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Muoi Nene from his perspective as an actor in Volcano Theatre's production of *The Africa Trilogy*.

Silvija Jestrovic contemplates two contemporary performances that approach the legacy of Brecht's political theatre in very different ways: Christoph Schlingensief's explosive *Ausländer Raus!* (Foreigners Out) performed in Vienna in 2001, and a 2009 production of *Mother Courage* at Britain's National Theatre.

DISPATCH
Selena Couture with a performance response to *Ali and Ali 7: Hey Brother (or Sister) Can You Spare Some Hope and Change?* at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre.

BOOK REVIEWS
A review-essay by James McKinnon on *Performance in Place of War* by James Thompson, Jenny Hughes, and Michael Balfour.

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THEATRE

"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

COVER PHOTO
© Tim Matheson
Tamara Podemski in ***The Edward Curtis Project.***
The play was commissioned, developed and produced by Presentation House Theatre as part of the 2010 Cultural Olympiad and PuSh International Performing Arts Festival.

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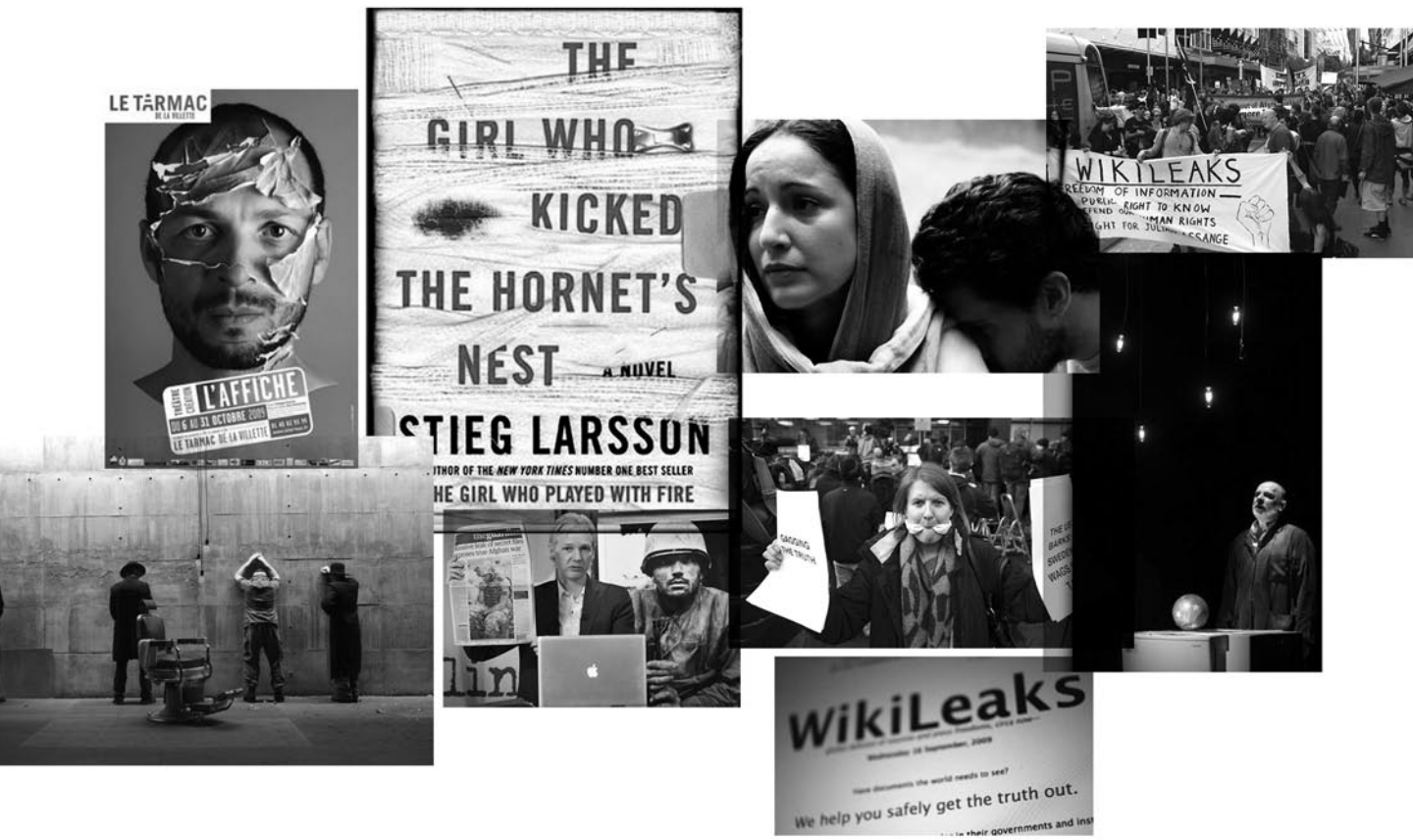
With a Vengeance

By Edward Little



THE HOSTILITIES BETWEEN THE US GOVERNMENT AND WIKILEAKS—WHAT SOME HAVE DUBBED THE WORLD'S FIRST *CYBER WAR*—ARE PLAYING OUT LIKE COMPETING TELEVISION DRAMAS ON A GLOBAL SCALE. TRUTH IS FICTION, FICTION IS TRUTH.

Production photos in collage. Clockwise © Terry Hughes / Christine Aubin Khalifah and Abdelghafour Elaaziz in *Truth and Treason*; © Federico Ciminari / Denis Gravereaux as Abu Salem in *L'Affiche*; © Federico Ciminari / Denis Gravereaux, Étienne Pilon, Justin Laramée , François Bernier as Jewish Worshippers in *L'Affiche*

The "National Security" drama features the powerful US government—portrayed as a global champion for freedom, democracy, and upward mobility—under attack by *Assange*, a sexually perverted cyber-terrorist who has released classified government data. National security and the lives of government workers and citizens are at risk. The US government, in concert with its corporate and international allies, launches a coordinated two-pronged attack to take out Assange and immobilize his operation. A Special Ops squad —with the humanizing names of PayPal, eBay, Visa, MasterCard, and Amazon —hits WikiLeaks hard and fast. But attempts to sever the head of WikiLeaks lead to the sprouting of a hydra-like army of "hacktivists" including a German computer club named "Chaos." Assange is *contained*—charged with rape in Sweden and held under house arrest in Britain. The US government moves to extradite Assange on charges of espionage. The plot thickens.[1]

Another drama, the story of Assange, closely mirrors the plots of the Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy set in Sweden. A small media organization of investigative journalists with a charismatic leader speaks truth to power. They release a massive amount of classified information implicating powerful people in deception, crime, and corruption. All hell breaks loose. Larsson's reporter goes underground, just as Julian Assange goes underground—fugitives with no fixed address pursued by governments and their powerful corporate allies.[2] A battle wages between corporate-aligned government interests trying to shut down the WikiLeaks websites and a grassroots resistance movement of web-jamming internet hackers wreaking havoc on targeted corporate websites. Larsson has Lisbeth Salander—a brilliant, socially reclusive revenge-seeking hacker with a photographic memory. Assange has US Private Bradley Manning, a naïve, idealistic young soldier answering a moral imperative to blow the whistle on the crimes against humanity he has witnessed in his tour of duty in Iraq. Salander has been raped by her court-appointed guardian and declared a criminal. Manning has been "detained" as a criminal and allegedly tortured by the US government (Sengupta). Truth and fiction meet openly in Sweden—a jurisdiction that has led the world with its liberal freedom of information laws. The plot thickens.

WikiRebels, the television documentary produced by Sweden's SVT, tells a more nuanced story. The film explores the unfolding of Assange's strategy to "stake all" on the massive release of documents implicating the US government. The camera is focused on Assange during meetings in Iceland with activists and Member of Parliament Birgitta Jónsdóttir as they work to draft groundbreaking new anti-secrecy legislation in the wake of the collapse of Iceland's banking system. The film both documents and exploits the various faces of Assange in the media—the charismatic, photogenic, quicksilver-haired master of media image battling a corrupt and dying Empire; an out-of-control investigative journalist trying to take on government; as either rapist or saint. Assange's self-declared uncompromising moral stance lands closer to an avenging angel wielding disclosure like the sword of Damocles: "We set examples. If you engage in immoral, in unjust behaviour you will be found out. It will be revealed and you will suffer the consequences" (*WikiRebels*).

As escalating attacks on WikiLeaks and Assange led to increased secrecy at WikiLeaks, spokesperson Daniel Domscheit-Berg and others who disagreed with Assange's "stake all" strategy began to worry about the survival of WikiLeaks and about the tremendous but volatile power that media attention was focusing and Assange was wielding. In a leaked online chat, Domscheit-Berg accused Assange of behaving "like some kind of emperor or slave trader" (*WikiRebels*).[3]

ART HAS A LONG HISTORY OF PROVIDING US WITH SPACE TO RECUPERATE AND FOCUS INFORMATION

WikiRebels calls on Iain Overton, Editor-in-Chief of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, to sum up its editorial stance: "By and large *WikiLeaks* is a force for good." As Overton points out, however, there are no absolutes: "*WikiLeaks* is very, very powerful . . . one has to be cautious of anything that is very, very, powerful." The final word is given to WikiLeaks spokesperson Kristinn Hrafnsson: "Democracy without transparency is no democracy, it's just an empty word."

Art has a long history of providing us with space to recuperate and focus information, to speak truth to power, to shape our common humanity. Or, as Augusto Boal might have put it, to rehearse our moral response. Larsson didn't give us much time to practise before he died and Assange is impatient. His Wikipedia vision for WikiLeaks is about creating an online space where the general public can receive and write analysis of leaked information. Assange's recognition that the world is not yet ready for his vision of a global "participatory online democracy" prompted him to seek a strategic collaboration with the traditional media of major world newspapers. To do this, Assange needed to get their attention.

He did it with the leak of the classified military video now known as *Collateral Murder*—an exposure of the cockpit bloodlust of the crew of an American attack helicopter in Bhagdad, 2007. We hear the voices but

we see only what the helicopter gun-sight camera sees, dehumanized forms caught in the cross-hairs of an eye-in-the-sky technological interface that, combined with the crew's excitement, imparts a horrifically surreal resemblance to a video-game. The crew open fire with armor-piercing ammunition on a group that turns out to include two Reuters News correspondents and a father driving his children to school. A crew member later responds, "it's their own fault for bringing their children to a battle."

Assange, by controlling the subsequent feed of information to the newspapers, realizes his stated intent to eliminate competition *between* major news media in order to get them to *collaborate with him* to serve "the best interests of the story" (*WikiRebels*). Assange and WikiLeaks are effectively *managing* global media by deploying their expertise in information systems management.

The leaks prompted think pieces from many independent media and journalists. John Naughton called the threat to empire rhetoric "official hysteria," pointing out that the worst that WikiLeaks has done is to "comprehensively expose the way political elites in Western democracies have been lying to their electorates." Francis Shor characterized the US response as "the last gasp of a dying empire to shore up its fading legitimacy in the world and among its own citizens." Mark Levine's analysis is that the "leaks have made it harder for Western governments to dupe their citizens into accepting potential future wars." Walden Bello feels the crisis of empire "bodes well" for the world and for the American people: "It opens up the possibility of Americans relating to other people as equals and not as masters" (qtd. in Shor).

The leaks reveal horrific truths about unreported civilian casualties, torture, and crimes against humanity. As Overton puts it, this is "visceral, unarguable death written in raw detail" (*WikiRebels*). The response from numerous right-wing news sources and politicians was similarly shocking and bloodthirsty. Sarah Palin posted a call on Facebook for Assange to be "pursued with the same urgency we pursue al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders" (Shirazi, Gómez del Prado). Many pronounced that Assange should be "taken out." Others advocated classifying Assange as a "terrorist" in order to circumvent the due judicial process of the American constitution. The rhetoric drips with what Steven Erlanger describes as "imperial arrogance and hypocrisy." Here in Canada, Tom Flanagan, a former senior adviser to the PM, speaking on national television twice expressed his opinion that "Assange should be assassinated" (Shirazi).

These are the new realities provoking artists to create a theatre of *political new realisms* concerned with speaking truth to power.[4] Particularly in Canada, there's something old *and* something new in this work that draws authenticity from DNA strands including protest literature, agitprop, living newspaper, documentary drama, verbatim text, oral history interviews, and variously constituted embodied experiences of social injustice. Of late, this political new realism has begun to invade Montreal theatre seasons.

THESE ARE THE NEW REALITIES PROVOKING ARTISTS TO CREATE A THEATRE OF *POLITICAL NEW REALISMS* CONCERNED WITH SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER.

Project Porte Parole—Quebec's only verbatim theatre company—creates theatre with mixed francophone-anglophone audiences in mind. They have tackled the Quebec health care system (*Santé*, 2003), the treatment of Algerian refuges (*Montréal la blanche*, 2004), the giant genetically modified seed manufacturer, Monsanto, in its case against a Canadian farmer (*Seeds*, 2005). PPP's latest three-part piece, *Sexy Béton* (2008, 2010, 2011) examines the 2006 collapse of the De La Concorde overpass: a disaster—labelled as a traffic accident to reduce insurance and public liabilities—that left five people dead and six others physically and emotionally damaged and, in some cases, financially ruined.

Rahul Varma's latest play, *Truth and Treason*, is about the atrocities being committed in the guise of the US War on Terror. Varma's script is filmic, with cut-away scenes designed as leaks or disclosures. For Teesri Duniya's 2009 premiere of the play, set designer Romain Fabre and director Arianna Bardesono transformed the Monument Nationale stage into a military gray box with ground and second-story panels that slid open like the doors of an attack helicopter to reveal the action.

