenous artists have begun to script medicine and craft ceremonies for the contemporary stage. In their creation and manifestation, such projects are active, mindful recoveries of wholeness: their artists actively seek to dislodge colonization from their bodies,[3] to intervene upon the brokenness and excise psycho-spiritual scars that unbalance so many survivors of the relocations, residential schools, sixties scoop, and forced sterilizations—the sustained campaign to eradicate or assimilate Indigenous peoples. They seek too to reconnect themselves and their audiences with our biotas, reminding Indigenous witnesses of the responsibilities they carry to live in right relationship with every element of the creation. And they seek to recover the first literatures of this land—the ancient texts left for us by Indigenous ancestors on the talking rocks, the hidden scrolls, or the mounded earth.

Artists who carry such objectives into their work must perforce plunge themselves into deep time and re-member themselves as conduits, linking ancestors with those yet unborn, to devise works in the present moment that build legacy for future generations. It is in these spaces of ceremonial time, wherein entanglements are most acutely apprehended, that conciliation[4] between settlers and Indigenous peoples might begin.

Canada's current prime minister has committed this nation to honouring the 94 Calls to Action set forth in the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). These include Call 45—a call to this nation to partner with Indigenous peoples to develop a Royal Proclamation of Reconciliation—and four discrete calls to repudiate the Doctrines of Discovery and *Terra Nullius*, the cornerstones of Canada's claim to sovereignty. This new Proclamation of Reconciliation, then, would require the dissolution of these cornerstones and the reconfiguration of Canada's identity as a fully invested treaty-partner.

This is not a task for governments alone: "It is important for all Canadians to understand that without Treaties, Canada would have no legitimacy as a nation" (TRC, *Reconciliation* 33).[5] Further, as John Ralston Saul cautions, without a bone-deep and heart-felt understanding of "the role and implication of the treaties" and the inescapable fact that "they [all who live within Canada's borders] too are treaty people" (Saul 287), treaties will continue to be dishonoured, treaty negotiations will continue to be delayed, treaty battles will continue and intensify, and any attempt at conciliation will prove itself an impossible project. Our task in the work we do, as artists and scholars, is to facilitate such conciliation—to utilize our gifts to transform hearts and minds and behaviours—and to effect transformation by opening up spaces of meeting and testing out the ways by which we, the storytellers of this generation, might effectually mediate such spaces of profound encounter and renewal.

CONVERSATION AND CONCILIATION: THE DUTY TO SPEAK AND THE "RIGHT OF REPLY"

"By listening to your story, my story can change. By listening to your story, I can change."
(TRC, *Legacy* 125)

Conciliation is an ongoing process grounded in *mutual* good will, courteous communication, and compromise. This principle is imbedded in Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee accounts of creation, while the Two Row Wampum models the principle in action. When Sky Woman hurtled towards an ancient watery world, its denizens, moved by compassion and prompted by an originary directive to preserve life, offered significant compromises, sacrificing their own comforts and wellbeing (i.e., Turtle who offered her back and Muskrat who offered her life) to make a way for this uninvited guest to survive and thrive in their territory. Similarly, the Two Row Wampum documents a significant compromise offered by the Haudenosaunee to the Dutch. Upon the 1613 treaty belt is inscribed a mutual agreement between two sovereign nations to *share* territories (once under the sole stewardship of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy). Respect and appreciation for the goodwill of the sovereign host was to be demonstrated by the newcomers through sustained communication (i.e., "polishing the silver covenant chain") and a scrupulous observance of boundaries (non-interference). Within the Anishinaabe origin cycle are also imbedded teachings that speak to the catastrophic consequences that ensue when good will, communication, and compromise are *not* mutually exercised. When earth's youngest children repay the ongoing compromises and sacrifices of their elder siblings with wanton disregard, betrayals, and exploitation, "communication" devolves into silence as the waters dry up, game disappears, and seed lies dormant in her bed of earth (see Simpson, *Dancing* 109-111, "Looking" 34; and Borrows 16-20).

Nevertheless, as Michi Saagiig scholar Leanne Simpson reminds us, these stories also teach us that repair, redress, and "reconciliation" are possible. Out of *emergency* engendered by human frailty and moral failure, new life *emerges*. Reparations might be made. Treaties might be negotiated (where they have not existed) and might be re-negotiated where they have been violated (Simpson, "Looking" 34). We might remember ourselves again—our personal histories, our nation-to-nation relationships, our responsibilities, and the original laws that govern life on this planet:

> According to Nishnaabeg traditions, our relationship with the moose nation, the deer nation, and the caribou nation is a treaty relationship like any other, and all the parties involved have both rights and responsibilities in terms of maintaining the agreement. The treaty outlines a relationship that, when practiced continually and in perpetuity, maintains peaceful co-existence, respect and mutual benefit. …First and foremost, treaties are about maintaining peace through healthy relationships. They require commitment and work, but when done correctly can bring about a lasting peace for all involved. (Simpson, *Dancing* 111)

Conciliation, if it is rooted in respect and a sustained commitment to mutual benefit, is a process of address and redress, transforming the enmity and distrust that may characterize relations between two or more parties into a functioning reciprocal relationship. And this relationship is established and maintained through ongoing conversation—through the articulation and exchange of ideas in the sustained and carefully nurtured context of familiar association. It is the means by which we come to "know" each other. In its historical usage (Old, Middle, and Modern English), "knowing" also referenced sexual congress, and it is no coincidence that young people today casually speak of "talking to" somebody to indicate that they are engaged in an ongoing sexual relationship. Knowing denotes intimacy—a deepening intimacy within relationship that protects the discrete human, offering a comforting bulwark against the existential despair that feeds on the consciousness of one's own isolation. But such protections are bought with huge responsibility, because "knowing" also denotes power, resonating always with the possibility of violation.

To know and to converse, then, are weighty acts and must be undertaken with great care. In the context of this discussion and the task that lies before us, I remain mindful that "converse," while denoting the act of articulation to establish and maintain familiar association, also references opposition and contrariness (i.e., the "converse" is also true). How exciting it is, then, to consider that the act of conciliation requires mutual speech across distance to bring opposing bodies into alignment and intimacy! To regale each other with verse—*con* verse that overflows from opposing/

opposite hearts. To articulate conflicting truths and through mutual good will, compassion for the fragility of all life, humility (to hear) and courage to allow others to hear us hearing, we might bridge the distances between us and agree to a shared existence on shared lands (that are *owned by no mortal agent* but conditionally lent to all created life to sustain it for the brief period of its existence).

John Ralston Saul identifies one key barrier to this conciliation as the "absence of shared public mechanisms," particularly as they pertain to treaty negotiations (287). He calls for the institution of such mechanisms in the educational, political, economic and legal sectors to address the ignorance of (and, hence, disregard for) the historic treaty agreements negotiated and signed by European newcomers and their Indigenous hosts as well as the unwritten treaties between humans and their biotas (287). As disseminators of this nation's stories, theatre workers have a responsibility to address this absence and to dedicate our energies to the project of redress, repair and relationship building. In this historical moment, it is perhaps the artists who are best positioned to craft such "public mechanisms" and to begin mapping "[processual] pathways of [conciliation] that are forged in truth and justice" (TRC, *What* 117).

Much work remains to be done if this nation's theatres are to realize themselves as *authentically* "shared public mechanisms" within which a collective dismantling of colonial structures—structures of cognition, story-ing, teaching, governance, social organization, and relationship building—might be imagined and *present*-ed. Many theatres in Tkaronto (and I suspect across Canada) are still inaccessible to differently abled performers. Funding agencies and production schedules often do not offer the flexibility or the liberality to comfortably accommodate Elders or the parents of young children as performers (see Carter, "Shaking"). Decisions around funding, programming, casting, and publication still lie within the purview of Euro-Canadian settlers (most often, male), while Indigenous artists and artists of colour are still vastly underrepresented in theatre programs (as both instructors and students). And what of the (now, ubiquitous) land acknowledgement? What is its function in the project of re-worlding?

Currently, in the wake of the TRC's Final Report, a rush to reconcile is occurring. Indigenous organizations are daily inundated with requests from settler-run organizations for aid in crafting a correct and appropriate land acknowledgement to be disseminated in written and oral forms as a marker of their involvement in the process of reconciliation. Who, these organizations want to know, are the original stewards of the territories upon which they conduct daily business? What is the correct pronunciation of names? In what order should they be acknowledged? Who is best suited to *utter* these words of acknowledgement—an Indigenous or a non-Indigenous person[6]?

While such initiatives and questions are heartening in that they bespeak a sincere desire to engage in the project of (re)conciliation between settlers and Indigenous peoples, they also carry the implication that such initiatives may, over time, regress into prescriptive speech acts—empty utterances that signify a paradigm shift without actually effecting one. I have had the opportunity to witness land acknowledgements performed by various non-Indigenous people in a variety of contexts (and certainly at every live performance I have attended in recent months). I have witnessed a land acknowledgement being read haltingly off of a cellphone; I have heard a land acknowledgement prefaced by an apologetic explanation, "We are all supposed to do this now"; I have stared into a dimly lit stage-world as a disembodied voice avowed in somber tones its gratitude "to have the opportunity to live and work on these lands." But in all of these well-meant performances,[7] I heard nothing about treaty-relationships, about the responsibilities of settlers to the Indigenous stewards of unceded lands, about the relationship of the speakers to the history they were relating, or about a commitment to right-relationships in that moment and extending into the future.