Writer and director Philippe Ducros' 2009 production of *L'Affiche* (Public Notice) was a poetic, agitated, at times violent, and visceral expression of Ducros' haunted and haunting journey into occupied Palestine, where, when someone dies as a direct result of the occupation, a poster or public notice with the face of the dead martyr is posted on a wall. The act is criminal, yet the walls are thick with the notices.

In March 2010, Table d'Hôte Theatre—a company founded by Concordia theatre graduates Mike Payette

and Mathieu Perron to support emerging artists—produced Guillermo Verdecchia and Marcus Youssef's *A Line in the Sand* at the Segal Centre Studio space. Inspired by Albert Camus' existential novel, *L'Étranger*, the play draws on a myriad of documentary and verbatim sources.

In spring 2010, at the meeting of the Canadian Association for Theatre Research, Teesri Duniya produced The MT Space Theatre's *The Last 15 Seconds*. It's a collective piece drawing on investigative reporting into the death of Syrian-American filmmaker Mustafa Akkad and his daughter by the suicide bomb attacks that targeted hotels in the Jordanian capital Amman in 2005. The play stages an imagined dialogue between Akkad and his killer during the moments that preceded the explosion.

In fall 2010, Imago Théâtre produced the English-language premiere of Pierre-Michel Tremblay's *Champ de Mars: A Story of War*, billed as "a gripping investigation into the lives of four people who have been changed inexorably by the ongoing war in Afghanistan" (Imago). Also in fall 2010, Infinithéâtre staged David Fennario's new play *Bolsheviki*—a one-man show created from an interview Fennario did many years ago with a World War I veteran politicized by his experience of the horrors of trench warfare.

These political new realisms share a common and urgent commitment to authenticated experience, freedom of information, participatory democracy, and social justice. Larsson's novels raise questions about the lines between truth and fiction, coincidence and synchronicity. WikiLeaks is exposing duplicity, corruption, and the abuse of state power. What Assange is calling into the human imaginary is nothing short of a global consciousness where "information is the currency of democracy" (Pilger). I leave the last word to Margaret Mead:

> "Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

NOTES

1 The US legal case rests on being able to prove that Assange actively plotted with Manning to acquire the leaked material—rather than simply receiving the material when Manning uploaded it to one of WikiLeaks' secure sites.

2 Or, in Larsson's novels, pursued by a powerful corporate entity with allies in government.

3 Domscheit-Berg has left WikiLeaks to found OpenLeaks, an "unedited" online information distribution centre.

4 A research symposium examining "New Canadian Realisms" is being held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 27-29 Jan. 2011.

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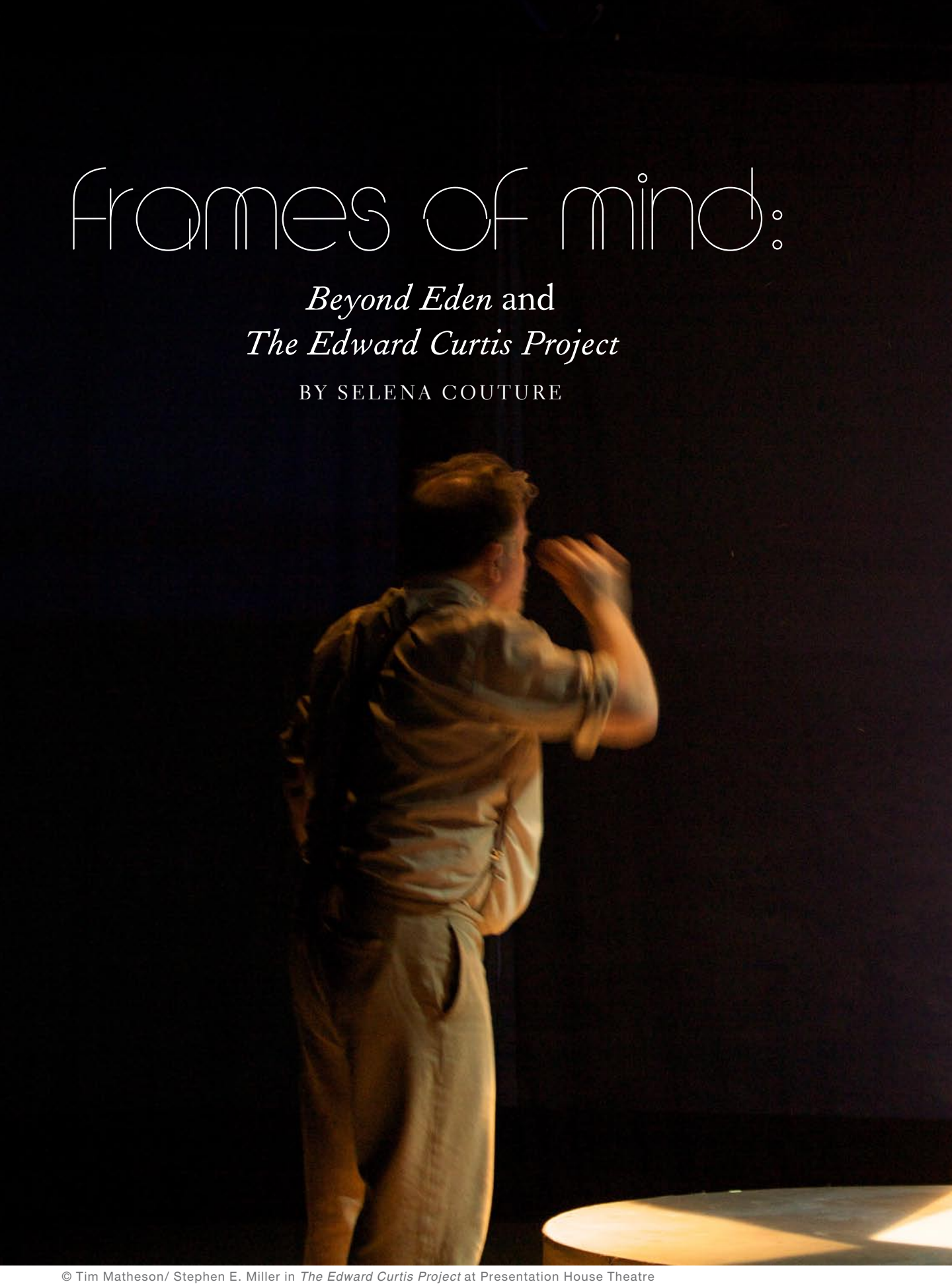
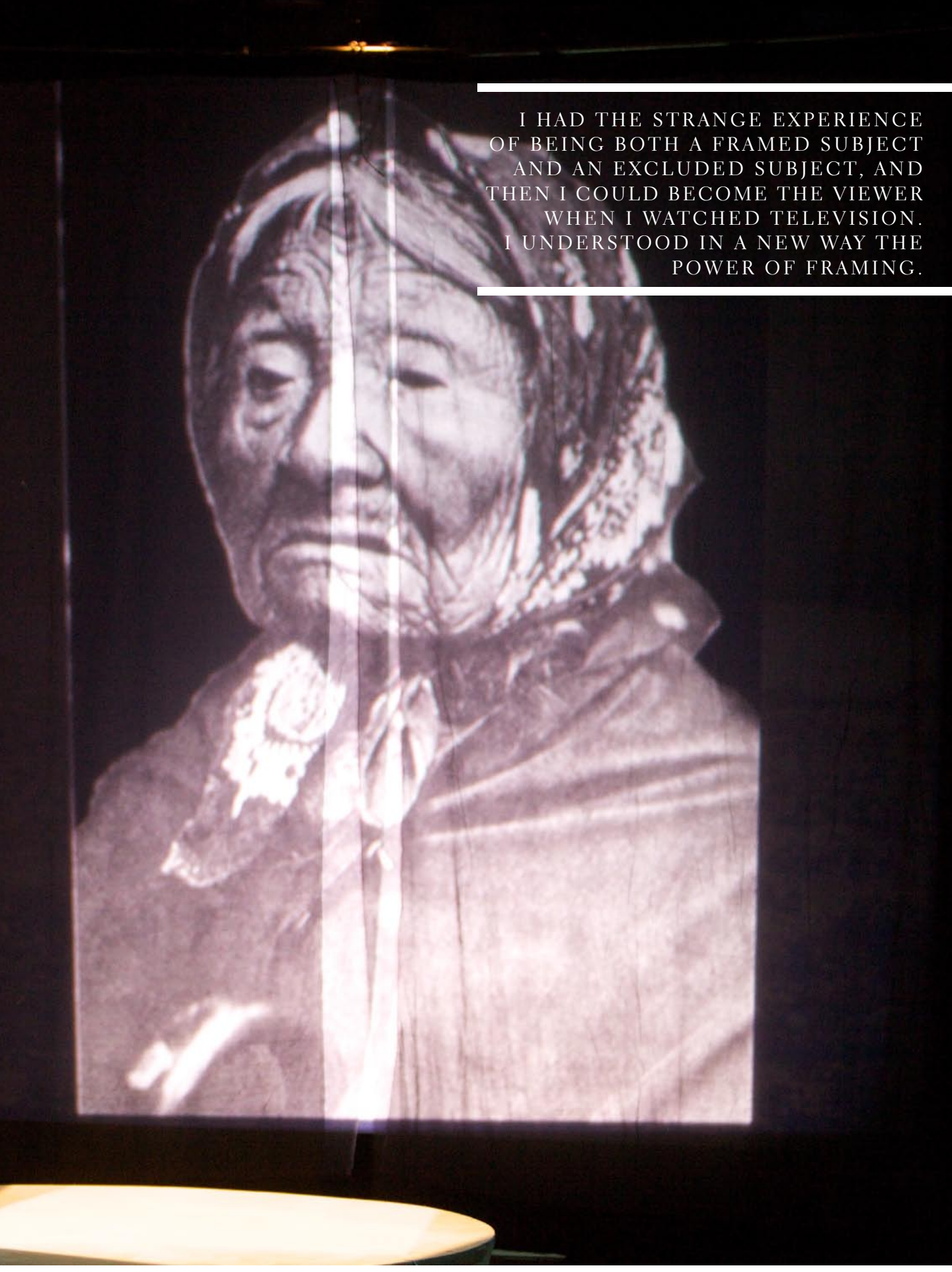
frames of mind:

Beyond Eden and *The Edward Curtis Project*

BY SELENA COUTURE



© Tim Matheson/ Stephen E. Miller in *The Edward Curtis Project* at Presentation House Theatre



I HAD THE STRANGE EXPERIENCE OF BEING BOTH A FRAMED SUBJECT AND AN EXCLUDED SUBJECT, AND THEN I COULD BECOME THE VIEWER WHEN I WATCHED TELEVISION. I UNDERSTOOD IN A NEW WAY THE POWER OF FRAMING.

© David Cooper/ John Mann & Tom Jackson in *Beyond Eden* at the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre

The televised nationalistic fervor that gripped Vancouver during the 2010 Olympics was difficult to deal with if you had any problems with rabid flag-waving, corporate greed, and the mismanagement of public funds. At times this winter, I felt like I was walking through a television studio instead of my city and neighbourhood. Sometimes I was inside the squeaky clean frame created by the television camera, such as at the Aboriginal Pavilion presented by the Four Host First Nations; at other times, I was in places the corporate cameras failed to frame, like the Olympic Tent Village in the Downtown Eastside, organized as a protest against the homelessness and displacement caused by the Olympics (Walia). I had the strange experience of being both a framed subject and an excluded subject, and then I could become the viewer when I watched television. I understood in a new way the power of framing.

While I contended with these thoughts, I saw premieres of two Canadian plays (both part of the 2010 Cultural Olympiad) dealing with the legacy of colonial efforts to preserve and frame Aboriginal culture: Bruce Ruddell's *Beyond Eden* at the Vancouver Playhouse and Marie Clements' *The Edward Curtis Project* at North Vancouver's Presentation House.

But these productions were themselves contained in a frame: that of the Cultural Olympiad funded by the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee (VANOC). Billed as supporting culture as the third pillar of the Olympic values (sport and environment being the first two), the Cultural Olympiad was a $20 million series of three festivals that started in 2008 and culminated in a sixty-day, 650-event extravaganza with an estimated attendance of 2.5 million during the Winter Olympic and Paralympic games (Griffin). Being part of the Olympiad meant that your event had some funding and was listed in the guidebook distributed throughout the Lower Mainland and online. There was some controversy when VANOC insisted that all artists involved in the Cultural Olympiad sign a contract stating they would "refrain from making any negative or derogatory remarks about the Games and its sponsors" (Chong). This is just one overt example of the power of how those with capital control the frames of containment.

The Playhouse's production of *Beyond Eden* had the potential to be a fascinating echo of its 1967 Canadian Centennial commissioned production of George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. On the night of the performance, the capacity crowd was told to stand and welcome BC's first Aboriginal Lieutenant Governor and his wife, Steven and Gwen Point, as they entered the theatre and took their seats. The audience was then welcomed, as is the custom in most gatherings that are aware of the complicated legacy of BC colonialism, by members of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Tsleil-Waututh (Burrard) First Nations to their unceded territory.

The immediate contrast between *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*'s scathing condemnation of the treatment of Aboriginal people with this celebratory event forty-three years later, "welcoming the world" to BC, was marked. Care was taken to support and frame the performance with an intercultural display of syncretic power—the physical presence of Lt. Gov. Point representing both his people (Skowkale of the Stó:lo Nation) and the Queen, together with the official welcome from two members of the Four Host First Nations. These events created a tone of co-operation and prepared the audience to view a mixing of performance styles: a 1950s musical combined with Haida singing, dance, and costumes.

Beyond Eden is based on a significant event in BC/Canadian/Aboriginal culture: the 1957 expedition to retrieve the totem poles at Ninstints on Haida Gwaii by UBC anthropologist Wilson Duff and the young photographer/journalist—but not yet famous artist—

Bill Reid (Haida). Writer and compose Bruce Ruddell aimed to re-paint the event, giving consideration both to the colonizing forces and to the resistance in order to show the positive and negative legacy of the taking of the poles. The goal to create a multifaceted understanding was supported by the presence of a racially diverse cast and crew: the musical was co-produced by Theatre Calgary and the Vancouver Playhouse; it featured John Mann (lead singer of *Spirit of the West*) as anthropologist Wilson Duff (called Lewis Wilson in the play) and Tom Jackson as the Haida Watchman. I was curious how the creative team would be able to express the thematic subtleties and still give a cohesive performance.

At the heart of the ethical dilemma in *Beyond Eden* is the drive to preserve a culture perceived as vanishing. Ruddell's re-construction of a BC legend attempts to broaden understanding by recreating a sense of physical wonder. The set was a tilted ramp, which represented in turn a dock in Vancouver, a storm-tossed ship, and the Ninstints totem site. The off-kilter levels were an effective visual metaphor for a contemporary view of this unbalanced historical period, when the power differentials between colonizer and colonized were still so severe.

The physical set was enhanced by the lighting design, which included projections used to magically evoke the carving and painting of the tree trunks as they became totem poles, and then to show how the glowing totem poles were extinguished as they were finally taken down. These technologically precise effects were impressive, providing a small replica of the wonder one feels at seeing a beautifully carved totem pole, as well as the sense of loss when it is uprooted or decays.

The performance also represented the unbalanced power relations of 1957 in British Columbia—first in the natural world through the storm the expedition weathered in Hecate Strait and then in the human world through anthropologist Lewis Wilson's mental turmoil. Wilson loses his mind because of the ethical dilemma of whether to preserve the poles for anthropological study or to follow the warnings of the Watchman and the Haida spirits to leave them in place at Ninstints where they honour the dead.

Max Tomson, the Haida journalist played by Cameron MacDuffee, is the character who ultimately brings down the poles—deciding to take them to the city so that he can learn from them and reclaim the Haida art of carving. The extinguishing of the poles was a moment of defeat and sorrow. While their preservation by the team of anthropologists led to a revitalization of Haida art and the beginning of Bill Reid's career, it also marked an uprooting from place and a reification of the "traditional" art of the Pacific Northwest. These "artifacts," mass manufactured in factories in China, can now be purchased in Canadian airport gift shops. In *Beyond Eden*, Ruddell displays this story, but does not comment on the decisions made and their consequences. The play is a re/presentation of actions for us to admire and/or despise.

perhaps THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM IS THE DESIRE, ARISING OUT OF AN ASPIRATION TOWARDS RECONCILIATION, TO CREATE A HYBRID FORM—A FORM THAT IN THE END LACKS ITS OWN THEMATIC INTEGRITY.

This seeming neutrality is perhaps part of an effort at reconciliation, but it is weakened by some of the judgments and choices made to frame and tell a story. Ultimately, the play did not satisfy because of some basic structural, generic and stylistic decisions. Written in the style of a 1950s romantic musical, the play's main character is the anthropologist Wilson, and much of the plot is dedicated to his unhappy relationship with his wife and their son. We are supposed to care about Wilson and his wife finding happiness, but given the rest of the production's emphasis on the expedition, their relationship should be made secondary.

© David Cooper/
Jennifer Lines, Andrew Kushnir,
John Mann & Cameron MacDuffee
in *Beyond Eden*

Maybe Ruddell, working in an intercultural creative relationship with First Nations people and organizations, felt he should focus on this side of the story. *Beyond Eden* is an attempt at restitution—to revisit characters and know them better in order to forgive and then establish a respectful relationship. Perhaps Ruddell is using the structure of a dysfunctional family and its members' attempts to reconcile as a metaphor for post-colonial relations in BC.

However, if this is the intention, the play falls short of achieving it. The characters are too specific to be generalized, there is too little development to make the audience really care for them, and as they are a white nuclear family, they cannot approach the complexity of intercultural relations within BC's "extended family." Further, the focus on Lewis Wilson and his family takes the attention away from the journalist Max Tomson's character development. Some of his personal struggle is revealed through his actions and songs, but his connection to other characters is limited. Perhaps the root of the problem is the desire, arising out of an aspiration towards reconciliation, to create a hybrid form—a form that in the end lacks its own thematic integrity. Fundamentally, the play lacks an internal point of view to give it coherent meaning.

Three days after the opening of *Beyond Eden*, I went to the much-anticipated performance of Métis/Dene playwright Marie Clements' new work, *The Edward Curtis Project*. The production was part of Vancouver's PuSH Festival, whose aim, stated in their program, was to explore new forms of staging, storytelling, and combining of disciplines. The performance included an installation of photojournalist Rita Leistner's work in the gallery attached to the theatre.

Clements' play and Leistner's photos were concurrently developed to examine the work of Edward Curtis (1868-1952), the well-known photographer and self-styled ethnographer of the "North American Indian." Curtis was responsible for "one of the most significant and controversial representations of traditional American Indian culture ever produced"—the twenty-volume work *The North American Indian (1907-1930)* ("Introduction.").

Travelling with Clements to Aboriginal communities throughout Canada and the US, Leistner's work was created as a response to Curtis' practice of posing his subjects with regalia from his own collection to create authenticity. In Leistner's photo diptychs of contemporary Aboriginal people from many communities, she allowed the subjects to frame themselves; as Leistner explains in her artistic statement distributed at the gallery, "The diptych series [...] became a central scheme of *The Edward Curtis Project*—an exploration of past and present, traditional and modern, as presented by the subjects themselves"(2).

In many of Leistner's diptychs, the first part of the portraits are of people in modern clothing and the second of people in the same pose but wearing traditional clothing. Her photos are an artistic display of the surviving and vibrant people Curtis had framed as "vanishing," while he created monovalent single images that effectively erased the present in favour of romantically celebrating the past. As Gerald Vizenor explains, "Edward Curtis created pictorialist images of natives, but most of the interpretations are ethnographic." His photos aided the construction of the scientific body of knowledge called ethnology, which Vizenor describes as the "sacred association of the studies of native cultures." But the photos were really visual analogies which were then interpreted by "linguistic authority."

Leistner's photographs and Clements' play are connected through the recognition that photographic documentation is seductive in its apparent truth-telling, but that it is always a process of choosing what to include in the frame and what to exclude from it. By presenting the photo installation and theatrical performance at the same time—one working in Curtis' medium but consciously foregrounding the framing of a subject and the other bringing a subject to life to interact with Curtis—the audience is given access to multiple points of view and possible truths.

Clements' play is partially based on the tragic freezing deaths of two young girls in January 2008 on Saskatchewan's Yellow Quill Reserve: in the middle of the night during a snowstorm, Christopher Pauchay left his home while under the influence of alcohol with his two daughters, 15-month-old Santana and 3-year-old Kaydance. He was found at 5 a.m. and taken to the hospital; the children were found dead after an extensive two-day search (Friesen). The play has a small cast of four actors playing eight characters.

The main character, Angeline, a Dene/Russian-Canadian journalist, is focused on finding meaning in life after taking part in the search for the lost children. Angeline is struggling with grief and doubt about her ability as a journalist to represent some truth about Aboriginal people. The responsibility of the journalistic frame has become too much for her. The complicated nature of contemporary Aboriginal life—its tragedies, triumphs, and even banality—is more than she feels she can represent. As she attempts to heal, she encounters a physical incarnation of the photographer Edward Curtis. Through Angeline's interaction with the character of Edward Curtis on stage, it becomes clear that while Clements respects him as an artist, she recognizes that his work has helped to construct the mythology of the vanishing Indian—through the freezing of cultural heritage by photo documentation, through the objectification of living subjects.

This is where Clements' power as a poet becomes evident—the frozen children and Angeline's state of suspended animation represent the same kind of cultural freezing that occurred when Curtis published

THIS IS WHERE CLEMENTS' POWER AS A POET BECOMES EVIDENT—THE FROZEN CHILDREN AND ANGELINE'S STATE OF SUSPENDED ANIMATION REPRESENT THE SAME KIND OF CULTURAL FREEZING THAT OCCURRED WHEN CURTIS PUBLISHED HIS PHOTOS.

his photos: something was preserved but at the expense of recognizing that cultural meaning evolves. His work gives credence to the idea that there is a "traditional" culture whereby things are done in the correct way and that everything since that time is in a state of decline on its way to vanishing. This is the state of mind that Angeline must fight against: she has to recognize that despite the wretched deaths of the children there is still life and hope.

Like *Beyond Eden*, the production of *The Edward Curtis Project* was a hybrid form whose installation and emphasis was on the perception of the visual. However, unlike Ruddell's play, Clements' provided a coherent theatrical experience. The stage was a black platform framed by scrim on all sides—including the front, which was pulled back after the first scene. Words and photos of the contemporary characters as well as Curtis' photographs were projected on these surfaces. This staging helped to establish the intellectual examination of Curtis' work and Clements' play.

Curtis "framed" or staged the photos he took; he then "framed" them as ethnographic studies even though they were not accurate. The photos have power because of his skill as an artist, but that power was abused—first by Curtis seeking fame and influence and second by colonial society[1] seeking a way to frame the "Indian problem"; by preserving a romanticized past, they would thereby erase the problematic and complex living people.

Clements engages with the fallout of the concept of a frozen "traditional" culture using the metaphor of the frame in multiple ways. Angeline is enclosed in her frame: frozen by depression, she lies on her bed in emotional pain she is not able to acknowledge. Yet she is both frozen and active: she and Curtis share stories, and he cares for her, making her food and telling her about his life. In the conclusion of the play, she challenges him to take a picture of the vanishing of the frozen children.

Angeline's hybridity as a person of Dene and Russian heritage is also enacted by this duality—she is both subject and object in the act of viewing. Playing Angeline, Tamara Podemski's riveting physicality served to emphasize that she is a living subject, not just an image. Her embodiment of the journalist's emotional wounds through precise dance-like movement, the framing of her body through music, light, and the set design all emphasized the importance of her "live-ness."

The play opened with Angeline lying on her side, her hand illuminated by a tightly focused light. The hand—what it can and cannot do—served as a visual metaphor for the entire production, articulating the artist's dilemma as she asks: What will the effects and consequences be of the judgments I make about how to frame the story I want to tell? When Angeline revealed her horrific experience of finding the dead children, I didn't feel like an observer: I felt like I was momentarily in her world, inside her frame. This was not only an experience of connection but also of the fear of possibly remaining as if forever in this traumatic space.

Clements is generous and hard on Curtis at the same time; she is struggling with the beauty of Curtis' work, which resonates despite its ultimate function. Clements' concern is with the ethical implications of irresponsibly collecting cultural artifacts—as Curtis did through his photography—and with the responsibilities of an artist. She shows how it is possible to love and hate while trying to survive and create, as both Angeline and Curtis do. Curtis' drive to document what he considered "the vanishing race" finds its parallel in Angeline's fight against personally vanishing. Through her physical and emotional connections with her partner and sister, neither of whom give up on her, she is held back from personal extinction through her mental illness. *The Edward Curtis Project* seems to me a excellent example of what Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles describe in their essay "Creation Story Begins Again": "We need, then, to have hope *with the wounds showing*. What makes it moving, and makes it matter, and makes it hit the body, is the *courage* to have that hope while showing those wounds" (3, italics original).

On February 23, as the city of Vancouver was submerged in celebrations of the Winter Olympics, I stood on the sidewalk in front of my neighbourhood community centre. It wasn't raining, although it was dark, damp and windy as February often is in Vancouver. I was standing beside a sign for a "pay-what-you-can" Urban All-Nation Revue that was part of the ninth annual Talking Stick Festival put on by Margo Kane's Full Circle First Nations Performance. I had volunteered to help with the event, which eventually led to my standing outside on the sidewalk, trying to direct patrons to the difficult-to-find venue and encourage people to come.

The evening's schedule was a rich buffet, including local hip-hop artists Ostwelve and First Ladies Crew, Edmonton spoken-word poet Anna Marie Sewell, and contemporary dance by Daina Ashbee (*Talking Stick Festival 2010*). My neighbourhood is a particularly culturally vibrant and diverse place, where the arts and performance are usually well supported, but that night only four people attended the show. I was both frustrated at the lack of attention the artists received and glad that the corporatizing Olympic media was not present to warp the event through its interpretations and framing.

Although more media gives momentary attention and possible monetary benefit, the consequences of mis-framed events are not worth it. That evening of the Talking Stick Festival, which has been staging contemporary Aboriginal performances since 2001, had little audience to engage with, but the festival and that

night's performances also helped to hearten me, along with some of the work done for *Beyond Eden* (despite its flaws) and the vitality of *The Edward Curtis Project*.

I felt grateful to the artists and activists who despite everything work to explore and stage difficult concepts and mentor young people in the arts, sometimes without acknowledgment. They may not be in the official frame, but I am able to view them personally. These experiences help to remind me that being part of the official frame is desirable for the neoliberal economy, but working outside of it and questioning those who have the power to frame events is an act of resistance in this postcolonial world. Frustrations abound, as the BC government serves corporate greed and gluttony, but so does an abiding energy and connections that will nourish despite it all.