The land acknowledgement perfunctorily performed by rote or by prescription across this nation will not serve the delicate project of relationship building; indeed, it may, at the end of the day, render such an endeavour an exercise in futility. *It is, in short, akin to smudging with a dead fire*. It cannot facilitate the transformation of the individual speaker or listener; it cannot generate conversation or goodwill between settlers and their Indigenous hosts; nor can it facilitate a necessary, collective, seismic "shift" in Canada's body politic (Saul 281) because it requires (and will be seen to require) little-to-no personal investment on the part of those who recite an "official script."

The task, then, for all Canadians goes beyond education: it goes beyond learning historical events, names, or geography; it requires Canadians to *re-imagine* themselves in light of this learning (Saul 287), to re-imagine their relationships with the biotas upon which they live and work and love; and it invites Canadians to re-imagine a way of doing life—on treaty or unceded lands—that honours the nation-to-nation relationships into which they have been born or (in the case of new Canadians) into which they have been "adopted." This work concerns itself with the shared duty of all Canadians to listen, to learn, and to *speak*—to converse. It requires a Speech Act through which to perform sincere desire to enter into an ongoing relationship with Indigenous peoples and the biotas that have been under Indigenous stewardship since time immemorial. And the desire must be bone-deep if it is to achieve perlocutionary effect—if it is to render articulation into ongoing *practice*. Without such a practice, "reconciliation with the natural world" and conciliation between our peoples will prove themselves to be impossible projects (see TRC, *Legacy* 121-26; see also Crowshoe, qtd. in TRC, *Legacy* 123).

"To articulate conflicting truths and through mutual good will, compassion for the fragility of all life, humility (to hear) and courage to allow others to hear us hearing, we might bridge the distances between us and agree to a shared existence on shared lands (that are owned by no mortal agent but conditionally lent to all created life to sustain it for the brief period of its existence)."

Mapping and Sharing Personal Stories of Arrival; Routes & Roots (First Story) July 2017. (Photo by Jill Carter.)

Top Right: Talking Toronto Treaties (George Brown College, Waterfront) Stace Laforme Explicates the Wampum, June 2015. (Photo by Jill Carter.)

STEPPING BACK TO THE "EDGE OF THE WOODS": PREPARING TO CONVERSE

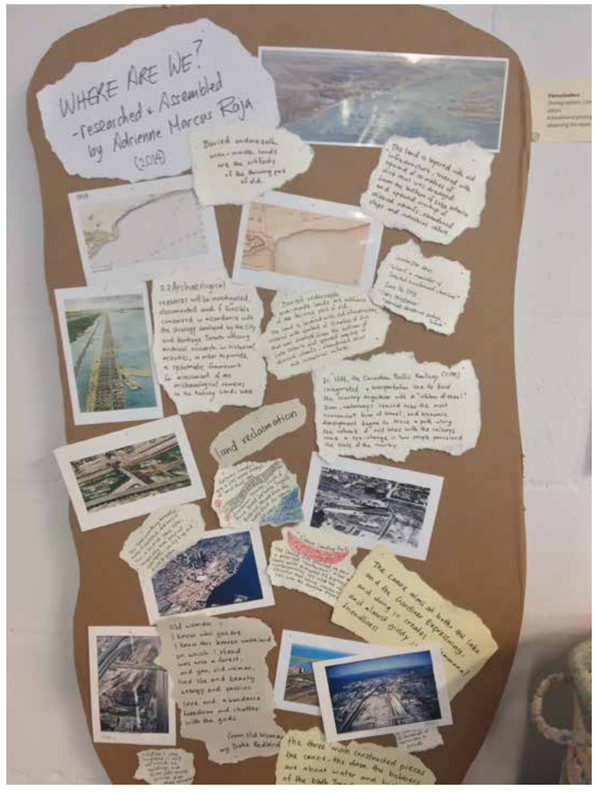
"Whenever a person loses his way, he must, of his own accord, find his way back. No one else can assist him. Only he knows the way; only he knows where and when he departed from the path."

(Johnston 117)

British-Canadian researcher Natalie Chambers has demonstrated, after years of research with immigrant and refugee peoples, that Canada's "collective amnesia" has arisen not out of malice or negligence but as a "survival strategy…to protect [newcomers to these shores] from [the] chaos—created by guilt, grief, insecurity, and dislocation" (260-61). But, as she observes, this survival strategy has not ordered the chaos; rather, it has produced an inchoate disconnect, rupturing the relationships between guest and host, between humans and their biotas, and between mind and heart. When Syilx/Okanagan writer Jeanette Armstrong (quoting her father) characterizes non-Indigenous

Canadians as "dangerous," as "insane," as "people without hearts [who] are wild and scatter anywhere" (qtd. in Chambers 261), she holds up a mirror to all Canadians, allowing them to view themselves, momentarily, through the eyes of their Indigenous neighbours and to see clearly just what this "survival strategy" has cost.

Herein lies the dis-ease of the settler. At some level (beneath her conscious life), she knows that she is "out of place." She is out of *her* place. She is connected to no land. What profound (albeit, too oft unaddressed) mourning must reside in the settler-psyche? This settler has never been welcomed by any Indigenous group. She has not been condoled. She has not announced herself and awaited welcome at the "Edge of the Woods." And her grief (unrecognized by herself and unaddressed) continues, as it has since contact, to fuel incalculable destruction. As newcomer to ancient territories—an interloper on ancient relationships—the settler has the responsibility to (a) integrate into Indigenous systems; (b) to follow natural laws; and (c) to adhere to treaties with the land and its original stewards. And our people crafted mechanisms to smooth that passage—to *settle the guest*, as it were—protocols that, of late, have been blatantly ignored by the very people who call for "reconciliation," by the very governments and funding agencies who are making it into an industry.



In the territories from which I write, the Haudenosaunee have, as part of their cycle of Condolence, an "Edge of the Woods" ceremony. And Anishinaabeg have a like ceremony (*O-ma-mi-wi-nini*)—"Waiting at the Edge of the Woods" (Simpson, "Looking" 36). We did not just enter another's territory. Instead we waited at the outskirts, building a signal fire and announcing our presence in song, waiting to be welcomed *con* verse with an answering song and a series of actions to cleanse us and prepare us for entry into the community (see ibid 36). The announcement of self; the welcome; the exchange of song, story and gifts; the sharing of food—all this is part of the treaty process between humans.

The first task then is multi-faceted: it requires an active embrace of new knowledge and a recovery of what has been forgotten. As non-Indigenous peoples invest time and energy in re-educating themselves, they must also invest equal portions of time and energy in remembering themselves. *How is it that you come to be here in this moment? From what "boat" did you (or your ancestors) disembark on these shores? On what shore did you first arrive? From what nations? What has been left behind? What languages, spiritual beliefs and practices, lifeways, and knowledge systems have been forgotten, ignored, or discarded? Why? What may be worth retrieving and preserving and sharing with (not imposing upon) others?* Through such an examination of self and other, the process of "unsettling the settler" begins (see Chambers 260). A conscious and conscientious series of actions designed to facilitate such unsettling carries the promise and the power to re-right the chaos, to restore the human heart and bring it into balance with mind, body, and spirit, and to engineer the spaces in which every Canadian may, at last, converse truthfully and properly begin the process of conciliation (see ibid).

Certainly, as artists who craft and breathe life into the stories that build communities and nations, we all play a key role in these processes. We craft medicines to heal the human heart. We mirror our fellows; we embody alternate ways of being, which our witnesses might model; we suggest processes of building relationship. We pose crucial questions. And for good or ill, we share the answers at which we have arrived. If we regard the land acknowledgment as a necessary epigraph to a story that will map out the first halting steps towards conciliation on these shores, then our witnesses must be compelled to dig in and wrestle with questions around their place in this story. And I am hopeful that they will be so compelled if their artists model their own investment in this heuristic exercise as they struggle to address the questions that hang between our peoples at the edge of the woods: *To what degree are you personally invested in "the truth and [conciliation] process with the Indigenous peoples whose homeland we call Canada" (Chambers 259)? Do you (personally) have a functioning, clearly defined, ongoing relationship with the Indigenous peoples of the territories on which you live? How far does your sense of community extend? Does it include our non-human neighbours? Do you recognize that they may be among your audience? What practices and ways of working might you adopt to maintain and uphold the ancient treaties that have governed human movement upon and stewardship of these lands long before first contact?*

Of our national theatres (and the bodies that fund them), artists might begin (and inspire their audiences) to ask, "Do you develop and support projects that provide tangible benefits to and build capacity within the Indigenous communities that surround your city, village, or town? Have you developed or begun to develop meaningful relationships with these communities? How extensively and how often are Indigenous artists, Elders, storytellers involved in your projects? Are Indigenous peoples safe to create, witness, and respond within your structures? These are some of the questions with which Indigenous artists continue to engage as they enter their work. And these are the questions with which settler artists must learn to wrestle, as they story their own call at the edge of the woods and await response.

The land acknowledgement presents itself as a crucial (and courageous) first step in the project of conciliation. But it must realize itself as a perlocutionary act. Lacking action to lend blood and bile, sweat and tears, force and substance to the syllables that mark an ancient story, their utterance constitutes only a false start. Without the mess and discomfort engendered within the drama (the thing done), the land acknowledgement is little more than T.S. Eliot's proverbial "shadow," marking the chasm between impulse and execution in a "wasteland" that has been blasted by inchoate desires and hollow words.

Opposite Page:
Talking Toronto Treaties
— Community Activation.
Jumblies Theatre, June 2017.
(Photo by Jill Carter.)

"How is it that you come to be here in this moment? From what 'boat' did you (or your ancestors) disembark on these shores? On what shore did you first arrive? From what nations? What has been left behind? What languages, spiritual beliefs and practices, lifeways, and knowledge systems have been forgotten, ignored, or discarded? Why?"

Notes

1. Versions of this paper have been presented at land-acknowledgement workshops for the Theatre Centre, Toronto (26 July 2016) and SummerWorks (8 August 2017).

2. *Chi Ziibi* (The Great Creek) in the east is known today as the Rouge River; to the west is Kabechenong (in Anishinaabemowin, "leave the canoes and go back") or *Niwa'ahone ga'gaihi'ih* (Little Thundering Waters to the Seneca), known today as the Humber (named by John Graves Simcoe for an estuary in England). Between these lies *Osk-ka-da-nosh / Wonscotonach* (the river at the place of scorched earth), known by Torontonians today only as "The Don."

3. Consider, for instance, Monique Mojica's *Izzie M: The Alchemy of Enfreakment*, a new work that has emerged from the development of *Sideshow Freaks and Circus Injuns*, by Leanne Howe and Monique Mojica (for more information on *Sideshow Freaks and Circus Injuns*, see Carter, "Discarding" 430).

4. As Metis artist-curator David Garneau observes, the term "reconciliation" invokes the "restoration of something lost (that never quite was)" (15). Conciliation between the Canadian state and Indigenous people and settled citizens of Canada and Indigenous people seems, to me, a more achievable objective.

5. This is a truth upon which all settler-Canadians should seriously reflect. Those who live on treaty lands should understand and uphold their responsibilities as treaty people. Those who live on unceded lands live there without legitimacy—as occupiers. I contend that those who occupy unceded territories are obligated to personally acquaint themselves with the history of the territory upon which they make their home, to reach out to and ally themselves with its Indigenous stewards, and to exercise the responsibilities that come with being citizens of a democracy by championing (through advocacy, lobbying efforts, and financial support) the establishment of contemporary treaty agreements that might emerge out of comprehensive land claims or self-governance agreements.

6. The land acknowledgement that opens events (a meeting, a performance, a negotiation, a celebration, etc.) is a protocol. And, for me, protocols are simply principles manifested through *action*. There are many actions that will need to be taken (many protocols to be enacted) throughout the fraught and arduous journey towards conciliation on these shores. The efficacy of such protocols relies upon the principles (spirit and intent) that undergird them. Ultimately, protocols and principles must be aligned. Without the spirit and intent, true reparative action will never be undertaken. And without full commitment to the action, the articulation of spirit and intent is stripped of meaning and resonance.

7. There are some few exceptions. For instance, in early February 2018, on the final night of the University of Toronto Drama Festival, the student-organizers of the event read a statement they had penned for the occasion. These young Settler-Canadians located themselves on this land, tracing their families' roots; they confessed their lack of knowledge about the history of Tkaronto; they committed themselves to learning more about the land, about their Indigenous hosts, and about their own responsibilities as treaty-people and as allies in Tkaronto. In this, they modelled the Seven Grandfather Teachings, articulating and embodying Respect, Truth, Honesty, Bravery, Humility, and Love through their address, demonstrating throughout how they are growing in Wisdom.

Works Cited

Borrows, John. *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law*. University of Toronto Press, 2002.

Carter, Jill. "Discarding Sympathy, Disrupting Catharsis: The Mortification of Indigenous Flesh as Survivance-Intervention." *Theatre Journal* 67 (2015), 413-32

———. "Shaking the Paluwala Tree: Fashioning Internal Gathering Houses and Re-fashioning the Spaces of Popular Entertainment through Contemporary Investigations into Native Performance Culture (NpC)." *alt. theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* 6:4 (2009), 8-13.

Chambers, Natalie. "Reconciliation: A 'Dangerous Opportunity' to Unsettle Ourselves." *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey*, 257-78. Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009.

Garneau, David. "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing." *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and beyond The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.* Ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, 1-27. Wilfred Laurier UP, 2016.

Johnston, Basil. *Ojibway Heritage*. McClelland & Stewart, 2003.

Saul, John Ralston. "Reconciliation: Four Barriers to Paradigm Shifting." *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey*, 279-92. Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009.

Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*. Arbeiter Ring, 2011.

———. "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg Diplomatic and Treaty Relationships." *Wicazo Sa Review* 23:2 (2008), 29-42.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). *Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy*. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 5. TRC, 2015.

———. *Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation*. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume 6. TRC, 2015.

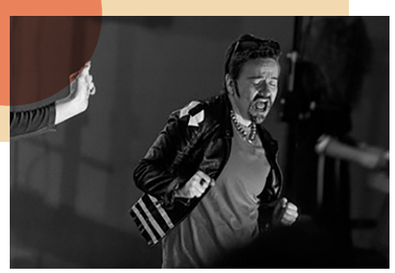
———. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. TRC, 2015.

———. *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation*. TRC, 2015.

Monologue for a Drag King Performance Adapted from *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke, written by Herself* (1755)

BY HEATHER LADD

An actress at her toilet, or Miss Brazen just breect by John Colley (Photo from Wiki Commons).



Heather Ladd as Dick Hazard. Pretty, Witty and Gay Festival, Lethbridge. (Photo by Jaime Vedres.)

As both an academic and (occasional) drag king, I find Charlotte Charke (1713-1760)—a multi-talented writer, producer, and performer famous for her onstage and offstage cross-dressing—one of the most compelling figures in English theatre history and queer history. Charke was the youngest—and estranged—daughter of theatrical impresario and poet laureate Colley Cibber (1671-1757). The Cibbers were an (in)famous theatrical family; these eighteenth-century Kardashians capitalized on making their private lives public, rendering their personal selves commodities and airing their familial dirty laundry for profit. Charlotte had a storied professional life, which included years as a strolling actress—technically a vagabond under English law—and spells of non-theatrical work, usually in male-dominated fields.

Early in her acting career, Charke became recognized for her "breeches roles," parts in which female characters donned male dress within the action of the play.[1] Charke, whom I like to think of as a proto-drag king, was tall and slim and easily adopted the swaggering confidence of a young gentleman. A number of breeches roles involved a cross-dressed heroine boasting of "his" virility and supposed sexual conquests, and even wooing another woman. Charke took, for example, a role in her father's comedy, *The Double Gallant* (1707), playing Clarinda, a heroine who generates much (temporary) chaos dressed as a man. Given the popularity of breeches roles among English audiences, Charke's aptitude for gender-bending was an asset, though some cultural commentators damned cross-dressed actresses as immoral for drawing playgoers' eyes to the unseemly spectacle of women's legs and hips. Moreover, the homoerotism of such love scenes was undeniable, as audiences knew they were performed by two actresses in close physical proximity. Charke also took on travesty roles, male parts traditionally played by actors but cast with actresses (usually for the bankable novelty of the exercise). These roles could be performed straight or as a burlesque—and potentially biting critique—of what we would now term "toxic masculinity."

For many years, up until less than a decade before her death, Charke regularly, and rebelliously, dressed as a man in her private life—a private life that was never far from the public eye. Fortunately for posterity, Charke penned *A Narrative of the Life of Charlotte Charke* (1755), the first autobiography by an English actress.[2] Published in six installments, this work is part of a larger cultural movement in the eighteenth century: the rise of the self-image cultivating celebrity performer. Charke's autobiography is fascinating as a story of failure and perseverance, of almost supernatural optimism in the face of both bad luck and bad choices and the world's opposition and indifference. Though written for publication rather than performance, Charke's autobiography is highly theatrical, not only containing many allusions to plays in the repertoire of her time, but a plethora of dramatic episodes ranging from the farcical to the melodramatic.

Drawn to Charke's compulsion to experiment and to disrupt as well as to perform, I adapted the *Narrative* into a monologue. In this original work, I touch on some of the more salacious and comic incidents of Charke's life, including: her wooing (passing as a man) of a rich heiress; her time acting in London and the provinces; her imprisonment for debt (bailed out by prostitutes fond of "Master Charles"); and even a brief stint as a sausage maker (the implicit joke about "packing" was just too easy to pass up). Something of an exhibitionist, Charke was relentless in turning her trials into the stuff of comedy. In her *Narrative*, new identities are tried on and discarded; both professionally and personally, she crashes and burns without any seeming lasting harm to her stock of high spirits. Nevertheless, she persisted.