NOTE

1 Capital for the project was funded by J.P. Morgan, American financier (Gidley np)

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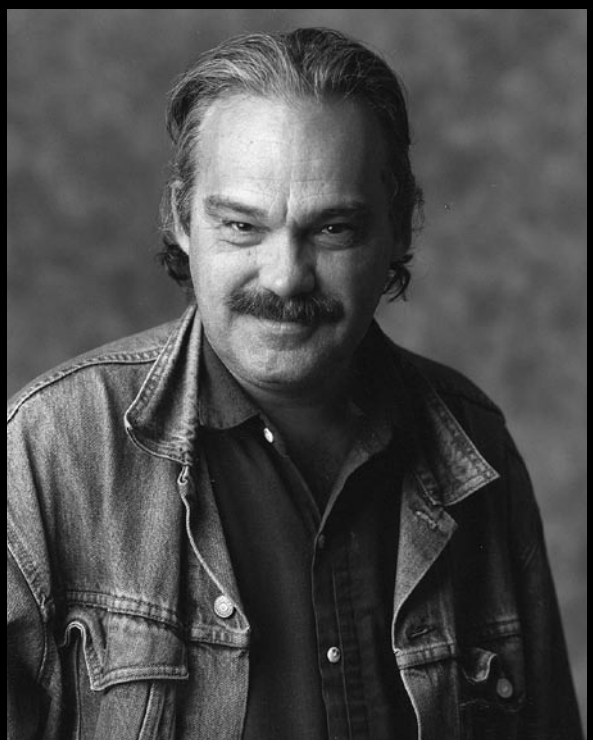
BIO

Selena Couture IS A GRADUATE STUDENT IN THEATRE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA. SHE HAS LIVED AND WORKED AS AN ALTERNATE SCHOOL TEACHER IN EAST VANCOUVER FOR TWENTY YEARS. SHE IS ALSO ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF ARTS IN ACTION, WITH A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PURPLE THISTLE CENTRE, A YOUTH ARTS AND ACTIVISM CENTRE IN EAST VANCOUVER. THIS SUMMER SHE HELPED TO COORDINATE AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN YOUTH FROM EAST VANCOUVER AND DENE YOUTH FROM FORT GOOD HOPE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES.

LE PEUPLE INVISIBLE

Isabelle Zufferey Boulton interviews Jean-Marc Dalpé about his French adaptation of Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*.



Isabelle: How did this project come about?

Jean-Marc: It's actually a rather sad story. My friend Robert Dickson, who translated Tomson's novel *The Kiss of the Fur Queen* into French, was initially supposed to translate *Dry Lips*. Unfortunately, he passed away a little over three years ago. You have to understand that Les Éditions Prise de Parole is a close-knit family around the Sudbury area. Robert was a poet and one of the founders of Prise de Parole, and worked there for years. We both knew Tomson, who lived on Manitoulin Island for a few years, and the editors asked me to take over Robert's first draft of *Dry Lips*. The translation was far from the stage of just needing a little polish, so I started from scratch.

Isabelle: In your "Mot du traducteur" of the published translation, you write of being present at the original production of the play, and you describe your reaction to it at the time. You reveal the anger you felt about how Native history was misrepresented in schools and laugh at how gullible people were then (and still are today) about this issue. How has your perception of the play and the issues it raises changed since you saw the original production?

Jean-Marc: Well since I was only an audience member at that point, my reading of the play was really only a cursory first impression. But I had seen *The Rez Sisters*, so I already an idea of what to expect. However I do think *Dry Lips* is a harder piece in many respects than Tomson's first play. I'm not saying that he held back his punches in *The Rez Sisters*, but it did and still does seem to me that *Dry Lips* is coming from a somewhat darker, more brutal, more violent place, which Tomson contrasts with a more pronounced madcap looney-toon-ish zaniness which at the time I had not seen very often on stage and that I found very powerful.

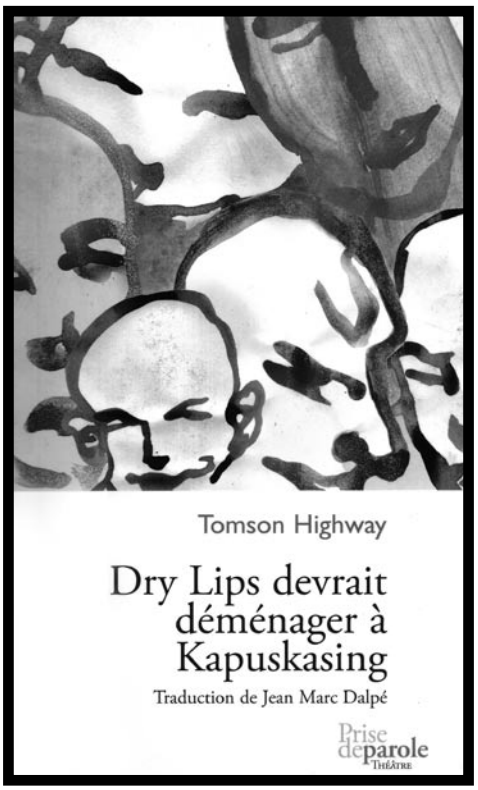
My perception of the play hasn't changed that much in the sense that when I re-read it for translation, I was just back at the theatre, following that story again as it unfolds. I don't think the play has aged very much.

Isabelle: Would you say that by adapting the play into French you are taking responsibility and spreading an awareness you had gained then?

Jean-Marc: Do you know the movie *Le Peuple Invisible*? It's a recent documentary by the singer and poet Richard Desjardins. I haven't seen it yet, but apparently it's quite good. It's about the fact that we live side-by-side with Native people in regions of Northern Canada, but we ignore them, we don't really know them. *Dry Lips* is much more than just a testimony of the plight of Native people, but of course that is an important aspect of the play.

Isabelle: You are a playwright yourself. How do you compare the process of adaptation to that of creation?

Dry Lips is coming from a somewhat darker, more brutal, more violent place, which Tomson contrasts with a more pronounced madcap looney-toon-ish zaniness.



Jean-Marc: It's very different. When you're translating or adapting, a big part of the work has been done by the writer. The writer has invented the story and created the characters. When you're the writer, the language choices often come spontaneously because you've created the characters. All your choices are part of a coherent universe you've created.

I've always found adapting really instructive and fun. I enjoy spending hours finding how I am going to recreate specific moments in the theatre in another language. All the choices need a precise craftsmanship. Sometimes you can translate three pages in a couple of hours and sometimes you spend two days on three lines.

Isabelle: Did you collaborate with Tomson Highway at any point on this project?

Jean-Marc: "Collaborate" is a bit of a big word. At first, we communicated by e-mail because he was travelling all over the world. There were maybe ten or fifteen moments where I wasn't sure exactly what he wanted: I understood the lines, but in French it could either go this way or that way, so I sent him an e-mail and he answered.

We also talked about the level of humour and he sent me a collection of essays by several Native Canadians compiled and edited by Drew Hayden Taylor, *Me Funny*.

We talked about where the laugh comes from, the type of laughter he wants from the audience.

But we did meet eventually, at the end, to go through it once more. We met at home before having supper with both our families. And then I sent him the draft, of course, because Tomson now speaks French. He spends almost half the year, every year, in France with his partner, Raymond. And you know what he says about language? "English is from the head, it's very intellectual, it comes from the head. French comes from the stomach, the French eat so well. And Cree, well, it comes from a little bit below the stomach, if you know what I mean." It's one of his classic spiels when he does interviews, and you can find a more elaborate version of it in his contribution to *Me Funny*.

After that last meeting, I sent him the text and told him to read it, have Raymond read it, and send me some notes. And that's it.

Isabelle: You describe remaining true to the spirit of the original text as very meticulous work. Do you feel that this close relationship with Highway may have, to a certain extent, helped prevent "losses in translation"?

Jean-Marc: Well, it helps when you are translating the work of somebody who's alive. I don't know much about prose and poetry translation, but in the theatre, I think there is usually a dialogue between the translator and the writer, especially here in Canada. That way, you can verify the writer's intentions. There are always moments that are a little ambiguous in the original text: the first layer of meaning is clear, but there's a second level or third level that you're just not going to get, because it's another culture.

When you're translating for the theatre, the bottom line is the performance.

Isabelle: So the idea is to recreate the same experience in the other language?

Jean-Marc: When you're translating for the theatre, the bottom line is the performance. Your end goal is to have an actual text to give to the actors and to a director, so that two months after rehearsals begin, the events in the theatre, in the new culture, in Montreal, will be as close as possible to what happened in Toronto during the original production.

There's a tension that rises and falls during the two hours of the performance, so you're going to want to be really attentive to what the original writer has on the page. But what's on your page is not just about staying faithful to what's on the writer's page. It's about what the writer's page did to the audience. You find the rhythm. Your piece has got to be coherent, but sometimes you have to move a detail because it won't work there in French, but it will work if you have "beat – beat – beat – beat," it won't go "beat – beat" like in English.

Then there's the humour, the belly laugh it generates, and that's the toughest thing to translate. The rage is not too difficult. But what type of laugh do you want? And how are you going to get it? That is so culturally based, so language-based, so specific. Tomson's jokes work for his Canadian, maybe North-American, audience. And the original text can be performed elsewhere, maybe in England, but they're going to want to change a few things. And he's not going to get quite the same laugh in the same place in a West End London theatre that he's going to get when it's being done in Kapuskasing.

Isabelle: You've touched a little bit upon the differences between the French, Cree, and English languages. But these differences also extend to differences in theatrical traditions. How would a distinctly French Canadian performance modify the play?

Jean-Marc: Well, I'm not sure about the French Canadian/English Canadian differences, although I've seen actors work in both languages. All I can say is that when I had a workshop reading of the translation at the CEAD, the actors had a hoot. They really understood that world very rapidly; they knew how to get laughs. I'm not flattering myself—well I am—but I'm giving praise where it's due: to Tomson's text. That universe is very theatrical. The play has a lot of heart. Tomson understands theatre. He understands what makes plays work, what an actor needs to get that spontaneous response from an audience that he is looking for.

Isabelle: You have stated that your goal in translating is to have the new, French Canadian, audience experience the play in the same way that the anglophone audience experienced the original production. But do you think that a French Canadian audience's perception of the play might be different?

Jean-Marc: Yes, I think so. But that's outside of my control. I decided early on that although the play was commissioned by an editor—which was a little strange for me because until then, all the plays I had translated or written had always been for specific productions—I would pretend that I was translating for a production. Its audience would be the people of Montreal, and this production would tour Quebec and Canada. That was an important choice already because I was not thinking of France, of Europe, of an international audience.

Isabelle: In your "Mot du traducteur," you mention that you felt a very strong identification with the play

due to your familiarity with the Canadian North. And in particular, you mention feeling like an Outsider on the night you attended the original production, and that this feeling brought you closer to the characters. Do you think that a francophone audience from Northern Canada would similarly identify with the play?

Jean-Marc: Basically, when I'm translating I imagine a French Canadian audience. But that's not entirely accurate, because in the real audience, if the play were performed tonight at the TNM, the audience would be a mix of French Canadians, anglophones who speak French, and French people from France. So my imaginary audience is a bit of a construct.

I think the play speaks to French Canadians a little differently than it did to English Canadians because the history, and especially the recent history, between the Native communities and French Canadians isn't quite the same as the one between Native communities and English Canadians. Tomson and other Native writers have been part of the English Canadian experience since the 70s and 80s, they are part of all the conflicts that might exist there. But here, they're just "le peuple invisible,' as Richard Desjardins says. That's a great description of it. There was the Oka crisis in Quebec a few years ago, which was a very tense moment, but as far as Native artists go, they're not as much a part of the Québécois mental or cultural landscape. I think that a production of *Dry Lips* would create something in that theatre hall that isn't as important at the moment for an English Canadian audience. I'm obviously generalizing, but, for example, that Native humour just blew the minds of the actors around the table at the CEAD, and they felt that this needs to be done, that people here need to hear this right now.

Isabelle: So you see the possibility for a French-language production of the play in the near future?

Jean-Marc: Yes, hopefully. I've talked to a few people, I've sent them the text. We'll see.

Isabelle: In reference to your comment about feeling like an Outsider, do you think that being portrayed as the "Other" of anglophone Canada is something that Native Canadians and French Canadians have in common?

Jean-Marc: Maybe, yes. It's just that we don't really care about being portrayed as the "Other." I mean, for us the "Other" is the English Canadian.

Isabelle: But do you feel that this common experience fosters a kind of understanding, or dare I say sense of solidarity, between French Canadians and Native Canadians?

Jean-Marc: I'd love to say yes, but I think that would be untrue. Unfortunately, I don't think there's a sense of solidarity, if you're thinking about solidarity versus the rest of Canada. There are too many conflicts. Many Québécois believe that the relationship between the different Native communities within Quebec and the government of Quebec is more advanced on many levels than in other parts of Canada. But I'm not sure of that, so I would have to check with the Cree from Abitibi, or the Innu or the Montagnais from Sept-Îles, because every once in a while we hear about confrontational situations in those regions.

Isabelle: You've talked about the tensions that can arise from having many cultures in one place. In your own plays, you express these tensions at the level of the language, through linguistic tensions. Highway also uses language as a site of resistance. In *Dry Lips*, for example, the characters speak a mixture of English, Cree, and Ojibway. And in Act Two, the character of Simon Starblanket is in a state of drunken desperation and refuses to continue speaking English. He finds English inadequate to speak to Nanabush (who is both male and female or neither) because it lacks the neuter gender. In the translation, French is inadequate for the same reason. If the character rejects English as the embodiment of the Imperialist power, or as the embodiment of a dominant anglophone Canadian culture, where does this place French in the adaptation?

Jean-Marc: In Quebec, French is the same as English, it's the dominant European language. In the past, there weren't any French schools on the Reservations because everything was controlled by the federal government and everything was done in English. But that's changed. More and more of our Native communities are now francophone as their second and often even their first language, because of the difficulties of losing their first language. I didn't hesitate to put French as the European language, with the connotation that's there for Tomson in that Starblanket speech, which is about the European presence and language, and how that caused the loss of the first language, the loss of the drums, the loss of traditions, etc. It's not quite the same relationship as the one between English and Native languages because of our own history, our own struggle, to not disappear and become "un peuple invisible."

But I would not get the reaction I want from my imaginary audience in Montreal without French. Starblanket has to reject French, the audience's first language, because that's what Tomson wants that audience to react to.