I performed this monologue at Pretty, Witty, and Gay, a yearly queer cabaret founded in 2004 by Jay Whitehead, currently associate professor of Drama at the University of Lethbridge and the co-founder and artistic director of Theatre Outré. Though we cannot know Charke's sexual orientation, we can consider many of the episodes in her autobiography as queer or outré—non-normative in terms of both gender and sexuality. The event was held at the Sterndale Bennet Theatre in downtown Lethbridge, a small city in Southern Alberta, a place of ubiquitous pickup trucks and un-ironic cowboy hats, but also a surprisingly visible LGTBQ2+ presence.[3] The theatre was full on that mild March night in Lethbridge; a Chinook wind was blowing as I cycled there in costume. The performance was in a thrust configuration in a black box theatre, seating set up cabaret style. The audience was an age-diverse group made up of members of Lethbridge's queer community and their allies and included a number of college and university students and faculty. The audience was wonderfully receptive and enthusiastic. Whitehead, hosting the night as his drag queen alter ego, Didi D'Edada, has a special gift for fostering a warm, accepting environment among performers and spectators. At PWG, the attitude is "anything goes," from confessional coming out monologues to amateur clog-dancing and everything in between. I took to the stage in a blue eighteenth-century-style coat with silver buttons, tight leather pants, a tricorn hat, and drawn-on facial hair (I have since learned how to apply real hair clippings with spirit gum adhesive).[4] Cheers met my introductory appeal: "Is everyone ready for a little queer history?" I subsequently enjoyed an attentive audience and even a few laughs, far more than I expected out of a monologue adapted from a work published in 1755, over 260 years ago.

> "*A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* is a brilliant source text for a performance at a queer cabaret—a balancing act between the sensational and the conventional, between self-deprecation and self-assertion, and between frankness and mystery."

The Monologue

Prologue

I'll begin my autobiography with an epigraph, for who doesn't like a nice little quotation from someone wittier (but hopefully not prettier) than yourself:

This Tragic Story, or this Comic Jest,

May make you laugh, or cry – As you [*Gestures to the audience*] like best.[5]

That's from John Gay. Fitting, don't you think?[6]

And now for a dedication: I dedicate this work to *myself*, Mrs. Charlotte Charke—though you may call me Mr. Charles Brown: actor, puppeteer, a woman-man of a thousand professions, an eighteenth-century theatrical celebrity unmatched "in Oddity of Fame" (vi).[7] I dedicate this work to you (me!) for those "WONDERFUL QUALIFICATIONS by which you have so EMINENTLY DISTINGUISH'D YOURSELF" (iv). I admire the "Ease (so particular to yourself) with which you have run thro' many strange and unaccountable Vicissitudes of Fortune" (iv). And, I can only hope that "the World may be persuaded into a tolerable Opinion of my Labours" (vii). Now let's to it, for I have "promis'd to give some Account of my UNACCOUNTABLE LIFE" (13).

Childhood and Youth

Every good autobiography starts in childhood and since I was a queer little boy-girl child, let us spend a few moments there:

I was born in the year of our Lord 1713, the twelfth and last child of the famous Colley Cibber, an eighteenth-century triple threat (actor, theatre manager, and playwright).[8] Although he and I are currently estranged, the theatre is still in my blood; these boards were my nursery. [*Gestures to the floor of the stage*]

Father "omitted nothing that could improve any natural Talents Heaven has been pleas'd to endow me with" (16). Nevertheless, heaven would have served me better in endowing me with that organ [*Vaguely gestures to front of breeches*] the world seems to think the requisite of genius. "My Education was not only a genteel, but in Fact a liberal one, as might have been sufficient for a Son instead of a Daughter" (17). I hope you won't accuse me of "a vain Self-conceit," however, for making mention "of knowing more, or thinking better, than . . . my Sister Females" (16). I was taught Latin and Geography while most girls spent their hours sewing and embroidering. I was never much good with "a Needle," handling this feminine instrument "with the same clumsy Awkwardness a Monkey does a Kitten" (17).

I was four years old when I first donned masculine dress. I borrowed my brother's waistcoat and my father's enormous wig. I put these on and marched around dragging a "monstrous belt and large Silver-hilted sword" (18). But it wasn't long until I was unboy'd: "to my Shame and Disgrace, forc'd into my proper Habiliments" (20). Still, "my natural Propensity to a Hat and Wig" (271) would not be extinguished. I was ever full of "strange, mad Pranks" (23). At the age of fourteen, I took to hunting. I spent whole days shooting and would return home "laden with feather'd Spoil" (29), in less poetic terms: dead birds. But again, I was unmanned: "one of my Mother's strait-lac'd, old-fashion'd Neighbours paying her a Visit, persuaded her to put a Stop to this Proceeding" (29). Though hunting was fine sport for a boy, it was unsuitable for a "young Gentlewoman to follow such Diversions" (29). Thus, I was deprived of my prick . . . err, my GUN. But my "mad-cap Self" (33) was still not vanquished. As a young person, I tried to set up as physician and gardener, manly occupations both. In those years, I was "as changeable as *Proteus*" (40). My family could not domesticate me. Rather, I pitied my sisters, who were "incapable of currying a Horse, or riding a Race with me" (33).

Adulthood

Years added to my catalogue of "unprecedented, ridiculous Follies" (47), which included a disastrous marriage and a child. But we won't get into that.[9] I took to the stage and made "Acting my Business as well as my Pleasure" (59). In the theatres of London and the provinces, I was received with applause: playing women, playing men, and playing women playing men. Audiences loved women in breeches roles, mostly for the costumes that put shapely legs like my own on display. [*Poses to show off legs to their greatest advantage, encourages admiring applause*] I triumphed in the part of Hamlet and one reviewer even proclaimed that "no Man could possibly do it better" (208). I was also a hit in the part of Lord Foppington (no surprise there), a character from *The Careless Husband* by my father dearest.

Increasingly I took to wearing breeches offstage, which was *not* so smiled upon. It was no small matter to "forsake my Sex" (258) outside the playhouse. For "some substantial reasons" (which I will keep to myself) I came to dress entirely as you see me: "EN CAVALIER" (90). [*Gestures to ensemble*] I continued many years in men's clothes; "Charlotte" was effectively concealed, as I was "of the Bulk and Stature of most of our modern Fine Gentlemen" (169). Acting led me into the world of puppet theatre, not for children in those days, but often for incisive political satire. "My Puppet-Show," I must confess, "was allowed to be the most elegant that was ever exhibited" (82).

At points, however, I entered the world of trade. And as many of you know, [*sarcastically*] actors are excellent with money. I tried any number of commercial occupations: tavern owner, pastry cook, grocer, valet, farmer. You name it, I tried it. Everything ended poorly. Attracted to the shape of the product, I became a sausage maker. I "bought a considerable Quality of Pork" (138) and set to work. But "My unlucky Stars were ever employed in working on the Anvil of Misfortune" (127).

"OH! DISASTROUS CHANCE! [*Takes pose of tragic actor, hand over brow*] a hungry Cur had most savagely entered my Apartment, confounded my Cookery, and most inconsiderately devoured my remaining Stock" (142). "After having sighed away my Senses for my departed Pork" (143), I realized I was bankrupt. Debts sent me to prison, where I was taken as a "young Gentleman of a decay'd Fortune" (157). I was bailed out by the whores of the theatre district. A collection was made "for the Relief of poor Sir *Charles*, as they were pleased to stile me" (92). I was a favourite with these obliging ladies, to whom my figure (as you see it) was well known. [*Winks at the audience*]

I continued to live in men's clothes as Mr. Brown and "not making the least Discovery of my Sex by my Behaviour, ever endeavouring to keep up to the well-bred Gentleman, I became, as I may most properly term it, the unhappy Object of Love in a young Lady" (106), a *rich* and "agreeable" (111) young lady. She wanted me as her husband and had I been born a man, "I might have been at once possessed of the Lady, and forty thousand Pounds in the Bank of *England*, besides effects in the *Indies*, that were worth about twenty Thousand more" (107). I could have been "the happiest Man in the Kingdom" (108) "if I had been lucky enough to have been in Reality what I appeared" (273). As things really were, her "amorous Heart" (108) had fixed on an "improper Object" (107). In short, me. I was "conscious how unfit I was to embrace so favourable an Opportunity" (108) and felt a tender concern for her *needs*. [*Somewhat lasciviously*] So, by honestly confessing who I was, and thus, what equipment I lacked, dashed "her Hopes of me for ever" (109).

What a tender scene ensued: she dissolved into tears, and could only speak in "broken Sentences" (110). I tried "to sooth her into a Calm, but unhappily encreased [sic], rather than assuaged the dreadful Conflict of Love and Shame which labour'd into her Bosom" (110). And such a bosom it was. [*Gesturing to suggest her lover's ample gifts, lightening the tone a little*] I was "sincerely grieved it was not in my Power to make a suitable Return" (112) of her love. "Poor Thing" (112). Poor Charles! It was a sad disappointment on both sides. "With many Sighs and Tears on her Side, we took a melancholly [sic] Leave" (112). 'Twas the last I saw of that dear girl, "but hope she is made happy in some worthy Husband, that might deserve her" (112).

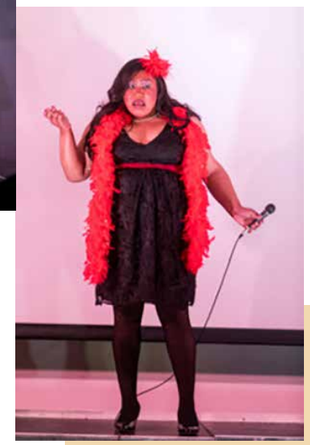
Well, before I descend any further into tragedy, I will end this narrative, my strange and true history. And, in defence of my rather unconventional life, I declare: "I cannot recollect any Crime I have been Guilty of that is unpardonable" (275). I trust "I have rather painted my own ridiculous Follies in their most glaring Lights" rather than debar you pretty & witty listeners "the Pleasure of laughing at me" (263). Here, I make my exit. [*Bows*]

Heather Ladd as Charlotte Charke. Pretty, Witty and Gay Festival, Lethbridge, 2018. (Photo by Jo-Anne Finch.)