Isabelle: You've mentioned Highway's specific language, the language that elicits the belly laugh. In your own work you're also very specific about writing a French dialect that is consistent with the setting and the world about which you write. Would you like to elaborate on how the French dialect in your translation of *Dry Lips* is different from other French Canadian dialects? And, more specifically, how you preserved the bawdy language that elicits the belly laugh?

Jean-Marc: The language in *Dry Lips* is a theatrical construct. If I had wanted the language to be as realistic as a true dialect, I wouldn't have been able to do that. But I thought about how Tomson's English varies according to the characters. Even though the language he uses comes from an actual place—Manitoulin Island English or Northern Manitoba English, used by the Cree and the Ojibway—his language isn't documentary. The language he uses is informed by what he's heard, but his writing is theatrical.

Now, I don't have the same cultural references. The obvious references for me would probably be the Montagnais, the Innu from Sept-Îles, communities that speak French. But I don't know how they speak, so I decided to use Franco-Ontarian as my basic reference. I went with a popular working-class, sub-working-class French, the Northern Ontario mixture of languages, and then I tried to follow Tomson's lead as far as the theatricality of the language goes. The lines read as they read to get that specific response from the audience that the moment calls for—how "true to life" they are is not the point. Eventually, if the play is done in production, I would like to sit down with some French-speaking Natives from Quebec, go through the play and see what they think.

You know, I asked myself all of these questions, but the play has been translated into Japanese and the translators there didn't ask themselves what a Japanese-speaking native would sound like. We make choices within our culture, for our audience. Of course, since there are francophone Natives in Québec, I know I am treading on thin ice, but at this point in our "common" history I honestly don't see what other choice I could make.

I**sabelle:** Do you see the possibility for future collaborations between yourself and Tomson Highway?

Jean-Marc: Hopefully. I think we'll get this book done and see what's in store. Tomson is just so busy. The next step, I think, would be to get a production of this play up. Then we'll see.

BIOS

Jean-Marc Dalpé IS A PLAYWRIGHT, NOVELIST, POET, SCRIPTWRITER, TRANSLATOR, AND ACTOR. HE RECEIVED THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARD IN THEATRE FOR *LE CHIEN* IN 1988, FOR *IL N'Y A QUE L'AMOUR* IN 1999, AND FOR HIS NOVEL *UN VENT SE LÈVE QUI ÉPARPILLE* IN 2000. HIS LATEST PLAY, *AOÛT*, PRODUCED BY THE THÉÂTRE DE LA MANUFACTURE, EARNED A MASQUE AWARD FOR BEST ORIGINAL PLAY. HE RECEIVED A DOCTORATE *HONORIS CAUSA* FROM LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY IN 2002 AND FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA IN 2010.

Isabelle Zufferey Boulton IS A CANADIAN ACTRESS BASED IN NEW YORK CITY. SHE IS A RECENT GRADUATE OF THE STELLA ADLER STUDIO OF ACTING, AND HOLDS A BA IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND ECONOMICS FROM MCGILL UNIVERSITY. SHE WAS RECENTLY SEEN IN THE TITLE ROLE OF ICBINS'S NEW COMEDY, *ANDY TAKES A HUSBAND*, AND AS NATALIE IN LESLYE HEADLAND'S *CINEPHILIA*.

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A Canadian Playwright in Mumbai

THOUGHTS FROM THE EIGHTH INTERNATIONAL WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS CONFERENCE

BY MARCIA JOHNSON

November 3, 2009: Ten female Canadian playwrights gather under a frangipani tree on the beautiful grounds of the University of Mumbai for a group photo. Someone quips that they should sing *O Canada*. Seconds later, the women are singing their national anthem in English and French. A patient new friend takes turns using each of the women's cameras. Other women begin taking pictures with their own cameras. Why would these women from India, the UK, the US, Scandinavia, The Netherlands, The Philippines, Mexico and approximately twenty other countries be interested in capturing this moment? Why are these Canadian playwrights causing such a stir? We will have to start from the beginning.

The International Women Playwrights Conference is a triennial event organized by Women Playwrights International (WPI). The first Conference took place in Buffalo in 1988 and the second in 1991 at Toronto's York University, Glendon College campus. Since those early North American days, the conference has been hosted by Adelaide, Australia (1994); Galway, Ireland (1997); Athens, Greece (2000); Manila, Philippines (2003); and Jakarta, Indonesia (2006). I attended in 1991 as an actor with feminist theatre troupe A Company of Sirens.

By 2006, not only was I was a full member of Playwrights Guild of Canada, I had also just accepted the position of chair of its Women's Caucus. I encouraged Caucus members to be proactive. It was time to stop complaining about how much "easier" it was for male playwrights. It was up to us to promote ourselves better: apply for grants, submit our work, and follow up on those submissions. We formed a supportive community—sharing successes and opportunities.

Former caucus chair (and, at the time PGC president) Hope McIntyre informed me that the 2009 IWPC was scheduled for Mumbai. Hope had attended the conferences in Jakarta/Bali (2006) and Manila (2003), and wrote about her experiences at the Jakarta Conference in The Seventh Triennial Women Playwrights International Conference. She suggested that I join the WPI mailing list so that I could keep myself and therefore the membership informed about the upcoming conference.

Doubts had been circulating about that conference in Mumbai. No information was forthcoming on the dates and actual location. After the December 2008 bombings in downtown Mumbai, there was speculation that the IWPC would be cancelled. Then, in January 2009, a posting appeared on the WPI site ambitiously announcing the conference in November. Its co-presenters were the Academy of Theatre Arts, University of Mumbai, and Stree Mukti Sanghatana (Women's Liberation Organization).

The posting stated that the majority of scripts presented would be by local Indian playwrights—approximately fifty "reading workshop" slots were available to playwrights from other countries. Over thirty countries would be represented. I felt it was important for as many Canadians to apply as possible. It would increase our chances of having any representation at all. The conference theme of Liberty and Tolerance was

broad enough to include many works. I made sure to promote the conference and encourage writers to apply in my weekly listserv messages.

I got a message from an ecstatic playwright that both her scripts had been accepted. Wonderful. Then another. And another. Experienced playwrights; emerging playwrights; published scripts; non-published scripts. The acceptances were flooding in. Canada was going to be well represented! I was so proud of these writers.

Then suspicion arose. The conference had stated there would be only a marginal representation of playwrights from outside of India. How many slots were going to other countries? Was this a cash grab to help pay for the conference? After all, invited playwrights still had to pay the US$275 entry fee. That adds up. Response from conference organizers was that they'd decided to increase the number of non-Indian writers, but that participation would be limited to forty-five minute readings.

I asked Caucus members who had been to previous conferences for their perspective, namely Margaret Hollingsworth, Hope McIntyre, and Joan MacLeod. They said that some conferences were run more efficiently than others but that, for the most part, there tended to be very little funding from the presenting country. Money was always an issue and the registration fees were relied upon to allow the conference to exist. I shared this with the membership on our listserv to help them make their decision. Member Leanna Brodie sent her own message that we should look at the conference as an opportunity to share and to meet other women in our field.

Experienced playwrights; emerging playwrights; published scripts; non-published scripts. The acceptances were flooding in. Canada was going to be well represented!

We came to understand and appreciate that the Indian women in charge of the event were not professional conference planners. They were theatre artists, academics, and activists volunteering their time while doing their own work.

By September 2009, of the approximately twenty Canadian playwrights who had been invited, we were left with ten. Regrets had come in gradually from July to September due to lack of funding and work conflicts. Then one member had to cancel due to visa problems at the very last minute. The nine remaining were Beverley Cooper (*Innocence Lost: A Play about Steven Truscott)*, Trina Davies (*Shattered*), Christine Estima (*Central Line*), Tara Goldstein (*Harriet's House*), Jordan Hall (*Kayak*), Melissa Major (*Art is a Cupboard; Butterfly*), Gail Nyoka (*Mrs. Seacole*), Sally Stubbs (*Herr Beckmann's People*), and me (*Say Ginger Ale*). We formed our own e-mail group, sharing information on visas, funding, and what to do on our down time. Tara put together a casting template for our readings, and Beverley Cooper organized a sightseeing tour for those of us who would be in Mumbai the day before the conference began.

After two long flights stopping over in different European cities and a night in the Hotel Parle International, six of us were met in the lobby by a tour guide from Magical Mumbai. We had a tour of the bazaars of Mumbai including lunch, a cooking lesson, and an autographed cookbook by our host and teacher, Arundhati Venkats. It was a great welcome to the city.

By the next morning, more of our group had arrived. We met in the hotel restaurant to catch up on travel stories. Meg Barker, a non-PGC member from Ottawa, joined us. Christine Estima had been travelling in India for three weeks and would join us the next day.

I still get a warm feeling when I think of our rehearsal in Tara Goldstein's hotel room. We were reading each other's diverse works and were genuinely impressed. Our themes included the Steven Truscott case, global warming, the Halifax explosion, a tragic family secret from the Holocaust, international adoption by same sex couples, the Salem witch trials, immigration, oppressed Russian artists, and a biography of Mary Seacole (a contemporary of Florence Nightingale). (As a side note, Tara Goldstein is my successor as PGC Women's Caucus Chair. Her passion and excellent organizational skills made her a unanimous choice at the June 2010 AGM.)

At the opening ceremony we finally laid eyes on the dynamo who is Jyoti Mhapsekar. She is the president of Stree Mukti Sanghatana and, in her own words, an activist and an accidental playwright. Theatre is one of the tools she has used in thirty odd years of running the organization to help women find their own voices and support themselves. Hearing her speak was the highlight of the night—although Bollywood superstar Shabani Azmi was there and gave a wonderful speech on the importance of the female gaze.

We got to meet a lot of women that night. Many of them weren't aware if other writers from their countries were in attendance and so were impressed with our united Canadian front.

The next day, the conference began in earnest. We had our first readings. The plays and their talkback sessions were well received. We were ambushed at our meal break. Writers wanted us to take part in their readings because they loved our clear pronunciation of English. Throughout the rest of the week, Canadians appeared in works by American, Swedish, Australian, and Dutch playwrights.

Students from the University of Mumbai's drama program were available for readings. I thoroughly enjoyed the performance of an eager second-year student who played the lone male role in *Say Ginger Ale*, and Christine Estima read stage directions as students took on her two-hander *Central Line*.

Each day began with a talk or presentation, then the readings, lunch, a panel discussion, dinner, and two plays (usually not in English). I confess to skipping back to the hotel after dinner most nights. We took over the hotel bar, scaring off travelling business men who only wanted to relax with a Kingfisher beer and watch a cricket game to unwind at the end of the day. We were loud, raucous women who were thrilled to have found one another.

I was very impressed by the Swedish contingent and their presentation, *Spekt*, whose title is a word with the two meanings "lace" and "shard." The three women from Riksteatern in Stockholm produced plays by Sweden's forgotten female playwrights. It was a huge undertaking. Some of the scripts existed only in university libraries, having gone out of print or having never been published. The plays tackled reproductive rights, mental health issues, and fidelity and were written between the 1880s and 1950. They were huge hits in their day, making the playwrights stars, but somehow they were pushed aside. We were assured that the plays were presented as written. These incredible Swedish theatre artists encouraged us to find forgotten female playwrights from our own countries.

That presentation made me realize how lucky I am to be writing plays today. It doesn't always feel that way. The Straw Poll for 2008-2009, conducted by the PACT Diversity Committee's Women's Initiative, stated that on average only 29 percent of the plays produced by PACT theatres nationally are female-written, and this number is lower in some regions (*Impact!*). The straw poll came some three years after Rebecca Burton's article "'Adding It Up': (En)gendering (and Racializing) Canadian Theatre," which showed that progress has been slow and unsteady since Rina Fraticelli's groundbreaking study, *The Status of Women in the Canadian Theatre* (1982).

We found ourselves in good company with our international counterparts. We heard from several women from Scandinavia, the US, and The Netherlands that plays by women represent around 25 percent of the professional productions in their countries as well. When someone asks why there needs to be a PGC Women's Caucus or the International Women Playwrights Conference, we can quote those numbers to them. I look forward to the day when the Caucus and the IWPC will seem unnecessary or redundant.

I also look forward to the 2012 conference in Stockholm. Apparently aspens are common in Sweden. I hope to be joined by my Canadian playwriting sisters to reprise *O Canada*.

BIO

Marcia Johnson HAS BEEN A THEATRE ARTIST IN TORONTO FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS. HER PLAYS INCLUDE *BINTI'S JOURNEY*, FROM *THE HEAVEN SHOP* BY DEBORAH ELLIS (THEATRE DIRECT); *COURTING JOHANNA* BASED ON ALICE MUNRO'S *HATESHIP, FRIENDSHIP, COURTSHIP, LOVESHIP, MARRIAGE* (BLYTH FESTIVAL), AND *LATE*, AN ORIGINAL PIECE (OBSIDIAN THEATRE COMPANY). THE SHORT OPERA *MY MOTHER'S RING*, FOR WHICH SHE WROTE THE LIBRETTO, WAS NOMINATED FOR A 2009 DORA MAVOR MOORE AWARD. MARCIA IS ALSO AN ACTOR AND TEACHER.

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CLAP YOUR HANDS AND SAY YEAH

By Layne Coleman

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE THE SMELL OF OIL AND KFC CHICKEN IN THE MORNING. THAT COMBINATION OF SMELLS MEANS YOU'RE NEAR AN EXTRACTION POINT. LIFE MAY BE A CARBON HIGHWAY, BUT I'M LEARNING FROM MY RESEARCH MATERIALS ON THE TAR SANDS, WE CAN'T BE CONFIDENT WE'LL BE RIDING IT ALL NIGHT LONG. IN FORT MCMURRAY THEY HAVE LOW QUALITY OIL, BUT THERE'S A LOT OF IT. THE STAGGERING ABUNDANCE IS AN OPEN INVITATION; ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES BOYS THERE'S WORK TO DO AND MONEY TO BE MADE.