CONCLUSION

I wrote and performed this monologue with the aim of conveying to a general audience the spirit of a remarkable historical personage, Charlotte Charke, but by way of my own play with gender. Though my lives as an academic and a performer rarely intersect, my drag name, Dick Hazard, is an homage to my field of study: the eighteenth century. I borrowed it from the title character of an anonymous novel, *The Adventures of Dick Hazard*, actually published the same year as Charke's autobiography. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* is a brilliant source text for a performance at a queer cabaret—a balancing act between the sensational and the conventional, between self-deprecation and self-assertion, and between frankness and mystery. She never tells us exactly why she dressed as a man in her day-to-day life, but gives us hints of her childhood predilection for drag. Though she admits to going by the name Charles Brown, she elides the most intriguing part of this story: her long-term partnership/marriage with Mrs. Brown, another actress. For many years, they lived and worked together and often passed as a husband and wife. Regardless of whether this partnership was a sexual and/or romantic one, or a practical economic arrangement between close friends, this was an unconventional situation. Understandably, Charke has been much discussed as a significant figure in lesbian and transgender history and part of the ongoing scholarly project of "queering" the eighteenth century.[10]

Still, Charke oscillates between "owning" her eccentricities as being born of natural impulses and self-reproachfully dismissing them as bouts of folly, deviance, or even insanity. In these latter moments, Charke internalizes the association her society insistently made between unconventional gender identities and madness.[11] Both shame and pride are never far from her bold assessment of herself as the "NONPAREIL OF THE AGE" (iv). Though she identifies as a woman in her autobiography—notably referring to her "Female Pen"—she is attractive to twenty-first-century audiences for her gender fluidity. The actress' brand of self-conscious gender swapping, like the contemporary art form of drag itself, anticipates Judith Butler's game-changing understanding of gender as a performance, the acting out of a series of gendered traits within a society that thinks in terms of a feminine/masculine binary. Charke may not go as far as we want her to go, politically speaking, but she—like so many of the performers, volunteers, and audience members at Lethbridge's Pretty, Witty, and Gay—challenges society's restrictive gender expectations in defiance of those who would police gender expression through gossip, slander, ostracization, and even violence. Charke points the way to a time of increasing understanding and acceptance of queer lives and identities. Were Charke alive today, perhaps she would have chosen to put the gender-inclusive X on her driver's licence, an option given to Albertans by the provincial government in June 2018.



> Charke may not go as far as we want her to go, politically speaking, but she—like so many of the performers, volunteers, and audience members at Lethbridge's Pretty, Witty, and Gay—challenges society's restrictive gender expectations in defiance of those who would police gender expression through gossip, slander, ostracization, and even violence.

Pretty, Witty and Gay Festival, Lethbridge, 2018. (Photos by Jaime Vedres.)

Notes

1. Much of the information about Charke's life in this introduction was drawn from a detailed and highly readable popular biography by Katheryn Shevelow, *Charlotte: Being a True Account of an Actress's Flamboyant Adventures in Eighteenth-Century London's Wild and Wicked Theatrical World* (Picador, 2006).

2. Many scholars have noted that Charke echoes the anecdotal style of her father's autobiography, *Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740). Though I do not delve into Charke's fraught relationship with Cibber in my adaptation, the *Narrative* was written (in part) as a bid to be reinstated into her father's favour. Thus, Charke often adopts the pose of a prodigal child; and, as her autobiography was published serially, some scholars read it as blackmail: in essence, forgive me or I will keep "oversharing."

3. For more on this phenomenon see Ritchie Wilcox and Jay Whitehead, "Homesteading a New Queer Frontier: Queering Performance and Cultivating Community from Outside the Centre," *Queer Theatre in Canada*, ed. Rosalind Kerr and Ric Knowles (Playwrights Canada Press, 2018), 37-48

4. My first experience performing in drag was at a 2012 Pretty, Witty, and Gay, performing Robin Thicke's song "Blurred Lines" as a critique of rape culture. Since then, I have performed at other drag events, several at Club Didi, Lethbridge's members-only (but extraordinarily inclusive) gay bar and queer theatre space. I have participated in a drag game show (Lip-synch Roulette) and a TV-themed cabaret night. Most recently, I performed solo as well as with another drag king, Killa Watt, at the first Pride in Cardston, Alberta, a small town just north of the Rocky Mountains.

5. From the title page of *A Narrative of the Life of Charlotte Charke (Youngest Daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq)* (London: Printed for W. Reeve, 1755). Note that all parenthetical citations refer to this source.

6. John Gay is an eighteenth-century playwright, famous for writing the incredibly popular ballad opera, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), with music arranged by Johann Christoph Pepusch.

7. Puppetry was a staple of Elizabethan fairs, but evolved as a more fashionable entertainment in the eighteenth century, a golden age of puppetry in England. During this period, several permanent puppet theatres opened in London that offered up sophisticated entertainment for adults. Marionettes were sometimes elaborately costumed, and operated on stages that included painted scenery and footlights. Puppet shows were regularly a vehicle for satire. To that end, Charke had the faces of her puppets carved to resemble recognizable public figures. She wrote and devised puppet shows such as *Tit for Tat* (1743), which does not survive, according to the Orlando Project's online entry on Charke's shows for the stage.

8. Here, I inserted an impromptu topical joke, explaining who Colley Cibber was by calling him the "Jay Whitehead of the eighteenth century."

9. One of the scenes I included in an early draft of the monologue involved spectators wondering at the male-presenting Charke's visible devastation when her child falls ill. As this scene occurs in a public space, Charke's onlookers respond—like theatregoers—to the unusual spectacle of a young man demonstrating great concern about a child.

10. It should be noted that I am not the first person inspired to turn their scholarly interest in Charke into a contemporary performance. Lisa Quoresimo created a devised musical theatre piece titled *Charlotte Charke/Mr. Brown*, which she writes about in the journal *Theatre Topics* 26:3 (2016).

11. Charke was also daring and ambitious as the manager of an acting troupe named the Mad Company that performed at the Haymarket Theatre, London, during the summer season of 1734.

Shakespeare Adaptation across Borders:

A CONVERSATION WITH MONA ZAIDI

"O, no, my dream was lengthen'd after life;
O, then began the tempest to my soul,
Who pass'd, methought, the melancholy flood,
With that grim ferryman which poets write of,
Unto the kingdom of perpetual night."

(*Richard III* [Act 1 sc iv])

BY RACHEL OFFER

In Act I, scene iv of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Duke Clarence tells his prison guard of a horrid nightmare he has experienced, recounting all of the terrible sights he beheld. The imagery in this scene is some of the strongest in the play, and Toronto-based filmmaker Mona Zaidi takes advantage of it in her 2017 short, *Richard III: Unto the Kingdom of Perpetual Night*. Applying the text to images depicting the current refugee crisis, the film magnifies a small moment from an epic play in order to create powerful resonances for a contemporary audience. *Unto the Kingdom of Perpetual Night* was named Best Film at last year's prestigious Shakespeare Shorts Competition, organized by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon. It was selected from 235 entries submitted from countries around the globe, including New Zealand, Iran, and Romania. Zaidi is the first Canadian to receive the award.

The theme of the 2017 competition was "Crossing Borders," and Zaidi's film uses visuals that cross borders of time and country to bring the imagery in the text to life. Zaidi takes an often-overlooked scene from a play that centres heavily on war and destruction and stretches the text across centuries to suggest its application to experiences in our world today. Within the time constraints of the short film format, Zaidi layers and juxtaposes images such as boats, water, and war in order to pull the viewer into the fantastical world of Clarence's dreams. The images emphasize the pace, style, and poetic rhythm of the text and create an immersive experience of Shakespeare's language. Sir Kenneth Branagh, who adjudicated the competition, said of Zaidi's film, "This was a powerfully felt, cinematically ambitious exploration of nightmare—personal and global . . . Shakespeare as prophet was met with prescient image making of the self-destruction of which man is capable, in imagination and action."[1]

I spoke to Zaidi over the phone just after her return to Canada upon receiving her award.

Above: Still from *Richard III: Unto the Kingdom of Perpetual Night*. (Photo by Mark Mainguy.)

Page 25: Filmmaker Mona Ziadi. (Photo by Mark Mainguy.)

"Really, what's incredible about some of these classical texts, Shakespeare in particular, is that he had an almost prescient sense of this epic cycle of human war and destruction and displacement. When Clarence describes his vision, I thought, 'Wow this could literally be talking about today.'"

R: ***How significant is it for you to be the first Canadian to win this award?***

M: Oh, wow. Well, in Canada we have quite an amazing history with Shakespeare. Actually, I think Voltaire famously once said that "Shakespeare is a drunken barbarian, popular only in places like London and Canada." [*Laughs*] So we have an incredible tradition here of doing Shakespeare, but not too much in cinema. I feel really honoured and proud to be able to take some of the tremendous history that we've had in Canada of performing Shakespeare but to add a new twist to it; so being the first Canadian filmmaker to receive this award is very meaningful.