I buy my first coffee of the day from a Toronto Cuban who owns a tiny hatch-in-the-wall coffee spot, part of a strip mall next to a forty-acre parking lot. Fat black ravens waddle among the dirty snow and monster trucks. They're more like vultures than crows— I try not to look at them as I sip my early brew. The young Cuban proprietor says he hasn't had a day off in seven months. He works fifteen-hour days and he wants to meet a woman soon. He talks of going home for a short holiday and finding himself a fiancée. I'm with my daughter so he gives us the coffees for free. As I step around the ravens I ask myself what the last truck out of Fort McMurray will look like. Will the drivers be wearing space suits?

It's late January in the year of our Lord two-thousand-and-nine.

Georgina Beaty, Jonathan Seinen, Greg Gale, Charlotte Corbeil-Coleman

Prelude

The opinions expressed in this piece will be a reflection of my own. I'll not attempt to speak for the others. I realized early on that I was working with an exceptionally gifted group of artists and their intellectual depth was equal to their acting talent. This was without a doubt the most co-operative artistic adventure I'd ever been on. On the producing end, Jonathan and Georgina did the heavy lifting.

Highway 63 began as a collaborative idea between Jonathan Seinen and Georgina Beaty. Jonathan is from Edmonton, a graduate of the National Theatre School, and Georgina, from Calgary, studied theatre in Vancouver. I met Jonathan in 2006 in Montreal while visiting my daughter at the National Theatre School. She and Jonathan were part of a collective creation called *You Like It*: a show that played the Fringe in Montreal and Summerworks in Toronto, and was based on themes of banishment from *As You Like It*. I helped them generate material for a couple of days. I stressed the importance of giving an audience context when you are creating a new play. Context and character being the best part of any story.

Jonathan and I met to discuss the possibility of going to Fort McMurray. Jonathan wanted to return to his home province, create art out of the contradictions that lived there for him. He'd been inspired by his experience in *You Like It*. I was in the process of leaving Theatre Passe Muraille as Artistic Director and was at another end of things. I knew we could be a good team, but I had little confidence we would find funding. The collective form had gone out of fashion and was fading to black in the theatre world. I was burned out and a little bitter.

The collective connection

I am someone who thrives in a social context, but I have trouble engaging in normal life. Theatrical playmaking is something that connects me to others. I'm most fulfilled when creating a story that is meaningful to audiences. I'm fed by verbatim theatre, by the process of meeting people and research, learning about others and their lives. I've been developing Canadian plays in Toronto and other places for many years, but I'd lost my connection to my country. I didn't know what it was like anywhere else except in my own head.

In collective creations you engage with real life, meet hoi polloi, working people, struggling people, refugees, immigrants, and the children of the vast human project. You become a part of humanity in a way that is healthy. A written play is a wondrous thing and I'm as attached to that as anything, but a show based on deeper engagement with "real" people living in a real location, who work and live non-artistic lives, is a soulful growth experience. There's an isolation that grows out of artistic discipline. I'd lost sight of what I hoped to accomplish by acting, writing, and directing.

Highway 63 would make me feel the pain, vulnerability, and strength of my country. I was reminded once again of the joy that theatre brings when you reflect real life. There's nothing like the first time you mirror a culture and those actual people are in the audience. It comes with both a terror and a transcendent gift. The night that Architect Theatre performed for Fort McMurray for the first time was a textbook example. The play did not know its story yet, but the shock of recognition from the audience and their gratitude, laughter, and relief at our reflection of their community spurred me to take another look at things.

Highway 63 now

The company developed *Highway 63* while performing runs twice at Azumith Theatre in Edmonton and with Downstage in Calgary, and once in Vancouver at upintheiar theatre's Neanderthal Festival. The show has been to Fort McMurray three times (this within a year and a half of its creation). The production played once in Ottawa and once at The Cameron House in Toronto. Andy Mckim has generously invited the show into the Backspace of Theatre Passe Muraille for February 2011, as part of the TPM season. TPM is the home of collective creation theatre; the Backspace is the temple that has launched a thousand ships.

At this point, in 2010, *Highway 63* is a play that has been fine-tuned and pushed into clearer terrain. The work grows, not by adding or subtracting text, but by carving out the performances. The only ongoing major rewriting that occurs is the nightmare scene. Chad's nightmare: Chad drives a monster truck in the mines. The dream remains the same; it's the nightmare that's always changing. Every city has a unique context for viewing the show and so the show mutates and deepens. It's a play about trade-offs and unforeseen consequences; what trade-offs do to and for people. And the bonus feature is—it's filtered through the particular sensibilities of young artists.

You see the world through their eyes and it's a complex and prophetic portrayal. You know the energy of Fort McMurray through men and women in their twenties. I find that younger people see the world the way it is. When you're my age, you remember the world you knew when you were young. It's different; aging can be a process of blocking things out. *Highway 63* is created out of the feelings of the young and the production is imbued with their fears, awareness, and strong hope for a future. The process has been a rich one. I'm grateful to my colleagues and to the community of Fort McMurray who live in the work.

The process begins

When Jonathan phoned to say he and Georgina had formed a new company, Architect Theatre, and that they had funding from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the National Theatre School, I knew this was going to be special. I asked my daughter, Charlotte Corbeil-Coleman, a playwright graduate of NTS, if she wanted to come along and work with us. She was a good friend of Jonathan's and the project's third actor, Greg Gale (a Newfoundland actor and graduate of NTS). Charlotte had other plans and changed them. The company was excited to have her penmanship as a backup to improvising. She would take over the duties of the outside eye (editor/director) when I left the project. I had an acting gig that conflicted with the opening of the Fort McMurray show in Edmonton. I would be with the project for the first unveiling and that would be it.

The five of us gathered in Calgary. Jonathan borrowed a station wagon from a friend and we piled in and drove nine hours north to Fort McMurray. It was February; it was cold.

The highway to hell

The spirits in the station wagon were high. We had our first production meeting on this drive. We were a garage band in the forming stage and our first album would be about the community that lived in and near the oil sands. They were a daily feast in the front-page news and had charted number one for a year or more. Albertan feelings were raw regarding anything bitumen related.

The actual Highway 63, the one you drive on, is long and perilous, called "the highway to hell." In the middle of nowhere, there's a small volunteer women's fire fighter group. The men are always away working so the women took it upon themselves. They took all the accident calls on their stretch of the highway. The firewomen have just disbanded because of burnout. They got tired of zero support from the provincial government. Their spokes-person said she could no longer get up at 2 a.m. to pick up body parts off the highway with no help. In their locale, if you have a serious accident now, it will be a two-hour wait or more before an emergency vehicle arrives.

We stopped at a giant green highway sign and took the cast's picture. This was to be our poster shot. The light was good and it was snowing. There was chemistry within the group. I felt something new about to enter my life, scared in my guts of the work ahead but eager to get started. It had been awhile since I'd done this kind of improvisational work. I offered a silent prayer to Paul Thompson (patron saint of verbatim theatre and early Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille, the visionary director of collective creations). I was approaching sixty years of age, I was feeling lucky to be working with these smart young artists, and they'd already done a ton of research.

We were to live as a group in an unfurnished condo (owned by the Christian Labour Association of Canada) brokered by Jonathan's uncle. Jonathan's people are Christian Reform, a Dutch Protestant church. The pay was going to be minimal—with the five to nine day hold on cheques, we would be eating at home. We'd be rehearsing at Keyano College in Fort McMurray. The college was going to be our unofficial co-producers.

We pulled in under darkness, found the condo, the key, and unloaded our gear. There was a single bed and one double. We started by blowing up the air mattresses and eating leftovers from our dinner stop in Edmonton. Jonathan's parents had cooked a vegetarian meal—we had a couple of those in the group. Books related to the history of the oil sands project—including environmental and social impact studies—were passed around. We had interviews lined up for the next morning. This was a dive into the deep end of the pool.

The building of the pyramids

We lived and breathed the show 24/7. This was a group of recent former students. They knew how to be poor. They wasted nothing. They were mindful and hungry to do the best work of their lives. They knew what was at stake in Canada's north.

Fort McMurray is a living metaphor for industrial development and the corporatization of modern life. I began to see the Alberta governing party as a cult that had placed their faith in the oil business and had fallen asleep. There were many success stories to point to: an Albertan entrepreneurial class that was distinctly homegrown. Steady Eddie Stelmach was in charge now he was the new premier, gifted with billions of surplus dollars. Ralph Klein had followed the well-worn path of unregulated development—the penultimate king and his own fool, all in one dangerous package. Devoted to pleasing the big boys, playing to the cheap seats at the same time. Klein scored a few easy touchdowns early, and when times were good, they were very good.

What amazed me was how little awareness the governing party showed Fort McMurray. The cash cow was milked and as long as she gave bountifully, nothing else mattered. The highway to hell, the lack of services for women, neglect of the workers and First Nation people, the rape of the land—all full speed ahead. Even the victims knew progress was essential to buy all the good stuff. I am reminded that the poor and the vulnerable like me are attracted to gold rushes. Everyone wants a chance at the table. The smooth running machine that comes from full government coffers is enough for the people of Alberta and the rest of Canada (I began to feel that we are all Albertans now).

The successive Conservative governments of Alberta gave the oil companies freedom and encouragement. The companies are allowed to police themselves and they responded with imagination and breathtaking ambition. The scale of engineering was, in my own mind, equivalent to the building of pyramids. Pyramids were graves and monuments to honour the dead and the powerful. They marked the end of one thing and therefore the beginning of another.

These are companies that dream big, and the world's dependence and need for their product matches the scale of what is being accomplished. It's a runaway train and the throttle is broken. The community lives in close-up with the trade-offs at the centre of our world. The city is a boom and bust capital, and it's inspiring to meet the community holders who keep it all together within the radical ups and downs. The companies are "progressive"—they say all the right things.

Fort Mac

This is not a culturally monochromatic community. The diversity is impressive. It calls to mind Toronto. The taxi drivers are Somalia Muslims, and we live down a frozen street from the mosque. Filipinos appear to have a direct flight to Fort Mac. When it comes to labour, business is colour-blind. Fort McMurray is global village all the way, where everyone, with a little luck, can drive a Super-Truck. For the unlucky ones it's a different story, the city has many social problems, but what place doesn't? Opportunities and challenges exist side-by-side. Evident contradictions are not ignored, they're tolerated—"Well, I'll be gone soon." Generally, the locals are positive thinkers. The long-time residents are a resilient and stable lot who love their city and Northern landscape. The First Nations people have been here for thousands of years, and expect ten thousand more.

It was clear we needed to separate ourselves from our political agendas. We would represent the views and conflicts as told to us by the people of Fort McMurray. We consciously purged our work of "opinion" and tried to let the voices of the locals speak through us. We vowed to avoid the obvious. In a theatrical context an elephant is more interesting when it is not continually being pointed at.

The themes of our show formed around the hunger the people of Fort McMurray had for a home: the missing of their old home, the longing for a new home, the missing of loved ones, and the need for new loves, for comfort and purpose—for some meaning over and above money. The displacement, the constant flux of new "friends" coming and going, was the culture of the city. Some were attached to the place because everything and everyone was new. You didn't have to feel bad for being a stranger. As a worker you were welcomed in a kind of practical way. Money was certainly the reason most people were there, and the amounts of money being made were a source of pride. Humour was an important part of the equation. During the month of rehearsal, we developed a way of seeing as the locals did. And everyone in our company fell a little in love with the casino that is Fort McMurray.

Living downstream of the extraction process

In Fort Mac there's a real and transparent connection between environmental consequences and daily life. Workers drive huge machines moving tons of bitumen and speak with awareness about living and working in an environmental catastrophe. (Again: What place isn't?) Everyone agrees what the stakes are. You live with it. It forces the community into recognition of the fragility of the natural order. The health issues of living downstream of the extraction process and the loss of species affected negatively by development are evident for anyone to witness. The locals do not live in denial as politicians choose to. I began to see that we pay politicians to tell us the lies we want to hear.

Most of the community distrusted us from the beginning. They assumed we were there to join the critical chorus of environmental activism. The locals lived in flux and dialogue with mediated culture and its portrayal of the Tar Sands. The Alberta print media chew daily on the bone. Community members were outraged by the image of their city as a place of hookers, drug addicts, and shallow gold diggers. Many residents were creating an alternative narrative to the picture they imagined the larger world held of their city.

National Geographic's article about the environmental impact of the oil sands development with accompanying shocking pictures—this was daily being referenced in the Alberta press. The coverage swung from thoughtful to outrage, with some fake puffery, of course. The Alberta government promised $25 million towards "rebranding" the oil sands—a defensive posture revealing the unsettled feeling of "What are we going to do if this crisis spreads further?" A lone Albertan NDP member of parliament rose to say that this $25 million dollar study should have been named, "Obama is coming, look busy."

Most of the people in Fort McMurray care little about those matters. They're more engaged in earning money. It's a workaholic town and everyone has their eyes on leaving as soon as they get what they need. But then there are the community holders—plenty of them—and they're a brave and growing tribe. They speak of a developing family culture. The deputy mayor spoke proudly, "Fort McMurray's going to become the world's most important environmental centre." But he's pleased by the slow down. It allows the municipality to catch its breath. The city's gone from a floating population of 1,500 to 100,000 in a short time.

Georgina Beaty, Jonathan Seinen, Greg Gale and Charlotte Corbeil-Coleman

Nobody cares more about the environment than an oil executive.