R: ***I watched the film, and it was quite wonderful to see the text brought to life cinematically.***

M: Thank you. That's one of the things that I was most interested in, because as a filmmaker, taking some of these classical texts, one always has the challenge of "How am I going to communicate this four-hundred-year-old text to a modern audience? How am I going to bridge the language barrier, even the cultural barrier, so that the profoundly resonant truths that are being explored in some of these things can come to life for a person who talks in a modern language and is accustomed to certain types of storytelling?" With this particular work, I was really struck by this nightmarish, apocalyptic vision that the Duke has. Really, what's incredible about some of these classical texts, Shakespeare in particular, is that he had an almost prescient sense of this epic cycle of human war and destruction and displacement. When Clarence describes his vision, I thought, "Wow this could literally be talking about today." But because of the unique techniques that you can use in film, I'm able to do that without distracting too much from the original text: you can still hear what he's saying but you get this double layer of it, by being able to see almost time compressed so that past and present are intermingled. I thought that it would be a very interesting, fresh way to do a modern adaptation, so in some ways they're still in their costumes, they're still in the intended period of the piece, and yet behind them through this dream sequence, we're able to see just across the span of human history, this endless cycle of war and destruction, displacement and suffering, that is just as true today as it was in Shakespeare's time, and certainly long before his time. It was exciting to be able to contribute something new to a tradition that has certainly had such a long and significant history. It's not every day that you get to put a new twist on Shakespeare.

R: ***You talked a bit about the text that you chose, but what was your selection process? Did you start with the idea of war and refugees and look for text that fit that, or were you reading the scene when that came to you?***

M: It came about when exploring the competition theme of "Crossing Borders." It's difficult to say whether the text came first. This particular scene had captivated me for quite some time because, for me, it captures this idea of crossing borders in both the literal sense of migrants and immigrants—with that amazing image Clarence has of "a thousand fearful wracks/ A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon"—but also in a more poetic sense, the sense of that liminal space between life and death, between dreaming and waking, these borders that we're constantly flirting with in our daily existence. This was really my line of inquiry as an artist, this idea of crossing borders. That prompted me to look at this scene in a way where I was asking, "How do I create almost a precipice that the viewer stands at, where we are neither awake nor asleep nor alive nor dead? We're all almost migrants in a sense, and we've lost sight of the shore behind us, the safety of the home we've left behind, and the new shore hasn't really appeared in front of us yet, we're adrift." It's not a very well-known scene in Shakespeare, but for me, it just had this magical quality of multilayered meaning. And for me that liminal space is one of the most fascinating to explore as an artist, if you can take the viewer or if you can take your reader to that edge where they've left behind the material existence that they're usually functioning in. If you take them into this, you've essentially drawn a magic circle on the ground and said, "Come in here, the rules of the normal world don't apply, now you're in the world of the story."

More generally, this film is the first in a series I'm doing based on

classical texts from world literature. So the idea behind the project was to take moments from some of the really great works of human history from around the world and just distil a single moment from them and explore the larger questions of human existence. Sometimes when you take an entire work, some of the subtle nuances of the meaning get lost because there's just this epic story behind it, so I thought as a filmmaker it's kind of interesting to explore just a single theme in a single moment from some of these really great works. The short film format is kind of perfect for that sort of narrow exploration, just taking a moment, just a taste of what this thing could be.

R: ***Adaptation is debated between purists, who don't think that Shakespeare's plays should be taken out of their original context, and post-colonial critics, who suggest that assuming Shakespeare's texts are universal glosses over classist, sexist, racist aspects of the plays that ignore the experiences and stories of marginalized peoples. What is your response to these ideas?***

M: That's a really interesting question, and I think it's a really timely one. The way I look at the story is that there's the plot, and the plot is what works on your conscious mind, and then underneath that plot is the story. And the story transcends time and culture and place, and the story speaks directly to that within us which is part of the shared inheritance of humanity, the shared existence. So for me, when I look at some of the great works of Shakespeare, certainly in terms of the plot, culture has changed, and times have changed, and the specifics are no longer relevant or meaningful to us. But if you look underneath it, the archetypal stories that are being told are the same, as they have been for all time. That underneath part is the part I'm interested in exploring in adaptation. As far as I can see, if you are true to the underlying archetypal story, you're always on sure ground. Because in many ways that's what Shakespeare was doing too—he was really doing a modernization of some very ancient stories going back to Greek times and before.

In terms of gender and colonialism, those are two significant issues. And I think that every artist has to ask themselves how they're going to remain mindful and sensitive to those issues. I can only say that the way I approach my work is to say, "Alright, let's look at what was the story underneath these plots. What was he really talking about when he was talking about these things? What was the metaphor? What was the poetic analogy that was being made?" Even though the specifics of how he did it may not be culturally appropriate in this time and place, it is what was underneath it that made it such a resonant and significant story for the time.

It's a complicated issue. You know, I'm a woman and my family comes from India, so I'm not a member of the boy's club for sure. But at the same time, India has a very rich mythological tradition, but it's a polytheistic tradition. There is an allowance made in India, at least theoretically, for everyone to worship their own deity in their own manner. Having that background maybe gives me a certain perspective of being able to make space for a wide variety of things. It's comfortable for me to make space for everyone to exist in their own way. So for me as an artist I have to follow my own artistic path and try my best to integrate the past but stay mindful of the issues. And it's a constant question I think that every artist, every woman artist, is constantly up against. When you look at the traditional classics, they're all written by men, the protagonists are primarily men, and it's a question. However, I'm very mindful that with moving into a time where women are making their voices heard, I don't want to lose some of those incredibly beautiful and significant stories that lie underneath those classic texts. The fact that it was written by a man doesn't really matter to me; the significant thing is the humanity in those stories.

R: ***You've described your work as influenced by "ancient artistic and spiritual traditions of India." How does that translate to your work on this film specifically?***

M: In this particular project, I would say that the influence is probably more generally in terms of an approach. And also, well, in some ways every work you do is autobiographical. In this one for example, that ending monologue that the guard speaks, I took it from a very different part of the play, I took a bit of liberty and I took a different character's speech and put it at the end because I felt that really underlined what I wanted to say about the piece. And the perspective I think is probably a uniquely Vedic perspective in some ways, which is neither to judge one way or the other, but simply to recognize the particular cycle that we're in. As Third Citizen says "Before the days of change, still is it so. By a divine instinct, men's minds mistrust Ensuing dangers." So that is to say that here we enter a particular cycle of the human story, and it's not a unique cycle, this is the way it is; in times of change men's hearts are full of fear and you cannot reason with people in this time. But without saying particularly that this is wrong or that is wrong: simply to recognize that humans go through cycles, human history is a circular history. A particularly Vedic perspective is of time being cyclical and circular as opposed to a straight line. I think that that vantage point—the Eastern vantage point—permeates everything that I do. The idea of polytheism and the idea of cyclical time are two fundamental perspectives on existence that then inform everything that you do, without you realizing it really. If you have a sense of time where there is a beginning and then an end, this gives you a particular approach. There's a particular, shall we say, anxiety in the work as the end is getting near. As opposed to in the Eastern approach, where a certain perspective suggests, "Well, this is the cycle that we're in, this is the cycle that has happened many times before, this is what happens when this cycle is in place." It's a particular way of looking at things.

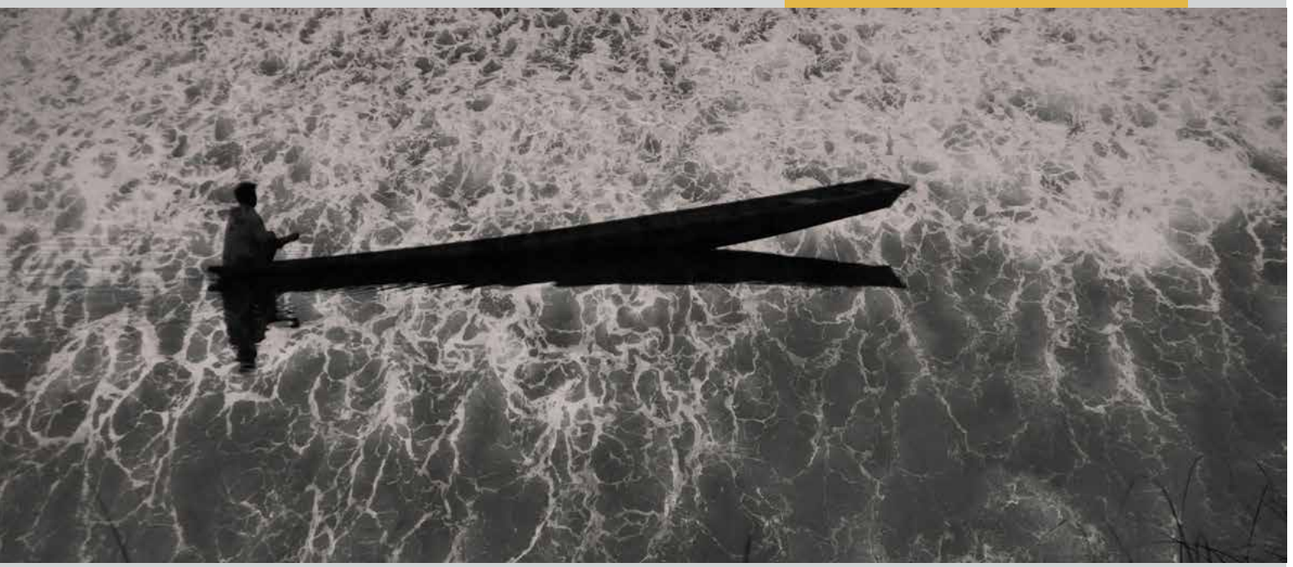
R: ***Do you think maybe that's why you're drawn to these types of stories?***

M: Absolutely. When I was very young I was really interested not so much in the plot, but in the insides. I was interested in philosophical work. I was interested in the Upanishads and the Tao Te Ching, and those were the things that I found fascinating. The internal journey has always been the one that fascinated me.