The deputy mayor owns a music store, had came here as a musician who wanted to finally settle. He was sick of touring. He hated the place on first sight, thought it was the armpit of the world, but in time has put down roots and come to appreciate the oil companies and what they bring to the table. He had a toilet problem upstairs, and a month ago the plumber would have been booked to late May, maybe June (we are in February). But today, he phoned in the morning and the toilet was fixed by early afternoon. He was now, at least temporarily, a fan of 30-dollar-a-barrel oil.

Flipping burgers pays 18 dollars an hour. Anybody laid off will quickly find other work. And that week's concern at city council was widening the highway so the Tim Hortons's drive-by-lane was more easily and safely accessed. He cited "the bridge to nowhere" as an example of oil sands far-sightedness—it had been built, to much outrage, across a river to an empty landscape. But now it's done and when the next boom comes, that pod will be ready for developing. "Cheaper to pay for a bridge in the past than it will be in the future."

He was certain that the good times always return to Fort McMurray. "Nobody cares more about the environment than an oil executive." He gave the impression that the smart boys at Syncrude and Suncor were a way out in front of the rest of us. "It is their business to do it clean. And everyday I spot deer and wild life—it's one of the joys of living this far north."

Personal fallout

This was a fertile artistic stew. The drama was being played out in every part of this society. There was no resting place from this engagement. It meant that we did not have to dig to find the conflicts. The contradictions were native to the city, inside the people, and there seemed to be no area of their lives that did not actively rub against the larger issues. We had struck theatrical gold—or oil as it may be. As artists we couldn't put our pan in the river without coming up with sparkling nuggets. If we had been fisherman, this was the motherlode.

However, a deeper emotional subtext for the performer emerged. We became disheartened, overwhelmed, saddened, and afraid. It was like we were being buried under the issues. It was hard to see a positive outcome for the planet, for the future. The end of oil became a tangible reality. We could feel the fear in people, the weight of our dependence on this resource. The helpless march of our addiction to growth, and all of this fed by oil, it was relentless.

At a key moment in rehearsal period, we took a day to speak personally about what was going on. We had to find the therapy in the work, process the dark side,

and ground ourselves in the human comforts: Warmth, food, love, meaningful work, the need for money to raise families and fuel culture. We were reminded daily that we drove a car to work; we flew to Alberta on a jet plane; the cream in our coffee was part oil. Oil was in our bloodstream and without it we would die.

The women

It's clear the most important resource in Fort McMurray is women. Women carry themselves accordingly. They are not wallflowers here. They're rare in the camps, but more easily sighted in town. The town is loaded with them. A married woman with two young children told me that she has developed a way of never looking in men's eyes: If you look you then have to deal with a lot of unwanted neediness and attention. She has often been condemned for going out on the town—it was unfair to walk among the men if you weren't available.

Charlotte tells me the men have a deep carved-out loneliness—they are isolated in ways that make it painful to reject them. Their hunger for warmth and contact is overwhelming. Like prisoners in the camps, they work twelve-hour shifts and are not allowed to have guests or visitors in their rooms. The women in the camps are to be avoided. The image we have is that they are predatory.

The apprentice

My daughter and I rescued one of the men from the camps for a night on the town in Fort McMurray. We drove deep into the bush to bring him back to civilization and a night of drinking and gambling at the casino. We first met him at a family Christmas dinner in Montreal a year earlier. He impressed me then as an unusually warm individual—articulate, aware—and a loving son to his francophone parents who were from Sudbury. He told us then about his work camp, which had only five French-speaking people. Indeed an Albertan co-worker had heard him speaking French to someone and asked him to speak "white." We were outraged.

At that time he spoke in a positive manner about Fort McMurray and his dreams. Meeting him again in this new context surprised me. I would not have recognized him. He was colder and gathered in on himself. He seemed a little angry and dangerous. He was 28 years old and as good-looking as Brad Pitt, with the perfect three-day beard. He had the air of a young man on the make for a quick thrill.

I could understand—he was a prisoner on a weekend pass, owned a Triplex in Montreal, and had worked in the Shell camp for four years: twenty days on, eight days off. Gets twenty thousand a year bonus for transportation. Another thirty thousand dollars cream-on-top to drive a bus with workers every morning into the mine. Spends his shift as an electrician—god only knows what that pays him over and above his extra allowances. He drives the men back to the dorms at the end of the shift.

He used to fly back to Montreal for his eight days off, but his friends in Montreal can't meet his energy. They have different lives than him. They have families and he just wants to go crazy. Now he flies to exotic locales on his off time, to Mexico, or Costa Rica, anywhere where he can scuba-dive. He dives looking for sharks. Sharks are his passion, says they never mistake you for food when you run into them. Only swimmers flailing on the surface look like food. They appear as injured fish to the sharks and then get attacked. He paints the picture of the deep shark as a magnificent creature, powerful, sleek, fast, predatory, a lonely king of the realm.

He's only now been issued his full electrician papers. He was an apprentice for four years.

We drove past vast areas of moonscape. The electrician said it was a joke to think that the companies would ever reclaim. An oil company will always declare bankruptcy after a dig. It's cheaper. The mines are often badly managed at the beginning of a dig and the new concerns about safety are too much. They now have to go to ridiculous lengths not to be injured. He hates oil companies.

Happy people doing happy things

A woman engineer gave our group its first tour of the work sites. She drove a black Suburban with TITANIC printed on the plates. She demonstrated the extraction process for us on the back tailgate. She poured boiling water from a Starbucks thermos into a jar of raw tar sands. She stirred and we watched like children as the sand settled into the bottom of the jar with the oil slimy on top. She said we could drink it without harm and then she dumped it into the snow bank. When asked what her play about Fort McMurray would look like, she said, "Happy people doing happy things."

We interviewed a high school girl. She had long stringy blonde hair and was aggressively shy and somewhat hostile. She gazed off into the middle distance, "I'm not part of the same group as you. I know that all the cops sell crack. And I know where all the crack houses are. No . . . I won't be coming to your play. I have to work. I work in the kitchen at Earl's with mostly guys, which is good because there's no chick drama . . . See you never."

She made it into the show. She's a highlight.

A WRITTEN PLAY IS A WONDROUS THING AND I'M AS ATTACHED TO THAT AS ANYTHING, BUT A SHOW BASED ON DEEPER ENGAGEMENT WITH "REAL" PEOPLE LIVING IN A REAL LOCATION, WHO WORK AND LIVE NON-ARTISTIC LIVES, IS A SOULFUL GROWTH EXPERIENCE.

Highway 63 then

We do a presentation on a Saturday night. It's our "*Farm Show*" moment. We present in the room where we rehearsed. Along the wall are the blackboards where we've listed all the scenes—in an order we've never tried before. The cast will perform with one eye on the blackboard. We light one end of the room as best we can and declare it the stage; we set the chairs in such a way as to allow the actors surprising entrances. At the doorway we leave an open guitar case for donations.

Charlotte and I give the before show "welcome to the process" speech; we're a couple of nervous Nellie standup comedians. The cast are strung as tight as power lines.

The show is a mix of portraits and realistic scenes. We've taken care to give the audience a story along with the impressionism. The central tale is simple: one man rents a room from another; the two men meet a local woman in a box store, later at a bar. The evening goes badly for all of them until a late night feast of comfort food leads to a flash of (unrequited) love and an exit from Fort McMurray.

The audience connects more strongly to the invented story than the portraits. It's a lesson we learn immediately. The mix of dark and light is a good one. The cast gets a standing ovation, an embrace from the locals—you can feel the emotional release for everyone.

It's bitter-sweet for me. I have to leave the group and play the Magistrate in *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* in Kamloops. *Highway 63* is launched. I'm a midwife ripped from the child too soon, but the baby is healthy and its new parents are going to be the audiences, the actors, and my daughter.

The art

The next time I see the show again it is early November 2009. We're in Edmonton and I watch the first run-through after a long lay off. The group has changed. The story of Fort McMurray has become something else again. The George Bush era spike for oil is over. It's hard again to find workers to stack the shelves in Fort Mac. The Bush presidency was good for oilmen everywhere. You might call Bush the "Oil President."

My daughter and I catch the swine flu. We cough and wheeze through our laughter as the actors fly through the show. Their confidence and skill is breathtaking. They know how to surf the emotional tide in the story. Every character is sharply drawn and finessed with a breezy effortlessness. It's like meeting old friends again, but they are more vivid. The pain and conflicts are there, but the power of the piece is hidden. They have perfected the Hemingway four-fifths theory: the company reveals only the top fifth of the iceberg. But you feel the size of the thing hidden beneath the water line.

Jonathan argues the two sides of any debate better than any actor I've known. Greg has a touch for bringing huge universal truths to the ordinary acts of men. Their scenes together are like the meetings of a secret society, watching them makes you a member of a very funny private club. Georgina has a mind for absorbing complicated theories, facts, and figures, and she integrates this gift into dramatic character turns. In any collective creation, the woman often has the harder task: keeping the laughs rolling with the boys and matching the rough and tumble of getting your shots in, along with carrying the beauty myth and being just good-old-fashioned sexy, all at the same time. She manages this with aplomb. Charlotte's direction is flawless. She has ensured that the human heart is visible throughout and that everything moves with nuance and pace from heartbreak to laughter.

I have tears in my eyes as I laugh. I am immensely proud of this company and their art. May all of us find meaningful lives, sustaining and nurturing Planet Earth.

BIO

Layne Coleman IS A FORMER ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THEATRE PASSE MURAILLE AND A WRITER. HE WAS NOMINATED FOR A NATIONAL MAGAZINE AWARD FOR HIS STORY "OASIS OF HOPE," WHICH WAS PUBLISHED IN *THE WALRUS*. LAYNE IS WRITING A BOOK THAT WAS EXCERPTED IN THE SUMMER ISSUE OF THE LITERARY JOURNAL, *BRICK*. HE ACTS AND DIRECTS PLAYS AS WELL AS WRITING THEM. HIS LAST PLAY, *TIJUANA CURE* (PRODUCED BY THEATRE SMASH), WAS NOMINATED FOR A DORA AWARD FOR BEST NEW PLAY.

Roadside (Self) Interrogation—*Gas Girls*

When I set out to write *Gas Girls*, my demons whispered the oft-heard maxim, "Write what you know."

Gas Girls tells the story of two young sex trade workers, Lola and Gigi, who exchange their services for gasoline, a commodity only available on Zimbabwe's black market. So little information was available about the "gas or ass" phenomenon that my research opportunities were limited. Taking up my pen, I replied to my demons, "I will write what is untold."

The real challenge was more about honesty than accuracy. In theatre, we are obligated to shine a beam that reveals but risks becoming a spotlight that exploits. Finding an appropriate lens through which to view an experience not your own is a perilous act requiring a process of self-interrogation. Without sharing these women's experience, I could at best watch from the roadside and at worst approach them from an anthropological distance.

I don't understand mental health, economics, or international trade, so I didn't try to explain any of these things. Instead, I told the part of the story we can all understand: the human part, which ultimately transcends race, class, geography, and gender.

When *Gas Girls* placed second in the Herman Voaden Playwriting Competition, we received the gift of a week's workshop at Queen's University with the support of the Thousand Islands Playhouse. Our creative team worked in Robert Sutherland Hall, named for the university's first black graduate, Canada's first known black lawyer, and the university's first major benefactor. In addition to this palpable sense of legacy, the presence of students, professors, and theatre artists created an accountable environment which productively pressured us to choose factual specificity where appropriate. For example, does the character of Mr. Man represent several truckers, or a single, regular client? Are we watching the normalization of perpetually renewed degradation or the prolonged brutality of one specific man?

We looked at the character of Lola who is vaguely "slow" and wants to cuddle with clients. Is she developmentally challenged? Naively childlike? Would naming her problem give us insight into her character that a genuine engagement with her humanity would not? The truth is that in the developing world where I come from—where many of us come from—it doesn't matter. We don't have the luxury of expending energy and resources to label those who are functionally different, maybe because we don't have anything to manage the diagnosis once it is made, or maybe because it doesn't matter what you call it. The intellectual disparity between Lola and Gigi makes them very different women, but causes no discernible difference in their income or opportunities. We know that being prostitutes neither defines them nor diminishes their human value.

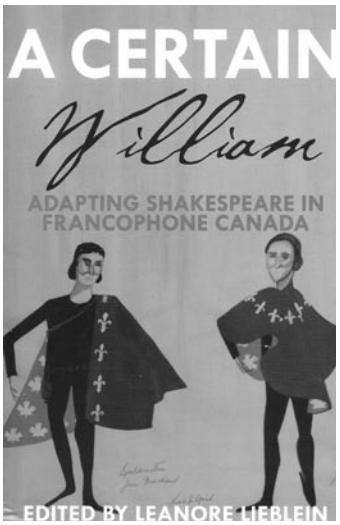
At the public reading there were inevitable questions about the cost of gas in Zimbabwe, the accuracy of the dialect, and the rate of inflation. Again I questioned all the choices that took me away from verifiable certainty into more intangible truths and again decided I could be accurate without being factual. And that's part of storytelling too. It is a selective, incomplete, narrow lens on a broader vista, and with what little I know, it is as much as I am willing or able to tell. Why is Lola "slow"? Ask Beckett if Godot is ever coming.

Sometimes we don't get to know.

Donna-Michelle St. Bernard

BIO

Donna-Michelle St. Bernard, A.K.A. BELLADONNA, IS AN AWARD-WINNING EMCEE, PLAYWRIGHT, AND THEATRE ADMINISTRATOR. HER WORKS FOR THE STAGE INCLUDE *SUPERNOVA*, *CAKE* (A COLLABORATION WITH IDIRA CRUZ), AND *SALOME'S CLOTHES*. SHE HAS BEEN PRESENTED AT SUMMERWORKS, IGNITE!, ARCFEST, LABCAB, CANADIAN MUSIC WEEK, NXNE, AND THE VANCOUVER FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL. SHE IS CURRENTLY THE GENERAL MANAGER OF NATIVE EARTH PERFORMING ARTS AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF NEW HARLEM PRODUCTIONS.



BOOK REVIEW

BY JENNIFER DROUIN

The Shakespeare's Mine: Adapting Shakespeare in Anglophone Canada, edited by Ric Knowles. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. Pp. ix & 427.

A Certain William: Adapting Shakespeare in Francophone Canada, edited by Leanore Lieblein. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. Pp. xv & 331.

The past decade has seen an explosion of research on Canadian and Québécois adaptations of Shakespeare led by a handful of Shakespearean scholars, particularly Ric Knowles and Leanore Lieblein, the editors of these companion volumes of anglophone and francophone adaptations. These two anthologies contribute to the growing body of work in this field and make several previously unpublished texts accessible for teaching purposes.

Each volume contains a general introduction, suggested further reading, and six plays, each with its own brief introduction, providing sufficient material around which to construct a syllabus on Canadian Shakespeares, especially if both volumes are used together. What makes these volumes versatile in the classroom is the selection of plays. The six adaptations in Knowles's volume focus on just three Shakespearean plays—*Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar*—while Lieblein's volume contains three adaptations of *Hamlet* and three plays based on *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. One could structure a syllabus around just two or three of Shakespeare's plays and their corresponding adaptations or even base an entire syllabus on the five anglophone and francophone adaptations of *Hamlet* that Knowles and Lieblein have amassed in tandem.

Given the hundreds of adaptations in English and French from which to choose (many of which are available on the *Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project* website), Knowles and Lieblein have done an admirable job in narrowing the selection to these twelve adaptations. Careful attention has been paid to issues of class, gender, race, and ethnicity in choosing adaptations representative of the broad range of topics broached in Canadian and Québécois adaptations since the late 1960s. Knowles asserts that adaptors of Shakespeare "piggyback on his cultural capital, using his name to gain access and recognition" while taking care "to shuck the oppressive weight of his influence" in order to advance their own agenda (iii), and, as Lieblein points out, that agenda is often closely tied to the adaptor's personal and political identity.

Each of these adaptations is, in its own way, political; Ken Gass's *Claudius* and Daphné Thompson's *Saved from the Waters* are arguably feminist while Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet*, Yves Sioui Durand and Jean-Frédéric Messier's *The Maleceet Hamlet*, and Tibor Egervari's *Shakepeare's* The Merchant of Venice *in Auschwitz* interrogate what it means to be black, Aboriginal, or Jewish in twentieth-century North America—although an adaptation about queer identity is notably absent.

The most overtly political play—*Hamlet, Prince of Québec*, in which the characters correspond to politicians whose interactions illustrate the duplicity of Canadian federalism and the necessity of Québec sovereignty—reminds us that questions of national identity raised by Shakespearean adaptation over forty years ago remain pertinent, and arguably unresolved, today.

While these volumes are tailored well to the needs of their intended classroom audience, scholars might find that the critical apparatus falls short of their expectations, providing teasers rather than a sustained engagement with each of the texts. The general introduction and bibliographic material for the anglophone volume come in at a mere seven pages compared to the 22-page dense theoretical introduction and bibliography provided by Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier in their internationally oriented critical anthology *Adaptations of Shakespeare*.

In the final page of his introduction, Knowles asks a series of fourteen pertinent questions about the nature of adaptation ranging from "What does it mean to efface the Shakespearean source of an adaptation […] rather than engage openly in dialogue with that source?" to "Should a reader know the Shakespeare well before tackling the adaptation, or should the adaptation be read independently, relying on the general knowledge of Shakespeare that's in the ether, in Canada as elsewhere?" (viii). In particular, his question about prior knowledge of Shakespeare is important for the francophone audiences, who would have viewed the adaptations in Lieblein's volume in their original French: "What does it mean in any adaptation, but particularly those that mount class, gender, or race based critiques of social hierarchies, to differently reward audiences based on their knowledge of Shakespeare, perhaps provoking a self-congratulatory discourse […]?" (viii). Francophone adaptors say they do expect less prior knowledge of Shakespeare from a Québécois audience than an anglophone adaptor does from an English Canadian audience, and they view this lack as an opportunity for greater creative freedom. It would have thus been instructive had Knowles put forth positions on some of the excellent questions he raises rather than simply offering them up for the reader to tackle.

Coming in at thirteen pages, Lieblein's general introduction and bibliography provide greater theoretical depth and historical context to the texts in that volume, as well as related texts not included, offering a better picture of the phenomenon of Shakespearean adaptation for readers new to the topic. Constraints upon the length of the critical apparatus of each volume, however, must undoubtedly be attributed to the press rather than the editors themselves. In fact, each editor has a distinguished academic career, and readers of these anthologies would be well served to approach the plays in conjunction with Lieblein's long list of scholarly essays and Knowles's monograph *Shakespeare and Canada*.

Knowles does address the particularly "thorny question" of "what constitutes (an) adaptation, together with what constitutes Shakespeare, and what constitutes the Canadianness of Shakespearean adaptation" (v), but readers may find his answer unsatisfactory. Wary that "[d]efinitions and taxonomies, useful in organizing bodies of knowledge and ways of thinking into fields and disciplines, are also ways of policing the generic borders around bodies of work that might otherwise get out of hand" (v), Knowles takes recourse to a recent article by Mark Fortier. In this article, Fortier "makes the case, in the face of restrictive definitions, for 'wild adaptation'," which he argues "'is, quite literally, anything you can get away with'" (vi).

But just because a corpus of plays "includes work that for various reasons would not be considered to be adaptations by the definitions of Linda Hutcheon" does not mean we must throw our hands in the air and give up on classification (vi). Instead, we could re-evaluate Hutcheon's definitions of adaptation and posit a new, more workable definition that accounts for the pieces of the puzzle that do not fit. In fact, although he eschews definition, Knowles hints at categories for each of the five plays that, unlike Ken Gass's *Claudius*, do not meet Hutcheon's definitions.

For instance, Knowles explains how a play like "*Cruel Tears*, by Ken Mitchell with Humphrey and the Dumptrucks, does not announce itself as an adaptation unless one recognizes the two-word title or, late in the play, an adapted 'Willow Song,' as deriving from *Othello*" (vi-vii). Similarly, Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* is a prequel rather than an adaptation of Shakespeare's plot, and Vern Thiessen's *Shakespeare's Will* "adapts the life rather than the work of Shakespeare." *Death of a Chief*, by Yvette Nolan and Kennedy C. MacKinnon, leaves Shakespeare's text largely intact except for "stage directions, cuts, and rearrangements" that betray its "status as an adaptation," and Michael O'Brien's *Mad Boy Chronicle* achieves its effect by "adapting Shakespeare's *own* sources for *Hamlet*" (vii).

Rather than throwing all of these plays into a hodge-podge of "wild adaptation," might it not be better to flesh out a taxonomy that could usefully be applied to other adaptations, both Canadian and international—perhaps along the lines of "unacknowledged adaptations," "prequels" (and "sequels"), "biographical adaptations," "restructured adaptations," and "primary source adaptations"? In our desire to be as inclusive as possible of the range of creative works available for study, must we adopt umbrella terms that dilute our scholarly analysis—such as Fortier's "wild" and Hutcheon's expansion of "adaptation" from literary texts to films, operas, and even theme parks—when a few adjectives could add meaningful layers of precision?

The definition of adaptation is complicated in Lieblein's volume by issues of translation. Each of these plays was written in French, often heavily influenced

by *joual*. Except for Robert Gurik's *Hamlet, prince du Québec* (Éditions de l'homme, 1968, subsequently Leméac, 1977), none of these plays has been printed by a publishing house, so the manuscripts are available in their original French only through the *Centre des auteurs dramatiques* (CEAD) or the authors themselves. While translation is an effective means of getting these plays into the classroom as well as the hands of readers outside of Québec, scholars will want to look to the original manuscripts in order to appreciate fully the nuances of how the authors have at once translated and adapted specific lines of Shakespeare's texts.

Those who read these plays only in translation, however, will not be disappointed, since the quality of each translation is superb. Significantly, rather than relying on an earlier adaptation into English of Gurik's *Hamlet, prince du Québec* by Marc F. Gélinas for a performance in London, Ontario (effectively an adaptation of an adaptation), Lieblein undertook the translation of this text herself, and the result picks up the many subtle differences between Shakespeare's, Gurik's, and Gélinas's texts. Also of note is Linda Gaboriau's translation of Jean-Pierre Ronfard's *Lear*, a text littered with difficult to translate idioms and curses that she renders with aplomb.

In short, these two volumes accomplish well what they set out to achieve—to offer readers treasures of Canadian playwriting that dance briefly across the stage but might otherwise only gather dust in archives and authors' attics were it not for the editors' efforts to re-imbue them with life by making them available to new audiences. Dramaturges and directors will find engaging plays worthy of mounting on the floorboards again; scholars will want to read these anthologies alongside the rich critical history of Canadian and Québécois Shakespeares already available; students will benefit from increased access to texts that push the boundary of what counts as Shakespeare, or even what counts as Canadian or Québécois. I've already integrated one of these volumes into an undergraduate course on Shakespeare adaptation that I'll be teaching next year, and I would encourage other professors, whether they are teaching a course on Canadian Shakespeares or any type of contemporary adaptations, to consider the possibilities that these two elegant collections of plays have to offer.

BIO

Jennifer Drouin IS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH IN THE HUDSON STRODE PROGRAM IN RENAISSANCE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA. SHE HAS PUBLISHED ESSAYS IN *THEATRE RESEARCH IN CANADA; BORROWERS AND LENDERS: THE JOURNAL OF SHAKESPEARE AND APPROPRIATION; SHAKESPEARE RE-DRESSED: CROSS-GENDER CASTING IN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE; QUEER RENAISSANCE HISTORIOGRAPHY: BACKWARD GAZE;* AND ON THE *CANADIAN ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE PROJECT* SITE. SHE IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON A BOOK ENTITLED *SHAKESPEARE IN QUÉBEC: NATION, GENDER, AND ADAPTATION.*

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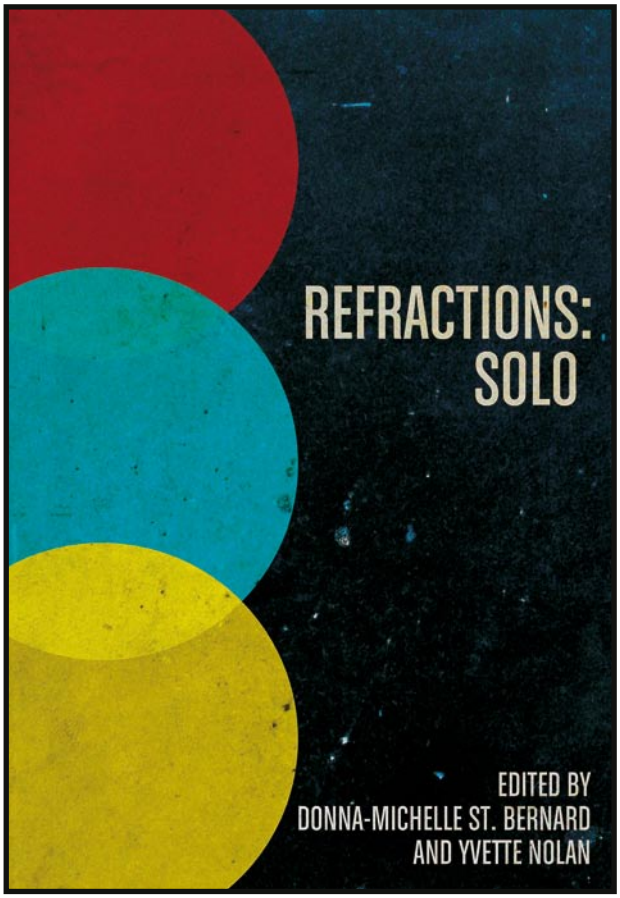

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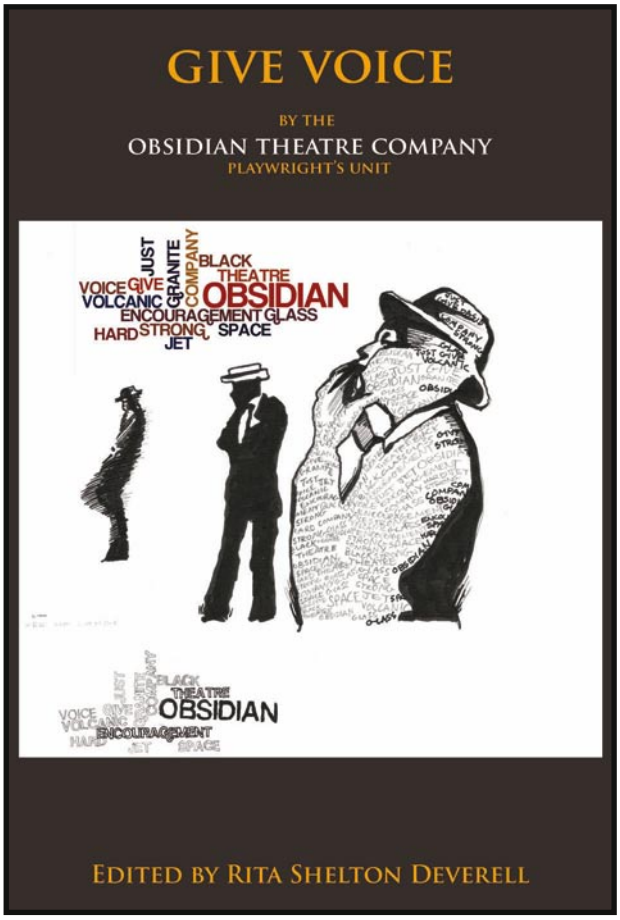

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