"How do I create almost a precipice that the viewer stands at where we are neither awake nor asleep nor alive nor dead? We're all almost migrants in a sense and we've lost sight of the shore behind us, the safety of the home we've left behind, and the new shore hasn't really appeared in front of us yet, we're adrift."

Stills from *Richard III: Unto the Kingdom of Perpetual Night*. (Photo by Mark Mainguy.)

The Ferryman.
(Photo by Mark Mainguy.)



To read more from Mona Zaidi and Rachel Offer's conversation and watch *Richard III: Unto the Kingdom of Perpetual Night*, **visit alttheatre.ca.**

R: ***What does it mean to you to use Shakespeare's work to discuss issues of migration and diaspora?***

M: It is always a tricky line to walk as an artist, I think, of becoming political or becoming involved in the politics of the day. The images really came to me listening to the text itself, and I felt as though, "Okay if something from inside of me is speaking to me about these things, then I'm gonna have to explore it." It wasn't that I thought, "How can I make a film to put a spotlight on these important issues of today?" I try to rely on an internal compass to direct the work, and if my internal compass is telling me that this is the area that I have to explore, then I try to do it. But I try to do it from the perspective not so much of preaching that this or that is the right way or "Isn't this a terrible thing?" but in terms of owning my humanity, and in this way challenging the viewer also to own their humanity. In the sense of, "This is who we are. Is this who we want to be?" And not being afraid to just look at it face on.

James Joyce once said that the proper function of art is to induce aesthetic arrest. Just to make you say, "wow." The awe of it, the horror of it, just "wow." And anything that tries to persuade you or attract you or disgust you is just pornography. And if it's trying to teach you a lesson, it's even worse; it's just didactic pornography. I laughed when I first heard that, but the further I walk on this path, the more I think he was absolutely right. Really, in some ways the artistic experience has to be one with a spiritual connection with that animal that we are. And the excessive attempt to particularly sway your viewer in one direction or the other, I think, is not really the role of the artist. The role of the artist is to put the mirror in front of you and say, "This is it. This is what we are."

R: ***I'm not sure that all artists would agree with you.***

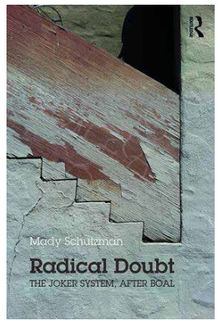
M: No, absolutely not. [*Laughs*] Certainly not.

You know any culture you come from, there are certain invisible cages that your culture creates for you that you can't even see. For example, when you come from a monotheistic culture, one of the things we constantly have to remind ourselves is "Why am I only allowing for one god?" I find that in the discourse of the day, in the West, we must stay mindful of the fact that this tradition of monotheism leads us in a direction where there's one right answer. I think that the Eastern approach allows us a different perspective, which is to say that I have to find my own internal truth. For me, the search for an artist is to find that internal authenticity that is unique and particular to me, while recognizing that there is going to be that same but totally different unique authenticity in another human being. In India there is a tradition of saying "Namaste" to people. When it's translated, people often say, "The divine in me recognizes the divine in you." And I think that starts to touch on this journey that artists have to take, which is trying to find that unique authenticity in myself while simultaneously respecting that something unique and authentic is happening in you that's completely different.

Note

1. Qtd. in Ian Hughes, "Winner of Shakespeare Shorts Film Competition Announced," *Stratford Observer*, 26 September 2017.

Book Review



MADY SCHUTZMAN *RADICAL DOUBT: THE JOKER SYSTEM, AFTER BOAL*

Routledge, 2019.

BY LIB SPRY

I am sitting on my third-floor balcony in Joliette, Quebec, looking out over the train tracks to the sun setting over the Laurentians. It is 1981. The summer is almost over. La Grosse Valise, the francophone theatre company I have just joined, has finished the creation workshops for the next show, and we have a long weekend off before we start rehearsals. I am enjoying the evening peace. In my hands Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. *I have never heard of the man, but as a political theatre maker, the title had caught my attention on my annual pilgrimage to Theatre Books in Toronto. Now, finally I have time to read it. Here was somebody writing about the kind of theatre I wanted to make.*

It was an inspiring read that changed my life.

What excited me in that first read was Boal's description of his work in the Arena Theatre (Teatro de Arena) in Sao Paulo, and the Joker System, developed in the 1960s as a response to a highly inequitable society. From his description, the company had developed a method of working that brought together the best of Brecht, Stanislavsky, clown, vaudeville, the Greeks, and popular and political theatre, working with the local community to create theatre that challenged the elitist, colonial government ruling Brazil at that time.

A year later, I was lucky enough to see CEDITADE, Boal's Paris company in Montreal—he was in exile by then, driven out of Brazil by the newly elected fascist military government. I went to the first evening of their Theatre Forum performances and I was hooked! I returned for every night of the run, made a fool of myself in an intervention from which I learnt so much, and then took the workshop they were offering in Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). We were introduced to Forum, Image, Invisible, and Newspaper theatre[1]—all methods developed during his exile. In the years that followed, first as Boal's apprentice in Paris (thank you Canada Council), then as one of the small group who gave the initial TO workshops in English Canada, and in the work we did in my theatre company Passionate Balance, it was Theatre of the Oppressed that I focused on. In the thirty plus years since then, variations of TO have spread across the country,[2] but there has been little discussion about his early work at the Arena Theatre, or how that Joker System can be used today. So it was with some excitement that I picked up Mady Schutzman's new book, *Radical Doubt: The Joker System, after Boal*.

> "These are two words rarely seen together and even more rarely expressed, named, or acknowledged …Yet they ring so many bells. Is she saying that radicals should doubt? Or that doubt is and/or should be a radical action? Perhaps both?"

It is a book that anyone interested in social and political theatre and performance should read. In TO, the Joker plays the role of the master of ceremonies, acting as liaison between the audience and the stage. This is a challenging and exciting role, as the Joker has to act as the animator of the event, find the exact balance between encouragement and guidance so audience members will stop the action and try out their solutions, be sensible (to use Rancière's term) to both the needs of the person intervening and the audience, guide the actors in their responses, and know how and when to bring things to an end. Here the role of the Joker is that of an active listener. Open to all points of view, the Joker needs to be flexible, funny, supportive, and kind. As Schutzman makes clear, it is important to understand that the job of the Joker in the TO method is different from the Joker System: "While the 'joker function' in the Joker System suggests a dramaturgical resemblance to jokering in Theatre of the Oppressed, the differences—in action, effect, and systemic permeation—are formidable" (16). The Joker System is designed for those who wish to create large-scale political and community productions. She writes,

> First, what is outlined in Boal's description of the Joker System consolidates the theoretical foundations of his work into a concrete, accessible form. More precisely, Brechtian, Freirean, and Bakhtinian principles are interwoven into a legible, practical, and modular schema that can be applied to not only collective dramaturgy but artistic and liberatory endeavors of all kinds… Second, in the translation from the Joker System to Theatre of the Oppressed, many of the joker functions were accorded to spect-actors who performed the interventions. As a result, the kind of intellectual rigor and complexity that marks the Joker System is often lost…Finally, I am not suggesting that the Joker System be practiced in lieu of TO. I am saying that the meticulously crafted techniques and functions that characterize the making of a Joker System play—including extensive time allotted for amassing

"From Epicurus to Levinas, Aristotle to Brecht, from Pataphysicists to Buddha, she roots, as did Boal, her work in some of the most influential Western and Eastern thinking of the last couple of millennium, and in doing so, she models her own words: 'to love theory, to let it drift as it is wont to do, to give it time to surge back around and grip you' (182)."

> historical documents, doing research, engaging in preperformance debate and analysis, and practicing rehearsal techniques—is simply not viable within the constraints of most applications of forum (and other TO formats). (12-13)

Schutzman examines—with the same mixture of playfulness, rigour, ambiguity and clarity that Boal brought to his work—how the Joker System provides an approach to both ethical and political theatrical challenges, and how it can be used in the non-theatrical challenging realities we face today. The book offers both a practical structure and a solid theoretical base. She tells us:

> On its surface, the Joker System is a dramaturgical method for collectively writing and staging plays designed to activate audience members to become agents of change regarding the social inequities that affect them. But beneath the surface, the Joker System is a set of dynamics applicable to struggles of all kinds. It demonstrates, with adventurous exuberance, the creative relationship between theory and practice; it translates revolutionary principles and ideologies into a theatrical language. And perhaps most importantly, it awakens and galvanizes these capacities in others. (2)

She asks: "How might a play—a time-based theatrical display—capture and inspire the magnitude of what interventions, interferences devoted to inquiry, can teach?" Her reply describes how the Joker System can meet these challenges:

> Through the Joker System, Boal proposes that intruding, digressing, disrupting, surprising, derailing, postponing, and destabilizing are requisite analytics (ways of reading social phenomena) and requisite aesthetics (ways of reforming them) toward achieving any semblance of democracy and social justice. There will be no return to democratic process if conflict is avoided; but, unfortunately, in the face of conflict, war (often bred of fear) has become an easier choice than peace. Interventions, as enacted within theatrical space, simulate encounters with un-familiar others and cultures; they generate moments when we find ourselves discomfited by unexamined biases or lack of experience and knowledge. They derail our customary rhythms and routines, challenge our roles and presumed authority, cast us into liminal terrain, and require a negotiation with vulnerability and loss. Through an elaborate structure that privileges slippages over security, risk over habit, the Joker System provides a way to uncover and contain discomfort, to promote and tolerate transformation. In other words, interventions are a mechanism for stopping our performances of social complicity long enough to recognize that we are perhaps seeking refuge, ironically, in the very identities that cause us so much pain and isolation. (22)

Schutzman structures the book in the same way that she defines radical doubt: "a relation to knowledge that yields to what is unknown just as emphatically as it scrutinizes what is already known and taken to be 'true'" (130). It is written so that it echoes all the elements found in Boal's Joker System. The very title reveals the fundamentals of the work, as she plays with the words in it. "Radical Doubt"—what does she mean? These are two words rarely seen together and even more rarely expressed, named, or acknowledged by those struggling to change the societies we live in. Yet they ring so many bells. Is she saying that radicals should doubt? Or that doubt is and/or should be a radical action? Perhaps both? What about the other half of the title: "The Joker System, after Boal"? That comma makes me ask: Is she talking about how that system has developed since Boal's death? Is she talking about being inspired by someone else's style or method, just as one speaks of a painter or writer who creates in a style or method, "after" another artist? Or is it both? It is up to us to find out. The playfulness, wit, and ambiguity of this title are a reflection of Schutzman's understanding of the Joker System, a system in which humour, chaos,[3] change, seen and unseen connections, and the identification not of individual character but the roles those characters play in society are the basis of the work.

This is no academic text; it is personal, practical, theoretical, filled with honesty and humour. Within these pages we find a history of Boal's work in Brazil at the Arena Theatre in Sao Paulo and an explanation of the Joker System as developed there; an analysis of how Schutzman uses the system[4] and the text of the play *Upset!* she wrote with Plaza de la Raza Youth Theatre Program; an argument for the use of humour in political work of all kinds (jokes, riddles, and koans run through the book); an Encyclopedia of Radical Doubt, written by several authors; a discussion of Boal's use of identification, recognition, and resonance—the idea of being approximate; an exploration of what we mean by community; an important personal journal (which she uses to look at the concept of "It's as if…"); and an (In) Conclusion that concludes nothing but leaves us with much to think about.

Schutzman explains and explores the main themes of the Joker System in a variety of different ways, which allows us to approach them for ourselves in the way that makes most sense to each reader.

The first, and for me the most important, is Schutzman's dedication to humour as a political tool. Jokes and riddles are scattered through the book. This is humour that comes from dealing with the politics of life, be it race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, or the many intersectional varieties of these. I, a Canadian WASP growing up in a family of intellectuals in England, have a completely different cultural background than Schutzman, but like her, humour became a way of life, and, as importantly, a way to create change. As she so eloquently puts it:

> It was through humor that I discovered the curious intimacy of fear and glee, danger and enticement, vulnerability and desire. Over time, these enigmatic correlations transformed from personal inheritances into critical beacons for analyzing and navigating complex social and interpersonal circumstances …
>
> I recognize recurring preoccupations borne of these early encounters with humor: trickster tactics, double binds, clownery, ritual, montage, performativity, and magic. All engage a degree of ambiguity, paradox, and incongruity. All rely upon counter-intuitive and nondualistic logic. All treat contradiction and irresolution not as illnesses to be cured but rather as natural, inexorable human conditions to be respected and engaged. *And all have tremendous potential as strategies of resistance and transformation.* (1-2, emphasis added)

Second, Schutzman's use of philosophers and theoreticians throughout the book is both inspiring and useful. Her theoretical references reflect on or reinforce the practicalities she describes. From Epicurus to Levinas, Aristotle to Brecht, from Pataphysicists to Buddha, she roots, as did Boal, her work in some of the most influential Western and Eastern thinking of the last couple of millennia, and in doing so, she models her own words: "to love theory, to let it drift as it is wont to do, to give it time to surge back around and grip you" (182). In the penultimate chapter entitled "The Joker Never Dies: The World As If," she tells of a journey she made to Poland to take part in a meeting of the International Society of Humour Studies, visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau camps, and travel to Pultusk, her maternal grandfather's home. It is within this personal context that she discusses what she calls "Boal's mantra: the courage to be happy," the slogan he used when he ran for the Rio city council.[5] Schutzman discusses what happiness means in this day and age, and then quotes Aristotle's treatise on happiness: "[It] declares that if a person's (or group's) pleasure or advantage in having achieved any of these rights comes at the expense of another's, it cannot be deemed 'happiness.' It is, rather, a contemptible form of power and abuse" (168). And then she discusses what she thinks Boal meant:

> I am imagining "the courage to be happy" as "the strength to be moved"—emotionally, psychically, sensually. To move, however hesitantly, amidst double-binds, across barriers, in conditions riddled with unhappiness, without clear direction or expectation. To be lucky enough to encounter another human being and be radically altered by their alterity. To be moved outside of oneself. To see strength and courage as heart (from Latin, cor)—the seat of feelings, of affection. (179)

A third approach Schutzman takes is through the concept of "As if"—where those involved represent themselves as real when they know they are not. This is the basis of theatre and a useful political tool:

> Play is potent precisely because of this complexity: we engage it as real in spite of knowing it is not. According to Bateson,[6] it is through play's paradoxical construct that human beings develop intelligence, specifically the capacity to negotiate conflicting or incongruous signals. Play ensures our evolution by facilitating a third-ness, a terrain that privileges complexity over unity or polarity. (103)

Then there is her exploration of what it means to be approximate, in which she references both Boal's Rainbow of Desires[7] and the Ganser syndrome, or "talking past the point":

> Employing methods typical of clowns and tricksters, the syndrome's witty sufferers refuse to comply with the stigmatizing effects of diagnostic classification. They derail (the tyranny of) clarity, literalness, and precision by providing indirect, irrational, and imprecise answers to questions. Their wily approaches resemble Boal's resonant responses as well as the Joker System's subversion of the literal in the name of social change. (85)

In the heat of the daily struggle to create, produce, and fund our theatrical work, live our lives, and continue the fight for a better world, progressive theatre artists often do not have the time, the financial stability, nor the intellectual background, to analyze what they do with the clarity that Schutzman has done here, in terms of her own work, and what Boal's Joker System offers us in the way of tools for transformation.

Reading this book feels like an affirmation of my own work, and that of many of the people I work with. It is also a guide and a challenge. It is a joy to have someone writing about this kind of work as Schutzman does.

I leave Schutzman the last word:

> Throughout the writing of these chapters, I have never lost sight of some core goals of the Joker System: righting wrongs, provoking dialog, and promoting ethical behavior. But I don't have clear directives on how to achieve those ends, *only a plea to be accountable to complexity. To seek outcomes and solutions to human dilemmas through inquiry, experimentation, play, and collaboration, and not exclusively through rational, outcome-driven modalities.* (181-82, emphasis added)

Notes

1. For those who do not know Boal's work, Forum Theatre is a short play created around an issue faced by a community in which the central character (representing the community) tries to change their situation and fails. The play starts again and the audience, "the spect-actors" as Boal calls them, are invited to stop the play's action, replace the central character and test out their solutions against the actors who represent those who wish to maintain the status quo. Image Theatre is the building of images with the participants' bodies, and then working with those images, sounds, and words to explore their meaning and how they can be changed. Newspaper Theatre is similar to that developed in the 1930s, where a reading of what the papers say about an issue is placed beside images that tell the real story, e.g. a politician devouring a banquet while talking about the need for austerity.
2. And the world. There are hundreds of theatre companies and community groups using these methods, from Burkina Faso to Puerto Rico, from India to Scotland.
3. Schutzman gives us Boal's definition of chaos as defined in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* as "a system founded on incongruous pairings: 'chaos' (his term) and empathy, alienation and action, skepticism and morality, disagreement and camaraderie, urgency and wit" (4).
4. This is a multidisciplinary arts centre in East Los Angeles, a member of the Community Arts Partnership at the California Institute of the Arts which offers workshops to teens taught by CalArts students and faculty.
5. He won, and used his salary to pay for his Rio theatre company to go into communities and use Forum Theatre as a way of researching what the citizens wanted, thus creating Legislative Theatre. A total of seventeen laws were passed using this method.
6. English anthropologist, who wrote *A Theory of Play and Fantasy* (1972).
7. Boal began using TO to explore what he called "The Cops in Our Heads"—our internal thoughts, traumas, and socializations that stop us from taking action. He used the idea of "resonance," other people's interpretation of one person's image of their problem, as a way of looking beyond the initial interpretation.

alt theatre
cultural diversity and the stage

A magazine for artists, thinkers, and changemakers

A group of readers around the world engaged in politics, cultural diversity, social activism, and the performing arts.

alt.theatre alt_theatre

Visit our blog for reviews of theatre and performance happening across the country. **alttheatre.ca**

Interested in reviewing a production for alttheatre.ca? Have something you'd like us to review? Contact us at **reviews@alttheatre.ca**.

Photo of d'bi.young anitafrika by Che Kothari.